

DPsych thesis

**Saving face: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study
of women's personal agency explored through the lens of
adverse childhood experiences**

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**Saving face: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological
study of women's personal agency explored through the lens
of adverse childhood experiences**



Judith Ann Adcock M.Ed.

Final Project

submitted to

The Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University

as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies

January 2023

Student Number M00705078



My mission in life is not merely to survive,
but to thrive;
and to do so with some passion,
some compassion, some humor,
and some style.

Maya Angelou

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Lou, for your steadfast support, love and belief in me. I love and appreciate you more as each day passes.

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my adult 'children' Sam, Ben and Indya. I haven't always known how to be the best parent, but you have forgiven me and inspired in me how to become a better one. I love and appreciate you all, always.

Abstract

Through the lens of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), this qualitative study explores the development of women's personal agency and the phenomenon of 'saving face'. Ten experienced female psychotherapists, all in practice and with recognised ACEs, were recruited with interviews being conducted via the online platform Zoom or in person. Semi-structured questions invited dialogue both before and after the creation of images using basic art materials. Within the creative research design, a pluralistic philosophical approach, which included Critical Realism, supported the development of the bespoke methodology combining arts-based research, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry and Template Analysis.

Generated data (text and images) were manually coded to surface phenomenologically descriptive elements while allowing for interpretation to evolve through application of the hermeneutic circle. A deeper hermeneutic phenomenological exploration, using Memory Theatre, developed into four vignettes which serendipitously aligned with the four top-level themes. The findings not only demonstrated that adverse experiences in childhood significantly impacted development of the participants' personal agency, but that, in spite of years of counselling training and personal therapy, none of the participants had previously made connections between the two. In addition, all participants felt that their intra- and inter- personal relationships had been affected. The participants also recognised that 'saving face' was a strategy employed, consciously or unconsciously, to safeguard against potentially painful and shameful exposure.

The findings indicated that by using expressive art as part of the exploration process, new depths of understanding, insight, and meaning making were achieved for the participants and the researcher. As a result of the research, a new theory and model for practice is being developed by the researcher and will be published

as a tool for practitioners' clinical practice. Insight gained from this research will be used in post-doctoral projects including promoting the awareness of trauma informed parenting and relationships along with arts-based workshops designed to develop personal agency, increase authenticity and reduce the need to 'save face'.

Key Words: Hermeneutic phenomenology, creative/expressive art, arts-based research, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma, agency (personal, human, self), saving face, Template Analysis, and Critical Realism.

Declaration of originality

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration unless specifically indicated in the text.

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Prologue

Life, for some women, is experienced as unfulfilled and inauthentic; often unknowingly influenced by the adverse experiences of their childhood. They may come from outwardly respectable homes that hide certain suffering manifest within. Without a strong sense of identity they may feel they have little to no power or control over what happens to them; struggling to make every-day decisions, let alone act upon them. Or they may simply be drifting along feeling unfulfilled and empty, unaware of the impact of adversity has had on their relationships and, if they have children, their parenting. We may consider that they are lacking in personal agency, presenting with an inauthentic persona which, consciously or not, serves to meet the perceived or actual expectations placed upon them.

As a practitioner I have witnessed these phenomena in many of my female clients. I have also experienced this personally as a woman living with the consequences of adversity in my childhood and associated feelings of shame. As my personal agency develops, I wish to explore, through the lens of childhood adversity, the lived experiences of other such women. I hope that they too may begin to discover their own authentic and agentic self without needing to 'save face' from the potential shame and humiliation of being found out to be, in their estimation, fundamentally flawed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research represents the culmination of my personal experience, observations in clinical practice, master's research (exploring adolescent shame), and doctoral study over the past four years. I now strongly believe its origin is pre-natal, ebbing and flowing while developing organically towards this point my entire life. This work feels truly enmeshed as part of my very being.

Underpinning my work as a practitioner-researcher is my original 'bread and butter' training in Adlerian counselling. I introduce this now as Adlerian concepts are mentioned at various points within the thesis.

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was an Austrian physician and psychiatrist and the first significant theorist to break away from Freud and his deterministic drive theories of sex and aggression (A. Freud, 1992). In contrast to Freud's tripartite theory of personality - Id, Ego and Superego - (S. Freud, 1991, 2010), Adlerian theory is holistic – i.e., the mind and body cannot be separated but rather, they operate as one. Adler's theory of personality is known as Individual Psychology conveying his belief in the uniqueness and indivisibility of human personality (Adler, 1992; Adler University, 2022).

Adler (1998) saw human beings as inherently social and that all behaviour is therefore purposefully directed towards the goal of social embeddedness. He described this as 'Social Interest' (or the German *gemeinschaftsgefühl* – translated as 'community feeling'). Relationships and human connectedness are therefore fundamental to our wellbeing.

Another key tenet of Adlerian theory is that we are born naturally inferior, both physically and psychologically and our life is spent striving to find significance, meaning and our place within the world. An 'inferiority complex' can therefore be seen as an innate motivator which impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and actions. Midway through his life Adler began to address important contemporary issues of the day, such as equality and parent education. He also placed importance on birth order, a person's *Lifestyle* - understood as one's creative convictions developed to traverse a lifespan - and their uniqueness (Adler, 1992, 1998).

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that my interest in the significance of adversity in early childhood aligns with Adler's notions of early inferiority, feeding my curiosity to understand how such adversity may also interfere with the development of personal agency and inhibit a natural striving towards feeling connected and capable. This may also lead to the phenomenon of masking or 'saving face' – or in Adlerian terms, the idea of the 'mistaken goal' which unwittingly moves one towards the development of an inauthentic self. This project seeks to explore these phenomena.

Although I have undertaken subsequent integrative and creative arts trainings, this research truly feels I have come 'full circle' and is grounded in my Adlerian roots, reminding me also that I am indeed an Adlerian at heart.

As will be explored in detail later, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten experienced female counsellors and psychotherapists all currently in practice and all with recognisable adversity in their childhoods. Using hermeneutics, the research utilised image creation and interview dialogue to phenomenologically explore the development of their personal agency, through the lens of their adverse childhood experiences. Such experiences may, in turn, lead to what I refer to as the conscious or unconscious necessity of 'saving face' and feelings of inauthenticity

which are also explored. All research is purposeful, so once the topic was clarified, it was important for me to determine exactly what I was hoping to achieve.

1.1 Research aims

1. To determine at what stage in life ACE recognition was consciously realised and what this experience was like.
2. To understand how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) may impact the development of women's personal agency.
3. To gain insight into the impact of women's ACEs and agency development on their inter- and intra- personal relationships.
4. To gain insight into women's experiences of 'saving face' as a safeguarding or defence strategy and if/how this is impacted by ACEs and personal agency.
5. To understand how therapists may take their own insight of ACEs and personal agency development back in to their client work.
6. To gain understanding of the role expressive art plays in supporting the exploration of ACEs, personal agency development, and saving face.
7. To make sense, and find meaning, from adversity experienced in childhood.
8. To bring new insight and meaning to the participants and researcher from using expressive art as part of the interview process.

1.2 Chapter summaries

Chapter 2: Context and overview

In chapter two I give an overview of the research and its origins. I also discuss the practitioner-researcher lens through which this project was conceived. The research questions are located in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Literature review

Here I will detail my search strategy and the results. The literature linking ACEs to the development of personal agency and saving face, as explored through arts-based research, is scant. Therefore this chapter provides a grounding in related topics while providing the context within which this research may be located. I have also added a short review on using creative/expressive art in therapy and research as image creation is a component of the methodology rather than arts-based research (ABR) being the stand alone methodology.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

The research design begins with my conceptual framework. I then discuss the bespoke research methodology with other methodologies that I considered also outlined. The pluralistic and phenomenological underpinnings of the project are discussed alongside my philosophical position which has driven my approach to the research. Trustworthiness and dependability considerations are found within this chapter.

Chapter 5: Methods, data analysis and ethics

This chapter looks at the methods used for data generation and the approach taken for analysing the data. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the ethical

considerations have formed an essential thread which runs through the project, however, they are detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Reflexivity

In this chapter I consider my researcher reflexivity, again seen as a thread that runs through the entire project. A heuristically influenced reflexive self-study was conducted during the research and write up of the thesis. As the origins of the study are so personal to me it reflects aspects of my journey through the process. The self-study is located in Appendix 20 (A20, p.507).

Chapter 7: Findings and discussion

Chapter seven details the findings along with a discussion, here combined into one chapter to provide a more cohesive flow and ease of reading. Themes emerging from the data analysis will be presented with attention paid to the those most relevant to answering the study's aims and research questions. All the participants are represented in this section. Four vignettes are then presented, chosen from the four participants whose material was most salient in answering the first four research questions. In these vignettes the findings are explored further through hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and a creative and imaginal practice known as Memory Theatre. This chapter will also make links to the extant literature.

Chapter 8: Limitations and recommendations

In this chapter I consider the limitations of the study and offer recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 9: Products

Products are split into two categories: what has been achieved already and what is currently in progress, plus plans for future product development. Although the origins of this study have been a long time in the making, epiphanic moments when tacit knowing has emerged in to the light have been relatively recent. Therefore the majority of projects are, at the time of writing, in progress. This chapter also gives a brief outline of Red Zone Theory, the key product to emerge from the research. A more comprehensive summary is located in **A21 p. 547**, due to wordcount limitations.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Here I consolidate the findings from the study, review the usefulness of the research design and offer my personal reflections on the process.

1.3 Notes

Throughout this work I have typically chosen to use the term ‘expressive’ rather than ‘creative’ art as I deem all artistic psychic manifestations to be creative. I wish the focus to be on the participant *expressing* whatever emerges into an image manifestation in response to the research questions and dialogue.

In the literature, reference to the therapeutic use of art is typically termed as ‘art therapy’. In this thesis any reference to art therapy is used generically to describe arts-based practice and not referring to the specific training undertaken by those with an art degree who choose to train in psychotherapy. I use the term psychotherapy throughout as an umbrella to encapsulate the multitude of professional identities found within the counselling and psychotherapy professions. I also use interchangeably the terms ‘study, inquiry, exploration’ depending on the context.

From the main body of work, when referring to an item in the appendices, I will use the following shortform, e.g., See Appendix 17, page 494 will be noted as **(A17, p.494)**.

1.4 Key to abbreviations

AA	Academic advisor
AC	Academic consultant
ABR	Arts based research
BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
CDC	Centers for Disease Control (and Prevention) - USA
CF	Critical friend
D(Psych)	Doctor of Psychotherapy by Professional Studies
IWD	International Women's Day
LA	Learning agreement
M.Ed.	Master of Education
PAP	Programme Approval Panel
PK (paper)	Professional knowledge
PTUK	Play Therapy UK
RAL	Recognition of accredited learning
RPPL	Recognition of personal and professional learning
TeA	Template Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organisation

1.5 Definitions of terms

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE or ACEs)	Refers to childhood adversity as categorised in the ACE study.
Personal Agency or Self-agency or Human agency	The capacity to identify goals, make informed conscious choices and be able to act upon them.
Saving Face	Used to describe a person's attempt to hide an aspect of self/family/group for fear of humiliation and ridicule.
Child or young person	A child or young person between 0-18 years.
Self	Refers to a person's unique and essential characteristics of being that differentiate them from other people. The self is often the object of deep introspection, reflection and reflexive action. Self is only denoted with a capital 'S' when referring to Jung's work, in line with his own usage.

Content warning: this research discusses childhood adversity and therefore includes material which may be potentially challenging to read.

Chapter 2: Context and origins

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.

Gordon W. Allport¹

2.1 Overview of the research

I consider my research project to be a life's work in the making. But more recently progressing as a result of my Master of Education (M.Ed.) studies alongside the recognition of personal and professional learning (RPPL) and recognition of accredited learning (RAL) assignment requirements of Metanoia's Doctor of Psychotherapy by Professional Studies - D(Psych) - programme. The above quote speaks to my research participants with the hope that the research sessions may offer them a new perspective from which they might make sense of and find new meaning in the phenomena being explored through this research.

The present study began with a nugget, a feeling, a sense of 'something' that I couldn't quite put my finger on. As an arts-based psychotherapist and clinical supervisor I use expressive art in my practice and for personal reflection. Driven from personal experience I have an interest the phenomenon of shame. As I pondered the 'nugget' I began to consider the origins of core shame as being rooted in childhood adversity and how this shame may manifest in adult women (born female) - as I am one - and what its impact may mean. I began to think about my own experiences. I began to consider my once chronically poor personal agency and my strategies for not revealing my authentic self for fear of further shaming. This led me to the phenomenon of 'saving face'. As I began to make links I realised the 'something' was the desire to explore the potential relationship between adverse

¹ Mistakenly attributed to Nietzsche and Viktor Frankl – the quote is in fact in Allport's preface to Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (2004)

childhood experiences (ACEs), personal agency and the need to 'save face'. As an arts-based practitioner-researcher, with a natural inclination towards creativity, it felt natural to explore using expressive art as part of the data generation and analysis. Saving face is the term I'm using for masking or hiding one's self or an aspect of one's self because it feels, consciously or unconsciously, too shameful to reveal who we are or what we believe - if indeed we really know to begin with.

With a lifetime's experience I have become increasingly interested in what it means to be a woman, an adult human female, particularly apposite in the current political climate, and therefore chose to seek female-only participants. A bespoke methodology was created blending arts-based research with hermeneutic phenomenology, utilising both Template Analysis and deep phenomenological exploration to gain understanding of the meaning held within the generated data.

Understanding my philosophical position was particularly challenging yet crucial in order to understand what drives my beliefs and the lens through which I examine the data. I have often found the literature impenetrable spending many hours trying to differentiate and grasp complex philosophical concepts. My strong propensity for cognitive dissonance has made this difficult. This has fed in to my default sense of 'not being clever enough'. Yet, I have finally come to understand myself as a philosophically and methodologically pluralistic researcher. This project, then, is designed with this positionality in mind.

I relate to my work as an arts-based psychotherapist who thinks beyond the process of art making purely for the sake of aesthetics. But rather to where the heart and hands meet, bringing to life an unexpected or previously unimagined image.

Levine (1997, p. 23) adds:

“Art gives a voice to suffering. It expresses the pain and confusion of the disintegration of the self, and in so doing, enables clients to face themselves without reservation.”

2.2 Origins of the study

It seems a lifetime ago that I enrolled onto a ten week *Introduction to Adlerian Counselling* course, in October 2005, with only a few ‘O’ levels to my name and taken some 20 years earlier. The following spoken words from Levine (2021) echo my experience, for it was during a bout of Adlerian counselling that the seed, which would turn into my vocation, was sown.

“Start where you are, go where you are called.”

These words also resonate with my progression through the doctoral process. I have, at times, been called in many directions. Yet, allowing myself to come back to where I am has finally led me to the most meaningful calling of all.

2.2.1 Biases

Here I make explicit, in line with my methodology, an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, my biases and assumptions. This research is born of personal interest and experience of the phenomena in question. I have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), I have lacked personal agency and have lived much of my life ‘saving face.’ In other words I have pre-understandings and fore-conceptions (Gadamer, 2013) which inevitably imprint my experience onto my perceptions. To be clear, I am not hypothesis testing; rather, I seek to understand the essence of experience from other women to determine if there are plausible links between ACEs, a lack of personal agency development and the necessity to

save face. I use arts-based hermeneutic phenomenology to assist me in this endeavour.

2.2.2 Practitioner-researcher lens

The following words from Sprague (2016, p. 238) resonate deeply with me:

“Let your anger call your attention to something that needs addressing, and figure out what it tells you about what is missing in our knowledge.”

I am angry (sometimes rageful) and finally able to own this once shameful aspect of [my] self. My anger is now mostly tempered but it still bubbles away. A firestorm of *humiliated fury – turning shame inside-out*, (Thomaes et al., 2011), still inhabits my being, teasing me like a moth to the flame. This research is a call to my anger. To galvanise me ready for purposeful action; so that I may develop my knowledge and utilise the findings through the platform I am fortunate to have available to me.

2.2.3 Intergenerational trauma

The following words from W.H. Auden’s compelling poem *1st September, 1939* (the outbreak of World War II) haunt me obsessively at a deeply painful and shamefully recognisable level. Never have I found words to be so powerful and laden with meaning:

*“I and the public know,
What all school children learn
That those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.”*

These words troubled me again as I watched the 2020 film 'Big Boys Don't Cry'. A true story in which the ramifications of growing up in a children's home, run by abusers in the 1970's, are painfully demonstrated.

In his wonderfully rich text *The Wounded Researcher*, Robert D. Romanynshyn (2019, p. 103; 2013, p. 82) astutely notes:

"What is concealed remains as the unfinished business of soul in all psychological work."

The impact of adversity in childhood may be concealed or unrecognised. Focussing on the impact of ACEs on the development of a person's personal agency, within the context of psychotherapy will, when attended to, facilitate an *openness* (from concealment), endorsed so elegantly in the doctoral work of Dr Rupert King (2017).

In a similar vein, akin to Auden's words, there is an African proverb which captures the sentiment of why I believe this research is important:

*The child who is not embraced by the village will
burn it down to feel its warmth*

2.2.4 Personal meaning and connection

I consider the origins of this study to begin when I was in utero, which, according to my mother, was the result of my father raping her after eight years of unconsummated marriage. According to my father my mother had 'sexual problems' and although she appeared to 'manage' the pregnancy, from the moment I was born, I have been told, she disliked me intensely. I know that I was left alone with her and although I have few explicit memories to draw on, I have a strong

sense of what may have happened to me, left in her care, not least because my body keeps the score (van der Kolk, 2015).

2.2.5 Early years

I was born an only child into a nominally middle class family. My mother was a teacher and later headmistress, my father a highly intelligent yet unfulfilled librarian. My paternal grandfather was a devout Anglican priest. My mother left me and my father, when I was three, for another much older man. It would be unusual now for a father to gain sole custody and almost unheard of in the early 1970's. Yet he did, and so I lived with him and my paternal grandparents in south London. My father was depressed and emotionally unavailable. My grandparents were old fashioned; Grandma, a dutiful vicar's wife, harboured a deep anger while Grandpa was a quiet, studious and solemn man who read voraciously and took snuff. I was aware of 'secrets in the family'; for example, something inferred about my grandma's father killing himself when she was just 16. Much later, thankfully after my grandparents' death, their youngest son, my uncle, also took his own life.

I believe that my grandparents loved me, they took me in when I was three as part of the court's condition for my father gaining custody; yet tangible affection was not forthcoming. My grandmother had a vicious hatred for my mother, derived, I have been told, from my mother's attempts to elicit an affair with my paternal grandfather. This hatred was reciprocated. My mother, whom I had to visit periodically, was, what was termed, 'highly strung'. Her unpredictable behaviours oscillating between histrionics, rage and moody silence caused a fear that my body still holds as extreme hypervigilance, along with a shocking startle reflex. A highly intelligent woman, she was, and still is, witty and commanding; yet she was also cold, cruel and frightening. I have a strong impression that she was abused as a child. After 16 years of no contact we have, for the past few years, settled into a

relationship where I feel stronger and more in control. It's still there, evident within her, but she tries hard to 'save face' and, as an adult, I can walk away. Rather than focus on the negative I find my compassion and look for the exceptions, that which I can admire; namely her intellect, wit and extraordinary work ethic.

My father is extremely awkward in every respect. He is controlling, bigoted, and judgemental, with a tendency for psychological cruelty. A lifelong Conservative Party member, he left the party in disgust when same sex civil partnerships and later marriage became legal, choosing to join UKIP. My father has a pathological hatred of homosexuals, somewhat hypocritical with his substantiated perversions. I have, for many years, and with experience of my daughter's significant 'classic' autism, also considered him to be high functioning but significantly placed on the autistic spectrum. This belief helps me to make sense of him and, although challenging, I find some compassion towards him. I haven't seen him for 14 years with scant and difficult contact.

2.2.6 Change

Grandma died when I was 11. Having been ill with cancer for 18 months, she died at home, in the room next to mine, choking on her haemorrhaging stomach. Her body was kept in an open-topped coffin in the vicarage for a week before her funeral. My father thought it appropriate to detail how she died, and then burnt my grandma's remains, contained within the saturated bedding, in the open-topped garden incinerator, as I watched from my bedroom window. My father had laid the responsibility for her illness at my feet, with Grandma having 'taken me in' when I was three and forgoing necessary medical treatment.

Life as I had known it was about to change dramatically and I had absolutely no say in the matter. Having not seen my mother for two years she reappeared, married

for the third time. The decision was made that I should be sent to boarding school. A co-educational school was chosen, so off I went with a trunk and tuck box to be a full boarder; my mother lived only 15 miles away. Out of the three non-games exeat weekends per term (when students were able to go home), I would go to my father's for one, my mother's for one and have to stay at school for the other. Unwittingly, my sole purpose became searching for love, affection and acceptance. I used a plethora of unhealthy ways to try and fit in. But I didn't and did not know how to. One day, a girl from the other female boarding house stood in front of me announcing loudly in front of our nearby peers that I had 'evil eyes'. I am still impacted by this public shaming. I own Nazar amulets to protect me from the malevolent stare and evil energies of others; yet, it has often disturbed me to wonder, what if the evil eyes *are* my own?

As I write these words I am awash with Sartre's (2003) *discursive shudder* of shame. I began to wear a lot of eye make-up, partly in an attempt to try and look more attractive but I now realise the unconscious intent; that if the focus was drawn to the decorative outside then no one would see in to my eyes and find the evil as she had done. This mask acted as a defence for the vulnerable, lonely and socially awkward only child within. Pseudo affection came through promiscuity and so, by the age of 12, I had discovered my worth. As I sit and write I am consumed with a familiar anxiety; a shame so penetrating I feel nauseous and enveloped in a certain panic. Tears surface but I remind myself *I am ok*. I also feel grateful that social media hadn't yet been invented.

By the age of 19, I was pregnant with my first child. Two children, a marriage, divorce, third child and another broken relationship, and many hours in therapy later, I began the introduction to Adlerian counselling course, aged 35. It had been suggested to me by the Adlerian therapist I had been working with. With a desire to please and poor agency I dutifully rang the number on the leaflet I was given. I

was met by a warm and friendly voice and so I joined up. By the end of that first evening a spark had been lit within. However curious it seemed, it was the closest thing to a 'calling' I had experienced (Sussman, 2007).

I have a few close-enough friends, not caring for casual acquaintances. I flit between avoidant and disorganised attachment styles. I am socially awkward and introverted but lately find meaning in my 'lonely only child.' She has served me well as I am alright in my own company, always with something to do. I am learning (with the help of a recent course) to be more compassionate; rather than berating myself for my perceived inadequacies or others for theirs. I strongly believe that had I understood the impact of ACEs and worked on developing my personal agency much earlier in life, my parenting and relationships would have been significantly less impacted; I would have been able to make better informed choices for me and my children and spent less energy unconsciously and consciously saving face. What I *did* know was that I did not want *my children* to grow up feeling like I did; an inherently flawed misfit.

2.2.7 Making links

It was an epiphanic moment, then, as I whiled away some time in the Faculty of Education Library back in the autumn 2015, that I picked up a copy of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. I hadn't heard of him before. The page fell open to reveal '*The Existence of Others*', (Sartre, 2003, p. 245). I began to read the words:

"In addition its structure is intentional; it is a shameful apprehension of something and this something is me, I am ashamed of what I am."

I continued to read:

"I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the otherShame is an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation." (Sartre, 2003, p. 246)

Up to this point I had felt the wrath of shame but not known it as shame. It was an epiphanic moment. I became obsessed with Sartre and his words, as if he had written them with me in mind. This poignant moment illustrated perfectly through van Manen's words (2002, p. 238):

"...the reader must become possessed by the allusive power of text – taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experience."

I was indeed overcome, not least because in spite of many hours in counselling this link, curiously, had never been made – the concealment to which perhaps Romanyshyn (2013) refers. It was though I had been given permission to engage in a reflection of my own lived experience. I also, in those moments, realised the power of the written word; how evocative I found Sartre's words and how astute of him to arouse such meaning in his unsuspecting reader. In fact, at one point, early in my doctoral journey (March 2019), as I grappled with defining the ineffable, which evaded me so effortlessly, I became excited when I thought I had my topic – *authenticity as an antidote to shame through the philosophical lens of Sartrian phenomenological ontology*. It felt highly impulsive *but I had it*. Yet my AA's (Academic Advisor) response was less enthusiastic, finding the title 'overwhelming' with the suggestion that I should remember 'simple is also good!' I noted in my research journal (6th March 2019):

My immediate response was one of shame, I am trying too hard to be seen as 'clever' - I'm feeling that pressure at the moment, to be able to come up with something special. I am feeling the grip of imposter syndrome and inferiority. What do I do now?

My AA's words provided me with a useful reminder that I have to take a step back, breathe, and dwell in the not knowing. It has also occurred to me that, at this point, I had not yet been diagnosed with combined ADHD (July 2020) and so now, my impulsivity makes more sense.

Although it took me some time to distil my current project, my thinking always linked back to Sartre's words. Shame also links my master's project to the present study; adversity in childhood can feel very shameful. Paradoxically it can be shameful to mask (save face) as we mask to avoid the shame. Yet, even more shame inducing not to mask, and shameful to inauthentically 'go along with' what we perceive is expected of us, rather than knowing intuitively what we need or want.

2.2.8 Research journals

As an example entry has been given it is worth mentioning the purpose of my research journals (five in total) as they have been a constant companion and reliable confidante throughout the entire doctoral journey, long before this study came to fruition; much akin to a faithful friend. From the joy of choosing the next book to filling it with philosophical musings, scrappy diagrams, neat writing, messy writing, colour, and a sense of ephemerality they have provided me with a place to process my thoughts and feelings. In them I have traversed my mind's abyss through dark winter storms to the joyful lightness of a fresh spring morning, as dew settles on the spider's delicate web. They have served to call me out when my ideas have become directionless yet never with harsh or critical judgement. I have noted

my frustrations, epiphanic moments, deliberations over theoretical concepts, ethical dilemmas, doodles, and ideas. They have brought me comfort and a sense of continuity throughout this journey.

As I returned to them, I noticed the cyclical nature of my musings and the genesis of my final project. In a phase of heuristic indwelling (A20, p. 507), I immersed myself in my journals with the text and images that I had created. I contemplated the experiences of my life to see what may emerge. I achieved this by setting aside time and space to purposefully focus on distinct periods in my life. I have little sense of a coherent narrative, it is rather fragmented. Yet powerful images, of especially painful moments, washed over me. I offer the occasional extract from the journals throughout this work to give a flavour of their content, purpose and usefulness to me.

2.2.9 Conception

This research project, *Saving face: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study of women's personal agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences* began with an exploration of my own adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); along with observations, reflections and insight gained from working with many women, also living with the legacy of ACEs and seemingly poor agency.

My desire to enter the D(Psych) programme at Metanoia came about as I considered the end of my studies on the Master of Education programme (Child & Adolescent Psychotherapeutic Counselling route) at The University of Cambridge. My research explored how shame may be accessed and processed with adolescents, using art materials, within the therapeutic relationship. The findings indicated that using the

creative arts² had been instrumental in the participants' accessing and processing of shame without the need for extensive or perhaps intrusive discussion with these young shame-based client-participants.

As an arts-based practitioner the creative/expressive arts form the basis for much of my client work with children, young people and adults. It therefore felt natural to use creative methods in my M.Ed. and again for this present research study. It also speaks to the phenomenological aspect aligning with van Manen (2016c, p. xi) who states the usefulness of

"...interpretive models that place human situatedness central and are based on the belief that we can best understand human beings from the experiential reality of their lifeworlds."

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of consciousness as they appear and are experienced from a subjective view point. As will become clear, using art in research feels natural when accessing deeply rooted embodied experiences in the least shaming way possible. As van der Kolk (2015, p. 16) states:

"Because humans are meaning making creatures, we have a tendency to create some sort of image or story..."

However, in spite of my personal experience and previous research interest I could not seem to articulate the essence of the tacit knowing, held within me, into a research project. A challenging yet necessary period of 'grappling' ensued. I work with many people identifying under the LGBTQ+ umbrella so initially considered

² At this point I was using the term creative art whereas now I prefer the term expressive art as all expressions are necessarily creative to begin with.

researching shame within the transgender population. However, I realised this did not feel congruent with the tacit knowing; my search continued.

Interested in women's experiences of shame, trauma and parenting, I explored the possibility of researching with members of the female prison population. After discussions with an independent social worker and Dr Maxine Daniels, an expert-in-the-field of working with prisoners, it became apparent that this would be near-impossible within a reasonable time frame and due to my lack of experience in the penal system.

At the time I was working as an arts-based therapist in a primary school, a service which I had previously set up. It seemed natural, then, to consider researching the phenomenon of shame in primary school children. Researching with young people was not unusual under the educational research umbrella at Cambridge and therefore the ethical considerations a known quantity. Yet, without the education research umbrella I realised I would face an ethical migraine and deemed it not feasible.

These ideas were not wasted as unknowingly they were bringing me closer to my topic. I spent weeks dwelling with the tacit sense: the 'something'. I began contemplating the incongruences of my childhood. The outwardly respectable home, the granddaughter of the local Anglican incumbent, middle classism and all its 'niceties'. I thought about the local private school, the 'privilege' of boarding school, the well-spoken, polite, obedient, yet lonely, only child. The odd, socially awkward, hypervigilant, pathological people pleaser. I could go on. But what was *'the thing'* that evaded me so? What was the problem that I embodied but could not seem to articulate?

As I grappled with defining the focus for my research I began to realise that the incongruence I was experiencing lay in the space between being the 'privileged' ex-boarder and the shame-filled, angry, socially awkward only child with attachment issues, poor emotional regulation, and physical issues in adulthood. Who notices the child living in an 'outwardly respectable' family? Joy Schaverien's work on 'Boarding School Syndrome' (2015) spoke to some of my experience, however it did not appear to speak to the boarders for whom *home* was frightening.

During a period of reflection I realised that my life had been a series of events over which I had no sense of knowing or perceptible control. I just went along with.... a sense of being *done to* rather than being self-directed. I was so consumed with trying to belong and so unknowing of myself that I never thought about or had the ability to consider what I actually wanted or needed to live a meaningful life. I never questioned that I could be *someone* without others' approval or consider what might give my life meaning and purpose? Every 'decision' was underwritten by an unconscious need to belong, no matter the personal cost.

After reading about childhood trauma and development of the self, I began realising that I had lived with a catastrophic lack of personal agency. I recognised that many events in my life had been suggested to me, including doctoral study, and that my strong priority to please had left me fulfilling others' desires and expectations, not my own – although I'm not sure I would have known what they were in any case. A most embarrassing example of this occurred to me when pregnant with my daughter. I was discussing name choices with a friend. She questioned the spelling of a name I was considering, suggesting that I should spell it a certain way. I had not questioned the spelling until this conversation, yet completed the birth certificate with the name written as suggested by my friend! Why did I do this? I can only surmise to avoid shameful feelings of my friend not

liking something I had chosen and therefore not pleasing her. It still irks me some 23 years later, although recently I did 'confess' this to her causing bewilderment! In the spring of 2020, early in to the Coronavirus pandemic, I began a practitioner training with Trauma Informed Schools UK Ltd. I was introduced to the acronym ACE: adverse childhood experiences. While I was aware of the phenomenon of childhood trauma I had, incredibly, never heard children's trauma or adversity described in this way. As I began learning about the ACE study (Felitti & Anda, 2020) I realised that I scored six out of the possible ten experiences considered to be adverse.

Alongside the soon to be diagnosed combined ADHD it was an intensely life changing period. While discussing my thoughts one evening with my wife, I had another epiphanic moment. Could it be that the adverse experiences in my childhood and teenage years had impacted the development of my personal agency? Was this what lay behind my never ending need to save face? My mind and body were awash with excitement. Might *this* be the nugget I was searching for? The one I and many clients seemed to experience?

After months of uncertainty I sensed I had finally struck the nugget of gold I had been searching for. I was elated! I began a preliminary literature search but found nothing linking ACEs to women's personal agency development and saving face. I began to consider that if, from an earlier age, I had had knowledge about ACEs, agency and saving face, then I may have made some different choices and viewed myself differently. I also realised that my research could potentially lead to products which would support mothers in breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma. My research topic was born.

Sprague (2016) explains that researchers who openly offer their reasons for being invested in the research question necessarily reveal more about their own

assumptions, biases, and agendas and may include such data in the findings. It is important to me that my investment in the topic is as transparent as possible. My hours of wondering led me to consider the questions I wanted to answer, as I will now discuss.

2.3 Research questions

2.3.1 Rationale

The rationale for this study, then, is to use expressive arts to gain insight into the lived experience of women who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences, have potentially lacked agency development, and for whom saving face is used as a safeguarding strategy. I will use insight gained to develop products that support the development of women's agency, address the effects of ACEs and saving face while contributing to the reduction of intergenerational trauma.

2.3.2 Questions

True to the phenomenological aspect of this study, the following questions emerged 'bottom up' as I incubated and dwelled with the phenomena in question:

1. When do women first recognise they have ACEs and what is this experience like for them?
2. What impact do adverse childhood experiences have on the development of women's personal agency?
3. What is the impact on their relationships?
4. How do women who have been subjected to ACEs experience themselves as agentic?

5. What meaning do women attribute to the phenomenon of 'saving face' and how does this link to their sense of personal agency?

The participants, all practicing psychotherapists, had already, at pre-interview, recognised that ACEs were a feature in their life story. The questions were developed and amended after the pilot studies into the following interview questions:

- 1 At what stage in your life did you recognise and acknowledge that you had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and what was your experience of this?
- 2 What do you understand as your personal agency and how might your ACEs have impacted its development?
- 3 How do you think your ACEs and personal agency have impacted your relationships with others?
- 4 What are your experiences of saving face and how do you sense these experiences have been influenced by your ACEs and your personal agency?

After discussing with my AA my concern that the project was in danger of resembling a quasi-sociology doctorate, I added a fifth question:

- 5 How are you able to take what you've learnt through your own experiences of ACEs, the development of your personal agency and saving face, back into your therapeutic client work?

By asking these questions my aim was to answer the overarching research questions:

- What impact do adverse childhood experiences have on the development of women's personal agency and how might this influence their need to save face?
- How might ACEs and poorly developed agency impact women's relationships?

2.4 Learning from the Learning Agreement and Programme Approval Panel

A sense of holistic learning occurred, from the achievement I felt, after presenting my draft learning agreement (LA) to the Programme Approval Panel (PAP).

Presenting evokes a memory of the mistake I made when, at nine years old, I recited the 'Lord's Prayer' to a full school hall of peers, parents and teachers. Flooded with shame I froze before them offering an embarrassed '*sorry*' to the room. As I was the vicar's granddaughter this was even more humiliating. I knew the prayer better than the back of my hand; yet made my mistake *before the gaze of others*. From that moment on, the intense humiliation I felt has preceded *all* experiences of talking in front of people, whether professionally or socially.

I had the most incredible feedback from the PAP leaving me rather overwhelmed. I satisfied the questions that were asked of me and felt confident with my topic. Although I was in a frenzy of charged excitement, I understood what the greater significance of this event meant to me; the validation of *my* research project.

The only requested change to my final Learning Agreement was to consider and discuss the cultural implications regarding the participation of women originating from non-White European heritage. Would I positively discriminate and if not how

would I manage the cultural variance in attitudes towards childhood adversity, personal agency and the matter of saving face? (see chapters 4 & 5).

2.5 Psychotherapy

This thesis is the culmination of personal, professional and research experience. It is also a partial requirement towards the award of Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies. There is a clear linkage to sociology within the topics of women's studies (e.g. feminist theory) and agency (e.g., structure vs agency debates) and, Critical Realism (e.g. a philosophy of ontology in the social sciences). Yet, I am a psychotherapist, so it felt important to me that I consider what is meant by psychotherapy in order to establish it as the heartbeat for this study. I have therefore added a short section dedicated to psychotherapy in my review of the literature and weave this thread throughout the project.

2.6 Freedom and inspiration

As I considered my attitude towards the topic and my research project I came across these words written by Mark D. Vagle (2018, p. xvi):

"...I mean the kind of humility whereby we turn ourselves over to openness, wonder and inquiry. It is the kind of humility we engage when we try to stop being so certain of what we know and what we think. It is the kind of humility evinced when we truly consider new things. It is the kind of humility in which we let go."

Touching me deeply I questioned the importance of these words; what meaning did they hold for me? As I closed my eyes and freed myself to dwell in their meaning I came to know myself as too often stuck in historic scripts of deterministic doom,

paradoxically *restricting* myself from the freedom to *know* myself that I have so long envisaged *for* myself.

During a particularly stuck moment, this time as I sat seemingly immobilised within the quagmire of complexity I was generating for myself over the phenomenological aspect of my methodology, I reached out to Dr Rupert King for some guidance. Dr King graciously accepted my invitation and, with his typically calm and considered manner helped me take stock and realise I was on the right track, just over complicating things for myself. Recognising some similarities between our research methodologies Dr King also suggested I look at certain chapters in his own phenomenological thesis to help with my own project and cite it as evidence that in part, the phenomenological dimension to the work, has been successfully achieved before. I began reading and felt excited and inspired when I came across King's (2017) words:

"This thesis is an invitation.....a guide – an example of how to connect the reader with the fertile ground..... this type of engagement requires patience, imagination and Openness."

With Dr Vagle's words and Dr King's invitation in mind, I have approached this project accordingly, with gratitude for their wisdom. I feel set to go forward, no matter the hurdles I may face along the way. I begin with my review of the extant literature as a base from which to locate and commence this study.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Purpose

My review of the literature revealed that there are no previous studies using expressive art that link ACEs, personal agency, saving face, and women's studies, thus indicating the esoteric nature of the study. This is the position from which my literature review begins. The review takes a theory-based approach to the literature (Hart, 2018) which aims to knit together several related and complementary concepts, ideas and theoretical positions to form a contextual framework in which the development of women's personal agency, adverse childhood experiences and saving face, as explored with art, may be located. While I attempt to create a framework that is accessible and relevant, literature pertaining to individual subject areas such as agency and women's studies are extensive and therefore, in this review, I give a 'flavour' rather than exhaustive account. Moustakas (1994, p. 112) reminds me that

"The theoretical review analyses the theories that account for the existence of the phenomenon."

3.2 Literature search strategy

To conduct my search I consulted my own books plus peer reviewed journal articles using the following search engines:

APA PsycInfo and PsycArticles

PubMed

Google Scholar

Science Direct

Web of Science

Middlesex University online library

Researchgate.net

academia.edu

It is noteworthy that as of July 2022 I discovered a book by the American psychologist Dr Laurence Heller and NARM trainer Brad Kammer (Heller & Kammer, 2022) that proposes trauma work focusing on the development of agency. This was not published at the time I conducted my literature search or carried out my research interviews. However, the Neuro Affective Relational Model (NARM) that Heller and Kammer propose, is different in many aspects. For example, currently my theory and model is, as yet, not a complete trauma approach, NARM does not have any emphasis on saving face and, unlike my model, it is not arts-based. My research also focuses specifically on women's experience. I take comfort in the fact that over in America the link between ACEs and Agency is gaining momentum which adds validation and positioning for my own research.

The areas I am covering are both varied and extensive and, as such, no search can be fully comprehensive. I have therefore critically evaluated the literature within the subject areas most salient to the research project: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study into women's personal agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences, in order to help me answer the research questions:

- *What impact do adverse childhood experiences have on the development of women's personal agency and how might this influence their need to save face?*
- *How might ACEs and poorly developed agency impact women's relationships?*

With no previous studies to guide me I had to consider what to include and potentially exclude from the literature search. When considering what to include I began with the phenomena in question and the demographic I wanted to research. This gave me:

- Women

- Face (including saving face)
- Personal agency
- Adverse childhood experiences

I then considered the phenomena of **shame** from my own experience, my master's research and discussions with female clients who, having experienced adversity or trauma in childhood recognised it as inherent within their being. This then led to **trauma** as a category, for not all adversity is necessarily traumatic and it is important to differentiate between that which is traumatic, and that which is not.

As I considered the phenomenon of saving face I was drawn to the development of **self, identity** and the **inauthenticity** potentially caused by masking one's true self, character and personality.

I then contemplated the healing aspect already with the knowledge that I would be conducting interviews that included the creation of expressed images. For this reason I chose to include a short section on **art heals**.

One of the key reasons for excluding other areas was quite simply down to word count; I decided to include literature I had searched and written up in the appendices as I had already long exceeded the maximum I had allowed for the main body of the work. I suggest that there are many potentially related topics and none that could be deemed irrelevant. However, I had to make a decision on what to include and therefore my justification for inclusion was substantiated by the multiplicity of phenomena being explored. I was also aware that the subject matter was sociologically biased and therefore also represented the study's **psychotherapy** roots.

Women are at the heart of this work therefore I begin this review with discussion of what it means to be a woman while giving an overview of some of the struggles women have faced along with how they have responded.

3.3 Women's studies

In the current age of critical race theory, critical social justice, identity politics ideology, and 'wokeness', I admit to feeling rather nervous to say anything about women, which, in itself, I find disturbing. I have never seen myself as a politicised woman yet this doctoral process is changing me. I notice my interest in women's studies growing by the day. I also believe in respectful, intelligent free speech and so, with courage, I begin this discussion with a simple and yet, within the current zeitgeist, a seemingly ineffable question.

3.3.1 What is a woman?

A woman is an adult female human being (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022b) with XX chromosomes. Beyond that, the experience of what being a woman means to each individual will depend on their subjective experience. For essentialists being a woman is an anatomical destiny and for some feminists differentiating between sex and gender has been crucial in debunking this claim (Butler, 1986, 2004, 2006; de Beauvoir, 2011; Webster, 2000). The experience of growing up female from a girl to a woman will have, in many ways, varied significantly depending on race, culture, ethnicity and particular domestic setting. It will also depend on which century, decade and even year they were born. Yet *all women* face threat potential.

3.3.2 Crimes against women

Being a woman can mean danger. In the United Kingdom (UK), between 2009 and 2019 a woman was killed by a man, on average, every three days with "*millions*" of further crimes committed against women and girls involving violence, harassment

and abuse annually (NPCC, 2021). In 2020 in the UK 110 women were killed by men (Femicide Census, 2020). The year ending 2020 saw 15% of police-recorded crime as domestic abuse against women; this equates to an estimated 1.6 million female victims of violence perpetrated by men (NPCC, 2021). Since March 2021 no less than eight murders have been reported in the news of women dying at the hands of violent men. For example, Sarah Everard, the 33 year old woman who was kidnapped, brutally raped and murdered at the hands of a serving Metropolitan Police officer (NPCC, 2021).

Estimates by the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that 30% of women across the globe have been physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner or by non-partner sexual violence during their lifetime (UN Women, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2021). The data is shocking and the violence perpetrated towards women is grotesque. It is perhaps unsurprising that the risk factors to those vulnerable to such violence align with many of the risk factors originating from the 1995-1997 adverse childhood experience (ACE) study (Felitti & Anda, 2020). Children growing up in a familial setting where violence is prevalent, may suffer from a range of behavioural and emotional difficulties, and, I argue, poor agentic development. This may lead to perpetrating violence themselves or, due to Freud's repetition compulsion (Van der Kolk, 1989), unwittingly 'choose' abusive partners and thus the cycle of intergenerational trauma proliferates (World Health Organisation, 2021).

During 1992-1995, it is reported that an estimated 50,000 Bosnian women were subjected to rape as a weapon of war. Thousands more witnessed the devastation of their homes and killing of loved ones leaving them with the struggle of trying to provide for their families while dealing with terrible trauma (Milojevic & Kesmer, 2022). One woman, Fatima, spoke of unimaginable cruelty during the Rwandan

genocide of 1994: *“They told me to choose: either have sex with us or we will abort your child”* (Women for Women International, 2022).

As history repeatedly shows, and now again with the conflict in Ukraine, wars are inherently gendered. Men go to the battlefield and women, as they try to protect their families, are exposed to the most heinous of war crimes such as rape, trafficking, violence and arbitrary killings (Alsalem R., 2022; O’Brien & Quenivet, 2022). United Nations Women reported initial evidence to suggest a global intensification of violence against women and girls due to the Covid-19 pandemic with an increase in reports of calls to helplines, the police and women’s refuge shelters from service-use data across the globe (UN Women, 2020).

3.3.3 Patriarchy

All the female participants in this research were children once and all will have likely experienced, whether consciously or not, the effects of patriarchal oppression in some form or another. As a child of the 1970’s and a teenager in the 1980’s it doesn’t take me long to identify such experiences. The word patriarchy originates from the Latinized form of Greek *patriarkhia*, from *patriarkhēs* meaning ‘male chief or head of a family’ with a ‘system of society or government by fathers or elder males of the community’ being recorded from the 1630s (Harper, 2020). Nowadays the term is used typically

“to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways” (Bhasin, 1993, p. 3)

Feminists typically state the term ‘patriarchy’ when describing the power dynamic between men and women with patriarchy relating to male dominance and oppression found both in private and public arenas with the concept used by feminists to help understand women’s realities (Sultana, 2012). Dating from the

1960's, 'radical feminism' calls to eliminate male supremacy in all domains by radically reordering a society in which the patriarchy is abolished (Echols & Willis, 2019).

3.3.4 Feminism

Feminism is an extensive and complex area of study. It is also important when considering women's studies. Yet to give a substantial account would necessitate a dedicated study. Feminism has been referred to as a series of 'waves', indicative of periods in time when women's concerns came to the fore as political issues, *not* because they were the first female thinkers in history (Grady, 2018). Women's activism began largely in search for equal rights between the sexes, moving towards a more nuanced approach, focusing on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality (Butler, 2006; Day, 2016; Hines, 2020).

Many questions have arisen for me, not least regarding women's agency and the levels presumably employed by the many thousands of women taking part in feminist activism. Yet, it occurs to me that they cannot all have been without adversity in their childhoods? For example the suffragist author Rebecca West (née Cecily Fairfield) 1893-1983 who remarked, of her childhood, that it was a deplorable and deprived existence with her father leaving the family for good in 1901 (Glendinning, 1987; Rollyson, 1995). I wonder, then, what enables some women to rouse towards activism but not others? Perhaps it was an innate resilience to such adversity and/or finding a sense of connection, belonging and comradeship that motivated women such as West. I find West's (1983, p. 219) powerful words both poignant and though provoking:

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute."

3.3.5 First wave

As Smith (2019) describes, 'first wave' feminism occurred towards the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at a time when women, world-wide, demanded basic rights such as receiving the money they earned, owning property and gaining the same political rights as men.

As part of the first wave, the women only members of the UK political movement Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), demanded the right to vote in political elections. Founded by Emily Pankhurst in 1903, women members undertook direct action along with civil disobedience, highlighting the extent of feeling. The Suffragettes, as they came to be known, felt towards the extant inequality women were subjected to (Pankhurst, 1911; Phillips, 2004).

The disturbing image below depicts one of the ways suffragists were treated if, after arrest, they went on hunger strike. Even more alarming is that while a man holds open the woman's mouth, other women can be seen administering the force feeding. I wonder if, for the woman in the chair, her resolve was similar to that of Frankl who espoused that no matter the circumstances, we can choose our attitude towards it (Frankl, 2004).



Image 1 - (Pankhurst, 1911, p. 432)

Women became avid readers and participated in political and literary discussion but it was not until 1928 and the Equal Franchise Act that women over the age of 21 achieved the same rights to vote as men (UK Parliament, 2022). In another shocking example of inequality, Mary Whiton Calkin was denied her PhD at Harvard on the basis that she was a woman (Calkins, 1930). Yet as far back as 1865 John Stuart Mill, a philosopher, civil servant, member of parliament, and a keen proponent of classical liberalism, was elected to a platform in parliament that supported women having the vote. In 1869 he wrote *The Subjection of Women*, a treatise on the promotion of social and legal equality which was also not only unexpected but pivotal in changing the way that men viewed women (Thomson, 2022).

3.3.6 Second wave

In 1949 French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir published her seminal text *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 2011) which signalled the early beginnings of feminism's 'second wave'. Differentiating between what she saw as biological sex (female) and gender (woman) de Beauvoir (2011, p. 293) famously said:

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

Although this statement's intention is open to interpretation (e.g., Lebeouf, 2015) de Beauvoir asserted that perceptions of gender are not biologically inherited, rather, they are imposed on us by the society and culture we live in. Rather than born a fully formed woman, she is influenced by the external factors of her upbringing and it is these influences that conspire to make her passive and 'the second sex' as subordinate to men (de Beauvoir, 2011).

3.3.7 Third wave

As a movement, third wave feminism broadened the debate focussing on patriarchal critique, issues of domesticity such as domestic violence and marital rape alongside male-dominated institutions, workplaces and cultural practices (Lebeouf, 2015). In 1963 Betty Friedan's controversial book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was published in which the 'accidental' polemic feminist Friedan discusses the systemic sexism within which women were taught that their place was in the home and any complaint was due to their being broken and perverse (Friedan, 2010). Friedan is also well known for the following quip (Grady, 2018):

"I thought there was something wrong with me because I didn't have an orgasm waxing the kitchen floor."

3.3.8 Campaigning

Feminist political activists campaign in areas such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, fairness, social justice, and workplace issues such as family medical leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, and discrimination (Hines, 2020). Across the globe marital rape, child brides, 'honour killings' (Kumari, 2017) and female genital mutilation still exist in countries where there are no laws to protect women; only as recently as 2015 have women been able to vote in Saudi Arabia (COE, 2022; Gill et al., 2014).

Of interest to this study is political activism in the area of domestic violence (Lombard & McMillan, 2013) which, when witnessed or experienced first-hand, may lead to traumatic memory being held within the body of a developing child (Rothschild, 2017; van der Kolk, 2015); thus contributing to subsequent mental and/or physical ill health in adulthood as indicated by the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) study (Burke Harris, 2018; Felitti & Anda, 2020).

3.3.9 Fourth wave

Sometimes referred to as in its fourth-wave, modern day feminism exists as an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach concerned primarily with issues of equality and justice based on issues of sex, sexuality, gender, gender expression, race, and power (Delap, 2021; National Women's History Museum, 2021).

Feminist discourse has also entered the realms of the internet and social media platforms with a plethora of conflicting opinions confusing and alienating those trying to make sense of feminism within the latest political climate (Redfern & Aune, 2013; Teitel, 2014). In part, today's feminism is being criticised for its over conformity and, as Teitel (2014) suggests, its

“never-ending obsession with ‘privilege’...internet bickering and suffocating identity politics.”

Feminism, then, may be viewed as a largely political and temporal movement relative to the zeitgeist. While it has been referred to as a series of waves, the belief they are monolithic is false. Rather, each 'wave' has developed as emergent from the previous (Day, 2016; Delap, 2021; Grady, 2018; Lay & Daley, 2007).

From my reading to date, it has become apparent that modern feminism and gender studies presents a divided and contentious area of scholarship and theory development. It has been challenging to grapple with the plethora of information while raising questions beyond the scope of the present study. I have looked to Critical Realism (see Chapter 4) to help me find a way forward at this stage of my learning.

3.3.10 Feminism through a critical realist lens

Feminism and gender studies, seemingly fraught with dispute and fractious splits, presents the challenging assumption that the fields are, at best, in a state of unrest underlaid by the patriarchal 'norms' that still exist, while recognising

"the feminist movement in itself far from being a unified force for liberation" (van Ingen et al., 2021)

Gunnarsson, van Ingen and Grohmann (2021) argue that a return to the critical realist philosophy of science offers feminism and gender studies a base from which to ask important ontological, epistemological, intersectional, and methodological questions. They also suggest that advancements could be made through the dialectical logic of a critical realist approach.

Young (1994) argues that the category of 'women' is unequivocally requisite to the feminist task. Yet Gunnarsson (2020, p. 99) was left

"slightly disturbed, yet not very surprised"

when, at a conference, in response to a question about what makes feminist theory feminist, a participant offered an elaborate answer without uttering the words 'women' or 'men' or any such representation. Gunnarsson (2020) adds that according to Gubar (1998, p. 886),

"Women has become an invalid word."

Critical Realism is a dense and complex area of study but from my understanding of its relationship to feminism, there is a call to return to a philosophy (of science)

that does not eschew the term 'women' in favour of a broader spectrum of gender identities. Rather, that we recognise each for their contribution to social study; a position I find to be both pragmatic and tenable while putting me somewhat at ease.

3.3.11 Feminism in counselling and psychotherapy

Much of the literature on feminism in counselling and psychotherapy (as opposed to feminism and psychology) for women appears to be from the time of the women's liberation movement to the early 1990's. Other than revised editions, recent papers and books with updated information appear to be scant; although much of the work appears to still be as relevant today. Feminists in the 1980's moved towards understanding how the psychic inner life of women could be affected by living in an oppressive society of institutionalised sexism whereby women were seen primarily as carers of children and the family (Young, 1994). Another important achievement of the era was to identify that psychology as a discipline was based on the experiences of men, with Kitzinger (1991, p. 49) arguing that the discipline itself was oppressive to women, with men

"labelling us intellectually and morally inferior when we comply with patriarchal models of femininity, and mad when we refuse."

As an early pioneer of feminist therapy, Miriam Greenspan, a innovator in the field of women's psychology, laid out a model for practice that exposed what she saw as the harmful traditional of patriarchal psychotherapy (Greenspan, 2017). She envisioned a therapeutic framework free from oppression and movement towards women's healing (Greenspan, 2017). Greenspan (2017; 1983) wanted to initiate a feminist framework that, rather than pathologising so called 'symptoms', understood women's repressed anger, depression, and low self-esteem as the result of patriarchal oppression and societal dominance. Greenspan saw the women's

liberation movement as beneficial in 'curing' her own sense of powerlessness, depression, and aimlessness and wanted to develop a therapeutic model that could also be advantageous for other women (Greenspan, 2017). And so the first edition of her seminal book *A New Approach to Women & Therapy* (1983) was born.

Influences such as sexual orientation, ability, race, class, and age are considered within a complex social structure that has power and dominance at its core (L. S. Brown, 2018). With an egalitarian approach and the relationship at its centre, feminist therapy seeks to empower clients by helping them find and use their voice to address the issues that have led to a poor sense of agency and lack of authority over their lives (L. S. Brown, 2018; Greenspan, 1983).

Having said this, it is important to note some important findings from research carried out by Ogrodniczuk (2006). The findings showed that women's outcomes in therapy were more successful when a more collaborative, personal and supportive relationship, which attended to external factors as causal for their distress, were emphasised.

Men, on the other hand, benefited from a more neutral therapeutic relationship which facilitated introspection and examination of difficult emotions (Ogrodniczuk, 2006). Although there may always be exceptions, I suggest this highlights one of the many innate differences between women and men. Pondering this led me to consider that for many women, who enter therapy, misogyny and oppression may underlay their relationships, be it at home or in the work place, and so the quality of the relationship as supportive and collaborative in therapy must be based on equity.

Whereas for men, therapy becomes a space where they can explore difficult emotions free from the ego driven machismo and albeit unintended humiliation they may experience from their male associates. Masculinity in and of itself is another huge area of study and beyond the scope of this review. However, it is

noteworthy that while the majority of men are, it is argued, not aligned with hegemonic masculinity there are many who are, perhaps inadvertently, complicit in its maintenance (Robinson, 2020).

What has become clear, is that, unless highlighted in the title, much of the literature I own pertaining to counselling and psychotherapy, other than that specifically relating to the transgender/transsexual population, is, as noted by Day (1992) rather 'gender-blind' with the fallacious assumption that men and women are the same. I am also left wondering why I hadn't noticed before? It is an outcome of this literature search, that I realise how little I have known and how impacted I feel from the little knowledge I have now acquired; I view this as a personal research product.

From my reading to date it seems clear to me that a feminist approach which is premised on equality, anti-oppression and multi-cultural theoretical paradigms would benefit both clients and therapists working within the vast array of therapeutic modalities that exist today.

3.3.12 Women and power

Power is a crucial concept and phenomenon for analysis in feminist thought. Feminists are concerned with understanding, critiquing, and challenging the multitude of unjust power differentials affecting women in contemporary Western societies (McNey, 1992). These include sexism, racism, class oppression, misogyny, and heterosexuality. In *The Power of Feminist Theory*, Allen (2000) identifies the inadequacies of previous feminist conceptions of power, instead drawing on the work of power theorists such as Judith Butler (1997, 2006, 2021a), Michel Foucault (2020b, 2020a; McNey, 1992), and Hannah Arendt (2018) in order to construct a revised feminist notion of power. The notion of power developed by Allen (2000) enables readers to conceive domination, resistance, and camaraderie in a way that elucidates the interrelatedness and connection of these three modes of power.

3.3.13 Women rise up

But, women have fought back, beginning for example with The Women's Rights Movement between 1848–1917. Yet, despite historical gains, e.g., the vote, the inequality that activists have fought against still exists (Phillips, 2004). The women's liberation movement of the late 1960's to the mid-1980's began as a network of local groups who communicated their message through its newsletters, the first of which was distributed in 1969, the year I was born – a sobering thought. Campaigns included reproduction and abortion rights, equal pay, political representation, men's contribution to domesticity, feminist art and culture, and women against violence against women (Fraser, 2013). Campaigning led to equal rights legislation, notably the sex discrimination act and domestic violence and matrimonial proceedings acts both in 1975 (British Library, 2022; Murphy, 2022).

3.3.14 Celebrating women

Celebrating women's achievements, including the cultural, political, economic, and social saw the first International Women's Day (IWD) take place in 1911; a key aim of IWD is to promote the acceleration of women's equality (International Women's Day, 2022). IWD is not a country or organization specifically, rather it belongs to all collective groups worldwide. United Nations Women reported sixteen defining moments for gender equality in 2021, e.g., new laws to support survivors of gender-based violence, women in the highest political offices, and eliminating gender stereotypes in advertising (UN Women, 2021).

As I pondered the knitting together of the phenomena in question, women, ACEs, agency, saving face, and related concepts, e.g., agency and its relations free will and self-efficacy, I realised that they all manifest under the broader notion of identity. I therefore continue my literature search by asking *what is identity and how does it develop?*

3.4 Identity

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates famously declared that an unexamined life was not worth living (The School of Life, 2022a). When asked to sum up what all philosophical commandments could be reduced to, he is said to have replied '*know thyself*', an aphorism inscribed in the forecourt at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece (Best, 2022; The School of Life, 2022a). For the ancient Greeks the god Apollo represented enlightened power with self-knowledge and identity forming the basis of their civilization (Rossellini, 2018).



Image 2 - 'Know Thyself'

(from Cyprus Today on Twittter.com)

3.4.1 What is identity?

From medieval Latin *idem* (same) and later *identitas* (sameness) identity came to represent a specific temporal quality of dependability across time (Bamberg et al., 2022). This speaks to the current concern within identity politics which, I suggest, fundamentally highlights an incessant need to belong, to ensure our sense of connectedness, and even our survival. For Maslow, to belong is one of the crucial needs that motivates human behaviour (S. McLeod, 2018) and for Adler (1992) one of the fundamental tenets of Individual Psychology known as the German *gemeinschaftsgefühl* and translated to Social Interest. Quite simple, yet effective, is Todd's interpretation: "*Identity is how we are known to ourselves*" (2008, p. 211) and for Becker (1997) our identity and behaviour are determined by how we are described and classified.

Identity development may be viewed as a lifelong process in which we define our beliefs, morals, values and sense of who we are and our place in the world. Our personal identity develops and changes from childhood to adolescence, as we mature towards adulthood (Appiah, 2005; Bamberg et al., 2022; Coulmas, 2019; Holland et al., 1998; Scott, 2015). As a socially driven species with an innate need for connection (Adler, 1992, 1998; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009) our identity is influenced by many factors. These may include familial setting, friends, social groups, cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, gender, sexual, and professional identities (Bamberg et al., 2022; Holland et al., 1998). Interestingly since 2010 the number of English-language books with 'identity' in the title exceeds 10,000 (Coulmas, 2019).

As a concept 'identity' relates theories and invokes discourse from a variety of sources such as ethics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, social psychology, and interdisciplinary fields including cultural studies (Bamberg et al., 2022; Coulmas, 2019; Holland et al., 1998). Ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual identity and nationality are typically the concern of 'cultural identities' to which people are structurally categorised and identified (Bamberg et al., 2022; Holland et al., 1998). The current insurgence of identity politics highlights, in particular, transgenderism as a current frontier within which identity is being explored and debated (Burchill, 2021; Butler, 2021b; Stock, 2021).

A departure from matters of identity leads naturally onto the development of a 'self' which will now be explored.

3.5 Self

Unlike a foot or a hand the self is, I suggest, an intangible aspect of what it means to be a human being. Somewhat subjective, definitions will vary dependent on belief, faith and for counsellors and psychotherapists perhaps influenced by the theoretical

framework with which they trained (J. McLeod, 2013; Mearns & Thorne, 2007). Self can be used to describe someone's characteristic attributes such as personality and their non-physical abilities that make a person different from other people (Hanna & Bemak, 1997; Peters & Vereen, 2020; Woo et al., 2014). Contributing to our sense of self, we may include genetically determined tendencies, temperamental differences, and other physiological predispositions which combine with the prenatal environmental stresses to form the embryonic self (Firestone, 2016).

Underlying modern discourse on self is Locke's empirical treatise on personal identity (Locke, 1997) and a self which has been, according to Strawson (2011), erroneously critiqued as circular in nature and inconsistent. Scholars such as Plato, Kant and certain religious thinkers have viewed the self as a perpetual soul capable of transcending the psyche and those such as Hume and Levinas, for whom the self is merely a group of perceptions (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2022; Thagard, 2014).

From a psychological perspective self has encouraged a plethora of popular yet anecdotally ridiculed 'self-help' books (Hall, 2021). Amongst many, titles such as 'dear self,' (Tamarra, 2022), 'Women Who Love Too Much' (Norwood, 2004) and of the current zeitgeist the rather amusingly titled 'Oh No, Not Another 'Woke' Self-Help Book' (Skye, 2022) can be found. We evolve continually, contextualised within the many experiences we face as part of our growth. While discovering our self, the essence of what makes us unique, can be usefully viewed as part of life's journey rather than a concrete destination (Best, 2022; Kohut, 2009b; Redfearn, 1977).

A key proponent of the self from both a philosophical and psychological stance was the previously mentioned Mary Whiton Calkins, a keen supporter of women's rights, a suffragist with an active interest in women's right to vote, and the first female president of the American Psychological Association (Calkins, 1930). For

Calkins (1908, p. 273) the self is unique in so much as it's character is to be distinguished from every other self and is

“an emphasized part of emotion, will, and faith, but an unattended-to factor of all consciousness.”

I am new to the work of Calkins but find the following words, from over 100 years ago, to resonate deeply with my project. I sense her tenacity and find it hugely inspiring (Calkins, 1917, p. 279):

“I am a complex self, a unity of present with past – yes, and with future... I am a perceiving and remembering and thinking and feeling self”

I had previously understood Kohut (2009a, 2009b; A. M. Siegel, 1996) to be the originator of self-psychology. Yet, I discovered during this review it was in fact Calkins who, at the turn of the 20th century introduced the field of self-psychology during a time when notions of the self as a whole, indivisible unit were out of fashion, instead in favour of bringing

“psychological method into artificial correspondence with that of the physical sciences” (Calkins, 1917, p. 278).

Calkin's self-psychology was based on three fundamental conceptions: the self, the object, and the self's relation/attitude towards the object (1930, p. 45) which appears to be in line with Kleinian object-relations theory (Gomez, 1997). Calkins describes the self as *“egoistically conscious”* (towards one's self) or *“altruistically conscious”* (towards other-than-self) (1908, p. 273).

For Jung, the Self (he denoted with a capital S) signifies, through the transcendent function, the unification of our consciousness and unconsciousness, thus representing the psyche in its totality (P. Goss, 2015; Jung, 1969b, 1969a; Lockhart, 2014; J. C. Miller, 2004). The transcendent function is at the heart of Jung's theory of psychological growth and the phenomenon he named *Individuation* (Jung, 1969b; J. C. Miller, 2004). According to Jung this is the process by which a human being is guided teleologically towards the person they are meant to be (Jung, 1969b; Jung & von Franz, 1968; J. C. Miller, 2004).

Freud (2010) explained the self, represented as the Ego (self/consciousness) and two conflicting forces which coexist within us; the Id and the Superego. The Id (unconscious) serves our basic fundamental needs while the Superego (pre-conscious) is akin to a moral compass. The Ego, or sense of self, sits somewhere between the Id, which is always unsatisfied and seeking, and the Superego, which inhibits the Id's impulsive nature. An underdeveloped self may develop due to over-dependence on caregivers, a harsh childhood and adolescence environment or a lack of affection and stimuli for example, poor affect attunement (Stern, 1985). Whereas a strong Ego (self) enables a fulfilled life free from the repression that may hold us back (A. Freud, 1967; S. Freud, 2010). The iceberg is a useful tool to visualise Freud's theory:

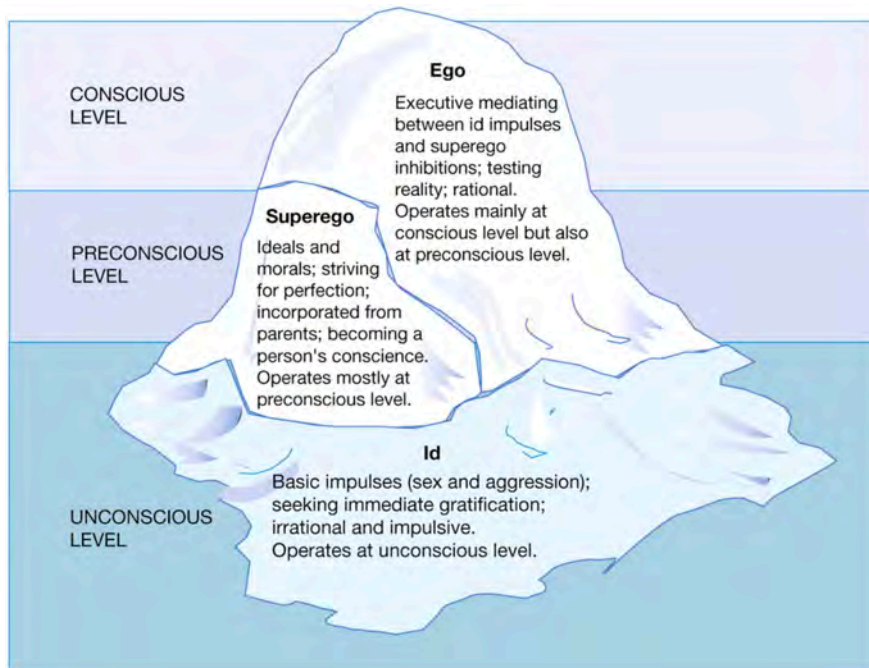


Image 3 – Freudian Iceberg (Brooks, 2017)

Winnicott's contention was that we are all divided into a false and a true self; we are essentially born with a self that is true and authentic while the false self develops to protect this inner and more vulnerable true self (Winnicott, 1990). Developing a sense of self is an activity shared by the maturational processes but also within the therapeutic task (Spelman, 2013; Winnicott, 1990). In what Winnicott terms '*unit status*', dependence is achieved when a fundamental boundary emerges between self and other, thus providing an objective understanding of the 'other' as separate, leading then to the ensuing stage of dependence (Spelman, 2013).

Winnicott's 'true' self is in reference to one that is based on authentic experience; only the true self can feel truly creative and real with an aliveness of the body (Winnicott, 1990). The infant, according to Winnicott (1990), is born with a true and omnipotent self which develops within the mother-infant relationship (Winnicott focuses his theory primarily on the mother-infant). In 'good-enough' parenting the mother is able to make sense of the infant's omnipotence and then, only after

repetition is the infant's true self able to come alive. Following Winnicott's formulation the infant is not interested in others' feelings, rather it is naturally asocial and amoral (The School of Life, 2022b) which contrasts with Adler's belief that we are inherently social and holistically indivisible (Adler, 1992, 1998).

As Abram (1996) points out, and to which I can attest, Winnicott's exact meaning of the term 'self' can be somewhat confusing as he uses the terms self, psyche and ego somewhat interchangeably. We might discern that across Winnicott's work 'self' describes one's subjective sense of being while ego can be differentiated as a self-aspect with the function of categorising and incorporating experience (Abram, 1996). Indeed, it seems as if Winnicott himself was not always certain when describing the false self as having a defensive function, that is to protect and hide the true self "*whatever that may be*" (Winnicott, 1990, p. 142). When considering Winnicott's theory of true and false self it brings up the question of authenticity which is now discussed.

3.5.1 Authenticity

Inextricably linked to one's sense of self, identity and, I argue, purchase towards agency, is the matter of authenticity (Bamberg & Dege, 2022). The etymology of authenticity derives from the Greek *authentikos* meaning original, genuine, principal and autos (self) and hentes (doer/being) – i.e., acting on one's own authority (Harper, 2022b). The phenomenon of authenticity is ubiquitous, yet, due to the plethora and diversity of contexts in which authenticity arises the literature has struggled to consolidate what the term actually means (Harter, 2005; Newman & Smith, 2016). Necessarily, this review privileges a psychological stance.

Joseph suggests that it's only in the past decade or so that research has become more focussed, with positive psychology research stimulated by the work of early

humanistic psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers (Harter, 2012; Joseph, 2017) who considered humans to be hardwired towards authenticity (Joseph, 2017). Maslow's (2011, 2013) version of authenticity was the process of reaching 'self-actualisation' and for Rogers (Rogers, 2003, 2004), to become 'fully functioning'. Both recognised that attempts to be authentic would however be foiled if one's basic needs were not being met. Freud, on the other hand, rejected authenticity suggesting it led to selfish behaviours driven by lustful and murderous urges (Joseph, 2017), although this is contested by Thompson (2005) who suggests that when Freud suggested that the goal of psychoanalysis was to *"transform hysterical misery into common unhappiness"* (Breuer & Freud, 1955, p. 305) he was in fact *"invoking authenticity as an essential, if undeniably ambiguous, goal of psychoanalysis"* (M. G. Thompson, 2005, p. 144).

Nevertheless, a definition appears to remain rather nebulous. Research has conventionally studied authenticity through a dispositional lens (Lenton et al., 2016) which perhaps raises the question of whether authenticity is an essentialist character trait or, alternatively, imbued from life experience and the choices we make? Lenton et al, (2016) suggest that in lay terms authenticity is a feeling of being one's 'real' or 'true self'.

Joseph (2017) has stated that authenticity research is still in its infancy. While there are more recent papers on authenticity many are rather esoteric in nature with less generalisation about the nature of authenticity or its emergence in, for example, psychotherapy. Pertinent however to this project Joseph (2017, p. 37) asks questions such as:

- What are the factors in a young person's life that thwart the development of their authenticity?

- What problems in living does a lack of authenticity lead to?
- How can we nurture authenticity and maintain it in adult life?
- How stable is authenticity over time and right across the lifespan?

This leads me to consider the links between agency and authenticity. A delve into the literature quickly brought about the realisation that a) specific literature is scant and b) broadly, to consider the links is to engage in philosophical and/or neuroethical and/or bioethical debate, all of which extend beyond my purpose here. What becomes apparent, however, is the interrelatedness between agency, authenticity and autonomy. Autonomous agency, although widely debated (Buss & Westlund, 2018) may be viewed with agency as foundational to autonomy; i.e., agency meaning the capacity to act and autonomy requiring that the act is self-governed (Schönau et al., 2021). Although the idea of a definitive attribution-static sense of self is rebutted (Walker & MacKenzie, 2020), nevertheless, if a self-governed act is done so in accordance to one's 'true' self then this may be viewed as authentic (Schönau et al., 2021; Varga & Guignon, 2020).

3.6 Personal (human/self) agency

The terms used interchangeably throughout will be agency, human agency, personal agency and self-agency as referenced in the literature. Autonomy and self-efficacy are concepts closely related to personal agency, and from my search it appears that autonomy, in particular, is often viewed as synonymous with agency. Although I understand why this may be the case it is however a fallacious conclusion as evidenced by the plethora of literature contrasting the two, for example: Oshana (2008), Cummins (2014), Abrams (1999), Hill Jr (1999).

3.6.1 Definitions

Personal or human agency is generally accepted as either a philosophical or sociological construct although definitions appear broad. For the purpose of this review the focus will be psychologically influenced by modern developmental theory which is both relational and systemic in nature (Greene & Nixon, 2020). To aid clarity I initially position agency amongst its related concepts:

- Autonomy - essentially self-government (OED, 2022); an autonomous agent is someone who acts on their own's motives with control over their actions (Buss & Westlund, 2018; Sokol et al., 2015).
- Authenticity - is to act in accordance to one's 'true' self (Harper, 2022b).
- Self-efficacy can be seen as a person's *perceived* ability to act (Bandura, 2014).
- Agency is person's *actual* ability to act with the agent being the one who acts (Bandura, 2001).

While agency, originates from the Latin *agere*, meaning to act or do, human agency typically implies intentionality with control exerted by the 'doer' (Greene & Nixon, 2020). As suggested by Raeff (2017, p. 477) agency can be viewed as

"aspects of action a person controls or regulates him/her self."

To summarise, agency, then, is the ability to make decisions and act upon those decisions in a way that feels authentic and consistent to the way in which we wish to live our life.

3.6.2 Free will and determinism

Also closely related to agency is the issue of whether or not human beings have free will or if everything is pre-determined as was the view espoused by Freud (S. Freud, 1991, 2010), who was, in turn, influenced by Newtonian scientific laws (Dilman, 1999; Frankfurt, 1971). Free will and determinism present an ongoing

debate that theologians, philosophers, scientists, and psychologists have been arguing at least since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers (Dilman, 1999). From an existential phenomenological perspective Sartre believed we are all *condemned to be free* (Sartre, 2003) meaning that freedom comes with the anxiety of responsibility.

Harris (2012) argues that we can never have complete free will. Our seemingly free will choices are contingent on two causes of action: we either *want* or we are *forced*. It seems to me that the paradoxical freedom here is that by agreeing with Harris's thesis, i.e., that we are better off accepting that we do not have free will, we are then 'free' to make choices based on the wants we may have.

3.6.3 Agency and the philosophy of Critical Realism

As a critical realist and social theorist Margaret Archer has been instrumental in debating and resolving sociological issues between structure and agency (M. Archer, 2003; M. S. Archer, 2013; M. S. Archer et al., 1998). Rather than perpetuating the dichotomy of structure vs agency, debates nowadays emphasise the way in which these two fundamental aspects of social life influence each other with questions focused more towards understanding the extent of each's influence on the other and how they may in fact be combined (Stones, 2015). I find the polarisation that has been the source of much debate quite curious; for, without agents acting with agency, societal structures would not exist in the first place. Yet, as I further my reading, I note that Pilgrim, who writes about Critical Realism for psychologists, suggests that social structures "*can only operate through human agency*" (2020, p. 77), which aligns with my thinking.

However, Pilgrim (2020) also suggests that while agents may draw on structures such as organised religion, culture and so on, structures cannot be diminished only to an agent's formation of them. I am in agreement with Hays (1994) who argues

that the interconnectedness between agency and structure is lost when they are polarised, aligning with Weber's individualistic stance (Jackson, 2002; Weber, 2019). For Gorski (2013, p. 668),

"There is no 'structure/agency problem.' Human agents are bio-psycho-social structures with emergent powers of intentionality."

This highlights one area in which the critical realist vision transcends and clarifies the established wisdom (Gorski, 2013).

Roy Bhaskar's underlying principle of Critical Realism is to revindicate ontology as crucial in providing a sound scientific base for asking what the world (the real) is like so that we may come to gain knowledge of it (Bhaskar, 2008). Critical Realism holds that by separating epistemology from ontology we may distinguish between the transitive (changing knowledge) and the intransitive (typically unchanging things we try to know) (Bhaskar, 2008). This aligns with the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus' tradition of viewing reality as being in a state of constant flux, and, with a belief that biological systems are open (one event does not necessary cause or follow another). Critical Realism also holds that human systems are particular in so much as our personal or collective agency inputs towards these systems (Pilgrim, 2020). Trying to reduce what we say is 'real' or exists (ontological statements) to what we can know or understand about the 'real' (epistemological statements) is, what Bhasker termed the *epistemic fallacy* (M. Archer, 2003; Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 2000).

From a critical realist psychological perspective Pilgrim argues that

"objectivity requires substantial epistemic humility and reflexivity about the social norms we are embedded within"

because, as Pilgrim rather amusingly notes, unlike the empirical detachment enjoyed by, for example, a chemist, our ‘test tubes’ (clients) talk back! (2020, p. 28). Yet language affords humans the ability to communicate information about ourselves to others creating the capacity for agency but, argues Pilgrim, our brains, although necessary, are insufficient alone in explaining human experience and behaviour (Pilgrim, 2020).

Childhood adversity is a significant predictor of mental health issues (Burke Harris, 2020; Felitti, 2002). Acute trauma and chronic stress impact neurotransmitter activity in the brain (Lederbogen et al., 2011) while environmental factors shape an infant’s gene expression during and after pregnancy (Galea et al., 2011). These impairments to our biological mechanisms impact the development of agency and, as Critical Realism restates continually, human experience and behaviour, as part of an open system, necessitate temporal and situational contextualisation (Pilgrim, 2020).

I am particularly interested in the development of children’s agency within the constraints of the familial setting, particularly one where ACEs are a de facto constituent of the relational and developmental dynamics. Beyond the scope of this research I am also interested in agency development within the school environment and the role teachers can play in facilitating its development particularly when appreciated through the lens of adverse childhood experiences. From preliminary investigations, this appears to be another under researched area.

3.6.4 Children’s agency

The topic of children’s agency has been neglected, with accounts of its development across childhood sparse (Greene & Nixon, 2020). Conversely, agency is a key concept in Childhood Studies, in which children’s active and agentic contribution to their social worlds can come to be appreciated alongside the development of theoretical and empirical contributions (Esser et al., 2016; James & James, 2012).

Inequitable status impacts children's identity development while necessarily impacting their agential capacity (Wihstutz, 2016). Ordinarily children are free from responsibility but nevertheless bound within a hierarchical structure in which adults are deemed to be control (Wihstutz, 2016). However, for socioeconomically impoverished families or for those where, for example, abuse and domestic violence proliferate, children are at risk of victimisation with minimal influence or choice regarding their environment (Corsaro, 2018).

Early agency begins in infancy when a baby indicates a need for comfort, nourishment or stimulation; when we listen to these messages and respond accordingly we are beginning to build agency in our children (Erickson, 2022). Children learn that even before they have words, their actions are causal in bringing about a response and that they have some control over their environment (Music, 2011). In normal growth children will experience self-efficacy and a developing sense of agency (Xplor Education, 2022).

3.6.5 Developing agency through play

Learning through play encourages a sense of agency which means children can be actively engaged as willing participants who may exert control of their own learning (S. T. Baker et al., 2021; PEDAL Research Centre, 2022). Self-regulation and motivation are two psychological mechanisms that may be naturally encouraged via play and children's agentic development (McClelland & Cameron, 2011). Baker et al., (2014, p. 2) provide a useful feedback loop visual demonstrating the *"multifactorial space between play, agency and learning"* via the aforementioned mechanisms.

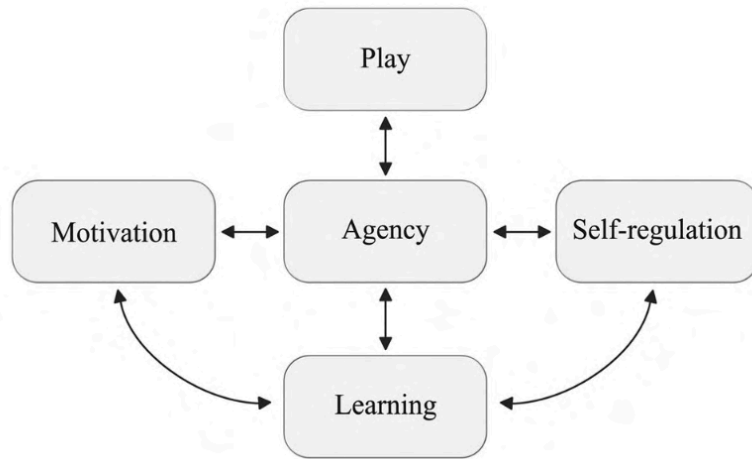


Figure 1 – Feedback loop (F. A. Baker et al., 2017)

The greater the mechanisms of self-regulation and motivation are developed, the more agency can be employed by children in their learning (S. T. Baker et al., 2021). Baker et al., (2021) suggest that learning through play is effective as it harnesses the natural way in which the brain learns and develops. Learning through play also encourages a *theory of mind* whereby the child begins to appreciate what other people may be thinking or feeling, (Macintyre, 2016) which in turn, I suggest, increases the individual's agentic development and capacity for mentalization (Fonagy et al., 2004).

Emphasising the agency of learners has been important in the contributions of self-regulation developed in line with the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura (Martin, 2004). Educational psychologists are concerned with understanding how agency, self-regulation, and academic learning skills can be combined to facilitate improved and easier learning with both the skills and the will to learn (Woolfolk, 2020).

From a developmental perspective, psychologist Lev Vygotsky argued that children become capable of abstract thought from the manipulation of meaning derived through play in early childhood, thus enabling them to manage situations

otherwise out of their control (Vygotsky, 1978). In turn they increase agentic awareness. This aligns with Erikson who regarded play as a *“function of the ego”* providing a child with necessary power to navigate their journey by being *“his own boss, because he obeys himself”* (Erikson, 1995, p. 211); in other words the ability to act agentially.

Erikson linked children’s play into adulthood (1995). Piaget, however, who placed great importance on children’s education and viewed play as part of normative development, did not elaborate his theory towards adulthood other than to say

“it [play] has something of the creative imagination which will be the motor of all future thought and even reason” (1999, p. 162).

What is apparent is the emphasis paid on the development of children’s agency not only through their domestic setting but crucially during their formative years in education.

3.6.6 Agency in the familial context

Familial context and relationships are a significant aspect of childhood and will necessarily impact agency development (Corsaro, 2017). Relational dynamics are typically characterised by a normative power imbalance (S. H. Matthews, 2007) with either consistent nurturing and supportive care (K. Smith, 2014) or problematic power inequity, where coercion or silencing may be a feature (Johnstone & Boyle, 2020). Children, who experience familial adversity, comprise a contextually rich heterogeneous group. Research shows that adversity experienced within the familial setting in childhood is a strong predictor for negative outcomes, in not only childhood, but into adulthood (Dam & Hall, 2016; Felitti, 2002; Felitti & Anda, 2020; Michelson, 2022).

The conceptualisation of a child's agency determines whether or not they will be viewed as a passive victim or a meaning making resilient survivor (Michelson, 2022). If children are recognised as active agents in their development they are more likely to negate any potentially impactful negative psychosocial occurrences (Killian et al., 2014). Underdeveloped agency may, in contrast, leave them vulnerable to overwhelm from their environment and significantly reduce their resilience (Killian et al., 2014).

For those who have encountered childhood adversity, experiences of being treated poorly are often seen to be an everyday occurrence of misrecognition (Munford & Sanders, 2020); with psychological and emotional neglect and abuse deemed the most painful to young people's sense of developing self (Aadnanes & Gulbrandsen, 2018). How then can a child's agency begin to develop strong roots to carry forth into adulthood? Along with protective factors (see p.104) one contributing factor may indeed be that of resilience.

3.6.7 Resilience

In her paper 'Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development' (2001) Ann Masten considers the extraordinary resilience shown by the many children who suffer adversity. This has produced the notion that resilience has some kind of esoteric fantastical element, an *ordinary magic* which enables some young people to make good progress irrespective of any adversity they may suffer (Killian et al., 2014; Masten, 2001). This ties into my earlier question about women's activism, how some seem able and some less so. However, heralding resilient children as some kind of super-class possessing an astonishing capability, for example Werner and Smith's '*vulnerable yet invincible*' (2001) notion, is misleading, with research demonstrating the normality of the resilience as a function of "*basic human adaptational systems*" (Masten, 2001, p. 227). For resilience to be considered there has to have been some kind of threat, a notable risk to normative development

(Masten, 2001), such, I suggest, as ACEs. However when removed from adverse situations into the care of normative nurturing environments the capacity for resilience development improves significantly (Rutter & ERA Study Team, 1998).

3.6.8 Power and agency

McLeod (2013, p.236) suggests that issues pertaining '*power, control and agency*' are fundamental in counselling and invites us to question issues around power, abuse, reflection, and counsellors' input etc., in respect of clients' agency. Critical realists, for example, see power as either coercive power that oppresses agency or creative and emancipating power that promotes free agency (Alderson & Yoshida, 2016). Oppressive power is feared as typically authoritarian, for example as a means of adult control over children, whereas collaboration invites agentic remonstrance against injustice, instead promoting harmony and emancipation (Bhaskar, 2016).

Bandura's social cognitive theory (initially learning theory) contrasts Skinner's behaviourism theory and view of science in which "*We undertake to predict and control the behavior of the individual organism*" (Skinner, 1953, p. 35). Skinner argued that an individual's behaviour is always controlled by their environment, by laws, and is pre-determined. Human beings are nothing more than passive bystanders to, and recipients of, the environmental influences they find themselves in (Skinner, 1950).

Dweck & Leggett (1988) argue, with which I am in agreement, particularly as it relates to adversity in childhood, that when a person feels paralysed and powerless, their ability to explore, learn, manage, and I suggest realise and act on preferences and choices, will be inhibited and the development of their agency therefore compromised.

3.6.9 Women's ACEs and personal agency in psychotherapy

No literature was found predicating adverse childhood experiences as a factor in women's poor agentic development as explored within the psychotherapeutic arena.

3.6.10 Models for client agency in psychotherapy

It has been argued that during the therapeutic process clients are active agents who are capable of creatively using therapy to move towards self-healing (Bohart & Tallman, 1999; Hoener et al., 2012; Mackrill, 2009). This view emphasises clients' active involvement in the therapeutic process rather than place the emphasis on the therapist alone to enact change within the client. This aligns with a pluralistic stance whereby the client is actively involved with the therapeutic process (Cooper & Dryden, 2016; J. McLeod, 2017).

According to Williams & Levitt (2007) and Mackrill (2009) the development of personal agency may be endorsed as an aspiration within the therapeutic endeavour but there is little evidence to support how therapists may take this beyond the theoretical to facilitate client's agency in the work. Influenced by a humanistic and constructivist approach Williams and Levitt (2007) conducted research to develop practice guidelines grounded in eminent therapists' perspectives to address the development of clients' agency in therapy. The key outcomes, which I find to be a useful guide, are:

- 1 Skills training – to increase clients’ agency by equipping them to alter their emotional response resulting in a positive impact on their behaviour.
- 2 Setting agency development as a specific goal for therapy.
- 3 Encouraging client decision making and choice regarding the direction of the therapy – *this aligns with a pluralistic stance.*
- 4 Therapists to encourage introspection so clients learn to engage with their problems and develop suitable responses to them.
- 5 Acceptance or pushing limitations, exploring what is changeable.
- 6 Working through obstructions and increasing awareness, exploring and integrating clients’ concerns.
- 7 Biology vs psychology: developing a holistic approach to facilitating agency.
- 8 Increasing clients’ awareness of the reasons for their inhibiting change.

Mackrill (2009), from an existential stance, advocates for the importance of understanding how client agency is captured in psychotherapy research given that clients often present in therapy when experiencing issues which unknowingly concern their personal agency in daily life. While some researchers claim to focus and example client agency in their practice (Bohart & Tallman, 1999; Rennie, 2001), Mackrill (2009), noticing that the psychotherapy research literature on constructing client agency is scant, differentiates and describes six methods psychotherapy researchers have used to construct client agency in psychotherapy. The model proposed by Mackrill (2009) is a tool for psychotherapy researchers to consider how they construct client agency which has also been helpful in developing my thinking during this study.

I now offer Mackrill’s (2009) model demonstrating six ways psychotherapy research constructs client agency with my assessment of the perceived meaning.

Mackrill's (2009) model	Perceived meaning
1 Constructing client agency as general client change process.	Focus on 2 studies which describe the processes clients go through to make therapy work. Charts changes in client's reflexivity, does not clarify if change occurs due to the client's agency, therapist's agency, others' agency or a combination. Does not attend to an interrelational aspect of agency. Views agency as a prevalent feature of being a client with constructions translating client agency into a model of general change for individuals.
2 Reconstructing client agency as diagnoses and personality types.	Use of diagnostic tools and personality types to quantify client agency into a set of variables. Agency de-constructed and re-constructed with assumption that certain types of people share a certain type of agency. Individuality is lost, person becomes one of a herd.
3 Extra therapeutic moderating variables – the elimination of client agency.	What occurs in the therapy is caused by the intervention and therefore seen as primary with everything outside of therapy seen as either helpful or hinderance with 'extra therapeutic factors' thus eliminating client agency. Views therapy only occurring in sessions and therefore is the product of therapist agency.
4 Constructing client agency as what clients do in sessions.	Clients as active participants in therapy. Client interpretations of therapy are significant in the psychotherapeutic process and the therapeutic relationships highlights significance of client's agency in the sessions.
5 Constructing client agency during the life course.	Agency constructed in relation to client's general life, therapy seen as one small part. Clients are 'thrown' (Heidegger, 2010) into and impact on the world. Agency understood through client's life narrative including therapy.
6 Constructing the client as a cross-contextual agent.	Similar to no. 5, client is viewed as agent of change however this approach focuses on the relationship between the client and all their life contexts. However, instead on the narrative, focus is on practical change and interrelational change, i.e., not following others by rote. This approach aligns most closely to the existential view on agency.

Table 1

Mackrill's (2009) model for constructing client agency

3.6.11 Client agency in existential thought and practice

From an existential perspective, as agency may be deemed a condition of human existence, client agency in therapy is not seen as qualitatively different from the general population. Therefore, it is not related to any particular setting, as in therapy clients are viewed as agents everywhere (Mackrill, 2009).

Agency is an important aspect of existential philosophy and the phenomenology of human existence with existentialism, rather than a separate school of philosophy, being an approach to philosophising (Mackrill, 2009; Macquarrie, 1973; Van Deurzen, 1997). MacMurray (1995) in his explication of self-as-agent, expounds an

existential view on agency which establishes a primacy of action towards a realisation of the self through existence and action. This is in opposition to Descartes' thinking and reflection with his well-known phrase *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am (Mackrill, 2009; Macquarrie, 1973). For MacMurray thinking is a sub-category of action noting that *"to act is to effect a change in the external world"* (MacMurray, 2004, p. 36). This highlights the experience of the self as foremost in a state of nonreflexive agency or, as I suggest, can simply be put as 'being on autopilot'. An example might be loading up one's plate at a wedding buffet without giving the actual food on the plate much thought and eating it without much awareness. This contrasts to subjective reflexivity, whereby, in such moments of reflection and self-awareness, clients are able to step away from an activity and become aware of the activity (Mackrill, 2009; MacMurray, 1995).

In contrast to MacMurray, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2010) begins his discussion on human agency by questioning what we attribute to humans as agents but not to animals. Adding to this, Carrozzo (2021) suggests that questions of intentionality and language disparity between human and non-human animals necessitate deeper discussion. Frankfurt (1971, p. 6), influencing Taylor, argues that

"Human beings are not alone in having desires and motives, or in making choices. They share these things with members of certain other species, some of which even appear to engage in deliberation and to make decisions based on prior thought."

However, what makes humans uniquely different is their power to evaluate desires with the ability to choose between the desirable and undesirable. For Taylor this aligns human agency uniquely with *"the capacity for reflective self-evaluation"* which he deems an *"essential feature of the mode of agency we recognize as human"* (2010, p.16). Taylor deepens his proposition of this mode of agency by

distinguishing between two broad evaluations of desire i.e., we might weigh up the pros and cons of two desired actions e.g., I fancy a curry but I also want to go for a run (ibid, p.16). Missing from this, argues Taylor (ibid, p. 26), is a qualitative evaluation of the two desires leading to a

“plurality of ways of envisaging my predicament, and the choice may be not just between what is clearly the higher and the lower, but between two incommensurable ways of looking at this choice.”

Taylor views human agency purely as an aspect of reflection rather than incorporating MacMurray’s nonreflective agency and, in so doing, appears to omit key elements from the full scope of human agency.

Existentialists regard agents in respect of their individual agency. Van Deurzen (1997) describes the danger of Heidegger’s Dasein i.e., *I, being-in-the-world*, as being swallowed up into the anonymous ‘They’ time and time again. This, van Deurzen (1997) describes as similar to Kierkegaard’s ‘Crowd’ (2015) and Nietzsche’s ‘Herd’ (1997). Heidegger’s primordial phenomenon of *das Man* (the They) (Heidegger, 2010) may unburden Dasein of its innate Being (being-there). This creates an inauthentic existence which I liken to the inauthentic necessity of ‘saving face’ when adverse childhood experiences have hindered the development of personal agency. In what I consider to be a circular causality, the passive societal role of *das Man*, which is also ignorant to its existence, continually plagues Dasein in its role of understanding the nature of Being. Existentially then, agency challenges us when we desire to act differently to others and therefore can be considered as a feature of human relatedness (Spinelli, 2015).

For existential philosophers, agency is also reflected in the investigation of what it means to be free. For Heidegger (2010), agency can only ever be regarded as a limit

and condition of our existence. Heidegger (2010) considers we are 'thrown' into the world, that is we arrive into a particular zeitgeist; a world of rules and constraints yet also possibility, and that we will also inevitably have some impact as a 'thrower' – that is the 'thrown thrower' with a conditioned agentic existence. Agency, if viewed as a condition of human existence, cannot then be limited to clients within a psychotherapeutic relationship; rather, existential perspectives support the notion of psychotherapy clients being ubiquitous agents (Spinelli, 2015). In existential psychotherapy, of importance is the way in which clients understand and utilise their agency.

The psychotherapy specific research literature is short on agentic construction and developing agency within the therapeutic setting (Mackrill, 2009), still evidenced through my searches. With only two models found to consider and both developed more than 10 years ago, I consider there to be an opportunity for my own research to add to and promote the importance of such work by way of developing and promoting an alternative model which includes expressive art.

3.6.12 Cultural factors

Cultural factors in psychotherapy are also for consideration when thinking about a client's general sense of agency or agentic expression within the therapeutic exchange. Due to sociological factors such as socioeconomic status, homophobia, racism, and sexism, feminists and multiculturalists argue that agency may be diminished within marginalised groups in a way that more dominant groups may not (Barker, 2020; Duran, 2019; Phillips, 2004; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 1997). This is an area in which I would like to develop my knowledge.

3.7 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

3.7.1 Introduction

The burgeoning literature that began with the original adverse childhood experiences study spans 25+ years, is vast, and multi-dimensional. This review offers an introduction to the study and its relevance to the current study.

The (Centers for Disease Control) CDC-Kaiser Permanente adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente in collaboration with the CDC in San Diego between 1995 and 1997. Data was collected from approximately 17,500 members of their Health Maintenance Organisation (HMO) (CDC, 2021). It remains one of the largest ever investigations into childhood abuse, household challenges, and health/wellbeing in adulthood (CDC, 2021). The study revealed that ten ‘adverse’ (so named to be neutral) childhood experiences, common amongst the predominantly white middle-class respondents, could be linked directly to chronic disease and poor mental health in adulthood (Burke Harris, 2018; Dube, 2020; Fiorillo et al., 2014; Herzog & Schmahl, 2018).

3.7.2 Origins of the ACE study

The seeds were sown in 1985 as Dr Vincent Felitti, the chief physician at Kaiser Permanente’s Department of Preventative Medicine, ran his usual obesity clinic. He began to enquire about sexual activity of a patient. Mistakenly, he asked how much she weighed when she’d become sexually active, rather than how old she had been. ‘Forty pounds’ was her reply. Sensing he’d misheard he asked again. It was the same, ‘forty pounds’. The patient had been sexually abused by her father at four years old when she weighed around forty pounds (Burke Harris, 2018; Felitti & Anda, 2020; Fiorillo et al., 2014).

Alongside the shock of hearing this admission, Felitti was also becoming confused about the 50% drop out of patients, who, although the most successful at losing weight, were leaving the programme (Fiorillo et al., 2014). Felitti began to investigate more deeply and, with another 200 or so patients' interviews, realised that there was a common thread between obesity in adulthood and abuse in childhood (Waite & Ryan, 2020). Realisation that obesity was not the underlying problem on a weight loss programme seemed counterintuitive; obesity was in fact being used as a safeguarding strategy; the less desirable they were, the better their protection would be from further abuse (Waite & Ryan, 2020).

For the next two years Dr Felitti and Dr Robert Anda, a physician epidemiologist who was researching links between behavioural and cardiovascular disease, researched the literature searching for connections and, after nine challenging months, gained approval to conduct the ACE study (Burke Harris, 2018; Dube, 2020; Waite & Ryan, 2020), supported by both Kaiser Permanente and the CDC.

3.7.3 The ACE study findings

An unexpected finding to emerge from the study was that the prevalence of adversity in childhood linked to a marked correlation between ACEs and poor adult health decades later (Felitti, 2002), not least the tangible link to obesity. I found Felitti's (2002, p. 44) words to be particularly striking:

"They [ACEs] provide remarkable insight into how we become what we are as individuals and as a nation. The ACE Study reveals a powerful relation between our emotional experiences as children and our adult emotional health, physical health and major causes of mortality in the United States."

Felitti and Anda's findings were unexpected (Felitti, 2002) yet crucial in developing new understanding of the links between ACEs, health and social wellbeing. The ACEs were categorised into three groups: abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction with an ACE 'score' of ten being the maximum as shown:

Abuse	1. Emotional 2. Physical 3. Sexual
Neglect	4. Physical 5. Emotional
Household dysfunction	6. Family member depressed/mental illness 7. Loss of parent/carer through death/divorce 8. Family member in jail 9. Witnessing domestic violence 10. Family member addicted to drugs or alcohol

Table 2 - ACE categories

The findings showed that as the number of ACEs increased so did the risk of poor outcomes for health and well-being in adulthood (Felitti & Anda, 2020). One in six were found to have an ACE score of four or more which indicated for example, a 460% increased risk of depression. Due to the participant demographic the study showed that wealth is not an automatic predictor for ACEs and of interest to the present study, women were 50% more likely to report five or more ACEs. Waite & Ryan (2020) citing Fulford (2017) suggest that the tendency towards health conditions commonly suffered by women such as chronic pain and auto-immune disease may be related to issues of gender and the possibility that gender 'blindness' by practitioners may play a part. I am curious and wonder if such gender-blind issues relate to higher instances of sexual abuse towards women and girls and the societal expectations placed upon them. This may be the case, however Waite & Ryan do not elaborate. The complexity of childhood abuse is summarised powerfully here by Pizzey and Shapiro (1982, pp. 36–37) which relates to the words of W.H. Auden (p.31).

“When pain and pleasure become inextricably mixed in early childhood...the result is a badly abused and abusing human being.”

3.7.4 Critique of the ACE study

A limiting factor to the study’s generalisability is that it was conducted with participants already in receipt of services at the Department of Preventative Medicine (Fiorillo et al., 2014). The 17,500 participants, followed for 15 years after the research took place, were mostly middle-class, educated white Americans living in or around San Diego with a mean age of 56. Racial diversity was limited with 80% White and Hispanic, 10% Black and 10% Asian; 54% were women, 46% men and all with good health insurance (Waite & Ryan, 2020). I suspect the outcomes would have revealed yet another story had the 17,500 comprised those who were socioeconomically disadvantaged. Yet I, for one, from a nominally ‘middle-class’ background am personally grateful for the study as it highlights that not only the poor and disadvantaged suffer the results of adversity in childhood.

The ACE questionnaire itself has come under scrutiny with some of the questions deemed problematic. For example, it was developed for the purpose of research rather than at the individual level, all ten ACEs are erroneously treated equally and other childhood adversities such as poverty and disability are ignored (Welsh Government, 2021). Yet research concludes, that in the subsequent decades to the original study, the ACE study has proved unparalleled in determining information towards understanding the root causes of disease and premature mortality (Zarse et al., 2019).

In this review I have discussed the adverse childhood experiences study (Felitti & Anda, 2020). I have used ACEs as the *lens* through which this study explores

personal agency. For this study's purpose, I am aligning the experiences of childhood adversity with childhood trauma, which will now be discussed.

3.8 Trauma

3.8.1 Research

The mounting body of research literature evidences that exposure to adversity and traumatic events in childhood leads to long-term consequences for both mental and physical health (Bremner, 2006; Carrion & Wong, 2012; Dye, 2018; Felitti, 2002; Thomason & Marusak, 2017; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016; van der Kolk, 2015). Research emphasises that alterations in neurological structure and function take place following trauma leading to *phenotypic plasticity* (Burggren, 2020; Thomason & Marusak, 2017); that is the ability of an organism to alter in response to environmental stimuli with wide-spread adaptation to short-term environmental variabilities (Oostra et al., 2018; West-Eberhard, 2008).

3.8.2 What is trauma?

Trauma may be described as a response to stressful, distressing or frightening events that affect and overwhelm our psychological and physiological wellbeing and mental health (Mental Health Foundation, 2021; Mind.org, 2020; van der Kolk, 2015). Trauma can be categorised as *acute*: the result of witnessing or experiencing a single event, *chronic*: such as sustained and repetitive physical or emotional abuse and *complex*: where a person/s is subjected to multiple traumatic events (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). To be human is to experience trauma. Most of those who experience traumatic events survive without spiralling into serious psychiatric disorders; however, for some, past traumas interfere with their current existence (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 2007). Exposure to traumatic experiences are prevalent and do not discriminate against race, ethnicity, age,

gender or sexual orientation (Dye, 2018); yet human beings' remarkable capacity to adapt can be indebted to their ascendance within the animal world (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 2007).

Each person's reaction to traumatic events is unique and will depend on previous influences, personality and their current support network (Big Think: Van Der Kolk, 2021; Early Connections, 2022). Trauma expert, Bessel van Der Kolk (Big Think: Van Der Kolk, 2021) suggests that

*“the trauma is not the event that happens,
the trauma is how you respond to it,”*

with the traumatic stress response seen as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

3.8.3 Early brain development and toxic stress

The foundations laid in utero and the first three years of life are vital in the formation of a child's social brain and for the development of their emotional responses and emotional resources (Gerhardt, 2004; R. A. Thompson, 2018). We now know that the 40 week gestation period for the developing foetus is profoundly impacted by the social and emotional wellbeing of the mother (Buckroyd, 2014). If the mother is stressed or anxious during pregnancy the foetus will be subjected to increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol and the baby will be born more naturally agitated as a result (Buckroyd, 2014; Gerhardt, 2004). Two important points to note are that from early childhood and through to later life the normal human brain naturally undergoes changes in structure and function (Bremner, 2006), and all human beings, as part of the human condition (Arendt,

2018) will likely experience a 'normal' level of discomfort at some point in their life (Nakazawa, 2016).

Neurodevelopment and psychosocial development are two processes that are affected by early childhood abuse and neglect (Putnam, 2006) with exposure to early adversity affecting the developing brains *and* bodies of children (Burke Harris, 2020; Nakazawa, 2016; van der Kolk, 2015). Acting as a threat to wellbeing, traumatic events activate a neurobiological stress response; while this is necessary for survival, chronic and frequent physiological stress responses can alter the developing brain, causing dysregulation to the neural circuitry (Carrion & Wong, 2012; Putnam, 2006).

During traumatic episodes the personality of a child is formed and reformed due to repeated trauma or toxic stress with adaptation to her environment as the only option available for survival (Herman, 1997). Herman (1997, p.97) offers a chilling synopsis:

"She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness."

Research into scientists' understanding of these early years has culminated in three key discoveries (National Research Council, 2015):

- 1) Research into developmental neuroscience shows the phenomenal scope and growth of early brain development alongside the impact of experience.
- 2) Cognitive development research highlights a less egocentric and more conceptual/analytic engagement in early childhood.
- 3) Research into social-emotional development shows that foundational success is key to long-term competency.

3.8.4 Neuroplasticity

Key to our understanding of human brain development is the role neuroplasticity plays in the brain's ability to grow, adapt, and change according to experience (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019). Brain maturation is use-dependent with studies showing that between childhood and adolescence, through a process of axonal myelination and concurrent synaptic 'pruning', there is a pronounced increase in the brain's white matter (Eagleman, 2016; Mills et al., 2014; Thomason & Marusak, 2017). This is in contrast to the brain's grey matter which increases rapidly until the age of ten and thereafter decreases (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Thomason & Marusak, 2017). Put simply, the parts of the brain that are used will develop and those not receiving input will be 'pruned' away.

3.8.5 Stress response

The brain reacts to stressful and traumatic events in the child's young life with the amygdala, hippocampus and pre-frontal cortex implicated during the stress response (Burke Harris, 2020). Traumatic stress in the infant can be associated with increased hormones such as cortisol, the hormone and neurotransmitter noradrenaline and lasting changes to the developing brain (Bremner, 2006; Burke Harris, 2020). When infants and young children are subjected to acute or enduring ill-treatment within their caregiving environment, brain development may be impeded, affecting their social, emotional, and behavioural growth (Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2017). Studies of the brains in children who have documented maltreatment show significant change in their structure and functioning (Delima & Vimpani, 2011). MRI scans of those who have experienced adversity indicate measurable differences in the amygdala, the brain's fear response centre. Toxic stress affects areas in the brain such as the nucleus accumbens, the pleasure and reward centre of the brain which is implicated in substance misuse and addiction (Burke Harris, 2017; Maté, 2018).

3.8.6 Risk to the body's systems

Many problems potentially arise from trauma-induced brain changes, such as difficulty focusing, low self-esteem, compromised social skills and emotional dysregulation (Nemeroff, 2016). The pre-frontal cortex, necessary for learning, personality, decision making, impulse control, reasoning, and so on, is also affected by toxic stress (Burke Harris, 2020; Carrion & Wong, 2012). Those with high levels of adversity are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours and/or develop cancer or heart disease. This is due to the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (HPA), the body and brain's stress-response system, which triggers the fight or flight response (Bremner, 2006; Burke Harris, 2020; Eagleman, 2016; Thomason & Marusak, 2017).

Children are especially sensitive to repeated stress activation as their brains and bodies are still developing (Carrion & Wong, 2012; Music, 2011). This not only impacts the changing the shape and chemistry of the growing brain but also an infant or child's developing immune system, developing hormonal systems and even the way their DNA is read and transcribed (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Burke Harris, 2020). Long term effects of toxic stress include obesity, heart disease, anxiety, depression, and risk of suicidality (Burke Harris, 2018; Felitti & Anda, 2020).

Research also shows that a child's early social-emotional development is vulnerable to adversity (Blake, 2011; Burke Harris, 2020; Nakazawa, 2016). In the first year of life the infant learns she exists separately to her caregivers, acquires skills for connection to others, and builds early affect tolerance and emotional regulation strategies; as she explores her surroundings she also develops an awareness of other objects and space along with a basic sense of personal agency and ability to impact the world (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019). An infant whose interpersonal experiences include relationships based on affect attunement, mirroring, and safety from a regulated other (Stern, 1985) along with 'good enough' parenting (Winnicott, 1990, 1991) will likely develop an attachment style that is secure and, as they mature, are able to explore the world confidently knowing there is a secure base to return to (Bowlby, 2005; Holmes, 1993; Porges, 2011).

3.9 The legacy of trauma

3.9.1 Intergenerational trauma

Sometimes referred to as multi- or trans- generational trauma, intergenerational trauma is the term commonly used to describe trauma which has been passed down through the generations (Alexander, 2015; Franco, 2021; Houck, 2018). First recognised amongst children of Holocaust survivors (Fosson et al., 2003; Franco, 2021) intergenerational trauma has since been identified amongst other marginalised groups such as people of colour (PsychCentral, 2022) and through the colonisation of indigenous populations (Bezzo & Maggi, 2015; Franco, 2021).

Descendants of those who have experienced war, conflict and genocide such as the Holodomor of 1932-1933, which killed millions of Ukrainians, are also susceptible to suffering from intergenerational trauma (DeAngelis, 2019). Describing the energy that proliferates from traumatic experience, such as the violent crimes we are

currently seeing perpetuated against humanity in Ukraine, Houck (2018, p. xiii) suggests a traumatic “*communal encapsulation*” of human souls, reinforced through the societal systems in which we live.

3.9.2 Transmission of trauma

Intergenerational trauma may be transmitted either directly or indirectly. For example in direct transmission children may replicate the disturbing thoughts and behaviours of their parents so convincingly that it might be easy to imagine they had been part of the traumatic event themselves (Weiss & Weiss, 2000). However, with indirect transmission, the trauma itself is not transmitted but, for example, a person’s parenting abilities may be impacted (Weiss & Weiss, 2000). The pain of unresolved trauma may be passed on (Gerson, 2021) and transmitted in a variety of ways, for example in our behaviours, conversations and through epigenetics, the changes to genes caused by environmental factors (Delima & Vimpani, 2011; PsychCentral, 2022).

Children may also be impacted by parental trauma, for example if the mother has been raped and suffered an emotionally complex pregnancy. Intergenerational stress may also be attributed to the experience of living with a traumatised other while children may become the vessel for parent/carers’ unwanted pain (PsychCentral, 2022). In a poignant reflection, Houck (2018, p. 5) proposes that

“Family secrets and personal stories of injustices that were intended to be taken to the grave, also live on in present generations.”

Related to this legacy of trauma I now discuss the ‘secret’ yet ubiquitous phenomenon of shame.

3.10 Shame

3.10.1 Definitions

Shame is a significant aspect of 'saving face' (Pattison, 2013) and a common occurrence for those who have experienced trauma in their childhoods (Broucek, 1991; DeYoung, 2015; Nathanson, 1992). When experienced chronically as a child/adolescent it can become such a core component of a person's identity, the consequences can be devastating (Rossenbergs, 2013). The word 'shame' originates from an ancient Teutonic root word meaning **"to cover oneself"** (Lewis, 1971; Sanderson, 2015, p. 20). Edleman (1998, p. 19) suggests that the

"blushing, lowering of the eyes or other avoidance of eye contact, lowering of the head so that the face cannot be seen"

is a universal expression of shame, *"a hellish flame"* typically experienced throughout much of the world (Edleman, 1998, p. 19). Tomkins (1987) describes this bifurcation of the self as one part the judge the other as the offender. Sartre (2003) argues, that in its basic form it is 'shame *before* another'; previously unmoved by our transgression we lift our head and realise we have been seen, suddenly we feel exposed and we become ashamed. The Other becomes the mediator between 'myself and me' therefore *"I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other whilst now in the position of passing judgement on my 'self'"* (Sartre, 2003, p. 246).

Jung (1969a) suggests that intrapsychically, an individual feels shame when they experience the pain of realising a discrepancy between their idealised self and the self they actually are. Often seen as a central affect in self-psychology due to its ability to induce extreme self-consciousness (Kohut, 2009a; Sedgwick and Frank, 1995), subjectively, the somatic response to shame is one of varying degrees of extreme physical discomfort. Rossenbergs' (2013) analogy suggests that difficulties

in childhood, be it at home or school are where the seeds of adult shame may be planted in the fertile soil of a child's early psychological environment.

3.10.2 Core-shame

Developmental psychologists' views vary on the origins of shame. Stern (1985) proposes that by approximately two months the core-self begins to develop and the caregiver's role is vital in helping the infant regulate their affect states. On the other hand, Nathanson (1992) argues shame is an innate script that mitigates affects, similar to disgust limiting the urge to eat. My understanding of shame's social origin leans me toward Kohut (2009a) and Broucek (1982, 1991) who, aligning with Stern (1985), suggests core shame begins from a failure of the parent/caregiver to act as a self-object mirror to the infant. This leads to a rupture in the affective exchange resulting in the infant's sense of self being depleted.

3.10.3 Narcissism and shame

Morrison (2011) argues that narcissism is a yearning to be significant and unique; when this is successfully met in childhood the infant grows to feel nurtured, well esteemed and whole. Kohut's "*gleam in the mother's eye*" (2009b, p. 116) suggests the mirroring self-object has fulfilled its task. However, when the mirroring is absent, a fragmented self may develop leaving the infant open to a life of narcissistic vulnerability and shame (Morrison, 2011). While other emotions may be deliberately be induced or situationally avoided, shame is involuntary (Gilbert, 1998); as Darwin noted some 150 years ago we can cause a range of responses but "*we cannot cause a blush*" (1998, p. 310).

As Sanderson (2015) points out, a repetition of shaming experiences may lead to shame anxiety causing the client to pre-empt shameful feelings and become hypervigilant to potential shaming experiences. This leads, I argue, to possible

activation of the 'compass points' (Nathanson, 1992), a useful guide when working with shame based clients or those lacking agency, which I now discuss.

3.10.4 The compass of shame

Nathanson (1992) developed *the compass of shame* to describe four universal systems of defence we employ when

"we do not know how to focus where the spotlight of shame tries to aim our attention" (Nathanson, 2003 n.p.).

These four modes of response are illustrated in figure 2 below and table 3, p.99.

When writing the descriptions for each compass point I noticed their correlation to the priority/impasse typologies as described in Adlerian theory of personality by Kfir (2011), also noticing the links to 'saving face'. I have therefore added the priority/impasse and link the phenomenon of saving face to each compass point in table three.

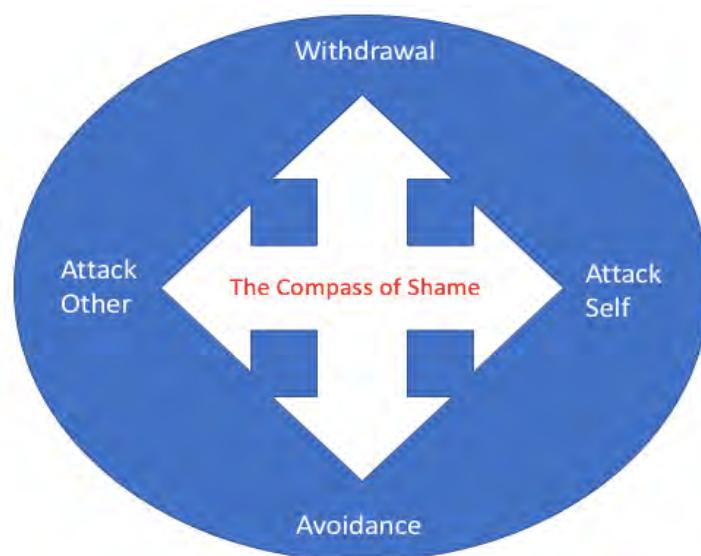


Figure 2 – adapted from D.L. Nathanson 1992 - The compass of shame

Compass point	Description and associated Adlerian theory of priority/impasse
Withdrawal	<p>Concealment, fear of being held in contempt by others, feeling weak, defected and afraid of exposure.</p> <p>Priority/impasse – control/humiliation: <i>I must remain in control of myself and others. I will distance myself and control contact or else I will face humiliation and ridicule – publicly shamed. I must put on the mask and save face.</i></p>
Attack Self	<p>Feeling 'less than', only through reduced status can we hope to have maintain relationships, low self-esteem and self-worth – unhealthy behaviours e.g., promiscuity or engaging in risky behaviours to please others.</p> <p>Priority/impasse – please/rejected: <i>I need to please people, do what they want (or what I think they want) to gain their approval, no matter what it takes or else I will be rejected by everyone. I save face by becoming an inauthentic version of myself.</i></p>
Avoidance	<p>A knowledge, felt-sense, that shame is painful but dissociates from the feeling. Alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling may be used as ways to avoid feeling the shame, paradoxically increasing further shame.</p> <p>Priority/impasse - comfort/avoidance (of responsibility): <i>I seek 'comfort' by minimising risk, keeping myself 'safe', avoiding life or else I may have to face up to my responsibilities, face up to the painful feeling, feel the shame of inadequacy. I save face by becoming a shadow of my authentic self.</i></p>
Attack Other	<p>Reduce the painful feelings of shame by projecting self-blame to blaming or attacking another. Reducing the other's self-esteem in order to feel superior – false self.</p> <p>Priority/impasse - superiority/inferiority: <i>I must show everyone that I am significant, more powerful and better than them, reliant on others' affirmation; it's all their fault, not mine. Or else they will see me as weak and inferior and I cannot risk being exposed – shameful. I save face by wearing an inflated-self mask.</i></p>

Table 3 - Compass point, D.L. Nathanson 1992; Descriptions and priority/impasse, author, 2022.

3.10.5 Healing trauma induced shame: a relational approach

Childhood adversity happens within a relational context. Therefore healing requires a relational approach (Cooper, 2008; Finlay, 2016; Mearns & Cooper, 2018). Toxic stress doesn't get better on its own (Burke Harris, 2020), with poor behaviour often seen a manifestation of early trauma (Brisch, 2009; Stuewig et al., 2015). Shame proneness also contributes to behaviour with core toxic shame, potentially developing as a result of trauma in childhood (Lewis, 1971; Pattison, 2000; Skov, 2018). Shame expert Brené Brown talks of shame only surviving if we keep it secret (B. Brown, 2006, 2018), with DeYoung (2015) adding that successful relational therapy with shame-based clients requires the therapist/supervisor, and I add researcher, to have faced their own shame. Tangney and Dearing (2011, p. 399) remind us that therapy may provoke shame experiences and that

“therapists are by no means immune to the dark pain of shame.”

Protective factors, seen below, and early intervention such as arts-based counselling or play therapy increase the chance of lessening the damaging effects to the developing child (Dye, 2018; Green, 2014; Holliday, 2014b; Landreth, 2012; Music, 2011).



Image 4 - protective factors (Children's Bureau, 2022)

Counselling may help a person recognise when perhaps, in the face of adversity and/or trauma, there were a lack of (good enough) protective factors during their childhood (0-18 years). These are factors that protect against, and mitigate as much as possible, difficulties such as the ten adverse childhood experiences (see p. 91). Counselling can also help a person understand how protective factors contribute to the development of good mental health, increase resilience when faced with life's challenges and impediments and encourage healthy relationships and general functioning as a human being.

I contend that for those with an ACE history, the addition of expressive art in therapy offers a substantive approach to facilitate shame exploration without risking further shaming and minimising the need to 'save face', the phenomenon of which is now discussed.

3.11 Face

3.11.1 What is a face?

Before embarking on an explication of '*saving face*' I believe it necessary to first of all explore what is meant by the term *face* and then what it means to *lose face*. The word face is used frequently with profusions of expression in popular culture such as: Facebook (social media), The Face (magazine) and colloquial metaphors such as '*her face was like thunder*'. In this review the word 'face' is the term given to the skin and features which appear at the front of body from forehead to chin but it also refers to the metaphoric representation of one's core self and identity.

*"Faces are all around us and fundamentally shape both
everyday experience and our understanding of people."*

This is the opening line of Stephen Pattison's book *'Saving Face'* (Pattison, 2013 n.p.). I find this presupposition serves as a useful reminder that faces are ubiquitous and unique. The developing infant learns about itself and its environment through attuned face-to-face relationships with the mother/caregivers reflecting back through facial expressions the pleasure and joy they experience in their young child (Gerhardt, 2004; Schore, 2016; Stern, 1985). We are recognised by our face. For McNeill (1998) it is a

"showcase of the self, instantly displaying our age, sex, and race, our health and mood."

We delineate people by their face and make cultural and racial assumptions by the colour and features of a face the first time we see it (D. McNeill, 1998). For some women covering their face in public is a faith-based mandatory requirement, while for others this may be seen as oppression (Garcier, 2015).

3.11.2 Losing face

Below is a recent dictionary definition of what it means to lose face (Collins Dictionary, 2022):

"If you lose face you do something which makes you appear weak and makes people respect or admire you less. If you do something in order to save face, you do it in order to avoid appearing weak and losing people's respect or admiration."

While this definition may broadly capture what it means to lose/save face I suggest there are two problems: 1) it fails to mention how shameful it can feel to lose face and 2) it feels judgemental - 'you do something' places the onus and blame on the

person 'losing' as if it were their fault. Would we blame the child who 'saves face' to safeguard against the shame of having a parent with a custodial sentence or the woman whose partner has violently attacked them? A more sensitive and useful summary can be found on the back cover of Pattison's (2013) book 'Saving Face':

"To lose face is a shameful experience amounting in perceived or actual alienation."

Goffman (1990) contends that *loss of face* is metaphoric language for a shamed identity, one which loses honour and respect. Pattison (2013) continues the argument by adding that many versions of 'face' give rise to shameful feelings, leading to alienation and displacement for example through disfigurement. In society, to have face indicates belonging; to lose face is indicative of exclusion, often leading to both social and psychological shame (Pattison, 2013) with embarrassment involving an additional

"interpersonal exposure, 'loss of face', and a desire to escape, hide or disappear." (Edelmann, 1990, p. 206).

Society in ancient Greece saw criminals publicly shamed by branding their face for all to see (Goffman, 1990), while in modern times horrific depersonalisation occurred by the defacement of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, (Butler, 2020, p. 73),

"...with hands manacled, mouths covered by surgical masks, and eyes blinded by blackened goggles....rendered faceless and abject, likened to caged animals."

More recently we have seen attempts at public shaming through the medium of 'cancel culture'. For example, figures such as the Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling

and philosophy academic Professor Kathleen Stock, both subjected to ‘group think’ contempt pitted against them for having particular views on aspects of transgenderism and the notion of free-speech (Hinsliff, 2021; Ramachandran, 2020). While for Stock, continuing in her university post became untenable, both have ‘saved face’ by continuing to speak on issues they feel to be important.

Whether losing face or saving face (to prevent the loss of face), it appears we lose either way. This loss is assumed to be in relation to the Other, as noted by Sartre *‘I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other’* (2003, p. 246). Yet there is no reference here to losing one’s own sense of self-respect *to oneself*. For an only child, for example, where one’s audience is often oneself, with no siblings to mediate an alternative experience, would I suggest be a natural route of enquiry (Pitkeathley & Emerson, 1994). I contend that while shame is relational and social (Pattison, 2013), first and foremost we are in relationship with our *own* self. We can lose face through feelings of embarrassment, an intrinsically public emotion involving *“interpersonal exposure”* (Edelmann, 1990, p. 205), separating it from shame and guilt which one might feel when alone (Dong et al., 2013). Feelings of embarrassment arise for an individual from a public action that they perceive observers may believe to be foolish or inappropriate (Dahl et al., 2001).

Manifested shame is often depicted as a loss of face (Hollander, 2003; Kaufman, 1996; Wurmser, 1981); faces covered by hands and arms, a head held low, a face scribbled out as seen in the images below. The face may not be seen but the expression of shame is recognised by its ubiquity across the world.



Image 5 - Faces of shame (freeimages.com/freepik.com)

3.11.3 Saving face

What does it mean, then, to *save face*? Colloquially, in business and predominantly in Asian cultures the term is used as an expression for the avoidance of embarrassment, humiliation and ultimately the shame of being exposed in some way that feels detrimental to one's sense of self or family (Grimm, 2019; Rodgers, 2020). Research into young Chinese adults' experiences of childhood adversity demonstrated that how ACEs may be perceived and reported may be culturally specific (Yu et al., 2021). Ho, Chan, Shevlin, et al. (2019) found that young Chinese adults tend to perceive their ACEs as a private matter and rarely disclose them, accounting perhaps, in part, for this study's solely White British demographic. In their findings Ho et al, (2019) noted that most of the participants' experiences highlighted their conforming to a prevailing societal norm in which it was felt they ought to refrain from showing their negative emotions by keeping their views private and therefore not bringing shame to the family, and, in so doing 'saving face'. One female participant with five ACEs, rather harrowingly describes how they

"...didn't want to look bad in front of others, meaning I don't want others to know I'm actually like that, that so many things had happened to me, so I

pretended like there was nothing wrong... I felt that if I say it, others may actually think you are annoying. Especially about my mother passing away, even the school social worker felt my negative energy was so much that I was annoying.” (Ho et al., 2019, p. 13)

A strategy to preserve dignity and honour, saving face may apply to the individual, the family, social or community group (Covelman & Covelman, 1993). Focus may then be motivated towards restoring one's public image (Feinberg et al., 2012) or to metaphorically reinstating the 'lost' face (White et al., 2004). Feelings of embarrassment may lead to an avoidance of the precipitating conditions and thus saving face quite literally by hiding one's face, avoiding eye contact and maintaining a psychological distance (Keltner & Buswell, 1997). The physical face and psychological face are cognitively linked and, as such, a person may not only respond directly to embarrassment but also symbolically by hiding their physical face, for example, with sunglasses or through restorative surgery or cosmetics (Dong et al., 2013).

Saving face, then, can be seen as a strategy employed to safeguard one's self or family/group against the humiliation of being found out as somehow flawed, shamefully different or to avoid further embarrassment. Saving face can be employed to preserve a sense of dignity while upholding one's actual or perceived reputation. As may be seen in the following section, using art within a therapeutic relationship may facilitate a non-shaming way to work through some of the issues caused either by saving face or pre-empting the necessity of saving face.

The final section of this review looks at the healing potential of art and its use within the therapeutic endeavour and in research.

3.12 Art heals

3.12.1 Setting the scene

Cave Art



Image 6 - (Ghosh, 2014)

According to Lewis-Williams (2004) the recorded use of art stretches back some 40,000 years to European caves and those of the Sulawesi in Indonesia. Having dismissed the notion that art was created simply for art's sake, 20th century art historians realised that art making served a social purpose and must be understood within a social context: *"...it is the context of an image that focuses its meaning"* (Lewis-Williams, 2004, p. 44). When using the arts as part of the healing process we are returning to ancient cultural traditions where ceremonial healing took place, yet art and healing have become separated in Western society (Levine, 1997). More recently however art therapy and arts-based practice acknowledges the value of image creation as part of the therapeutic endeavour (Archibald, 2012; Chilton & Leavy, 2014; Webber, 2017).

3.12.2 Using art in therapy

The benefits of arts-based practice are well documented, for example, McNiff (1981, 1992, 2004, 2009), Wadeson (1980, 2010), Archibald (2012), Malchiodi (2007, 2012).

Using art-media can reduce a person's anxiety by enabling them to communicate their feelings and experiences without having to find words (Malchiodi, 2012). Skov (2018) suggests that by using expressive arts we are offering the client an alternative 'other' to the therapist and the created image becomes the mirror with which their soul is given expression; through dialoguing with the image their self is given voice. The unconscious or *unthought known* (Bollas, 1987) is represented through the image; as if their psyche has produced through the hands what their eyes need to see (Adcock, 2016; Souter-Anderson, 2010). This psychic manifestation of the client's inner world is witnessed by the therapist as a containing 'other' which, I suggest, enables the client to reveal of themselves through the image with a sense of acceptance and, if the therapeutic relationship is robust, without fear of negative judgement.

3.12.3 Expressive therapies in the treatment of trauma

No matter their age, trauma survivors often experience difficulty with verbal expression, particularly relating to early trauma where basic language skills and haptic perception have been impacted (Elbrecht, 2013; Hinz & Lusebrink, 2016). Childhood adversity disrupts development of the brain's right hemisphere impacting emotional regulation, the processing of pain, and the ability to retain attention (Bremner, 2006; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017; Schore, 2013). In discussing the work of trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk (e.g., van der Kolk, 2015), in which he suggests the place for therapies based on action rather than verbalisation in trauma recovery, Crenshaw highlights the benefits of a "*mind-body integration*" whereby it is beneficial for both arts-based therapies and neuroscience to remain open to each other (Crenshaw, 2006, p. 25). Using art in trauma therapy assists the integration of traumatic experience through cognitive restructuring (Hinz & Lusebrink, 2016): essential for the treatment of preverbal trauma. The broadly held view holds that

“traumatic memory is encoded through visual imagery and bodily sensation, rather than through language or cognition”

with neuroscience evidencing a nonverbal rather than cognitive approach as the most effective (Gantt & Tripp, 2016).

3.13 Using art in research

Epistemological, ontological and ethical in its ambition, art is not simply directed at producing new knowledge; rather using art in research generates new ways of being in the world by opening up the possibilities found through experience (Rosiek, 2018).

Levine (1997, p. xvi) suggests that

“If we can let go of our previous identities and move into the experience of the void, then the possibility arises for new forms of existence to emerge.”

However, Rosiek (2018) heeds warning that explaining art in purely epistemic terms jeopardises the ontological influence and resolve of the artistic endeavour.

Although Souter-Anderson, an arts-based therapist, is referencing therapy I find her words to also be applicable to using art in the research endeavour:

“Our work as therapists is in a similar vein to that of archaeologists. Our therapy sessions are similar to an archaeologist’s dig. As the therapy commences the top soil is carefully moved to one side to enable us to see what is underneath. Together, the therapist and the client carefully sift, sort and dig through the layers underneath to discover what has been previously experienced, lived and covered over.” (2010, p. 103)

3.13.1 Interpreting images

We don't see things as they are

We see them as we are.

Anaïs Nin

Nin's (2014, p. 124) words, which she attributes as Talmudic in origin, are important to remember as they speak to our subjectivity, biases, and apperception. This provides a useful reminder that when we are interpreting images we are always interpreting and assimilating through the lens of our own experience (Gilroy, 2006; McNiff, 1998, 2013). Therefore, what emerges is a unique view, not the only view. When used in research the created images are explored and interpreted by the researcher who is seeking insight which may help her answer the research questions (Chilton & Leavy, 2014; McNiff, 1998).

McNiff warns that *"literal-minded psychological interpretations"* (2004, p. 70) may inhibit the imaginative realm in which the uniqueness of the phenomenon may otherwise be explored. The danger of diagnostic interpretation invokes the interpreter's own obsessions and meanings which become projected on to the image (McNiff, 2004). Levine warns that interpreting an image may reduce it to *"pathological structures"* eradicating its inherent substance and depth (1997, p. 63). Therefore we are wise to remember that

"the image reveals its transcendent dimension" (Levine, 1997, p. 74) and *"the art of interpretation depends upon our capacity to trust in the guiding power of the image"* (Levine, 1997, p. 75).

However McNiff (2004) is clear that it is not only the art creator who has authority to interpret their image. Rather the issue lies when an insistence is made by the

observer, in line with some theoretical framework, that it *must mean 'this'* (McNiff, 2004). McNiff (2004) also notes that supposing the interpreter is in an actual or perceived position of power or authority, the creator may feel unable to question their interpretation which, I suggest, may inhibit the creator's agentic response and potentially render them voiceless. Frater adds that *"Interpretation alone rarely leads to lasting transformation"* (Frater, 2021, p. 8) which brings me to consider how working with the images in a research session can be therapeutically viable while also satisfying the questions being asked of the research.

Not everyone in the art therapy world have been in favour of using art in research. Wolf (1995, p. 159) argues that art therapy research may *"contribute to the diminution of our credibility."* However, McNiff, somewhat more optimistically, suggests interest has grown for art in research (McNiff, 2013). Scholars such as Chilton, Gerber, and Leavy are so convinced of the relevance of art in research that they argue it should have its own paradigmatic recognition as *the aesthetic intersubjective paradigm* (Chilton et al., 2015) to which I'm inclined to agree. Paramount is the necessity for clear ethical principles when using art in both therapy and research (Furman, 2013; Gilroy, 2006; Moon, 2015), the ethics of interpretation are discussed in Chapter 5.

Betensky (1995) suggests that when we produce an image, as a psychic expression, the experience of *seeing* is crucial. Firstly the creator experiences the image's appearance in their own eyes and immediate consciousness and secondly they need to learn *how* to look at the image in order to experience all that may be seen in their created expression. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 68), invites us to consider that

"to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habituation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it."

In other words, to see with intentionality through a phenomenological lens (Betensky, 1995). Ultimately there are, as Joy Schaverien points out, *“no rules governing interpretation of pictures”* (1999, p. 3). Therefore, I suggest, it becomes the responsibility of the therapist or researcher to ensure that ethical implications are considered and appropriate training has been completed before undertaking therapy or research that involves image creation and, in particular, interpretation.

3.13.2 Imagination

Like Winnicott, Jung attributed the roots of imagination to the fantasy created through childhood play (Jung, 1971). The ability to imagine, to symbolise and to play was, for Jung, a necessity for all analytic work (Colman, 2006). Jung described this as a feature of the *‘transcendent function’* in which symbolic imagination emerged from the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious (Jung, 1969b; J. C. Miller, 2004). For Winnicott (2005, p. 3) creativity emerges in the

“intermediate area of experience to which inner reality and external life both contribute...[which exists] as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.”

Creativity is based on imagination which qualifies human beings to experience something *‘as if’* it could be different. This aligns with Adler’s notion of *psychic creativity* and *trusting only movement* in which he posited the idea that *things can always be different* (Adler, 1998, 1992; Sutherland, 2016). This capacity is essential to symbolisation because symbols fluctuate. This involves changing and re-presenting an object; reality and imagination are therefore working in tandem (Hollway, 2011).

Although this is a study involving hermeneutics, it is important to note that imagery and active imagination may facilitate healing not only through interpretation or expression but by experiencing meaning in such a way that one might develop a language for the soul (D. Kelly, 2017). For Schaverien (1999, p. 102),

“The embodied image embodies unconscious processes, while the diagram may evoke unconscious processes through associations made in relation to it.”

So powerful is the embodiment of imagination, I argue that holding an empowering image in mind may help the participant draw on their own imagination in terms of what *being* agentic looks like in order that they may imagine themselves in an alternative reality to the one they may be used to. Schaverien describes an initial *“sympathetic connection”* between the creator and the recently created image (1999, p. 104). The image is empowered by this conscious and unconscious psychological and, I suggest, embryonic embodiment in which the image and its meaning are inseparable (Schaverien, 1999). As conscious awareness towards the image increases so does a separation from the image, while words begin to consolidate meaning and bring new insight (Schaverien, 1999). For Schaverien (1999, p. 103), *“The effects of the picture are spatial and temporal, actual and imaginal.”*

3.13.3 Mundus imaginalis

For Henry Corbin (1903-1978) a professor of Islamic studies, the Latin ‘mundus imaginalis’ or ‘imaginal world’ subscribes a very specific meaning to experience which, for Corbin, is impossible to describe with the term ‘imaginary’ (1964, 1972). Rather, imaginary, is equated with the unreal, the utopian, divorced from our sense of being or existing. Corbin describes the bodily organ perceiving this particular

reality as the *"imaginative consciousness"* a place which exists between the *"interworld"* and its landscapes (1964, 1972).

Corbin's work brings a sense of the spiritual and the mystical, or *"psycho-cosmology"* (Cheetham, 2020, p. 9) to what may otherwise become a rather perfunctory application of imagination and its role when interpreting images. As I reconcile my own a-theism (denoted a- to highlight atheism is *not* a belief system) with that of my Christian upbringing I am both drawn to and intimidated by the complex work of Corbin, Jung, Hollis, and Hillman as I contemplate 'the middle passage' of my life (Hollis, 1993). This is touched upon in the self-study (A20, p. 507).

3.13.4 Metaphor and symbolism

I notice when using art media it is easy to think of metaphor or symbolism as only held within an image, yet metaphor is universal (Kopp, 1995). Indeed as Siegelman notes, Winnicott's *"holding environment creates a particular metaphorical kind of space"* variously referred to as a transitional, play or potential space (1990, p. 154). Early mis-attunement (Stern, 1985) trauma may be healed in this protected space. As described by Siegelman metaphor is *"something that is itself and not itself at the same time"* (1990, p. 157). Metaphors, argues Holliday, become symbolic when the relationship between the image and the emotional experience is greater than the sum of its parts; a symbol can also hold unrealised numinous aspects (2014a). In *Re-Visioning Psychology* Hillman emphasises the soul in favour of the self in order to preserve the metaphoric root *psyche* (Hillman, 1992; Slavin, 2018). Hillman's argument, to which I subscribe, is that we have lost the ambiguous and the metaphorical by imagining a universe with only *"living subjects and dead objects"* (Slavin, 2018, p. 135). Hillman emphasises that *"Our desire is to save the*

phenomenon of the imaginal psyche" (1992, p. 3), which speaks to my understanding of Corbin's mundus imaginalis as discussed in the previous section.

3.14 Literature review summary

I began by introducing the purpose and search strategy for the literature review. In the main body I reviewed women's studies, identity, self and authenticity, ACEs and trauma, personal agency, shame, face, and use of creative/expressive art. A key challenge to this review has been keeping 'on topic' as it has led me down many a curious and interesting tunnel. And due to the subject matter, also easily into the realm of sociology, which I now see as much more entwined with psychology and psychotherapy than I perhaps realised. The review has opened up a whole new world of interest to me for which I am grateful. But also with an acute awareness of the passage of time. It is not often I wish I were in my 20's again but this is one of them.

There appears to be a dearth of literature linking the impact of ACEs to the development of women's personal agency and saving face, particularly as explored through arts-based research. I therefore believe I have identified a gap in the psychotherapy literature knowledge base to which this research contributes. In the next chapter I introduce the research design which initiates my attempt to rectify this.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

The research design for this project incorporates the development and use of a conceptual framework, the creative bespoke methodology (approach) and summary of methods (tools for data generation). Within the research design I also discuss my philosophical position, the ethical considerations, and participant recruitment. Methods, data analysis and ethics are further discussed in Chapter 5.

I recall Dr Stephen Goss's words from one of the first year research challenges sessions in which he talked about the importance of the '*The Recipe*'. I liked this analogy, so created a recipe here for the clarification of my research design. In other words – would another researcher be able to pick up my research design and re-create the research based on their understanding of how I have conducted my project? It is my intention that they would.

4.1.1 The 'Recipe'

I will begin with a visual map followed by the conceptual framework, which, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016) is erroneously not often used, but of value to me as a visual reference and reminder of the research process. Subsequent detail is amended and updated throughout the project from inception to completion.

4.1.2 At a glance

Here I provide a visual 'recipe' of the steps I have taken throughout the construction of this research design. Detail is provided throughout the rest of this chapter.

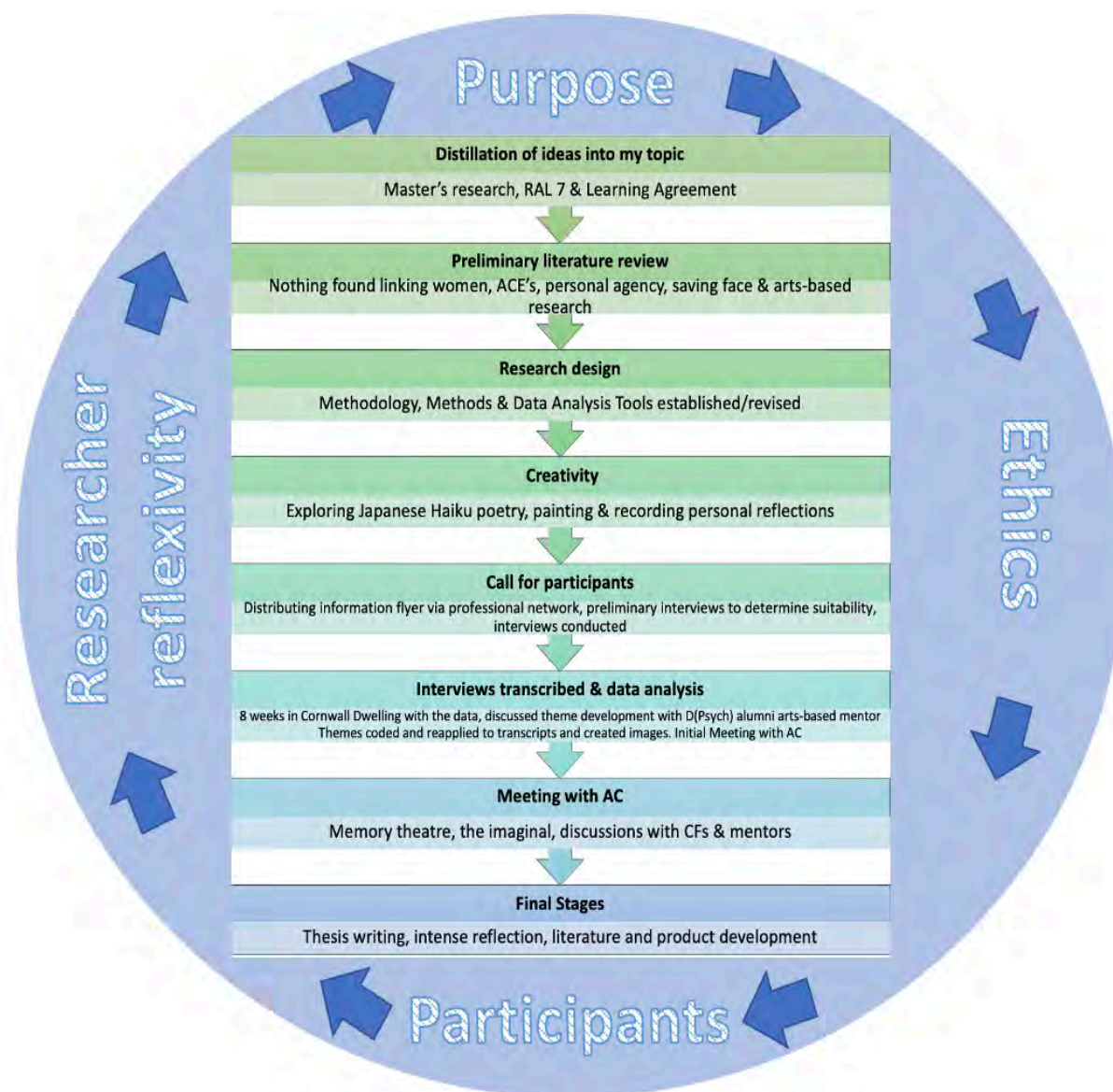


Figure 3 - Research steps

4.1.3 Conceptual framework

I have found creating and using a conceptual framework helpful as a tool to support and guide my research but also by heeding caution from Leshem and Trafford (2007) who suggest that a project with no conceptual framework is likely to be unsuccessful. Robson and McCartan's (2016, p. 68) words spoke clearly to me:

"Developing a conceptual framework forces you to be explicit about what you think you are doing."

A stark reminder that what I *think* I am doing needs to correlate with what I am *actually* doing; while Weaver-Hart (1988, p. 11) usefully acknowledges conceptual frameworks as “*tools for researchers to use rather than totems for them to worship*”. Leshem & Trafford (2007) discuss the conceptual framework as fulfilling two roles: to provide clarity on the intended investigation and to enable the reader to understand what the researcher seeks to achieve and how they will go about it (Bryman, 2001; G. King et al., 1994; Leshem & Trafford, 2007, p. 97). The conceptual framework has helped me design a bespoke flexible approach, one that can be adapted as my research evolves; a one off “*do-it-yourself*” design (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 146) developed for my project’s particular needs (as described in this chapter). Figure 4, shows the conceptual framework followed by Table 4 where I show a sample taken from the fourth iteration from which I began to cogently develop my research design.

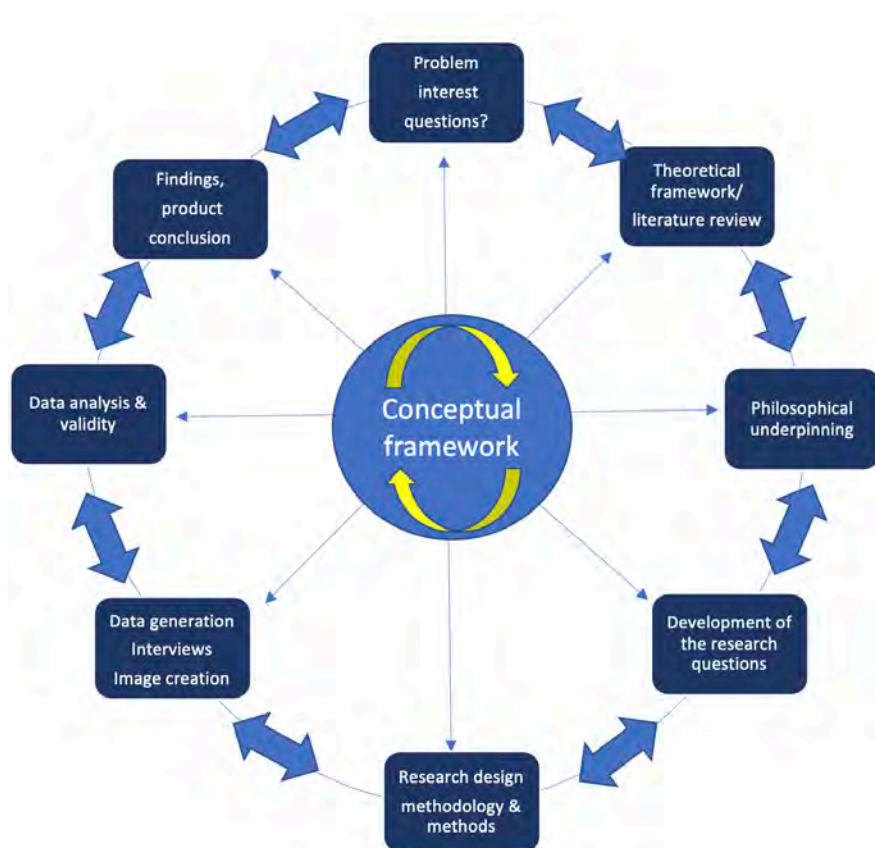



Figure 4 – Conceptual framework

4.1.4 Development of the conceptual framework

Stage 	Initial (a)	Developing (b)	Developed (c)	Finalised (d)
Problem/ Interest/ questions	What is this ineffable 'thing' that evades me? What have I not known about myself? What sense can I make of this 'thing' that female clients bring?	A sense of inadequacy, shameful feelings of not knowing my own mind. Why have I just gone along with things even when I have instinctively not wanted to? What prevents me from saying 'no'?	Insight into ACEs, the impact of childhood trauma on developing self. Cognitive dissonance? Unable to say 'no' and 'going along with' in order to 'fit in', be accepted? Pretending to myself and others? What am covering up? Is it 'saving face' from further humiliation and shame? Where is my agency in all this?	Definite focus on the lived experiences of women. Will seek counsellors and psychotherapists due to previous training and therapy. Develop questions to gain insight into their agentic development, potential links to ACEs and potential need to save face. Explore the relational too.
Theoretical framework/ literature review	Phenomenological, existential, bricolage, initial search of the extant literature. Arts-based research. Bricolage, pluralistic research.	Can't find <i>any</i> literature linking ACEs to agency let alone links with using creative arts in research. No prescribed methodology fits, will design bespoke.	Explore: Lived experience. Women Arts-based research Phenomenological study, Template Analysis (use of <i>a priori</i> themes)	Explore the lived experiences of women. Use interview and image creation to develop understanding of how their ACEs may have impacted the development of their personal agency.
Philosophical underpinning	I'm assuming interpretive constructivist but need to study this	Exploration of philosophical stances relating to ontology, epistemology, axiology. Confusing!	Critical realism is making sense to me but how do I link this to anything else? Feeling very confused. Existential, interpretivist.	Critical realism fits. Ontological importance.
Development of research questions	What is it I want to know and how will I go about finding it out?	I know that I am somehow linking ACEs to agency.	What is the impact on women of poor agentic development, how might they hide	What impact do adverse childhood experiences have on the development of

		I am interested in the impression we might like to give and the fear of exposure. What will this look like in regards to my research.	themselves from shameful exposure? How will my research be most useful?	women's personal agency? How might this influence women's need to save face? And later: What can be done to support parents in understanding how their ACEs may impact their own relational ability and parenting skills?
Research design, methodology & methods	I need a RD that is going to meet the study's particular needs. It will be creative, flexible and bespoke. Ethical considerations. Ethics to run through project as a stabilising thread.	Think about what's important: using creative arts, women's experiences of childhood trauma (ACEs), agency development, hiding away (saving face).	Pre-interview all participants for suitability and arrange date. Send art packs to participants as necessary. Finalise research design.	Research design finalised. Interview arranged, dates agreed, consent forms signed. Carry out 1 day and 4 week post research check-ins with participants.
Data generation, interviews, image creation	Interviews with image creation.	Recruiting participants from my professional network.	Prepare questions, organise sessions, carry out pre-interview interviews assessing suitability.	Transcribed interview data, 5 questions, 4 inviting image response too. Also apply codes to my self-study.
Data analysis & trustworthiness	Template Analysis is my chosen tool due to the flexible design and use of <i>a priori</i> themes.	Independent checks by 2 arts-based colleagues, one of whom graduated from the D(Psych) 12 years ago.	Researcher reflexivity, academic supervision, personal therapy, checking each iteration of the template and findings with arts-based colleagues. Discussions with critical friends.	Be transparent, scrutinise the data according to philosophical stance plus a, b and c.

Findings, products, Conclusion	Keep an open mind! Be curious and allow the work to emerge, don't run before I can walk!	Thinking about the utility of products, researcher reflexivity and self-care.	Products defined in chapter 7 and work in progress. Conclusion summarises the research journey and the findings.	Work on progressing products and dissemination of research findings.
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Table 4 - Contextual framework example in draft

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Bricolage – a pluralistic approach

When considering the nature of my research design, the idea of a 'bricolage' with myself as the bricoleur resonated with me. This technique, commonly suited as a transdisciplinary and mixed paradigm research approach, is also suitable for when combining qualitative methods and reconciling ontological and epistemological perspectives (Hargreaves, 2021). The term bricolage originates from a French expression describing a handyperson and the making of something meaningful from whatever materials may be to hand (Kara, 2020; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004).

When used in research, this drawing together of theories and methods of data generation/collection from differing disciplines (in my case Adlerian/existentially focused psychotherapy, sociology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and arts-based research) produces a creative and eclectic approach, which fits well with my particular project. With image creation as a key part of the data generation in this study and the imaginal as a key part of exploring the findings, I am particularly drawn to Kincheloe (2004, p. 1) who, on discussing Hermes' verbiage when relating to ambiguous messages from the gods, suggests that:

“If hermeneutics came to connote the ambiguity and slipperiness of textual meaning, then bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research.”

Bricolage is concerned with incorporating the theoretical and philosophical alongside the phenomenon and object or particular area of study with context and social/cultural implications as paramount (Frost, 2021). Willig (2013, p. 8) adds that qualitative researchers are “...concerned with the quality and texture of experience...” As a keen ‘sewist’ I appreciate the patchwork quilt analogy (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and that, as a bricoleur (J. McLeod, 2011) I use the materials (data) available to me to construct a pattern to tell a story. This allows the experiences of childhood adversity, the development of personal agency and the need to ‘save face’ to emerge and be interpreted whilst remaining congruent to my philosophical position (p.127) (Cresswell, 2012).

This study involves re-searching for uniquely beautiful pieces of cloth, both old and new, which, when stitched together, will create one unified and meaningful whole, i.e., the creation of my final thesis. As I write, the image of a beautiful patchwork quilt comes to mind. When taking the time to look, new meaning can be found, for example, in the ‘Crazy Quilt’, image 7 below. As I look again at the quilt I am drawn to aspects that resonate with my findings such as the spider’s web, the woman’s shoe, and the butterfly-like insect. ‘Crazy’ also resonates with how I have felt at times during the thesis write up.



Image 7

‘Crazy Quilt’ by Victorienne Parsons Mitchell (1829-1916)

Indianapolis Museum of Art, USA

4.2.2 Philosophical positioning

Along with grasping a reasonable understanding of phenomenology, I have found establishing my philosophical position probably the most challenging aspect of the doctoral experience. I have found it necessary to develop a pluralistic philosophical position as described in subsequent paragraphs. The *bricolage* as a pluralistic approach reconciles my ontological, epistemological and axiological concerns; in other words how I come to understand the real world and gain theoretic knowledge of it alongside a respect for the values, ethics, and aesthetics of the research project (Hargreaves, 2021).

As I noted in my research journal (dated 12th October 2021):

I am approaching a great wave, a likeness not experienced before. The vessel in which I travel is worn and supplies are running low. Yet, distracted, I see in the distance a mountain whose summit is of brilliant white. It entices me nearer. I am curious and impatient yet mistaken if I believe the mountain has the answers to my questions. For, by the time I arrive, the terrain will no longer be the same. As the light changes and the snow melts, new facets will be revealed. I must remain open. Yet, firstly, I must learn to patiently navigate these waters and ride the waves without being consumed in their mighty jaws. I breathe and remain calm, for as I face certain challenge, I must allow myself to be guided by the wisdom of those who have gone before.

4.2.3 Feminism in research

Although this is not a doctorate in sociology, true to the bricolage nature of this study, there is desire to align this work, with women at its core, under a broad umbrella of non-radicalised feminism. Not requiring adherence to a set of instructions, feminist research instead encompasses an attitude characteristically aimed at producing rigorous, theoretical, ethical, and politically informed useful research (M. Kelly, 2020). Therefore, as a woman and a practitioner-researcher with the feminist principle of challenging inequality at my core, I am interested in, and not exclusively, the following: parenting, relationships, education, physical health, psychological wellbeing, and creativity. From the results of the adverse childhood experiences study (Burke Harris, 2018; Felitti & Anda, 2020) as discussed in the literature review (p.89) we know the potential and likely effects of trauma on the body and, as is my contention, the impact on the development of a person's agency. I embody the reality of such experience.

With the spirit of feminism in mind, I am encouraged by Sprague, a feminist sociologist, who, when offering a reasoned argument, suggests that in order to change ourselves and the world, feminist researchers must,

“take three basic steps: ask passionately, analyze critically, and answer empoweringly.” (Sprague, 2016, p. 238)

This sentiment is an underlying aim of this study. I will discuss whether or not I feel this has been achieved in the conclusion (Chapter 10).

4.2.4 Ontology

In my lengthy and often confusing search for a philosophy of being that felt congruent with my beliefs I discovered the work of the English philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014) who placed ontology, the philosophical study of being, at the fore of his concerns. Bhaskar was best known as the key initiator of Critical Realism, a new non-empirical realist ontology characterised by structure, difference and change, a branch of philosophy which distinguishes the ‘real’ from the ‘observable’ world (Bhaskar, 1989, 2014).

While anecdotally Bhaskar’s original writings have been recognised to be highly complex and challenging to understand, to which I concur, key proponents of his work including Archer (2013), Collier (1994), Sayer (2000), and Pilgrim (2020) have made the complexity of Critical Realism (slightly) more accessible (M. S. Archer et al., 1998). One of the complexities of Critical Realism is that it is not a methodology, nor a theory, as it explains nothing; but rather, it is meta-theoretical with a reflexive philosophical stance through which our empirical investigations may be informed (M. S. Archer et al., 2016). Pilgrim (2020) wrote a highly readable text in which he

merges the ontological premise of Critical Realism with the task of psychological exploration which, coming from a psychological perspective, I have found useful.

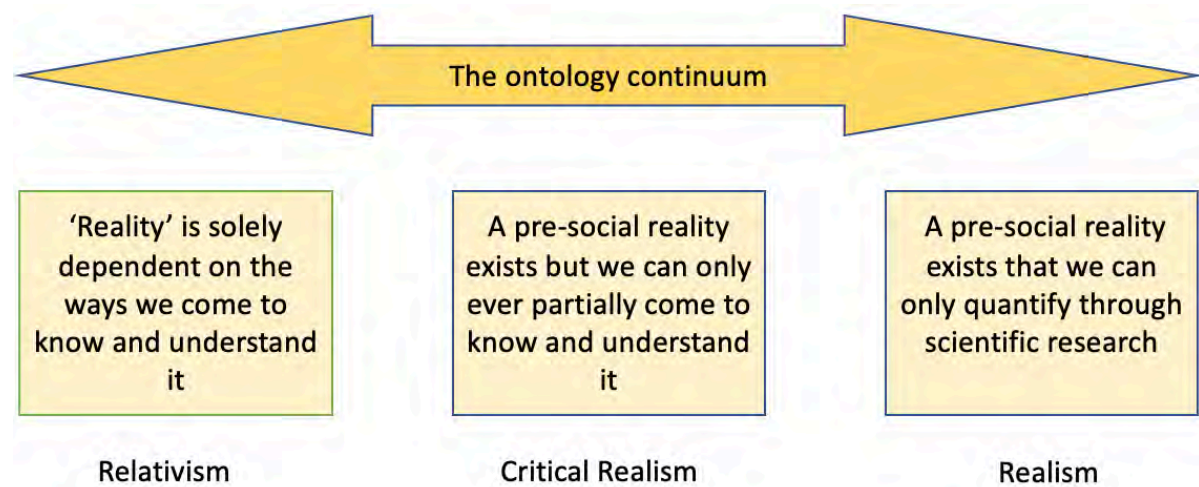
Critical realists hold the view that there are multiple realities and therefore the 'real' cannot simply be observed; consequently existing independently outside of human perception, theory, and construction. The world as we come to know and understand it can only be construed and re-construed through the lens of our experience, interpretations, assumptions, and biases; that is, through what is 'observable'. According to critical realists it is the unobservable structures, otherwise known as generative mechanisms, that cause the observable events and thus the social world may only be understood if we understand the structures that generate the events (M. S. Archer et al., 1998; Pilgrim, 2020; Sayer, 2000).

The present study is both hermeneutic and phenomenological; a common misconception is that hermeneutics adopt a relativist position, positing that interpretation destroys objectivity. Rather, hermeneutics takes a critical realist approach whereby acknowledging that our personal involvement is critical for how we come to understand the world. We don't construct the world but rather the world *discloses* itself to us based on the lens through which we view it and the angle of our vision (Zimmermann, 2015). I suggest that from this disclosure we may then begin to construct meaning.

The 'holy trinity' of Critical Realism (Pilgrim, 2020) then, refers to 1. ontological realism, 2. epistemological relativism and lastly, 3. judgemental rationalism – the premise being, that in light of the first two, we are able to weigh up truths and likelihoods. Bhasker saw the complex and multi-layered nature of reality as a laminated reality (M. S. Archer et al., 1998; Bhaskar, 2014; Pilgrim, 2020) with Fletcher (2017) arguing that in our quest for knowledge we can only ever capture a fraction of a deeper and greater reality. It appears to me that Critical Realism and

phenomenology share alignment in so much as they both seek an ontological exploration which appreciates that true understanding must emerge not only from what is present, but also what is absent, in the concealed and unknown dimensions of experience (Budd et al., 2010). I have adapted Braun & Clark's ontology continuum (2013, p. 26) as a useful aid memoir:

Figure 5



4.2.5 Making sense of the 'isms'

As a qualitative researcher in the social sciences who values human experience as a way of knowing, I disagree with the core tenet of Realism, that reality can *only* be measured through scientific means, thus rejecting of human experience; that is the subjectivity found within sensing, emotion and feeling. Yet, while I instinctively feel most aligned to the tenets of Critical Realism as previously described, I also find myself drawn to the relativist belief that meaning making emerges from our subjective reality and that this reality is solely dependent on our understanding of it.

While repudiated time and again Relativism has survived, as a philosophical doctrine, from the 5th century BCE, through Western philosophy and into debate

with contemporarily philosophers (Baghramian & Coliva, 2019). Broadly, Relativism denies objectivity, rather claiming that facts are only ever true, relative to the perspective of the observer in their given context (Baghramian & Coliva, 2019).

As I consider Relativism it occurs to me that it is also pertinent in the present study in relation to *'saving face'*, as cited in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Baghramian & Carter, 2022):

- *"Each thing appears (phainesthai) to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you—you and I each being a man."* (*Theaetetus* 152a 6–8)

In other words, no matter whether we save face or not, it is surely the subjectivity of the observer or the observed that renders whether or not the face has been saved.

- *"The notion of the mask over the face of nature is.... what I have called 'relativism'. If 'the face of nature' is reality, then the mask over it, which is what theory gives us, is so much deception, and that is what relativism really comes to."* (Grote 1865: I.xi, 229)

Remembering my propensity towards cognitive dissonance I deliberated at some length to come to a position that felt most congruent to *my* beliefs about how we know and come to understand the world. Again, and with a sense of agency, I found myself choosing a pluralistic position from which to undertake my research.

4.2.6 Epistemology

In this study, then, I combine the ontological stance of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 2014; Collier, 1994) with Relativism (Baghramian & Carter, 2022; Baghramian & Coliva, 2019) and Heidegger's Interpretive Phenomenology (Heidegger, 1994;

Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Watts, 2014). Taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to my interviews, and later data analysis, I subscribe to the belief that, as human beings, we are continually sense making and seeking the meaning(s) in our life (Frankl, 2004). This occurs in a broader world context through Heidegger's concept of human beings as *Dasein*, literally meaning 'there-being' or 'being-in-the-world' with the self and world together as one entity – i.e., Dasein (Finlay, 2011; Heidegger, 2010).

4.2.7 Philosophical approach to knowledge generation

Here, again, I find value in pluralism when considering my approach. I regard all data to be available for our subjective interpretation and that meanings can be multiple depending on the lens through which we experience them. I place myself philosophically, then, as an *interpretivist* – interpreting meanings attached to actions. Yet, as a phenomenologist also interested in how we may harness imagination, I am keen to not rush into analysing imagistic data. Rather I allow for the emergence of phenomena and to spend time dwelling with and within the created images (as generated in this study), unmediated or constrained by theory or assumptions. I wish to be moved by the language of the images themselves rather than by my hasty interpretation of them (Frater, 2021) and in so doing allow a dialogue to naturally emerge with the image from which may be facilitated a deep and embodied emotional awakening. A "*Hermeneutic reflection*" (Finlay, 2003, p. 105; Van Manen, 2014), wherein

"data is seen to emerge out of the researcher-co-researcher [participant] relationship." (Finlay, 2009, p. 29)

I also consider myself to be a *constructivist* who constructs knowledge from studying the individual participant's meaning making (Ponterotto, 2005; Willis,

2007). And as a contextual constructionist (Madill et al., 2000), I seek knowledge from the way in which participants have constructed meaning within certain contexts (Willig & Billin, 2011). I am also interested in social constructionism, i.e., constructing knowledge within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978) as children and adolescents do within their familial setting. Again, I suggest that these positions need not be islands, but rather speak to my pluralistic attitude and positioning.

4.2.8 Axiology, ethics and aesthetics

Arts-based research attends primarily to aesthetic concerns and ethical challenges, both of which are primary values of axiology. They will also be considered when evaluating the rigor and validity of the research design and the findings. I find Willig's summation useful; that rather than seeking truths, the study's findings will be valued for being "*both accessible and useful for practitioners and policymakers*" (2017, p. 286). I take an anti-essentialist stance apropos meanings and values (Bruner, 1990; Rorty, 2018) i.e., essence not preceding existence, with no innate and universal qualities (Sartre, 2003). Of note, Sartre also posited that other than the meanings we ascribe to life we have no innate value or intrinsic identity (1993, 2003). I note in my journal:

I have been in a state of deep reflective thought today as I continue my write up. Ideas, concepts, theories, any number of 'ologies....all muddling around in my rather weary brain as if they are teasing me when there is yet another variation to be found.... For some reason I felt an urge to revisit my very first doctoral research journal and so happened to open it on a page I had written a rather apposite quote by Joseph Campbell. I think I will insert this into my thesis, not least as it adds colour while feeling relevant...we bring meaning from experience through our research endeavours: we do indeed bring it to life (March 15th 2019).

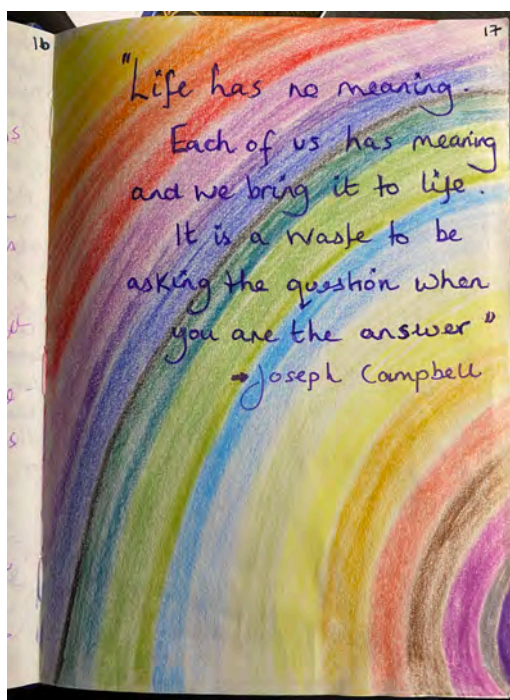


Image 8 - 'Life has no meaning' (Journal 1, researcher, 2019)

4.2.9 Qualitative research

Qualitative research offers a rich and diverse broad church to researchers who seek to explore the quality of meaning rather than the analysis of numerical data found in quantitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While it is possible and may be useful to combine the two in a 'mixed-methods' approach, this project relies on the researcher to think in a qualitative manner and focus on the meaning ascribed to the participants' lived experiences of the phenomena under study. Qualitative research attempts to understand either individuals or groups, contextualised within their natural setting, seeking to understand and reflect the meaning they make out of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The overarching purpose of qualitative research is to capture, record and elucidate aspects of the social and psychological world (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I consider that all qualitative research must be seen as a 'snapshot in time' – the expression of particular participants at a particular time and within a particular context.

4.2.10 Pluralistic qualitative research

While floundering under the weight of methodological and philosophical variances and taking a break from yet another book on phenomenology, I came across a paper by Dr Claire Mitchell published in the European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy in which she described the difficulties she experienced as a novice researcher (Mitchell, 2021). Reflected back at me I saw my own struggle to determine *how exactly* I understand and convey my own epistemological and ontological position.

I found the following words from Pilarska (2021, p. 64) helpful as I considered this study's paradigmatic identity,

“As a set of assumptions, beliefs and models of conducting research, paradigms are fundamental (and primary) factors in the design of the inquiry. Not only do they orientate a researcher towards the (social) worlds to be investigated providing the appropriate ‘tool’ of getting insight, but equally they reflect the values that motivate a researcher in the undertaking.”

While I have historically considered myself to be an interpretivist-constructivist (during my master's research), believing that all data may be open to interpretation with meaning established through context and individual experience (Ponterotto, 2005), I wondered if my position was now fixed or whether my epistemological and ontological beliefs could operate on a continuum? I realised that being a phenomenologist does not mean being in agreement with *all* phenomenologists. Some appear to adhere to a critical realist position (Budd et al., 2010), while others fall into a relativist position (Baghrmian & Coliva, 2020). Constructivism, a heterogenous paradigm, grew in a move away from the more traditional positivist

(Realist) approaches, with a belief that knowledge can be newly constructed and that there is no one universal or absolute 'truth'. Rather, knowledge is produced and reproduced through experience, constructed from subjective understanding.

Phenomenologists from a relativist tradition are typically post-structural, post-modern feminists who lean towards reflexivity, multi-vocal and artful forms (L. Fisher, 2010; Mitchell, 2021). I also believe that human existence cannot be explained with one single answer or reduced to one single truth and that, as McLeod (2017) argues, there is validity to be found within numerous sources of knowledge. Phenomenology is particularly suited to my project due to its

"reflective and nuanced approach" and as McLeod suggests, *"...one of the unavoidable challenges of being human is to live with uncertainty"* (ibid, p. 13).

Particularly appealing to me on a personal and professional level, pluralism argues for a holistic and reflexive stance where a multi-perspective understanding of the presenting phenomenon can be achieved by not limiting ourselves to one single approach (Frost, 2011; Willig, 2013). Furthermore, making explicit the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underly the chosen methodologies and methods employed, strengthens not only the analytical rigour but demonstrates the researcher's clarity of understanding (Frost & Bailey-Rodriguez, 2020). This has in itself been a personal aim and commitment to my learning. The researcher's own philosophical assumptions are also pre-requisite, and for me a preferable requirement, for my chosen data analysis tool, Template Analysis (TeA), as indicated by King (2012; 2017).

In summary: pluralistic qualitative research is underpinned with a view of human experience as multi-ontological, partly constructed and partly fixed and

unavoidably influenced by the researcher's subjectivity (Frost, 2021). In the present study the pluralistic ontological stance incorporates *Critical Realism* - we can only ever partially understand reality, with the absence of phenomena of as much interest as the phenomena's presence (Budd et al., 2010) and *Relativism* - where reality is entirely dependent on knowledge derived solely through human interpretation (Baghramian & Coliva, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

4.3 Trustworthiness and dependability

It is of primary importance that this research project proves to be both trustworthy and dependable in its contribution to the broader knowledge base. I now demonstrate how this has been addressed.

4.3.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in the present study relates to the suitability of the methodology, the methods for data generation and tools for analysis chosen to meet the research aims. It is also a fundamental aspect of my work as an arts-based therapist, and as a researcher, that there is a congruence running throughout my professional and personal philosophy of how we make meaning and understand the social world (McLeod, 2011). Aesthetic concerns are attended to, i.e., perception of the phenomena in question as experienced phenomenologically through the senses. The ethical implications for this project have been carefully considered at all stages of the research and write up. A key ethical challenge came with my initial use of Memory Theatre (p.212). Here, transparency has been shown in explicating the process, describing the impact on me, as the researcher, and how learning from this process was then applied to the subsequent Memory Theatre, used as part of the hermeneutic phenomenological exploration (p.245).

I am aware that as the primary research instrument my subjectivity could be deemed a weakness (Gillham, 2000). As the present study has grown from my own experiences there is a potential that I may 'see' similarities in experience where in fact they do not exist, noting also the potential for collusion (Yontef, 1988). My aim, therefore, is to be fully transparent whilst providing as much contextual information as possible (Etherington, 2004). To help me with this endeavour I have utilised the skills and knowledge of an arts-based mentor and D(Psych) alumni who has helped ensure that I am not influenced by seeing or hearing what I may wish but rather that the data and write-up are a genuine reflection of the participants' narrative. Being awake to the ethical challenges of arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological research has also been paramount to the study's success.

4.3.2 Dependability

It is crucial that my research shows reliability by being both credible and dependable. My transparency and attention to reflective practice supports this. While it is more challenging to prove reliability in a qualitative study, I consider that if the research were to be carried out again using a similar participant group with the same methodology, methods and data analysis then the findings would likely be of a comparable nature; although allowance must be made for the individual and unique experience of the participants which cannot be exactly replicated. To establish reliability five processes were conducted:

1. I conducted pre-interview interviews with the initial 12 responding participants to assess suitability.
2. Triangulation was employed with data sources emanating from interview dialogue, participant and researcher created images and reflections on the researcher's heuristically informed self-study to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena explored.

3. Data was initially analysed and coded using Template Analysis with textual examples given.
4. Four in-depth hermeneutic phenomenological vignettes emerged in answer to the research questions and to satisfy the aims of the research. It was discovered these vignettes aligned with each of the four top-level themes thus demonstrating the dependability of the methods and analysis used.
5. Three pilot studies were conducted: one online, one face to face and one with the researcher as a participant.

4.3.3 Audit

I conducted an audit throughout the data analysis phase, the details of which can be seen in **A17, p. 497**.

In summary, then, this pluralistic qualitative research, underpinned by my epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions recognises that instead of seeking one 'truth' there are many ways in which to perceive phenomena and that different methodologies and methods will produce a variety of insights into the same phenomena (Frost & Bailey-Rodriguez, 2020).

4.4 Phenomenology

Broadly, phenomenology can be viewed as an umbrella term which encompasses the predominantly 20th century philosophical movement and a range of research approaches used to study the way in which things that 'appear' (the phenomenon), are observed and perceived. As the study of lived experience, phenomenology seeks to understand the outside world as interpreted by and through human consciousness (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Referring to existential phenomenology, Brooke (2015, p. 44) suggests that:

“Existential phenomenology can be defined as the method for describing and interpreting lived experience as it is revealed in the life-world.”

Modern phenomenology, established by Husserl (1859-1938), early in the 20th century, is an approach which seeks to explore phenomena as they present to consciousness. This is primarily being guided by theory and literature which are not only vast, but so varied in opinion that proponents can, in my view, appear somewhat defensive and protective about their particular viewpoint.

From the philosophical discipline beginning with Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology, which had, at its core, a focus on consciousness and essences, the phenomenological movement, of which Heidegger (hermeneutic) in Germany (1889-1976) and Sartre (existential) (1905-1980), and Merleau-Ponty (embodied) (1908-1961) in France were key protagonists, moved towards the development of existential and hermeneutic (interpretive) dimensions (Finlay, 2009; Kafle, 2011; van Manen, 2016c, 2016a).

I conducted my M.Ed. research as a ‘phenomenological case-study’. I baulk as I realise how little I knew and understood but feel uncertain as to what prevented me from exploring further. I can only surmise that I felt intimidated by an anecdotal sense of phenomenology being complex and difficult to understand alongside my embryonic foray in to academia. Nevertheless, an opportunity presented itself during my time on the D(Psych) programme, not least as an urge had been growing exponentially within – to tackle phenomenology head on. I realised that if I wanted to claim my research as an arts-based phenomenological study, then I had better extract my head from the sand. A good re-starting point presented itself with Dr Rupert King’s PK seminar on **Phenomenology** in December 2019; 11 months before I would present my Learning Agreement to the Programme Approval Panel.

I found this seminar extremely useful helping to de-mystify some of the basic tenets which aided my understanding of what phenomenology *is* and what it *does* for a research study. I started with the premise that phenomenology, in research, as a whole, seeks to help us understand phenomena as they present themselves to us, as conscious sentient beings (Dibley et al., 2020).

As I read further I became more enmeshed in the complexity of phenomenology's seemingly entwined branches; yet I found solace in Zahavi's (2019) reminder that although phenomenology is not a philosophical doctrine with clear demarcations, the overriding concern of understanding subjects existing as culturally, socially, and embedded human beings remains the united purpose. Faced with a myriad of options the dilemma was how to determine *which* particular branch of phenomenology, i.e., descriptive, hermeneutic, existential or embodied (van Manen, 2016a) would be congruent to my beliefs and assumptions; while also availing me with the most suitable lens through which to explore, understand, and present my participants' data. I was aware of the challenge that lay ahead, and, as noted by Finlay (2009, p. 6), realised that

"...the application of philosophical ideas to an empirical project provokes both uncertainty and controversy."

I found Goble's (2021, p. 70) thought provoking explication of the purpose of phenomenological research helpful:

"The results of our studies are texts that do not explain, theorize, categorize, or summarize. They are merely and completely rich, evocative descriptions and interpretive explorations that evoke an embodied recognition and new awareness of the potential living meanings of the particular phenomenon in question."

I also accepted Dr Rupert King's (2020, p. 38) invitation

"to dwell, to step back and consider those issues critical to the selection of a suitable phenomenological methodology."

With this in mind I set about exploring in more depth two key phenomenological approaches.

4.4.1 Transcendental descriptive phenomenology

In his move away from scientific positivism, Husserl, an Austrian-German philosopher (1859-1938) established a transcendental descriptive approach to phenomenology with the aim, through the study of consciousness, to distil the perception of phenomena to their essence (Betensky, 1995; Finlay, 2011). Concerned with how 'things' reveal themselves Husserl sought, *"critical to his methodology"* (Finlay, 2011, p.46) a phenomenological reduction often referred to as *epoché*, a bracketing off of previous experience or suspension of judgement. Through phenomenological reflection one focuses on the intentionality of the *relationship* between the subject (the experiencer) and the object (the experienced); consciousness must always be *of* something. In other words, the experiencer becomes conscious of the '*of-ness*' of the experience (Vagle, 2018).

As Sartre notes

"This necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself is what Husserl calls 'intentionality' " (Sartre, 1970, p. 5).

In Husserlian phenomenology one is describing the relationship between the two, with consciousness held within the subject and directed intentionally (that is,

how we are meaningfully connected) towards the object (Finlay, 2011; Vagle, 2018). Essentially, Finlay (2011, p.45) reminds us, Husserl's intention is to bring out the

"full richness of our subjectivity as ways of discovering the world."

In other words, the meaning of a thing as it appears to us through our lived experience of it and therefore *"if we love a woman, it is because she is loveable"* (Sartre, 1970, p. 5).

This helped me re-consider my plan, in order to let go of restrictive notions of obtaining concrete answers, and with the acceptance that my research will never be complete but rather a 'snapshot' in time (R. King, 2020). This uncertainty I find naturally challenging yet exciting. As King (2020, p. 38) notes,

"Phenomenology is a powerful tool ...it provides a creative approach to investigating complex issues,"

such as this study's exploration of the possible links between participants' lived experiences of childhood adversity and the development of their personal agency. It also looks to understand their experiences of 'saving face' from the humiliation and shame of being 'found out' as fundamentally flawed.

4.4.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

In folk lore the term hermeneutic originates from the Greek god, and messenger of the gods, Hermes who was tasked with communicating messages from the gods to mere mortals (Packer & Addison, 1989; van Manen, 2016a). The messenger must, however, interpret the meaning in the message in order to convey the message. The word originates from the Ancient Greek *hermeneuein* which was later translated into

the Latin *interpretari*, hence our familiarity with the term *interpretation* (Zimmermann, 2015).

Today, hermeneutics refers to “*the theory and practice of interpretation*”, historically of classical and biblical texts (van Manen, 2016, p. 179). Yet interpretation is ubiquitous in our everyday lives. As Packer and Addison (1989, p. 2.) perceptively note “*We advise each other to ‘give clear signals’ in our relationships*” which links to research interview question three (p.44). Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenological approach contributed to the “*ontological turn*” (Vagle, 2018, p.41), in a move away from Husserl’s descriptive approach and into the interpretive and existential domain. Vagle (2018) suggests that an attempt to separate hermeneutics from phenomenology forces us back to Husserl, for Heideggerian phenomenology is enmeshed with hermeneutics.

This is a significant move as the focus directs us away from consciousness, instead placing *being* and how we are *in* the world at the core of philosophy and the social sciences (Vagle, 2018, p. 42). In turn this moves us further towards ontological concerns, i.e., what it means *to be*, with meaning arising from intersubjectivity, language and being-in-the-world; in other words, Heidegger’s notion of the human as *Dasein* (in German *da* – there and *sein* – to be), a uniquely human existential position. The paradox of living relationally with others yet being relationally alone with oneself; specifically noting the *in-ness* of something, e.g. in-love, in-relationship and so on. Heidegger’s ideas have, as suggested by Finlay (2011), been fundamental to both the existential movement and indeed psychotherapy itself, and so by its own admission, relevant to the present doctoral concern.

Packer, when describing the character of interpretation, points to Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenological investigation in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 2010) in

which Heidegger addressed the ontological questions of what it means to be a human being or *Dasein*. Heidegger, according to Packer (1989, p. 96),

“...argued that interpretation is the necessary kind of inquiry for a being that always has an understanding, albeit unarticulated, of the kind of being it is.”

In response to this I add that interpretation is also necessary, in fact essential, for those beings who, having experienced adversity in their childhood, are *not* always fortunate to have an understanding of the kind of *being* they are, irrespective of whether their being is articulated or not. In fact it is necessarily through the interpretation of participant-researcher dialogue and expressed images that the *meaning of what kind of being they are* may come to light as demonstrated by sub-theme 1.3, *Every cloud has a silver lining* (Chapter 7, p.234).

I found Rorty's (2018, p. 315) interpretation of the purpose of hermeneutics interesting to consider. Instead of regarding it as a methodology for achieving the

“sort of results which epistemology failed to achieve”

he describes hermeneutics as an

“expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled”

going on to say that we should no longer feel the

“constraint and confrontation”

experienced in our quest for a theory of knowledge which incorporates stringent and imposing frameworks.

Willig & Billin (2011, p. 118) suggest that

“the aim of existentialist-informed hermeneutic phenomenological research is primarily to deepen our understanding of the quality, texture and meaning of a particular experience for those who undergo that experience.”

I maintain that phenomenology is intrinsically existential by its very nature so the addition of ‘existentialist-informed’ in this purpose feels somewhat unnecessary although I do recognise, for example, Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* as his most significant non-fiction illustration of existential phenomenology (Sartre, 2003; van Manen, 2016a). By privileging the existential, I agree that light is thrown towards deepening our understanding of the human condition. This gives rise to fundamental existential themes such as

“our relationship with time, our bodies, our physical environment and with other people” (Willig & Billin, 2011, p. 118),

which serendipitously aligns with the top-level themes generated from this study’s data analysis (see Findings, Chapter 7).

Although there is a naturally descriptive element when interpreting the data, particularly in relation to the expressed images, Husserl’s purely phenomenological approach did not align with the interpretive and existential element of the data analysis. Husserl’s belief that we can *“bracket off aspects of consciousness”* by transcending our subjectivity (Langdridge, 2007, p. 23) is not realistic for my project. With personal experience of the phenomena in question and curiosity

sparked in my clinical practice, I would find this impossible. And given that we inescapably view the world through our own subjective lens I question if it would actually be possible at all? In describing the aims of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, Finlay suggests the Husserlian ‘*descriptive*’ and Heideggerian ‘*interpretive*’ approaches to phenomenology could be viewed as a continuum weighted on the side of the researcher’s preference. The aim is to

“evoke lived experience through the explicit involvement of interpretation”

with this experience being deflected through a philosophical, literary, theoretical, and reflexive linguistic lens (Finlay, 2011, p. 110). The hermeneutic phenomenologist will aim to capture the nature of the experience to be revealed through aesthetic, embodied, imaginative, and sensing methods while recognising that interpretation is fundamental due to phenomenology’s concern for meaning which may be hidden or implicit (2011, p. 111). As can be seen, with arts-based and heuristic elements, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach is particularly suited to this project. This aligns with van Manen (2016c, p. 180) who suggests that,

“Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretative (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena.”

I also recognise the parallel between the ‘*saving face*’ element of this study and Moustakas’s (1994, p. 10) take on interpretation:

"Interpretation unmasks what is hidden behind the objective phenomena...interpretation is not an isolated activity but the basic structure of experience."

I make sense of this by considering how a woman may 'save face' by masking her authentic self. If she is able to reflect on and interpret the context of her life, understand her ACEs, and gain insight then she may be able to construct meaning; an 'unmasking' may then occur to reveal her authentically agentic self.

On reflection I now realise that I have come a long way in my understanding since my master's degree and, indeed, since I presented my Learning Agreement.

4.5 Arts-based research

Expressive and creative arts based approaches, from which I practice therapeutically and conduct this research, refer to the integrative use of typically multi-modal arts into therapeutic practice (Leavy, 2018; Malchiodi, 2007, 2012). A key method in this study is the participants' expression, through images, during the research interviews which are then discussed and interpreted with meaning being constructed either in the session or in subsequent data analysis. Van Manen (2016b) proposes that interpretive elements necessarily increase when description is mediated by an expressive aspect, such as the created images. While the study is a hermeneutic phenomenological study I consider it also to be arts-based as two thirds of each interview relates to the creation and interpretation of participant expressed images. These images revealed to us, in the research session, each participant's psychic expression, based on their response to the research question and dialogue.

It is helpful then that Leavy (2018, p. 4) describes arts-based research (ABR)

“as a set of methodological tools which may be used by researchers at all phases of the research and across the disciplines.”

While McNiff (1998, p. 15) defines ABR as using expressed images

“as objects of inquiry as well as modes of investigation.”

When considering the use of art in research, and in response to the scientific vs philosophical tension of what *“can and cannot be expressed”*, McNiff likens attempting to apply science to the creative process akin to attempting to fly with just one wing (1998, p. 31).

In this study I am bridging two realms: *arts-based research* and *hermeneutic phenomenology* and have therefore, in an attempt to not complicate matters further, decided to view the arts-based aspect of the study under the pluralistic qualitative umbrella previously described (p.125).

4.5.1 Philosophy of arts-based research

This study considers arts-based research as an adjunctive method rather than being utilised as a complete methodology. Philosophically, art, and in this case expressive art, is positioned within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm and, as such, well suited to this project. True to the bricolage, this study has its philosophical foundations in arts-based research, first to third wave feminism, hermeneutic phenomenology, Critical Realism, and Relativism; thus producing a pluralistic design (p.125). By exploring participants' lived experiences of childhood adversity and the development of their personal agency, I am able to contextualise the complex nuances and potential difficulties arising in their sense of self, their relationships, and the inauthentic need to 'save face'. Van Manen suggests that

when using art materials we are “*giving shape*” (2016a, p. 74) to our lived experience. This study requires the practitioner-researcher to engage in “*phenomenological reflection*” in order to “*grasp the essential meaning*” of the creations (van Manen, 2016a, p. 77) in order to do so.

McNiff suggests that arts-based research is “*essential to advancing the sophistication of practice*” (1998, p. 39). Epistemologically, ABR assumes that meaning can be created and conveyed [constructed and interpreted] through the creation of art as imagery (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Although I am using ABR within a qualitative paradigm, the *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm (AIP)* (Chilton et al., 2015) suggests a philosophy of ABR which I recognise as relevant to my project. The table below offers a summary by Leavy (2015) with my recognition of its relevance:

<i>ABR AIP</i>	Relevance to present study
<i>Art is able to convey truth(s) and bring awareness and knowledge of self and others.</i>	An expression created through the use of art has an unfiltered honesty which brings about new meaning to the participants.
<i>Using art is critical in achieving knowledge of self and other(s).</i>	The hands produce what the eyes need to see from deep within the psyche, which, interpreted by myself and the participants, brings about new understanding and knowledge.
<i>The preverbal is valued as a way of knowing.</i>	Adverse childhood experiences may be pre-verbal, in which case the trauma is stored without language but may emerge in the expressed image of the participant.
<i>Artistic expression includes multiple ways of knowing such as the imaginary, sensory, and kinaesthetic.</i>	This study utilises, in particular, the imaginal and embodied sensing.

Table 5 - Arts-based research and the aesthetic intersubjective paradigm

This relates to my research because, as Leavy explains, the *aesthetic intersubjective paradigm*, values the ‘beauty’ of the research, defined by reflexivity and empathic mutuality between researcher and subject. It values the intersubjectivity of art as a way of knowing, meaning making with others, and the natural environment. ABR is also considerably influenced by philosophical corporeal understanding, particularly embodiment and phenomenology (Leavy, 2020).

4.6 Chosen approach: arts-based hermeneutic phenomenology

In far west Cornwall, a place that truly nourishes my soul, I walked one day through the winding valley to our local cove as pictured below. There, as I sat upon a large rock, overlooking the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean, I became meditative, opening myself up to possibility, encouraging the wisdom of the powerful waves to wash over me and enliven my being.

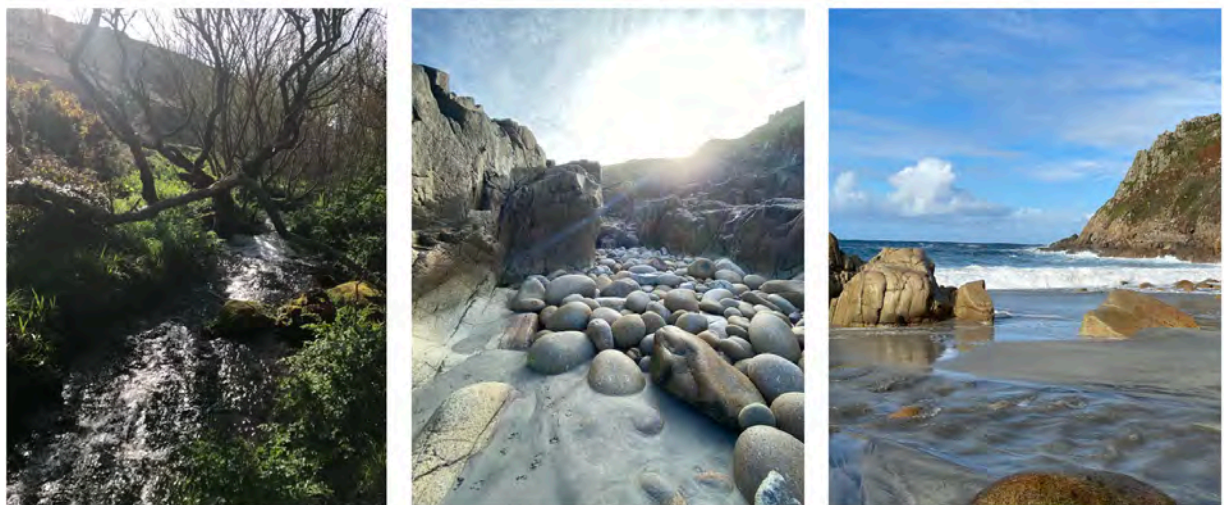


Image 9 - Local valley and cove in west Cornwall

As I felt the warmth on my pale skin, the breezed sunlight dancing all around me, and the taste of the sea’s salt as it touched my lips, I began to envision the purpose of my work. Images such as flying above the vast ocean came to me, bringing a feeling of freedom and hope. I sensed my chosen approach would help me find

deeply embedded meaning in the expressions of my participants and from my own self-study.

4.6.1 Phenomenology in practice

There is no formal methodological guidance for the budding hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to follow which can feel a little daunting. Finlay notes that adherence to such a method would be *“almost proscribed by this approach”* (2011, p. 115). I decided to use a process commonly associated with hermeneutic phenomenology, known as the *hermeneutic circle* which I detail in this chapter, p.160.

I have also found inspiration from Les Todres’ (2007) *‘Soulful space’: ‘freedom for wound’* as mentioned by Finlay (2011, p. 116). This felt like a fitting metaphor for freedom from the wounds of adversity in childhood as experienced by my participants. I went to the book itself and was moved by Todres’ writing. However, I found myself in disagreement. Todres discusses the Greek myth of Narcissus, a beautiful young man who becomes obsessed with the image he admires as he sees, what is, his own reflection in a pool of water. Todres (2007, p. 152) suggests that the psychologically minded may interpret this as a metaphor

“...for how we can become alienated from the nourishment of our lived experience by turning ourselves into an image or object.”

What Todres neglects to mention is that for many, their lived experience has often not been nourishing at all. And by expressing their embodied experience into an image they are healing aspects of self that may otherwise remain as a painful and often unrealised wound.

Phenomenology, it must be remembered, is mainly concerned with the *how* rather than the *what* and the way in which the object manifests itself, possibly in a multitude of ways (Zahavi, 2019). Inquiring of my participants within a phenomenological framework assists me in elucidating how my participants' experiences of adversity in their childhoods have impacted the development of their personal agency and how this may have inadvertently compelled them towards 'saving face'.

An awareness of the esoteric nature of this academic research serves to remind me not just of the examining audience but for whom the work is *really* intended. It is intended, in a variety of distilled and abridged forms, for parents, educators, and for those in the counselling and psychotherapy professions to utilise in clinical practice. Much consideration has been and will be given to how I communicate this research, through my products, in a meaningful way.

Romanyshyn (2002, pp. 120–121) advises that

"The phenomenologist is a witness and not a critic of experience, and for a phenomenologist what appears matters first before one asks what it might mean."

To which R. King (2020, p. 47) adds

"We can only be a witness if we are able to loosen our grip on the agenda for the research."

When I consider the purpose of using arts-based *hermeneutic* phenomenology as my particular methodological approach for discovering meaning in the seemingly

ineffable experiences of my participants, van Manen's (2016c, p. xviii) words are thought provoking and helpful:

"How do we capture and interpret the possible meanings of such experiences? The things we are trying to describe or interpret are not really things at all – our actual experiences are literally "nothing". And yet we seem to create some-thing when we use language in human science inquiry."

Given the diversity held within the phenomenological methodology I realised the need to be quite specific in my approach. Finlay (2011, p. 115) alone offers nine variations (ibid, p.121) – advising that there is

"no actual method of how to do hermeneutic phenomenology."

I initially struggled to reconcile phenomenology as either 'this' or 'that', i.e., descriptive **or** interpretive as it felt reductionist; moving away from the openness I understand phenomenology to promote, which prizes individuality and creativity. Finlay (2011, p. 120) suggests that

"in practice the space between description and interpretation is [in any case] ambiguous."

I thought that surely there must be room for both as I will first describe the image or textual data and then interpret the meaning from what has made itself known. Todres and Galvin (2006) effectively demonstrate their use of both description, as a general structure, and embodied interpretation, to elucidate meaning from an embodied sense of the phenomenon in question. Finlay argues that interpretations made by the researcher are *"inextricably intertwined"* with the context and findings, acknowledging that the *"researcher-participant (inter-) subjectivity is*

embraced" (Finlay, 2011, p. 109). In *Dancing Between Embodied Empathy and Phenomenological Reflection*, the passage by Finlay (2006, p. 1) speaks, through the imaginal, directly to my former dancer-self:

"So, researcher and participant engage the dance, moving in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through a shared intersubjective space that is the research encounter. Then, after the dance, the researcher engages a solo waltz...moving in and out of (pre-reflective) experience and reflection as the researcher engages multiple meanings emerging from the data. Different interpretations are tried out like dance steps. Eventually the researcher settles on particular meanings revealing possibilities that may excite, inform or point the way to future research."

4.6.2 van Manen and Finlay

I consider van Manen's *six element structure* approach in which he usefully views hermeneutic phenomenology as **both** descriptive and interpretive, combined with Finlay's *four tenets for a phenomenological methodology* (ibid, 110-111) a creative yet pragmatic approach to answer the research questions:

- What impact do adverse childhood experiences have on the development of women's personal agency and how might this influence their need to save face?
- How might ACEs and poorly developed agency impact women's relationships?

In answering his own question *‘How can human science research be pursued?’* van Manen offers the following ‘Structure of Human Science Research’ (1984) to which, I demonstrate its relevance to the current research project:

	van Manen’s 6-point structure, originally described as “Doing” Phenomenological Research and Writing (1984, pp. 39–41)	Relevance to present study
1	Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.	The phenomena being explored in this project are adverse childhood experiences, the development of personal agency and saving face (masking self).
2	Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.	I have lived and continue to live with and through the experience of adversity in my childhood and poor agentic development with a proclivity for saving face.
3	Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon. Four lifeworld existential themes: Lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations.	The themes characterising the phenomena are consistent with the four key existential themes emerging from this study: temporality, experiencing the somatic and psychic self, the legacy of adverse childhood experiences, inter- and intra- personal dynamics.

4	Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and re-writing.	The phenomena have been reproduced both in imagistic form and through writing Haiku poetry, this thesis and journal articles.
	Adding two more steps in Researching Lived Experience (2016c, p. 30),	
5	Maintaining a strong and orientated pedagogical [psychological] relation to the phenomenon - note psychological inserted due to my particular concern. (see Langdridge, 2007, pp. 122–123)	Products that [educate], psychologically inform and serve to contribute to breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma.
6	Balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole.	Use of hermeneutic circle: parts may be seen as emergent material from the interview questions, the textual dialogue and expressed images. The whole is the bringing together of all that which has been explored into reflexive writing, thesis and product creation.

Table 6 - van Manen's six-point structure

To support my quest and adding to van Manen's six-point structure (Table 6) are Finlay's four tenets (2011, p. 111) which characterise the hermeneutic phenomenological approach; again I have highlighted relevance to this study:

	Finlay's four tenets	Relevance to present study
1	Commitment beyond science and towards the humanities.	I am a practitioner-researcher concerned with understanding lived experience and seeking new knowledge.
2	Explicit use of interpretation.	Both dialogue and created images will be subject to explicit interpretation.
3	Reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher's involvement.	The study is born of the researcher's personal experience and includes a heuristically influenced self-study as part of the research journey.
4	Placing emphasis on expressive presentation, usually writing using myth and metaphor.	Data will be presented creatively using both written word, created images and the use of the imaginal, wonder and metaphor.

Table 7 - Finlay's four tenets

It felt a little ambitious creating a hybrid of both van Manen and Linda Finlay with the addition of arts-based research. Yet, in discussion with Dr Rupert King he advised me that he too had blended van Manen and Finlay, both well respected and trusted in the field, in his own phenomenological study which is valuable to me as it supports my idea as a tried and tested approach (R. King, 2017).

I also consider that my research requires that I engage deeply in reflexive practice. Remaining open to our own biases and perspectives while cognisant of our own unique researcher lens means, I suggest, that our embodied knowledge from previous experience will enhance rather than diminish the co-construction of meaning. This also links to the use of Template Analysis as a tool for analysis in

which *a priori* themes, when utilised, are made explicit before the data analysis commences. The development of the highly detailed template attends to the principle of phenomenology which is to go “*to the things themselves*” (Crowell, 2009; Husserl, 2001; Sartre, 1948).

Having attempted to understand the foundational differences between the various phenomenological methods I resolved to apply and do justice to a *hermeneutic phenomenological approach* originating from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, with the wisdom and guidance of Max van Manen and Linda Finlay.

4.6.3 The hermeneutic circle

I have found the hermeneutic circle valuable as a tool for moving back and forth iteratively between individual parts and the collective whole within the textual data; the whole cannot be referenced without both within this circular interpretive movement. The ‘part’ may be represented by a word within the context of a whole sentence or the part may refer to a single interview out of many (Finlay, 2011; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The textual meaning is placed within context of the historical and cultural nature of the participants’ lifeworlds. I have created a diagram to illustrate this circularity and my interpretation for use:



Figure 6 - Researcher's hermeneutic circle

Romanyshyn (2013, p. 221) suggests that:

"Within the embrace of this circle of understanding, the knower approaches a text with some foreknowledge of it, which in turn is questioned and challenged and amplified by the text, thereby transforming the knower who returns to the text with a different understanding of it."

4.6.4 Double/triple hermeneutic

The double hermeneutic is a hermeneutic theory espoused by well-known sociologist Anthony Giddens (1987). Giddens differentiated between the natural sciences where understanding is one way – towards a definitive ‘single hermeneutic’ and the social sciences whereby we study not just the what but the how, forming a ‘double hermeneutic’. I suggest that in this study there is a triple hermeneutic taking place as the reader makes sense of my sense making of the participants’ sense making as we view the images in which they have expressed the essence of their experiences.

4.7 The use of body in research

My body, as suggested by van der Kolk, *“Keeps the Score”* (2015) of the adverse experiences in my childhood. With increasing awareness of this during the past few years, I take my body seriously when it has something to tell me; I listen to my body’s wisdom. I only have to be talking to a friend about something seemingly innocuous for my body to have a visceral and palpable response. I listen to clients as they tell me their difficult ‘stuff’ and often my legs start tingling or my heart feels as if it will implode. Sometimes, a client merely sitting with me during a quiet reflective moment brings about the most physical of responses such as an overwhelm of emptiness. These responses occurred also during the research sessions. I noted Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, p. 186) words with recognition:

“It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body I perceive ‘things.’”

Therefore, both in the interviews themselves, during transcription and when analysing the generated data for themes, our shared experience of adversity in childhood brought about a deep connection between us. A tacit knowing, an

unspoken numinous quality that was particularly evident through the participants' use of their bodies; i.e., their hands producing from their psyches what their eyes needed to see. The inter-view, originating from the Latin and French words meaning "*to see each other*" (Harper, 2022d) within this shared experience.

4.8 Other methodologies considered

I considered several qualitative methodologies in pursuit of the most suitable for my project's requirements. While there were some with relevant elements, none exactly satisfied my need. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) was the first and most obvious through analysing the interpreted phenomena. Yet IPA felt too prescriptive, lacking flexibility and no use of *a priori* themes, an important consideration due to my insider-researcher position. As a 'bottom up' and, in its entirety, an inductive approach, IPA could not accommodate my prior knowledge and therefore, to remain completely unbiased and without presupposition would be impossible.

Grounded theory, as another 'bottom up' approach, was also considered, however I was not seeking to construct a hypothesis and theory at the outset of the project. However by adopting an open attitude, in line with a phenomenological openness, should a theory emerge then I would work on its development. In the event, a new theory and model for practice is being developed as a consequence of the research (A21, p.544).

Heuristic inquiry was also considered particularly in relation to my own heuristically influenced self-study. Yet this project could not meet the demands of a pure heuristic inquiry (S. Goss & Stevens, 2016; Hiles, 2012; Moustakas, 1990). The research was driven by but not primarily about my experience, but rather that of the participants. I also regarded the data as being generated by participants rather

than view them as co-researchers, whose involvement would necessarily be greater than that of attending one interview.

Participatory action research, a sub-set of action research, was an interesting methodology to consider as a primary aim is to bring about social change which aligns with my aim of reducing intergeneration trauma. However, action research involves input from community or organisational members who wish to improve a particular situation; pooling knowledge to define a problem in order for it to change (McDonald, 2012). For this project my interest was in understanding, at depth, individual experiences of the phenomena in question with the ability to then examine themes across all data sets.

This is also, in part, an arts-based study so naturally artistic inquiry (AI) was considered. In AI, findings are disseminated typically through visual representation. While I am including images in my presentation I am also interpreting the images and textual data meaning a hermeneutic phenomenological approach would be better suited.

To conclude, the bespoke methodology, developed for this study, has enabled me to creatively investigate the phenomenological aspects of my participants' ACEs, agency and need to 'save face'.

Chapter 5: Methods, data and ethics

5.1 Methods

5.1.1 Introduction

The recursive nature of qualitative research creates a basis for results to emerge from the data, therefore allowing for new and evolving decisions to be made throughout. The data has been analysed in a reflexive, systematic and iterative manner based on guidance, as seen in Chapter 4, from Max van Manen and Linda Finlay (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 2016a, 2016c). I have balanced the phenomenological aspect, where a desire for wonder and imagery are naturally occurring, with the methodological thoroughness necessarily required for doctoring my chosen topic.

5.1.2 Abductive reasoning

While this study could be deemed as inductive reasoning, i.e., Latin prefix *in* - leading *towards* a generalisation, abductive reasoning is a better fit as the conclusions can only be made from the information known in this particular study. Abductive reasoning, Latin prefix *ab* – typically begins with an incomplete set of observations, in this case the lived experiences of the research participants, which can never be ‘complete’ and proceeds, through interpretation, to take *away* the likeliest possible explanation in order to construct of knowledge.

5.1.3 Pilot studies

Three pilot studies were conducted with female psychotherapists. The first pilot was conducted online with a peer member volunteer from my cohort. This was a very useful experience, not least as this volunteer had never experienced the use of expressive arts in her work or personal therapy. Although the session was

important in terms of running an arts-based research session online (having never done so before), it was also significant for two key reasons. Firstly she realised that in spite of her 20 years of experience, both as client and therapist, she discovered new and unexpected insight within a very short time. This gift of a pilot session brought about confirmation for my resolve to only research with participants already qualified and currently practicing in counselling or psychotherapy.

The second pilot interview was conducted with a colleague, not an arts-based therapist, but familiar with arts-based psychotherapy, face to face in my therapy room. This session, although it went well and was useful for both my pilot and for the participant, caused me the most anxiety. I reflected that perhaps it brought back the anxiety of conducting research sessions in my room for my master's degree. This session was also with a respected colleague I have known for some time. I perhaps felt a little insecure as my inferiority kicked in; would she be judging the credibility and integrity of my research and think less of me if she perceived me as inadequate? My fears, it turned out, were rather paranoid and unfounded. Again, as with the first pilot and no matter her long-standing experience, the interview brought about fresh insight and the use of expressive art facilitated new sense and meaning making.

Finally, I seconded a willing D(Psych) alumni who also happens to be a very experienced arts-based therapist to interview me. The pilot session was run to replicate an intended participant session, only with me as the participant being asked my own questions. I had a strong feeling that if I wanted other women to participate with potentially sensitive and emotive content, I needed a sense of what it felt like to be asked my questions, experience the image creation, and dialoguing. I wanted to use the pilot interview to identify any biases and assumptions and increase my ability to conduct the participant interviews with greater awareness.

This transparency would also contribute to the dependability and trustworthiness of the study.

All three pilots were all extremely useful; I was able to nuance the questions and foci so that they were more pertinent to the phenomenological aspect of the study. This gave me a sense of what the participants could expect with an increased feeling of congruence towards my explication of the process. The pilot sessions also left me with the renewed realisation that there is *always* something more for me to learn about myself and my process as a psychotherapist and social science researcher.

The following gives an example of a change made as a result of the pilot interviews:

The question: In what ways do you understand how the phenomena of ACEs and personal agency have impacted your sense of who you are and how you are in the world? *(This needed narrowing down to reflect the relational element that was manifesting during the pilot interviews).*

Became: How do you consider your ACEs and your sense of personal agency have impacted your relationship with others?

As a post-research reflection I realised this question could have usefully been expanded to:

How do you consider your ACEs and your sense of personal agency have impacted your relationship with others *and yourself?* (see Limitations, Chapter 8)

Using the arts in research may bring about unexpectedly difficult material which, for the lay person, may be too much and for which they are unprepared. With limited assurances due to the nature of it being research and not therapy, the 'safety net' of researching with practicing therapists gave some reassurance. I knew they had all already engaged in therapy during training but also had access to therapy and supervision post research. The pilot interviews, conducted with qualified and 'in-practice' therapists provided a useful experience from which I was able to conduct the 'real' interviews with increased assurance and confidence.

5.1.4 Participant selection (including ethics) and sampling

The sampling is '*purposive and homogeneous*' (Langdrige, 2007, p. 58), that is to say, all participants share the phenomenon of adversity in their childhoods.

Participants were recruited via my professional network. I issued a flyer (A1, p.386) detailing the purpose of the study. I sought women over the age of 18, who had completed and qualified in their chosen counselling profession. Participants did not need to be familiar with using the creative/expressive arts and I offered to send an art pack (paper, card, colouring pencils, felt tip pens, oil and chalk pastels) to any participants who required it - two were requested.

Due to the demographic of participants and safety measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic (although out of lockdown at the time) only two of the ten participant sessions were held in my therapy room. Although this was the first research I had conducted online, I had, at the point of the interviews commencing, been working solely online in clinical practice with clients and supervisees for a year. The online pilot also gave me a good indication of what to expect and again proved useful for ironing out any idiosyncrasies and administrative issues. I had been concerned that trying to conduct arts-based research online might be problematic. Part of the process, when using art in therapy, is being witness to the other as they create an expression from their psyche. I imagined this may be more challenging when not

actually in the room together; again the online pilot allayed my concerns.

Researching online using art materials proved to be very successful and did not, in any notable way, diminish the experience. This was also useful when thinking about future products.

I was open to a demographic which represented ethnically and racially diverse participants as discussed in an amendment to my learning agreement (**A5, p.398**). However, the White all-British cohort likely reduced complexity for the study of agency and childhood trauma, already challenging areas to explore. I had also decided to accept the first 12 suitable participants. Suitability being decided at the preliminary 15 minute online interview. Ten were initially deemed suitable and accepted, two were tentative with an awareness that there could be some drop-outs. Indeed the two tentative potential participants, after careful consideration decided to withdraw prior to interview. One decided her one ACE was not in fact an ACE after all and felt uncomfortable to continue, the other had become too anxious when thinking about what may surface for her during the interview. Both were de-briefed and knew they could contact me should they wish to but neither did.

Participants needed to meet the following criteria:

- Psychotherapist/counsellor currently in practice
- Awareness of own childhood adversity/ trauma(s)
- Female (at birth and still identifying)
- Fluent in the English language
- Personal experience of at least one of the ACEs
- Availability of a private, uninterrupted space if unable to travel to researcher or being interviewed online
- Not concurrently accessing arts-based therapy

- Able to seek therapeutic support if necessary post-research and two post-research check-ins.

Exclusion criteria:

- Diagnosed personality disorder
- Currently suffering with mental illness/poor mental health
- Trans-women and any otherwise-gendered identity

5.1.5 Trans-women

For this study's participants I wanted women whose genitals were observed and recorded female at birth. They should also currently identify as female, holding an awareness of the polarities between the growth, development and gendered experiences of the binary sexes. While I believe this study would be suitably replicated for those identifying as transgender or transsexual, in this instance I was seeking women who were socialised as female throughout their developmental years and experienced adolescent puberty as a biological female (Thomas, 2019). A trans-woman who has lived their formative years typically with normative masculine expectations and socialisation, with stereotyped gendered masculinity, will inevitably have had differing kinds of experience.

5.1.6 Participant data

	Ruby	Millie	Louella	Rebecca	Alex	Diana	Tessa	Winnny	Lauraley	Jemima
Participant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lives in	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK
Age	To aid confidentiality I have not disclosed individual ages. The age range was between 30-75 with a mean age of 48.9 years.									
RS	S	D(S)	S	S	D(S)	M	M	P	M	M
Children	Four participants did not have children, while the remaining six had between 1 and 4 each									
Ethnicity/race	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB	WB
Use of art materials	Three participants were not familiar with using art materials									
#ACEs/10	6	3	5	6	1	8	5	10	7	4
RS = relationship status (S=Single, D=Divorced, P=Partner, M=married) WB=white British #ACEs out of a possible 10										

Table 8 - Participant's demographic data

The ten participants were all counsellors and psychotherapists currently in practice with an incredible total of 603 years of life experience between them. I am intrigued by a sense of lived time which brought me to consider that 603 years ago, in 1420, England was under the rule of King Henry V. I can't help but think of women's adversity and agency development during that particular period in time...but that would be for another study.

5.1.7 Cultural considerations

After presenting my PAP viva I was asked by the Middlesex Chair, Dr Tarek Younis, my views on participants from other cultures taking part in my research, given that the phenomenon of personal agency may be understood very differently. I wrote in my Learning Agreement that while researching White British women, like myself, may be less complex, it didn't feel ethically congruent or comfortable discriminating against any woman, irrespective of their race, culture or ethnicity. As recommended, I read Mahmood's writings on agency in 'Politics of Piety' (Mahmood, 2006) which helped me consider the multitude of cultural implications. Although I was immensely grateful to the women who showed interest in my project and for those who became research participants, I noted my disappointment with the zero interest shown by women from other cultures and ethnicities to my own. I have thought long and hard about this and can only conclude that agency and saving face may be culturally too sensitive to risk exposure with associated shame playing a part.

5.1.8 Location and context

The research sessions were conducted in my private therapy room which looks out over a secluded garden, resplendent with a variety of trees and shrubs. Separate to the house the room offers a peaceful place ideally suited for therapy, research, and quiet contemplation. Both of the in-person participants were offered expenses for petrol but both declined stating the opportunity to be part of my research was a

privilege. I was humbled by their gratitude for contributing to my research, also in the knowledge that as Sedgwick's (1994) *Wounded Healers*, their experience may help others. The remaining eight participants attended the sessions via the online platform Zoom. As agreed with the participants, sessions were audio recorded and for the online sessions screen shots were taken, with participant permission, of all the expressed images.

5.1.9 Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity

On the basis of the pre-interview and deciding to continue, the participants signed a consent form, which included the use of their images in present and future projects; (see A3, p.391). While absolute anonymity was impossible to guarantee, as I had met with and therefore knew all the participants before the research sessions, all participants were satisfied that the research would be confidential and that any personally identifying information would not be used in the final thesis or in any other material I may produce. Participants agreed that non-identifiable data could be stored in national archives and used in future research. To keep a 'real person' feel to the work each participant was given a pseudonym which they agreed to, only in one case did a participant wish to choose their own.

5.1.10 Interview process

Data was generated through "*informal conversational interviews*" (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 47–49), loosely guided by five questions (p.45) and images created by the participants during the interview process. In line with phenomenological questioning, my questions were directed towards the participants' experience of the phenomena in question (Welman & Kruger, 2002): ACEs, personal agency and 'saving face'. All data were treated with equal significance. Due to the heuristic nature of the project, the researcher's own reflexive diary, art journaling (Chilton & Leavy, 2014), and created images were used reflexively when contemplating the interview sessions.

Each research session was 2.0 hours in duration, including 20 minutes of reflection and a 10 minute de-brief at the end. The following table demonstrates the interview process:

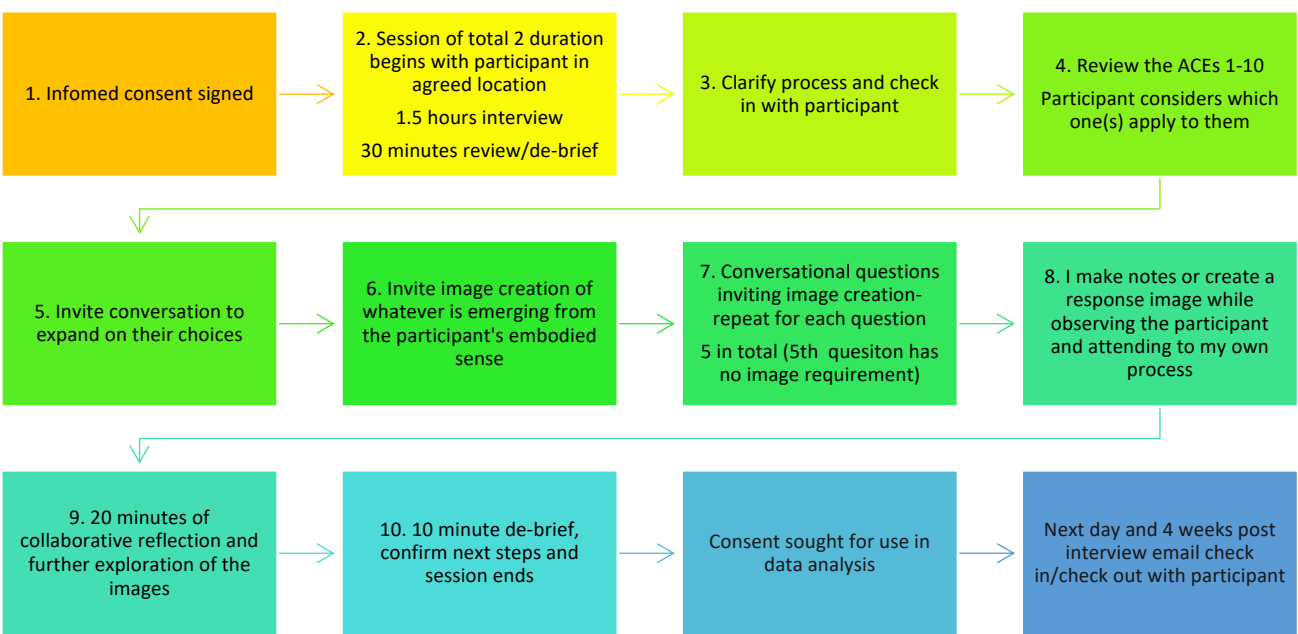


Table 9 - Interview process
as presented in the Learning Agreement (Adcock, 2020)

The format for each question was as follows:

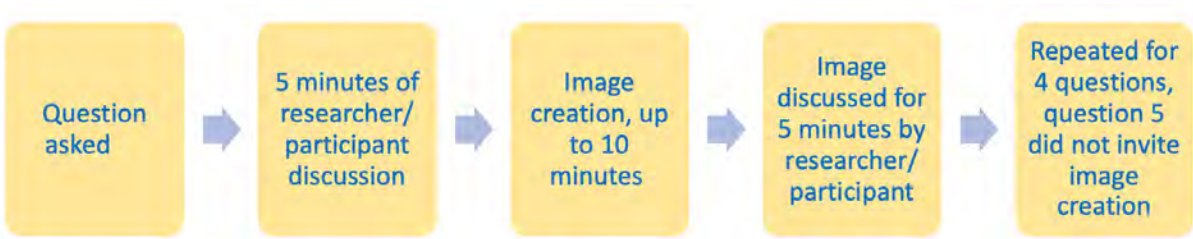


Figure 7 - Question format

5.1.11 Transcription

Due to the extremely sensitive material being discussed, it felt ethically important to transcribe the interview dialogues myself as I wanted to be immersed with each

participant as I listened, re-listened, and transcribed our conversations. It helped me acquaint myself intimately (Etherington, 2004) with each participant's experiences while offering the opportunity for self-reflection on the process as I reflected on my embodied experience when I heard their voices anew. The transcripts were manually coded to allow both descriptive and interpretive elements (Finlay, 2011; van Manen, 2016a, 2016c), to emerge organically, while my immersion in the evolving text allowed for a greater depth of empathic resonance to the lived experience of the participants. This experience also contributed to the theme development.

After careful consideration and discussion with a critical friend (CF) and my academic advisor, I chose not to share transcripts with the participants, hence referring to them as participants and not co-researchers. I wanted the essence left as natural and close to the interview experience as possible. Participant 'correction' would have been an afterthought and possible change in perspective and therefore inhibit the phenomenological emergence of sense and meaning making. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic I also didn't want to risk the participants' surfacing of new feelings in response to reading the transcript away from the containment of the research session.

Transcription was not a task for the faint-hearted! Ten participants and interviews of two hours in length produced roughly 140,000 words. Ochs (1979) reasons that transcription is analogous to translation, whereby the spoken word is transformed into the visual. This analogy encouraged within me a sense of bringing the spoken word to life as imagined in 3D forms. Langdridge (2007, p. 73) suggests that transcription in a phenomenological study aims to provide a verbatim account of the interview but not typically in more detail than noting the 'ums' and 'ahs'. I agree, sensing that too finer detail would detract from the natural flow of the

dialogue. Therefore to promote fluidity, inferences in notation were kept to a minimum. A sample section of transcript is located in **A6, p. 403**.

5.2 Data analysis

5.2.1 Template Analysis (TeA)

Due to this study's bespoke methodology, an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, I sought a data analysis approach that would also be suited to the pluralist approach taken. Template Analysis (TeA) is a style of structured yet adaptable thematic analysis. It provides the researcher with an epistemologically flexible technique where responsibility lies with the researcher to establish their philosophical position (p.127), (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Frost, 2021; N. King, 2012). TeA aims to *"contribute to genuinely real and useful social change"* (Langdridge, 2007, p. 109) through scrutiny of the data and quality of the findings produced.

TeA uses a flexible level coding hierarchy where the broadest themes represent the highest level codes and lower codes denote refined integral themes (N. King & Brooks, 2017). This aligns with the phenomenological 'bottom-up' approach as described in Chapter 5. TeA also values the development of descriptive and/or interpretive themes drawn from the richest data relevant to the research question(s) (p.44), (N. King, 2012) and was therefore again suited to this project. TeA, while rigorous, allows for flexibility in the application (N. King, 2012; N. King & Brooks, 2017). TeA is an example of what Crabtree and Miller (1999) refer to as 'codebook' approaches, otherwise known as a coding frame which Brooks et al. (2015, p. 205) advise is

"Where a coding structure is developed from a mixture of a priori interests and initial engagement with the data and then applied to the full data set."

While similar to IPA a key difference in TeA lies with the potential to use an *a priori* coding template and less adherence to a pre-structured format. The *a priori* codes are driven from theory, previous research, previous knowledge or experience. Segments of data initially relating to the *a priori* codes are noted and used to revise and update the template. These codes are tentative, and necessarily developed or discarded (N. King, 2012). With each revision the template will evolve iteratively until a top-level template is created ready for data analysis (N. King, 2012; Langdridge, 2007).

TeA also allows for parallel coding, i.e., more than one code may be applied to the same piece of data, and, if executed correctly, there will be no significant risk to the depth of analysis (N. King, 2012). N. King (2008) advises defining and highlighting the themes when they have not been well thought through. A data analysis journal (p.181) was used for this process. N. King also reminds us that TeA is a tool, and not an object of perfection, which helps to tell the story of the data and the researcher's engagement with it. As I can concur, the danger is for the researcher to become too fixated on the 'perfect' template (N. King, 2008).

To get a 'real life' sense of TeA in action, I searched peer reviewed journal articles and found two studies in the area of health psychology (Kent, 2000; H. Matthews et al., 2018). In the present study, guided by King (N. King, 2012, 2008; N. King & Brooks, 2017) diligence was partially determined by completing an audit trail throughout the data analysis (**A17, p.494**). Quality checks were conducted with two psychotherapy colleagues who were familiar with the research. Together we were able to discuss and challenge the template development assisting me with modification of the themes selected for the final template.

Figure 8 shows the process using TeA:

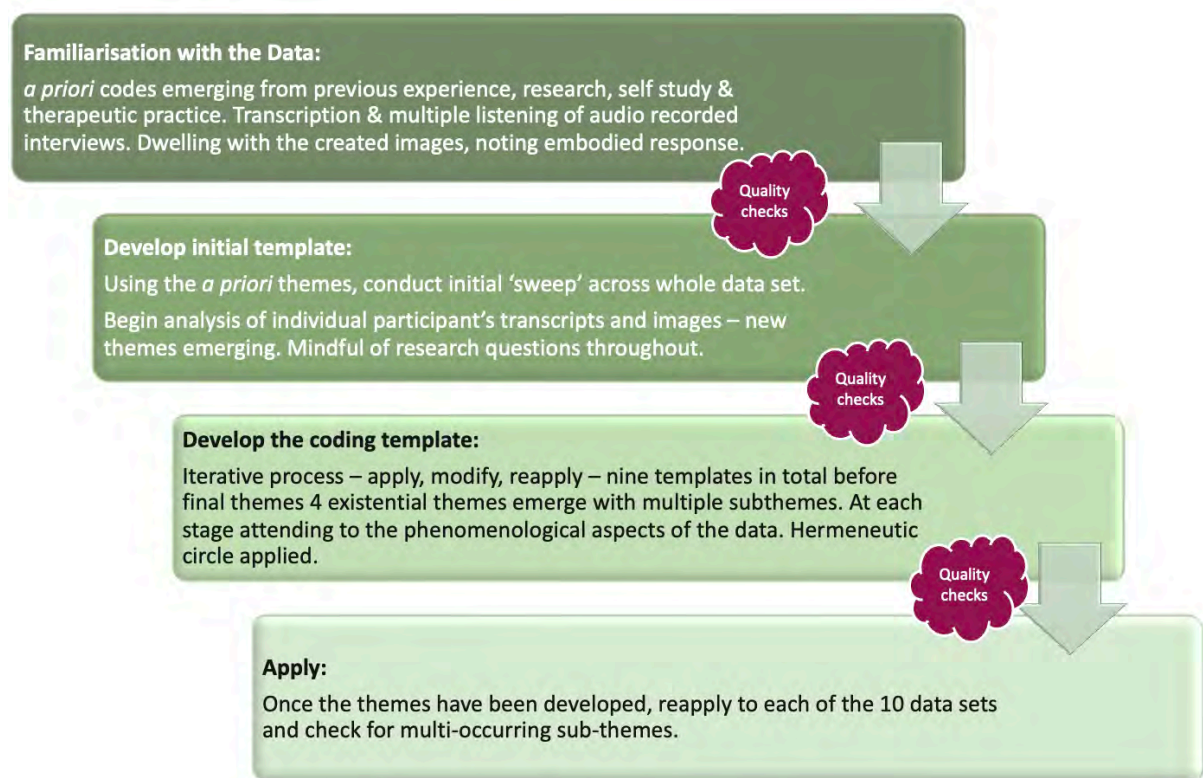


Figure 8 – Template Analysis process

5.2.2 Key challenge of using TeA

Whilst TeA may be focussed more on between cases than within a case it does vary from study to study and for this study both is required. The key challenge using TeA for my project was to use it with a congruent phenomenological stance. I note in my research (data analysis) journal, dated 15th August 2021):

So, I am, in my process, rather than taking a participant or 2 as the sub-set to apply across the whole data set, using a priori themes and those emerging from Q1 to then apply across each remaining question across all participants. The reason I am choosing to do it this way is because it is neater, more efficient and allows for depth into each question across the board for each participant which means with an idiographic, abductive and authentically phenomenological way. I am, by doing it this way, paying full justice to each individual experience (and will do so in the write up).

A phenomenological analysis demands that the individual experience of each participant is fully attended to, which, in this case, occurred through scrutinising each individual participant's transcript and images. Therefore, the use of *a priori* themes is potentially contentious and questionable considering the typical 'bottom' up prominence given to phenomenological data analysis (Brooks et al., 2015). This was resolved by developing the initial template based on analysis across the whole data set prior to in depth analysis of each participant's data, rather than using a couple of sub-sets to apply across them all as noted in my research (data analysis) journal, dated 23rd August 2021).

Also, because each participant's data is personal to them it feels more appropriate to use all participants for each iteration of the developing template rather than 'force' 2 selected participants' data onto the other 8 participant. This, then, also keeps the process phenomenological while also allowing for cross group analysis – this feels phenomenological, abductive and ethical!

A priori themes, rather than resulting from the broader literature, were defined from my personal experience, previous research, and observations in my clinical work. The template was then developed to a high level of detail (see Chapter 7) to ensure depth and clarity. To assist me during the analysis phase and the task of identifying themes I was guided by van Manen's *selective reading approach* (2016c, p. 94) to uncover thematic aspects of the phenomena found within the textual and imagistic data from the participants' *lifeworld*³. In this approach the text is listened to and/or read several times before asking what phrase(s) or statement(s) are of particular

³ Lifeworld (Lebenswelt) was Husserl's idea of the world as pregiven, already there and experienced with a primordial attitude, that is, natural and prior to critical or theoretical reflection (van Manen, 2016c, p. 182).

interest or revealing apropos the phenomena being explored and helping to answer the research question(s) (2016c, p. 93).

5.2.3 Template Analysis in practice

By using a hermeneutic process of dialoguing with a mentor and with the data and revisiting and scrutinising the text and images, eight iterations of the template were developed before the ninth, and final template, was ready to apply to the entire data set. After hours of painstaking data analysis and compiling the emerging hierarchical themes, starting with the most detailed and expanding up to the broadest, eight top-level themes emerged from the data. I then began the lengthy process of coding each participant's data set accordingly. The images, having been explored during and after the research sessions, were interpreted into textual data for the purpose of coding. Therefore separate coding of the images was unnecessary. None of the *a priori* themes were kept as top-level themes; instead becoming absorbed into lower level themes. This is not uncommon as advised by King (2012, 2008).

Phenomenological inquiry does not necessarily favour the use of codes but TeA requires them as part of the template development process. I did not find that this detracted from my phenomenological attitude of being fully open to whatever emerged. It simply gave me a tool that helped me explore the data in a coherent and focussed manner while also speaking to the phenomenological essence and hermeneutic process of the analysis. In practice this involved moving back and forth between the images, transcripts and audio recordings; every new discovery recorded in my data analysis journal. The following images offer a visual exemplar of the iterative process of analysing the data using Template Analysis.

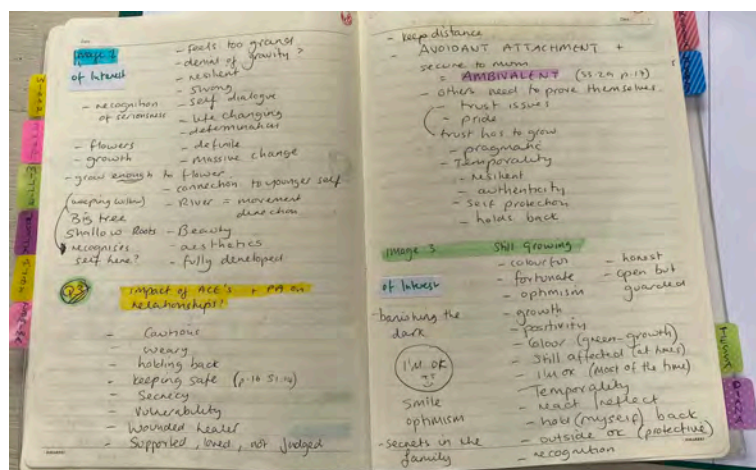


Image 13 – Data analysis journal

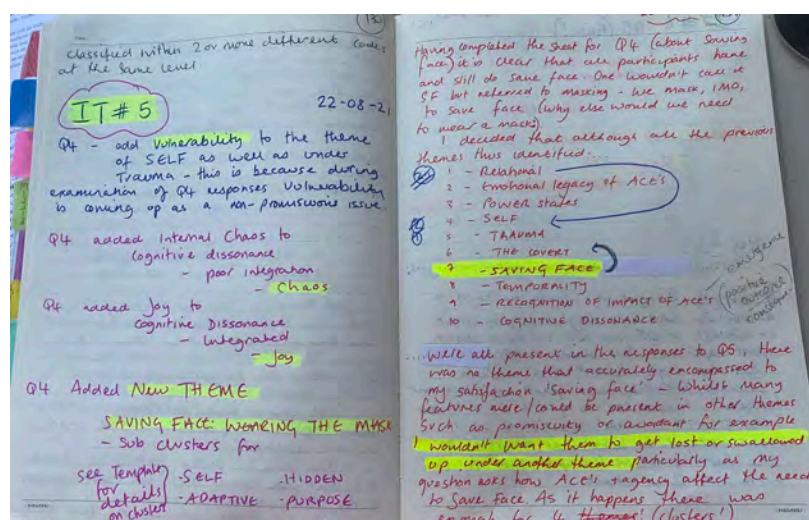


Image 14 – Data analysis journal iteration 5

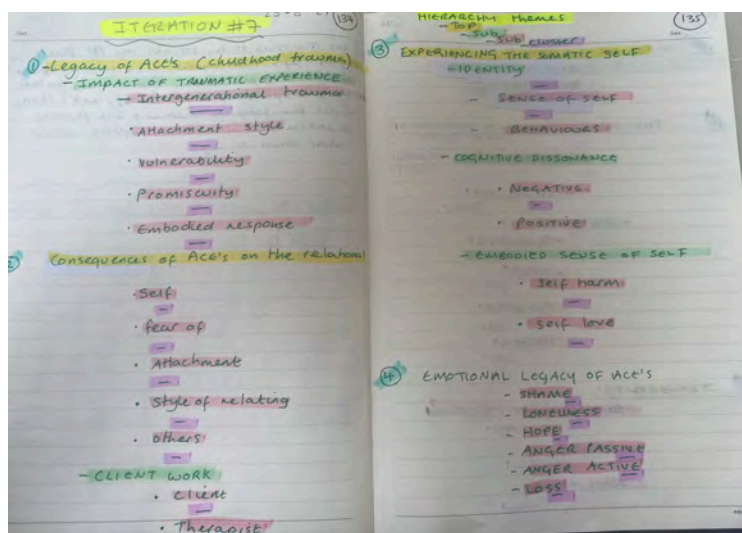


Image 15 – Data analysis journal iteration 7

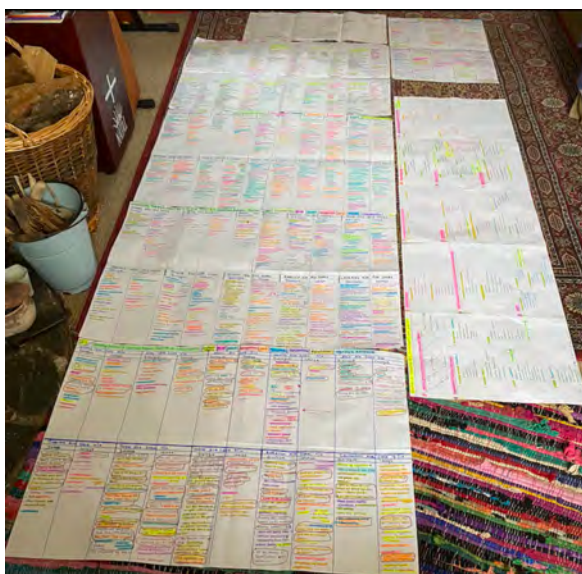


Image 16 – Development of all iterations

5.2.4 Applying the hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis

A phenomenological approach to data analysis necessitates that full justice is made to individual participant experience, therefore I use extracts of the participants' generated data to support the claim of each theme arrived at from the TeA.

Initially, under the themes, I will give examples of mostly textual data whereas in Chapter 7, Section five, the hermeneutic phenomenological exploration, I will use a combination of textual and imagistic examples from the generated data.

I began with TeA, which enabled me to use the four *a-priori* themes: shame, loss, anger and loneliness, which arose from previous experience of the phenomena being explored. These *a priori* themes were applied across all the participants' data sets. As themes then emerged for question 1 (Q1) I applied the themes across all the participants' individual data sets before moving on to Q2 and subsequent questions refining the themes as I went. This enabled me to include all the participants' experiences as natal rather than taking, for example, two participants and applying them across the other data sets. This would have felt a-phenomenological and against the ethos of this phenomenological inquiry.

5.2.5 Memory Theatre

In 2019 I attended a Professional Knowledge (PK) Seminar run by Dr Deborah Kelly, an integrative arts psychotherapist and D(Psych) alumni. The seminar, **Embodied Imagination in Research** included an experiential exercise with the, as yet, unfamiliar-to-me Memory Theatre. The premise is to create imaginal 'rooms' by placing images, poetry, postcards etcetera arranged so that one can 'step into the room' to gain new understanding from the sensorial and embodied practice.

Memory Theatre fits well with both the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the research and my pluralist philosophical position; that of Critical Realism with Relativism. Memory Theatre also speaks to the *Mundus Imaginalis* as discussed in Chapter 3.

Yates, in *Art and Memory* (2014), describes Memory Theatre as a technique in which one assigns images to memories with multiple images subsequently grouped in 'rooms' in one's imagination. The object being to visit a room and 'walk' around it gathering memories to remember the details of, for example, a presentation or speech one might be giving. Relevant to the present research Harpur (2002, p. 233) suggests that

"The art of memory reminds us that memory is a dynamic place, a theatre, where the images we store take on their own life, interacting like the gods and myths of which they are composed, creating new connections and new imaginative configurations."

I was so moved by the experience and the entire seminar, which felt relatable to my own studies, I asked Dr Kelly there and then if she would consider the role of being my academic consultant (AC). Thankfully she agreed. Memory Theatre has been used and adapted for this project as described and discussed in Chapter 7.

5.3 Ethics

As an introduction I have taken the following words, unfiltered, from my research journal to highlight the importance of the researcher's personal ethical care – something I confess to find a huge challenge and something I suggest can easily be neglected (dated 30th September 2022):

I have been feeling TERRIBLE. Anxiety so high, ADHD out of control, impulsivity and panic – sheer panic. I realise my self-care is poor at the moment. Avoidant, shame filled and not coping with the overwhelming sense of doom, failure and doctoral pressure. Not seeing the wood for the trees, feeling totally inadequate, incapable and a rabbit in the headlights. Obsessed, possessed, fearful and exhausted. I have cried on the Zoom call to L and her wisdom shone through: “under stress we go back to our Achilles’ heel. Trapped in the trauma, the doctorate gets into the raw cracks like a fish swimming into the fine cracks found in the rocks under the sea.” I compose myself and meditate with my singing bowls and a candle. I am feeling grateful for her wisdom and kindness. The data analysis and write up has taken its toll. I need to rest and recuperate. Can I give myself permission to do this? I don’t think I have a choice!

5.3.1 Ethical considerations

To guide me through the entire research process I have drawn on the ethical guidance of my governing body, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), their Ethical Framework (Mitchels, 2018), and guidelines for researching in counselling and psychotherapy (Bond, 2004). The ethical considerations for this project were worthy of particular care and attention due to the sensitive nature of the phenomena being investigated; not only for the participants’ emotional wellbeing but for mine as an insider-researcher.

Confidentiality and anonymity were discussed with each participant at the initial suitability interview and again before the research interview. It was clear that

participants could halt the session at any time with a space for reflection and discontinuing if necessary. Not just as a researcher or therapist, but as a fellow human being, with values and a desire for transparency and authenticity, I contacted each participant the day after the research session and again after four weeks to a) to check in with them and determine if anything was 'left over' from the research and b) to ask if they were still consenting for me to use their data in the research. No participants requested a premature ending to a session and neither did anyone request their data to be withdrawn.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics personal agency and adverse childhood experiences and the potential risk for bringing up unexpected and painful feelings, the decision was made at the outset to seek qualified and practicing counsellors and/or psychotherapists who had already engaged in long term therapy as a pre-requisite for their core training but who also had (determined at the pre-interview) access to therapy post-interview should the need arise. I also offered participants the opportunity to contact me for a free session post interview. Only one participant took up this offer as she began to make connections between the research subject and a previous experience which had left her confused. It was very interesting for me to see how the research had positively impacted her and, as she reported, a useful session which gave her insight and a sense of empowerment and agency over what had been a difficult experience.

5.3.2 Practitioner-researcher ethics

I was a practitioner for several years before being able to consider the title of practitioner-researcher, feeling it is better to arrive late than never! My first and only previous research experience was for my master's degree. Yet, on reflection, I believe that every single day is a day spent researching life (even if unintentionally) and every client or supervisee I work with inspires in me the desire to 're-search' the

nature of their particular predicament. No two clients or supervisees are the same. Therefore, while I am ethically adhering to the same standards, I am inevitably different each time I meet with a client due to unique interpersonal and interrelational dynamics. Due to the qualitative nature of my inquiry no two outcomes will be the same; this acknowledgment contributes to my enthusiasm and enjoyment of the work.

For my master's degree I chose to research the accessing and processing of adolescent shame with young people in my own therapy practice. The degree came under the banner of education, so although the ethical considerations were demanding and the process for approval rigorous, researching with young people is what educational researchers do and so, my research was approved by The University of Cambridge ethics committee. I became very aware of the duality of my role, and the importance of ownership of both aspects, as therapist and as researcher, without one usurping the other. The welfare of my client participants was paramount as was my transparency to both my client participants and their parents; parents and clients (deemed Gillick competent) signed the consent form.

The present research study is born from my own personal experiences and therefore I consider my researcher visibility and openness to be of paramount importance. While I am not researching with existing clients, I do have a stake in the phenomena explored. I want to gain depth to my understanding of adverse childhood experiences and the potential impact on the development of women's agency for two main reasons: it will help my quest to support parents in their own understanding of how ACEs may impact their relationships and parenting style but also because I did not have this information when I was pregnant at 19. I therefore went in to adulthood and parenting with no understanding of my childhood adversity, let alone the impact this would play; not just how I managed and parented but concerning the impact on my agency development and necessity to

save face. Psycho-education pertaining to ACEs, agency and parenting, along with arts-based interventions therefore feels increasingly important to me.

In this vein, I also reasoned it equally important to be aware of myself now in terms of my social position, socioeconomic status and any potential blind spots. Also, essential to me, an awareness of how my overall biography may impact the research and most importantly my participants (Hertz, 1997). Most importantly I had to be mindful not to enter unwitting collusion with any participants whose particular stories resonated with my own. My empathic nature, while real and appropriate for all the participants, felt particularly strong towards three of the them. I reflected at some depth and realised that although I was highly compassionate and empathic towards them, I was also recognising a compassion for my younger self who had experienced some similarities with their experience.

Without judgement I was keen to note any obvious similarities or differences between myself and my participants. We had some similarities and discernible differences. We all identified as White British women, are qualified and practicing psychotherapists, all with ACEs in our history, poor agency development, and the propensity to save face. Sedgwick's *The Wounded Healer* (1994) and Romanyshyn's *The Wounded Researcher* (2013) have been useful as a reminder that many of us come wounded into psychotherapy practice and research.

5.3.3 Practitioner-researcher ethical care

The following section has relevance to the reflexivity chapter, however I decided to keep it here to highlight why *researcher* ethical care matters.

5.3.4 Ethical dilemmas in research

I realised that the research would likely bring about challenges for me both as researcher and on a personal level. And I was, indeed, tested. The evening before the second interview, due at 10am the next morning and the first face to face, one of our beloved dogs died. He became ill very quickly with gastric dilatation-volvulus. By the time I arrived at the vets with him and opened the boot of the car he was dead. The shock and pain of losing him was agonising. I was beside myself with grief. Most upsetting of all were the months of wailing that would ensue from my daughter who was utterly bereft at the loss of her 'Boysie'⁴. I noted in my research journal the morning after his death, the morning of the session (26th March 2021):

Feeling heartbroken & raw this morning. Leify died on the way to the vets in Whittlesford yesterday evening between 8.50-9.15pm. The house is so quiet without him. The others are subdued – it's horrid ☹. I have cancelled my client sessions this day but decided, as it's not counselling, to continue with my 1st f:f research session with Millie – she's driving a long way to see me and will have left early. I really need to keep my shit together. I don't know if this is ethical, the right thing to do? I guess I won't know yet but I do feel I want to continue and have to make the decision whether or not to tell her. I think I will mention it briefly then I'm not holding on to the worry of it interfering. I feel anxious and tired but resolved to carry on.

Yet, I decided to continue with the interview. My participant was voluntarily driving two hours each way and dedicating, therefore, a day to my interview. I wanted to be congruent and transparent so decided to inform her shortly after her arrival that the previous evening one of my dogs had died. I gave no detail just the bare facts and remained professional and composed. My participant was kind, checked if I was sure I wanted to continue (she was after all a psychotherapist) and

⁴ As an aside I can report that my daughter finds love and comfort from her new 'fellas', our beautiful bouncy Doberman pups who have a very similar feel and temperament to her beloved Boysie.

so we began. I took the decision based on several factors; not wanting to inconvenience her, feeling excited for the session and most importantly being congruent and authentic. Later, as I reflected and somewhat surprised at my resolve, I recognised my ability to compartmentalise, to shut off from the pain; I later realised a survival strategy from childhood.

It was the right decision – my disclosure and the participant's response freed me up to continue as planned and to take a welcome breather from my grief knowing that I would be certain to return to it the next day when collecting our dear boy from the vets in order to bury him in the garden. Faced with this unexpected ethical dilemma I cannot be certain as to whether or not I made the 'right' decision but, as indicated by the quality of our session, it was the best one.

5.3.5 Personal ethics

I spent my formative years heavily preoccupied with seeking affection and acceptance. But now that I no longer have that need I am able to embrace education both in an academic and lived life sense. I experience many of the physical manifestations as reported in the ACE study (Felitti & Anda, 2020) such as multiple auto-immune diseases, heart arrhythmia, disordered eating, high blood pressure, borderline type 2 diabetes and asthma. I have combined ADHD and the comorbidity of high anxiety. My 23 year old daughter, who lives at home, is a musical and numerical savant. She is beautiful and funny. Diagnosed with significant 'classic' autism aged four (staged now at level 3), she also has no sight at all. The first month after her birth was spent living in hospital, uncertain whether or not she would live. Now, increasingly violent, her behaviour has become progressively difficult to manage. An inability to articulate her feelings means that sometimes the triggers are unclear, although her frustration certainly is.

Managing my stress levels throughout my doctoral process has, at times, been challenging. As Kara (2018) discusses, the pressures of work, family, and general life can make even relatively stress-free research demanding. My life feels busy, possibly with an intention born from avoidance of myself; working ethically is therefore crucial to managing my own self-imposed expectations and as a preventative measure from becoming overwhelmed. This year I have embarked on a self-compassion course, a stress course and a waking dreams training, all of which have facilitated my movement towards a more spiritual and imaginal way of being in the world. This has helped me reach the polarities of total research immersion and the freedom that comes from a willingness to let go. I am also grateful for the encouragement I receive.

At times, moments in a participant's story resonated so strongly with my own, I needed to mindfully re-connect to my senses in order not to become dissociative. Finlay (2011, p. 39) brings acknowledgment to

"the moment where I am so immersed in the data and intertwined with my participant I can no longer separate the pieces."

Remaining focussed and cognisant of what is mine is a skill I have been able to develop as a result of my training, clinical practice, personal therapy, and supervision. I recognise that through the research process and heuristically influenced self-study I may return to painful feelings. Adams (2014) notes that, according to her own research, the numbers of therapists returning to therapy voluntarily after training is complete (I question if it ever is?) are in the minority. Other than the painful death of our beloved dog I was not otherwise in a time of *"deep crisis"* (Adams, 2014, p.75) during the interview phase. Therapy-during-research has been useful in helping me own my own experiences so as not to 'muddy the waters' with data from my research participants. I have also found it a

relief to unburden myself in an unfiltered manner and feel the sense of containment I wished for my participants during our sessions. This leads me to think about ethical considerations.

5.3.6 Participant ethical considerations

1. Research participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Confidentiality with anonymity considered.
3. Pre-interview; 15 minute suitability assessment and question opportunity.
4. Information form and participant signed consent.
5. Permission to conduct research obtained through the PAP approval and the Metanoia ethics committee 'green light'.
6. Free session offered for post-research processing.
7. Be open to questions about the research both before, during and after.
8. The ability for participants to withdraw from the research at any point up to four weeks post-session.
9. Practitioner-researcher use of personal therapy to process any internal conflicts potentially triggered throughout the research.
10. At the discretion of each participant, potentially identifiable images produced during the research may instead be represented by the researcher (not requested).
11. Any challenging material that is uncovered during the research session may be recognised and processed with the researcher immediately or in psychotherapy post-research.
12. Sessions may be stopped at any time with no expectation for a reason.
13. Use of clinical supervision as necessary and valued doctoral peer support via 'critical friends' (CF).
14. Next day and four weeks post-interview follow ups.

5.3.7 Ethics of image use in research

Although I have not trained specifically as an art therapist (impossible as I do not have a primary art degree) I have undertaken intensive Play Therapy UK (PTUK) accredited creative-arts and clay-therapy training courses alongside three years of arts-based psychotherapeutic counselling study at The university of Cambridge. Expressive art forms an important aspect of my therapeutic work so naturally I give due consideration for the research. Moon (2015) considers the complex moral implications of interacting with images during research and therapy, suggesting that the parallels between the ways in which we treat images and people are significant and must be considered during the research. It must be taken into account that images expressed during the research are manifestations of the individual participant's inner world and therefore the images belong to the participant (Moon, 2015). However, they are to be used for research purposes and therefore consent must be sought for what their use will be during and post research. For Wadeson (1980, p. 109) the expressed art object is

“an expression of the client, so it is treated as such.”

McNiff (1991), in his paper *Ethics and the Autonomy of Images*, suggests images created in therapy are equally worthy of ethical consideration; I adopt a similar stance when using images as part of the data generation. McNiff (1981) emphasises that the image constitutes a 'third person' who expresses itself to us, a participant in its own right alongside the researcher and human participant.

5.3.8 Ethics of data interpretation

Interpreting participants' data comes with an ethical responsibility I take very seriously. All generated data has been permitted, through participant consent, for use in thesis write-up. McNiff (1998, p. 184) suggests we must ask questions such

as, how do we know our interpretation is correct or valid? How do our biases impact our interpretations? What values are shared? These questions are useful as I consider it my duty to portray the participants and their data respectfully. I noted in my research (data analysis) journal the weight of responsibility I felt and my adherence to the ethics of image interpretation in research (dated 20th July 2021):

I am mindful as I enter the data analysis phase that not only am I interpreting text (client transcripts) but also their images. This feels like an enormous responsibility yet, in equal measure, an enormous privilege. For although, to some degree, words voiced can be altered, retracted, spoken again, the image is an unfiltered (and often unexpected!) manifestation of each participant's psychic life, perhaps, at first glance not yet understood by them. I take this responsibility seriously, it feels huge – I know the power of image creation first hand, reminded by the pilot interview Lynne conducted with me! I am reminded again of Rogers' core conditions and the ethical principles of non-maleficence and benevolence – to treat the images with the respect they and my participants deserve.

Another journal entry (from main journal) illustrates my many 'wonderings' as I considered representing the images from an ethical stance during the data analysis phase (journal entry dated 25th August 2021):

How am I using the image? What is it and where does it come from? Am I viewing it and emphasising the creative/expressive aspect? - see (Shaun McNiff and Cathy Malchiodi's work) – the process of the creativity is freeing up and helping communicate deeper parts of ourselves when words are not enough. The process is just as important as the end result. Jung and Hillman talk about the image as the language of the soul and the psyche where the image is revealing unconscious processes (see 'the revealing image' by Joy Schaverien). Hillman talks about staying in the image, don't rationalise it, not necessarily literally but seriously! Attend to it, ask it questions, allow it to reveal something – this takes me back to thinking about Corbin's mundus imaginalis... This is all really important as I consider how I may best represent the inner workings of my participants and express it both with insight, meaning and respectfully. This is such a gift. I wish I had 100 years to explore!

5.3.9 Role of the research participant

It might seem a natural requirement for this phenomenological research that participants are quite heavily involved with validating the findings. By checking whether or not the researcher's account aligns with a participant's original experience, the participants become highly involved with the whole process. However, key proponents of this approach such as Colaizzi and Cohen et al. (Colaizzi, 1978 and Cohen et al. 2000 cited in Willig & Billin, 2011) come from a Husserlian descriptive phenomenological stance which is a more straightforward process than for the interpretive approaches such as hermeneutic phenomenology (Willig & Billin, 2011). Langridge (2007) offers three suggestions as to why participant checking may be problematic:

1. Researcher's use of phenomenological language which may be challenging to understand.
2. Participants may feel inhibited to offer critical feedback due to a perceived power imbalance.
3. The interpretation of data may take the unsuspecting participant to places they do not wish to go which would give rise to ethical concern.

It is for these reasons (and others described on p.169) and to honour the hermeneutic phenomenological aspect, rather than 'interfere' with the data as it first appears to the participant and researcher, I decided not to share the data unless specifically asked for. Only one participant ask for the transcription of their interview, not to give me feedback, but rather so they could share the experience with a relative.

5.3.10 Academic Advisor (AA)

I have experienced a positive relationship with my AA, Dr Marie Adams. I was initially assigned to an AA who, after the first meeting, I sensed would not suit me. I put in a request to change and met with Dr Adams. I was drawn to her, from the first day on the programme as she appeared confident, assertive, straight talking and humourous; all attributes I find appealing. Dr Adams did warn me that I might need to be persistent in contacting her at times but with my avoidant attachment style and pleaser/rejection personality trait (Kfir, 2011) I have not always felt able to do so. This led to a frustration which I eventually tackled and the outcome was positive. Dr Adams did not behave in a rejecting manner as my historic parental script would have but rather helped me realise that I have voice and it is okay to use it. While my sensitive inner child may react at times I am an adult and as such may offer comfort and solace to soothe the pains of my wounded inner child when, on occasion, they arise.

5.3.11 Academic consultant

After being 'blown away' by Dr Deborah Kelly's Professional Knowledge (PK) seminar, my ADHD impulsivity kicked in and I asked her there and then if she would consider becoming my academic consultant (AC). Dr Kelly graciously agreed informing me this would be her first AC post. Reflecting on the seminar and its usefulness to my project, I wrote in my professional knowledge (PK) paper:

"When we invite creative and imaginal methodologies to our research, we are giving acknowledgement to ways of knowing other than by the rational arrangement of facts (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Romanyshyn, 2013). To see with multiple eyes, process data in multiple ways, use multiple brains (participants/researcher) and many mouths we adopt a circular rather than linear approach (Braud & Anderson, 1998). These

hermeneutic circles are not simply to confirm our prejudices but rather, through a process of openness and perseverance, the process compels the researcher through subjective and objective processes into a deeper understanding of the experience being studied."

I was fortunate to have a total of ten hours with Dr Kelly over the duration of my project. Her wisdom and gentle guidance proved particularly helpful as I considered how best to utilise Memory Theatre as part of the data analysis process while deepening the hermeneutic phenomenological reflection.

5.3.12 Additional support

I also sought wisdom from Dr Rupert King (twice) with his expertise in the field of phenomenology. I found Dr King's calm and considered manner to be instrumental in helping me refine the 'mountains' of data into coherent vignettes as I experienced an ADHD fueled overwhelm. Having read my findings thus far, Dr King also suggested that I locate the extensive writing I had already crafted into the appendices. Essentially I had written so much that he too had felt overwhelmed. I met with Dr Lynne Souter-Anderson on several occasions. Having attended her trainings (creative arts and clay therapy) and worked with her in various capacities I felt that I and my project would benefit from her knowledge and experience in using arts-based approaches to research and psychotherapy practice. Dr Souter-Anderson has been familiar with my work since beginning the PG Diploma at Cambridge University. These meetings were held in person and via Zoom at varying stages of the data analysis and findings write up. This helped me remain focused and true to the ethos of the research and my pluralistic approach.

I also seconded two willing arts-based colleagues to support my data analysis audit. I sent them samples of the anonymized transcripts along with my theme development which we then discussed. I was aware of my subjectivity and

potential for bias 'blindness.' These discussions were also useful in helping me 'fine tune' the themes as they emerged through the phenomenological and abductive approach.

In summary, this study utilised TeA as the tool for initially analysing the data, generated through semi-structured interviews with image creation. Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and Memory Theatre were then utilised to deepen the exploration with the creation of four vignettes. Researcher and participant ethical considerations have been attended to alongside researcher reflexivity which is discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Researcher reflexivity

6.1 Insider-researcher reflexivity

This project stems from the personal and therefore my researcher reflexivity is vital to its coherence and success. I imagine my reflexivity running through this thesis as the stream runs through the valley until it reaches the sea: *the final project*. I wish to describe what reflexivity means to me, and why it's so important not only for the research study itself, but so that I feel accountable to myself; in other words consciously aware of myself throughout the whole process.



Figure 9 - Reflexive tools

I have always enjoyed 'Do It Yourself' and as such found the metaphor of a tool kit useful as an aid for reflexivity. Figure 9 depicts the various 'reflexive tools' I have been able to draw upon throughout the study.

Reflexivity can be described as a two-pronged event: personal and epistemological (Willig, 2013). Willig states that personal reflexivity is about reflecting on the ways in which our personal values, experiences, wider aims, identities, and interests have shaped the research (2013). Willig's explanation of epistemological reflexivity 'requires us to engage' with questions about how the research has been constructed. She asks that if one considered differing ways of carrying out the research and asking the questions, would the results differ in the investigation? This question was applied to my research when analysing the transcripts and images. I considered how the findings may have differed if, for example, I hadn't required image creation as part of the data generation. The same questions would have likely produced similar discussion initially but the depth gained from the image creation and subsequent discussion brought a significantly greater level of depth than words alone would have likely ever achieved, particularly within the time constraint.

Researcher reflexivity sits at the heart of this study. Being born of personal experience I am heavily invested in each stage of the process and passionate about the study's purpose. The heuristically informed self-study (A20, p. 507) also examples my researcher reflexivity. Aligned with my clinical practice I consciously reflect-in-action, for example, during the interview process and by being emotionally present at every stage of the write up. While also reflecting on action, that is by a process of continually reviewing my work, the findings and my cognitive and embodied sense of the research.

Professor Nollaig Frost's presentation on **Being a Researcher** at the Metanoia research academy, 25th Feb 2022, asked us: what is personal? What arises for me on a personal level? Perhaps, as she said, we are 'passionate and angry?' – in this moment my anger towards the injustices etcetera felt validated. Yes! I am angry and I can own this feeling.

I consider myself an insider researcher on two overlapping counts. Firstly I have personal experience of the phenomena under study so I am 'inside' the research topic. And secondly, I so happened to share similarities with the participants such as race, sex, occupation, shared knowledge, and some similarities in our experiences. I also had the choice of how to position myself to be of most benefit to the research (Frost, 2016); for example using my network of contacts when distributing my flyer.

This also aligns with a feminist position by recognising my inherent role and how my personal element is at play when shaping the research from design to implementation and dissemination; while also recognising and 'flattening' any hierarchical processes (Frost, 2016).

6.2 Impact

I believe the interviews to have been impactful on the participants in both the pilot interviews and the research interviews. The impact to me as a practitioner-researcher has been profound. I cannot un-know what I have learned about the impact of ACEs on the development of women's personal agency and what it means to save face. I have become more politicised; I realise it's okay to have a view and feel strong in my resolve that my work here be disseminated and become useful to the profession. There is much to do.

6.3 Cultural considerations

I had already become aware of matters pertaining to cultural difference during Dr Beverley Costa's PK seminar **Languages of the heart: therapy and multiculturalism** (April 2020) so quickly realised how useful a question it was that Dr Younis raised at my PAP viva. I was stimulated into consciously coming out of my predominantly 'middle class' white 'bubble' and begin reading books such as

Black Identities + White Therapies (Charura & Lago, 2021), Working with Difference and Diversity in Counselling & Psychotherapy (Cameron, 2020), Internal Racism (Davids, 2011), Psychological Therapies for Survivors of Torture (asylum seekers) (Boyles, 2017), and Overcoming Everyday Racism (Cousins, 2019). At this point due to thesis writing, work, and life demands my reading in this area is on hold with a view to picking up again post doctoral studies.

It has been a shameful journey of recognising my ignorance but one I am grateful to be on. I have much to learn. To gain deeper understanding and insight of cultural issues and sensitivities faced by women, I attended a PK seminar with Dr Akima Thomas, founder and director of Women and Girls Network, in May 2022 on **Resistance, rebellion, resilience, and revolutionary love**. A thought provoking day, again confirming my relative ignorance and assumptions while furthering my resolve to learn more.

6.4 Re-searching reflexivity

The following is a painting I created a few years ago for my daughter-in-law's birthday. It reminds me that reflexivity, as a metaphor, can be like diving deep into the ocean. We may swim around in the depths of our unconscious and, through meditative transcendental practice, bring to consciousness insight and discoveries that have laid dormant at 'the bottom of the sea-bed'.



Image 17 - 'Dive Deep'

6.5 Contribution to psychotherapy

My key contribution to the profession will be via my products and contributing to the psychotherapy knowledge base. However, as I work as an arts-based psychotherapist and clinical supervisor, the impact this research has had on me will also be filtered through my practice. Not necessarily explicitly, I have already used insight and knowledge gained through this project and entire doctoral journey. The process has contributed significantly to my personal and professional development which, without doubt, impacts my own sense of agentic identity.

Chapter 7: Findings and discussion

*Re-searching deep pain
dwelling, tacit, reveals late –
bluebells under foot.*

Researcher, late March 2022

7.1 Reflection

The Haiku poem above was written early one spring morning as I walked through a local wood with my dogs. The research was weighing heavy, a leaden cloak upon my soul. I was consumed by a sense of an *unthought known* (Bollas, 1987) as I pondered the shared experiences of adversity, through a temporal lens. I tried to comprehend the impact and legacy of living an in-agentic life. I wondered how much of the participants' collective 603 years had been consumed through energy spent surviving a 'psychic hell'? As I watched my dogs play out their unaffected innocence, through excited exploration of the wood, I was reminded also to be present, to embrace nature in all its abundance. I found myself in the juxtaposed position of contemplating suffering while surrounded by serenity.

In a moment my senses became heightened to the mass of budding bluebells that lay, as a beautiful carpet before my eyes, enlivened by the morning sunlight teasing its way through the overhead branches. It was picture perfect. This walk was marvellous gift. I felt so fortunate to be there, to be alive to the experience. As thoughts came in to mind I recognised the sense of responsibility I felt to present my findings as meaningfully as possible. On returning home, feeling deeply moved and with tired dogs, I sat, closed my eyes and took some deep breaths; an image came to mind which I painted on to an old scrap of wood. The piece of wood is

now hanging on the wall in my beloved Cornish cottage and after a period of further reflection a poem came to me which can be found in A8, p. 415.

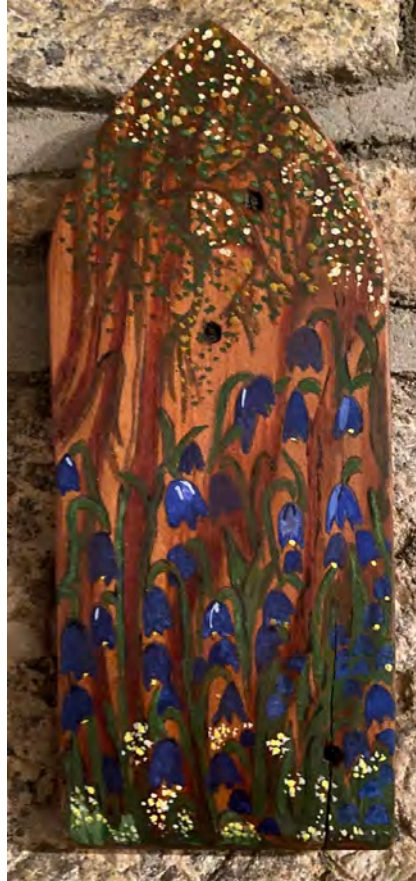


Image 18 - 'Bluebell Wood'

7.2 Preface

As helpfully clarified by Linda Finlay, guidance is scant for researchers drawn to using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for their research project. Finlay (2011, p. 115) suggests that

“Virtually anything goes providing the research retains its phenomenological intent and sensibility.”

This insight felt simultaneously freeing and daunting. The findings of this study are text and image rich. It was important to me that there should be an organic flow to their presentation. Placing the findings in one chapter and the discussion in the next felt too mechanistic and disjointed. I envisaged the participants' words, images (and my response images if used), and discussion to be given shape; a gestalt brought about through interpretation of the data and consideration of the literature.

I have therefore chosen to first present the themes with an introduction and a selection of supporting participant quotes. Then, after making links to new theory development I present four vignettes which, through the use of hermeneutics, delve deeper into the data offering phenomenological insight and reflection. These vignettes incorporate a discussion which also naturally runs through the chapter. This chapter demonstrates that I am a researcher who

“fashions a dance between phenomenological reflection, interpretation and theorizing” [with my own] ‘dance style.’ “ (Finlay, 2011, p. 110)

I spent some considerable time deliberating not only the most interesting and creative way to present the findings but also the most practicable and ethical; by which I mean honouring my participants' experience respectfully and with care. I demonstrate my use of Template Analysis (TeA), the tool I chose to analyse my data, while attending to the invitation of evoking the lived experience of my participants through arts-based hermeneutic phenomenology; my methodological approach. I also very much wanted my participants' voices to be heard individually as well imbuing a sense of the women's collective experiences. My approach has afforded me quality time in deep reflective wonder when dwelling with my participants' words and images.

This chapter is necessarily long. Therefore, for ease and flow, I have divided it up and present it in sections. This also supports the emerging triple hermeneutic: the reader making sense of me, the researcher, making sense of the participants' sense making experience.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Section 1: p.207 | Overview, introduction to the findings and composite participant narrative. |
| Section 2: p.212 | Theme development with examples from participant transcripts and discussion explicated under theme headings. |
| Section 3: p.234 | Every cloud has a silver lining (sub-theme 1.3 of theme 1 Legacy of adverse childhood experiences). |
| Section 4: p.240 | Links to new theory development. |
| Section 5: p.245 | A hermeneutic phenomenological exploration of findings with discussion: Four Vignettes |
| Section 6: p.299 | The wounded healer: taking experience back into practice. |
| Section 7: p.303 | Participants' reflection on the research process. |
| Section 8: p.306 | Summary of chapter. |

This research project, along with *a priori* themes, has culminated in the ongoing development of a significant product: a theory and model for practice which I have

named Red Zone Theory. Mentioned briefly in this chapter Red Zone Theory is explicated (due to wordcount restrictions) in **A21, p. 547**.

7.3 Section 1 – Overview

The only source of knowledge is experience.

Albert Einstein

7.3.1 Introduction

In this section I recap the purpose of generating the data along with a reminder of the aims, questions, and participant demographic. I begin with a reminder of the ACEs and then offer a *composite participant narrative*. This narrative aims to give the reader an introduction to the overarching flavour of the research findings while also recognising the mutuality in the participants' shared experience of the phenomena being explored: ACEs, personal agency and saving face.

Table 2 (p. 91) serves as a reminder of the 10 adverse childhood experiences, commonly referred to as ACEs, derived from the 1995-1997 ACE study (Felitti & Anda, 2020), discussed in the literature review, Chapter 3. In summary, the ACEs study is the largest ever exploration in to childhood abuse. The study found that adversity could be located within the ten broad categories listed which have an enormous impact on a person's lifelong physical, mental health wellbeing and opportunities.

The ACE study with its ten categories of abuse was used as a starting point for each research session. Participants indicated which points felt relevant but no further intentional exploration of a specific category was required; only that which emerged organically as a result of the research questions was deemed necessary. The number of ACEs identified by each participant can be found on p.170.

Abuse	1. Emotional 2. Physical 3. Sexual
Neglect	4. Physical 5. Emotional
Household dysfunction	6. Family member depressed/mental illness 7. Loss of parent/carer through death/divorce 8. Family member in jail 9. Witnessing domestic violence 10. Family member addicted to drugs or alcohol

Table 2 – ACE categories (repeated as a reminder)

7.3.2 Composite participant narrative

The findings showed that all the participants had experienced adversity in their childhoods and all agreed that the development of their personal agency had, in varying ways, been impacted. None of the participants had previously recognised their childhood adversity as impactful on their development until well into adulthood. Some of the participants were unfamiliar with the term ACEs, particularly in relation to their own experience and none of the participants had linked their ACEs to the development of their personal agency. For a small number, an explanation of ‘personal agency’ was necessary, while, for a number of participants, clarification of the term ‘saving face’ was required. For the majority, their childhood (0-18 years) trauma had necessitated modes of survival while overcoming a variety of obstacles. However, somewhat unexpectedly, all participants believed their experiences had made them stronger; for a couple of the participants it had even cemented their resolve to succeed from an early age.

What do I mean by unexpected? Up to the point of this research I had viewed my own ACEs as purely detrimental and causal in my perceived failings in life, i.e., it was all *my* fault; and where there is blame we also find shame (Danziger, 2021; Scrambler, 2019). As a direct result of this research I now realise I had not given

myself permission to imagine otherwise. As I reflect, I realise that there has been a significant shift in my thinking and somatic reaction. This has been personally significant.

The degree to which the participants showed courage and strength in striving to overcome adversity was humbling. As previously noted, it is no secret that many of us in this profession recognise Sedgwick's *Wounded Healer* (1994) or Romanyshyn's *Wounded Researcher* (2013) residing within us; acknowledging the links between our often challenging childhood and our 'chosen' (I sense it chooses us) profession. In *A Curious Calling* (2007) Sussman discusses the complex and often intriguing motivations that lead us to this profession, one which requires of us that we examine our own life experience as part of the training. While Adams (2014), in *The Myth of the Untroubled Therapist*, discusses the plethora of potential challenges faced by those who come to work in the counselling and psychotherapy professions.

Once the terminology had been clarified, saving face (or masking, as some participants acknowledged it to be) was also widely recognised as a strategy for promoting a positive self-image to, as Adlerian psychotherapists term it, *safeguard* against intra-/inter-personal rejection.

"Safeguarding refers to the mistaken movement of the discouraged person in thought, feeling, and action in response to perceived threats to his or her self-esteem." (Mosak, 2022)

For the majority this had a profound implication on their sense of self in relationships to others and to themselves. For some it had meant romantic relationships ending in divorce, while for others their desire for romantic relationships and perhaps children had yet to be fulfilled. Power dynamics within

interpersonal relationships were of interest as was the relationship each participant had with themselves (for comment see Limitations, Chapter 8). A strong sense of the temporal emerged through connection to their younger self; layers and patterns of experience that repeated, along with a sense of movement through space and time. This was both manifest as recognition of fear and lack of direction but also as growth, having made sense of their experiences and found meaning in the movement.

When exploring the somatic and psychic self, a theme that was ubiquitous for all participants, I found the juxtaposed positions under the sub-theme of emotional/cognitive dissonance to be especially interesting. I was particularly struck by the human capacity to hold two positions simultaneously. How, for example, one can experience a sense of embodied internal chaos while also, simultaneously, experience a sense of internal peace and joy? Reflecting as to why this feels particularly important I realised that this speaks to me personally with my own experience of combined ADHD. The juxtaposed position of my chaotic, hyperactive, impulsive, inattentive, and highly anxious self, and the meditative transcendental experience of inner calm I experience when sitting on a rock of Cornish granite, gazing out across the tempestuous Atlantic Ocean.

This led me to recognise that no matter how affected our development of personal agency may be as a result of ACEs, balance may be found, predominantly through acceptance rather than harsh self-critique (Brach, 2003). By allowing self-compassion to heal towards the '*no wonder I amas a result of*' rather than the more shameful assumption that there is something inherently wrong about our person, we may find and readdress this balance.

The five R's of my *in-development* Red Zone Theory (**see A21, p. 544**) are key to promoting empathic acceptance not only for ourselves but as an attitude towards

others. Manifesting from what has been a challenging and inspiring⁵ subject matter, the sense of overcoming and movement towards agency is compelling and rather humbling. I hope this will be recognised as the presentation of the findings and discussion unfolds.

7.3.3 Presentation

After the introduction in section one, section two looks at theme development using Template Analysis (TeA). Textual examples (which includes analysis of the created images) for each theme are taken from the participants' responses that best reflect their lived experience of the phenomena in question, and also help me answer the research questions (p.44). Section three focuses on the exceptions, overcoming adversity, and demonstrating agentic development. Section four briefly introduces the new theory development. Section five brings deeper enrichment to the findings by giving textual and imagistic examples relating to the research questions, alongside the researcher's hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and broader discussion. Section six summarises the participants' experiences as wounded healers while section seven offers examples of the participants linking their experience to clinical practice. Section eight summarises the chapter.

In summary, TeA (Chapter 5) with its use of *a priori* themes, was used to explore the data, leading to iterative cycles of theme development. Adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological stance of dwelling with the textual and imagistic data enabled deeper exploration and resonant amplification of participants' experiences.

⁵ Inspire etymology: from the Latin 'to breathe into' which feels rather apposite in this instance.

7.4 Section 2 – Theme development

7.4.1 Original emerging themes

The following themes were the original eight to emerge from nine iterations of the coding template.

1. Impact of traumatic experience
2. Relationships
3. Temporality
4. Experiencing the psychic and somatic self
5. Emotional legacy of ACEs
6. Every cloud has a silver lining
7. The covert (not openly acknowledged or displayed)
8. Power states

Having arrived at the eight top-level themes, and after a conversation with my academic consultant, I embarked on a truly transformative exercise using, what I now realise to be, my rather naïve yet, nonetheless, powerful adaptation of Memory Theatre. I will now introduce, describe and discuss this experience.

7.4.2 ‘Stepping’ into the themes

Taking inspiration from Dr Deborah Kelly’s PK seminar, Memory Theatre was used to deepen the hermeneutic phenomenological aspect of the data analysis by bringing “*an experimental addition*” (D. Kelly, 2017, p. 46) to the data exploration.

At my first AC meeting Dr Kelly, aware of the impact the Memory Theatre had had on me during her PK seminar, invited me to consider producing images in relation

to what arose for me when considering the themes. On reflection, with Dr Kelly during an AC meeting, I realised that my excitement and impulsivity had taken hold and I had misunderstood Dr Kelly's suggested use of Memory Theatre. Nevertheless at this point I had eight top-level themes. I wrote each theme name at the top of a piece of paper and then sat with eyes closed for a few moments, allowing my embodied sense of the theme and memory of the research sessions to come to me in the form of an image.

Images came to mind quickly. I then set about creating them using a mixture of chalk and oil pastels, coloured pencils and glitter. I was struck by a disembodied sense of 'no-thing-ness' as explicated in Sartre's *'Being and Nothingness'* (2003) as the images emerged. I gazed at them for a while yet felt unmoved. I laid the images in a U-shape on the floor and stepped into the open room (Image 19). I still had no particular reaction. Feeling slightly deflated I decided to close the room. I moved the images around me as I remained in position (Image 20).



Image 19 - Memory Theatre 'open room'



Image 20 - Memory Theatre 'closed room'

As I sit now and write, a discursive shudder runs through my body, so powerful is the evocative embodiment of this Memory Theatre experience. As I stood in the room with eyes closed I conjured up the images that surrounded me. Within seconds I was overwhelmed with a recognition that Sartre notes as “...*I am as the Other sees me*” (2003, p. 246). I felt trapped, suffocating, as if I might stop breathing. As tears began to flow, and awash with overwhelming shame, I realised that, in that moment, I was the experiencing the embodiment of my participants’ trauma.

Later, having reflected upon the experience I sensed that while the images were born of *my* psyche’s representation of the themes from *their* data, I was not only sensing the impact of my participants’ ACEs but connecting them deeply to my own. I had felt exposed and vulnerable which gave me considerable insight into not only how my participants experiences may feel but also that of my clients. It

was quite the most instantaneously and unexpectedly profound experience. Larger copies of the images may be found in **A12, p. 430**.

After what felt like an eternity but, was in reality, just a few minutes, I took some deep breaths, focussed on the window brought myself back to the main room. I felt unable to step over the images yet, by moving one aside, I was able to choose to step out of the imaginary room. I made a cup of tea and stroked my dogs; a proven strategy for reducing stress (Casella, 2019). I was utterly exhausted yet my mind continued to circle as if on a merry-go-round. I decided to go and walk on the cliffs, wrapping myself up in the atmospheric landscape of far West Cornwall.

As I later reflected upon my experience, I was drawn to Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 play *No Exit*, a portrayal of the afterlife, in which three "*damned soul[s]*" (Sartre, 1989, p. 17) are locked in a strange room (hell) as eternal punishment for their earthly crimes. Sartre's play depicts the ongoing ontological struggle faced when, through *The Look*⁶, we are forced to see ourselves as an object perceived by an other's consciousness. Although I had committed no crime, the exposure I had felt in the Memory Theatre room had, for me, a similar quality evoked from my shameful belief of being fundamentally flawed and rejectable through others' objectification of my being. As depicted in Sartre's play, hell is not the burning fires and torture chambers we are may imagine. Rather, it is being trapped with others who objectify us from their own consciousness. I linked these ideas to the living 'hell' many children suffering from adversity in childhood will experience - from which *they* have no exit. This is a poignant reminder as to the purpose of my research.

⁶ Central to Sartre's ontological phenomenology, *The Look* describes when a person's consciousness is forced to acknowledge its existence, not only from its own outward gaze but as a mere object of others' consciousness (Sartre, 2003).

7.4.3 Distillation

I entered a phase of uncomfortable procrastination, becoming aware that I was avoiding the task of writing up the findings. I just couldn't get going but was unsure of the reason. During a mentoring session with a D(Psych) alumni and trusted arts-based colleague, I recognised that I was feeling overwhelmed with the number of top-level themes. I realised, after careful consideration, that some themes could be amalgamated, and after reflecting on the meaning of each theme, I discovered that numbers 1, 5 and 6 could be combined to give a new top-level theme and so could numbers 2, 7 and 8.

7.4.4 Final four top-level themes

1. **The legacy of adverse childhood** (0-18 years) experiences (incorporating 1, 5 and 6).
2. **Interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics** (incorporating 2, 7 and 8).
3. **Experiencing the somatic and psychic self** (remained the same).
4. **Temporality** (remained the same).

Due to its significance in terms of a person's developing agency, I was initially reluctant to remove *power states* (no 8, original list) from its position as a top-level theme. But power dynamics are essentially relational and therefore as long as I paid it due attention, felt power states would be better placed as a sub-theme under *interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics*.

The following table illustrates the final four top-level themes with second and third level sub-themes, demonstrating how they feed into the top-level:

Blue arrows denote an abductive, 'bottom-up' phenomenological approach with the four emergent top-level themes shown

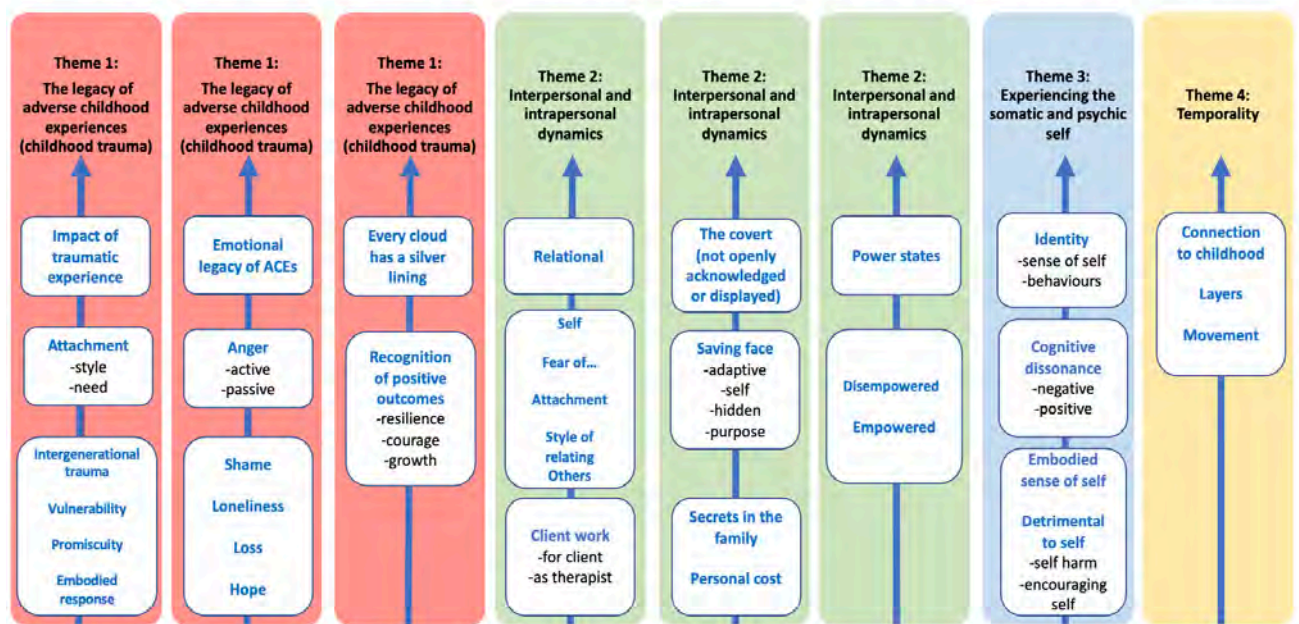


Figure 10 – themes 'bottom up'

In *Researching Lived Experience* (2016c) van Manen usefully explicates, at some length, the essence of what constitutes a theme in hermeneutic phenomenology. In summary, themes serve to capture the meaning of the phenomenon/a that one is trying to make sense of by means of a desire to know, an openness, insightful invention, and disclosure.

The themes illustrate the impact of ACEs and how they may impact a person's relational self, sense of self, and temporal sense of being in the world. As van Manen (2016a) suggests, phenomenological themes are merely anchors from which description and, in this case, interpretation can emerge. In order to understand the meaning of each theme as defined purposefully from the findings I will offer clarification under each theme heading. Under each theme I will also add the tables denoting the top-level themes with all of the sub-themes. After discussing with a CF I decided to keep these tables in the body of the work as they demonstrate the depth of analysis undertaken. Finally I will illustrate, with participant examples, where I found each theme/sub-theme to have been elucidated. The four top-level

themes along with all the sub-themes emerged from the ten participants' lived experiences of the phenomena being explored: adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), personal agency, and saving face. The four themes are now explored.

7.5 Theme 1

7.5.1 The legacy of adverse childhood experiences (0-18years)

Described in the literature review (p.89), the ACE study findings, originally published in 1998 (Felitti & Anda, 2020), detailed the first large-scale investigation into childhood adversity and its links to mental health and/or physical complications and even early death in adulthood. The occurrence of ACEs in the participants' narratives demonstrates an almost inevitable legacy which encompasses the overarching impact of their traumatic experience. The focus for this study links personal agency and saving face to ACEs, therefore I am not enquiring about the potential legacy of poor physical health.

It is my contention that ACEs and their subsequent legacy may be impactful on the development of personal agency and necessitate saving face, as explored in this research project. The first top-level theme 'legacy of adverse childhood experiences' emerges from the three sub-themes which includes, and of particular personal interest to me, intergeneration trauma, i.e., trauma passed down through the generations (Alexander, 2015; Franco, 2021; Houck, 2018). As it was a requirement for participation in the research, the experience of adversity in childhood was not a surprise. However, I was interested to see *how* the participants had been affected by their experience and what emerged was what they were left with – i.e., the legacy. The following table shows the theme hierarchies followed by the most salient participant textual examples and occasional image from the sub-themes.

Note: I will follow this pattern for all the themes.

Theme 1: The Legacy of adverse childhood experiences (child/adolescent trauma)									
1.1 Impact of traumatic experience			1.2 Emotional Legacy of ACE's			1.3 Every cloud has a silver lining			
1.1.2	Intergenerational trauma		1.2.1	Shame		1.3.1	Recognition of positive outcomes		
	1.1.2.1	Repeating patterns		1.2.1.1	Worthless	1.3.1.1	Resilience		
	1.1.2.2	Repetition compulsion		1.2.1.2	Burden	1.3.1.1.1	Battled through		
	1.1.2.3	Domestic Violence		1.2.1.3	Rejection	1.3.1.1.2	Wounded healer		
	1.1.2.4	Family breakdown		1.2.1.4	Blame	1.3.1.1.3	Able to ask difficult questions		
	1.1.2.5	Denial		1.2.1.5	Exposed	1.3.1.2	Courage		
	1.1.2.6	Sexual abuse		1.2.1.6	Abandoned	1.3.1.2.1	Allowing creativity		
	1.1.2.7	Neglect	1.2.2	Loneliness		1.3.1.2.2	Positive attitude		
	1.1.2.8	Emotional abuse		1.2.2.1	Alone	1.3.1.2.3	Determination		
				1.2.2.2	Broken family	1.3.1.2.4	To move forward in life and succeed		
1.1.3	Attachment			1.2.2.3	Abandonment	1.3.1.2.5	Motivated		
	1.1.3.1	Attachment style		1.2.2.4	Trapped	1.3.1.2.6	Becoming assertive		
		1.1.3.1.2 Insecure disorganised		1.2.2.5	Scared	1.3.1.2.7	Sense and meaning making		
		1.1.3.1.3 Insecure avoidant		1.2.2.6	Empty	1.3.1.2.8	Exploring experience		
		1.1.3.1.4 Insecure ambivalent	1.2.3	Loss		1.3.1.2.9	Validating self		
	1.1.3.2	Attachment need		1.2.3.1	Sadness	1.3.1.2.10	Realisation and acceptance of impact		
		1.1.3.2.1 Validation		1.2.3.2	Loss of childhood	1.3.1.2.11	Learning to trust others		
		1.1.3.2.2 Affirmation		1.2.3.3	Disconnection	1.3.1.2.12	Learning to trust self		
		1.1.3.2.3 Safety		1.2.3.4	Don't know how to play	1.3.1.3	Growth		
		1.1.3.2.4 Yearning to belong		1.2.3.5	Regret	1.3.1.3.1	Now in control of self		
1.1.4	Vulnerability			1.2.3.6	Broken family	1.3.1.3.2	No longer collapsing		
	1.1.4.1	Scared		1.2.3.7	No identity	1.3.1.3.3	New insight		
	1.1.4.2	Fearful		1.2.3.8	Innocence	1.3.1.3.4	Impact recognition as a driver		
	1.1.4.3	Unsafe		1.2.3.9	No-thing-ness	1.3.1.3.5	Journey		
	1.1.4.4	Risk taking	1.2.4	Anger		1.3.1.3.6	Knowledge to power		
	1.1.4.5	poor or no boundaries		1.2.4.1	Active	1.3.1.3.7	ACE's leading to career in counselling/psychotherapy		
	1.1.4.6	Pleaser		1.2.4.1.1	Rage	1.3.1.3.8	Movement towards		
	1.1.4.7	Bullied		1.2.4.1.2	Explosive	1.3.1.3.9	Reaching		
1.1.5	Promiscuity			1.2.4.1.3	Aggressive	1.3.1.3.10	Self containment		
	1.1.5.1	Seeking love		1.2.4.1.4	Violent				
	1.1.5.2	Seeking acceptance		1.2.4.1.5	Verbally				
	1.1.5.3	Seeking affection		1.2.4.1.6	Humiliated fury				
	1.1.5.4	Risk taking		1.2.4.2	Passive				
	1.1.5.5	Vulnerable		1.2.4.2.1	Manipulation				
1.1.6	Embodied response			1.2.4.2.2	Undermining language				
	1.1.6.1	Flashbacks		1.2.4.2.3	Passive aggressive				
	1.1.6.2	Anxiety		1.2.4.2.4	Possessive				
	1.1.6.3	Stirred up		1.2.4.2.5	Jealousy				
	1.1.6.4	Anger	1.2.5	Hope					
	1.1.6.5	Tension		1.2.5.1	Freedom				
	1.1.6.6	Pain		1.2.5.2	Darkness to light				
	1.1.6.7	Terror		1.2.5.3	Colour important				
	1.1.6.8	Hyper vigilant		1.2.5.4	Love				
				1.2.5.5	Connection				
				1.2.5.6	Optimism				
				1.2.5.7	Pride in self				
				1.2.5.8	Finding joy				
				1.2.5.9	Gratitude for experience				
				1.2.5.10	Excited for future				

Table 10 - Theme 1

7.5.2 Sub-theme 1.1: Impact of traumatic experience

This theme encompasses the more general impact of traumatic experience.

Intergenerational trauma, attachment style/need, vulnerability, promiscuity and the embodied response to trauma all featured and resulted in the development of sub-theme 1.1. I have indicated in brackets the sub-theme(s) I interpret the quotes to best align with.

Tessa: “I did ridiculous, stupid, daft things and I let people do dreadful things to me, because I just let them” (1.1.5 and all sub-themes).

Lauraley: “There was a lot of rape and different traumas ...I framed it as I just liked older men and managed to get whoever I wanted” (1.1.4.3/1.1.5).

Alex: “And I became a bit of a cockerel, watching, hyper-alert, been like that probably most of my life since” (1.1.6.8).

Jemima: “My biological father was very jealous of me and basically tried to shoot me. I was four, I watched it all going on, I watched it all happening. I’ve worked through over these years and I know there’s still things that happen because of it” (1.1.2.3).

Louella: “I feel like sexual abuse kind of violates you more...well for me anyway...it has had loads of different emotions... I still get things like flashbacks” (1.1.2.6).

Millie: “...it’s going to be a repeated pattern; this was my childhood, this is my adulthood, this is my life” (1.1.2.1).

7.5.3 Sub-theme: 1.2: Emotional legacy of ACEs

In this theme, the emotional impact of ACEs, my original *a priori* themes of shame, loneliness, loss and anger became situated with the addition of hope which was somewhat unexpected. It is well documented that adverse childhood experiences may lead to significant health issues later in life (Burke Harris, 2018). This theme explores the emotional impact experienced which leads to increased stress which in turns exacerbates the likelihood of poor physical and mental health and wellbeing. A sense of anger was common amongst the participants. The following words illustrate this well.

Tessa: “My mum would undermine me a lot. I did love her but my goodness she was difficult. I think I over compensated by being fairly aggressive” (1.2.1/1.2.4.1.3).

Rebecca: “If I think about my dad, he doesn’t have to take responsibility for something and there’s been a lot of anger in there, a lot of frustration” (1.2.4.1).

Lauraley: [on therapy during training] “I’d argue and fight and shout and leave and...really very teenage behaviour. But actually looking at it through the lens of ACEs, there was a child there, who needed support. So yes, it released feelings of shame I think” (1.2.1/1.2.4).

Lauraley: “When I was a young person, I was violent, quite violent... I can still be extremely aggressive” (1.2.4.1.3/4)

As mentioned previously, sub-theme 1.3 is illustrated in Section 3 of this chapter.

7.6 Theme 2

7.6.1 Interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics

I consider all human experience to be in some way relational. We are always in relation to something, someone or ourselves. As a species we need to be in relationship with others to survive, highlighted by *gemeinschaftsgefühl*, a key tenet of Adlerian theory, translated as community feeling or Social Interest (Adler, 1992; Adler University, 2022) and through procreation the continuation of the species is secured. No matter what the circumstances of our birth and subsequent upbringing, we are born as the potential ‘next’ in a long line of descendants. At

some point our biological parents were relating in some way to each other or through relationships with professionals the ovum and gamete necessary for our creation joined together.

This theme and the four sub-themes (highlighted in green) demonstrate the relational issues caused by ACEs on the participants' experiences of being-in-relationship with self or other.

Theme 2: Interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics									
2.1 Relational			2.2 The covert (not openly acknowledged or displayed)			2.3 Power states			
2.1.1	Self		2.2.1	Secrets in the family		2.3.1	Disempowered		
2.1.1.1	Keep safe		2.2.1.1	Hidden		2.3.1.1	Compliant		
2.1.1.2	Cautious		2.2.1.2	Swept under the carpet		2.3.1.2	Voiceless		
2.1.1.3	Hold back		2.2.1.3	Gas lighting		2.3.1.3	Silenced		
2.1.1.4	Keep distance		2.2.1.4	Denial		2.3.1.4	Controlled		
2.1.1.5	Trust issues		2.2.2	Personal cost		2.3.1.5	Trapped		
2.1.1.6	People pleaser		2.2.2.1	Hiding feelings		2.3.1.6	Abused		
2.1.1.7	Guarded		2.2.2.2	Shame		2.3.2	Empowered		
2.1.2	Fear of		2.2.2.3	Confused		2.3.2.1	Overcoming adversity		
2.1.2.1	Rejection		2.2.2.4	Bleak		2.3.2.2	Art in therapy		
2.1.2.2	Abandonment		2.2.2.5	Dark		2.3.2.3	Strength		
2.1.2.3	Confrontation		2.2.2.6	Masking		2.3.2.4	Knowledge is power		
2.1.3	Attachment		2.2.2.7	Feeling unsafe		2.3.2.5	Self development in training and therapy		
2.1.3.1	Insecure disorganised		2.2.2.8	Splitting		2.3.2.6	Understanding self		
2.1.3.2	Insecure avoidant		2.2.3	Saving face					
2.1.3.3	Insecure ambivalent		2.2.3.1	Adaptive					
2.1.4	Style of relating		2.2.3.1.1	Pretence					
2.1.4.1	Seek connection		2.2.3.1.2	Try to control situations					
2.1.4.2	Keep quiet		2.2.3.1.3	Make excuses					
2.1.4.3	Keep peace		2.2.3.1.4	Be successful					
2.1.4.4	Inauthentic		2.2.3.1.5	Achieve					
2.1.4.5	Vulnerable		2.2.3.1.6	Be academic					
2.1.4.6	Move towards		2.2.3.1.7	Seek superiority					
2.1.4.7	Move away from		2.2.3.1.8	Show how clever					
2.1.4.8	Often with poor boundaries		2.2.3.2	Self					
2.1.5	Others		2.2.3.2.1	Avoidant					
2.1.5.1	Rejecting towards		2.2.3.2.2	Self deprecating humour					
2.1.5.2	Trust needs to grow		2.2.3.2.3	Show calm exterior					
2.1.5.3	Confusing		2.2.3.2.4	Inauthenticity					
2.1.6	Client work		2.2.3.2.5	Poor or no agency					
2.1.6.1	For client		2.2.3.2.6	Hiding self					
2.1.6.1.1	Sense and meaning making		2.2.3.2.7	Lying self					
2.1.6.1.2	Developing autonomy		2.2.3.2.8	Splitting					
2.1.6.1.3	Developing agency		2.2.3.2.9	Only a few relationships by choice					
2.1.6.1.4	Knowledge is power		2.2.3.2.10	Internal chaos					
2.1.6.1.5	Connect to inner child		2.2.3.2.11	Protective mask					
2.1.6.1.6	Not to be defined by trauma		2.2.3.4	Hidden					
2.1.6.1.7	Learn to take responsibility for choices		2.2.3.4.1	Hide vulnerability					
2.1.6.2	As therapist		2.2.3.4.2	Don't expose self					
2.1.6.2.1	Wounded healer		2.2.3.4.3	Vulnerable inner child					
2.1.6.2.2	Use of own experiences		2.2.3.5	Purpose					
2.1.6.2.3	Ability for deep empathy		2.2.3.5.1	Hyper-vigilant to protect self					
2.1.6.2.4	Reflective practice		2.2.3.5.2	Keep emotions safe					
2.1.6.2.5	Resilience to vicarious trauma		2.2.3.5.3	Mask before threat occurs					
2.1.6.2.6	Help clients without hurting self		2.2.3.5.4	Prevent being exposed as stupid					
2.1.6.2.7	Professional mask		2.2.3.5.5	Pretend all is ok					
			2.2.3.5.6	Anger as a defence					
			2.2.3.5.7	Won't allow real self to be seen					
			2.2.3.5.8	Avoid exposure					
			2.2.3.5.9	Mask					
			2.2.3.5.10	Cover up					
			2.2.3.5.11	Not revealing self					

Table 11 – Theme 2

7.6.2 Sub-theme 2.1: Relational

This sub-theme considers the relational aspects between people and how one relates to oneself. I consider this to be one of the most important sub-themes as how we relate to ourselves and others is indicative of our ability to survive as a social creature seeking connection. Relationships in childhood provide the blueprint for relationships in adulthood

Diana: “Probably an accumulation of both [ACEs and religious upbringing], so I think, ahh yes...I do think I hold back from being able to be within a relationship. I think I’ve got stuck there because I don’t feel I can make a change there” (2.1.1.2/2.1.1.3).

Winnie: “The people that were helping me in a bad way, I let them in, and got into some really dangerous situations.” (2.1.4.5/2.1.5.3).

Diana: “I don’t think I let people in, not fully. I really don’t. I think there’s always a little bit of a block there. I think my long-term relationship, my marriage, is probably out of safety rather than out of love” (2.2.2.1).

Alex: “It’s very visceral isn’t it and it’s very powerful and it’s like your response art to me, I know that you felt both what I went through and your version of what I went through”

7.6.3 Sub-theme 2.2: The Covert (not openly acknowledged or displayed)

The covert encompasses the very essence of this research so its emergence as a theme was not so much expected as unsurprising when it did. This theme describes that which has been secret, shameful, hidden.

Diana: "...the secret life of Diana will always be there. I'm not deliberately being secretive, I just don't talk about things" (2.2.2.1).

Alex: "I knew I couldn't talk about it, so there was a taboo... so I must have known there was something to talk about...It's a bit like being gas lighted I suppose (2.2.1.3). I didn't think it was normal, because that couldn't be the case, but I did think no one else can see this" (2.2.1.2).

Ruby: "...the reason I think I have [had] so much anxiety throughout life is because I didn't share how I felt about things... in order to protect my parents and my mum in particular..." (2.2.3.2.6)

Researcher: "So you held it all in you?"

Ruby: "Yeah...I masked it." (2.2.3.2.11)

7.6.4 Sub-theme 2.3: Saving face (see Literature review, Chapter 3)

Saving face may be seen a desire or strategy that results from the need to hide oneself or one's life from others' gaze for fear of judgement or humiliation. The findings demonstrated that saving face may occur at both a conscious and unconscious level. Saving face can lead to inauthentic behaviours necessarily impacting a person's sense of self and identity.

Ruby: "...probably had a mask up till a few years ago, throughout life...I don't know if I would say 'saving face', it was more protection and survival ... I didn't really know who I was and things because I just had this mask up (2.2.3)I didn't have any agency (2.2.3.2.5) and

couldn't get out of the situations that I was in, erm, so I would dissociate...to get through" (2.2.2.8).

This interested me as I suggest that saving face is all about protection and survival, and therefore Ruby's disconnect to the terminology was helpful for me to consider, when to me it feels obvious.

Winnie: "I always used to think that I had something written across my head. That people could just see everything...when somebody learns a tiny bit...about me, they'll go 'gosh, I never would have thought that would have happened to you'...I don't show it, but that really shocks me. And I've learned that people actually don't know, they can't see...the things that I've been through and what I've done, they can't see it...I used to think that it was written on my head...the worst thing that was written there was ...prostitute."

Winnie's words resonate. They touch a nerve and are painful to hear. I feel a deep empathy for Winnie and her vulnerability. I'm also aware of the anger I feel towards the injustice of childhood abuse and the consequences a young person has to endure.

7.6.5 Sub-theme 2.4: Power states

Power states initially evolved as a top-level theme encompassing two sub-themes, disempowered and empowered yet, as previously mentioned, it was moved to become a sub-theme. Here the participants' experiences are illustrated when, due to their ACEs, they had felt initially disempowered yet, on the flip side, empowerment came later as they began to understand their trauma through

personal therapy and lived life experience. Using art in the research process facilitated greater insight into their overcoming of such adversity.

Diana: “If I can avoid doing it, because I don’t want to, I will (2.3.2.1). But if I can’t avoid doing it because I can’t say no then I will take part willingly and not necessarily like it “(2.3.1.1).

Millie: “...that sense of *falling* into things, having no power, no control, no say... Yea...I did feel powerless as life was just happening to me. I had *no* control being in that relationship” (2.3.1).

Millie: “I don’t think I thought I could take control and be empowered” (2.3.1.3/5).

Lauraley: “People do make decisions for me all the time (2.3.1).

7.7 Theme 3

7.7.1 Experiencing the somatic and psychic self

We may often limit the knowledge of ourselves to cognitive processes and evaluative measures with little attention given to how we are feeling or how our bodies are responding somatically to internal or external stimuli. How participants experience themselves psychically is important but how they experience themselves corporeally, their feeling sense of being in a body, is equally important. While words are necessarily important to name the feelings, all the themes have a ‘felt sense’ to them. Experiencing the somatic and psychic self is therefore given as the top-level theme with three sub-themes.

Theme 3: Experiencing the somatic and psychic Self			
3.1	Identity		
3.1.1	Sense of self		
	3.1.1.2	Vulnerable	
	3.1.1.3	False self	
	3.1.1.4	Duality	
	3.1.1.5	Sensitive	
	3.1.1.6	Complex	
	3.1.1.7	Inauthentic	
	3.1.1.8	Poor agency	
3.1.2	Behaviours		
	3.1.2.1	Compliant child	
	3.1.2.2	Good child	
	3.1.2.3	Inauthentic	
	3.1.2.4	Risk taking	
	3.1.2.5	Withdraw	
3.2	Emotional/cognitive dissonance		
3.2.1	Negative		
	3.2.1.1	Alone and lonely	
	3.2.1.2	Angry with men and patriarchy	
	3.2.1.3	Not good enough	
	3.2.1.4	Internal chaos	
	3.2.1.5	Move away from connection	
	3.2.1.6	Weak	
	3.2.1.7	Vulnerable	
3.2.2	Positive		
	3.2.2.1	Happy when alone	
	3.2.2.2	Love men	
	3.2.2.3	Good enough	
	3.2.2.4	Peace and joy	
	3.2.2.5	Move toward connection	
	3.2.2.6	Strong	
	3.2.2.7	Resilient	
3.3	Embodied sense of self		
3.3.1	Detrimental to self		
	3.3.1.1	Noise	
	3.3.1.2	Emotionally tumultuous	
3.3.2	Self harm		
	3.3.2.1	Substance abuse	
	3.3.2.2	Alcohol abuse	
	3.3.2.3	Eating disorders	
	3.3.2.4	Addictions	
	3.3.2.5	Self-sabotage	
	3.3.2.6	Put body at risk	
3.3.3	Encouraging self		
	3.3.3.1	Reflective	
	3.3.3.2	Dynamic	
	3.3.3.3	Survivor	
	3.3.3.4	Intuitive	
	3.3.3.5	Self admiration	

Table 12 – Theme 3

7.7.2 Sub-theme: 3.1 Identity

This sub-theme speaks to one's sense of self and behaviours. This includes vulnerability, false self and inauthenticity along with poor agency.

Lauraley: “I think it's been catastrophic [ACEs]. I think that it's catastrophically impacted a sense of self, *my* sense of self (3.1.1) therefore my sense of

agency (3.1.1.8), trusting myself, knowing myself, knowing what I want, what I like, what I don't like (3.2), this is still a work in progress for me at 41." (3.3.1.2).

Winnie: "I couldn't make decisions for myself. I couldn't even...I didn't even have a sense of what was right and wrong. I had to go eventually to the Bible because I just didn't have any idea how to live." (3.1, 3.1.2.2, 3.1.1.8).

Millie: "Yea, so clearly they [ACEs] impacted me negatively in terms of... I don't think I thought I could make decisions (3.1.1.8)...I think I thought I just kind of had to be swept along with things....and somehow things would work out." (3.1.1).

7.7.3 Sub-theme 3.2 Emotional/cognitive dissonance

This sub-theme highlights the dissonance experienced by the participants, suggesting a conflict between emotions as experienced and expressed and/or an inconsistency in beliefs, thoughts and behaviours which may lead to confusion and inauthentic sense of self.

Winnie: "Every time I learn something, yes, it gives me an understanding of why I'm like I am, but it didn't help me to make connections with other people. It was making me move away from people" (3.2.1.5).

Alex: "And that's how it was, the duality, always about the duality. One hand safe, on the other hand not safe. Wonderful and dreadful. The seeing and not seeing, the knowing and not knowing" (3.2).

7.7.4 Sub-theme 3.3 Embodied sense of self

This sub-theme encompasses the embodiment of self-experience including self-harm and self-encouragement. Self-harm, for this purpose includes addictions and substance usage.

Lauraley: “I think it resulted in a lot of self-hatred and for me alcoholism and drug abuse as well as substance abuse, so...and dissociation.”
(3.3.2.1/3.3.2.2)

Winny: “...when I went to therapy that was more...impacted me more, because I learnt that ...I could find the answers in myself without having to look outside myself.” (3.3.3)

Alex: “Very driven to succeed...you look at that terrified little hypervigilant cockerel and you wouldn’t think that was the case, but there was another part of me that was never going to show that, that was really very strong, and very articulate and very driven really.” (3.3.3.3)

Rebecca: “I started to suffer with my own mental health and had an eating disorder.” (3.3.2.3)

Rebecca: “it’s like, you know, trying to use a limb that isn’t there.” (3.1.1.8)

7.8 Theme 4

7.8.1 Temporality

While in the social sciences temporality is typically studied with regard to the human perception of time and socially organised structure, traditionally, in

philosophy, temporality refers to the linear progression of time from past to the present and to the future (Hinton & Willemsen, 2018, 2021). In the 20th century philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger interpreted a variance in meaning as demonstrated in Husserl's analysis in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1964) and Heidegger's explication of temporality in his magnum opus *Being and Time* (2010).

No matter which interpretation, our experience of time is "*at the very heart*" of what it means to exist because our sense and understanding of the present necessitates involvement of our past and our projection into the future (Langdridge, 2007, p. 30). Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* takes on meaning here with human *beings* continually moving forward trying to make sense of themselves in the context of others in society (Heidegger, 2010; Langdridge, 2007). I am reminded of the sentiment in Carl Roger's book *On Becoming a Person* (Rogers, 2004) and Alfred Adler's recommendation that we should *trust only movement* (Adler, 1992). In this research, the theme of temporality references the participants' connection to childhood, layers over time and their journey towards personal development and growth.

Packer (1989, p. 101) succinctly summarises my understanding:

"Temporality here has a complex, non-linear character, that Heidegger interpreted as the 'meaning' of care and existence: we are 'thrown' into a social world, where we 'project' ourselves toward our existential possibilities, and either come to understand ourselves authentically or fail to do so."

Theme 4: Temporality		
4.1	Connection to childhood	
4.1.1	Inner child	
4.1.2	Loss of childhood	
4.1.3	Hanker after childhood	
4.2	Layers	
4.2.1	Stages	
4.2.2	Repeating patterns	
4.2.3	Understanding takes a long time	
4.3	Movement	
4.3.1	Lack of direction	
4.3.2	Fear of moving forward	
4.3.3	Movement towards	
4.3.4	Journey	
4.3.5	Growth	

Table 13 – Theme 4

7.8.2 Sub-theme: 4.1 Connection to childhood

We all need a sense of who we are, where we came from and how we fit into the world. Adversity can disrupt our natural sense of developing a self in childhood, bringing with it a complex set of thoughts and feelings as we grow up (Fonagy et al., 2004; Gerhardt, 2004). The loss of a lost childhood and hankering after an idealised childhood were present in the participants' experiences.

Diana: "So I think there's this ongoing role and tendency that I need to parent, but there's a little bit of me that hankers for that I want to be a child again." (4.1.3)

Louella: "Yes, it was difficult. The only way I could kind of cope with stuff was to get my head down at school and do the best I could and try to be the best I could." (4.1.)

Winny: “It made me remember, when I was younger, I used to draw mazes all the time. I forgot that I used to do that and when I started to do like...I was really wanting to draw a maze, for some reason.” (4.1.3)

7.8.3 Sub-theme 4.2 Layers

Adversity in childhood is not necessarily a one off event but rather may develop layer upon layer culminating in an overall experience over time. An onion offers a useful metaphor with its many layers held together within a rather thin yet strong, resilient skin.

7.8.4 (sub-theme: 4.2.3 understanding takes a long time)

Here I show the approximate age it was when the participants were able to recognise and acknowledge that they had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or the recognition of a global sense of trauma as part of their formative years. For the majority, trauma in childhood wasn’t named as ACEs during their therapy or training, including those who trained pre-1997 when the CDC-Kaiser Permanente ACE study was completed as discovered in interview question 1:

Ruby	31	Diana	Early 20’s
Millie	Early 30’s	Tessa	well into adulthood
Louella	26	Winny	Late 20’s
Rebecca	24	Lauraley	32
Alex	30’s	Jemima	Late 30’s

Table 14 – age ACEs recognised

I have included a few examples of participant responses to give a flavour of the felt experience:

- Louella: “And I wasn’t able to deal with them [the trauma] or fully acknowledge them until I went into therapy when I was about 26.....I had a nervous breakdown at work and this is basically where it lead back to.”
- Millie: “I probably didn’t realise the truth until my early 30’s and I realised, well essentially, when I started training. I think I’d gone through life with my eyes shut and with blinkers on...well it ended up in my divorce.”
- Rebecca: “...it was during my training and went in to my own therapy...it was quite emotional actually, realising how many of those things [ACEs] apply to me...”
- Diana: “But recognising it was adverse to me, I probably didn’t until I was in my early 20’s and I’m not even sure I really did then. I went for some therapy, I had a very bad experience with that and it almost made me feel that it hadn’t been a problem and I shouldn’t have had the reaction that I did have.”
- Lauraley: “When I started training, when I was 30, oh gosh, 32 I think I might have been...that’s when I started to see my childhood as being, you know, having ACEs in it. I didn’t know what ACEs were until probably about three years ago. So yes, when I was doing my training.....but that’s a long time, to get to 32, to not have that cognition and not be able to see it.”

This admission from Lauraley speaks directly to my own experience.

7.8.5 Sub-theme 4.3 Movement

Movement can be described as the physical moving of a body without necessarily moving anywhere different. Yet movement also describes psychological shift, particularly relevant as a tenet of Adlerian psychology. A goal of Adlerian therapy is to move from a perceived *felt minus* to a perceived *felt plus*.

Ruby: “I am someone who is better at things being like [time] limited, otherwise I think I take too long thinking about it actually.” (4.3.7)

Lauraley: “I think that it’s still a journey I’m trudging along.” (4.3.3/4)

Alex: “I never want to stop, ever...” (4.3.5)

This completes section two in which textual examples from the participants’ data evidence the themes as emergent through the iterative application of Template Analysis. The following section pays attention to the exceptions, where we see that in spite of adversity the participants showed courage and resilience.

7.9 Section 3 – Every cloud has a silver lining (Sub-theme 1.3)

*In the midst of darkness
light persists.*

Mahatma Ghandi

7.9.1 Embryonic agency

The every cloud theme was welcome surprise to me; Ghandi’s light illuminating the participants’ words and images in order that I should see clearly. It had been easy

to be all consumed with the actual and assumed negative impact of ACEs and the potential impact on the development of personal agency. Thoughts of any positive outcomes had either not been realised or lost in the quagmire of ‘adversity doom’.

Unexpectedly, yet movingly, the positive outcomes of experiencing adversity in childhood and becoming agentic, typically post-training, were omnipresent. With a clear recognition of the positive outcomes the theme’s title **‘Every cloud has a silver lining’** felt pertinent. In particular, resilience, courage and growth featured as recognition of positive outcomes. Realisation of this theme brought me a profound sense of joy along with the participants’ palpable sense of overcoming as they shared their experiences. Sharing not only the challenges they faced as a result of ACEs and poor agentic development, the participants all demonstrated recognition of positive outcomes as shown below in table 15. In this section I offer a sample of such moments.

1.3 Every cloud has a silver lining	
1.3.1	Recognition of positive outcomes
1.3.1.1	Resilience
1.3.1.1.1	Battled through
1.3.1.1.2	Wounded healer
1.3.1.1.3	Able to ask difficult questions
1.3.1.2	Courage
1.3.1.2.1	Allowing creativity
1.3.1.2.2	Positive attitude
1.3.1.2.3	Determination
1.3.1.2.4	To move forward in life and succeed
1.3.1.2.5	Motivated
1.3.1.2.6	Becoming assertive
1.3.1.2.7	Sense and meaning making
1.3.1.2.8	Exploring experience
1.3.1.2.9	Validating self
1.3.1.2.10	Realisation and acceptance of impact
1.3.1.2.11	Learning to trust others
1.3.1.2.12	Learning to trust self
1.3.1.3	Growth
1.3.1.3.1	Now in control of self
1.3.1.3.2	No longer collapsing
1.3.1.3.3	New insight
1.3.1.3.4	Impact recognition as a driver
1.3.1.3.5	Journey
1.3.1.3.6	Knowledge to power
1.3.1.3.7	ACE's leading to career in counselling/psychotherapy
1.3.1.3.8	Movement towards
1.3.1.3.9	Reaching
1.3.1.3.10	Self containment

Table 15 – sub-theme 1.3

Ruby: “Yea I think it was quite positive, erm, of realising that you know how far I come, really erm, yea, definitely....” (1.3.1)

Ruby: “....but I think that the therapy I’ve had in my career has really helped with the agency, erm, side of it and if I I’m someone where if I want to do somethinglike in the past, when I didn’t have enough agency something within myself would have stopped me doing it whereas now I think I’ve got that internal resource to go with it.” (1.3.1.3.1)

I wondered if Ruby felt her agency would have therefore been underdeveloped due to her ACEs had she not have experienced therapy due to her counselling training?

Ruby: “Definitely.”

Diana: [after some poor experiences in therapy] “I think it was after that that I thought I want something different from therapy and actually if that’s what’s out there, I want to provide something different.” (1.2.1.3.4)

Tessa: “I’ve always been able to achieve what I set out to do in the long run, even if it’s taken me a long time.” (1.3.1.2.4)

Lauraley refers to the green and yellow mark which appeared as part of a bigger image.



Image 21 – in focus from Image in Q1

Lauraley: “Yes, that’s so interesting, because that was hope, that was me to begin with. I did another little person, at the very very end when I thought, stop tinkering with this now, but the yellow and green came in before the orange...that was hope, because I’ve always...I think this is the thing that’s always gotten me through, I’ve always had excitement or hope...I think that in amongst the stuff, there was still a little bit of that and the green...something about tiny green shoots, kind of...life.”

I was interested in Lauraley’s use of colour. For the shoots to be green they need to have had both water and sunshine, in other words, nourishment to enable growth; both representing movement towards a more hopeful future. This also indicates that before the ‘bad stuff’ or chaos of the orange, red and black, early seeds for growth had already been sown. The tiny person to the far right is perhaps indicative of how small Lauraley felt compared to the adversity she faced, although encouragingly she’s not placed herself within the chaos.

For Rebecca, it was the recognition of her resilience when thinking about her ACEs that had a significant impact.

Rebecca: "...realising I hit the criteria [to participate in the research] and...I think the impact that I'm talking about, the impact it did have, I think it's just an appreciation of how...of my own resilience.

I suggest that this feels like a powerful realisation and one of poignancy to Rebecca.

Rebecca: "Yea, it's interesting, I feel emotional just hearing you say that, yes it was poignant I suppose because I...maybe don't often acknowledge my strengths...I often think of myself as quite an emotionally sensitive person but I don't think that I acknowledge my resilience very often..."

This realisation has come about as a direct result of this research and feels like such an important moment for Rebecca.

Alex: "I thank my father every day while I'm still berating him because I'm angry with him at some level. But I do say, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be doing the most fascinating and wonderful profession on the planet I think and I certainly wouldn't still be doing when I was in my 70's. I never want to stop, ever..."

Millie: Millie is talking about the relationship with her father. I ask if there's still a feeling of anxiety when she talks about him?

"No, because I'm very much in control of this relationship now, it's on my terms...I only see him once a year, he only lives three miles away from me and I literally go to see him at Christmas to take him his present and that's it."

Winny: This felt like an important moment for Winny, expressing through her image what her therapist used to say to her:

“...about being a flower that grew from the concrete and there’s all these other people, flowers, who had families and had grass and I used to be like looking at them all, wishing I could be like them....but then she’d say, you know, you grew even despite not having grass and sunshine and things like that, so, yes, I got to draw it, which was nice.”



Image 22 – Flowers from the concrete

For Winny, the opportunity to express with art, in our interview, has led her to see the flowers of her imagination growing from the concrete as a tangible recognition of her courage and growth. This feels significant and as Winny speaks I sense a calmness emanating from her. I feel privileged to share in Winny’s experience.

Louella: “Yes, it is difficult and the only way I could kind of cope with stuff was to get my head down at school and do the best I could and try to be the best I could.”

Jemima: Having just created her first image I ask how it was for her:

“Yes... good. Yes. This is the first time I’ve actually ever looked at this in this way at all. I’m just getting that massive sense of relief that you know, where would I have been had Mum not done what she did?”

Using art in the research process has brought something new to light for Jemima along with recognition of what she went through and renewed gratitude towards her mum.

Both Winny and Jemima highlight how using expressive art in the research has helped them ‘see’ their situation in a new and meaningful way. For me, this is both rewarding and validating for my research.

This concludes the examples shown for the theme *Every cloud has a silver lining* in which the participants’ recognition of overcoming adversity is humbling. The following section links the findings from the thematic Template Analysis to the researcher’s theory development and hermeneutic phenomenological aspect.

7.10 Section 4 - Links to new theory development

Having completed the first part of my data investigation with Template Analysis, and arriving at the final four themes, I began to consider how I wanted to present the deeper hermeneutic phenomenological aspect of the study while considering the links to the development of my new theory and tools for practice. I have named this *Red Zone Theory* (see A21, p. 544 for theory development). How did I achieve this?

It began with a particular phase of phenomenological stuckness. Dr Rupert King, an expert in phenomenology, kindly agreed to meet with me (online). He helped me realise my stuckness was rooted in an over investment and obsession with answering the research questions as evidenced through the themes. Although answering the questions is a key point of the research, I was floundering, lost in the ineffable space between the data, hermeneutic phenomenology and my theory development. I was feeling my own pressure to succeed and to *know*; that I *should* be able to find the answers. I noted in my journal:

I have felt completely overwhelmed in the past couple of weeks. I just cannot fathom how I will present my findings. I am holding so much information in my head; so many thoughts, wonderings and anxieties about this research. I am beginning to feel overloaded and stuffed like a Christmas turkey. Am I entering the Red Zone? I don't like this feeling at all. I feel a fraud. I can't see how this project will ever come to fruition. I think I had convinced myself that in Cornwall this summer I would somehow just know what to do... It didn't happen like this, of course... Instead, my inadequacies as a doctoral candidate drilled away like a corkscrew urgently pulling at a cork to release the wine. Only... the cork isn't moving. I am either hyper-focused and up till stupid o'clock or wading through the inertia treacle that claims my entire being. I am noticing unhealthy patterns developing...desperate to avoid the Gollum inducing self-sabotaging Nutella frenzy of my master's write up. I have picked my arms to pieces and created wounds on my skin where there were none. They are sore but the compulsion is too great, my anxiety too high and so I continue. I feel overwhelmed with shame. But it is the only thing that brings any relief to the feeling that I am an empty body standing on the edge of a vacuous precipice uncertain of my stability. Perhaps I am just tired. Perhaps I need to admit to myself it's ok not to know. Perhaps I need to go for a walk (25th July 2022).

Dr King reminded me that the indwelling can be uncomfortable. This research originates from my own experience; part of which is that I have an avoidant and disorganised attachment style (Holmes, 1993); I realised that I was avoiding dwelling in the difficult 'stuff'. Dr King invited me to take a step back and put everything on hold while allowing myself to be immersed in the participant data. Then to select statements or phrases that seemed particularly *essential* or *revealing* about the phenomena in question and the experiences being described (see participant quotes in previous section). He also encouraged me to consider the Red Zone (see A9, p. 414), my developing theory, with an image of the melting pot (my original name for it) as this *is* the phenomenological image. And to ask the question:

- *What is the Red Zone and which of the participants experiences constitute the 'melting pot' that potentially leads to distorted agentic development and the need to save face?*

Inspired by the art of Jan Pienkowski (1936-2022) an image of the melting pot came to me which I painted, seen in Image 23 (p. 243). As I dwell with and *feel* into the image I begin to embody the pain of children and their silent screams; unceremoniously tossed into the burning pit of adversity and trauma. It is uncomfortable and my heart feels heavy. Who will hear their cries? Who will notice them as they are consumed by the darkness and into the living hell of Sartre's 'No Exit' (1989).



Image 23 – Red Zone – Researcher's art

The Red Zone, as illustrated below, shows the constituent components which materialised from the participants' experiences of the phenomena in question. This image can be seen contextualised within Red Zone theory development located in **A21, p.544**.

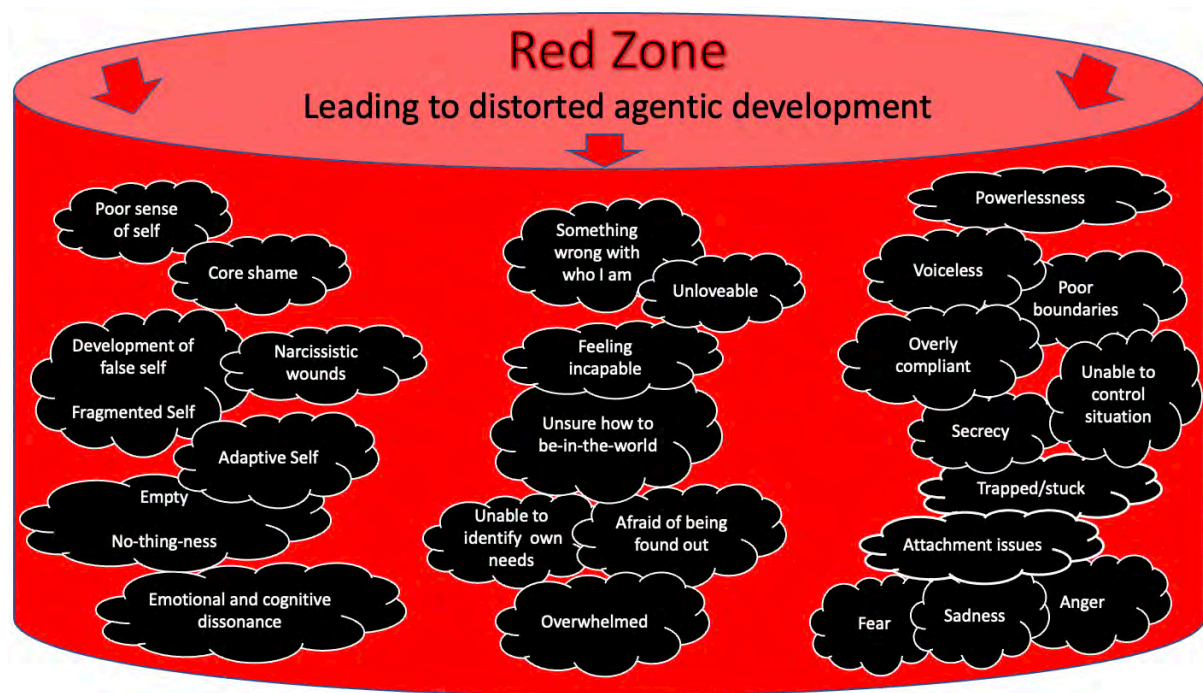


Image 24 - Red Zone's contents

Dr King encouraged me to create images myself in response to the words in the Red Zone as I experienced them. This I did, (see A9 p. 414), taking time to dwell with the words and emergent images which enabled the organic materialisation of new meaning and insight to wash over me. I connected, through the participants' data and my own reflexive practice, to the embodied felt sense of being in the Red Zone.

This meeting marked a turning point in my write-up and freed me to make decisions about how to present the data with congruence, adhering to both Template Analysis *and* arts-based hermeneutic phenomenology for which there is no prescribed process (Finlay, 2011, p. 115).

I shared my theory development and the above image with one of my cohort peer group members, one of my critical friends (CF). The reaction from my CF was profound. As we looked at the contents of the Red Zone they became overwhelmed with tears of recognition. This image consolidated their experience in one place rather than searching, as they had done, for understanding through a variety of

means, but never quite finding the nugget which spoke to their experience. For me this was huge validation of my work and in particular my theory and model for practice. I too felt overwhelmed and moved to tears. It was a such a powerful moment of connection in which we shared a mutual understanding and respect for each other's experience.

Section five is the result of my arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological exploration. It offers an insight in to the incredible power of creating images as a raw and unmetered expression of the psyche. It never ceases to amaze me that a question and a short conversation can evoke images that often say so much more than words alone can convey.

7.11 Section 5 – Hermeneutic phenomenological exploration

In the following section, through the use of hermeneutics, I offer the reader rich phenomenological insight into four participants' experiences of adversity in childhood, and the impact this has had on the development of their personal agency and need to save face. To begin, I offer some thoughts on wonder, a key aspect of imaginative and interpretive exploration.

7.11.1 Wonder

In my professional knowledge paper (Adcock, 2022, p. 4), reflecting on Dr Seth's Gateways to Wonder PK seminar I wrote:

“Upon this reflection it occurred to me that professional knowledge requires a commitment to open ourselves to all forms of experiencing. If we can openly engage in wonder as part of our sensorial investigations and

epistemological reflexivity, then we may free ourselves up to possibility and new understanding."

As I have dwelled in contemplative meditation with the words and images from my participants, moments of wonder emerged. I continued by asking the question:

"Yet, if we consciously search for wonder, do we close ourselves off to the opportunity for new insight and understanding by not waiting for the phenomenon to reveal itself?"

The purpose of the present study was to explore possible links between ACEs and the development of women's personal agency and to gain insight into the experience of 'saving face' or masking one's true self. The use of expressive art as part of the question response process elicited meaning through the imaginal as well as through semi-structure interview questions and dialogue. Rather than setting out to search for wonder per se, an *embodied openness to wonder* was embraced during the research sessions and throughout the data analysis. This enabled an engagement with wonder that did not prescribe a phenomenological revelation, but rather await its organic emergence through wondrous contemplation.

7.11.2 Hermeneutic circle

I begin this section with a description of the hermeneutic circle I have used in this study. With an oscillation between my cognitive and embodied pre-understanding of the phenomena in question, I began with a sense of inquisitive wonder (Schinkel, 2019) which has stimulated my inquiry (Hepburn, 1980) with deep curiosity. I then engaged in a hermeneutic exploration of the phenomena through reflection and indwelling with the transcribed dialogue and images created by the participants. The hermeneutic circle (p.161) supported my emergent and explicit understandings

of the phenomena. This was achieved as I cyclically moved back and forth between my pre-understanding and implicit knowledge of the phenomena in question as described in the origins and context of the study; researcher lens, biases, philosophical position (p.127) and my emergent interpretation of the findings.

7.11.3 Meaning and sense making

Van Manen emphasises the necessity of creativity with “*writing as an original activity*” (2016c, p. 173) when presenting the findings as part of the hermeneutic phenomenological study. The research is concerned with meaning and sense making. I have therefore attended to the power of language and imagistic data in my endeavour to reveal the participants’ lifeworld in the richest and most vivid way possible. There was so much interesting participant data; further raw examples from the early data write up, with preliminary phenomenological reflection can be found in **A14, p.439**. So as not to overwhelm the reader, and, after discussing with Dr King, I decided to give one in-depth example with reflection and discussion relating to each of the first four questions being explored. At the end of each vignette I have indicated in red where, from their data, I consider the participant has the potential to enter the Red Zone.

Already convinced of its utility and potential power in phenomenological exploration, I decided Memory Theatre should again be used as part of the creativity process in my hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. I created a ‘theatre’ with four ‘rooms’ to represent the four participants chosen.

7.11.4 Memory Theatre – setting-up the process

Having *not* achieved this the first time I used Memory Theatre in this project (see p. 212) and after discussion with my AC, Dr Deborah Kelly, a key part of the setting-up was to create a grounding space for myself to return to between visiting each of

the four rooms. For this grounding space I chose items that I was drawn to, which would offer me solace and a sense of grounded safety.

7.11.5 Grounding space

I chose two candles, one in a jar and the other inside a pottery owl – the owl as a symbol of wisdom. I also chose postcards, singing bowls, crystals and crystal tree, some autumn leaves, an elaborate egg, and a heart shaped container. Magpies hold a particular significance for me too; in mythology they are attached to a plethora of meaning, some negative, but in north east China the magpie is revered as sacred and the bringer of happiness (R. Taylor, 2022). Colloquially, they are also known for their “*weakness for shiny things*” (Winterman, 2008 p. 1) which I find very relatable! I enjoyed setting up the grounding space, finding a sense of comfort and peace as I did so. I also wondered why I haven’t done this as part of a self-care practice – I have resolved to do so from now on from a place of compassion. I was also aware of a feeling growing in my body, one of anxiety and excitement, a sense that something important would emerge from this process but unsure where this would lead. Image 25 shows my grounding space.



Image 25 - Researcher's grounding space

7.11.6 The rooms

To prepare the rooms for the Memory Theatre I spent time immersed in each of the four vignettes and, one by one, considered images, poems and objects that resonated with each of them. I didn't want to over analyse my choice of objects and, as a psychotherapist, I am familiar with 'trusting the process' (J. G. Allen, 2021). All the rooms contained the image created by the participant in relation to the question being explored. Where I had created a response image, I included that too.

In my counselling room I cleared an area and laid out my grounding space in the middle of the rug. I then placed the relevant items collected for each of the four participant vignettes on each corner of the rug. The objects placed in the room for all four vignettes were chosen intuitively, a response to the participants' images and refreshed time spent with the transcribed interviews. Each corner represented a 'room' which, together, became the theatre. I wanted to use a space where I would be able to leave the theatre 'open' without being disturbed for several days so I could re-enter as often as needed. As I was working purely on Zoom at the time, from my study in the main house, I had the ideal opportunity.

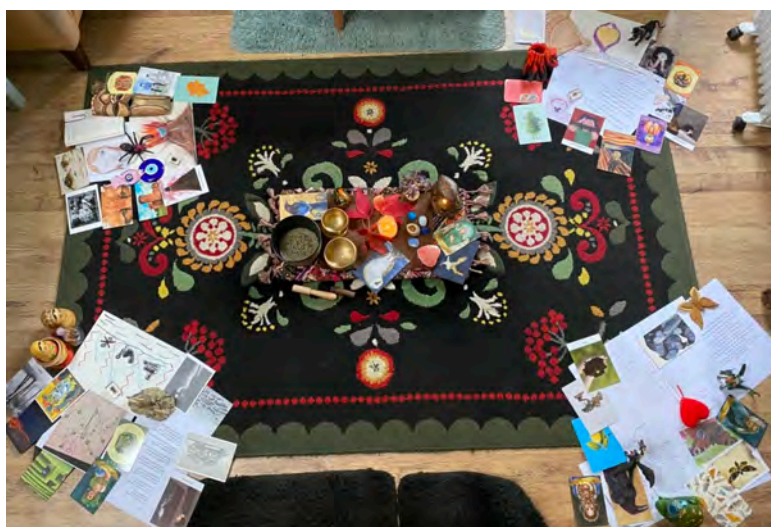


Image 26 – Participants' Memory Theatre

It would have been easy to continue collecting for the rooms *ad infinitum*. But, instead, I recognised when each was sufficiently full and ready, and then, having laid all the rooms out, I returned to the house for a break. On re-entering the counselling room and having decided in which order to visit the rooms (based on the order of my questions) I lit an incense stick and moved to the central grounding place where I then lit the candles.

I had every intention of entering all four rooms in one day. However this proved rather naïve and optimistic. The process of setting up the rooms and the grounding space was quite exhausting. After the experience of grounding, entering a room, re-grounding and writing I realised that one room per day, with a day in between, was necessary for processing and minimising sensory and emotional overload. I also returned periodically to the theatre, in case anything new should emerge. I now present the findings and discussion from this deeply reflective phase.

7.12 Four vignettes

7.12.1 Vignette 1

To being with (Q1), I was curious to understand from the participants at what stage in life they recognised and acknowledged that they had ACEs and what had been their experience of this?

As previously shown on p.232, Table 14 indicates the time in life when the participants first recognised their childhood (0-18 years) trauma as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). I found this insight quite shocking but not altogether surprising as I, too, was in my mid-30's before I started to 'unpack' my childhood with an Adlerian therapist. I am reminded that the ACE study completed in 1997, so for some therapists their recognition is pertaining to

childhood trauma, not necessarily labelled then as ACEs. Nevertheless, I was left wondering about all the women who are not able to access therapy and therefore may 'live out' their ACEs (by this I mean through behaviours and relationships) but never bring them to conscious awareness in order to explore their impact and meaning.

7.12.2 Millie

I have chosen Millie to elucidate this first vignette as her response illustrates the depth of exploration and interpretation that may be achieved from a seemingly 'simple' stick-people drawing.

In fact Millie's apology for her perceived lack of artistic talent was an opportunity to remember that expressive art is not about artistic talent but rather, that through the hands we produce from the psyche what the eyes need to see in order to deepen exploration.

Millie was in her 30's when she recognised her ACEs, this experience had been profound as Millie explained:

"[it was]...*very* significant, I essentially realised that I've married my Dad, yea, it was....so the word that's come into my head was I felt powerless as though life was just happening to me."

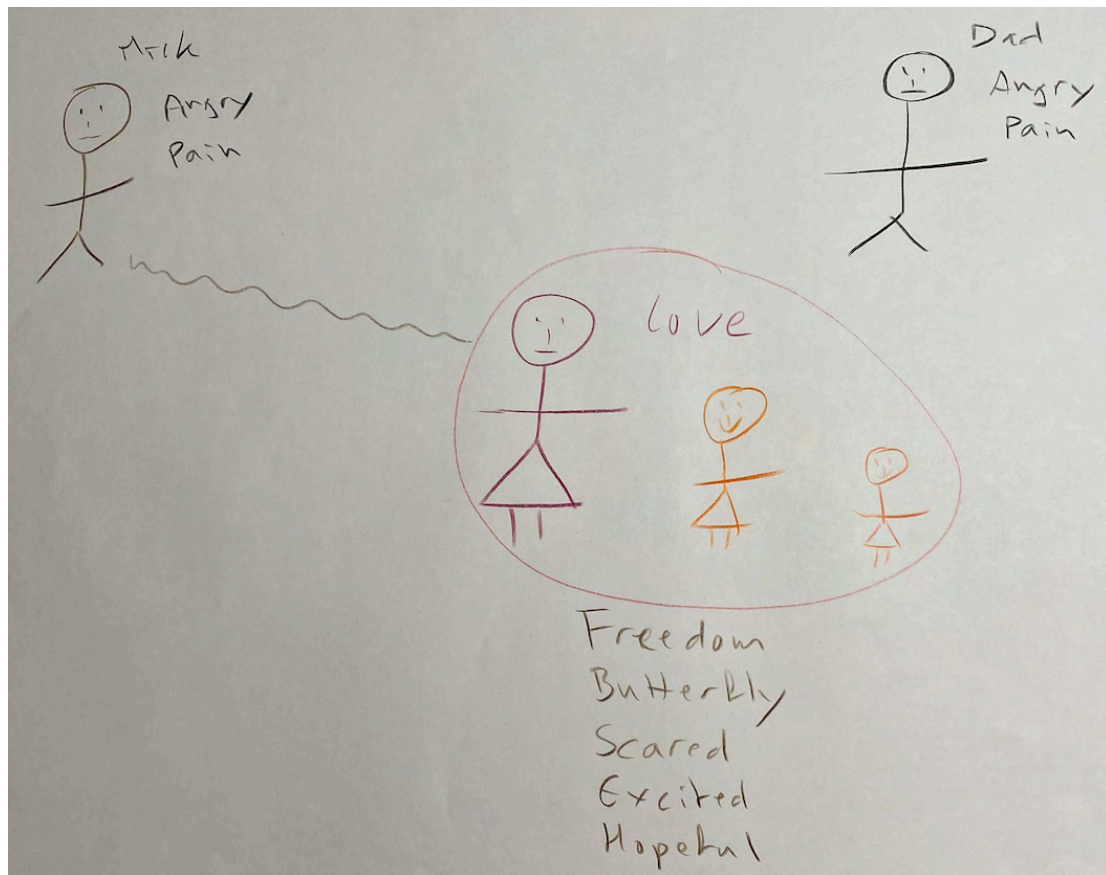


Image 27 – Millie's response to Q1

Millie recognised a feeling of anxiety arising as she looked at the two men on the image. She had recognised her ex-husband very much as the past but regarding her dad she noted :

"I wasn't expecting...erm... so even though I only see him once a year he's still very prominent."

This realisation had surprised Millie. Recognition perhaps that no matter how far we have come from the adversity and loss of our childhood, our experiences are so inextricably linked to our sense of being-in-the-world that we can't quite escape them. Colman (2006, p. 23) in discussing Jung's transcendent function, describes:

“...the opposites of presence and absence are transcended in the creation of the symbol. This strengthens the ego by creating a sense of meaning that enables us to bear and even embrace absence and loss, notwithstanding the pain involved.”

I am struck by the relevance I find in Colman’s words to Millie’s depiction, through imagery, of the relationship she has with her father. His absence now in her everyday life is clear, by her own adult agentic choice. Yet, as can be seen, his presence still looms over the safe bubble she has created. Through the creation of her image this symbolic representation occurred, and, in analytic terms, may have strengthened Millie’s ego to bear the discomfort this still causes her.

Colman’s (2006) article is also important as he argues that *real* imagination relies on one’s capacity to accept that what is imagined does not exist as a factual reality in the material world. Rather symbol formation is dependent on sufficient differentiation between the ego and the unconscious in order for them both to be treated equally (Colman, 2006). This is the nature of Jung’s *transcendent function*, i.e., when the ego transcends the psyche to unify with the unconscious in a move towards personality development, which Jung termed *Individuation* (Jung, 1969b) as represented in Image 28 (p. 254).

For Jung (1997) this was key to the activity he termed *active imagination*; a meditative technique whereby the unconscious becomes visible within created images and/or personified as an alternate entity (Jung, 1997). Put simply, this involves engaging one’s energetic creative spirit through the power of imagination and fantasies (Jung, 1997).



Image 28 - Individuation

Detail from The Red Book, Liber Novus (Jung, 2009, p. 40)

I suggest this highlights two important considerations for psychotherapy. Interpretation of a manifested image must always be tentative and only offered as such; for we can never know the mind of another and to make too hasty a suggestion could be detrimental to the client's own emerging sense making experience. This could potentially be detrimental, particularly if there is a priority to please (Kfir, 2011) and an insecure attachment style leading perhaps to an unconscious fear of rejection (Bowlby, 2005; Holmes, 1993).

Secondly, the capacity for a client to recognise psychic representation through imagery may be diminished due to adversity in childhood. As Colman (2006, p.21) states the capacity for symbol formation "*cannot be taken for granted*" and is reliant on the aforementioned transcendent function. Unfortunately, Jung, uninterested in development psychology did not elaborate further (Colman, 2006).

However, Bovensiepen's (2002) view is reasonable, suggesting that the ability to develop a symbolic space is dependent on early maternal care and in particular the mother's own sense of reverie. A lack of this early foundation, as potentially evidenced with young people experiencing adversity, can be somewhat compensated for or 'bridged' from the therapist's own reverie (Bovensiepen, 2002),

within what Bion termed the container-contained space of the therapeutic relationship (Bion, 1984; Bovensiepen, 2002).

Particularly poignant was that, as Millie drew and wrote the word 'butterfly', we noticed a butterfly trying to find freedom at the window. The moment had a numinous quality. The butterfly's bid for freedom, yet needing support to be released, felt symbolic to Millie's experience of feeling powerless. Yet, Millie too was able to find a certain freedom after working in therapy and able to divorce the husband who unconsciously, at first, reminded her of her dad. Both men were associated with anger and pain and both a distance from her bubble; although her ex-husband was still joined by a squiggly line, perhaps representing the link to their children. Although, I am now wondering, given Millie's realisation that she had 'married her dad' if the squiggly line held another significance – perhaps it was less painful to project her ill feelings towards her dad onto her ex-husband, than again face the realisation that her dad had not, perhaps, been a 'good enough' parent (Winnicott, 1990).

I was struck by Millie's sense of powerlessness and feeling that life had just happened to her, here demonstrating a lack of discernible agency. As we have seen previously in the literature, to feel powerless in a relationship assumes that there is a power dynamic at play (Kitzinger, 1991). The words Millie has written under the bubble, freedom, butterfly, excited, and hopeful are all indicative of optimism. Yet the word 'scared' appears, seemingly out of place but bookended by the others. Or perhaps it was contained so as not to 'run wild' or in fact so placed to diminish its power. Scared implies fear, and when we are living in a fearful situation our body's danger response mechanism becomes perpetually engaged, leading to a flooding of hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol (Platt & Freyd, 2015).

Millie grew up with an aggressive alcoholic father who was periodically, and then permanently, absent. As demonstrated in the literature review, humans are remarkably adaptive (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 2007) however Millie's reaction to her abusive and alcoholic husband will have been rooted in the experiences of her childhood (Dye, 2018). This gives context to the quote from Bessel van der Kolk (Big Think: Van Der Kolk, 2021) as seen in the literature review:

"the trauma is not the event that happens, the trauma is how you respond to it."

Millie's early trauma had impacted the development of her personal agency as she was now experiencing as an adult. Millie also recognised that she had essentially 'married her father'. Indicative of the repetition compulsion which originates from Freudian theory. This is where an individual's unintegrated traumatic experiences leaves them vulnerable to

"repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience in instead or . . . remembering it as something belonging to the past." (S. Freud, 2003, p. 12)

However, as shown in her image, Millie was able to protect her children and keep them safe. I am reminded again of Winnicott's 'holding' (Winnicott, 1960) and Bion's 'containment' (Bion, 1984; Symington & Symington, 1996) whereby love demonstrably prevailed in the sanctity of the bubble Millie had created, thus breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Interestingly Millie's own face in the image demonstrates a rather flat affect, there is no smile (Fonagy et al., 2004; Stern, 1985), perhaps demonstrating the underlying reality of sadness in her difficult situation. Yet both her daughters are smiling which is perhaps testament to Millie's 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1990) parenting in which Millie's determination that they should not suffer is manifest.

Millie depicted herself larger in the parent role, taking responsibility and placing herself between her and her ex-husband. Her dad was positioned closer, perhaps representing the larger-than-thought presence he still holds. As I reflected, the term 'blood is thicker than water' came to mind; breaking parental ties can be complex as there is, perhaps, a hope that remains from our younger self that our parents or caregivers are good and love us without condition. I was interested to note that Millie represented herself as a similar size to both her ex-husband and dad which led me to consider that although life had been tough, she was not, herself diminished in what is recognised in psychoanalytic theory as *ego strength* (A. Freud, 1992).

Red Zone: Powerlessness, adaptive self.

7.12.3 Millie's Memory Theatre

As shown on the hermeneutic circle (p.161) the Memory Theatre offers deeper exploration through heuristic indwelling and illumination of the phenomena in question: ACEs, personal agency and saving face. While traditionally used with text my research shows originality by demonstrating hermeneutics' usefulness with text derived from dialogue *and* interpreted images.

In line with the hermeneutic process the room is explored as a whole, then as each constituent part, and then back to the whole. Dwelling in the room in this way illuminates new insight and facilitates interpretation, therefore bringing greater depth of understanding and potentially new meaning. The phenomenological engagement came as I experienced what emerged from indwelling within each room. Some objects had more resonance than others but on reflection it was curious just how relevant many of the objects I had chosen were to each participant's

situation. This I can relate back to my attitude of being open to wonder whereby the artefacts *revealed themselves* to me rather than *me* searching for *them*.

The artefact constituents of Millie's Memory Theatre (MT) room and symbolic meaning:

Artefact	Symbolic Meaning
Mother Earth (Kyle Gray)	From the mythical Gaia, Greek goddess who personified the Earth
Card: Wise One (Kyle Gray)	The wise owl symbolising growth within current situation
Card: Medicine Mother (Kyle Gray)	Honour your inner knowing
Card: Hope (Sunderland)	Flower symbolising growth from the earth
Card: The Stone Pine (School of Life)	Symbol of resourcefulness
Card: The Femminello Lemon (School of Life)	Symbol of hope – an ally in our mind's attempt to keep going no matter the strife we navigate
Card: Raven (The Lost Words, by Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris)	'I steal eggs the better to grow, I eat eyes the better to see, I pluck wings the better to fly...'
Card: Jackdaw (The Lost Spells, by Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris)	'As dusk darkens Jackdaws gather to shake out feathers'
Card: Moth (Louise McNaught)	Close to the flame, danger, courage
Card: Moths (The Lost Spells, by Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris)	Towards the light, soul drawn to the divine truth, fragility and impermanence

most precious to her, her children. The pain and anger experienced at the hands of her ex-husband and father felt large and raw yet the overcoming felt greater. When I again observed Millie's created image, yet this time in the context of the Memory Theatre room with the artefacts, I was hit by the realisation that no matter the adversity in her marriage, Millie's maternal instinct to protect was very strong.

Millie had also demonstrated sufficient agency to protect herself and her children as evidenced by cocooning them all in safety, represented by her bubble. This led me to consider that although agency development may be hindered due to childhood adversity, if we take a relational view, in line with this study, then agency is *"never entirely here nor there"* (Sokol et al., 2013, p. 102). Unlike an essentialist view whereby agency is viewed as something inherent in our being which develops in linear progression and which a person claims to own. A relational view considers the developmental of

"constituent capacities that enable the performance of agency in a particular context and which contribute to a sense of agency on the part of the individual." (Greene & Nixon, 2020, p. 58).

Pondering agency leads me to the butterfly that appeared during our research session, a Peacock butterfly, similar to the image placed in Millie's room. The butterfly provided a striking metaphor for Millie. Her life, 'as if' akin to the metamorphosis of the butterfly moving through several stages of change before it can be free to fly away. Resemblant of cocooning her children in the safety of the chrysalis so that they could grow in safety before flying off into the world.

Images of love and hope infiltrated the room as an antidote to the fear felt from the wrath of Millie's dad and ex-husband. A warmth surrounded my heart as I experienced the courage Millie had shown. That, even in the face of fear and

recognition of the repetition compulsion, present with the realisation of marrying a man so similar to her own father, she was able to push forward and put an end to the intergenerational trauma that filtered down through her family.

Rarely are these behavioural re-enactments consciously related to experiences in early life (van der Kolk, 1989). It seems illogical to unconsciously 'choose' someone reminiscent of an abusive parent yet, in our striving for survival, familiarity with the aggressor paradoxically feels safer than risking the unknown. Millie's situation demonstrates that her ACEs impacted her relationship choices. While she may have 'chosen' her husband we might surmise that the relationship was born from Millie's insecure attachment (Alexander, 2015) and that the choice was not consciously agentic but rather driven by a need for familiarity.

7.12.4 Summary of vignette 1

This vignette indicates the approximate age Millie was when recognising her ACEs in adulthood and the impact this experience had on Millie. The seemingly simple image created by Millie in the research session gave a powerful visual to aid deeper exploration of her experience. I contend that through the creation of her image in the research session Millie was able to visualise her experience and recognise the courage and move towards agency that she had shown in protecting herself and her children in the face of adversity.

7.13 Vignette 2

Question two (Q2) was at the heart of my investigation. I wanted to find out what the participants understood as their personal agency and if/how their ACEs had impacted its development.

7.13.1 Winny

Winny ticked all ten on the ACE study category list. Spending two hours with Winny left me with a palpable sense of the extent to which she suffered throughout and beyond her child and adolescent years.

Although Winny had a grasp on the meaning of personal agency,

“...I understand it’s my feeling of being empowered to be able to make my own decisions and to act in my best interests...”

the impact of ACEs on its development was clear,

“I didn’t know how to function. I didn’t know how to do nearly anything without being told what to do. I was just really fragile and vulnerable but then because I got taken advantage of and I realised that things had happened to me that were wrong, I built this thick skin and became, like, really rebellious.”

This was difficult to hear. I felt an extraordinary sadness wash over me as I listened to Winny’s words, some of which resonated with me personally. As I re-read Winny’s words, I closed my eyes to embody the rebellious necessity she spoke of. What was the meaning behind these words? An image of an armadillo came to

mind. In Spanish armadillo means ‘little armoured one’ and while armadillos are the only mammal to inhabit such a shell of protection (National Geographic, 2022) I was struck by the symbolism for Winny. Without her own “*thick skin*” of protection Winny’s psychic and perhaps physical self would not have survived, just as the armadillo would be exposed to fragility and vulnerability without hers.

As seen in image 30, below, the armadillo curls up in a protected ball, thus providing itself with Bion’s ‘containment’ (Bion, 1984; Symington & Symington, 1996). Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, who coined the term ‘affective neuroscience’ concluded that basic emotional states emerge from the ancient limbic brain responsible for human emotions and facilitation of memory storage (Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Panksepp outlined seven emotional networks in the brain of which seeking was one (Panksepp & Biven, 2012). I am struck by the correlation between Bion’s *containment*, Panksepp’s *seeking* and Winny’s *courage*; rather than being able to rely on her caregivers, instead she needed to seek safety and provide containment for herself.



Image 30

A southern three-banded armadillo (*Tolypeutes matacus*) photographed by Joel Sartore at Lincoln Children's Zoo in Nebraska (National Geographic, 2022)

As was the pattern in all the interviews, we discussed Winny's understanding of Q2, how she understood personal agency and whether or not she felt ACEs had impacted its development. Winny was then invited to create an image to express her sense of the phenomena in question. Image 31 shows her response:



Image 31– Winny's response to Q2

As we talked about the image Winny had created, she offered,

“This is like steps that *she* wanted....wants to get up...but there's loads of different steps and it always felt like a bit of a maze, going through mazes, and not being connected to my body...so, it's got different shapes but I'm not connected all the time...my body, and then, coming to the conclusion that when it properly hit me that I was just wanting to be in a mother, but looking at it from the outside, not knowing what that feels like because....”

I'm feeling a little unsure if I heard Winny correctly so to clarify I ask...

"So, wanting to *be* a mother, or *in* a mother?"

"In the mother. That's where it all came from I think, not having any self-agency, not being loved."

It evokes great sadness for me as I hear Winny's words and the tone in her voice. Her desire to be held, nurtured, and loved is still strong. I sense disconnection and confusion from Winny directly, but also evidenced by the many lines that don't join up in her maze, as if there will never be an end to her searching.

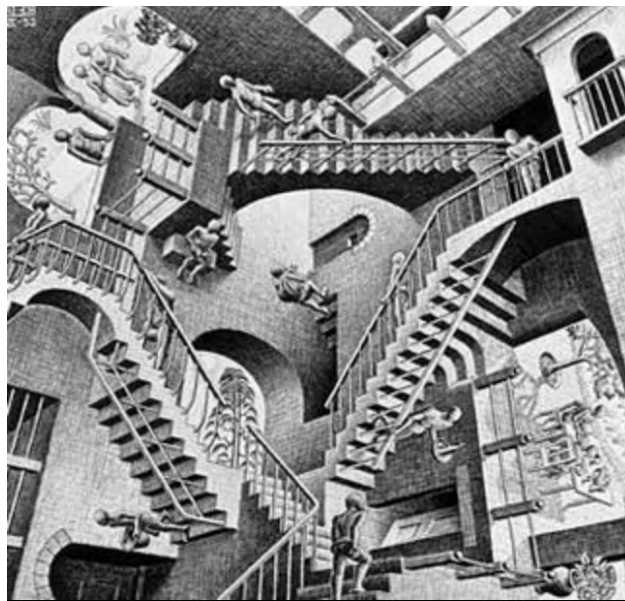


Image 32 - 'Relativity' (Escher, 1953)

As I look at Winny's image with its featureless faces I am reminded of Escher's artwork 'Relativity' (1953) in which the people have similar featureless faces with oval-shaped heads, and where the steps never end; *another child, insignificant in the wider care system but for whom the effects will last a lifetime*. Escher's lithograph print of surrealist imagery depicts a world in which the usual laws of gravity do not apply

(BYU Museum of Art, 2018). When I reflected on the meaning of gravity my first response was that *gravity is what keeps us grounded*.

For Winny there is a clear correlation between not being loved and a lack of agency development. This makes sense in terms of Bowlby's secure base in attachment theory (Bowlby, 2005), Stern's (1985) thesis on the interpersonal world of the [developing] infant and the reason behind Gerhardt's (2004) proposition that loving relationships are essential for the infant's developing brain. If agency develops from an ability for self-reflection and social traits of agency are relational in their origin, then the interpersonal dynamics of infancy are fundamental to the premise of agency which concerns an individual's capability to make choices and act upon those choices (Martin, 2004).

As I later studied the interview transcript I noticed the shift from 'in *a* mother' to 'in *the* mother' and wondered if this was significant. The importance of how we use and interpret language felt significant. I hadn't checked this difference out with Winny so I can only make guesses. My interpretation is that Winny's longing to be in *the* mother is so strong that she has idealised an archetypal mother; a vessel of nurture, wanting, and being loved rather than any particular mother. For Winny *the* or her mother could only ever be a figment of longing and imagination.

Bosnak (2007) suggests that the closer we get to the image, the more we can be pulled towards inhabiting the image as a world which is unfamiliar; although in this case it feels rather unpleasantly familiar. As I explore Winny's image further I am particularly struck by the uniformity of the maze, the green spheres resemblant of Escher's oval heads and what looks like a central pillar above which is what I initially thought to be a person, but now it becomes an empty sphere and connecting lines. I wonder if the pillar shape represents some kind of inner strength or support. Spheres or circles are omnipresent in the world as symbols of

wholeness, containment, unity, with Yin and Yang as the symbols of interconnected opposites contained within a sphere. Imagine for example a ring, the moon, the sun, a cycle of life, the earth, a mandala, and so on. For Pythagoras circles represented the most creative of forms, a monad or single entity for they have no beginning and no end, no sides and no corners (Rhys, 2022). In many cultures and religions the circle also indicates protection. For example, standing within a circle is thought to protect us from supernatural forces (see A15, p. 492) (Rhys, 2022). I also notice a green triangle in the bottom left corner. It is the only one visible. An upward-pointing triangle can be seen to represent the male principle (erect phallus) (Bruce-Mitford, 1996) while in Jungian psychology, the animus represents the unconscious masculine aspect of a woman's psyche.

At one point in time Winny had turned to the Bible for help. From my own upbringing I recall that in Christianity the triangle is a symbol of the 'holy trinity': the father, son and holy ghost (or spirit), three entities representing one omnipotent God. Interestingly the indigenous Maya people likened the upward-pointing triangle to a shoot of maize breaking through the soil (O'Connell & Airey, 2011). This reminds me of Winny's image in which she depicts flowers growing upwards from the concrete (p. 239). There is a link here to the theme of *Every cloud has a silver lining* (Section 3, sub-theme 1.3) in which courage, resilience and growth can be found.

Through the image a poignant connection to Winny's younger self was made. As I observed Winny's expression and demeanour this realisation felt significant. Adams (2019) suggests that as we age the number of 'first times' diminish, replaced with an increasing number of 'last times' which brings not only despair but more opportunities for spiritual development. Winny's maze and depiction of *being-in-a-mother* felt like a spiritual re-birthing of self, one in which she may be born to herself as the 'mother' she so desperately yearns for. This in turn would bring about the

potential for a secure, and what I term, self-to-self attachment. I find this to be reminiscent of the Venus statues found in Upper Paleolithic remains, no longer regarded by archaeologists as Cro-Magnon sex objects, rather, imbuing the mysterious power of the female to *“create life out of herself, and to sustain it”* (Sjöö & Mor, 1991).



Image 33

Venus of Willendorf, c. 28,000–25,000 B.C. (Fohringer, 2019)

So much of what Winny says feels essential to her experience of what I term ‘entering the Red Zone’. There is a strong dissociative element with Winny referring to herself in the third person *“the steps that she wanted”* as if ‘she’ were someone else, or a different ‘part’ of self, perhaps highlighting the disembodiment from her painful experience. After all, dissociation is way for the mind to cope with stress, a disconnect from painful situational reality (Boon et al., 2011).

I ask how it is for Winny to look at the maze, what feelings are coming up?

“I think it would be easy to dissociate...I think I feel quite angry. Yeah, I resent....yeah.”

Winny recognises the power held within the image she has created and recognises an anger born of resentment emerging within. It is crucial at this point to differentiate between anger and rage. While for some anger and rage are on a continuum, I am in agreement with Sue Parker Hall who takes a different view. Anger is, according to Parker Hall (2009), a pure emotion in which a moderate amount of energetic arousal occurs proportionally and in the moment. I would also add that the angry person is *always* in control even if it appears otherwise. Anger cultivates as a normal developmental process of separation and individuation (Mahler et al., 1975) from the caregiver, and in which the infant's emergent identity begins to manifest. Anger, argues Parker Hall is a crucial to learning and grieving processes but also as an "*antidote to depression*" (2009, p. 35). In fact the etymology of the word 'anger' includes grief, painful, suffering and sorrow (Harper, 2022a).

For Parker Hall (2009) rage, however, can be seen as a relational experience-processing issue that arises due either to early-life trauma or underdeveloped emotional processing skills caused by a lack of affect attunement, holding and soothing from caregiver to infant (Stern, 1985). This opposes the behaviourist view that considers rage as occurring due to faulty thinking or behaviour which therefore appears to apportion blame onto the agent (Sukhodolsky et al., 2016). This contrasts with the feminist enthused Duluth model (DAIP, 2022) which focuses on anger resulting from the power and control which emanates from patriarchal dominance (Parker Hall, 2009). In common parlance, anger and rage are, I've noticed, used interchangeably. However, if, as I do, we take a relational approach then rage can be viewed as an interpersonal relational arrestment-in-development, while anger maintains the position of a healthy emotion.

I sensed from my time with Winny that her anger is more likely rage, emanating from an incomplete or absent emotional-processing experience in childhood (Parker

Hall, 2009) and the relational issues that inevitably result from her formative years in multiple foster care placements. Challenging environmental circumstances during Winny's early years will inevitably have had a negative impact on her emotional and physical development (Nagle & Stabno, 2007) and although Winny stated *"I feel really fortunate to have been able to experience this"* [the research], clearly dwelling with her experiences produced strong feelings.

Winny also senses the familiar dissociation which protected her in childhood. I am mindful this is a research session and while the aim is for it to be therapeutic, it is not therapy. Yet Winny is present and I check in with her that she is ok to continue.



Image 34 – Researcher's response to Winny Q2

A false self (Winnicott, 1990) had developed in order for Winny to bear the unbearable. Winny feels disconnected to her body but there is a yearning to be nurtured and connected to the life-giving source of nourishment from the archetypal mother figure. A mother figure whose shadow attributes may include the abandoning of children as was real in Winny's own experience. A child, such as Winny, who finds themselves in many foster settings will inevitably feel a sense of abandonment and often conclude that there is something inherently wrong about their person, rendering them full of shame and feeling unlovable (Broucek, 1991).

Red Zone: Feeling incapable, poor sense of self, anger, development of false self, nothing-ness, narcissistic wounds.

I enter Winny's room with some trepidation. I am aware of the resonance I feel towards Winny and her early life experience. I am mindful not to confuse Winny's experience with my own but rather seek to appreciate both the similarities and uniqueness of our experience.



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Artefact	Symbolic Meaning
Winny's image of her maze that she had felt compelled to create in the session	Trapped, searching, seeking, lost, to catch and hold evil spirits, journey from darkness into light, secret wisdom discovered after overcoming difficulty
Researcher response art	Tears: squashed, kicked, existence denied
Matryoshka nesting doll	Grandmother, mother, old woman, protection For Winny "being in a/the mother"
Card: Mother Earth (Kyle Gray)	From the mythical Gaia, Greek goddess who personified the Earth – to feel love and comfort
Archetype card: mother (Caroline Myss)	Light attributes: nurture, unconditional love Shadow attribute: Abandoning
Card: naked ghostly woman	Noises in the night
Card: woman (Picasso 1937)	Weeping Woman
Card: Bare grey tone trees (Sunderland)	Desolation
Card: Maze (Sunderland)	Looking for something but don't know what
Card: Winter dusk (School of life)	Symbol of melancholy
Card: Truck carrying people and their possessions (Raymond Depardon)	On the move, unrooted
Card: Hell is being me (Sunderland)	Reflection in the mirror depicts hell
Card: Ant colony (School of Life)	Harbour a respect for rebels, fierce and determined
Poem: Hell	'There'd be no living left to die'

Dragon (viewed from top)	Protection, strength, courage
Moon goddess figurine	Divine feminine, intuitive nature, temporal
Insect in resin	Vulnerable, trapped

Table 17 – Winny’s Memory Theatre room artefacts

On entering Winny’s room I felt as though I was entering a metaphoric womb. Although I entered the room from my grounded space, with an openness to whatever unfolded, my senses were on alert. My embodiment of Winny’s desire to be mothered, contained, held, and nurtured was instantaneous and impactful. Tears came to my eyes as I was overcome with the love I have for my own adult ‘children’ and the sadness I felt for Winny, who hadn’t felt loved as a child. This resonated with me too on a personal level, as I too had been rejected by my mother at a very young age; the experience was one of longing for connection yet deep sadness at the reality we shared.

Objects I placed in the room included a dragon. Mythological interpretations of dragons vary, conceived as evil within some traditions yet in Eastern cultures dragons are depicted as powerful and benevolent creatures that ward off malevolent forces (Geller, 2018). In fact I’m reminded of an image that Winny created in response to Q4 (relating to saving face) and my response image (Images 36 & 37, p. 274).

The hearts seen in Winny’s image now bring new meaning: where there is love in childhood there agency. I feel joyful as I re-visit this image through the lens of Q2. In this image Winny (as the dragon, holding herself) had more agency than she realised. I recall how impactful these images were for us both, especially given that the session was conducted over Zoom and neither could see what the other was creating. There is a striking similarity between our images demonstrating that, quite

remarkably, we were able to *show* and *share* the strength of connection between us.



Image 36 - Winnie's (Q4)

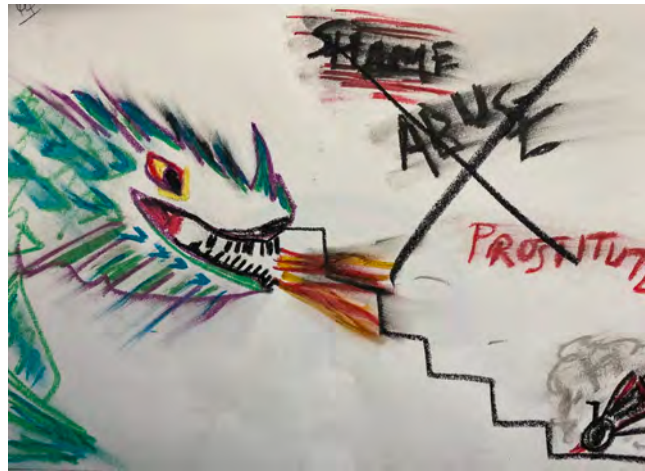


Image 37 - Researcher's response to Winnie Q4

These images perhaps speak to Winnie's omnipotent rebel self. Her shame of being abandoned as a young child described, by Morrison (2014), as the underside of narcissism. A narcissistic wound or 'wounded ego' emerges from emotional traumas such as the multiple foster placements that Winnie experienced leading to an overwhelm of her defense mechanisms or safeguarding strategies, devastating to her sense of pride and self-worth. As Adams (2019, p. 84) notes:

"when we lose the sense of ourselves as creative beings our lives get smaller."

Therefore seeking significance through misguided means. Becoming a rebellious and powerful dragon was Winnie's creative and, we could surmise, unconscious attempt at an agentic response. Panksepp's (Panksepp & Biven, 2012) *seeking*, as seen in the literature, becoming a distraction from Winnie's damaged core (Nathanson, 1992).

The appearance of the Matryoshka or Russian doll felt hugely significant as a representation of Winnie's desire to *"be in the mother"* and the meaning of Matryoshka in Russian is indeed 'mother'. If we consider an alternative meaning to

the Matryoshka doll, we can see it as an embodiment of Winny's life. The largest doll representing herself now with the decreasing in size inner dolls epitomizing her innocence and the layers of her developing self. There is also, represented in the doll, a metaphor for the disconnection to her body that Winny experienced. If one of the inner dolls is missing then the largest doll will feel incomplete. This brings to mind Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as seen in the image below, and like the Matryoshka doll, if one layer is missing the human 'doll' will be incomplete:

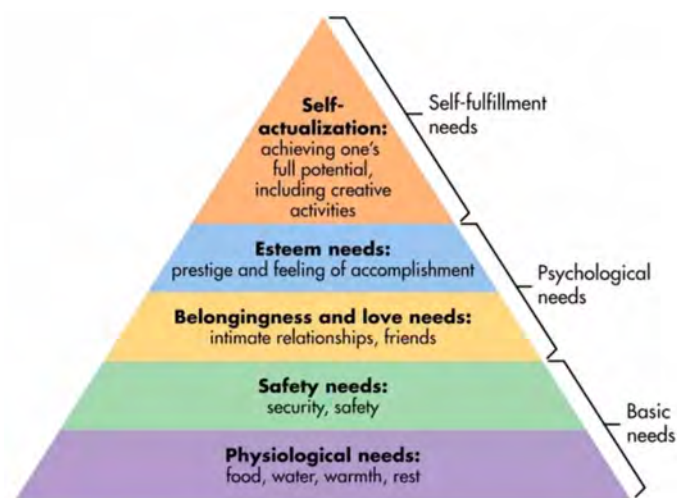


Image 38 - Maslow's hierarchy of needs (S. McLeod, 2018)

After a childhood spent in many foster placements, Winny's agency was significantly underdeveloped. She had no say in what happened to her. While the foster carers *may* have tried their best, this was not Winny's experience. Van Manen (2016c, p. 102) writes that

"The home reserves a very special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of our being....home is where we can be what we are."

These words brought up some uncomfortable feelings within me as this is of course the ideal but often, as in Winny's case, far from reality. For many, I contend, *away*

from home is where we have more chance to be what we are as the ‘what we are’ at home may be a child in survival mode.

7.13.3 Summary of vignette 2

This vignette demonstrates the level of interpretation that can be achieved from images that took less than 10 minutes to create while offering insight into the impact ACEs can have on the development of personal agency. It was a particularly moving session that lingered within me for a considerable time. One of my product ideas, in progress, is to set up and run therapeutic arts-based workshops with young people in the care system. Winny is the inspiration for this.

Today, after re-visiting Winny's vignette I have had a breakthrough. I have been increasingly concerned that I can no longer write, that I am creatively dead, and that I will never have anything worthwhile to submit. My fear of being openly shamed has been on a jolly this past week, it's really had some fun with me. But I need to give myself a break and find the compassion that I learned about in the compassion course! The thing I have dreaded the most in recent months has finally happened. My beloved dog Violet has been put to sleep and I miss her dreadfully. Thank goodness for the other four, how innocent and joyful they are. Y and B have been diagnosed with Myeloma which is a shock and I am still recovering from the complete tear of my hamstring. OK.... of course I have been impacted, this is not abnormal Jude! But today something has happened and I recognise myself once again. Oh the elation this brings!!! I regret not knowing what 'flicked the switch' but no matter, it's as if I've come alive. I must be careful not pressure myself and expect the same tomorrow for I will surely freeze again! It was a joyful moment when I saw the book in which I have written a chapter published and on Amazon. Exciting yet such a weird feeling (this is me, how did I manage to do that!?). I dare not read the chapter in case I find any errors. But...for now I breathe it all in, allow myself to dwell in the findings and sit with the

generosity of my participants in sharing their deep and painful experiences with me. This really is all the motivation I need at this point. And of course some Nutella on toast
(August 12th 2022)

7.14 Vignette 3

The purpose of question three (Q3) was to gain insight into how the participants experiences of their ACEs and personal agency may have impacted their understanding of themselves in relationship to self and others.

I chose Lauraley for this vignette as her experiences felt particularly relevant in helping me gain insight towards the aims of Q3 as indicated above.

7.14.1 Lauraley

Without hesitation Lauraley immediately highlighted an issue that she experiences in relationships,

“...it’s boundaries; the felt sense of boundaries are the enigma...me holding my shape is difficult, so in my world, as a practitioner, it feels different because I have a job to do and I have my therapist hat on.”

I am struck how this speaks to the masking of ‘saving face’ while necessarily wearing the professional hat as the *wounded healer* (D. Sedgwick, 1994). Lauraley describes a professional life where boundaries are managed; she knows the rules. But in private, and her personal relationships, it’s a different matter. I found the idea of Lauraley as a shape interesting, as though somehow amorphous. I feel remiss in not exploring this further with Lauraley although the time constraints of

the interview were impactful on the in-the-moment decisions made. Lauraley continued:

“So I would say that because of the violations, emotional and physical, sexual violations, violations of boundaries...I guess I defer a lot to other people...I give away my power a lot. I think that my experience as a child and as a young person has meant that the thing that hurts me is the thing that I go towards.”

Lauraley presents as articulate, intelligent, and capable so it takes me by surprise to hear she recognises how she typically defers to others and gives away her power with a demonstrable lack of self-agency. Lauraley exemplified this by telling me that in her intimate relationship her partner makes *all* the decisions. As the session progressed I became increasingly aware of how the complexity and impact of ACEs upon agency development has impacted Lauraley. I needed to understand what this strange hollow feeling within me meant but didn't want to distract from the session, so stayed focussed. I resolved to reflect on it later. In fact it wasn't until Lauraley's Memory Theatre that a possible answer came to me (p.283). Lauraley created an image in response to Q3.



Image 39 – Lauraley's response to Q3

Lauraley had had quite a strong image in mind yet found this image creation difficult as she couldn't replicate it. This she found to be,

“...frustrating. But familiar.”

However, she did have an embodied response to her image.

“Physically similar response to before, the tension in the stomach, abdomen, not so much in my throat actually, emotionally, ooh yes, I'm cutting off...yes, I don't have an emotional response that I can, that I can reach. It's almost like there's a guillotine that just...hmm.”

With a bout of somatisation it appeared that Lauraley was aware of the dissociation potential as she embodied her image. I pondered the metaphoric guillotine, an image that Lauraley subsequently drew for Q4. The guillotine was the favoured means for a, rather paradoxically, 'more humane' execution during the French Revolution, resulting in certain death (River, 2017). Is this a metaphor for Lauraley's 'psychic death' I wonder? This is term used in Jungian psychology referring to a necessitous transformation of the psyche after a loss of subjective identity (Jung, 1969b). For Campbell, ego death, in death and re-birth mythology, represents a period of transition after self-surrender (2003). But for Lauraley it represents the emotional cutting off from her parents and two sisters. As Lauraley noted,

“It's not their guillotine...it's *my* guillotine, but this is the blueprint, this is the template that I take in to relationships.”

It feels as if Lauraley has taken back some control as it is *her* guillotine. Lauraley has an avoidant attachment style which we have in common. As we talk it dawns on me that during this research process I am experiencing a strong sense of connection to

women I barely know and who no very little about me. The shared experience of ACEs, poor agency and saving face uniting us across time and space in what feels like an alchemical process leading me, the researcher, to find the gold.

Lauraley, doesn't have many close relationships, other than her partner, but whereas previously she would just cut people off, now she consciously withdraws gradually, I recognise this pattern in my own behaviour. Nowadays, Lauraley avoids externally chaotic situations but has to deal instead with her own internal chaos which, she recognises, is something to keep check on. When a person has experienced relational trauma in childhood, toxic stress results in the death of neural pathways within the thinking (neo cortex) and feeling (limbic system) areas of the brain which are responsible for emotional regulation (Banowsky Arrington, 2007; D. Siegel, 2020).

The ability to regulate our emotions is developed in childhood through an empathic, sensitive and regulating other (Schore, 2016). For Lauraley this appears to have been impacted and worse still the adversity she experienced has impaired her ability to regulate her emotions. Traumatic events leave behind a legacy such as a propensity to become emotionally overwhelmed alongside a diminished ability to self-regulate (J. Fisher, 2017). However, skills can be learned to support the development of emotional regulation, particularly with a psychotherapist who, acting as a regulating other, has encouraged the building of a safe and respectful therapeutic relationship with a strong working alliance (Clarkson, 2003; Horvath & Greenberg, 1994).

As Lauraley looked at her image she suggested that

“...the interesting thing about this is I had to make the whatever over the mouth, I had to cover the mouth up a bit more because the mouth was

smiling and it didn't feel appropriate...and I didn't quite know why it was smiling...the smile didn't feel right. I do a lot of laughing, I use humour quite a lot so there might be something there in that the smile wasn't/isn't appropriate. The laughter isn't appropriate."

"And, [I ask] there's something about this image that doesn't feel right, doesn't feel ok?"

"Hmm, it's not funny."

Lauraley's experiences in childhood have meant that her relationship to herself and her relationships to others have had poor boundaries. Her words "*the thing that hurts me is the thing that I go towards*" has a quality of self-harm, a form of punishment. Perhaps a re-enactment of situations that have caused her pain in the past, because the familiarity paradoxically feels safe as seen in the repetition compulsion.

Lauraley describes the difficulty she has in reaching her emotions but is able to describe the embodied experience as discomfort in her abdomen before it becomes too much and she begins to cut off from the experience, describing it to be like the guillotine depicted in Q4. This discomfort makes sense as there is a strong connection between the brain and the gut through the central nervous system; the gut-brain axis (Kozłowska et al., 2015). In the fight or flight response stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline cause food waste to pass more quickly through the digestive system so that we are prepared to fight or flight with energy diverted to muscles rather than processing food (Brabaw, 2022; Kozłowska et al., 2015).

The image created to express Lauraley's response shows a face which has had the smiling or smirking mouth taped over in an X shape as she deemed it inappropriate to show the mouth. Yet this smile does not feel like a smile of joy. It is perhaps an embarrassed smile, a smile to hide the pain that lies within; a self-deprecation and the defensive position of *'I will laugh at myself before you do'*. Perhaps a 'gallows' smile pre-empting the eruption of gallows laughter as described:

"Gallows humor is defined as witticism in the face of – and in response to – a hopeless situation" (Rauser, 2012).

Perhaps the kind of involuntary laughter one might experience with when facing psychic or ego death by the metaphoric guillotine. Yet I also detect shame; *I must not be seen to smile, to laugh, to have fun*, a deep core shame in which Lauraley believes she is somehow inherently defective.

By contrast, my response art shows a heart being held by hand-like shapes that seem to arise from water and radiate out a message of hope and love. Yellow represents joy and enlightenment, while the ancient Egyptians painted their gods in yellow to resemble precious gold (van Braam, 2022). I interpret this to mean Lauraley's soul (or self) is precious and worthy of nurture and love, from which her sense of agency may develop.



Image 40 - Researcher's response art to Lauraley Q3

Red Zone: Poor boundaries, powerlessness (gives away power), development of false self, emotional and cognitive dissonance, poor sense of self.

7.14.2 Lauraley's Memory Theatre

As I enter Lauraley's room, many months after the research session, I am overwhelmed by feelings of being misunderstood and silenced. But this is Lauraley's room, not mine, although the sensorial experience is evoking in me a deep connection to my younger self. This is a room which speaks of Lauraley's voicelessness, her lack of agency, and diminished power. Yet, as I immerse myself and dwell with the objects, I am struck by an energy of volcanic proportions, as if Lauraley's spirit is coming forth and admonishing the negativity, the silencers, the critics, the abandoners, and *she* has come alive.

Artefact	Symbolic Meaning
Lauraley's created image of a face with mouth taped over	Silenced, voiceless, not heard
Researcher's response art	Heart contained in hand shape rising from water
Poem: Heart of Steel (A13, p.431)	Steel heart to protect from hurt and suffering
Poem: The Courage of Shutting-up (A13, p. 431)	This poem speaks to Lauraley's anger and the injustices served upon her
Card: Shame (Sunderland)	Depiction of shame, head in hands - Lauraley
Card: Attacked in the park (Dominic Myatt)	The chaos, fear
Card: The Scream (Munch 1893)	Speaks to Lauraley's fear, outrage

Card: Full of silent screams (Sunderland)	I see Lauraley's pain represented in this image, the mouth has also been blacked out
Card: Defence is the first act of war (Byron Katie)	Represents Lauraley's need for self-protection
Archetype card: Child wounded (Caroline Myss)	Light attributes: awakens compassion, desire to serve other wounded children (wounded healer), opens the path of forgiveness Shadow attributes: blames dysfunctional relationships on childhood wounds, resists moving on through forgiveness
Card: Feeling powerless (Sunderland)	Small against the powerful perpetrators of abuse
Card: Wanting to smash/destroy (Sunderland)	Lauraley's anger needing to be seen
Card: Bamboo forest (School of Life)	Symbol of resilience
Card: Sugilite (Doreen Virtue)	Own your own divine power, replace co-dependent people-pleasing with assertiveness and empowerment
Cerberus	Three-headed hound of Hades in Greek mythology, Guardian of the underworld, prevents the dead from leaving, monstrous, powerful
Scorpion in resin	Sting in the tail, evil, death, destruction, trapped
Volcano	Anger, rage, bubbles along until it explodes
Fan	To keep metaphorically cool

Table 18 – Lauraley's Memory Theatre room artefacts

I return to the hollow feeling I previously expressed in response to Lauraley's admission that in relationships she gives all her power away in a demonstrable act of dissonant indifference. I wonder, where is her sense of agency and why doesn't she seem concerned by its absence? Conversely, while I need to be in control this brings me certain existential anxiety. I almost envy Lauraley's relinquishment of this anxiety by giving over her power (responsibility) by deferring to others. Neither does she have to make decisions or, crucially, face the shame of making the *wrong* decision. On the surface this appears to be a sensible strategy after all – yet is it? How can relinquishing one's power, decision making skills, and choices to others possibly be satisfying in terms of developing a sense of self, an identity, a way of being-in-the-world? I am drawn to the first line from a poem in Lauraley's room '*the courage of the shut mouth, in spite of artillery!*' and wonder if this might be represented by the sealed mouth, representing Lauraley's courage in *not* speaking, as a strategy for keeping herself safe.

As my own agency develops, I am reminded of an image and quote that has brought me comfort for some years:



Image 42 - Copyright: © PujolsManue

7.14.3 Summary of vignette 3

I am taken back to a specific memory of the research interview which I will now attempt to articulate. I experienced Lauraley to be composed, strong, self-assured, very pleasant and in control. I recall feeling small and concerned that she might view my research as wishy-washy with me as an imposter. Through the transference and counter transference (Gelso & Hayes, 2007) I felt inferior. As I sit here now I experience an unpleasant pang of anxiety wreaking havoc through my body as I am reminded of this perceived inferiority. I re-read the interview transcript and there it is: Q1 (age and experience of discovering ACEs): “so I’m quite academic...so I wrote around it [the experience] quite a lot....” Lauraley’s need was for me to *know* that she’s intelligent while my (internal) response was to feel inferior coming from my own need to be seen as ‘clever’. As the interview progressed and Lauraley’s vulnerability shone through the gallows humour, we settled at a way of relating to each other where neither, at least in my interpretation, felt the need to impress.

7.15 Vignette 4

With question four (Q4) I was curious to understand if the participants had had experiences of ‘saving face’ and if so, whether they felt this need had been impacted by their ACEs and personal agency development.

7.15.1 Alex

I chose Alex for this vignette, because not only was the response valuable, Alex provided me with certain challenge. I have a priority to please with an impasse of rejection (Kfir, 2011) and my questions were certainly not pleasing Alex. I inwardly acknowledged my capacity for not taking her criticism as a personal attack against

me or my research and for keeping my emotions within a regulated range. In fact Alex's appreciation of this can be seen in Chapter 7, section 6.

Alex was particularly disgruntled by the wording of Q4 and did not like the term 'saving face':

"I feel like it's leading me. That's what I don't like. I feel like it's telling me what I need to feel."

I sensed a defensiveness from Alex but this was her experience and I wanted to honour it. It gave me valuable insight into Alex's, what Adlerians term, *Private Logic*, the opposite of what we might term *common* sense (Adler University, 2022). In other words the beliefs, conscious or unconscious, an individual has about themselves and the world that drive behaviour and emotional response.

" I suppose it's the saving face I don't like....and also, I had to hide a lot of things and I've often thought that there was a mask, I've done lots of art about a mask, behind a mask....I've never really thought of it as saving face. That feels like a face that you put on for society and I don't feel like that's what I did. I think I was putting it on for me, something like that..... It didn't ever feel like I was saving face. It felt like I was putting on a real face because I'm two-faced literally [referring to an image created from Q3, see p.286) so one face is very real, it's just you're never going to see the other one...and so secrecy and all of that, that's going on."

It felt rather ironic that the question Alex seemed to dislike the most created the most interesting of images. I sensed that our interpretation of what saving face means may be the issue here. As I read and re-read Alex's words I notice I'm saying to myself '*but that's precisely what I mean by saving face.*' We did agree generally about the metaphoric *mask* used to hide aspects of self. I was interested that Alex

feels she *puts on* a *real* face. Is this just not her authentic 'face'? Whereas the one we are "[never going to see](#)" is the one she's hiding, or saving from the actual or metaphorical gaze and perceived critique of others.

However, objections aside and no matter how much previous art Alex had created with respect to wearing a metaphoric mask, she nevertheless appeared surprised at her created image as seen in image 43 below:



Image 43 – Alex response to Q4

["So, this one drew itself. It wasn't what I was thinking I was going to be drawing and I started with the little...supposed to be a tiny cockerel that's trapped in a box...not going to affect anything and then it drew itself into this...I don't know whether it was a spider's web or whether it's like a big effect wherever and obscured one whole half of me which I wasn't expecting, but it is what came up. It's just almost as though...like a migraine in one eye that you can't see through."](#)

I was fascinated by Alex's admission that the image had drawn itself; where was *her* agency I wondered? As if she had had no part in it and some creative force had taken over her hands to express this powerful image. The little cockerel, a representation of Alex which had come alive in previous questions, taken from a previous image and shown here for clarity:



Image 44 - Alex's tiny cockerel from Q1

As I look at the face image, I see the tiny cockerel in a box right in the centre of a spiders web as if waiting to be consumed by the spider, yet the spider is nowhere to be seen and the cockerel is protected by the box. One eye is completely covered by the web and the other is fully open, bright blue like a Nazar amulet or all seeing eye.

Alex was also moved by my response art (p. 291):

*"....but it feels so powerful, my experience of you doing response art. Feels so important...and also, as the participant, I feel *seen* by your images."*

That Alex felt seen was important, highlighting also the possibilities for arts-based research conducted online. I was both pleased and somewhat relieved that in spite of her irritation with the question, the images it evoked from us both proved useful. My response art is interpreted as representing Alex's bubbling anger and the

eruption needed to destroy the aspect of self that Alex states no one will ever see.

Image 45, as seen below, is big and energetic. A survivor, a life force to be reckoned with; I suspect this may be how Alex presents in real life.



Image 45 - Researcher's response image to Alex Q4

Despite Alex's dislike for the question and term saving face it appeared that her emerging image brought new insight. It was also validating to the question.

Although Alex recognised she often wore a mask, in fact, as depicted by her Janus god image from Q4, (p.295), most of the time, she hadn't felt she was saving face.

However Alex had noted that *"it's just you're never going to see the other one"* which suggests to me that she is in fact saving face against that which must never be seen by another. The image that came up for Alex, in response to my question, was however insightful and a surprise to her. I was particularly struck by the tiny cockerel, always vigilant and looking out for danger, as previously depicted sat at the table with her father in Q1. Now the cockerel is even smaller and contained in a box at the centre of a web-like structure which has grown to cover the right and side (left as viewed) of Alex's face.

I dwell with the image, drawn to the spiders. Myths of spiders transcend many cultures. In China a spider sliding down a thread symbolizes good fortune whereas in Japan a spider-woman can entangle the unaware traveller (Bruce-Mitford, 1996). In nature the purpose of a spider's sticky silk threads is to catch its prey, its sustenance for survival. However, I am struck by the words "like a migraine in one eye that you can't see through" and wonder what this may reveal about the essence of Alex's experience. What is the purpose of the migraine and what does it mean to only see with one eye, when monocular vision causes a lack of 3D or depth perception? I am reminded of the mythological Norse god Odin who sacrificed an eye to a witch so that he could have a view over all nine worlds (Long, 2015). Perhaps this is the same skill that Alex needed as the hypervigilant cockerel.

The expression 'web of lies' comes to mind, in other words that which lurks behind what we may believe to be true. In this case the truth is too painful to comprehend and so the mask, although causing pain, paradoxically protects Alex, as the tiny cockerel contained in a box, from further discomfort.

Red Zone: Trapped, emotional and cognitive dissonance, fragmented self, narcissistic wounds.

7.15.2 Alex's Memory Theatre

I found this room to be highly emotive. Having experienced Alex's dislike of the term 'saving face' and feeling the flirtatious impasse of my pleaser/rejection personality type being activated, I was trepidatious about using Alex's image as part of the Memory Theatre. But, as I revisited all the participant's data pertaining to Q4, I came to realise that Alex's resistance and my decision to further explore the expressed image were examples of personal agency at work.

Artefact	Symbolic Meaning
Alex's image response Q4	Saving face
Researcher response	Volcano burning metaphoric mask
Beetle in resin	Trapped, stuck
Wooden mask	In African culture the mask wearer can become a medium that allows for a dialogue between the community and the spirits
Spider	Great mother as weaver, destiny, web radiates from fiery centre; Arianrhod, a Celtic goddess linked to the spider weaving the cosmic fate and time.
Nazir eye amulet	To turn away the evil eye, deflect the look of anyone with evil intent
Poem: Family web (A13, p.431)	Web of secrets, vulnerability, fear
Card: X-ray of Venus with mirror (Robert Longo)	See inside, secrets, mirroring back
Card: Red fox (Lost Spells, Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris)	'Red is my fur and red is my art, I and red is the blood of your animal heart' Red – anger, blood – wounds, intergenerational
Card: Caerlaverock castle	Strong, steadfast, resilient, solitude
Card: Sitting on a volcano of feeling (Sunderland)	Heat, anger, fire, explosive
Card: False self (Sunderland)	Saving face through the false self
Card: Oak leaf in autumn (School of Life)	Symbol of necessity, temporality – living a long life

Creating the room for Alex facilitated a depth of empathy that, due to her seeming rejection of my question about saving face, had initially created a resistance in me to using her data. This is not an easy admission, yet feels congruent to the ethos of transparency and genuineness within my research. Rather than see Alex's discomfort at the concept of saving face in isolation, the room contextualised her experience of saving face as a temporal construct that had underpinned her sense of self as half seen and half hidden as with the Janus-like image she had created previously for Q3.



Image 47 - Janus god, Alex's image response for Q3

In mythology Janus was the Roman god of doorways, transitions, beginnings, endings, and the passage of time, with one face looking back and the other looking forward (Giesecke, 2020). The Janus image, although created for Q3 is also applicable for Q4. For Alex, one face is seen, the other hidden (saving face).

Aside from the Janus connection to the passage of time it may not be immediately apparent why I related this room to the theme of temporality. Significantly, after reflecting upon her image, Alex added,

"It told me something more than I thought I understood, even a billion years after the event."

This felt like a truly validating moment in my research. Alex is an arts-based psychotherapist with longevity and experience in the profession. Alex's words evoked a sense of her childhood adversity lasting an interminably long time. However unpopular my terminology, it evoked from Alex's psyche and on to the paper, an image that, in spite of much personal work over the years and the passage of time, brought her new insight and knowledge. Saving face may, for some, be a conscious or unconscious one off event. Yet for children living with adversity in childhood the need to preserve a version of themselves that keeps them psychically and often physically safe is an ongoing manifestation of their adverse experiences and self-development.

I notice the room, which originates from the interview and created images, contains a lot of symbolism. Eyes are a particularly strong feature in this room, counting 27 in total. I am drawn again to the striking bright blue eye of Alex's saving face image and its resemblance to the Nazar amulet, as mentioned earlier, thought to protect against the supernatural curse of the evil eye which is cast upon the unaware from others' malignant stare (Biedermann, 1994; Bruce-Mitford, 1996). The colour blue is seen to represent the depths of the human psyche with Jung viewing colour as a primary element of human experience and symbolic of psychic processes (Laughlin, 2015). As I reflect, I relate this to my school experience when I was told that I have evil eyes.

I return to the spider and the spider's web in Alex's image. The poem 'Family Web' (A13, p. 431) evoked a sense of fragility, an urgency to remain unseen or be noticed noticing, just as Alex had had to do. Symbolically the spider has a myriad of meanings, common themes are creativity, divine feminine energy, strength and, resilience. Interestingly, one can see through a spider's web, yet on Alex's image the web appears opaque and the right eye obscured. I return to the expression *caught in a web of lies* and the implication of *secrets in the family* as discussed by Pincur and

Dare (1980), whereby a whole family saves face from the humiliation of being exposed. This is certainly a possibility for Alex's family with a father who was a well-known and revered public personality. Yet, at home he would take on a different persona to which Alex became the hyper-vigilant cockerel caught in the centre of the spider's web.

Quietly bubbling away in the top right corner of the room, almost unnoticeable, is a small model of Mount Vesuvius, the volcano which erupted over the Bay of Naples in AD79. While Alex didn't explicitly mention anger during the discussion or image creation for Q4 it represents the irritation I sensed bubbling away inside of her. The injustice of her childhood adversity and subsequent marrying of a man so similar to the darker side of her father, as seen written in Alex's words under the Janus god, image 47 (p. 295). As I kneel in the room, I imagine the heat emanating from the volcano and the burning mask of my response image. This feels significant; ridding Alex of the necessity to hide as she had previously felt compelled to do. In the room I noticed Alex's image joined to my volcano image by the large spider who was perhaps creating a web to symbolically link them together.

7.15.3 Summary of vignette 4

I found this vignette challenging as it took me back to the conflicted feelings I had during and after the research session with Alex. While respecting Alex's dislike of the term 'saving face' I feel certain that this is, in fact, what her words and images relate to. I am grateful for this experience as it has caused me to challenge my own assumptions and release me from my strong need to please; knowing that not always pleasing is simply just that, and that it is survivable. I was also deeply moved by Alex's images, not least able to recognise that although her demeanour felt somewhat antagonistic, the little cockerel gave me a depth of insight into her vulnerability which strengthened my empathic response.

The four in-depth vignettes have explored the participants' experiences by using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. I now offer my reflections on the process.

7.16 Reflections on the Memory Theatre process

Having prepared carefully for the Memory Theatre I was ready to enter the rooms with a sense of openness to what may be discovered and an assurance that no matter what materialised I would be able to psychologically survive it. It was an extremely moving and valuable experience. The practice enabled further layers, profundity of insight, and interpretation to be reached. I still find it incredible that so much depth can be achieved from a Memory Theatre; in this case evolving from the participants' images, seemingly random artefacts, and the researcher's embodied sense of the participants' experiences.

After realising I wouldn't be able to do it all in one day, I chose to work with the Memory Theatre on specific days knowing that I had a session booked in with my AC. I also had a personal counselling session arranged to work through any difficult material that may arise relating to my own processing of the experience. I set up the rooms in the theatre for the specific purpose of deepening my phenomenological reflection of the participants' data, chosen to elucidate the four vignettes in which I was seeking to understand the following:

- When and what was the experience of discovering ACEs were a feature?
- How ACEs impacted the development of personal agency?
- What was the relational impact?
- What were the experiences of saving face?

7.17 Summary

In this section I have offered the reader insight into the phenomena under investigation: adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), personal agency and saving face, through the participants' words, images, and, where appropriate, my response images. I have offered a hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and discussion to each individual experience shown while also indicating what I believe has led each participant to the Red Zone (A21, p. 544). This section highlights the layers of experience that can be elucidated through the process of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. New depths of understanding have been reached which contribute to the broader counselling and psychotherapy knowledge base. During a discussion with my AC, we realised together that it was an unconscious yet serendipitous happening that my questions related to each of the four themes which in turn related to and aligned with the four vignettes. This feels like a harmonious completion to this study's hermeneutic circle and phenomenological inquiry.

I now move to Q5 which brought a reflective line of questioning linking the participants' experiences back to their current therapeutic practice as demonstrated below.

7.18 Section 6 – the wounded healer

*There is nothing stronger than a
woman who has rebuilt herself.*

Hannah Gadsby

This quote speaks to the courage it has taken the participants to not only survive their childhood adversity but to face a rigorous training and utilise their knowledge and experience for the benefit of others. This section relates to Q5 in which I sought to understand what learning, from their experience of the phenomena explored, the participants are able to take back into their client work. This research would not exist without the participants who were so very generous to share of themselves so openly. It feels important therefore that *their* voices are heard in response to the research experience as follows in table 20.

Ruby	"The therapy I've had in my career has helped me with the agency side of it so I can encourage people to develop that internal resource."
Louella	"Sexual abuse is the top of my credentials for obvious reasons and I think the more I've learnt about myself the more I can open up for clients. For example a client, like myself, had been talking about sexual abuse. But the reality of the word they were looking for was rape and I knew it, so instead of me walking around it, I said it. So in a way, to make sure I'm a step ahead, I'm working through my stuff in order to be able to support her, it doesn't mean I'm crossing over my stuff in to hers. It just means I have a greater understanding of myself, where I'm at, how my ACEs affect my work with clients."
Diana	"I don't think I could be the therapist that I am if I hadn't have got that background actually."
Tessa	"I think I'm pretty good at picking up the tiniest inkling that some abuse is happening, of any kind...and it's often happening right now but it's masked. I think I'm able to help people recognise that that's what's happening but very carefully, and

	<p>only as and when appropriate, to maybe lift that veil a little bit. So I think it has made me possibly hyperaware of abuse. The short answer is that I am able to really empathise with people who are experiencing any kind of control or abuse or being undermined or not being heard.”</p>
Alex	<p>“It’s so difficult to put it in to words, we need an image for this one! It’s every single moment of being a therapist, I think, I’m aware that the level of empathy, even if the story is completely different, that I can feel for whatever anybody has experienced is very...it’s very visceral isn’t it and it’s very powerful and it’s like your response art to me, I know you felt both what I went through and your version of what I went through [<i>the double hermeneutic</i>] and I feel that that is what a client can feel. I was going to say in the room but on Zoom as well.”</p>
Winny	<p>“Okay, so I feel that I’m able to use my own experience to really understand the client’s world, but then I have to be careful to bracket that as well because my experience isn’t the same as theirs. But it really helps me to understand and to show empathy and attune to them and developmentally, rhythmically, all different ways and I can really...because I struggle to regulate myself, I can understand, I can really help, I’m very good at regulating someone else.”</p>
Lauraley	<p>“When I’m working with ACEs... that my knowledge, my intellectual knowledge is shared and I haven’t met a client yet who isn’t empowered in a similar way...to how I was empowered...that’s part of trauma, recovering trauma... that we share, we share that information, that we arm our clients...there’s the psycho-education, I don’t really like that</p>

	<p>term. Lots of clients come to me and they say oh, I procrastinate, I can't make decisions, I have issues with being an adult, I can't adult...I think that working around ACEs from the perspective we have talked about takes that lens off, it's not that somebody can't adult. It's that they've survived through something that has upturned and tangled up parts of themselves, parts of their development perhaps."</p>
Jemima	<p>"I know that I'm very accepting, non-judgemental, kind of just...if you're here great, if you're not...great; is part of what I bring...and particularly when I'm working with *non-specific* clients, that's really invaluable because I'm probably the one person in the entire world at that moment they meet that isn't bothered whether they die tomorrow or not. Because actually I don't know if they are going to die tomorrow or not, I could die tomorrow or not....who knows. And I think that attitude that I have of maybe or maybe not does come from the fact that I potentially faced that [being shot] at that age, that I'm like well, oh it didn't happen, but it could have done, but it didn't."</p>
Millie	<p>"Well it's so rich, wow, so I guess the first thing that happened was that I decided to go into the drug and alcohol field....but I ended up feeling...disempowered maybe because of the constraints that were put on me. I knew I could be very effective but I wasn't able to be, I wasn't allowed.my ACE experiences have just, I guess they've underpinned most of my work to be honest...just somehow being able to meet your clients on that kind of soul level, on that unconscious level of my pain meets your pain, my healing can show you that healing can happen, you know."</p>

Rebecca	<p>“It’s about hope, first and foremost, that there’s treasure to be found in those places; giving them [clients] the message that it doesn’t have to end in despair. Of realising that vulnerability becomes the source of something quite precious and a strength. It’s about embodying something for my clients...also the phrase that comes to my mind is about being human...and learning how to let people down in a way that isn’t traumatising. It’s ok to be human and not know the answers, not to be perfect.”</p>
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Table 20 – The wounded healer

7.19 Section 7 – participants’ reflection

Within the spirit of this phenomenological study, and again in order that the participants’ voices be heard, I include their all-important feedback on taking part in the research.

7.19.1 Participants’ feedback

Ruby	<p>“It’s been very positive...revisiting it but having the agency within me to feel the robustness from the working through what I’ve done means I’m not rattled and nothing’s come up from it that I didn’t expect, or was untoward.”</p>
Louella	<p>“You’ve been really adaptable because you know I have to take longer....you’ve given me the opportunity to be creative in lots of different ways and being able to write it down or just giving me an extra few minutes and stop has helped me engage properly.” [Louella had informed me early on that she needs time when processing before expressing through art].</p>

Diana	<p>“It’s brought up a couple of things for me that I hadn’t recognised or seen or really thought about. Some of the images that have come up for me, I wouldn’t have expected... [The research] made me think, it made me look a bit deeper and then, yes, just find what I needed, so it’s been therapeutic as well.”</p>
On Tessa	<p>Tessa had a lot to say and I erroneously allowed my time boundaries to slip. Therefore we ran out of time for specific feedback but as she left the room Tessa told me that she found the session interesting and that it was useful to reflect on her experiences, particularly by the expression of images. I checked in with Tessa the following day and four weeks later. All was well.</p>
Alex	<p>“I think quite a lot of things came up but I think we’ve folded them back in to this period of time...so I don’t imagine there will be a big problem of any sort, just because I’ve had a lot of years to... you know...and it’s new and it’s different in lots of ways but it’s also very familiar. I’m fascinated by my reaction to the questions but that’s a whole different thing. If I’d have put that mask on and not said it to you, I would have probably been wittering on to myself....you gave me the chance to do that....”</p>
Winny	<p>“Yes... it has been really useful. I think I’ve had enough. I’m ok with what we’ve done. I feel really fortunate to have been able to experience this and to work with yourself because I think you’re amazing, what you’re doing is amazing....it must be so hard. I just really appreciate your time and letting me be part of it. It’s really great.”</p>
Lauraley	<p>“I’m feeling umm, wow...there’s a prophetic fallacy there, that’s incredible, there was just a roll of thunder! When I said ‘I’m</p>

	<p>feeling' there was a big....that's fantastic... It's been really interesting. It's been interesting to put the visual aspect of things because, as I say, I don't generally do that so that's been very interesting. It's been interesting to think a bit further around ACEsand actually I do have a therapy session at 5 o'clock today so if anything comes up I do know I've got the support."</p>
Jemima	<p>"This is, to be quite honest... it's been really affirming that you know what's happened, where I/you know the things I know about myself... like my attitude to death, my attitude to you know, the way I work, umm, honing it as well, you know, using what I know about myself to make a difference to people, umm, it's been, yes for me, this has been really affirming and just hearing it in different ways....and I just think it would be really nice for me to be able to say 'look, I took part in this research and this is what its confirmed Mum, what you did was absolutely right."</p>
Millie	<p>"I just felt really relaxed as soon as we began. I think having spoken to you on Zoom first was really helpful, immediately I got a sense of she's not going to be judging my art! You made that very clear so there was no shame. I suppose there's something about giving them, the experiences, the respect that they deserve...they do deserve to have that time and attention and thought."</p>
Rebecca	<p>"...it felt very therapeutic for me, I also like the idea that this is in some way helpful for you and the research that you're doing and that it's going towards something that could be helpful, erm, so I feel, I feel good...it will stay with me now a while and like I said I'll put the images up and let them sink in and see</p>

	where that takes me on my own personal erm, journey, how it feeds into themes that are in my life at the moment and anyway....I'm feeling enriched and grateful really, really grateful to take part actually."
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Table 21 – Participant reflection

What feels particularly prominent from the participants' very generous feedback is the authenticity and power of using of art in research. But also the opportunity to take part in research that was clearly so significant to their experiences and a feeling of it generally being a worthwhile knowledge building experience.

On reflection, the interview phase went well because the risks were mitigated through meticulous planning and attendance to the ethical implications of and for my research. At all times the welfare of the participants was paramount. Careful preparation really did pay off, leaving me satisfied that I conducted an ethically sound, reflexive, respectful, and purposeful piece of research.

7.20 Section 8 – summary of chapter

I now summarise the findings, in no particular order, and note the questions that arose as a result of the research.

7.20.1 Summary of findings

1	None of the participants had specifically considered the impact of their childhood adversity, or in terms of ACEs, until at least in their twenties.
2	None of the participants had previously linked ACEs to the development of personal agency.

3	None of the participants had considered the impact of ACEs and poor agency leading to the necessity of 'saving face'.
4	The use of art in the research proved to be profound for many of the participants, even those familiar with its use, as they could 'see' the impact of their ACEs for the first time in a new light.
5	All the participants either gained new insight or a new perspective on their experience.
6	The use of expressive art gave the participants new ways in which to embody their experiences.
7	All four themes applied to all the participants.
8	All the participants recognised that ACEs and poor agentic development had impacted their inter- and intra- personal relationships.
9	All the participants found the research to be a generally useful and positive experience with some commenting that, in spite of it being research, it felt therapeutic.
10	There is a paucity in the literature linking ACEs, personal agency and saving face. No previous studies link these phenomena or as explored using expressive art in research.
11	Using expressive art in the research session facilitated dialogue that would likely not otherwise have come particularly under the time constraints of the research interview.
12	The use of art as a medium for expression in research was not negatively impacted when used online, in fact in some cases highlighted the strength of attunement possible between the researcher and the participants.
12	All participants understood their ACEs to be causal in their choice of career.

13	The depth to which using art in research takes us in a short (two hours) space of time and the impact and importance of using images that are created in less than 10 minutes.
14	No matter one's age or qualifications there is always an opportunity for insight to be gained and new ways in which to revisit or explore experience.
16	The resilience and courage shown by all the participants was humbling and unexpected. For some, this was the first time, as a result of the research interviews, that it had been acknowledged.
17	Training programmes (one arts-based, one not) specifically designed for therapists/supervisors to work with saving face, ACEs and agency development is needed.
18	Up to the point of this research, in spite of many hours spent in therapy the researcher had not considered ACEs and poor personal agency to underlay her perceived inadequacies and failings, instead blaming herself. This recognition has been life-changing and the necessity of saving face is tangibly diminishing.
19	The necessity for Bion's idea of containment and Winnicott's sense of being 'good enough' were omnipresent as was Panksepp's emotional 'seeking' system.
20	Women are extraordinarily resilient and show enormous courage under the most dire of circumstances.
21	The use of Memory Theatre was profound in deepening the hermeneutic phenomenological reflection.
22	Repetition compulsion was a notable feature as was the propensity for dissociation as a safeguarding strategy.

Table 22 – Summary of findings

The findings from this research have been rich, moving, reparative, and thought provoking. I consider the research aims as stated in Chapter 1 have been achieved (see Chapter 10). I feel confident that my post-doctoral aim of contributing usefully towards the reduction of intergeneration trauma, will, through products and with the knowledge gained, also be achievable.

As a practitioner-researcher, with co-opted raconteurs, we may attend to the past and tentatively look towards the future; but the stories we tell are embedded in the world we inhabit *today*. Within the ebb and flow of nature's tides and, as the cycles of life and death endure, our stories with their beginnings, middles and endings continue, somehow seamlessly between the generations. We are all part of something greater and every one of us can contribute to ending the pain suffered through the transmission of intergenerational trauma; no matter our adversity at the beginning we all have something to give until the end.

As T.S. Eliot's famous words poignantly attest,

What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from...

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

(T.S. Eliot, 1986)

Chapter 8: Limitations and recommendations

There were a few limitations to the research study, which I have categorised as follows:

8.1 General

As with all small scale studies the findings cannot be generalisable. They can only ever be a snapshot of a particular time with a particular set of participants held within the particular research design, as determined by the researcher. In qualitative research, and in particular hermeneutic phenomenological research, there will inevitably be a level of researcher bias. Yet I don't believe this detracts from the intrinsic usefulness of such a project as long as any biases have been recognised and accounted for as found within the present study.

8.2 Literature

Personal/human agency is heavily weighted in the sociological literature but much less so in psychotherapy literature. This was challenging, as at times it felt as though I were studying for a doctorate in sociology.

The lack of literature combining the areas of study was also challenging as it led to a rather long-winded literature review. This felt frustrating, particularly when developing my argument. It was also a challenge to edit, leading to uncertainty when considering what to remove when reducing wordcount became a necessity.

With a greater word count I would have included more detailed sections on child development, explored the impact of adversity on children's social, emotional and pedagogic learning along with deeper exploration of the impact of adversity on neuro-development; this is of personal interest to me as I have a diagnosis of combined (inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive) ADHD.

8.3 ACEs

ACEs were used as lens through which to explore agency, and for this purpose were sufficient. However I did consider three aspects that could potentially be problematic in future research:

- The ACE list is restrictive, for example, being bullied at school is an adversity in childhood but not listed.
- The more ACEs a person experiences indicates the likely severity of health conditions later in life. Yet there is no obvious allowance made for say one or two ACEs over a sustained length of time.
- ACE study participant demographic could be deemed limiting with any generalisations hindered as a result.

8.4 Questions

Q3: How do you think your ACEs and personal agency have impacted your relationships with others?

It would have been potentially more useful if I had stated inter- and intra- personal relationships rather than 'with others.' Although I gained a sense of the participants' relationship to themselves, specifically asking this would have perhaps opened up more discussion rather than relying on my assumptions or tentative interpretation of the text/images.

8.5 Time

Time was also a factor. In a 'typical' therapy session where expressive art may be used, there would be an hour or so for image creation and exploration and the image may also be returned to in subsequent sessions. The interview allowed for approximately five minutes of dialogue either side of a ten minute allowance for

image creation. I could have increased the length of the interview or reduced the number of questions, both of which were not practicable. Although generally it worked well, it sometimes meant the depth of exploration, in session, was time limited.

8.6 Personal limitations

On a more personal note, my coming to the crux of what felt important for me to research took a long time. Therefore, once I had my topic, I went full steam ahead without taking my time to really process what it all meant. Consequently the work has at times been produced in me waves of emotion which have been difficult to understand. However, I believe as a result of this I have been ‘forced’ to confront some aspects of myself that, although challenging, have been hugely beneficial to how I consider myself in daily life.

Imposter syndrome has been an unwanted, yet constant companion. I came into academia rather late in life starting my studies with a post-graduate diploma from The University of Cambridge. I then continued to the master of education degree for which I earned a distinction. I began with no degree at all, to studying at Cambridge and leaving with an amazing graduation experience at the Senate House in Cambridge. Even with this evidence I still tend towards the ‘*stupid*’ and ‘*who do you think you are trying to be clever?*’ shame induced feelings. Completing this doctorate still feels rather surreal. As my CFs will attest, it has been frustrating to hear my self-doubt, no matter how far I have come. This has, at times, put limitations on my creativity, my motivation, and my self-belief. I recognise this will likely always be a work-in-progress, but resolve that life is a long lesson in learning which brings me a certain sense of balance, rationality, and optimism.

Other limitations to studying have been health related. Not least ADHD fuelled frenzies driven by high anxiety. The worst of which was probably around Easter 2021 when I bought 25 old manual typewriters over a three week period – and then all the equipment needed to ‘do them up’. Suffice it to say they are still waiting!

I mention personal limitations as I think they really can impact the research process and as part of my reflexive practice I always aim to be as transparent as appropriate and possible. I feel it is important to highlight such difficulties as part of my authentic lived experience during this doctoral journey.

8.7 Recommendations

Recommendations are, in main, considered to be the products that have been and will be developed as a result of the research.

I also suggest that this study’s usefulness may be found by replicating it for other groups such as men, people with disability and LGBT+ populations. Having worked extensively with young people (11-18 years) I would also like to conduct an appropriately modified version of the research with this age group. As previously noted, the demographic for this study was limited to White British women as they were the only respondents. In line the ‘cultural factors’ noted earlier, it would be useful to investigate how to explore the present phenomena under investigation with groups emanating from other ethnicities and cultures. I recommend that this is be done at some point in the future.

8.8 Summary

Although limitations may bring certain frustration at times I believe them to be part of the overall learning experience and see them as nuggets of gold for potential future projects. While some may be impossible to negotiate such as the

generalisation of small sample research, others may be adaptable or indeed avoided. This ties in with the critical realist approach of my pluralistic philosophical stance; that we can only ever come to gain partial knowledge of the world within which we live.

Chapter 9: Products

9.1 Praxis

I view this the entire doctoral journey and the thesis write up as the beginning, rather than the end, of my purpose and hope for even the smallest of change. While I am excited and enthusiastic as I imagine the future, and think about taking my research forward by way of creative and useful products, I want to attend here to an underlying anxiety I have felt. It relates to what felt like '*conjuring up products for the sake of meeting the doctoral requirement*' during the doctoral process. In particular during the write-up as the end was in sight. The embodiment of this assumed pressure has led to a range of physiological and psychological responses while tapping significantly into my sense of inferiority and failure – not least when I hear of or read about the plethora of products that other candidates have already achieved.

As described in Chapter 2, I believe the origins of this research to have begun in utero or even *prior* to my conception. I also consider the adversity of my childhood and poor agency development have inhibited my arriving at this point of study any earlier. This in no way lessens my enthusiasm. The all-consuming focus of writing up my research, to produce this thesis, will come to an end. The emphasis will then shift, moving towards the practical application of my products, in particular my developing model and theory for psychotherapeutic practice.

9.2 Products

I have listed below two columns in which I describe products that have already come to fruition and products that are either currently in progress or in the pipeline.

Established/in progress products	Planned products
Presentation to the Middlesex Summer Conference 2021.	Journal Article for BACP's Therapy Today <i>'What can be done to support new parents in understanding how their ACEs may impact their own relational ability and parenting skills?'</i> for the April 2023 issue.
Presentation to the Metanoia Research Academy February 2022.	Journal article outlining research for the European Journal of Counselling & Psychotherapy Research.
<i>Talking Point</i> in BACP's Therapy Today April 2022 (A10, p. 415).	Creation of website as a resource hub and regularly updated blog - ongoing.
Chapter <i>'The Faceless Face: Reaching Shame Without Words'</i> in <i>Using Art, Play, Metaphor and Symbol with Young Hard to Reach Clients: Reach Out To Me</i> – (Adcock, 2023) – <i>published</i> .	A book on Haiku poetry written during the write up of this thesis.
Two personal products: becoming a 'phenomenologist' has deepened my own reflexive practice and my therapeutic client/supervisory work. Developing as a practitioner-researcher is a personal product I am proud of.	Information leaflet to distribute to GP surgeries and post online directing women/parents to the resource hub website.
F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model.	Books – from ACEs to Agency – practitioner guide Book for parents/parents to be, title tbc.
In progress – the development of online training to deliver for Red Zone Theory and F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model for therapeutic practice.	The running of a therapeutic creative arts group in Cambridge for women and one for CYP in the care system.

Working on self-care and emotional wellbeing, heightened as a result of this studying for this doctorate.	Paper on <i>conducting arts-based research online</i> .
	Teaching module for IATE (suggested by my AA)
	Practitioner workshops/retreat
	As a qualified clay therapist I wish to run some workshops for practitioners and the general public using clay to explore body and self-image in response to the impact of adversity on agency and saving face.
	Article submission for the journal <i>Phenomenology & Practice</i> .
	As a product for the future I would like carry out the research with other groups, starting with men. In my PAP viva I was asked the question: “ <i>Why only women? As a man, I find it very relevant to me too</i> ” which felt validating while giving purchase for future research.

Table 23 – Products summary

- A **post-doctoral** aim of the project (through product development) is to work towards reducing the impact of intergenerational trauma on the relationship and parenting experience of women who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences and who experience poor personal agency.

As the present study comes to a close I now offer the conclusions.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

10.1 General summary

Having identified a gap in the literature, this arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the development of women's personal agency through the lens of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), while also gaining insight into the participants' experiences of saving face. Semi-structured interviews invited dialogue and the creation of images. The data was initially analysed and coded using Template Analysis, followed by a hermeneutic phenomenological exploration which led to the development of four participant vignettes. The vignettes related to the first four interview questions and serendipitously aligned with each of the four top-level themes. Memory Theatre was used for each vignette to deepen exploration resulting in phenomenologically rich discussions, salient in answering the research questions and aims.

The findings showed that ACEs, without exception, impacted the development of the participants' personal agency; however this impact also, for some participants, brought about a strong sense of overcoming and determination not to be defined by their experiences. The outcomes demonstrated the courage and resilience shown by the participants, with a strong sense of movement towards hope and, to borrow from psychologist Carl Rogers, *becoming a person*.

All of the participants were well into adulthood before realising they had ACEs and each participant recognised that their ACEs and poor agency development had also impacted their relationships to self and to others. Significantly, none of the participants had linked childhood adversity to the development of personal agency and all of them told me they felt the research was much needed. Although terminology varied, all participants recognised that they had saved face as a strategy against potential perceived or actual ridicule and humiliation. It was

recognised by both the participants and the researcher that poor agency and the compensatory phenomenon of saving face leads to an overarching sense of implicit or explicit inauthenticity. Inauthenticity, it emerged, undermines a person's sense of identity. In turn this produces an often shameful and rather empty feeling of not knowing oneself which, in turn, leads us back to Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness' (2003).

All participants, including those in the pilot study, felt that using expressive art in the research session brought about a depth and insight not previously realised when exploring their experience of adversity in childhood, and its impact on agency development. The creation of images enabled powerful psychic expressions which illuminated aspects of the participants' inner worlds, making tangible the ineffable and previously unrealised insight. For the researcher and participants using image creation highlighted the depth of understanding that can be achieved in a short space of time.

Memory Theatre has surprisingly (although perhaps not so?) emerged as the 'golden egg' of this research endeavour. While it was clear to me back in 2019, as noted in my PK seminar journal, that I would, in some way, like to incorporate Memory Theatre in my research design, I was unaware of quite how impactful it would be as part of the research process and to me personally. Its prominence has emerged organically, not only as part of the data analysis and hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry but also as fundamental to the development of Red Zone Theory. So captivated am I by the depth of insight gained during the practical application of Memory Theatre in this research that not only does it contribute to the scaffolding of Red Zone Theory but I have decided to include its use within F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's model designed to be used by counsellors and psychotherapists in clinical practice.

10.2 Research aims summary

To close the research loop, I have re-listed the aims from Chapter 1 (p. 22) and how they have been met.

No	Aim	Summary
1	To determine when in life ACE recognition was consciously realised and what this experience was like.	Mid-twenties onwards. Not all participants had recognised their experience defined as ACEs. The experience ranged from painful realisation to determination not to be a victim. This can be seen in Chapter 7. Also found in Vignette 1, Chapter 7.
2	To understand how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) may impact the development of women's personal agency.	All the participants felt their agency development had been impacted by ACEs. Poor sense of self, anger, rage, shame, power imbalance and self-blame were present. Sense of 'no-thingness' and being 'done to'. Illuminated in Chapter 7. Also found in Vignette 2, Chapter 7.
3	To gain insight into the women's perceived impact of ACEs and their personal agency on their inter- and intra- personal relationships.	All the participants felt their experiences of adversity in childhood had impacted their relationships with others and self. For those who had been married and separated there was evidence of the repetition compulsion. For others a sadness where they had not yet found lasting love and the

		chance to parent. Question 3 and Theme 3. Also found in Vignette 3, Chapter 7.
4	To gain insight into women's experience of 'saving face' as a safeguarding or defence strategy and if/how this is impacted by ACEs and personal agency.	Although understanding of the term 'saving face' varied and in some cases needed explanation, all participants demonstrated this as a feature in how they are in the world. Chapter 7: Question 4 and Theme 4, also found in Vignette 4.
5	To explore how therapists may take their own insight of ACEs and personal agency development back in to their client work.	ACEs are a likely contributing factor as to the career 'choice' or calling. The participants variously felt it gave them a depth of understanding and experience that was useful in their clinical work. See Section 5, Chapter 7.
6	To gain understanding of the role creative/expressive art plays in supporting the exploration of ACEs, personal agency development, and saving face.	Not all participants were familiar with using art and the experience was profound for them bringing new insight, depth of understanding, recognition of feelings and experience. Discussed in the literature review, Chapter 3, through the vignettes, Chapter 7, and the participant composite narrative, Chapter 7.
7	To make sense and find meaning from adversity experienced in childhood.	The whole research project speaks to this aim. The questions, dialogue, image creation all contributed to this

		phenomenological study; one of sense and meaning making.
8	To bring new insight and meaning to the participants, particularly from using expressive art as part of the interview process.	Evidenced through the images created Chapter 7 and post image creation dialogue. Also stated in the overall experience, section 6, Chapter 7.

Table 24 – Research aims summary

The findings from the research, along with the researcher’s personal and clinical experience of the phenomena being explored, culminated in the development **Red Zone Theory** along with **F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R’s** model for psychotherapeutic practice (see **A21, p.544**). These products will be developed further and disseminated through online training and the development of psychotherapeutic tools.

10.3 Questions to emerge from the findings

Alongside answering the research questions, new questions emerged throughout the research process as seen below. These questions will be fed into product development.

- *How may we support an increase in the personal agency of young mothers with a view to reducing their need to save face?*
- *What can be done to support parents in ending the cycle of intergeneration trauma by understanding how their ACEs may have impacted the development of their personal agency and how this may impact their interpersonal relationships and parenting skills?*

- *How can I develop an arts-based training programme for therapists in order for them to recognise and work towards agency development as explored through the lens of ACEs?*

10.4 Contribution to the field

I have undertaken doctoral study in order to contribute to the counselling and psychotherapy professions' knowledge base and, through the products, make a difference to the to those suffering the impact of ACEs and poor agency development. I have greatly furthered my own knowledge in an area I have become extremely passionate about. I am already utilising this insight and knowledge within my clinical practice; as a clinical supervisor this may also filter through my supervisees into their own practice.

This study also brings new, previously unlinked knowledge to the fore. Already, through the many discussions with 'not-in-the-know' friends and family I see this work already making an impact simply through raising interest and awareness. This project is causing me, and others, to think and feel into their own experience through an alternative lens. For practitioners in the field of psychotherapy (critical friends, colleagues, and participants) I know, from their feedback, this work has already made an impact to them on a personal level and for consideration within their clinical work.

10.5 Publication and dissemination

This study will initially be disseminated through the development of products (see Chapter 9). I am uncertain whether or not to evolve this thesis into a published work although it may become accessible through the Metanoia and Middlesex repositories.

In the methodology section (see Chapter 4), I stated that an underlying aim for the study was to follow Sprague's (2016, p. 238) suggestion that feminist researchers must, in their endeavours to seek knowledge

"take three basic steps: ask passionately, analyze critically, and answer empoweringly."

As a result of this experience, I am unclear whether or not I consider myself a feminist, this remains for further exploration. Nevertheless, I return to Sprague's suggestion and ask whether or not I have achieved this aim?

The research is born of personal experience, client work and previous research. There is a clear thread that runs between them and although it took me a while to reach the nugget or 'something' that eluded me, the determination to understand the tacit knowing within me, got me there in the end. As evidenced in the write-up and heuristically informed self-study (A20, p. 507) my passion is steadfast. I demand a lot from my bespoke research design and ask a lot of myself to carry it through to fruition, particularly when the subject matter has, at times, been painful to bear. I strongly believe that all women should be able to find and use their voice. Also, that they can be empowered to reduce intergeneration trauma, and that they can develop their agentic self, thus reducing the necessity to save face.

From the conceptual framework to the research methodology and the methods to findings, each stage has been critically evaluated. This includes the literature, the processes involved, and my own strengths and personal challenges; I have considered my biases and been transparent at all times. The findings have been clearly stated, and as I come to the end of this phenomenal period of personal growth, I feel louder, prouder, and galvanised to take my work forward. I believe, therefore, that yes, I have taken and fulfilled Sprague's three basic steps.

Not exhaustive, I now offer a few of the notable strengths and challenges I have found as a practitioner-researcher during the research experience.

10.6 Researcher's strengths and challenges

Strengths	Personal challenges
Determination to search until I found the nugget, the gold of my research.	Combined ADHD: and all that having this neurodivergent condition entails for me personally.
Learning to listen to and not just dismiss encouraging feedback.	Default to feeling inadequate, stupid or an imposter is ever ready to surface.
Accepting my anger and rage as part of my being.	Extremely high anxiety and the impulsive buying of books to 'make' me feel clever (which is very short lived!) followed by certain shame.
Courage to face my own ACEs, need to save face and lack of personal agency.	Staying focussed on the task in hand. Very easy to enter and get stuck in many rabbit warrens.
Embracing my love of art and letting go of 'needing to be perfect.'	Self-sabotaging e.g., going to bed too late....particularly when feeling hopeless or anxious.

Table 25 – Researcher's strengths and challenges

10.7 Reflection on the project

A bespoke research design was developed to help answer the research questions. It served the purpose well but, as previously mentioned, it was possibly more complicated than it needed to be. However, using expressive art felt important to me, as was the use of *a priori* themes to investigate the participants' lived

experience. I felt strongly that I needed to use *a priori* themes but, in actual fact, I think the project would have worked equally well without them. Template Analysis and hermeneutic phenomenology helped me explore the phenomena as they presented to me within conscious awareness. In summation, the methodology, methods and data analysis tools appropriately supported my investigations.

Along with the literature review, the findings, emergent from the data of 10 qualified and practising psychotherapists, revealed that this is an under researched area of study which warrants further exploration and product development. The fact that all 10 practicing therapists felt this research was important and much needed was extremely validating. The findings also revealed that in spite of impactful childhood adversity, the human spirit, like a Zippo pocket lighter, is hard to blow out.

10.8 Reflection on ethics in research

Having researched adolescent shame for my master's degree I was no stranger to the importance of ethical considerations and implications for research. However, the importance of ethics-in-practice was particularly emphasised during the initial Memory Theatre session (p.183) and impacted the subsequent use of Memory Theatre (Chapter 7). So instantaneous was the overwhelming experience, it highlighted the necessity for thorough preparation *for the researcher*, not just the participants - something I had not done in this instance. The embodiment of my participants' adversity, through images I had created in response to the themes from the participants' data, had unexpectedly taken me on a direct train to my own childhood experiences. This transformed me from a researcher who *knew ethics were important*, to the researcher who has *embodied the importance of ethics*; as if the participants' trauma has travelled through me in the Memory Theatre to bring

new insight and meaning to not only the themes, but substantiating the necessity for strong ethical foundations for research.

10.9 Academic consultant

I remember very clearly the feeling of overwhelm as I perused the student handbook, given to new students on the first day of study back in October 2018. I remember seeing the section explaining the use of an 'academic consultant' and how very far away it felt until such a time I *might* need one of these experts. I remember feeling engulfed by the enormity and uncertainty of the task that lay ahead. I remember also, at this point I didn't yet know if I had passed my master's degree! It is now January 2023 and I'm about to submit this work, *my* work. But suffice it to say, my work has not been achieved in isolation. For example, my impulsive request, back in July 2019, when I asked Dr Deborah Kelly to be my AC, proved to be a wise one. Dr Kelly's kindness, encouragement, generosity in sharing her knowledge, and unfailing enthusiasm for my project has enveloped me as if I were held within the safety of a cocoon; a place of warmth from where I could dare to go deeper, dipping my toes beneath the darker waters, not afraid of what I might find.

10.10 Personal reflections

Studying for this doctorate, with all that it has involved, has been an intensely life changing experience. I have learnt that I am resilient, a survivor, a 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1990) and very proud mum to three beautiful humans. I am also a loving Dama Wynn (Cornish for grandmother) to our little star. Along with his wife, witnessing my eldest son father his young daughter is beyond joyful. His absolute unconditional love for her, his empathy, rather than anger, when she's upset, his time which he so readily gives to her, and the patience he shows her even

when faced with another sleepless night, is heart-warming. As I share in the lives of my grown-up sons and look after my grown-up daughter, I see, feel and *know* that my family's cycle of intergenerational trauma has finally been broken.

This gives me hope that other women, whether first time mothers or not, who have experienced adversity in their childhoods, may also learn to become agentic so that they too, will one day share in my joy of knowing that they have broken the intergeneration trauma that no longer propagates unquestioned. I also realise it is time perhaps to turn off the metaphorical 'stupid tape' which plays on repeat and replace it with a new one. This was the advice of my clinical supervisor some time ago. I now feel ready to take notice of his wise words. I am not only relieved to see this challenging project through, but also to have confronted some difficult demons.

My critical friends have supported me with love, kindness and their great wisdom. I am most grateful for their generosity and also for the encouragement of my AA, Dr Marie Adams, who has always, without falter, demonstrably believed in my academic capability.

10.11 All roads have led to this point

I began this doctoral journey with an unclear sense of self and a large dose of imposter syndrome. As I recall applying to the programme, I realise I had no idea what I would be letting myself in for. Doctoral study had been suggested to me and I became carried away with a deep rooted urgency to please. It was also two years before I would be diagnosed with a combined (inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive) ADHD that was not remotely interested in my need to be able to concentrate! Along with the subject matter, this has been extremely challenging at times. And now, as I approach the final stretch with thesis submission and the viva voce to come, I don't so much recognise the person I was then but grow to like the

person I find myself with now. Studying for the Doctorate of Psychotherapy by Professional Studies degree has shifted something within me; my agency and self-perception is experiencing a reconstruction. I am moving forward and no longer dwell so much in the past. And while I may still occasionally save face, I am *always* aware of it and it comes from a place of choice rather than unconscious necessity.

I have embraced my lonely only child and see the benefits this has brought me. I have become more compassionate and less critical towards others but also towards myself. The most unexpected shift has come in the past three weeks. I have lost the urgency, need, compulsion....however it may be described, to buy yet more books. As ridiculous as this may sound, it feels absolutely incredible, an enormous release. As if the switch which has been on for many years, has been turned off. I realise that while my beloved books do contain vast amounts of knowledge, they don't have *the* answer. I have finally found *my* answer within. The following quote from Romanyshyn (2008, p. 398) speaks perfectly to my doctoral journey and experience of conducting a phenomenological study:

"In this respect phenomenology truly is a work of homecoming, a work of coming home to the world, a work of return to what we already know without knowing that we know it."

As I have finally come home to myself I am reminded of a quote I came across (author unknown):

"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending."

To follow Dr Stephen Goss's suggestion, offered in one of the early research challenges sessions, I have reached the point where I can ask myself the question:

"Have I doctored it?"

and answer with

"Yes, I believe I have."

Epilogue

women are amazing!
resilient to their core
no matter the adversity
their strength comes to the fore

as a child she suffered
only silence heard her screams
pain and torture, psychic death
played out in violent dreams

rage and displaced sorrow
the legacy of fear
who helps you when you're drowning?
who dares to keep you near?

yet courage buds where evil lay
go forth and you will find
that evil lies lie not within
but in *their* darkened mind

(Researcher, January 2023)

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Memory Rooms and researcher's grounding space

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The School of Life Cards


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Appendix 1

Participant information sheet



An invitation to participate in arts-based research

Are you a qualified and practicing female* counsellor or psychotherapist?

Would you like to contribute to valuable research using the creative arts by exploring how women's personal agency develops after enduring Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?

My name is Jude Adcock. I am an arts-based counsellor, psychotherapist and supervisor. I am conducting formal supervised research, for my final thesis, as part requirement towards the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies at The Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University.

I am looking to interview 8-10 female practitioners who speak fluent English and have sustained ACEs trauma in their childhood.

The interviews will be a total of 2 hours in duration between March-August 2021. They will comprise of informal conversation, embodied expression through the creation of images and 30 minutes reflection. Depending on Covid restrictions, interviews may take place either in my therapy room just north of Cambridge or online via a secure platform.

If you are interested in being part of my research, please contact me for more information via email or to arrange a short informal conversation to answer any questions you may have and to assess suitability.

jude.adcock@metanoia.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in my project,
I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmly, Jude



*for this study biological women

Information given to participants shortly before the research session:

It is well documented that women across the world suffer as a result of the patriarchy, oppression and sexual exploitation. I have encountered many women who, while articulate and competent, often coming from 'respectable' families, have felt a sense of 'no-thing-ness', perhaps lacking a sense of direction, purpose or meaning, as if they are existing in their life but don't feel fully present.

I am interested in using creative arts to explore women's experiences, through the lens of adverse childhood experiences, to help me understand the reasons why so many women are driven to 'save face'. In other words to wear a metaphoric mask.

Appendix 2

Invitation to participate

Metanoia Institute



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

20th February 2021

Participant ID Code: M00705078

Study title

Saving face: an arts-based study of women's personal agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to understand the links between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the development of a women's personal agency. Personal agency embraces the idea of meaningful action and an individual's capacity to act with intention. In other words, the belief she has in her own capabilities and control over her own life. The study will also seek to understand how ACEs and personal agency have impacted women's experiences of self-knowledge and to contribute to the reduction of intergenerational trauma.

Why have I been chosen?

You are an English speaking female psychotherapist and/or counsellor currently in practice who already has a level of self-awareness, some understanding of the 'self' and/or 'personal agency'. You will also recognise Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as part of your story. You will participate in your own supervision and have access to personal therapy should it be required. A total of 10 psychotherapists/counsellors will be chosen for this study and you will be considered as a participant in the research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be

given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time prior to the research without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform me, Jude Adcock, as soon as possible, and I will facilitate your withdrawal. You may withdraw your generated data up to four weeks post research interview. After this date it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as the results may have already been published. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way.

A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your professional status in any way or participation in future research.

The research phase will commence in March 2021 and run until August 2021, dates are to be agreed with each participant.

What will I have to do?

1. Sign an informed consent form to show understanding of the research requirement and agreement to participate.
2. The research will consist of an initial 1.5 hour session with 30 minutes of reflection at the end equalling 2 hours altogether. The session will be audio recorded. During this session you will be asked to create image(s) using your choice of art materials* in response to the questions asked relevant to the study. Together we will then explore the image(s) you have created.
3. Four weeks post research you will be contacted by the researcher (Jude Adcock) via email to check in with you and formally end your research participation.
4. The generated data will be analysed and the thesis written up.
5. You are welcome to receive a copy of the research findings should you wish.

*art materials may include paper, pens, pencils, paint, oil, and chalk pastels.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hope that participating in the study will be interesting and potentially useful to you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. Whilst the research sessions will endeavour to be therapeutic it is not therapy. The information arising from this study may help us to

understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have on the development of women's personal agency and how this impacts their lived experiences. You may gain new insight into how ACEs have impacted your life and choose to investigate further. You will also be contributing to the knowledge base of ACEs and women's personal agency which may be written up into journal articles, edited book chapters and a psycho-educational handbooks.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code and pseudonym that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the research team, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study may be presented at conferences or in journal articles. However, the data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Metanoia Institute Research Ethics committee (MREC) who reviewed the study.

Contact for further information

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Researcher: Judith Adcock

Academic Advisor: Dr Marie Adams marie.adams@metanoia.ac.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your researcher's participant code, important information and the research teams contact details.

Appendix 3

(sample) INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Saving face: an arts-based study of women's personal agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences

Name of Researcher: Judith (Jude) Adcock email: jude.adcock@metanoia.ac.uk

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20 February 2021 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

1
LKN

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time prior and up to four weeks post research session without giving any reason and without penalty.

2
LKN

I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.

3
LKN

I agree that my non-identifiable research data may be stored in National Archives and be used anonymously by others for future research. I am assured that the confidentiality of my data will be upheld through the removal of any personal identifiers.

4
LKN

I understand that my interview may be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

5
LKN

I agree that any images created during the process will be used for the data analysis but returned to me, should I wish, once the data analysis has been completed.

6
LKN

I agree to take part in the above study.

7
LKN

Name of participant

Signature

Name of person Jude AdcockDate 20/02/2021 Signature
taking consent

Researcher Jude Adcock Date 20/02/2021 Signature

Please email a scanned copy with hard copy signature or electronic signature. 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

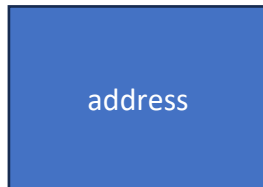
Appendix 4

Entering part two of the programme and research ethics approval



25th January 2021

Judith Adcock



cc. Dr Marie Adams

Dear Jude,

**METANOIA INSTITUTE/MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY
MASTERS/DOCTORATE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY by Professional Studies
Programme Planning Learning Agreement – Module DPY 4444**

We are pleased to inform you that your submission for LA, Module DPY 4444, was accepted by the MProf/DPsych Assessment Board held on 22nd January 2021. You have accordingly been awarded 40 credits at Level 7 which is recorded on the Middlesex Academic Register.

This means that you have entered Part 2 of this programme.

The LA assessors' reports are appended for your interest.

Congratulations on your successful progression.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Biljana van Rijn Faculty
Head of Research and Doctoral Programmes
Research Ethics Committee Form**

DETAILS OF APPLICANT AND RESEARCH SUPERVISOR

1.1. **Applicant's name:** Judith Adcock

1.2. **Email address:** jude.adcock@metanoia.ac.uk

1.3. **Telephone number:** 07872176056

1.4. **Research supervisor(s) name, qualifications and contact details:**

Dr Marie Adams: psychotherapist, author, academic consultant

1.5 **Institution/contact details (if applicable):**

The Metanoia Institute

1.6 **Do you have any external funding for this project?** No

1.7. **Project title:** *Saving face: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study of women's personal agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences*

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note: The items below cover all of those in the A/B categories of Middlesex University

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Will you describe the research procedures in advance to participants so that they are informed about what to expect? Please attach a copy of any recruitment letters and information sheet to be used.	Y		
2. Is the project based on voluntary participation?	Y		
3. Will you obtain written consent for participation?	Y		
4. If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	Y		
5. Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason and inform them of how they may withdraw?	Y*		
6. Will you ensure that participants are not subtly induced, either to participate initially, or to remain in the project?	Y		
7. Will you give participants the option of omitting questions from interviews or questionnaires that they do not want to answer?	Y		
8. Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	Y		

9. Have you made provision for the safe-keeping of written data or video/audio recordings?	Y		
10. Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?	Y		
11. Have you ensured that your research is culture/belief/social system sensitive and that every precaution has been taken to ensure the dignity, respect and safety of the participants?	Y		

If you have answered 'NO' to any of the questions listed in 1 to 12 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.

	YES	NO	N/A
12. Is there a realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If YES, what will you tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help.)	Y		
13. Is there an existing relationship between the researcher and any of the research participants? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		N	
14. Your research does not involve offering inducement to participate (e.g. payment or other reward)? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		N	
15. Will the project involve working with children under 16 years of age? If YES, please describe parental consent and safeguarding procedures.		N	
16. Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way? If YES, please explain why this is necessary.		N	
17. Will you need to obtain ethical approval from any other organisation or source? If YES, please attach letter confirming their ethical approval.		N	
18. Are there any other ethical considerations in relation to your project that you wish to bring to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee that are not covered by the above? If YES, please describe on a separate sheet.		N	

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions listed under 13 to 18 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.

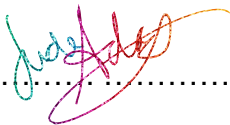
No 12: Working with adverse childhood experiences (childhood trauma) and personal agency is necessarily sensitive. I have a participant distress protocol in place whereby any distress in the research session will be attended to immediately and the session halted pending necessary action – either taking a break, ending the

session or ending the research completely with the participant and discussing the best action for them. That may be they talk with their own personal therapist or I will source a suitable therapist with them. Follow up email at 4 weeks as required.

No 5*: clarification – Yes, I will inform participants that they are free to withdraw before, during or up to one month after the initial interview. This is based on recommendation of Smith and colleagues who deem this strategy to be honest as it reduces anxiety for both researcher and participant (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The researcher has the security of knowing there is no risk to data use once a month post-research has passed and for the participant it offers the option to change their mind without any repercussions or need for explanation.

CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I have read the BACP and the BPS guidelines for ethical practices in research and have discussed this project with my research supervisor in the context of these guidelines. I confirm that I have also undertaken a risk assessment with my research supervisor:

Signed:.....

Print name.....Judith Adcock.....Date...27/11/2020
(Applicant)

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

- As supervisor or principal investigator for this research study I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that researchers/candidates under my supervision undertake a risk assessment to ensure that health and safety of themselves, participants and others is not jeopardised during the course of this study.
- I confirm that I have seen and signed a risk assessment for this research study and to the best of my knowledge appropriate action has been taken to minimise any identified risks or hazards.
- I understand that, where applicable, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that is consistent with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (see (Smith et al., 2009)).
- I confirm that I have reviewed all of the information submitted as part of this research ethics application.
- I agree to participate in committee's auditing procedures for research Studies if requested.

Please note that the Metanoia Research Committee meets twice during each academic year. Submissions between these meetings are dealt with by chair's action in consultation with one other committee member. All applications are acknowledged in writing and considered at the bi-annual Metanoia Research Committee meeting.

Signed:.....*Marie Adams*

Print name.....Dr Marie Adams
(Supervisor)

Date.....27/11/2020

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This project has been considered by the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee and is now approved.

Signed:.....Print name.....

Date.....

(On behalf of the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee)

Please note that the Metanoia Research Committee meets twice during each academic year. Submissions between these meetings are dealt with by chair's action in consultation with one other committee member. All applications are acknowledged in writing and considered at the bi-annual Metanoia Research Committee meeting.



Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent

Name of student: Judith Adcock

Name of research project:

Saving face: an arts-based hermeneutic phenomenological study of women's agency explored through the lens of adverse childhood experiences.

This is to verify that as Research Supervisor for the above research project I have seen proof that appropriate consent has been obtained from the participants used in the project.

Supervisor's name: Dr Marie Adams

Marie Adams

Signature:

Date: 23/1/2023

Appendix 5

Learning Agreement updates

Participants (my change)

Originally and as described in my DLA I proposed conducting the research with participants as co-researchers. Having reflected upon this decision and discussed it with my peer group and AA I decided, that for this project, I would be unnecessarily complicating the process, reminding myself that this is a heuristically influenced project, *not* a heuristic inquiry. By asking co-researchers to read the audio transcript there is a risk of evoking an uncontained emotional response. I wish the transcript to be a pure representation of the session and not risk distress by putting back into the co-researcher what has already come out. Therefore I have decided the women involved will be viewed as *participants* and not co-researchers.

Cultural considerations (requested change from PAP)

Whilst recruiting White British women, like myself, may present less complexity, I feel neither comfortable nor ethically congruent discriminating against any woman, based on ethnicity, race or culture, who wishes to participate in my research. Neither do I wish to positively discriminate participants. Consequently, I will neither seek out nor discriminate against any biological woman but rather choose the first 8-10 participants based on suitability to answer the research questions (for criteria see p.168). Influenced by Mahmood's writings on agency in 'Politics of Piety' (2006) I will consider each participant's individuality whilst attending carefully to the complexity of cultural difference regarding the subject of agency and necessarily the potential challenges as presented in the co-created space and during data analysis. It is important that I contextualise the cultural dimension of the participants; therefore, during the initial suitability conversation, I will enquire of the participant their ethnicity/race & culture so that I may broadly educate

myself to their particular circumstance, particularly in respect of agency, prior to the interview.

I am aware of the explicit and implicit power differentials due in part to White British history's colonial cultures. Therefore ongoing informed consent and transparency regarding data ownership will be fundamental to the study as will my sensitivity to each participant's unique apperception particularly pertaining to childhood trauma and personal agency. I believe my decision to be inclusive will add to the richness of data generation and cross-cultural/ethnic/racial understanding of women's personal agency as potentially implicated by adverse childhood experiences.

Appendix 6

Transcript notation

Key to notation used in transcripts (researcher's own)

Description	In text notation
Short pause (3 seconds or less)
Longer pause (3-6 seconds maximum)	(<i>pause</i>)
Pauses longer than 6 seconds qualify a new line	
Emphasis of speech	<i>Italics e.g. I said I never want to do that again</i>
In-text information	<i>(italics in brackets) e.g. Mary (eldest child) said it</i>
Anonymity of activity/person	e.g. <i>*sport*</i> not hockey, <i>*wife*</i> not Jane
Discourse interjections by participant	e.g. I know it's hard, (yea) but could you?
C/T and T Gelso & Hayes model (2007)	Countertransference and transference
Speaker and time	Noted in left hand column

Sample from transcript of research session 7th April 2021 with Rebecca – online

Prior to coding, text of particular interest is highlighted in red. With a phenomenological approach the notation is kept to a minimum.

J = researcher

R= Rebecca (participant)

Who	Time	Dialogue
J	00:11	So good morning Rebecca, thank you for joining me today for this research session...I've explained the process off recording so I don't need to do that again. So the first thing I'm going to do is read out the list of ACEs and I'm going to ask you to let me know which ones apply to you, we're not going to talk about them in detail it's just for my record so I know which ones we're, you know, to have in the back of the mind kind of thing. Ok so the 10 ACEs. The first one is under the category of abuse, emotional, physical, sexual, do any of those apply to you?
R	00:55	Emotional and sexual, yep
J	01:00	Emotional and sexual, ok and the next 2 are under neglect, physical and ...and emotional
R	01:06	Yep, physical and emotional
J	01:10	Ok and the last 5 are under household dysfunction and I'm going to read them one by one because they're longer. Family member depressed or suffering with mental illness
R	01:22	yep
J	01:23	Loss of parent or carer through death or divorce
R	01:28	Yep
J	01:29	A family member in jail
R	01:31	No
J	01:32	Witnessing domestic violence
R	01:35	No
J	01:36	A family member addicted to drugs or alcohol
R	01:41	Nope
J	01:42	Alright, ok so we've got one, two, three, four, five six out of the ten there, ok so that's just for my records really ok and just to have in the back of our mind as we go through the questions today... erm ok and just to remind you that everything on the recording is only going to be heard by me. I will be transcribing it and some of the transcription may end up in the final write up but you will not be identified. I've given you a pseudonym...erm which I will be using just because it's more personal than using a number, obviously it's not your name, ok so do you feel ok to start with the first question?
R	01:25	Yea I do
J	01:26	So, at what stage in life did you recognise and acknowledge your ACEs and what was your experience of this?
R	01:40	Ok, so, gosh, I'd say that there was maybe 2 points, so as a late teenager, erm probably 16,17,18 I started to suffer with my own mental health and had an eating disorder and erm and so knew that....I just had a vague feeling like ok, and I

		<p>felt very different as well to my friends that I had at school so there was a kind...it started I guess as an unconscious, ah....I'm different in some way and erm there's something wrong with me, I suppose and then when I really I guess started to piece together what those things were about, well I've had therapy at different points in my life, the first therapy I had was when I was 19 and then erm and then, and so I'd put that in the first bit of my life and then when I started to train as a therapist and went into my own therapy, erm, it was during my training so that's when I would have been start...er...23 or 24 started my psychotherapy training and had to have therapy for four years and I ended up having therapy for 5 or 6 years actually erm cos I stayed in therapy but erm...it was really in that bigger chunk where I did the thinking and the feeling at the same time whereas before it was kind of...I knew that things when I was younger weren't great and I had a lot of symptoms but it was erm a lot of unconscious kind of emotional being in the world...yea</p>
J	04:35	<p>So it was really the training and the therapy that you had alongside it that that helped you to start really putting words to the feelings and the knowledge that you embodied... knowledge that you had...yea, ok and when you were doing your own therapy or in training was it recognised as ACEs, was the terminology ACEs used or was it experiences that were traumatic?</p>
R	05:04	<p>Yea so ACEs definitely wasn't used...yea it was, with my therapist maybe just naming things like neglect, abuse, erm naming sexual abuse naming neglect erm so those kind of words were what came out but ACEs, in fact I think when you...the first phrase that I ... I just recognised it in your research and the email came through I was like oh that feels familiar but I don't know if I've ever used those terms before and I looked them up and realised oh yea, there's an official category of these things and yea...</p>
J	05:47	<p>What was that like for you to realise that, I mean you've done all your training, you've done all your personal therapy and whilst you've clearly covered a lot of the things, actually thinking of them in the terms of adverse childhood experiences, what was that like for you to have that name if you like?</p>
R	06:04	<p>Yea, it was quite emotional actually, erm because I...realising how many of those things apply to me I was kind of like ah ok...you know, these are the...I'm familiar with that with my client work I suppose and you know I might see a client and think gosh this person's been through so much and I know that about myself but when you see it in a set of criteria I think it's quite, you know, quite different and there's some emotion there for me I think and realising, yea and just realising that yea I went through, in these categories, I've been through quite a lot of stuff, yea.</p>
J	06:42	<p>Yea...did that bring about some different kind of meaning for you or a different, a different way of looking at it?...like you say to see it...a list and you can mark off on the list and to have that list of stuff which is actually your own experience</p>
R	07:02	<p>Errrrr, is it....that's an interesting question...I think the answer is yes but I'm not quite sure I could put my finger on what specifically that, that, that is, erm I suppose just to link it to the question about, during training and being in therapy, you know that was like a slow working through of things and ...and but I was very much was in that process and know my own material, I don't think that there's much stuff in there, if anything anymore that's unconscious, I'm aware of what my stuff is so to speak, but I think it was seeing it in quite a concise, shorthand</p>

		kind of way that made me, it made me, it's just very different from going through, working through those things therapeutically and then realising, oh, I hit the criteria for these things and erm I think the impact that I'm talking about, the impact it did have, I think it's just an appreciation of how...of my own resilience, an appreciation of my own resilience I think is the main thing...
J	08:23	That feels like a powerful thing, sorry to interrupt you...that feels like a powerful thing to come to realise....a poignant thing perhaps
R	08:36	Yea, yea, it's interesting, I feel emotional just hearing you say that, yes it was poignant I suppose because I erm maybe I don't often acknowledge my strengths, my, that word resilient, maybe I don't often acknowledge that, I often think of myself as quite sensitive or emotionally, erm, yea, an emotionally sensitive person, but I don't think I acknowledge my resilience or my strength very often and I guess seeing that list and realising...I don't know what website it was but there was a pdf document, when I typed it in to Google, there was a pdf document that came up and then those, you know 10 things were listed and I realised...
J	09:22	I think it's.... where have I put it, it's just slipped down, I think...is that what you're talking about? Mmm yea
R	09:34	Yea, yea something similar to that it was more, there was a colour, it was a kind of...
J	09:39	Yea, that was in colour, I was just stingy and used the black and white printing
R	09:41	Ah, ok (both laugh)
J	09:43	It is in colour, yea
R	09:47	Yea and yea, so yea, poignant, yea, moving I guess and saddened, just emotions, quite a few emotions in that for me
J	09:57	I'm wondering if there's erm, room for both in terms of being emotional, sensitive but also strong, resilient?
R	10:09	Yea, I think there definitely is room for both and I think the world probably sees that strength in me but I don't see it so much in myself (pause) often cos I'm living as me so on the inside it's often...you know, yea, a, so I've got quite a rich inner life, lots of emotions, and I'm really reflective but I don't necessarily, I'm not on the receiving end of my own resilience in the same way that other people might, so yea, it was almost....seeing that list I was oh ...ACEs, adverse childhood experiences, this is a thing erm yea, resilience, that's definitely the word that sticks out as a realisation of me, about me
J	10:57	Yea, ok, ok...I really don't want to have to move you on as it would be interesting to carry on talking about this. This is the problem with the questions it brings up such interesting stuff but would you feel ok erm to create an image erm in whatever comes up for you in relation to the question or in relation to what we've just been talking about but something to do with you recognising and acknowledging your experience of that, just an image, not a masterpiece, just whatever comes up for you, would that be ok?
R	11:32	Yea, absolutely, yea
J	11:36	Just so you know that I'm not going to be sitting there staring at you erm, I'm going to just make some notes and I'm probably going to create an image myself of whatever comes up for me in response if you wonder I'm doing and I'll give you

		a couple of minutes warning that we're coming to 10 minutes if you do need to use the 10 minutes that's absolutely fine.
R	11:58	Ok....arrhhmmmm (R starts to create an image)
R	17:24	Ok I think I've finished Yea ok it's abstract.... Shall I show you?
J	17:37	Yes please that would be great, are you ok if I take a screen shot of it
R	17:41	Yes and I'll send you some pictures afterwards, I can scan them
J	17:44	Ah that would be fabulous, I'll take a screen shotthat's wonderful, yea, perfect...I'll just get that in there....excellent, that's come through, so I'm just going to open my screen shot so I can see it on here as well as seeing you, I think I am anyway, I made it disappear, hang on a second, yea, ok....that's so interesting. So can you tell me what it is that you've, well actually can I just ask you first of all what that was like for you erm Rebecca, doing that image, creating that image?
R	18:34	Yea (pause) it was ok cos I sort of just really just did something quite intuitive so I imagine that the meaning will come out as I talk about it. I mean I had some sense of the meaning as I was drawing it but I went more with the feeling of something in response to your question erm so it felt quite good. I, I, could really feel, cos I used the thick waxed crayons I could really feel the intensity of doing some scribbles and really pressing down quite hard erm
J	19:06	So you were really, as you were creating it, not only were you making the marks on the paper but you were feeling it erm in the intensity as well
R	19:16	Yea, because I could feel, I guess that there's yes, there's emotion there and it felt like a connected experience I think in response to you, like it felt connected so what I was doing on the page did feel quite connected to something within, yea, yea
J	19:34	And how do you erm, how do you feel as you look at the image now?
R	19:46	It's almost like it's a continuation of what we were talking about really about the resilience, that word has come back ringing in my head because I feel sad but I also feel sort of an admiration, it's quite interesting, I feel quite moved, so I feel quite sad but I also feel, there's something about the containment that I Seems...picture....the containment about these tear shapes and the emotion and ...that's contained in them.
J	20:26	So it feels holding in a way? Is there some sort of sense of...because as you look at the tear shapes they do give the sense of a container, they're containing the ...the red and the black within aren't they
R	20:45	Yea, yea, I think that's a really accurate word, a holding so that the appreciation I suppose is that...ah gosh, I don't know, is it (inaudible) it's such a mixed bag of things, it's like ugh!! I've held so much in my life... I think that's what it is, I've held so much in my life and erm and I hold so much now, I think that that, that that's still true.
J	21:19	So there's a recognition of a before and a recognition of how that in some ways is still there.
R	21:30	Yea, so what I, what I guess I see in my image is chaos on the outside and then this capacity to, to, yea... hold things internally and that is still the case now...you know, and it's literally like I was saying at the beginning, my inner life is, you know, there's often lots of emotion, lots of reflecting, lots of dialoguing with myself you know, lots of feelings...lots of feelings in relation to interactions with other people, the world, my work as a therapist and I hold all of that and I guess

		those, those tears are like this container and what I also see in it, and this is just as I'm looking now, is yea, there's this blue outside which is kind of the cool, quite a cool colour and then on the inside is this red, you know and the black and I wonder about it being anger, fire, shame, I mean it's probably lots of things, but I would say that that is how I probably again, I'm in the world, that...I'm really calmer on the outside and gentle...yea, but something has held on the inside and er...
J	23:00	And so the red and the black on the inside are all those things you just mentioned, the shame and the anger possibly and <i>(pause)</i>
R	23:08	Yea and then there's also... <i>it's with the emptiness is really purposeful</i> because I read your thing that you sent meI read it again this morning and what, something really stood out to me in your words, I can't remember if you nothingness or emptiness...
J	23:31	I put....I can tell you if you bear with me a second...and I just have to confess I managed to delete the screen shot, I don't know...
R	23:38	Ah ok well we can ...I can always.....
J	23:41	It came up with a thing...do you want to keep it or not so I said yes and then it's gone, so I don't know....
R	23:46	Shall I can hold it up again...
J	23:47	If you wouldn't mind that would be fantastic, thank you, I'm so sorry, erm let me just move the screen over a bit, just bear with me a moment, ok here we go...ok brilliant, that's great, thank you.... <i>yes, I said 'often coming from 'respectable' childhoods but have felt a kind of 'no-thing-ness' but a nothingness, a being of a no-thing...so that stood out to you</i>
R	24:26	<i>That word, yea there's something of that that just stuck out to me, and so the space wasn't, I wasn't doing it purposefully but as I was doing it I purposefully didn't fill all the space because I thought there is something about emptiness or, yea, or...yea, no-thing-ness, it's an interesting way of putting it isn't it</i>
J	24:49	And the...the... thick intense marks around that you did, what do they represent for you?
R	25:01	Well I think maybe they're like the <i>multi layered-ness of, of the things that I experienced</i> , it's hard isn't it because for me it's not like, it's not like those things are back there adverse childhood experiences, <i>they were in my childhood but it's like the threads of those things and how those things have shaped me</i> . I think are still really present in my life, now and still play out, not in abusive ways sure but the, the, <i>the remnants of those things, how I've adapted and how I relate to life is still the same so I think there, they're these chaotic multi layered, it's hard to see what colours are in there, I went over with lots of different colours</i>
J	25:54	So they're really layered, there's lots of layers within that yea, ok...
R	26:00	Yea, yea, yea, I used red and <i>black and a greeny blue and a dark purple colour and I think they're the chaos of life</i> maybe or something that I keep on the outside perhaps erm, I'm not quite sure about that, something I keep on the outside....yea....that feels like a half conscious thought....something (inaudible)
J	26:36	What feelings are coming up for you as you ponder that? The something that you keep on the outside, where are you feeling that in your body, if you are?
R	26:45	<i>Yea so I feel kind of in my stomach area but also round my throat or my cheeks erm...yea...it's about...it's something to do with using my voice erm...or not using my voice, using my voice or not using my voice...</i>

J	27:11	Is that something that's been a feature for you historically erm would you say, not being able to use your voice?
R	27:20	Oh yea, absolutely...yea, very much so and not even erm, not even like it's almost, I don't know if the word, the word pre-verbal doesn't fit but it's something like that where a person might say oh I'm feeling really angry about this but I'm just going to sit on it...it's not even like that, it's almost, maybe it's back to the nothing-ness again , it's like I know there's things to say erm but there they're so, they're not even, yea they're not even sitting here with you know, like...yea...I can't quite, well I can't put it in to words and I think that's symbolic...
J	28:09	Yea absolutely
R	28:10	...of the nature of the experience, like, you know, it's almost like some, some personal power or some ability to say no, this isn't ok or should be there and it, it more... it is now, it's not that that's totally absent in my life but I still know that erm my work lies in finding that now more often and saying no to the world, and people and putting boundaries in place...and finding my fire, so yea, not using my voice, keeping things on the outside
J	28:52	It's interesting isn't it when you think about those layered, erm, marks, how that's so dark on the outside yet you know that underneath there, there are different colours that you put down first and whilst the words might not be quite coming you've done it on the paper so you've got something there to reflect, a tangible expression or your inner world....in tangible form as something you can reflect on at your will... you know
R	29:29	Yea, yea
J	29:30	Can I, can I just...I mean I don't necessarily have to share with you my, what I've drawn...
R	29:35	I'd love to see it
J	29:35and if you don't want to see it that's fine but I just think
R	29:38	No I do
J	29:39	I've been sitting....I think you'll see why in a minute but I've been sitting here with goose bumps erm so this is what came up for me
R	29:48	Oh wow (laughs in recognition) wow....
J	29:50	So there's the red, there's the black, there's the marks, there's the...
R&J	29:54	Tears
R	29:55	Yea, wow...
J	29:55	There's the pool...pool of tears, yea
R	30:00	Yea...wow...there's some really similar themes aren't there in there...
J	30:03	I just thought....that's so...when you said about feeling connected, I was so like yea... I'm feeling that as well , I'm feeling that...yea, it's just really, yea, I'm quite gobsmacked really, when you put your image up I thought gosh, that's so...just from, just from one question
R	30:25	Yea wow
J	30:26	That coming up
R	30:26	Yea, <i>I feel quite moved</i>
J	30:29	I do too
R	30:29	Wow
J	30:30	I feel very moved, yea....

R&J	30:32	(sigh)
J	30:33	Ok so... time....(laugh) are you feeling ok to move on to the next one...do you want a break?
R	30:40	Absolutely
J	30:41	Do you need a break
R	30:42	No, I'm ok, I'm just going to find a spot I think to put this so I can kind of keep it in view as we continue to talk
J	30:49	Yea, absolutely...ok so just checking my recording things are still recording, hopefully they are...yep...so the 2 nd question is what do you understand as your personal agency and how might your ACEs have impacted its development?
R	31:21	Hmmm...shall we talk about it a bit like last time
J	31:23	Yea

Appendix 7

Inspirational poetry

The following poems represent a sample that have ones that brought me particular inspiration, comfort and/or meaning throughout part 2 of the programme. It feels important that they are recognised here.

Still I rise by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

HOKUSAI SAYS by Roger Keyes

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing.
He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it, repeat
yourself as long as it is interesting.
He says keep doing what you love.
He says keep praying.
He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient,
every one of us has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find
a way to live with fear.
He says everything is alive—
shells, buildings, people, fish,
mountains, trees, wood is alive.
Water is alive.
Everything has its own life.
Everything lives inside us.
He says live with the world inside you.
He says it doesn't matter if you draw,
or write books. It doesn't matter
if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your veranda
or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in your garden.
It matters that you care.
It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you.
Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength
is life living through you.
Peace is life living through you.
He says don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.
Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.

"HEY BLACK CHILD"
(Useni Eugene Perkins)

Hey Black Child,
Do you know who you are?
Who you really are?
Do you know you can be
What you want to be?
If you try to be
what you can be.

Hey Black Child,
Do you know where you're going?
Where you're really going?
Do you know you can learn
What you want to learn?
If you try to learn
What you can learn?

Hey Black Child,
Do you know you are strong?
I mean really strong?
Do you know you can do
What you want to do?
If you try to do
What you can do?

Hey Black Child,
Be what you can be
Learn what you must learn
Do what you can do
And tomorrow your nation will be
what you want it to be

Come sit down beside me
I said to myself
And although it doesn't make sense,
I held my own hand
As a small sign of trust
And together I sat on the fence

by Michael Leunig

You may see me struggle,
but you won't see me fall.
Regardless if I'm weak or not,
I'm going to stand tall.
Everyone says life is easy,
but truly living it is not.
Times get hard,
people struggle
and constantly get put on the spot.
I'm going to wear the biggest smile,
even though I want to cry.
I'm going to fight to live,
even though I'm destined to die.
And even though it's hard
and I may struggle through it all,
you may see me struggle...
but you will NEVER see me fall.

By Joyce Alcantara

Appendix 8

Researcher's poetry written during the research and write up phase

Bluebell Wood

Deep within the bluebell wood
there alone the fairy stood
As time stood still
she breathed clear air, until
her wings were truly rested
from the time that she invested
in amongst the blues and hues
of that precious place.

A place no mortal will 'er be,
a quiet place for her and me,
breathe a sigh for you are free
when in the bluebell wood.

Sample of researcher's haiku poems written during research and write up

The light. It is near.
But, hail storms, wild wind. Wet.
Colour mixing – joy.

Scissors cut, pens scribe
Create, no matter the day
The bulb lays dormant

Shame comes, tsunami
Volcanous lava through my veins
No! this is not I!

Old dog, what narks you?
A sign of ageing temper?
Snowflakes gently fall

Deafening refrain
The silence of your absence
Oh! how the bees buzz!

The dogs sleep, no fear.
The passage of time knows not,
Winter comes once more.

Red hen, little spring
remember how big you were?
The small child scatters grain.

Uninvited guest
Winter's dark night, again – still
Emergent bulb

Shy, the dormouse peeks
Through the snarling bark; wise tree
Autumn in the air

How are you inspire me
Pay attention to the light
Through the willow tree

Sample of researcher's haiku poems written in the first months of the Ukrainian invasion; during the write-up.

Clouds of orange sky
Poison in the air, to what end?
Then the daffodils

Sickness of the mind
Eschew the iron curtain
Snowdrops on the ground

Needles fall from the sky
A war has come to my home
Europe's dark winter

Bloodied face of courage
Evil put in, unwelcome
Yellow and blue flowers

Palpable the pain
Windows of tears to your soul
Words but dormant seeds

Fate. Are we the same?
What brings you there and I here?
Lighter evenings

February still
The enemy draws closer
Siren's haunting drone

Black sheep in convoy
Eerily through winter's mist
Twenty-four cold hours

Child, I cry for you
Pink hair, sweet smile, Polina
A rose in your name

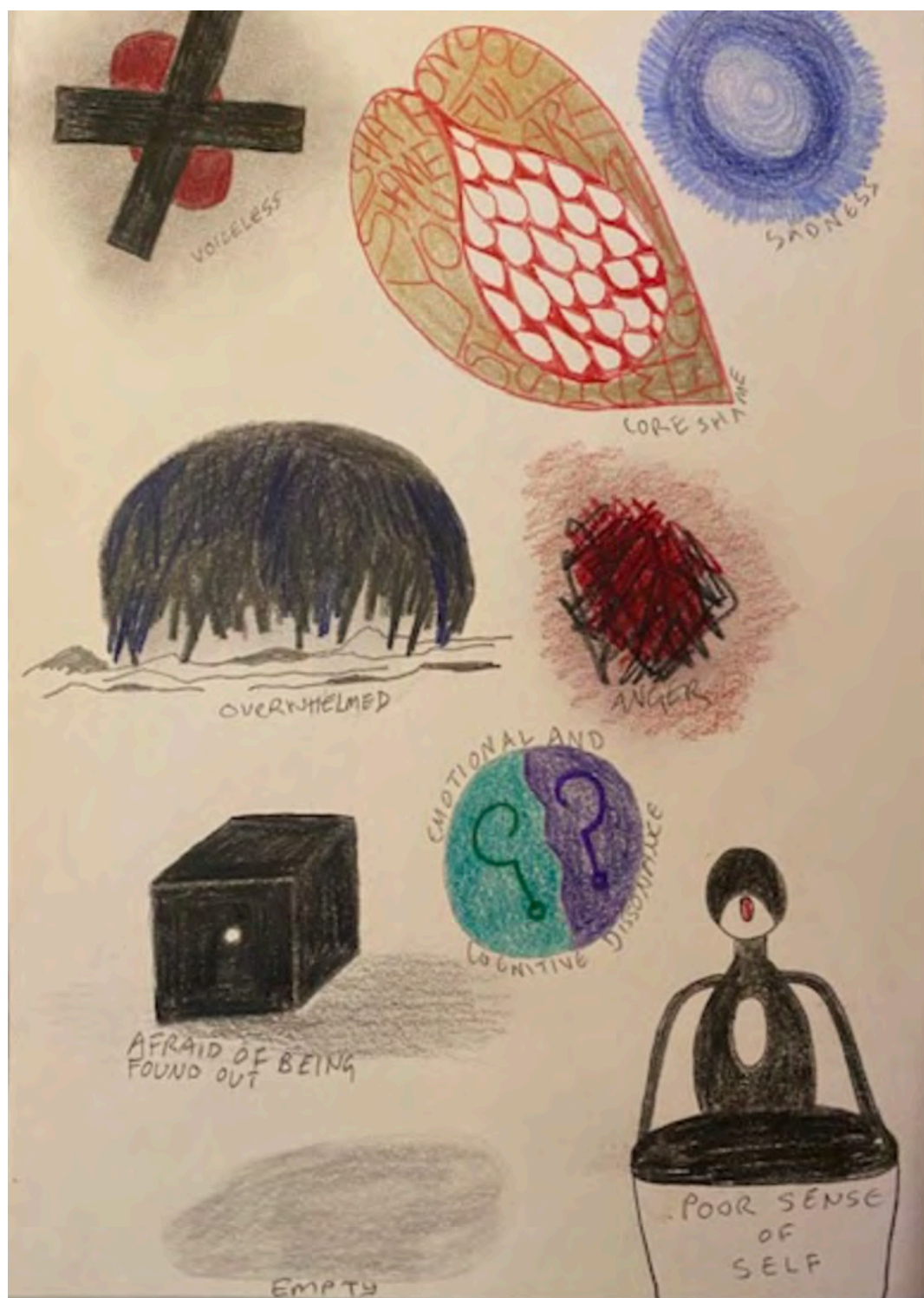
Silhouette on red
Hearts bleeding for your sorrow
Birds sing, a new day

Catastrophic death
War ravishes iced nation
'My father lives there'

My dear friend, welcome
Dismiss not your troubled mind
Rise again, bathed in sun

Appendix 9

Sample of researcher response art to Red Zone 'melting pot' contents



Appendix 10

Products

Product 1



Talking point: Returners

Therapy Today, April 2022

How do you feel about clients coming back?

‘Breaks in complex work are often necessary’

When reflecting on my therapeutic practice, I realise I have become increasingly comfortable with the phenomenon of clients returning to therapy, reminding myself that we all have different needs at different times. Some clients come into the work prepared to commit long term; for others, a few sessions will suffice; another group, me included, prefer to dip in and out as required. I recall in my early career a sense of shameful inferiority when a client decided to leave to see another therapist, only to be replaced by a feeling of superiority when they returned having not found the experience as they had imagined. As I became more experienced and developed confidence in my particular style and ability, I began to trust more in the process, and be more resolute in my belief that the client inherently knows what they need, even if they are not always cognisant of this. Latterly, my research interest has been sparked by clients who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences and the link I was noticing to the development of their personal agency. With this particular client group, breaks in the complex work are often necessary and their ability to trust when best to have them can be indicative of a client’s developing agency. While many children and young people reappear in counselling as they go through the various developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, clients may also return because they feel safe with a trusted therapist, ready to take the work to a deeper level.

Jude Adcock, arts-based counsellor, psychotherapist and supervisor

Please join our
Talking point panel!
Email therapytoday@thinkpublishing.co.uk

Returners

How do you feel about clients coming back?

'It often surprises me to hear what a client has held onto'

I recently – unusually – had a number of clients return within a few weeks of each other. Reasons for returning varied, but one client summed it up as a need to 'dock in the harbour' for a few sessions. I have noticed that returning clients are often the ones who, when they first came, expressed how reluctant and ashamed they felt about needing therapy. The return can be about exploring deeper issues over a longer period of time that they weren't ready to address the first time around. For children or adolescents, a return often signals a time of transition, such as a school move, transition to college or university, a family breakdown, change in foster placement or friendship challenges. I always start with an assessment and contracting on a return but I do find that returning clients are much quicker to get into the work – the groundwork of trust and establishing the therapeutic alliance has already been laid. It often surprises me to hear what a client has held onto and remembered from our first work together. It's wonderful to learn that they have been able to use a strategy or recall a metaphor when things have been tough and that it has helped them – it shows the power of the therapeutic work.

Georgia Swift, psychotherapist working with adults, young people and families

'Breaks in complex work are often necessary'

When reflecting on my therapeutic practice, I realise I have become increasingly comfortable with the phenomenon of clients returning to therapy, reminding myself that we all have different needs at different times. Some clients come into the work prepared to commit long term; for others, a few sessions will suffice; another group, me included, prefer to dip in and out as required. I recall in my early career a sense of shameful inferiority when a client decided to leave to see another therapist, only to be replaced by a feeling of superiority when they returned having not found the experience as they had imagined. As I became more experienced and developed confidence in my particular style and ability, I began to trust more in the process, and be more resolute in my belief that the client inherently knows what they need, even if they are not always cognisant of this. Lately, my research interest has been sparked by clients who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences and the link I was noticing to the development of their personal agency. With this particular client group, breaks in the complex work are often necessary and their ability to trust when best to have them can be indicative of a client's developing agency. While many children and young people reappear in counselling as they go through the various developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, clients may also return because they feel safe with a trusted therapist, ready to take the work to a deeper level.

Jude Adcock, arts-based psychotherapist and supervisor

'I do feel an obligation to find space for returning clients'

I enjoy working with returning clients. Some of my clients choose to start their therapy with a short-term piece of work, perhaps to learn healthy coping strategies that they can take away and add to their 'toolkit'. It is not unusual for a client to contact me months later to build on the foundations from their previous therapy. I feel pleased that they have chosen me to support them with this. Other returning clients may have had a change in circumstances or wish to increase their self-awareness. Whatever their reasons, I am curious when a past client contacts me. I enquire about their return, and we can explore what has changed, what this new piece of work might look like and what they wish to achieve. Returning to therapy can feel empowering for clients and helps support their self-care. During client endings, if they ask about the possibility of returning, I advise that they are welcome to make future contact and, if I have the availability, we would be able to work together again. If I don't have space, there is the choice of an onwards referral. I do, however, feel an obligation to find space for returning clients, particularly if we have worked together on a long-term basis. I recognise that this is something for me to reflect on in supervision – to find a balance between holding my boundaries, supporting my clients and maintaining my own self-care.

Nikki Kelly, Gestalt counsellor and supervisor in private practice



'For some clients, knowing they can return offers comfort'

I welcome returning clients to my practice as I believe that therapy should be a constant support for the maintenance of wellbeing. For some clients, knowing they can return simply offers comfort, and for others, it may be about exploring a deeper layer to the work that relates to previous themes. Many clients have said the thought of starting at the beginning with someone else can feel daunting, but if I had a full caseload, I would not feel pressured to squeeze them in. Generally, they are happy to wait until I have availability. When I worked for a charity that supported women with complex mental health needs, we often saw clients return many times, although they could rarely see the same therapist. It seemed to work well, possibly because the work was shorter term, and it also offered an opportunity for clients to experience a different therapeutic modality. In my EAP work, the issue of returning clients is more complex, as most EAPs have restrictions in place that prevent therapists from working privately with EAP clients for at least 12 months, if at all, after the initial EAP work has finished. If a client asks whether they can continue with me privately, I manage it carefully, explaining the regulations and reasons for them, and I also let the EAP know that the conversation has taken place.

Gemma Mitchell, counsellor and supervisor in private practice

Talking point

'My returning clients also have the option of single-session therapy'

My clients have invariably experienced trauma, either in their childhood or through intergenerational trauma, so to have the possibility of coming back if that's what feels right, and to know this is an option, may be appropriate. When attachments have been painfully lost or broken, it's a privilege to offer clients the very best of care, whatever that looks like to them. For some, it's good to move on and have the opportunity to experience a relationship with another therapist. The body of work we have undertaken helps them create another connection, building on what we've shared. I like the freedom of private practice to reach a clinical decision based on ongoing assessment in collaboration with each client. As I progress in my career and gain confidence in working more creatively, I can focus on what feels right for each and every client, trusting in their agency and our relationship. My returning clients also have the option of a single session rather than being committed to weekly therapy once more. It can also result in them being seen more quickly, as having to wait for a regular space can take a while when the majority of my work is long term. I hold a specific space in my diary for this.

Savita Nayyar, therapist in private practice

Product 2

Researcher contributions to Metanoia Research Academy 2022



**Research Academy 25th February:
Enjoying Research in Counselling and
Psychotherapy**

Seminar (3.30-5pm): Bumps, bruises and beyond: implementation tales from the student researcher.

Presenters: Metanoia D(Psych) by Professional Studies: candidates from Cohort 21

Bumps, Bruises and Beyond. Cohort 21's seminar offers a collection of experiential vignettes of challenges encountered during the creating and implementation of research designs, their impact on the researcher and how they were overcome.

Illustrations include: how do we challenge the complexity of philosophical approaches when there are so many variations, exploring this with confidence and not feeling like a phoney?; the profound political impact of one researcher's investigation into bullying and harassment in their organisational setting; applying a data analysis method that has no pre-defined epistemological positioning and creating a bespoke research design; responses to the pragmatic and personal impact of life events (e.g. Covid, grieving or mental health issues) on the research process; the challenge of embodied phenomenology; participant sampling and gatekeeping dilemmas; the implementation of an approach to phenomenological interviewing. The theme through this seminar is relationships: between academic rigour and creativity, the pragmatic and the personal, self-care and humility, and the vital importance of peer support. Cohort 21 promote 'resilience, endurance, perseverance and crisps' as essential qualities for psychotherapists to enjoy and overcome the bumps and bruises of the research experience.

- 1) *Applying a data analysis method that has no predefined epistemological positioning and creating a bespoke research design.*

After months, no, years of musing over my many ideas, going around and around in circles and sensing with crestfallen disappointment when the latest one was not *quite* right I finally had a lightbulb moment. All the threads came together and the direction of my final research project became clear. In a nutshell I would be researching women's adverse childhood experiences, curious to understand if these experiences had impacted the development of their personal agency and how this

may lead them to mask or as I term it 'save face'. The rather agonising process was now over and I could just get on and do it ...right? Wrong.

It was simple enough. As an arts-based therapist I knew art would play a part in my research so the obvious one to choose was arts-based research (ABR) using artistic inquiry. Yet to be congruent to the methodology I would need to present my findings solely through artistic representation. This wasn't quite what I had in mind. Hmmm. I also wanted the study to be phenomenological as I was interested in the participants' lived experience of the trauma in their childhood. But this could not be a purely phenomenological piece of research as I already had my own subjective experiences and a marked impression from the countless clients who had also sparked my interest in this subject. I could not be entirely free to let the phenomena in question reveal themselves untainted. Hmmm again. I also knew that I wanted to ask questions, invite image creation and that I did not want to interpret but rather dwell with what emerged during the research sessions so that the themes would emerge for themselves. And given that I already had some preconceived ideas and personal experiences that would be brought to the research through a heuristically informed and incorporated parallel self-study I knew a clearly set out and structured methodology such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) would not quite work. So what now?

I considered several approaches including grounded theory, IPA, ABR and Heuristic Inquiry but nothing *felt* quite right. Cognitively I realised I could probably 'make do and amend' enough to meet the requirements of a prescribed methodology but felt strongly that the research design needed to fit my study and not the other way around. I chose to listen to my embodied sense and realised my only option was to create a research design that brought together the elements needed to meet my particular study. I had to create a bespoke research design. Risky but I like a challenge.

And so, alongside trying to grapple with the quagmire of philosophical positioning (another big headache), I returned to the grass roots of my research study scrutinising what it was that I wanted to know. I knew it needed to include the creative arts and phenomenology alongside a data analysis tool that would enable flexibility and allow for the use of *a priori* themes. Template Analysis, a form of thematic analysis fitted my requirement and with no predefined epistemological or philosophical positioning allowed me to formulate a stance that felt congruent to my beliefs.

I mulled over ideas and after several weeks and many iterations finally came up with a research design to help me in my epistemological endeavour:

An arts-based phenomenological inquiry using Template Analysis as the (stand-alone) tool for analysing my data.

This moment was not only joyful but my risk was validated at the PAP and in the feedback for my Learning Agreement whereby the creativity in my design was noted with positivity.

2) Neurodiversity

1. What was the research challenge you encountered?

For as long as I can remember I have struggled with concentrating and retaining information. This has been most apparent in recent years when in group situations and discussions are taking place. I have always felt that I've missed something, not been present – how did they *know* that thing? How do people know what's going on? How do they manage to sit so still and appear so focussed? I have long felt stupid and more recently quite the academic imposter living in fear I will be 'found out' as incompetent and stupid. I often feel I don't fit in and find joining in difficult. I always feel on the periphery of any group. These issues were omnipresent during the research challenges during year 1 at Metanoia and my impulsive drive to nail down my research plan urgently drove me to distraction.

I had to consciously take time out to reflect on my doctoral journey and what this diagnosis would mean. I had to learn to trust in the doctoral process but more importantly learn to trust in myself. If I could not trust myself to *know*, how would I be able to trust the analysis of my data? I created a bespoke research design so I have had to be able to trust or even take a leap of faith that it will deliver as a way of discovering new knowledge. My research is born of personal experience so by engaging in a heuristically influenced process of immersion, incubation and explication the phenomena to be re-researched were illuminated and the focus of my inquiry crystallised through a creative synthesis of the sensorial, imaginal and a strong desire for justice.

Last year a cohort friend who could see I was struggling suggested I explore some possibilities and sent me a link to an online ADHD test. I scored highly so booked in with a psychiatrist for assessment. I was diagnosed with combined ADHD which means I struggle with attentiveness but am also pre-disposed to hyperactivity and impulsivity. The psychiatrist said it was almost certainly developmentally driven due to multiple traumas in my childhood.

2. How did this impact you personally and on your research process?

It was actually a huge relief. Over the following weeks and months I began to see myself and my life through a new lens. Whilst I also experienced some anger it gave me so many answers and I was able to vindicate myself from years of believing I was stupid. I recall every single school report implying I was bright but didn't concentrate, I didn't try, I daydreamed. My failings, in no uncertain terms, were all my fault and I bore that responsibility wholeheartedly. And so I was sent to boarding school to continue to fail, only finding significance through risky behaviours which in turn felt very shameful. I carried this shame, added to my underachievement shame right through school and into my 30's and into my counselling training. I eventually and very surprisingly found myself at Cambridge to study for a master's degree, not ever having been to university before. I then 'somehow' managed to join Cohort 21 at Metanoia and so the shame of my perceived inadequacies really went to town. Even if something I did turned out reasonably well I could rationalise it as a fluke.

That is until the diagnosis only last year. I consider it now as the day my life began. It's not about having a label, I don't need a label. But I have been given an opportunity to get to know myself. Understand myself. Forgive myself. I am learning to be compassionate towards myself and embrace my oddities, my impulses and use my extreme hyperactiveness to my advantage. I still find friendships challenging. I still procrastinate terribly. But now I do so with the knowledge that my 'turbo drive' will eventually kick in and not only will I get the job done but I will enjoy the challenge rather than view it as a failing. An advantage of my hyper-focus came when I was able to analyse my data for weeks over the summer with the need for very few interruptions. I'm like my Doberman with a new juicy bone. I don't let go.

Nothing practical has actually changed but my attitude towards myself is very different. I accept wholeheartedly that I am odd, that I struggle with certain things and definitely with people. But I now accept that I am ok enough. It has also helped my family make more

sense of me and when I pick up a book to read whilst they talk to me they no longer think I'm just being rude. It's not an excuse for anything but having ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity DIFFERENCE) does offer an explanation.

3. What solution did you find to address the challenge? Who and what helped?

I sought help from the disability advisor at Metanoia and found my cohort and members of Cohort 20 to be particularly supportive. I don't like a fuss so I largely manage it myself. I am unable to have the suggested medications so instead walk every morning and drink copious amounts of Pepsi Max (the caffeine stimulant paradoxically calms me down). What has helped most is the self-acknowledgement that I am neuro-diverse and that I do have challenging behaviours. But it is ok. It is what it is and I have learned to be more compassionate towards myself. I don't now default so readily to 'it's because I'm stupid' or 'there's something wrong with who I am'.

4. What learning/value did you take from this experience? Can you describe this in one brief statement to give the audience (no more than 2 sentences please)?

I have learnt that it's ok to be different. A diagnosis such as mine doesn't have to be a negative experience. I have learnt to embrace my difference rather than see it as the enemy. For the first time I feel integrated into one person. I have learnt I am able to find ways to study, I just need to ensure the conditions facilitate this.

5. Which research stage does this challenge best fit?

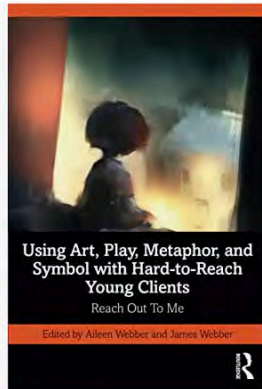
F – importance of self-awareness and good support.

6. Which theme does this dilemma fit? If a new theme please describe.

Both a and b.

Product 3

Book chapter (7) in print (December, 2022)



Using Art, Play, Metaphor, and Symbol with Hard-to-Reach Young Clients: Reach Out To Me

by [Aileen Webber](#) and James Webber | 30 Dec 2022

Paperback

£24⁹⁹

Pre-order Price Guarantee.

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This title will be released on
December 30, 2022.

Contributors

Jude Adcock is an arts-based counsellor, psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, academic mentor and Doctoral researcher based near Cambridge. After studying for her Diploma in Adlerian Counselling she studied for her master's degree at the University of Cambridge before commencing Doctoral studies at The Metanoia Institute. Jude is passionate about encouraging the development of personal agency, by using the creative arts, in adults and young people who have suffered from adverse childhood experiences. She enjoys working with children, adolescents and adults. Regularly contributing to therapeutic journals, Jude loves to write and enjoys playing the violin and cello.

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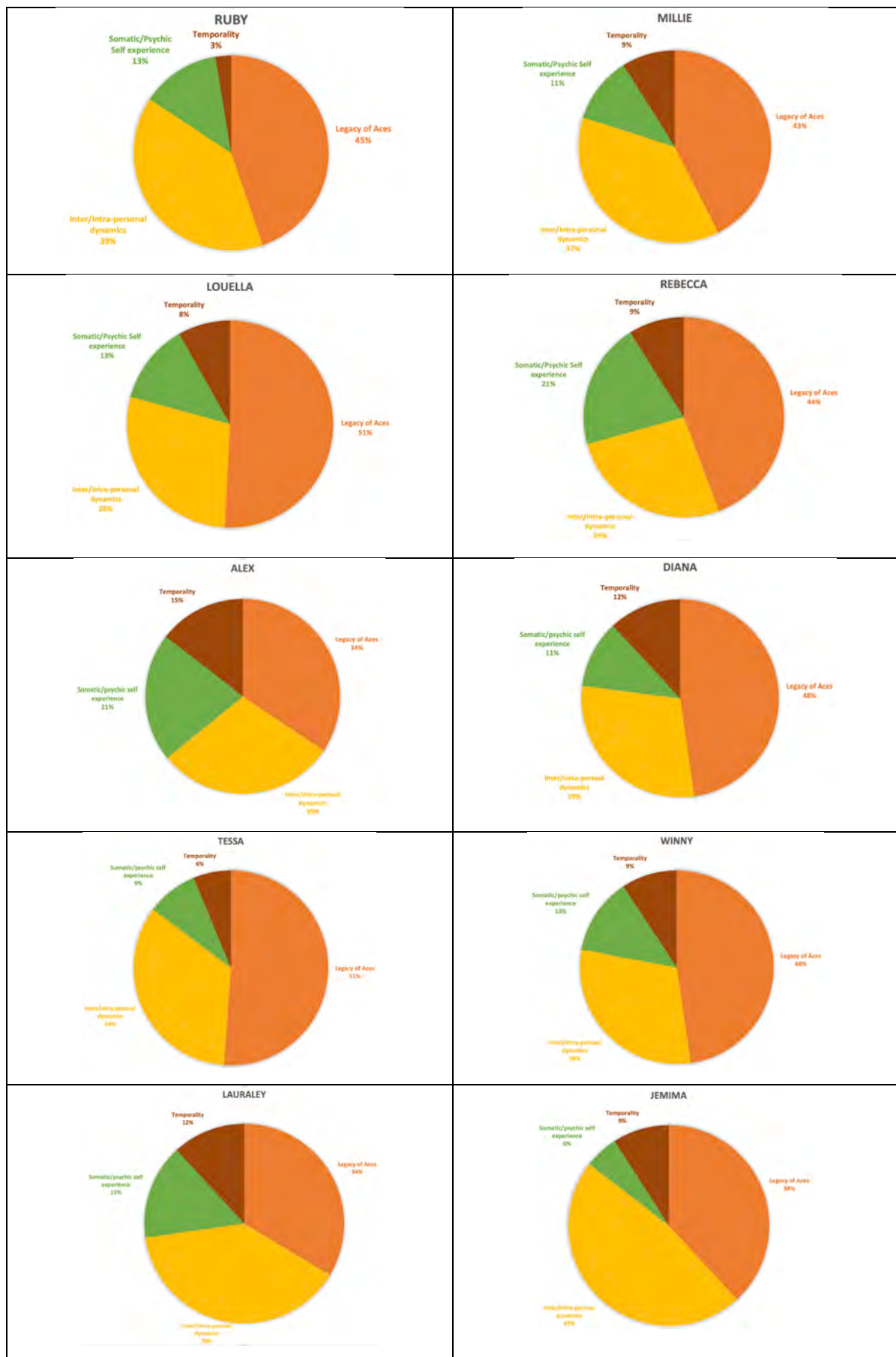
Appendix 11

Theme occurrence further information

Although this is a qualitative study, I chose to add into the appendix a small quantitative element by demonstrating the number of times the top-level theme along with *all* its sub-themes in minutia detail were indicated and/or interpreted by the researcher in each participant's transcript. This is in line with van Manen's third approach to isolating thematic aspects: the detailed reading approach (2016c, p. 93). It is noteworthy the number of instances did not mean all occurrences were relevant to answering the research questions or of particular interest. However, to satisfy my curious nature this information was of interest to me and, I believe adds rigour to the study by adding to, rather than detracting from the qualitative stance. The following table shows the number of times a top-level or sub-theme featured in each participants' data set.

Themes		Ruby	Millie	Louella	Rebecca	Alex	Diana	Tessa	Winny	Lauraley	Jemima
1	LA	34	57	93	74	45	52	90	41	37	21
2	IID	30	50	52	44	39	32	60	26	43	26
3	SPS	10	15	23	34	28	12	15	11	17	3
4	Te	2	12	15	15	19	13	11	8	13	5

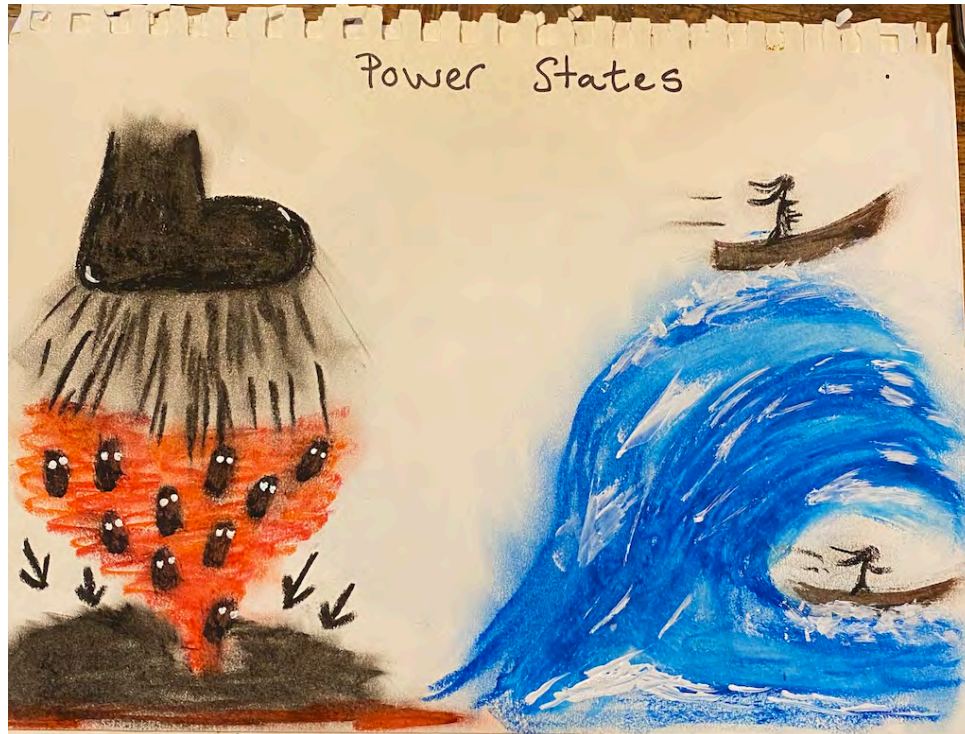
The following graphs turn the data from the table above in to an easy-to-glance-at graph demonstrating visually the distribution of themes and sub-themes per participant.



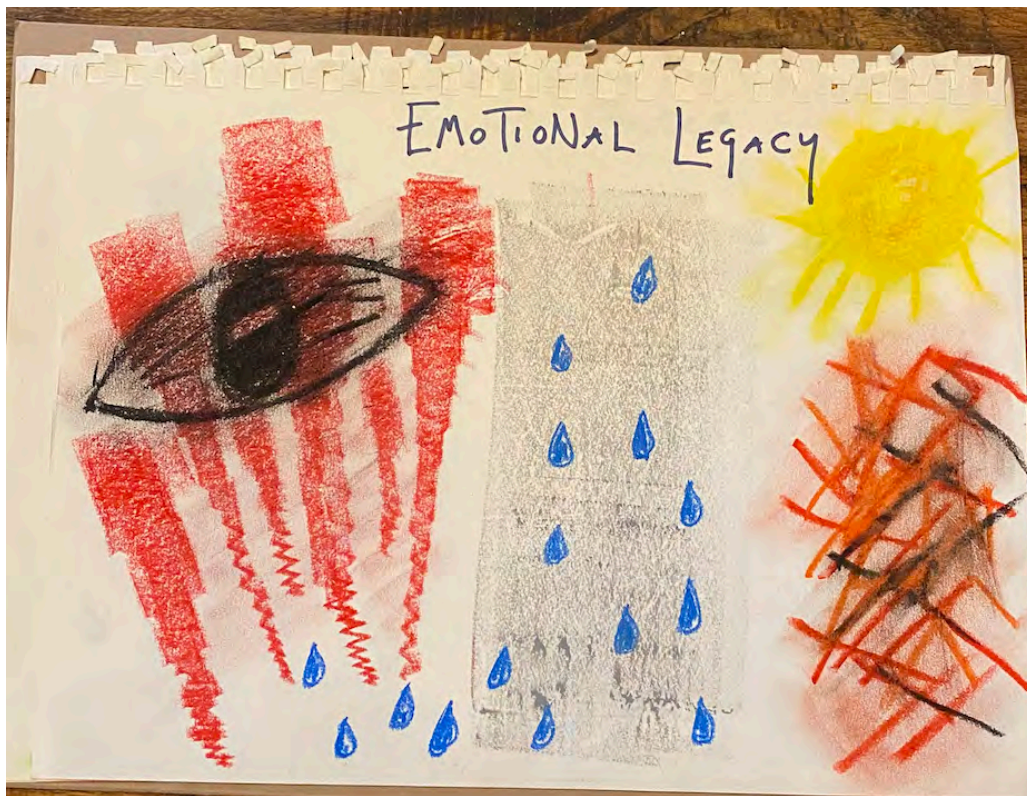
The figures and graphs represent my interpretation of the participant themes during the data analysis. It is with awareness that I realise another day, another researcher and the responses may differ, resulting in a different set of graphs. What they do demonstrate is that all the participants were, to varying degrees, affected by ACEs, the impact on the development of their personal agency and the need to save face. Experience is subjective and the graphs represent snapshots of time as remembered and recalled in response to the interview questions and images created.

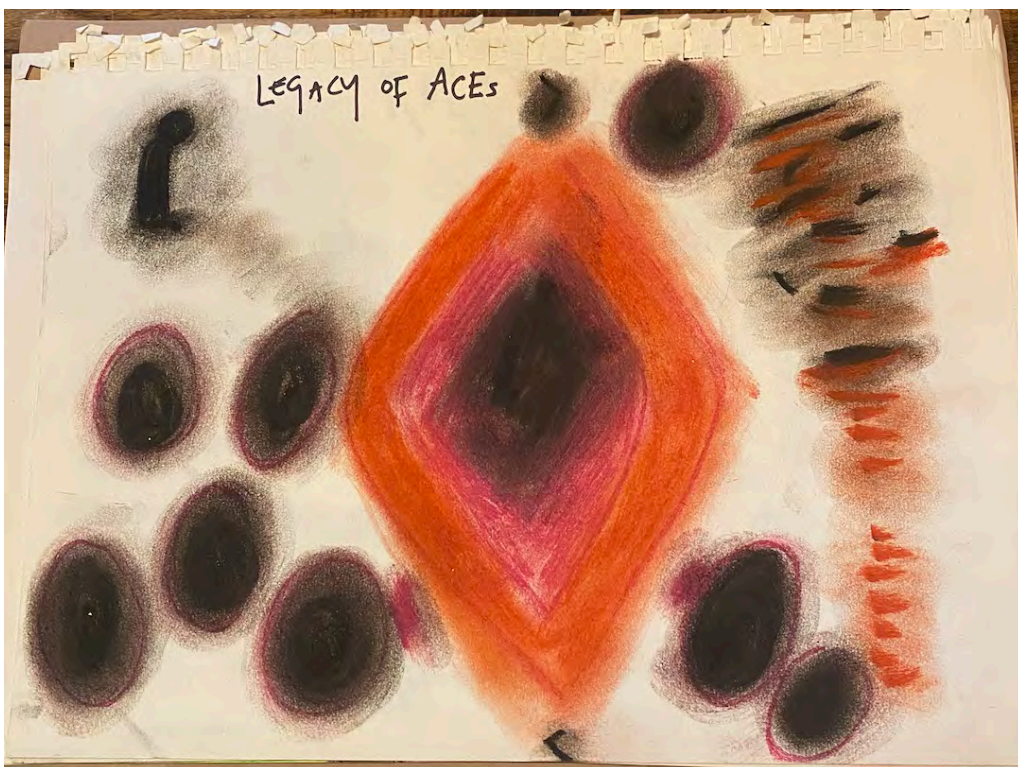
Appendix 12

Researcher's Memory Theatre from initial themes





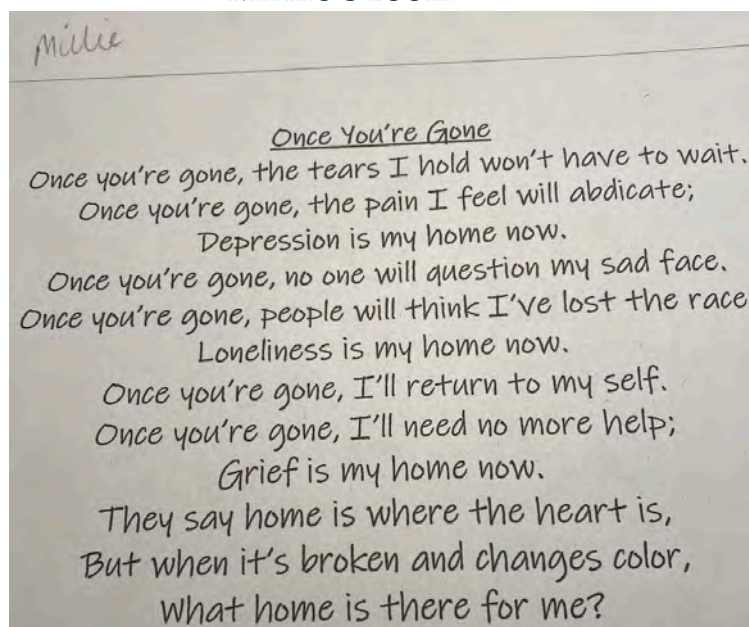




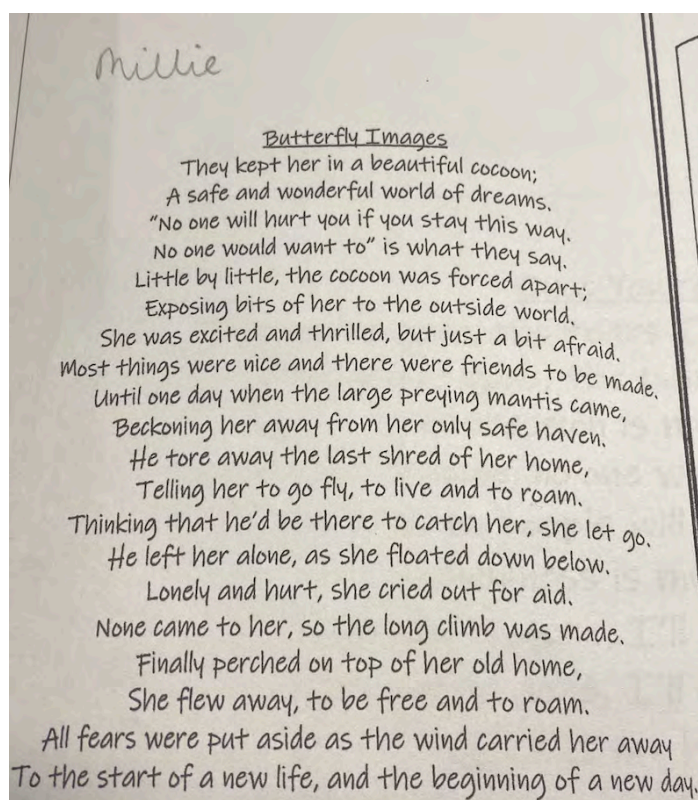
Appendix 13

Poems from Memory Theatre Rooms (Findings chapter)

Millie's room



By S.V. Brosius



By S.V. Brosius

Winny's room

winny

XII

Hell is neither here nor there
Hell is not anywhere
Hell is hard to bear.

It is so hard to dream posterity
Or haunt a ruined century
And so much easier to be.

Only the challenge to our will,
Our pride in learning any skill,
Sustains our effort to be ill.

To talk the dictionary through
Without a chance word coming true
Is more than Darwin's apes could do.

Yet pride alone could not insist
Did we not hope, if we persist,
That one day Hell might actually exist.

In time, pretending to be blind
And universally unkind
Might really send us out of our mind.

If we were really wretched and asleep
It would be easy then to weep,
It would be natural to lie,
There'd be no living left to die.

By W.H. Auden

Lauraley's room

LIVE

The Courage of Shutting-up

The courage of the shut mouth, in spite of artillery!
The line pink and quiet, a worm, basking.
There are black discs behind it, the discs of outrage,
And the outrage of a sky, the lined brain of it.
The discs revolve, they ask to be heard –

Loaded, as they are, with accounts of bastardies.
Bastardies, usages, desertions and doubleness,
The needle journeying in its groove,
Silver beast between two dark canyons,
A great surgeon, now a tattooist,

Tattooing over and over the same blue grievances,
The snakes, the babies, the tits
On mermaids and two-legged dreamgirls.
The surgeon is quiet, he does not speak.
He has seen too much death, his hands are full of it.

So the discs of the brain revolve, like the muzzles of cannon.
Then there is that antique billhook, the tongue,
Indefatigable, purple. Must it be cut out?
It has nine tails, it is dangerous.
And the noise it flays from the air, once it gets going!

No, the tongue, too, has been put by,
Hung up in the library with the engravings of Rangoon
And the fox heads, the otter heads, the heads of dead rabbits.
It is a marvellous object –
The things it has pierced in its time.

But how about the eyes, the eyes, the eyes?
Mirrors can kill and talk, they are terrible rooms
In which a torture goes on one can only watch.
The face that lived in this mirror is the face of a dead man.
Do not worry about the eyes –

They may be white and shy, they are no stool pigeons,
Their death rays folded like flags
Of a country no longer heard of,
An obstinate independency
Insolvent among the mountains.

By Sylvia Plath

Lauraley's room

Lauraley

Heart of Steel

I wish I had a heart of steel
So I wouldn't have to feel
The sting of your words,
The pain of your rejection;
Vulnerable.

I wish I had a heart of steel
So nothing would be real.
The world would seem new,
The people would be few;
Tranquility.

I wish I had a heart of steel
So I wouldn't have to feel.

By S.V. Brosius

Alex's Room

Family Web

A spider where you point your gaze:
brothers, tidied for battle, pinned
unarmed to the floor, ready for the killing

in them to reveal itself, not yet hard in their ways.
It will come. Your sisters are younger,
unknowing of the consequences of growing —

the absolution needed to harbour death.
The room spins, creatures scurry
under dust particles in corners,

leather strap stroked for the prettiest child.
You know fear. The boys will too.
Your sisters keep reaching to the highest wall for it

by Maeve McKenna

Appendix 14

Findings overflow

It became apparent on consultation with an academic mentor that I had given far too many examples for the findings chapter yet I wanted to attend to as much of the participant data generation as possible. It was therefore decided that I would select data that I wished to present in the body of the work and place the remainder in the appendix. I changed the format slightly in the body of the work but here my *raw, incomplete and unedited* reflections are under the title:

Researcher's Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection (HPR)

Diana

Diana described how she knew instinctively something wasn't right when she was younger but was so trusting that she just did whatever she was told. It wasn't until her 20's that she recognised the effects of her childhood adversity. Her early experiences of therapy were unhelpful, leaving her with a sense that if this represented therapy then she wanted to provide something different which ultimately led to her own training. Diana was visibly moved to tears as she reflected on her experiences.

Diana's described how the experience of creating her image helped her:

"I think it was helpful in the fact that it made me feel that it is where it needs to be, it's in the past. When I was younger I knew **it took up so much space within me**. I think that I thought... sort of like it just felt like when I was telling you about how the glove fits...and it really does fit. And I think in the centre it kind of explored some of the negatives...it just...I think it was to explore a bit of a journey, that's what it felt like, down the centre there was a

bit of a journey...but recognising... I know it's impacted on me because the feeling that it still brings up."



Diana Q1

"The rest feels like...it's full of growth and it feels like spreading the seeds...and it just felt freeing...it feels like a balloon should feel, light and free."

I share my image with Diana to which she responds:



Researcher's response to Diana Q1

"It's seeds again...and actually looking at that image, it just...the two people in the box...the first thing that came to mind for me was there was me and

my brother...because it was just the two of us that it affected all the time...but he was the one who hasn't really been able to move on from the emotional side of it."

Researcher's HPR

Diana's words "it took up so much space within me" and "affected all the time" feel essential to her experience. To feel so full and consumed by the difficult experiences would leave little room for healthy development. Indeed Diana felt her education suffered leaving her with a sense of not achieving her academic potential. However I am also struck by an apparent connectedness that Diana appears to have felt with her brother; a sense of 'we are in this together.' Diana had to look after her brother when she was young, feeling propelled into a parental role that's stayed with her throughout life. Her brother, she feels, has not been able to heal emotionally from the experience and I am left wondering what meaning this may have for Diana? I go back to the image and look it anew. I close my eyes and allow the image and its evocations to wash over me. I am struck by the contrast of the colour against the darkness. Images of art that might originate from sub-Saharan Africa come to mind. I look to the literature and find that there are five major elements that characterise African art which immediately I sense link back to Diana's image:

African art	Diana's image
Youthfulness – colourful, symbols of labour and fertility which indicate hope.	Full of growth and spreading seeds.
Luminosity – bright colours on a smooth surface.	Bright colours stand out on a smooth black surface.

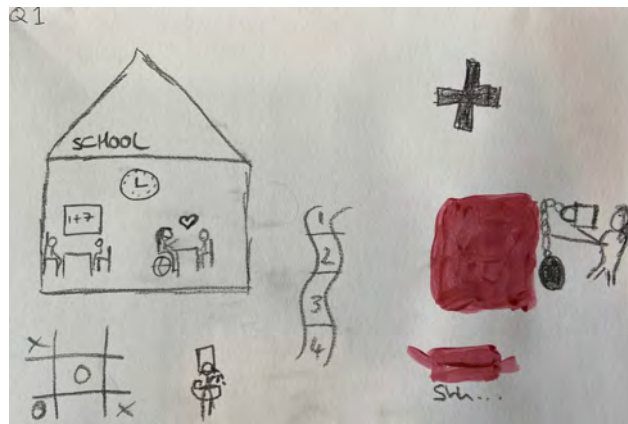
Self-composure – art looks cool and calm reflecting characteristics of the artist.	The use of blue, lilac/white brings a sense of calm alongside the uniform shape. I experienced Diana as calm throughout the interview.
Resemblance to a human being – inspired by reality and humans, a spiritual quality.	The shape is that of a hand, a reality and part of the human form.
Complexity of details and composition – fine detail, structure and quality.	There is a lot of attention to detail in the patterning and the structure is uniform.

While historically the African artist has been thought of as anonymous (Willett, 2002) particularly in Western African art there is dual emphasis placed on both the individual artist's expression and the link to the work of their predecessors (Bassani, 2012; Willett, 2002) . This leads me to wonder if the growth and reaching seen in Diana's image can be understood in terms of the collective unconscious, a central tenet of Jung's psychology that ultimately led to the break from Freud (P. Goss, 2015). The collective unconscious can be described as a *“reservoir of shared human images, instincts and experiences, beneath the personal unconscious where archetypal influences have their source”* (Willett, 2002, p. 22).

Red Zone: Incapable, overwhelmed.

Ruby

It was a poignant moment in our session when Ruby recognised that through feeling silenced she had also felt trapped.



Ruby Q1

“...and then erm **the shh is essentially a bit of tape across a mouth....both home and school, neither were safe...**”

I wondered if there was something about being voiceless or silenced in some way?

“Yea trappedbecause....the reason I think I have so much anxietyis because I didn’t share how I felt about things the first day of infant school.”

Ruby explains:

“...the image above is like a big ...erm... box **almost like feeling trapped and having this weight that I felt from the chain and the padlocks that I, you know, was carrying and dragging around with me.** ”

Researcher’s HPR

As I look at the image I am aware of the apparent polarities. The school initially appears fairly typical – a sense of time, connectedness and love between Ruby (in the wheelchair) and her sister. He sister was regularly pulled out of class to support Ruby when she had been “**placed in the sink with the taps on**”, seen in the image to the right of the noughts and crosses. In this game of noughts and crosses there is no

winner, no loser. Yet the scene to the right of the image feels dark, fragmented and disempowering.

I'm reminded of a scene from the screen adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* where Eden and Isaac, servants of the dystopian nation Gilead, both disempowered and shamed, are plummeted from height into a swimming pool. A ball and chain at their ankles to weigh them down until they drown. Again a sense of powerlessness, of others having control. As I close my eyes I draw my attention to Ruby's image. I cannot move away from the piece of tape representing Ruby's voicelessness. I am struck by a sense that this is the ultimate in saving face, such is the disintegration of self that there is no face at all.

Red Zone: Trapped, voiceless, powerless, fragmented self, something wrong with who I am.

Tessa

Recalling her experience of realising she had ACEs took Tessa back to an incident where breaking her arm led to a hospital visit. Wearing a princess skirt that had been made for her by an aunt, Tessa recalled the man looking down at her and pushing her from behind and wondering if the sexual abuse had already begun as she remembered:

“...because I remember how profoundly I did not want to lie down flat.”



Tessa Q1

As Tessa looked at the image I asked:

“What feeling comes up for you now a you think about that and you look at the image you’ve created here?”

She replied:

“I’m feeling...as I often did as a child, unable to control what happens...in someone else’s power and control because I certainly couldn’t get off the trolley. And they did eventually make me like down....I wasn’t worried about the bendy arm. I didn’t want to lie down and as a child I often felt speechlessly helpless but often angry.”

“You could feel it; there’s quite an embodied sense of that now isn’t there....you had no control?”

I wondered if I was too leading with my words but Tessa’s answer was concise.

“No control. No.”

Researcher HPR

I can remember the embodied sense of palpable fear I felt at witnessing the emergence Tessa's image during the face to face interview. A feeling of being trapped and unable to move, a fearful feeling I experienced as a child (and still as an adult) visiting the dentist. As Tessa apologised for her "terribly rough" drawing I recall the starkness of her illustration of and how a few seemingly simple pencil marks on paper could paradoxically convey her feelings of powerlessness so powerfully. I was particularly struck by Tessa's words "speechlessly helpless but often angry" and pondered how a child who feels so helpless they have no voice manifests their anger. Such was Tessa's determination not to lie down she forsook the pain of her broken arm, instead remaining with her held up, vigilant and hyper alert to potential danger as depicted in the image. Was this her anger turned inward as a motivator for change? And forsaking the pain gave her a sense of power over her body and the situation she found herself in? I wonder if my sense of fear was a parallel process evoked by Tessa's fear of exhibiting her anger in the hospital; I had also contained my fear in our research session just as she had contained hers in the hospital.

Red Zone: Powerlessness, voiceless, fear, anger.

Rebecca

Significant for Rebecca was that she had never before recognised her childhood traumas as ACEs. Seeing the list to ACEs that I had sent out brought her a new realisation of what she had been through and gave her an appreciation of her own strength and resilience. On creating her image, she remarked:

"I could really feel the intensity of doing some scribbles and really pressing down quite hard. I guess that there's emotion there and it felt like a

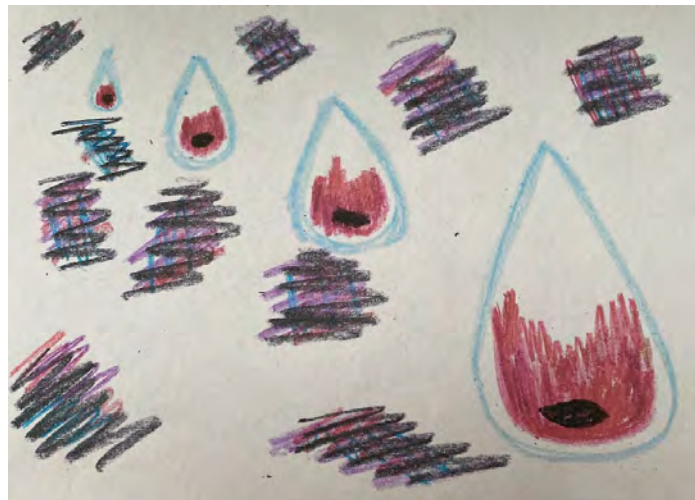
connected experience I think I response to you, like it felt connected so what I was doing on the page did feel quite connected to something within."

I ask Rebecca how she feels:

"...I feel sad but I also feel there's something about the **containment**...the containment about these tear shapes and the emotion that contained in them."

Rebecca continues:

"What I see in my image is **chaos on the outside and then this capacity to hold things internally**.....those tears are like this container...there's this blue on the outside which is kind of the cool, and then on the inside is this red, and the black and **I wonder about it being anger, fire and shame.**"



Rebecca Q1

"...and then there's also...it's with... the emptiness is really purposeful...something that really stood out for me....**the nothingness, the no-thing-ness or emptiness.**"

Rebecca continues to describe how she purposefully didn't fill all the space because the emptiness or no-thing-ness felt important. She then goes on to describe the multi-layered marks:

“...these [darker marks] are chaotic, multi layered...it's hard to see what colours are in there, I went over with lots of different colours. I used red and black and a greeny blue and a dark purple colour and I think they're the chaos of life maybe or something that I keep on the outside perhaps...I'm not quite sure...”

I am wondering about Rebecca's embodied sense of this experience?

“Yea, so I feel kind of in my stomach area but also round my throat or my cheeks....it's something to do with using my voice...or not using my voice.”

I ask Rebecca if she would like to see my image as I am struck by the similarity:

“I'd love to see it. Wow...there's some really similar themes aren't there in there....I feel quite moved.”



Researcher's response image Q1

Researcher HPR

Rebecca's tear shapes have a pale blue outline suggesting that, if these are a representation of her, that this is the image she projects out to *the world*, an expression used often throughout the interview, perhaps signifying her human need for social connection. Rebecca suggests that the emotions of anger and shame may be contained inside the teardrops perhaps ignited by a fire to keep them burning inside of her; the anger serving as a reminder to move forwards towards that which is better but hindered by the shame of an unknowing Self with a fragile existence. It was important for Rebecca not to fill all the available space on the page. The sense of no-thing-ness, a phrase had particular meaning for Rebecca, perhaps signifying that although she acknowledged she's come a long way, the healing is ongoing.

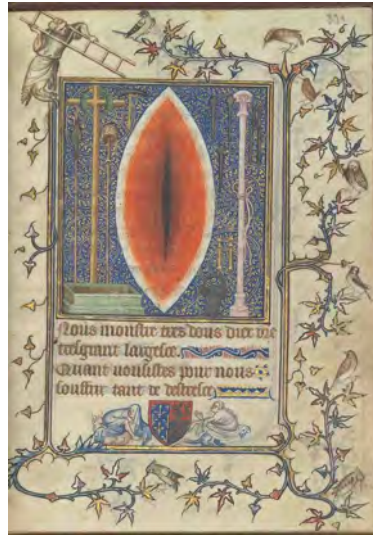
As I reflect on Rebecca's experience of the "[intensity of doing some scribbles and really pressing down quite hard](#)" and what meaning this may hold for her I am reminded of words from Czesław Miłosz poem *The Separate Notebooks* (1986):

*The bright side of the planet moves towards darkness
And the cities are falling asleep, each in its hour.
And for me, now as then, it is too much,
There is too much world.*

It is as if Rebecca's innate brightness and connection to the world has been eclipsed by a temporal darkness so powerful that now, in our session, as it was for her in childhood, the world is just too overwhelming.

My response image evokes a similar sense of containment yet here the anger erupts from what looks like a and turns into the tears of sadness she expressed. I am

reminded of the images often found in Medieval Christian prayer books depicting Christ's wound yet striking a remarkable similarity to a woman's vulva.



(Le Noir (artist), 1349)

With Rebecca's words in mind "[chaos on the outside and then this capacity to hold things internally](#)" I am then taken to the image of Baubo, the ancient goddess depicted with her head placed directly onto her legs, a symbol of sexual liberation and fertility. I have a sense that Rebecca's healing will culminate in a re-birth of Self.



Baubo

(self.pottedhistory.com)

Red Zone: Anger, shame, no-thing-ness/emptiness, voiceless

Winny

For Winny, discovering in her late 20's that she had suffered ACEs brought validation:

"So it started to give me some validation of why I was so messed up...you've been through this, and you've been through that, so this is why....probably a bit like fireworks."

Winny created her image:



Winny Q1

“...so the fireworks are like, you know, like light bulb moments when things make sense, but what happens is it’s almost like...**that’s me in the middle, clinging on for dear life, going round and round and round** and all the adverse childhood experiences are stopping me from getting ...so these are all people...”

I ask how Winny feels as she looks at the image?

“I feel quite sad. It looks almost trapped in there.”

“..and that brings a sadness to you when you think about that?”

“Yes”

“And this is *your* experience.”

“Yes”

I created an image in response to our dialogue. Winny indicated that she would like to see it.



Researcher response to Q1

“Do you know what I really like about that? Can I say what I really like about it?”

“Yes of course.” – I’m interested that Winny is almost seeking permission.

“I love that it starts off really bleak and dark...and then they almost look like flowers at the top; sun shining through them and the flowers have grown from the darkness.”

Researcher HPR

The sense of being trapped is profound. Winny’s image shows her stuck in a spiral of what feels like never ending pain. Winny spent her formative years in foster care being moved from one placement to the next. The sense of her “clinging on for dear life” evokes a feeling of desperation yet a surprisingly strong sense of survival – she’s not letting go; the clinging signifies that no matter the pain, no matter how trapped she felt, there was something about life that felt worth holding on for. A sense of ‘if I can get through this.....’ The fireworks may depict fear and perhaps

anger but I also get a feeling of movement, a rising upwards with vibrant and hopeful colour. I wonder, as I reflect on the image if the grey blob shapes are fragments of Self that are needing to survive this torment.

My image is similar to Winny's. Again, movement upwards with the darkness and sense of being trapped being released into the world. A freeing of Winny's painful experience.

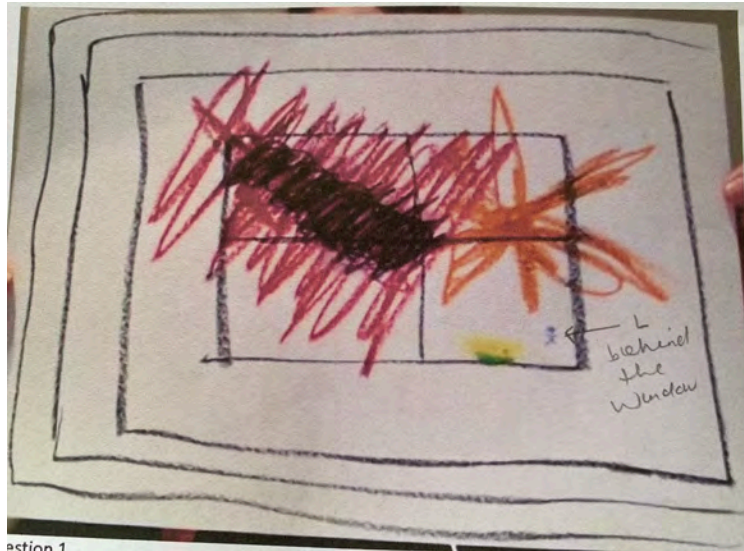
Red Zone: Trapped, sadness, fear, unable to control situation, powerlessness.

Lauraley

For Lauraley, recognising and beginning to understand her ACEs was a gradual process and one of healing:

“And then it was a very gradual thing because of course I saw my life as quite fragmented... It's managed to quieten down the very **critical voice** and the **voice that says that I'm not good enough or I'm not getting it right**...like my therapist, **she used to describe it as a minotaur, you know she saw it as this minotaur, this big beast**, and as I started to understand, **this beast became smaller and smaller**. I actually thought there was something wrong with me.”

Creating her image was challenging for Lauraley:



Lauraley Q1

"I could feel the resistance in me...to not having words, because I think I hide behind words....but of course image is different, I just ...I didn't think about it."

I asked Lauraley what came up for her as she looked at her image:

"I think the first thing is the **frame within a frame within a frame** looking at a window and I think that's quite....telling. There is something that I see quite often which is I've sometimes felt and sometimes **I still feel like I'm looking in someone else's window at Christmas time, looking at the Christmas spread**, so yes, that's quite interesting for me to notice that's what I did."

"And you completely just went with it, you just let yourself just produce whatever flowed...and that's what's come up for you."

"Yes...the first thing I did was the red...**the red explosion**...and then I did the window."

“And so you’re looking out of the window or you’re looking in to the window?”

“That’s interesting. That’s interesting because I am looking in to it now, but I’ve drawn a person, a **tiny little person, which represents me and I’m behind the window... that little tiny person is behind the window. I guess the thing that’s striking is the magnitude of the bigness of the mess...and the smallness of the person.**”

Again, I ask what it’s like for Lauraley to see this?

“It’s interesting and curious, yes, to see that my unconscious can see my life at that time as being too much and mess and yes, too big.”

I ask what feelings are coming up now and if she’s experiencing anything in her body?

“So, I’m going with the physical sensation, so I can feel a tensing in my abdomen...and a tensing in my throat, which is anger...”

Lauraley goes on to explain she’s not feeling angry now but can recognise “**blanket anger**” in response to the image.

I offered my response image to Lauraley:



Researcher's response Q1

Researcher HPR

The energy in Lauraley's image is palpable. Depicted as a tiny person in her image I am struck by Lauraley's words, "[this beast became smaller and smaller](#)" did she perhaps see the totality of herself as the beast or does the beast represent the angry part of her fragmented Self that senses an injustice has been served upon her.

I was moved to hear Lauraley's past and sometimes current experience of feeling as though she's looking through a window at someone else's Christmas spread. The window teases, already an impenetrable barrier framed within several frames. As if it is saying 'look what you could have if there wasn't something wrong with you'. The sense of no-thing-ness, of disconnection comes to me. It feels excruciatingly painful. As I dwell with Lauraley's image, a new image comes quickly to me:



Researcher response

If Lauraley tries to join the festivities the window will smash, the Christmas tree will plummet into darkness, the joy will be lost for everyone. The internalised shame is experienced as an overwhelming humiliated fury (Thomaes et al., 2011), perhaps born from the injustice of rejection.

Red Zone: Something wrong with who I am, anger, poor sense of self, powerlessness, overwhelmed, false self.

Alex

Alex had found the tick box list of ACEs difficult to connect to as she felt a strong resistance to having her experiences categorised. I was quickly aware of Alex's projection of anger, not necessarily to me but onto the research (which is of course of my making). I sensed that there was a deep pain for Alex and that this research had re-surfaced some still old but not resolved wounds. I wanted this to be a space where Alex could be honest and I appreciated her openness. I am also impressed that I didn't take it personally and was able to be in the moment with Alex without

feeling frustrated. This research is very personal to me and how a participant experiences the interview and the phenomena being discussed is subjective. It reminded me that even though I had taken every precaution possible with three pilot interviews and pre-interviews to check the participant's suitability, there are always eventualities that cannot be completely prepared for. Alex's irritation at the ACEs tick boxes and the wording of my questions, was one of them.

"The tick box feels quite...you can't put that experience in a box, you cannot give it words...there's something ridiculously non-validating in that... you can give it images."

I sensed a tangible fear emanating from Alex, perhaps of her experiences being misunderstood through words alone. The tick box list of ten ACEs (px), which was a small part of the research, felt like an inadequate label and minimising to her experience:

"...because I feel like you can't know when I tell you, I can show you."

Alex created her image:



Alex Q1

“It felt like a relief [to create the image] because I could *show you*. And what I had shown you is my father having arrived at the dinner table, being completely normal, perfectly handsome, lovely man, delightful man. During the meal, while I was eating, slumped, and became *that.....I mustn't look, I mustn't make it seem that I've seen that's happened...because everybody else was pretending it hasn't happened...* food became strange for me, because clearly **I ate my way through the trauma**. I came across the vigilant cockerel on my Gestalt training...this tutor...thinking about how hens carry on pecking and eating and don't have to worry about anything, because the cockerel will remain vigilant and will watch out. And that's what I think I did. I thought no one else was watching out, I had to do that.”

I ask Alex if she would like to see my image:



Researcher response image Alex Q1

“Oh wow...that's a wonderful image...and it would be really good to include in your findings if you're allowed to because that's very very powerful. **The seeing and not seeing, the knowing and not knowing.**”

Researcher HPR

Revisiting Alex's transcript, audio recording and images many times I am left with a deeply embodied sense of Alex's inner fragility; an anxiety perhaps about being misunderstood, her experience not being believed as real. I sense this was at the root of her clear irritation with the ACEs tick boxes. I wonder if her apparent defensiveness indicated a tacit sense of inferiority as to whether her experiences actually met the ACE criteria. What if they didn't? What would this mean to Alex? The drive to show me her experience through imagery felt so important that only when she had done so could she believe that I would see it, that I would then believe her with the tangible 'proof' in front of my eyes. Alex's words "I mustn't look, I mustn't make it seem that I've seen that's happened...because everybody else was pretending it hasn't happened" resonated with my own experiences so I am mindful not to confuse the two. The importance for Alex is that this was *her* experience of her father so I'm particularly interested in the need to collude, perhaps because of her fear of being 'found out', with other's apparent denial of what was happening. Fear of being found out brings about a fear of exposure which can feel excruciatingly shameful and disconnecting from the rest of the family. Disconnection threatens survival so Alex's strategy was in fact *ensuring* her survival no matter how difficult it was to experience repeated event. Alex felt she ate her way through the trauma which is not an untypical way for a young person to manage complicated feelings.

Red Zone: Secrecy, narcissistic wounds, emotional dissonance, unsure how to be-in-the-world, voiceless, compliant, unable to control situation.

Louella

"I feel like it's a **lot harder for me to be who I am in my life**. It's taken me a **lot longer in life to figure out where everything fits** and how I can respond to situations now, like the whole thing of being...**my natural language being creative rather than verbal**. Because that was the only way I knew how to communicate...no one has ever spent that time with me...the nervous breakdown for me was the start of hell..."

"And I didn't even realise things that I did want to dobecause **I didn't have a voice**, it became very difficult to engage."

Louella mentions the Bipolar she experiences:

"I find it very **difficult to identify my needs**...I used to often take the child response, oh I have no choice, but basically I now have the adult response of I do, most of the time, not always."

Louella's image evolved from her response to each question into one complete piece. In the first drawing she created the core 4-pronged image with the words: sexual, neglect, physical, emotional – referring to the abuse she had experienced.



Louella Q1

From the second question she created the patterns contained in the frame around the 4 prongs:



Louella Q2

The bubbles: representing her voice now

The chequer board: life is a game of chess

The yellow and green stripes: recognition that:

“Without all this shit I wouldn’t be where I am”

Louella remarked that one of the challenges her childhood has brought her is that to this point she hadn’t felt able to think about having a family.

“I’ve kind of done it in bits because, like the chequer board **I’ve always felt like I’ve been playing chess.** Then I’ve used bright colours because you can use a chess board to your advantage...**the power in their hands,** it’s a two-way street; feeling in a way to me like **being in a jail cell,** but then I handle it in different colours because I do see that the jail cell’s not so square anymore.”

As the image evolves it feels that Louella’s agency is also developing. I wonder if she is now better able to put in the boundaries herself?

“Yes, kind of with, you know, a frame and the bits going on the outside of the frame...it does shape...these are things that have happened in my life, yes they still have some impact, because you never forget do you? ...but they can be used in a different way.”

Researcher's HPR

I am intrigued by the developing image and Louella telling me that the nervous breakdown she experienced was the start of hell. When I look at the image I see horns, perhaps indicative of the devil she had experienced during the sexual abuse she had been subjected to as a child. The 'sexual' horn feels particularly powerful and determined to silence the young Louella rendering it impossible for her to find words to express fragmented self, as indicated by the splitting of the horns. Yet there is colour and there is movement, a sense of overcoming the overwhelmingness of adversity. What does it mean to feel as though one's life is a game of chess? There are some complex rules and only certain moves are permissible within such a hierarchy of power. Has Louella found herself as a weaker pawn? Quite helpless when alone but able to gain strength through connection to others, in particular those who have shared a similar experience to her own? Yet Louella's agency has developed as she learnt to communicate through imagery and I see it almost surge towards more growth as I sit with her image. There is containment, perhaps representative of the jail cell she spoke of or perhaps these lines represent the boundaries Louella has had to develop to keep herself safe from further harm. Of interest also is the use of colour and the movement upwards, reaching towards, which brings a certain sense of hope.

Red Zone: Poor sense of Self, adaptive Self, voiceless, unable to identify needs, powerlessness, trapped.

Jemima

Jemima brought a new dimension to the research. A clear demonstration of the role protective factors play in determining the outcome of adversity in childhood.

Although Jemima had experienced domestic violence and a threat to her life as her father held a gun towards her, her mother, although Jemima believes she was herself manipulated, had imbued a sense of connection, belonging and security in Jemima's young life. Jemima was able to reflect that without her mum:

"I might have been someone who is very vulnerable."

Jemima continued:

"...because...I was obviously aware...and I must have seen Mum being manipulated and maybe not liking it, perhaps that was part of it, maybe even at such a young age."

Our conversation and Jemima's image evoked new meaning for her; I asked how it was for her to create this image:

"Yea, it's just interesting because I never kind of thought of it in these ways, it's always just here isn't it, so I just kind of....yes, so shall I show you this one?"



Jemima Q2

“And that’s really interesting because obviously, in the middle of my page is the word ‘definite’. Because you know, I remember sitting in front of the social worker when they came to talk to me about you know, did I want this...did I really want *this man* to be my Dad [Mum’s partner] and I was like absolutely, there’s no other person I want as my Dad.”

Jemima continued:

“In line with a kind of relief as well I suppose, you know, butterflies, that there had been a massive change, not just a small change, a massive change...and the flowers, which is a bit like your image, you know, it was...they were flowering. They’d been able to grow enough to flower. And then at the bottom is a Weeping Willow. When my Mum and R (bio father) were together we lived near Victoria Park and there used...there’s a little lake there and they had weeping willows around it.”

I offer that it feels poignant that Jemima has incorporated the Willow into her image:

“Yes. An interesting thing about Weeping Willow’s is they don’t have very deep roots do they? So you’ve got this massive tree...but apparently they don’t have deep roots.”

Jemima reflects on her tree:

“And it’s a full grown tree. It’s not like a half grown, still in the middle of...that is a full grown tree.”

Researcher HPR

I was struck at first by the apparent positivity in Jemima’s image, butterflies, the word ‘definite’ taking centre stage. Definite feels strong and determined, knowing and self-assured. And then, as if almost fading in to the background, a tree which had the most profound meaning. A Weeping Willow is a tree which grows quickly and has overarching branches that producing yellow flowers borne of golden catkins in spring. Of significance was Jemima’s realisation that they only have shallow roots but that her tree was fully grown. This offers perhaps a metaphor for how Jemima sees her life. She has managed to grow big and strong, yet dig beneath the surface and the root system is more fragile. I sensed that in spite of her professed positive outlook and somewhat sunny demeanour there lay beneath the surface the wounds of a young child whose life had been deemed so insignificant by her father he was prepared to risk ending it. The flowers and butterflies, now feel more significant than before. The colours as typically used today, blue for a boy and pink for a girl perhaps signifying a unification of Jemima’s anima and animus, Jung’s anthropomorphic archetypes of the human unconscious (Jung, 1969b). In folklore the butterfly is also associated often with the human soul. For example, in

Christianity the butterfly is seen as representative of a person's spiritual transformation while in Irish folklore the butterfly as the soul is able to transcend Otherworldliness (Johnson Peregrine, 2004). In mythology flowers have many meanings such as youth and beauty but also fragility and death. Perhaps the flowers and butterflies in Jemima's image represent her unified Self able to transcend the traumatic events of her childhood to find a sense of freedom as she moves forward in her life.

Red Zone: Adaptive Self, narcissistic wounds, emotional dissonance.

Diana

"I think the other thing that's been impacted big time from it was my education because **I struggled to learn** at that time because there was so much going on...**I never felt capable on an academic level** and even now I don't. And when I'm working with people that are very academic, **I kind of shrink inside myself** and I feel that all the way through. And that has an impact because that's stopped my doing I think a lot of things that I might have done."

After Diana has created her image she noticed the following:

"The first thing that came to mind was seeing the wood from the trees. And I just thought it represented kind of the...the struggle probably...that I've found with the side of agency that hasn't been ...**I haven't felt able**. So there's just sort of like, **there's no way out of this all**, you know, it just seemed quite a struggle in the fact that **I can't find my way through**."



Diana Q2

I asked Diana if she would like to see my response art:



Researcher's response

"Oh my goodness!....funnily enough I wanted to put roots on my trees but because I'd put the bushy bit first **I couldn't find a space to put the roots in there...so you have given my tree roots.**"

Researcher HPR

Interestingly Diana again used a dark background for her expressive art, as if paying attention to the darkness of her early years. Diana felt her personal agency had clearly been affected by the adversity in her childhood. She had an unclear path ahead with her image beautifully depicting a small person (as indicated by the red arrows) struggling to find their way but unable to see the dark wood for the trees. Interestingly the view is looking down over the wood and so the trunk that holds up the foliage is invisible to the eye and Diana has noted there was no space to show the roots. I wondered if this was indicative of her feeling unrooted with no solid core or foundation to hold herself up in such a way she could not only thrive but develop the agency required to feel capable to make choices for herself and act upon them. When Diana saw that my image depicted a tree with roots I felt a sense of me having met her where, in that moment, she needed to be met demonstrating that research can also be therapeutic.

Red Zone: Feeling incapable, unsure how to be-in-the-world, powerlessness, stuck, shame, poor sense of self

Rebecca

“...there is some areas where there is **just a total absence** [of agency], **it’s like, you know, trying to use a limb that isn’t there...**”

Rebecca reflects on becoming the carer and how her ACEs have forced her to grow up before she was ready:

“...so yea, almost like something that’s **grown prematurely** or that has to....it grows really really fast...so it’s really tall but it’s quite...**there’s a vulnerability or a weakness to it...**”

Rebecca's feelings are expressed through her image which I note to be particularly powerful; her resilience depicted through colour and growth; contrasted to the darker side.



Rebecca Q2

Rebecca reflects on her image:

“It was quite satisfying to sort of create what we were just talking about...just this mixture of a sense of loss and a sense of gratitude.”

Rebecca notes that the roots are there but on one side they are blackened.

“...this kind of **blackened**...deformed is the word that comes to mind...distorted, **deformed and distorted**.”

I ask what it's like for Rebecca to hear herself say those words; what feeling is evoked?

“Do you know, it’s hard to name a feeling. I think there’s, there’s like an **absence**, there’s sad....there’s a really sort of **sadness inside of me**...and then there’s the thing....it’s just like that’s how it is, or that’s how it was.yea, an acceptance.”

I didn’t offer Rebecca my image but this is what I expressed in response. Certainly an echo of Rebecca’s light and dark.



Researcher response Q2

Researcher HPR

I was particularly struck how Rebecca’s viewed her lack of agency development as if she were “[trying to use a limb that isn’t there.](#)” And although initially her tree looks colourful and healthy, in fact it has had to grow too quickly and for Rebecca this leaves her feeling vulnerable and weak. The contrast to the blackened side is profound. I see this image as a depiction of an ego death for Rebecca, i.e., a loss of subjective Self-identity or in Jungian terms a psychic death which leads to a transformation of the psyche. In death and re-birth mythology, as described by Joseph Campbell’s research on the mythology of the Hero’s Journey, ego death is described as a phase of Self-surrender and transition (Campbell, 2003).

Red Zone: Poor sense of self, something wrong with who I am, feeling incapable, powerless, core shame, unable to control the situation, sadness

Louella

Louella described the impact of ACEs on her relationships as significant:

“I guess I’ve felt for a long time **that I haven’t had much to say**, just had to roll with either I’m good enough, not good enough....it’s affected my relationship with me, it made me question do I prefer men or women? And I figured it out to be men...it’s in terms of relationships with friends, it’s been very difficult because I’ve been **wanting to please all the time**, , so **whenever they’ve wanted something I’ve, you know, done exactly what they wanted**. It’s taken me 36 and a half years to figure it out. ”

In the third addition to her evolving image Louella added the words:

Loss of me, communication, fear, people pleaser, hide, free



Louella Q3



Researcher's response image to Louella Q3

Researcher HPR:

A lack of personal agency development has been hugely detrimental for Louella in her relationship to Self and others. Developing a priority to please for fear of rejection is one of the Adlerian priority/impasse personality types (Kfir, 2011). A priority to please can lead, as Louella has depicted textually on her image, to the acknowledgment that she would let others do what they wanted with her. As I look at my response image I find it depicts an idealised love that can never be reached. The large black fuzzy heads positioned on thin and sometimes limbless bodies feel shameful, lost in the void of no-thing-ness experienced perhaps when one 'sells their soul to the devil'. A traditional Christian perspective on witchcraft believes that the soul is traded for diabolical favours such as knowledge, power, sex and youth (H. A. Kelly, 2004; B. McNeill, 2012). The 'trade-off' for Louella has been a painful one leading to a poor sense of self and questioning her sexuality.

Red Zone: Something wrong with me, emotional and cognitive dissonance, core shame, adaptive Self, development of false Self, overly compliant, poor boundaries, unable to identify own needs, narcissistic wounds.

Millie

"Mmm...that one's hard."

"That one seemed harder to do than the other ones?"

"Yea...I just found it **hard to reach anything**. So I don't know whether that's because I have, you know, **pushed it down so far** it just didn't resonate – don't know, don't know really at this point what it's been... just felt harder to reach."

"And when you look at this image what do you see, what comes up for you when you look at it?"

"I see the **emptiness** I think...of the paper, so that must represent yea, an emptiness...."

"When you think about that emptiness, is there anything that comes up for you then?"

"Well, I suppose it's about, yea, that supposed to be a bottle of wine...**filling the emptiness with the wine** but then I also felt some empathy for my dad because, you know, that's obviously what he's been doing his whole life, trying to fill that emptiness."

"So is that, in a way, something that helps you connect to him? Because he's had a life experience?"

"It's how I've managed to forgive him."

“...and has that been important for you?”

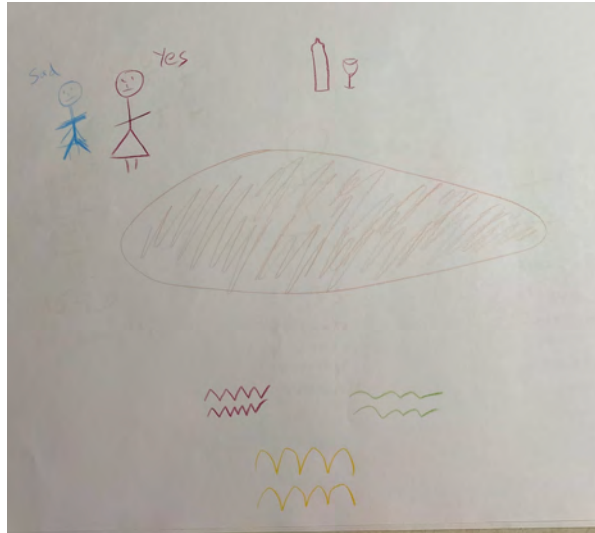
“It’s been important literally for me, yes, **I’ve forgiven him for me...** So I’m not holding on to it...now I don’t drink at all, I haven’t drunk for over three years...you only have to look at him to know he’s drunk all his life, there’s a sadness, you know I feel sad for him that he still needs to do it.

Millie describes a time when her brother came to stay with her for six weeks after his relationship breakdown:

“...and we did our own family therapy together, facilitated by me, obviously...but we worked together for hours, trawling through our childhood and our experiences.”

Millie describes how her and her brother didn’t live together again after the age of seven, she went to their Mum’s, he stayed with their Dad. For a few years Dad wouldn’t allow them to see each other but later they did and developed a close relationship. Alcohol had, however, become a problem for them both. Millie explained:

“...I don’t like confrontation, **I was very compliant...**I still am to some degree...**it’s just sad**, and then **these are patterns, repeated patterns and that’s the mud...**”



Millie Q3

Researcher HPR

Even though this image was as populated as previous ones, Millie had experienced it as empty and her feelings hard to reach. It felt important that the muddy area in the middle was the first to emerge, as if it needed to be seen and validated. The emptiness Millie experienced through creating the image paralleled her need for alcohol, using it, I imagine, as a void filling activity. Only like all addictions, the substance does not fill the void caused by the painful and adverse experiences of Millie's childhood. Millie recognises her dislike for confrontation and acknowledges the repeating of unhealthy patterns caused by the persistence of intergenerational trauma. Yet I notice in the image that curiously the bottle of wine and glass has almost a shrine-like quality to it, particularly the positioning on the paper. The rather amorphous mud almost acts as a barrier between this shrine and the various zigzag lines seen at the bottom of the page which perhaps represent the feeling of intoxication. I am touched by Millie's words "I have forgiven him for *me*" whilst depicting herself on the image as larger and saying 'yes' whereas her father is 'sad' and smaller in stature.

Red Zone: Overly compliant, sadness, empty.

Jemima

“I know that over the years it definitely made me cautious, with boyfriends. It definitely made me...**not fully giving** because I didn’t want to get caught out. Because I was young, **I’d been caught out**, and so had my Mum. So, it’s probably only really in the last five years that I’ve really kind of looked at it and thought actually, that’s a little bit that I really need to address. My husband has a little phrase for me, he says that ‘it’s **the secret life** of Jemima’ – I just don’t talk a lot about what I do or what I think or feel.”

Jemima and I begin to talk about attachment. I’m wondering if she relates to the avoidant attachment position?

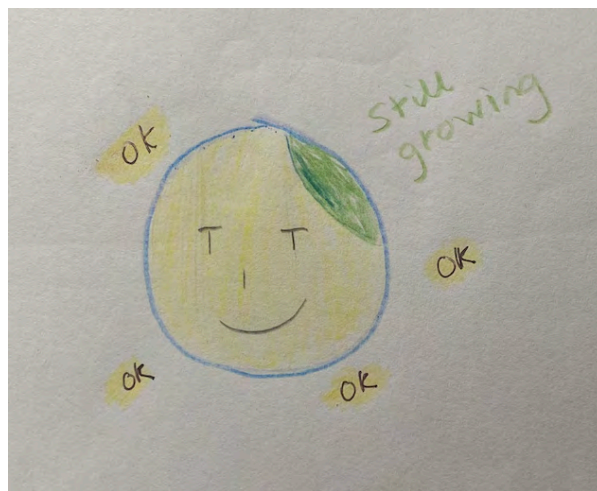
“If I was going to be really really pedantic, I would probably say that knowing...I would say it’s more...**ambivalent**. I’m like...well I’ve often been...**if you want to be with me...almost like prove yourself.**”

Jemima continues that she feels this has helped her in her work as she doesn’t become invested in whether the client likes her or not, in other words she’s able to give them space and time to build trust with her. She does, however, recognise that her early experiences have left her less able to trust than she would like but this is work in progress as she recognises that:

“...obviously **I needed to protect myself** until I knew otherwise.”

Jemima begins to talk about the image that has emerged:

“I wanted to draw a brain but I was hopeless at it, so I started with a face, which is my face....there’s lots of things that could have been way worse, I think I’ve been very lucky. And I was going to do this little bit [pointing to the green area] in black and I really... **I couldn’t pick the black pen up, the black pencil...**so I ended up doing it in like a really dark green...and then the words of still growing came to me and I thought that would make sense, because I am still tackling some things, sometimes.”



Jemima Q3

Jemima would like to see my image:



Researcher response image to Jemima Q3

“And if you think about it that is very similar because my outside is okay, but it’s protective...although you’ll think I’m really open and I am, I’m very open and I’m very honest, but that little bit, **that’s the bit that still protects....yes, that is my protection.**”

Researcher HPR

Jemima recognised that in her relationships she always keeps something back and is unable to be fully giving. I wonder what fully giving means to her ? I sense a conflict of Self as she also sees herself as open and honest and, I sense, wants others to see her as such. However Jemima may have a narcissistic wound from the trauma of her threatening birth father and his abandonment, seen, I believe, by her need for others to prove themselves to her before she lets them come a little closer. Curiously Jemima couldn’t pick up either a black pen or pencil when representing the need she has to still work on some issues. Black is often associated with death, mourning, the occult and darkness. Whereas green may be associated with growth. To have used black may have sub-consciously signified regression for Diana rather than movement towards growth. In my image I see Diana represented as open and full of treasure: optimism, warmth and honesty. But as she indicated I have also given her a protective layer, of which the lid is firmly shut closed. I am left wondering if or when the lid maybe able to be propped open.

Red Zone: Secrecy, fear, adaptive Self, emotional and cognitive dissonance, narcissistic wound.

Alex

“....I was and still have **ambivalent attachment**, and that makes perfect sense because on the one hand I felt lots of wonderful things about my Dad and on the other hand I had this whole side of whatever, had so much anger

in it...I played that out in my relationship, so very very....and angry with being put upon that I used to think I was being cast in a domestic role. Whereas really I think that I was wanting to be angry in **general because I was angry with men and how they have a different pathway than we women do.**"

Alex then describes how she felt, being a woman:

"...I'd been cast a bit of a bum role, because I'm a woman...I can with hindsight look back and see that ambivalence and you recreated that **unconscious fear...repetition compulsion**, you literally recreated the unavailable inaccessible partner that you would be very angry about.."

Alex reflects on the image that has emerged:



Alex Q3

"Well it's something I'd thought about before, it is as if I was **facing two directions at once**, which of course is the ambivalence and the duality...and that repetition compulsion is part of like seeking out that in the other to

respond to that need...because that's what I know. I've added the thing about grief because when my lover of 30 years died two years ago...he had three years prior to that started to have dementia...he became not who he was which I was so angry about and I think it was all tied up with my dad."

Referring to the image Alex explains:

"...the whole idea of the facing in two directions at once, one side, as you can see, is very fragmented and all in bits. And the one that's facing the world that's fine. **You are both...you're split**, and you're sometimes one and sometimes the other. **You're actually both all the time.**"

I offer my image to Alex:



Researcher response to Alex Q3

"...there was something very strong for me about you being in this marriage and squashed in this box... suppressed...but then there's something...and then the rage, the anger in there...but actually something about becoming freer... freeing yourself from that situation...you're starting to have a face and by this point you've got a face and you've actually got a voice..."

“I love it, I love it. The only thing that I would say is that actually then, probably about the second orange person, I then created an ambivalent attachment to somebody else [A’s lover], but I was still free, I was free, not conventionally, not acceptable to most people, but...I had the intimacy and I had the closeness and I had the friendship, but I couldn’t have the whole package...I don’t think I could ever have the whole package...because I would have too much anger inside there.”

“That’s a brilliant image, I love it, it’s great. What a process, I love it.”

Researcher HPR

For Alex, navigating relationships was an integral part of her existence, not least protecting the dark side of her otherwise charismatic and much loved father. The experience she’d had of no one else seeming to notice or acknowledge her father’s slump at the table (see p x) had meant that she felt as if she were facing two directions at once; on the one hand, fragmented and angry, on the other facing the world as if nothing were wrong at all. Although not part of this third question I noticed a saving face element, then, as the ‘pretence’ that all was well for fear of the unknown should she dare to question. Alex’s image depicts Janus, the mythological Roman god who, depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions, one looking towards the past and one towards the future (The Editors of Website ‘Janus’, n/d). Interestingly Janus, considered as one of the most important Roman gods, presided over beginnings and transitions such as war to peace (Giesecke, 2020) with resonates with the duality of experience that Alex frequently mentioned during the interview. Dwelling with Alex’s words “You are both...you’re split...you’re actually both all the time” brought up a sense of anxiety within me. I wondered what being both all the time must have been like for Alex, navigating the inter- and intra-personal relational dynamics with herself, her father and her family. Having to hold on to her anger and fragmented self while simultaneously

pretending that everything was 'normal'. I was particularly struck by the anger that still resides within Alex; anger towards her lover, anger towards the ACEs tick boxes, yet contrasted with the warmth and willingness to participate and share so generously of herself in the research. I sensed that Janus is still very much part of Alex's ambivalently attached identity.

Red Zone: Adaptive Self, anger, fear, emotional and cognitive dissonance, attachment issues, fragmented Self.

Ruby

"...probably had a mask up until a few years ago... **I don't know if I would say saving face, it was more like protection and survival... I didn't really know who I was and things because I just had this mask up** because stuff happened all the time...**I didn't have any agency...**the only time I felt like I was free or could be myself was when I was dancing...of course I still wore a mask...."

Ruby creates her image:



Ruby Q4

Ruby found this question and image creation the hardest of all due to the impact and the feelings that arose. She describes her image: the brownish line running down the page represents a big wall and in the left corner she is trying to make herself as small as possible. There is, in the middle, a faint outline of a ghost with only one eye open. To the larger blue mark top left Ruby remarks:

“I don’t know what that big blue part of me represents, it’s a part of me but I don’t know which...quite apt considering we are talking about a mask.”

To the right of the image Ruby has drawn herself, the arrows representing all the difficult things she felt coming towards her in life.

Researcher HPR:

I am initially interested that Ruby doesn’t see protection and survival as saving face but does use the term mask. I interpret these to be one and the same. We save face to protect ourselves from that which might mean we do not survive if seen for who we are. I am particularly interested to notice that she has no face at all in the created image of herself. As if the traumas she faced wiped her face out; however this also rendered Ruby voiceless. I wonder if this may be a displacement of Self as a protection....if I have no face, I have no identity and therefore I cannot be so harmed. The smaller blue marks on the left of the page perhaps represents the small and vulnerable Ruby with the larger blue mark representing a narcissist wound manifesting as her omnipotent Self. Colour plays a particular significance in this image. The brown line may be a sign of splitting but I’m rather seeing it as of the earth, a strength, a barrier of protection and sign of Ruby’s resilience. Ruby has depicted herself in a rich purposeful blue, the colour often associated with the sky and oceans, the darkness of the water representative, in Jungian psychology, of the unconscious. The ghost like figure with one eye open is phallic in appearance leading me to wonder if this is Ruby’s positive animus; the powerful, courageous

and assertive aspect from her unconscious masculine side (Jung, 2014). Ruby's need to mask was exacerbated as she "didn't have any agency" from which her Self could develop. However, I consider her distorted agency led her to make herself small enough to feel safe.

Red Zone: Narcissistic wound, voiceless, fragmented Self, poor sense of self.

Tessa

"Yes, I've saved face a lot I think. Especially when I was younger, when I was working as a manager...I don't like to reveal that I don't know things...and...I will try to cover up. Not faux pas, I'm alright with them...but if I made the wrong decision, for example, taking on an employee who turned out to be rubbish, I would save face by kind of... I would definitely sort of rationalise and justify that to myself."

I asked: "...are you saving face to yourself too as well?"

"Yes, definitely...I know I've screwed up so I do that a lot...I am also guilty of...I think I say things to impress, is that similar to saving face?"

"Yes, absolutely."

Tessa tells me she interviews people for surgical referrals for sex reassignment surgery:

"I have a PhD. I am not a medical doctor in any way at all, but I know what they're thinking – ooh she's clever – and I love that. **I love to be thought of as clever...I save face before its even under threat.**"

I enquire what it might be like for Tessa if she weren't thought of as clever or for her to imagine that people didn't view her as clever?:

"Oh no...I'd be the **short fat stupid woman again then**. Feeling stupid is very much a feeling that I'm **afraid of being found out**...thought to be stupid. And going back to the previous question...I know they're all linked...saving face by putting on a brave face, after some of the abuse that happened to me...**saving face by.... laughing**, having been abused in the playground in front of everybody, you know, exposed, literally physically exposed in front of everybody."

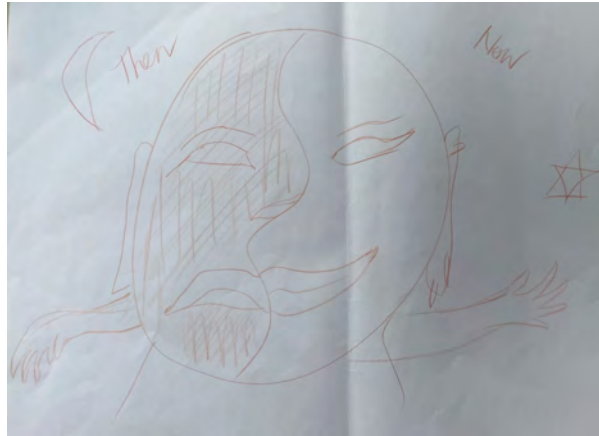
I wonder out loud about 'gallows laughter' – laughing that makes fun of shameful feelings when being scared or humiliated like that? Tessa replies:

"Which was, you know, of course awful....laughing things off a lot, I've done a lot of that."

We dialogue for a while about Tessa wanting people to have a certain impression of her, one that is perhaps capable and self-assured. She tells me:

"I think your question is very *very* pertinent. Yes, I've done a lot of saving face in my life ...**I'm not just a short fat woman. I'm a powerful professional person**. I had to prove it. I always use Dr. I get quite cross if forms don't allow me to put Dr. They don't care. Why do I care so much? But I really do."

Tessa's image is created in response to our discussion:



Tessa Q4

“This is what I show to the world. I’m smiley. I’ve got my lovely earrings...and I’m open handed. And this is what *I don’t show* to the world, because in here, is certain aspects of the abuse, abandonment, because I was made pregnant and abandoned, loss of possible relationships...loss of self-esteem and self-respect. Years when I felt stupid and I am going to use that word because that’s how I felt.”

“That is how you felt, yes.”

“...umm, total lack of agency here. But this was then and this is now [Tessa is pointing to the image].... And although I’m aware of this and sometimes I go there it’s the biggest half of my face.”

Researcher HPR

Saving face has been a big part of Tessa’s experience and she recognises the phenomenon only too well. Tessa doesn’t just save face to protect herself from others’ potential judgement she also saves face from her own internalised sense of shame at not being good enough. As I close my eyes and allow Tessa’s experience to wash over me I recognise my own narcissistic wound. It’s painful. To compensate her innate feelings of inferiority Tessa has had to prove herself not only

to others but to her own self and has spent a life seeking ways to find her significance. This has manifest in the most demanding challenge of academic study at PhD level. I wonder if this is enough for Tessa? I sense that while it may satiate one particular inferiority, Tessa's bid to be recognised has not ended there and manifests in her 'lovely earrings', a metaphor perhaps for seeking recognition through the adornment of beautiful objects thus disguising the 'short, fat woman' she appears to hold a deep shame for. The woman who was also impregnated and abandoned. The woman who felt stupid who I experienced as anything but.

Red Zone: Afraid of being found out, narcissistic wound, core shame, something wrong with who I am.

Winny

To give context to the image Winny created for question four (Q4) I have included her describing an experience in foster care relating to the relationship with her foster carer and her belief that people could tell she had been abused.

"I used to have this foster carer that used to go 'stop looking in to cars, stop looking at men all the time, they are going to think you want something from them'... I felt really confused...it made sense to me that I'd done that though because I used to lie in bed at night thinking of ways that I could kill her...and I know that now I wouldn't want to do that but as a child...I thought like these people were going to kill me...because they were frightening. And when I did do something wrong, like forgot my P.E. kit from school, I'd be up in my room thinking how could I kill myself?... because I was so terrified of her reaction."

Winny then depicted a “bad dream” she used to have: the foster carer she disliked was being chased by a dragon and Winny would wonder whether she should run back and save her or should she just save herself?

Winny created her evocative image:



Winny Q4

“So this is the dragon, this is my foster mother, this is me looking back, trying to think...whatever...and then this is **the suitcase and the door which stops me from being loved**...because I’m saving face ...I didn’t know how to save her from the dragon and this is all the old children’s homes that I went to...and that’s the knife that I used to have to carry around with me to feel safe.”

I note the heart shapes on the right of the image and wonder out loud to Winny:

“Ahh so that’s the **love...that I can’t get to.**”

I share my image with Winny:



Image X – researcher’s response image to Winny Q4

“I love...that is amazing. I love it.”

Researcher HPR

I was deeply touched by Winny’s words and experience which is undoubtedly the reason I perceive our images to be so similar, not least bearing in mind we couldn’t see each other’s images being drawn. It demonstrated what a deep connection can be created through research even though we have only spent a short time together and had not met in person. The question was about saving face and at first I was a little unsure of the connection to “the suitcase and the door which stops me from being loved...because I’m saving face” but having immersed myself in the imagery I believe I understand. Winny, in order to save face for her own sense of Self and esteem, *is* in fact the dragon. Winny had been shamed by her foster carer “stop looking in to cars, stop looking at men all the time, they are going to think you want something from them” as if she were to blame. In Winny’s image she depicts herself as a child at the bottom of the stairs unsure what to do whereas in my image I now see her as the dragon, invincible in her power to not be overcome by the injustice served upon her by the ‘wicked step-mother’ fictional archetype found traditionally

in fairy tales. Winny's image also depicts a fortress and the knife she would carry to feel safe. This perhaps represents her saving face by building a strong defence against others' perceived view of her as a foster child who is necessarily vulnerable and weak. Winny also perhaps positions herself on Karpman's Drama Triangle (Weinhold & Weinhold, 2014): *the victim* – the child who is persecuted by the foster carer, *the persecutor* – the child who wants to kill the foster carer and *the rescuer* – the child who is conflicted as to whether or not she should save herself or the foster carer.

Red Zone: Fragmented Self, emotional and cognitive dissonance, anger, narcissistic wounds, unloveable.

Millie

Millie describes the shame she felt as a teenager having to admit that she had nowhere to go on a Saturday night and having save face in front of her mum:

“...at the time, I think particularly with teenagers, it's that need to belong, that need to be accepted...**I remember I really needed my mum to believe that I was going out all the time and enjoying myself...**

Millie created her image. I remark that I was interested to notice Millie going back to the figure on the left to emphasis the mouth in more detail.

“Yes, I've drawn a zip...so **keeping it zipped and not saying anything.**”

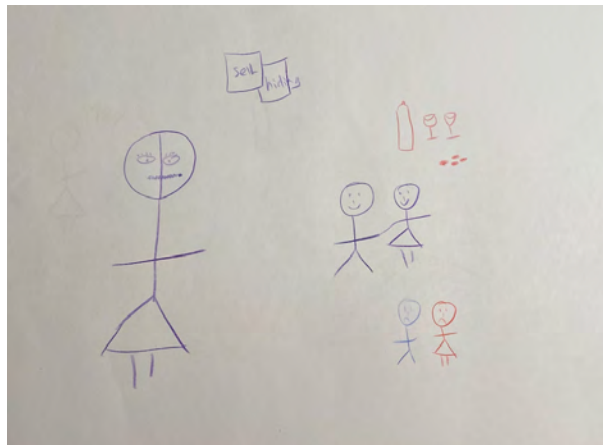
“Not say anything – keep quiet?”

“Erm...**saving face, not telling the world I'm struggling...**so that's literally....**so hiding from myself.** And that says self and that says hiding

[pointing to the masks at the top of the image] so there's a mask behind, so literally hiding from myself. I believe that it was my psyche's way of protecting me...I see it as a defence, a necessary defence."

Millie describes the figures in the middle of her image as her and her ex-husband who are smiling:

"I've allowed us to hold hands to show *how happy we are* [sarcastic tone]..."



Millie Q4

Millie has previously described how their friends thought they were the 'perfect' couple, the perfect family who have it all. I had wondered out loud:

"Your family, you, your ex [husband] and the children all had a mask?... like a family mask?"

"Yea, that's right, that's right!"

Researcher HPR

Millie's experience of saving face revolved around a need for others to see her as having a good time, having fun, not seeing the struggles she was having in her marriage and with alcohol. Another profound moment in the interview came when Millie realised that she wasn't saving face alone, in fact there was a mask for the whole family with which to save face. I am particularly drawn to Millie's need to hide from herself. To face up to the reality of her life was too painful to bear and so 'easier' to carry on with the façade. Perhaps this is related to Millie's need to save face in front of her mum. Not wanting her mum to think she had nowhere to go, no one to spend time with on a Saturday night. Millie did mention that she felt her mum would blame herself yet it felt somehow deeper and more significant than this. I wonder if it's to do with survival? As children we have an innate need for our parents to love and care for us as part of our unconscious survival strategy. Perhaps deep in Millie's psyche was a sense that if her mum perceived her not belonging to a peer group that she in turn may reject her too as not a good enough daughter and worst, unloveable. Millie's need for her mother's love was all the stronger due to her father's alcoholism and abandonment.

Red Zone: Secrecy [secrets in the family], false self, afraid of being found out, core shame.

Appendix 15

Ref Winny p.264 main body of work

SYMBOLS BASED ON CIRCLES

With the powerful symbolism associated with the circle, it's no wonder there exist numerous symbols resembling circles.




ENSO

This Japanese symbol resembles an incomplete circle, and represents enlightenment, elegance, perfection, strength, and the universe.

OUROBOROS

Also known as the tail swallower, this is a representation of rebirth, regeneration, completion, and eternity. It's found in Greek, Norse, Egyptian, and Aztec mythologies.





FLOWER OF LIFE

Made of overlapping circles, the symbol represents the cycle of creation and how all things come from a single source.

MANDALA

This term is used to indicate a circle enclosing a sacred symbol. The symbols within the mandala vary based on the specific culture.





YIN YANG

Featuring a circle of two parts with each half holding the seed of the other, yin yang represents unity in diversity, duality, change, paradox, and harmony.

symbolsage.com

Appendix 16

BACP Research Ethics Guidelines

- Valuing this research as a systematic inquiry to enhance professional knowledge.
- Provide evidence-based practice which will be beneficial to my clients and consistent with the research integrity.
- Adhering to the BACP principles and ethical guidelines.
- My research proposal, the Learning Agreement, has met the necessary criteria for the PAP and permission to carry out the research has been granted.
- Methods I employ in my research will comply within the standards of BACP's good practice.
- Ethical dilemmas that occur during my research will be dealt with responsibly and I will explain any action taken by me, the researcher.
- The use of any records will be restricted to the purpose(s) for which created and their use authorised by the participant's consent.

Appendix 17

Data analysis audit trail - (unedited to give a flavour of the actual experience)

1. Identified 4 *a priori* themes from previous research, personal experience and client/supervision practice.

Shame	Anger	Loss	Loneliness
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2. Use previous knowledge and self-study to drive categories

and list what stands out/against/under the *a priori* themes.


Include diary, personal therapy, images, supervision and self-study

3. Conduct 2nd complete read-through of textual data.
4. Immerse myself in the images created during the sessions.
5. In line with phenomenological attitude I apply *a priori* themes across each participant's data set. Begin to develop 1st iteration of the template.
6. Begin thorough review of generated data aiming to code numerically against template – this is not working, feels wrong. Frustrated.
7. i.e., I am **looking** for instances where **this happens**. *What* happens? What am I missing? I feel confused and stuck in an endless blur of tables and data.
8. I feel the need to revisit my quality checking and arrange a session with mentor.
9. I decide to take a break and re-ground myself by playing my violin.
10. Meet with mentor, discuss issues and clarify my purpose. I remind myself of Nigel King's advice on YouTube– to remember the template is just a tool to help me.
11. Again, I read and re-read the data, studying the images.
12. Repeat process, each time new themes emerge they are applied across all the data.
13. Cluster into sub-themes including any non-*a priori*. Final eight themes emerge.
 9. Impact of traumatic experience
 10. Relationships

quality checks with CF and mentor

quality checks with colleagues

11. Temporality
12. Experiencing the psychic and somatic self
13. Emotional legacy of ACEs
14. Every cloud has a silver lining
15. The covert (not openly acknowledged or displayed)
16. Power states
14. Tabulate in Excel.
15. Memory Theatre of themes, drawn as emergent images after talking to AC.
16. Sit with all the data, text and images, Memory Theatre....feel stuck, can't write.
The phenomenological aspect and need to answer questions is clashing. What to do?
17. Contact Dr Rupert King for emergency help!! He is brilliant. Calm, collected, sets me on the right path. He enabled a clearing where before there were just trees.
18. Too many themes, feeling stuck with them. Session with mentor and realise that 4 can be merged into other 4 – left with 4 themes and lots of sub-themes – this is ok and manageable.
19. Re-work template – iterative process of check, modify, re-check etc. GO BACK TO MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION – remember the point of the research!
Remember that I am exploring women's agency through the lens of ACEs and the necessity to save face.
20. Nine iterations in total before the final template can be used with all the individual participants' data one more time.
21. I realise the data I'm producing is too much – I'm trying to ensure all the participants' voices are heard. I don't have enough word count to go into this much detail. It's becoming overwhelming, HELP?
22. Re-consider Nigel King's words and make TA fit with what I need it to do. Go back to research question and key argument. Decide to stick to using the top-level themes as this should give me enough, no, *will* give me enough information to determine what, if any, **essential** experiences we share. Essential



Quality checks



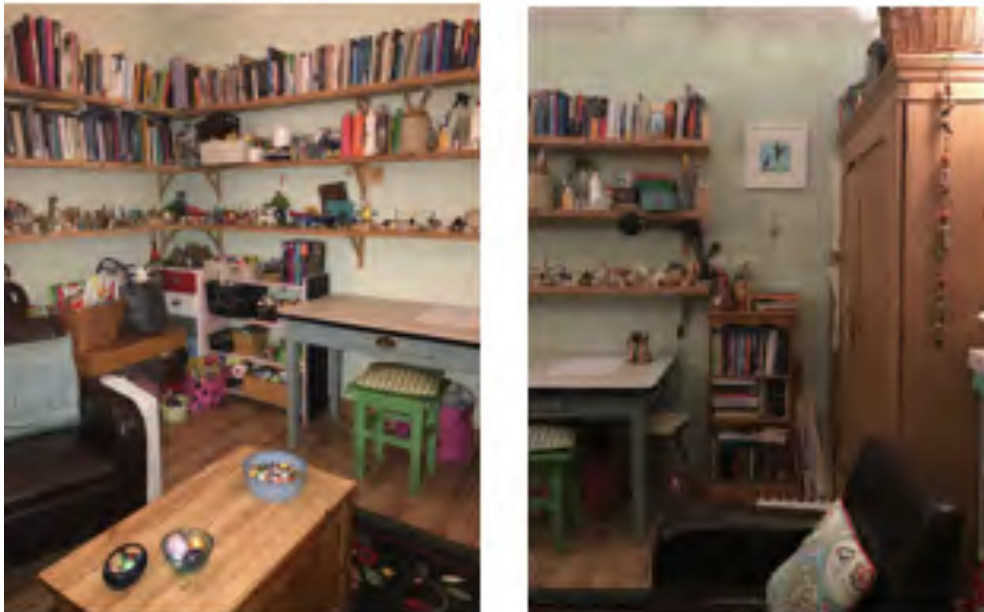
Keep it phenomenological

as in KEY ones, so that's it, I don't need the detail for this project
anyway...Hoorah, I think I have finally got it sussed?!

23. Final top-level themes: legacy of ACEs, **interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics, experiencing the somatic and psychic self and, temporality**
24. Re-apply top-level themes to all the data sets. Still feel overwhelmed with mass of data.
25. Meet with Dr Rupert King again, he suggests I just focus on a very small number of examples but go into much greater depth; I reluctantly put most of the findings to date into the appendix and begin focussing on the 4 vignettes that have emerged.
26. Ok so now I finally have it, I feel in a much better place. I decide to combine the findings with the discussion as it feels phenomenological. To separate findings from discussion feels too mechanistic.
27. I send the findings chapter to one of my CF's and to my AC. Feedback is phenomenal. Although I'm not feeling it, their words of encouragement tell me I'm on the right path.
28. Re-visit ethics, check reflexivity 'golden thread'.
29. Finish writing up and work on the appendices. I am almost there, I can allow myself to finally glimpse a peek at the finish line.

Appendix 18

Practitioner-researcher's therapy room where the research took place
in person (x3) and online (x10) including 3 pilot interviews



The practitioner-researcher's therapy room is quiet and privately located at her residence. It is light and airy with large corner windows facing out on to the garden. A wide range of art materials are available including wet and dry sand trays, clay, paints, pens, pastels and a varied selection of miniature figures and toys.

Appendix 19

For wordcount purposes some of this section from the literature review was removed but I have kept it here for interest's sake.

Face

What is a face?

Before embarking on an explication of '*saving face*' I believe it necessary to first of all explore what is meant by the term *face* and then what it means to *lose face*. The word face is used frequently with proliferations of expression and metaphor in popular culture such as: Facebook (Social Media), The Face (magazine) and '*her face was like thunder*'. In this review the word 'face' is the term given to the skin and features which appear at the front of body from forehead to chin.

*"Faces are all around us and fundamentally shape both
everyday experience and our understanding of people."*

This is the opening line in Stephen Pattison's book '*Saving Face*' (Pattison, 2013 n.p.). I find this presupposition serves as a useful reminder that faces are ubiquitous and unique. The developing infant learns about itself and its environment through attuned face-to-face relationships with the mother/caregivers reflecting back through facial expressions the pleasure and joy they experience in the young child (Gerhardt, 2004; Schore, 2016; Stern, 1985). We are recognised by our face, for McNeill a(1998) it is a

*"showcase of the self, instantly displaying our age, sex, and race, our health
and mood."*

We delineate people by their face and make cultural and racial assumptions by the colour and features of a face the first time we see it (D. McNeill, 1998). For some women covering their face in public is a faith-based mandatory requirement, for others this may be seen as oppression (Garcier, 2015).

For many of us, when we are embarrassed, it is our face that takes on a flush of colour often accompanied by a heat that can feel rather uncomfortable (Psychology Today, 2022). Although it may feel unpleasant, as an adaptive emotional response embarrassment is advantageous for our survival (R. E. Miller, 1996). Our body views embarrassment as a threat whereupon the autonomic nervous system ‘kicks into action’ with blushing occurring as part of the body’s trauma response mechanism, known as fight or flight, the way in which the body responds in an emergency (Keston, 2016; van der Kolk, 2015). Our face is also typically where one first notices signs of ageing and the ensuing shame precipitates the ‘need’ for cosmetic procedures aimed at delaying the signs of ageing (Honigman & Castle, 2006; Tiggeman & Slevec, 2010). I am as I am seen in front of the other (Sartre, 2003).

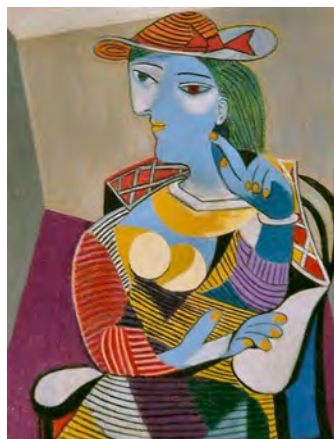
Reflecting upon one’s own face, the closest apprehension of our face we will ever see is the one reflected back to us in a mirror or photograph. Curiously *“Of all the faces we come across, our own is the one that we know the least”* (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001). Found in archaeological digs, crude and rather ineffective glass mirrors date back no earlier than the third century A.D. (Melchior-Bonnet, 2001). Strange to imagine then that before quality mirrors or photographs were invented no one knew what they looked like other than perhaps in an artist’s interpretation. As Pattison notes *‘This reflects the experience of face of which all we ever have is partial knowledge and understanding’* (2013, p. 12).

Painted faces

Faces can also be decorated. Tribes paint their faces symbolically according to culture and tradition often denoting status and stage in life (Kaddour, 2016).

Women, for centuries, have augmented their natural features, decorating their faces to appear more aesthetically appealing. While some men defy the stereotypical gender norms and wear makeup (Kaur, 2021) others will wear make-up as part of their drag queen act. Transgendered women will often adorn their face with makeup to appear more feminine, often feeling judged by normative beauty standards (Poulakis & Monteiro, 2019).

For some, 'fillers'⁷ or surgical intervention feels necessary either to restore a face to its former youthful appearance thus aiding social acceptability or modifying the face, for example in facial feminisation surgery, typically undertaken by those whose outward appearance does not match their felt gender or gender expression (Ainsworth & Spiegel, 2010; American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2020). The face is a living and moving organ to be interpreted from many angles, as expressed, for example, in Picasso's Cubist depiction, 'Seated Women', as seen below:



Seated Woman (Marie-Therese) 1937 by Pablo Picasso

⁷ 'Fillers' is a colloquial term to signify the use Botox or collagen injected into the face as temporary anti-ageing treatments.

Sociological origin

Deriving from Vulgar Latin's *facia* (Harper, 2022c), *face*, as a sociological concept, was originally developed by George Herbert Mead, creator of Symbolic Interactionism which suggests that our daily interactions are 'symbolic enactments' which act as reflections of our cultural knowledge; these interactions are not, according to Mead, our own spontaneously occurring creations (Blumer, 1992; Hopkins, 2015; Mead et al., 2015). Cupach & Metts argue that this cultural knowledge enables people to manage their behaviours while creating mutuality in the meaning making (Cupach & Metts, 2008). We can see that face is a multifaceted and highly complex part of our anatomy and subjective experience. So what does it mean to '*lose face*'? I shall now explore the concept of losing face with emerging questions: how might 'losing face' be exacerbated by those suffering from adverse childhood experiences? And how might 'losing face' at a young age impact the development of a person's agency? In light of the Covid-19 pandemic where masking one's face was often mandatory, I will also briefly explore the phenomenon and implications of wearing a face mask apropos early child development.

Covid-19 and the facemask

It is worth mentioning facemasks as they have become a way of life over the past two plus years. Slowing the spread of the Covid-19 virus during the pandemic has resulted in measures such as the wearing of facemasks covering both nose and mouth. This has led to concern regarding levels of emotional communication (Fortin, 2020; Ong, 2020) particularly by parents and teachers of young children worried about masks inhibiting the development of social interactions (Hadini & Katz, 2020), holistic processing and face perception in pre-school children (Stajduhar et al., 2022).

While much can be deduced by looking at the eyes and forehead, it may give insufficient information for some emotional inferences (Ruba & Pollak, 2020a). Little is yet known regarding the impact of face obscuration on young children (Ruba & Pollak, 2020b) however I highlight the wearing of masks briefly here with relevance to child development. Emotional perception is impacted by face masks meaning that emotions may be misinterpreted or some may be imperceivable under the mask (Carbon, 2020). This highlights the impact on a young child who may already be facing adversity in their childhood (ACEs) with 'reading signs' on parents or caregivers faces, impactful to their sense of actual or perceived safety (Carbon, 2020; Carragher & Hancock, 2020; Molnar-Szakacs et al., 2021). For those who are highly self-conscious, particularly about their appearance, the wearing of a mask may, I suggest, also have been, rather paradoxically, a positive experience.

Losing face

Below, a recent dictionary definition of what it means to lose face:

If you lose face you do something which makes you appear weak and makes people respect or admire you less. If you do something in order to save face, you do it in order to avoid appearing weak and losing people's respect or admiration.

(Collins Dictionary, 2022)

While this definition may broadly capture what it means to lose/save face I suggest there are two problems: 1) it fails to mention how shameful it can feel to lose face and 2) it feels judgemental - 'you do something' places the onus and blame on the person 'losing' as if it were their fault. Would we blame the child who 'saves face' to safeguard against the shame of having a parent with a custodial sentence or the

person whose partner has left them for someone else? A more sensitive and useful summary can be found on the back cover of Pattison's (2013) book 'Saving Face',

"To lose face is a shameful experience amounting in perceived or actual alienation."

Goffman (1990) contends that 'Loss of face' is metaphoric language for a shamed identity, one which loses honour and respect. Pattison (2013) continues the argument by adding that many versions of 'face' give rise to shameful feelings leading to alienation and displacement for example through disfigurement. In society, to have face indicates belonging; to lose face is indicative of exclusion, often leading to both social and psychological shame (Pattison, 2013) with embarrassment involving an additional *"interpersonal exposure, 'loss of face', and a desire to escape, hide or disappear"* (Edelmann, 1990, p. 206).

Society in ancient Greece saw criminals publicly shamed by branding their face for all to see (Goffman, 1990), while in modern times depersonalisation occurred by the defacement of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay,

"...with hands manacled, mouths covered by surgical masks, and eyes blinded by blackened goggles....rendered faceless and abject, likened to caged animals." (Butler, 2020, p. 73)

More recently we have seen the public shaming through the attempts of 'cancel culture'. For example figures such as Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling and philosophy academic Professor Kathleen Stock, both subjected to 'group think' vitriol pitted against them for having particular views on aspects of transgenderism and the notion of free-speech (Hinsliff, 2021; Ramachandran, 2020).

Whether losing face or saving face (to prevent the loss of face), it appears we lose either way. This loss is assumed to be in relation to the Other, as noted by Sartre '*I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other*' (2003, p. 246). Yet there is no reference here to losing one's own sense of self-respect *to oneself*. For an only child, for example, where one's audience is often oneself, with no siblings to mediate an alternative experience, I suggest this would be a natural route of enquiry (Pitkeathley & Emerson, 1994). I contend that while shame is relational and social (Pattison, 2013), first and foremost we are in relationship with our own self. We can lose face through feelings of embarrassment, an intrinsically public emotion involving "*interpersonal exposure*" (Edelmann, 1990, p. 205), separating it from shame and guilt which one might feel when alone (Dong et al., 2013). Feelings of embarrassment arise for an individual from a public action that they perceive observers may believe foolish or inappropriate (Dahl et al., 2001).

Manifested shame is often depicted as a loss of face (Hollander, 2003; Kaufman, 1996; Wurmser, 1981); faces covered by hands and arms, a head held low, a face scribbled out as seen in the images below. The face may not be seen not seen but the expression of shame is ubiquitous as captured in the image below:



(freeimages.com/freepik.com)

Saving face

What does it mean then to **save face**? Colloquially, in business and particularly in East Asian cultures the term is used as an expression for the avoidance of embarrassment, humiliation and ultimately the shame of being exposed in some way that feels detrimental to one's sense of self (Grimm, 2019; Rodgers, 2020).

Research into young Chinese adults experiences of childhood adversity demonstrates that how ACEs may be perceived and reported may be culturally specific (Yu et al., 2021). Ho, Chan, Shevlin, et al. (2019) found that young Chinese adults tend to perceive their ACEs as a private matter and rarely disclose them. In their findings Ho et al, (2019) noted that most of the participants' experiences highlighted their conforming to a prevailing societal norm in which it was felt they ought to refrain from showing their negative emotions by keeping their views private and therefore not bringing shame to the family and in so doing 'saving face'.

One female participant with five ACEs described how they

"...didn't want to look bad in front of others, meaning I don't want others to know I'm actually like that, that so many things had happened to me, so I pretended like there was nothing wrong... I felt that if I say it, others may actually think you are annoying. Especially about my mother passing away, even the school social worker felt my negative energy was so much that I was annoying." (Ho et al., 2019, p. 13)

A strategy to preserve dignity and honour, saving face may apply to the individual, the family, social or community group (Covelman & Covelman, 1993). Focus may then be motivated towards restoring one's public image (Feinberg et al., 2012) or to metaphorically reinstating the 'lost' face (White et al., 2004). Feelings of embarrassment may lead to an avoidance of the precipitating conditions and thus saving face quite literally by hiding one's face, avoiding eye contact and

maintaining a psychological distance (Keltner & Buswell, 1997). The physical face and psychological face are cognitively linked and as such a person may not only respond directly to embarrassment but also symbolically by hiding their physical face, for example, with sunglasses or through restorative surgery or cosmetics (Dong et al., 2013).

In her thought provoking book 'Saving Face' Talley (2014) deepens the discussion by considering the cultural and social politics of face and what it means when one's attributable identity is defined as disfigured. Talley (2014) explores the significance of metaphorical and literal saving face in regard to identity, the physical mechanisms of eating, breathing etc. and indeed our intrinsic way of being in the world.

Saving face, then, can be seen as a strategy employed to safeguard one's self or family/group against the humiliation of being found out as somehow flawed, shamefully different or to avoid further embarrassment. Saving face can be employed to preserve a sense of dignity while upholding one's actual or perceived reputation. As may be seen in the following section using art within a therapeutic relationship may facilitate a non-shaming way of working through some of the issues likely to be caused by saving face.

No extant literature was found demonstrating the concept of saving face in Western culture in relation to ACEs, although I suggest the motivation to save face, albeit perhaps under a different guise, is likely to be no less relevant at least for the individual even if not culturally within the wider family context.

Appendix 20

Heuristically influenced researcher self-study

Introduction

The self-study is a heuristically influenced practitioner-researcher reflection of my experience and what has come to light during the research and write-up phase. The premise for this self-study is two pronged. Firstly to have an account of myself as I journey through the research process and write up and secondly to gain new insight into my thinking and embodiment of experiences. The self-study is not a linear progression through the research experience more a collection of musings that occurred to me throughout. My hope is that it feels organic rather than necessarily academic as per the main body of the work.

As previously discussed, the origins for this study were born from my own personal experience of ACEs, realisation of poor agency development, observations in my client work and desire to research more deeply other women's experiences.

I decided to incorporate this heuristically influenced self-study as I progressed through the doctorate programme, research and write up of this study. More than the 'just' the thread of reflexivity that runs through the thesis, it offers my unfiltered responses and snapshots of phenomena that have been poignant as I have journeyed through this research. It is important to note that heuristic inquiry is not only a methodology in itself but an adaptable approach that may be used within other research paradigms (Hiles, 2012). It is with this in mind that I have been able to incorporate a heuristically influenced self-study within my project. Although this self-study is not a full heuristic inquiry I offer a summary of the core processes and phases of to aid the reader's understanding of its use herein.

The Nature of Heuristic Inquiry

Moustakas (1923-2013), an American psychologist interested in humanistic and clinical psychology developed heuristic inquiry as a methodology and method to provide a vivid and accurate portrayal of lived experience with the researcher immersing themselves totally in a lengthy period of self-exploration whilst explicating experience from co-researchers (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

Heuristic originates from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to find or discover (Moustakas, 1990). According to Moustakas (1990, p. 9) heuristic research refers to

“....a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.”

Summary of core processes

(Hiles, 2001, pp. 3–4; Moustakas, 1990, pp. 15–27)

Identify with the focus of the inquiry	Ability to get inside the research question, living with it and becoming one with it and achieving an understanding of it.
Self-dialogue	Fundamental to the beginning phase, self-dialogue allows the phenomenon to converse directly with the researcher’s own experience. Human experience enables epistemological experience to be discovered through candid self-inquiry.

Tacit knowing	Alongside explicit knowledge, i.e. that which is made known, there is another knowledge which is implicit within our experience and actions. It is indefinable, preceding intuition and may guide the researcher into sources of meaning otherwise undiscovered. Tacit knowing is the underlying concept in heuristic research.
Intuition	A 'bridge' between explicit and tacit knowledge is formed. It is observable and thus describable. It is the realm of the in between or what we would call the intuitive. Each indivisible whole requires intuition in its formation and is essential in the search for knowledge. We can see a house from each angle but cannot get a complete picture of the house without intuition.
Indwelling	Here we have a deliberate and conscious process of turning inward to gain a deeper, more comprehensible understanding of human experience. Indwelling requires willingness and ability to gaze within without losing attention. Rather than logical or linear it facilitates the researcher to dwell within clues when they appear to gain necessary insight.
Focusing	Essential in heuristic inquiry, focusing is a concept and process advanced by Gendlin (2003). Steps are followed such as clearing an inward space to assist clarifying, elucidating and explicating the researcher's question. It is a sustained process, systematic in contacting central

	meanings of the experience. It enables qualities of the experience to be brought to the conscious.
The internal frame of reference	However, it may have come about (i.e. tacit/intuitive etc.) or deepened (i.e. through focusing/indwelling etc.) knowledge and experience resulting from the research are placed in the contextual base of the researcher, not in another frame of reference.

Summary of the phases of heuristic inquiry

(Hiles, 2001, pp. 4–5; Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27–35)

Initial engagement	The task is to discover an intense interest that calls out to the researcher, one that incorporates important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. One encounters their autobiographical self and place in a socially embedded context.
Immersion	Once the question has been clarified the researcher becomes completely and intensely immersed in the question. It becomes all consuming, occupying every moment, even in dreams. The researcher becomes intimate with it, growing in understanding and knowledge of it. Concentration and alertness are required as virtually anything can become raw material for further immersion.
Incubation	During incubation the researcher retreats from the intensity of the immersion thus enabling an expansion

	of knowledge to naturally occur. This period enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full potential. A good analogy is offered by Moustakas: the house key that has evaded discovery when the owner intensely searches yet is quickly discovered once the search is no longer the owner's preoccupation.
Illumination	Involving a breakthrough into conscious awareness, an awakening happening naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. It may add new insight to elements of the experience or corrections to distorted understanding or disclosure of hidden meanings. A synthesis of previously fragmented knowledge or offering new discoveries.
Explication	Once illumination of themes, components and qualities into full conscious awareness, explication involves a detailed examination of what has been discovered. A comprehensively organised depiction of the core themes is required.
Creative synthesis	After full familiarity with the data and phase meditative solitude, the researcher synthesises the findings creatively to be expressed as a report, narrative account, poem, music, story and so on.

To bring balance I offer a short critique of heuristic inquiry.

Critique of heuristic inquiry

Etherington (2004, p. 125) suggests heuristic inquiry has been viewed as too self-indulgent with a lack of objectivity; reminding us that

“subjectivity is not an end itself and that heurism invites us to filter our participants’ experiences through our own, not to supplant their experiences with our own.”

I suggest this astutely examples the necessity for an attitude of critical self-reflection and reflexivity. Whilst Braud and Anderson (1998) suggest a lack of political/social/theoretical prominence disengages potential researchers, Sela-Smith (2002) provides us with the only known in-depth critique of Moustakas’s work (Adcock, 2017).

Interestingly, Sela-Smith’s critique is not so much about the methodology itself but Moustakas’s focus in the research shifting,

“...from the self’s experience of the experience to focusing on the idea of the experience.”

Sela-Smith claims this resulted in an ambivalent model, demonstrated by Moustakas’s introduction of the theory versus the presented application (2002). Sela-Smith reviewed 28 research papers *claiming* to have used heuristic inquiry. Yet 25 were apparently unable to follow the process laid out by Moustakas (1990) and had not reported internalising of the tacit dimension (Sela-Smith, 2002). Having read Moustakas’s methodology I disagree with Sela-Smith, not finding the suggested ambivalence; instead I propose three researchers in fact followed

Moustakas's method correctly whilst 25 misinterpreted the intention thus appearing remis of the 'kingpin' i.e., the tacit dimension.

Self-study

It is personal

As with many qualitative studies this research has been born of my own life's story. One that, finally, at the age of 53, I am beginning to comprehend. It stems from realisation that adverse childhood experiences have impacted my neural and emotional development alongside a felt sense that because my upbringing was, I expect, deemed to be in some way privileged (I mostly had food, clothes and went to boarding school). However, something happened to me which ultimately affected my ability to focus, retain information, and understand the nuances of social behaviour which gave me a pervasive feeling of there being something wrong with me and that I must generally be rather stupid. This was alongside my propensity to seek out unhealthy types of affection which led me to feel ashamed and vulnerable. My longing to belong and to be acceptable overwhelmed my adolescence and long into adulthood. I no longer (mostly) believe that I am inherently stupid but I still experience the waves of a core shame – although now I dwell under the waves for less time. Although I have felt very alone and hateful towards myself at times this doctoral journey, in fact beginning really in 2015 with the PG Diploma, has been life changing. I hardly recognise the person who first interviewed at Cambridge. I know it was me but it doesn't feel like it was me....not then. Now things feel different.

Previously my sole purpose was to please, to be accepted, and, to be liked. These are not unusual traits necessarily, yet my motivation was so strong, my need to attach was so strong that I became a version of myself I now can hardly recognise or

reconcile with the person I believe I am today. This doctoral process and the very nature of my particular research has changed me immeasurably. I am most grateful for this unique and privileged experience.

As this profession demands, certainly during training but essentially as one progresses, examining one's life is not unusual. Yet, after four years of Adlerian diploma training, three years of study at Cambridge (both of which required a set number of hours in counselling) it is only through this doctoral process that I can finally make sense of myself. I have come to understand and accept my beliefs, values and morals. I am able to get off the proverbial fence upon which I have sat for so long. I can accept my shadow aspect and I understand how my Private Logic has impacted my behaviours. By accepting my 'lonely only childness' as a gift rather than a curse, I have freed up my creative self and can embrace all the hobbies I have dabbled in for as long as I can remember but given up the instant a chance for validation has come along; or simply not allowed myself to do them for fear of failing or not being good enough. This is a work in progress and while my mental health now feels reasonably good, I need/want to focus on my physical health.

I begin the interview phase of my research soon. I am excited yet trepidationous. I can't quite believe it. I don't feel ready somehow but I'm unsure as to the reason. I think back to the PAP and wonder if that was really me..... did I really make it? Is there some parallel universe in which I'm playing a role? I sit in my therapy room and imagine the girl on the swing in front of the window. Her fresh pinafore blowing in the breeze. Her hair with its soft dark brown curls frames her face. Her big green eyes stare into space. She has no sense of the time, no other place to be. She just is. Her brown leather boots kick the dirt underneath as she whiles away the hours. She is my waking dream; I long to be her. Innocent and free. The church bells ring and I return from my reverie.

I am reminded that I have my first interview in a couple of days and I need to prepare. I need to check over my ethics, I must ensure that I am ready...mentally prepared, and I must remember to breathe!

Leif died last week. I am bereft, still in shock at his sudden departure. He was such a special boy. It hurts when those we love have to leave us. I note this here but will express my deeper feelings in my personal journal. I had to make a decision regarding Millie's session and decided to continue. I still don't know for sure if it was the right decision to continue – how is that really evaluated anyway...? but sense it was. The session was extremely moving and butterflies have taken on a whole new meaning.

Case study

I am writing this brief case study as an illustration and reminder to myself why this research is and has felt so important to me. Penned during the findings write-up phase of my research.

Jane

During recent explorations with a client I will name Jane, I witnessed the crystallisation of my research dilemma and a strong sense of the aloneness I recognised for myself. Born into a comfortable family where Maslow's basic needs (S. McLeod, 2018) were being met along with status and image, Jane had had the 'perfect' childhood. And now as an adult, ostensibly successful with a good job, nice home, a loving husband, and two beautiful young children she felt she *should* be content. Yet, instead, Jane felt an anger bubbling away as she became increasingly irritated with her work, husband, children, and life. This was affecting her sense of self, her self-worth and her self-esteem. Through our work, which included the use of art materials and sand tray, my client came to realise that she has been living the life her mother had mapped out for her, almost to the word.

Although loving and kind on the one hand, Jane's mother was also domineering, expectant and passively controlling. While nothing overtly abusive had occurred, for Jane the drip-drip-drip of emotional and coercive manipulation *was* the adverse experience of her childhood.

My client's personal agency was under developed and she was continually needing to save face in order that no-one would *know* her; here was a woman who felt extremely ashamed to admit that while she does love her children and sees her husband as a kind man, she would rather be single with no children and seeking the adventures of her choosing. Together we explored the impact of Jane's childhood and the complexity of her feelings around her identity in the present. Working with Jane was profoundly important, not only for her but for me as the wounded healer (D. Sedgwick, 1994) and now the wounded researcher (Romanyshyn, 2013). I have recognised many parallels with my own story; feeling stuck and hopeless. And, until recently, I had no idea that what has been missing is a reasonably solid sense of self or personal agency. Ironically Jane's 'privileged' upbringing was also her ACE.

It has been important for me to write about Jane as our work together has occurred during the write-up of my research. Jane had come to me originally because she was tearful on a daily basis. We had established initially that Jane was likely experiencing symptoms of post-natal depression. Jane saw her doctor and was prescribed anti-depressants. It was only once Jane was not 'an emotional wreck' as she described herself, that we were able to deepen our understanding of what lay at the foundation of her despair. Our work helped Jane make sense of her experiences and find meaning in moving forward. The relief was palpable, and although she faces certain challenge ahead, she is now beginning her agentic development and living life more consciously with awareness of her needs and wants. The concurrence of this work to my research project has again realised in me the

importance of understanding links between ACEs and the development of personal agency and how, in the profession, this recognition must become foregrounded for exploration.

Strange experience

I had a strange experience during the doctoral programme where I felt confused and conflicted. I had been supporting someone I will name Sam with some challenges they were facing around the same time as I was transcribing the participant interviews. While I very much like Sam I was beginning to struggle with some of feelings evoked in me around my perception of them needing to be treated as a 'special case'.

I had had a very positive session and felt very empathic towards a participant I shall name Mary. She very much reminded me Sam in her manner, demeanour and gentleness. Yet when I was transcribing the interview with Mary I noticed a shift in my feelings towards her. I was becoming irritated by her words and confused as to why. I couldn't understand the quite drastic change in how I was experiencing her through the transcription and audio recording. I was deeply concerned at my changing feelings and needed to understand what was happening. I spent time in deep contemplation.

What emerged was the realisation that it was the student Sam I was supporting with whom my difficulty lay and I was projecting this onto the participant who had initially reminded me of Sam. Once I understood this I was able to look at myself and realise that actually much, in fact most, of the irritation in fact belonged to me. There is something about a sense of entitlement, of needing to be special that reminded me of a relative with whom I have struggled for many years. The compassion course I undertook helped me work through my feelings and rather

than be critical be kind. I realised I was the criticised who had become the criticiser. I was then able to once again feel as I had towards both Sam and Mary. It was an interesting and valuable learning experience and while rather unpleasant to have such feelings, a deeply useful experience. The point of talking about this experience here is that a) it related to a participant and b) it felt important as it showed my agentic development and progression from remaining forever stuck to *wanting* and being *able to affect change for myself*.

Inspiration

I dwell with Maya Angelou's poem 'Still I Rise' (A7, p. 408). I am a White woman, and as far as I'm aware Black slavery is not in my ancestry. I do not wish in any way to diminish the power of this poem's meaning as conveyed by a Black woman living with the dream of hope for the slave. However, this poem has nevertheless touched me deeply. I am grateful to Angelou for writing the words that expressed my experience with an empowering sentiment.

I can vividly relate the poem's meaning to my own story but also as a beacon of hope for all the strong women who continue to rise despite their ACEs and poor agentic development. The following verses particularly resonate with me, encapsulating succinctly my experience:

As a child:

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still like air I'll rise.*

As an adult:

*You may write me down in history
With you bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

(Angelou, 2009, pp. 41–42)

Haiku Poetry

Poetry has become increasingly important to me over the past couple of years. I am enjoying it in ways I never have before. I am curious as to why this might be. I'm not sure but wonder if perhaps, as I have begun to free myself up to new educational experiences I have cast aside my previous belief that *I'm just not clever enough to understand it*. This journey has opened up a surprising new world to me.

I became aware during the write up of the findings that I was searching for a way in which to succinctly capture what it has meant to me to realise the transition from very little agency (both conscious and unconscious) to a lifespace of agentic capability. Drawn increasingly to traditional Japanese art not only as an aesthetic that pleases my eye, particularly representations of sea, mountains and nature, but as a way of increasing my 'self' understanding through indwelling with a particular image such as one from Hokusai's 'Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji' or Ganku's (1749-1838) tiger, a hanging scroll painting housed at the British Museum, London (Reeve, 2005).

I remember my first (and only) previous encounter with haiku, experienced during clay therapy training in 2015, whereby we were invited to write about the clay object we had just crafted. We were then invited to create a haiku from the writing.

I realise now, having read about the origins of traditional haiku, that we were not following any pre-defined structure but the symbolic representation was there all the same. I enjoyed the experience very much but it has not been until recently, during this doctoral study and thesis write up, that haiku has become important to me as a way to distil into a few words the essence of my own experience of saving face.

Interested to learn more about haiku and how it may assist me in my own endeavours has led me to research not only the origins but study many haiku poems in order to draw out or at least interpret the author's intrinsic meaning. A poem that I have found deeply poignant to my own experiences and to that of my research is by the Japanese poet and artist Yosa Buson (1715-1783) of the Edo era,

*Cherry blooms are falling –
and now between the trees,
a temple appears.*

(Patt et al., 2010)

Having spent much time indwelling with this haiku I came to its meaning for me personally. The temple represents my holistic presence; I must value my body and see its worth.

Eminent in Japanese culture and linked to themes such as mortality, mindfulness and living in Buddhism the Japanese cherry blossoms may be seen as an enduring metaphor for human existence. When in bloom their ethereal beauty can be quite intoxicating yet their exquisiteness tragically short-lived. An existentially stark reminder of our own fragility and impermanence. Cherry blossom, or *Sakura* as it is known in Japan, holds the meaning of life, death and renewal. It seems to be a fitting metaphor for the death of a non-agent life and the renewal of life once the

mask has fallen to the ground. I also see the cherry blooms falling as a metaphor for relinquishing unhealthy obsession and necessity for seeking validation through external beautification.

Only the author truly knows what meaning this poem held for him but for me the cherry blooms are the mask, the make-up, the vulnerable exterior; decorative for a fleeting moment, for the blooms can only ever last resplendent for a matter of days. Yet now as the blooms fall, the trees become significant and have multiple meanings: strength, growth, roots, steadfast, but also a sense of power, oppression and immutability. Yet, from the most delicate of branches, a temple appears. It is revealed and imagined as a strong, solid, stable, and purposeful container able to withstand the wind, the rain, the endless trampling feet and watchful eyes. And when the light has dimmed, the agentic self emerges, choosing when to close the door on the world; solace found within.

I am, in this moment, able to be vulnerable. Here I share this, my first intentional haiku, born from my 'ACEs to agency' voyage,

*Buried, deepest snow
suffocate the childhood fear
the mask melts away*

(Researcher)

My haiku meets the traditional (Japanese version⁸) of 5,7,5 syllables per line and also the *kigo* or seasonal word, a typical focus for traditional Japanese haiku with a contextualised surprise at the end. There is a tension which is necessary for the

⁸ van Den Heuvel (2000 p.xv) notes that it is now thought that 12 not 17 English syllables equate to 17 Japanese sound-symbols (*onji*). I choose to adhere to the 5-7-5 pattern with 17 syllables as adhering to this system helps me focus on explicating the phenomena as they emerge.

dynamic of the haiku, so it is alive, as with a sonnet that has volta or turn between the first and second part. Although many English haiku poets do not follow the Japanese structure, the distinguishing features are precision, observation and alertness and a willingness from the reader in sharing the creative process with an attitude of openness (van Den Heuvel, 2000).

In the beautiful book, *Haiku, Japanese Art and Poetry* it is noted that

“The goal of a true haiku poet is to create an emotional response in the reader through the haiku’s imagery of a particular moment” (Patt et al., 2010, p. 4).

As I re-read my haiku and dwell in the spirit of the moment I feel a surge of hope, of freedom and a revealing of my agentic-self. Haiku poems may be subjectively interpreted as illustrated by this, another from Buson which, for me, encapsulates the essence of coming to find my own self-wisdom later in life,

*I’ve come in late autumn
to see someone of great knowledge
and I found him at home.*

(Collected Haiku of Yosa Buson, 2013)

Haikus of war

As I write (currently 2nd March 2022) Russia’s war on Ukraine is ravaging through the country like crazed rats on a mission of destruction and devastation, not only to the infrastructure but to civilians going about their daily life. For many life will have changed for ever and I for one feel impotent at this point; other than sending

money I feel there is little I can do to help, which is frustrating. Writing haikus has become an almost daily necessity or obsession perhaps in an attempt to manage my own feelings while I try to comprehend the sheer terror in which the courageous people of Ukraine led by their stalwart president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy are undoubtedly experiencing. I am also mindful of the many innocent Russians who fall victim to the agenda of a dictator. I intend to compile my haiku's into a short book (see products Chapter 9 for sample poems).

Research academy shame

25th February 2022, I am presenting twice with three other members of my cohort this afternoon on bumps and bruises: implementation tales from the student researcher. I had put my name down for Professor Charura's 'decolonising research' session but due to poor health he had to pull out. I instead chose Professor Nollaig Frost's session which, again due to health issues was not live but, kindly, she had it pre-recorded. It was interesting and useful. In the feedback after with Dr Sofie Bager-Charleson I wanted to talk about Dr Frost's example that when we think about what arises for us we may realise we are 'passionate yet angry'. This spoke directly to me as I, too, can be passionate yet angry.

Yet, although I put my hand up and started to speak, I was spoken over, shut down by another, unknown to me, group member. Suddenly, awash with an unstoppable flow of shame rapidly reaching my every cell, I had become invisible. My imagination went wild amidst the hollow feeling of humiliation I was experiencing. My private logic (Adlerian term for one's views of self, others and the world; the opposite of 'common sense') tells me that I am a misfit, on the periphery, have nothing to say and so, armed with this belief, I am aware to challenge my assumptions and face my fear of speaking up. My challenge failed.

Then an exercise: What is our research project? How might we appear to our participants? And finally a metaphor for the research experience. I felt pleased I had something to offer and again put my hand up and, in an appropriate moment, started to speak. Again, I was talked over and shut down by the same person. I waited patiently for her to finish, hand up, started to speak and again, was usurped by yet another group member. In total, during that morning session, I experienced five occasions where my hand had gone up (politeness) and I had started to speak (having waited for the natural pause after the last person) and was immediately squashed. Invisible. An overwhelming sense being yet no-thing-ness. I did not exist. Overwhelmed with shame unrelenting tears ensued. I was unable, by the last opportunity, to speak.

I emailed Dr Bager-Charleson to let her know that I had wanted to contribute and did have something to add but hadn't had the opportunity. I needed her to know I was trying to participate. This felt important. I recognised its roots being deeply embedded in my intrinsic need to people-please. Needless to say Dr Bager-Charleson's response was kind and enthusiastic. I had finally used my voice and it had been heard and received. On reflection I know this feeds into my 'lonely only child' experience and never quite understanding the rules about when to speak or not. Add this to ADHD and it is a 'perfect storm'. Although I was upset at the time I learnt, as ever, from the experience. I can be more forthright and less polite or I can learn not to take it personally.

Peer reviewer

I have, today, submitted my first peer review for a well-respected counselling and psychotherapy journal on an article on using Story Completion within a mixed-methods paradigm. I felt excitement to be asked by Dr McBeath to do this yet noted an anxiousness at my ability to do it. As I write a surge of this anxiety reminds me I

have submitted and slipped into the familiar priority/impasse state of pleaser/rejection (Kfir, 2011). Yet I am somewhat in awe of the author. A qualified psychotherapist yet fledgling researcher who has been able to use his/her agency to believe in her research project design: a mixed-methods study using Story Completion as the qualitative method, demographic information for the quantitative element with reflexive thematic analysis to scrutinise the data. I wish to embody the courage and self-believe that this practitioner-researcher has demonstrably advocated. A haiku has come to me,

*Have courage my friend
let's share in its abundance -
swim your own cool stream*

(Researcher)

I have had feedback on my feedback submission. I am delighted and breathe a sigh of relief.

ADHD

I am having an ADHD 'crisis'. Of course it is not really a crisis when I think about the many *actual* crisis's erupting in the world at this moment in time. But, nevertheless, and perhaps it is fuelled by certain anxiety to do with the suffering from the invasion of Ukraine, I am recognising the pattern of impulsive, compulsive and 'out of control' highly anxious behaviours. This acknowledgement is a little late in the day as I have already purchased the 17 books I *so desperately needed to help me* in the past week, almost half of the 40 I have purchased in the past month. The range is minimal; obsessional purchasing of anything related to Japanese art and Haiku's; the rest related to phenomenology and research. I feel ashamed but not enough to send them back. For they have become 'precious things' to my Gollum-like self. Rather like Gollum and the ring I have a lust for books but a strong desire

to be free of them; or rather what they represent. I love books, I love the feel, the look, the knowledge they hold and offer at any given moment. But they remind me of my father, the remind me of my desire (need) to be seen as clever and the reality that I'm not particularly clever at all. This is a painful admission to make and I need to leave it there.

Yet I can't. As I sit here now, attempting to put some rational thought to my compulsions, I realise I have allowed my anxiety, the particular strain that tells me that I do not know enough, that I will be 'found out' and exposed as an academic imposter to take hold. And that if I have *all* the books I *will* be clever. A perfect example of magical thinking! The slight drawback is that I have to read them and then understand them. Yet with my inattentiveness and inability to focus, which is particularly strong at the moment, this is a near-on impossible. And so the cycle perpetuates. I am surrounded by my adored books yet my inability to regulate and focus when in full ADHD throttle, renders me almost helpless so I just sit. Stuck and impotent to move forward. The saviour becomes the oppressor. It is so stressful as I have to find somewhere to put them. I sit here in my literal library feeling as stupid as I ever did. I pause. This is not helpful. I am sitting with the realisation that I have just openly acknowledged my shameful behaviour and whoever reads this will have some small insight into the chaotic thought cycles I live with. The palpable anxiety. It's horrid. But.....it occurs to me that in doing so, I have been agentic and chosen not to save face. Perhaps this is meant to be somewhat liberating. I will sit with that possibility a while.

I have been reflecting on the ACE study, the ten categories of childhood adversity and the original obesity work that pre-empted the study. There seems to be a cruel paradox of finding my authentic self and what makes me feel whole and the increase in health conditions that may be related to ACEs.

Reading about women's struggles has really made me consider my own. On being a woman. I remember the numerous wolf whistles of my youth and a sense that I had better flatter their noticing me or else....a colleague telling me 'in jest' that I looked like I needed a 'good seeing to'. Not being able to take part in rugby at school because I was a girl. My father buying me typically boys toys such as woodwork tools, a train set, and Meccano because, as I was under no illusion, he had wanted a boy and the fact I was a girl was a tangible disappointment to him. What I did understand of being a girl is that I had to have a 'best dress' and that it had to be long and that my father had to choose it as he had 'good taste'. I had to keep my hair long and wasn't allowed to wear trousers. I had to wear long skirts trimmed with broderie anglaise that I felt very torn over: I hated them because I wanted to wear trousers but felt guilty as my grandma had made them and therefore I should love them and be grateful. As I write I am reminded of the cognitive and emotional dissonance that I experience still to this day. I still have the large doll made by my grandma that dons a smaller version of one of the skirts. It feels so strange when I look at it; as if everything has changed yet nothing has changed.

I think of Mary Whiton Calkins and what she endured by the male dominated institutions or Kathrine S. having to register under a neutral name for the Boston marathon so she wouldn't be recognised and was then literally man-handled as she was being pushed off the track. It has made me think of all the relationships I have had where being the woman meant looking pretty and being objectified. I think about my two grown up boys (32 and 29) and how they have never had to endure what I did simply by virtue of being female.

The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding
that life without wonder is not worth living.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

I have been reading *'When Ancestors Weep'* which has some useful insight on intergenerational trauma. However.... it also has a very apparent theistical streak running through it, pertaining to the Christian God, which, given James Houck is, amongst other things, a Professor in Pastoral Counselling, is probably unsurprising. I noticed my immediate and growing irritation with Houck, who, in discussing one's soul as *"...not something we have, but instead, the soul is who we are; the purest essence of ourselves that is related to God"* (2018, p. xii) seems to exclude those without such a belief. I wonder why one can't have a spiritual soul, an essence of being, without it having to align with Christian beliefs? I believe I have a soul, in so much as I have a centre of moral consciousness, I have an essence that is born of all the experiences that make me *me*, but I am an agnostic a-theist; that is, I don't *know* if God exists and until I *see* evidence that God exists I can't believe he (he?) does. And why the Christian God? Is the Christian God any more important than any other god? Who gets to decide? Whose god is the *real* God? Presumably all organised religions believe that theirs is? I am reminded of Alain de Botton and rather like his idea that secularism should be able to 'borrow' the 'nice bits' of religion – the beautiful buildings, the community feeling and so on. I remember asking C&C how they *know* that God exists and their answer was 'we just do'..... I agree that that constitutes *faith* but it is no more grounded in reality than my magical thinking relating to books!

I had a dream last night in which my concern was clearly manifest. I was due to supervise a group of women but so far only two had showed up. We decided to begin. One of them started describing her client work telling how she was encouraging her clients to realise that the only way they would find meaning and healing would be to follow Jesus and accept God into their hearts. I began to explain that this was erroneous and that it was highly inappropriate to try to force religious doctrine onto another, especially another already likely to be in vulnerable place. The other supervisee attempted to intervene but to no avail. The two women

got up and left in a huff. I was then worried that I had said too much, that I would get into trouble and be exposed as an imposter. I would be *seen*. Just as I feared the very worst, the rest of the group turned up and I woke up.

I remember, to a degree, living in the vicarage and attending church several times each week. I wanted desperately to believe in God, I prayed 'really hard' so I could be become 'good' and not be a 'sinner'. I also prayed for my Grandma but she died a horrible death. Suffice it to say my prayers had not been answered. My believe in a Christian God soon diminished and I was the only one in the group to flunk the Confirmation 'exam' – although I was still Confirmed – strange. I've never questioned that until now.

Yet, I *do* believe that I have a spiritual aspect. I am moved deeply by the power of the sea and wind; dazzled by the beauty of early morning dewdrops on spring grass; by the birds who naturally sing so beautifully, and the utter perfection of a flower in bloom. As I walk out with my dogs early in the morning I see and feel the beauty of nature. When I imagine the torment of the Ukrainians I see and feel devastating loss and injustice. If the Christian God is all knowing, all powerful, what stops him intervening?

The following poem by Fernando Pessoa written in 1914 (2006, p. 55) has deeply resonated with me and offers what I call a 'resting view' of my life; a pause, an appreciation of the here and now, not residing in the past and not concerned with what's to come – just being with and in the moment.

Beyond the bend in the road
There may be a well, and there may be a castle,
And there may be just more road.
I don't know and don't ask.

As long as I'm on the road that's before the bend
I look only at the road before the bend,
Because the road before the bend is all I can see.
It would do me no good to look anywhere else
Or at what I can't see
Let's pay attention to where we are.
There's enough beauty in being here and not somewhere else.
If there are people beyond the bend in the road,
Let them worry about what's beyond the bend in the road.
That, for them, is the road.
If we're to arrive there, when we arrive there we'll know.
For now we know only that we're not there.
Here there's just a road before the bend, and before the bend
There's the road without any bend.

Poiesis

For several years I have had a book on the shelf which I must have bought for a reason but I can't remember why and I have never looked at it. Yet each time I passed it, the word 'Poiesis' stood out to me and I made commitment to '*look at it later*'. I never did. But for some reason, now is the time. I took the book off the shelf and brought it with me to my beloved Cornwall. The book, Poiesis: The Language of Psychology and the Speech of the Soul (Levine, 1997) has been a gem. As I reflect I sense it was the word Poiesis that both scared and beguiled me. Poiesis – is "*that which 'pro-duces or leads (a thing) into being*" (Whitehead, 2003, p. 1), in other words, it simply means the activity of a person bringing something into being that did not exist before.

As I write these words I know immediately. I have not been ready to face my own ACEs, consider the shame of not owning my agency. But the time is right now as I have been privileged enough to witness, in my participants, that which has not

come to light before, particularly by way of their created images. This book is so strikingly relevant to my project that I now understand not only its latent intention but the tacit purpose for which I bought it.

Whitehead (2003) suggests that poiesis is 'in process', an 'undercurrent', bringing some-'thing' towards the light – that poiesis leads us into 'being'; for the Ancient Greeks, from which the word derives, poiesis was concerned with *aletheia*, an unveiling, an openness towards being-in-the-world. Whereas the Greeks viewed praxis as a complete act-of-will in the moment, poiesis was seen as an unconcealment, a bringing of a creation in to presence (Whitehead, 2003). The relevance to this project is the alignment of poiesis with the images created during this research. Participants 'unveiling' that which has not been previously expressed and therefore not seen.

Levine, (1997, p. xvi) invites us to,

"Let go of our previous identities and move into the experience of the void, the possibility arises for new forms of existence to emerge."

I am struck by the relevance of these words to this research project and hopeful that through new insight, understanding and compassion, women may begin to let go of the identity forged by our adverse childhood experiences, and the mask worn to 'save face' and that a new, agentic and authentic self may begin to emerge and exist in its place. Levine continues,

"The integration and affirmation of the psyche are one and the same. But this new identity only lives in the actuality of the creative process. We are called up constantly to re-form ourselves." (ibid).

The creative act of poiesis occurs as the soul dies and is re-born (Levine, 1997). Heidegger (2014) refers to poiesis as a 'bringing forth' like the blossom as it blooms, the emergence of a butterfly from its cocoon, and the fall of water as the snow melts. This takes me back to the butterfly so prominent in my research session with Millie. So meaningful to me, has the butterfly become, that I now wear a beautiful silver butterfly necklace as a reminder of the poignancy this final project has brought to me.

Researcher personal reflection

As a rather lonely only child living in the quiet solemnity of my grandparents' vicarage with periodical fear inducing visits to my mother, utilising my imagination became requisite for my psychic survival. Living with my depressed father and paternal grandparents (a solemn priest and dutiful but angry vicar's wife) I grew up spending a great deal of time on my own. I oscillated between a rich, imaginative internal world and a too often lonely reality. Sadly, as I grew older, the latter became more prominent with my imagination tuning into my attachment need of seeking inappropriate affection and conditional acceptance.

The imagination, once present in my rich and creative internal world, lay dormant. I have, over the past seven years, once again begun nurturing this aspect of my being, although it can be rather slow and painful. For it is when I allow myself the freedom to engage in the imaginal, by diminishing the critical parent that has suffocated my agentic self for so long, I feel truly alive. In my personal time I use art-making and the imaginal as part of my processing. I have recently begun creative journaling. Images come to me from deep within my psyche, particularly when I am out in nature or listening to music ranging from Shostakovich to Pink Floyd. But also from dwelling within the images created by others, particularly, Japanese scenes of mountains and sea.

One memory that comes to me often still is sitting often on the window ledge beneath the large window that faced out on to Oakhill Road from the middle of the staircase of my Grandpa's vicarage. A quick Google search led me to the very window. I feel rather strange as I look at the window with St Barnabas church looming in the background. The church rather reminds me now of the feeling I had when I first watched the 1970's film *The Omen*. Looming and oppressive. I would sit at the window longing. I am not sure what for but I can feel the longing as I close my eyes and call to mind one such moment.



The window at St. Barnabas vicarage

I'm sitting on the windowsill, the window is to my right. I lean my back against the small walled recess with my knees bent and my arms around them, hands clasped together in a hug. The curtains are bright, orange and yellow flowers. I am looking down the road to no 6. This is where Emma, my one friend lives. Only she's dropped me for a new friend, the girl who's just moved in opposite the vicarage. I feel empty, so alone. The road is quiet, no cars, no people, no Emma, no me.

I used to make Roman sandals out of layers of cardboard and old ribbon raided from my Grandma's stash and, in my imagination, rode into Rome on my big gold chariot. I realise now that I was searching for power and control. Perhaps this was an unrealised call to my agentic self in an aim to protect my lonely and vulnerable self. Yalom describes an existential isolation as being an 'unbridgeable gulf

between oneself and any other being' (1980, p. 353), his words speak directly to my own experience.

The re-awakening of my imagination has led me to want to explore further. As a lucid dreamer the lines between my dreams and reality are often very blurred. As a child dreams were, on occasion, pre-cognitive, a particular one was that my mother was going to come and take me only for her to then 'turn up' to do so without my prior knowledge. For many years, beginning in early adolescence, I had a recurring dream: I would be walking alone along a country road, a high hedgerow bank to my left. All along the bank I could see a cross section, rather like a sliced terrine. Revealed to me in the layers of mud, sand and stones were the bones of the people I had killed, all neatly stacked. No one else could see this but I had a deep fear that they would. I would be 'found out'. This dream haunted me for many years as I just couldn't trust whether the contents of the dream were real or indeed just a dream.

The dream ended in 2011 after a trip to Sicily and a visit to the Capuchin Catacombs of Palermo where the bones of many gave me strange comfort and a certain peace from *'hanging out with the dead'*. I find the image below strangely comforting as I notice a certain similarity between my dream and the layers of bodies lining the wall. I have concluded that I am not a serial killer (phew!) and that this recurring dream was a manifestation of my shadow aspect. I now understand this embodiment as 'saving face' for I was pre-occupied for a long time with people not finding out 'the very bones of me.'



Catacombs of Palermo

(Daniels, 2022)

Japanese inspiration



(Travel and Discover, 2017)

As I read King's (2020) chapter on phenomenology I was interested to read the beginning of *'Hokusai Says'* by Roger Keyes (Keyes, 2015),

*Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing.*

I looked up the poem by Keys (A7, p 408) and found that, for me, the beginning also, along with King, encapsulated the experience of *'being'* phenomenological and *'doing'* phenomenology. More broadly the poem captures the essence of finding meaning from adversity and hope from fear, thus aligning well with the purpose of my studies. The following words resonated with me personally as I consider my own experiences of aging and of saving face,

*He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.*

Roger Keys (2015)

During the write up process I have, as previously mentioned, become deeply *re-drawn* to Japanese art, particularly the work of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), Tani Bunchō (1763-1841), Ohara Koson (1877-1945) and Ogawa Kazumasa (1860-1929).



Ogawa Kazumasa

Mount Fuji as Seen from Kashiwabara – 1897

(This print hangs on a wall in my study)



Tani Bunchō

Earthly Paradise of Wuling (detail), ca. 1785

*I say **re-drawn** because I have, for as long as I can remember, found Japanese art, in particular depictions of the natural world, utterly mesmerising. I am drawn so deeply into the image it is as if I am actually there and that I will die if I ever have to leave that place. Yet, all through my twenties, thirties and most of my forties, near-on three decades, I was so*

in-agentic, so sub-consciously concerned with 'saving face' that I allowed myself to be influenced, even by people I didn't much care for. Cognitive dissonance has long been a strong feature – it feels as if I am gaslighting myself. Rather than trusting my judgement, proudly owning my tastes and satiating my own aesthetic desire, it is only during the write up of this thesis I have owned and spoken of my fascination and love of Japanese art. I dream that one day I will be able to walk amongst the cherry blossom and gaze at Mount Fuji's snow cap.

Hokusai's 'Under the Wave of Kanagawa', and the mountains of Bunchō and Kazumasa's Fuji have been particularly inspiring to me throughout this doctoral write up – many times I have felt as though I am riding against huge waves, seen the journey as travelling through mountainous terrain with the summit of Fuji being reached when my 'doctoring' is finally validated. In my imagination I am in Bunchō's entire scroll wandering through peach and cherry blossoms in bloom, chatting with the villagers and feeling free walking in the fields. I take this image as I imagine the journey towards my doctoral products.



Katsushika Hokusai

The Great Wave off Kanagawa - 1831

A truly numinous moment occurred recently (January 2023) on the way back from Cornwall. I was talking to my wife about my research, my hopes for the products and my gratitude for the experience. Suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, a beautiful bright rainbow appeared in the sky (much brighter than the image depicts). It was a wonderful moment and stayed with me for days.



I realise I am experiencing the phenomenon of *anemoia* – that is, nostalgia for a previous time or place I have never known. Having spent much time immersing myself in anemoia I realise I am juxtaposed between the sense that time is running out and wanting it all to be over. I am very aware of my age and the passage of time; this fills me with an existential dread that I won't have time to do all the things I wish to do. Yet I am also filled with the dread of having to live the rest of my life on this planet with the rest of the human race. I find myself longing for a time when people did not have social media, when world trauma wasn't 'on tap' 24/7, and when, broadly, it was standard practice to differentiate between women and men and, when free speech was tolerated. I fear for my granddaughter's future and this fills me with sadness. However, it also means that my work feels even more relevant; to develop women's sense of agency, reduce the impact of intergenerational trauma and reduce the necessity to save face feels so important.

As I come to close this self-study I want to note an event that has really tapped into this research project. For the sake of confidentiality I won't disclose how but suffice it to say, recently, in the past few weeks we have met and have involvement with (in a professional capacity) a Bangladeshi Muslim brother and sister. The sister is approximately my age, maybe a little older and speaks very minimal English (although more than my Bengali!). The sister, whom I will name Amala, appeared very suspicious of me at first but smiles do wonders and although very inquisitive seems more relaxed. I commented recently how much I liked the henna patterns on her hands. Very unexpectedly she invited me and my daughter to have our hands decorated at her home. I accepted on behalf of us both and we went to visit them. It all felt rather surreal but we were warmly welcomed into their home and the new daughter-in-law (whom I will name Zahra) proceeded to decorate my hands followed by my daughter's hands.

The henna, while beautiful on the skin of a Bangladeshi woman doesn't have quite the same impact on my very pale Nordic type skin! We were offered (and presented with) food. I didn't fancy it but I was polite, grateful and felt obliged to eat it along with the orange Fanta and peppermint tea. It was a challenge! My daughter came home with balloons and I was given the rest of the very spicy pasta. The reason this is relevant here is because our lives, I became quickly aware, are so phenomenally different. Zahra, having recently married Amala's son, has only been living in this country since the beginning of December, with very little English. But we managed to communicate and I discovered that at the age of 21 she is a housewife and her sole purpose is to look after her husband and to have his children. But Zahra told me that with no baby she is lonely and bored, and misses her parents. I felt a great sadness for Zahra, not least because her life has been mapped out for her. She has very little agency and apparently little realisation of this fact. I very much had the impression neither she nor Amala mix with many White British women.

While we were visiting both Amala and Zahra busied around while Amala's husband sat, motionless, the whole time we were there. As Amala walked me back to where the car was parked she, after some considerable effort on both our parts, communicated to me that if she were able to bring me the money, would I buy her a handbag online? She asked me to show her some, online, which I did with my phone with her gesturing to me which one I liked, it felt important I should like it; as if she couldn't choose for herself. Amala, it transpires doesn't shop online, she doesn't drive and she doesn't have a bank account.

And the beautiful young Zahra is to be the next generation who repeat this way of life. It is not for me to pass judgement at all but in my naivety I was shocked at how little agency these women seem to have, and how much I take my relative freedom for granted. Perhaps they don't question it but Zahra's apparent emptiness spoke volumes. It has brought up many questions for me and really affected me in a way I wasn't expected. They appear to have little, but nevertheless we were welcomed into their home. Zahra made it very clear she would like us to visit again. I felt truly humbled and became instantaneously aware of my privilege. This term gets far too overused but this is an instance where it is truly the right expression. I drove home with my daughter, something I normally would never even think twice about. Yet, later that evening, I ordered a handbag which I gave as a 'thank you' for showing us such kindness. Amala gestured that although we live differently, under her god's eyes we are all the same. I don't believe in her god but the sentiment felt extremely precious to me and I believe to her also.

I relate back to the literature review and Corbin's *Mundus Imaginalis* and my desire to learn more from Corbin, Hollis, Hillman, and Jung. While finding it somewhat complex I am, as mentioned earlier, drawn to their ideas of the psyche (soul) as self and the relevance of imaginative symbolism, the mystical and, the spiritual. I do not follow any organised religion and have eschewed in the past connection to anything of a spiritual

nature. Yet, over the past couple of years in particular I find the relevance of such work (I am early in my reading and understanding) and a strong draw towards it. As I journey this 'middle passage' of my life I am inclined to deepen my knowledge, understanding in order that I may face the second part of my life with a more peaceful, soulful, calm and, nourishing existence. This, I sense will help my body heal from the impact of adversity it certainly, tangibly, contains. I believe this will, in turn, help me to develop and deepen my psychotherapeutic practice.

This self-study hasn't quite gone the way I envisaged. It feels like an unfiltered stream of consciousness which sent me into a phase of 'is it good enough?' I have concluded that it has been what it needed to be. This doctoral experience has been quite literally life changing. I have learned so much about myself, my process, my sticking points, and my resilience. After experiencing excruciating levels of cognitive and emotional dissonance I have reached a place where it feels ok to differ in opinion even from those I respect. I realise now it doesn't diminish me as a person. It's ok to not agree, I don't have to people please and it's not a catastrophe if people don't like me. This is beyond liberating.

I have learned that as a parent the most important thing I have done is be a constant in my children's lives. I have made mistakes but I love them all dearly and I believe they *really do know and feel this from me*. They all seem secure in their attachments. My experiences have also led me into a profession, no... a vocation that I adore. To a degree, I can say I feel somewhat educated; I have gone from no degree at all at the age of 46 to gaining a PG Dip, a master's degree and now studying at doctoral level. I still have to pinch myself.

A few months ago I could feel the panic setting in about what to do next, once this doctorate is done. But now I've reached a point where I'm ready for this phase of it to be completed. I am feeling utterly exhausted with little left in the tank. But, I

have worked very hard and feel satisfied that I have done my best. It doesn't need to be perfect but I believe it is good enough. I will look forward to a study break and my first study-free summer in Cornwall where I will walk with my beloved dogs, paint, sew, and play music before setting to work on my products in earnest.

I end my self-study with a poem I bring to mind when I sense I am feeling vulnerable or too alone with my darker thoughts...it reminds me that I am alive and that to imagine freely is a wonder-filled gift for which I have much gratitude.

*There is freedom waiting for you
on the breezes of the sky,
and you ask
"What if I fall?"
"Oh my darling..."
"But what if you fly?"*

Erin Hanson

Appendix 21

Red Zone Theory with F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's model

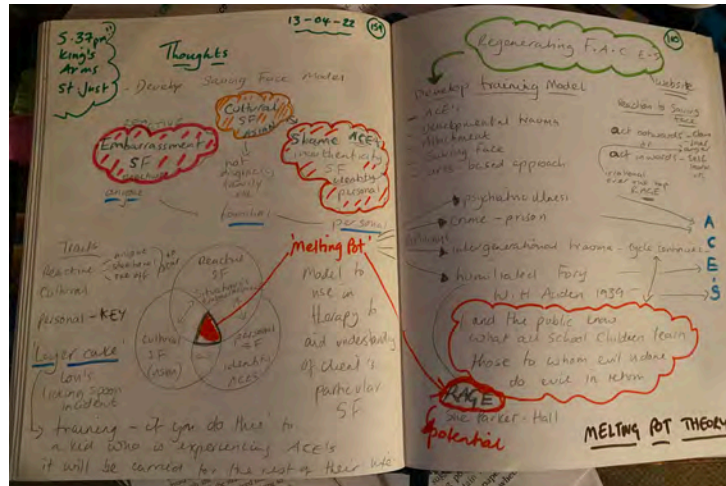
Theory and model development by the researcher

Red Zone Theory - from ACEs to Agency

I must emphasise that this theory and model is a work in progress. The model will be piloted by experienced arts-based therapists and feedback incorporated prior to any publication or dissemination.

Introduction

It was not my intention to develop a theory or model for therapeutic use during this doctorate. However, epiphanic moments often come to me when sat in the containing space of the King's Arms public house in far West Cornwall, armed with an orange juice and lemonade, typically between the hours of 5 and 6 o'clock. April 13th 2022 was one such afternoon. Some ideas that had been 'floating around' for the past few months/years began to take shape. Dwelling with the phenomenologically rich participant data, both text and images, stirred up a sense of 'there is something else' within me. Over the next weeks my ideas morphed and developed into a tangible theory incorporating new therapeutic tools for practice.



Early theory development

In the following pages I will be stepping the reader along the pathway I have journeyed in developing and outlining the theory and construction of my model for use in both client and supervisory practice.

What is Red Zone Theory?

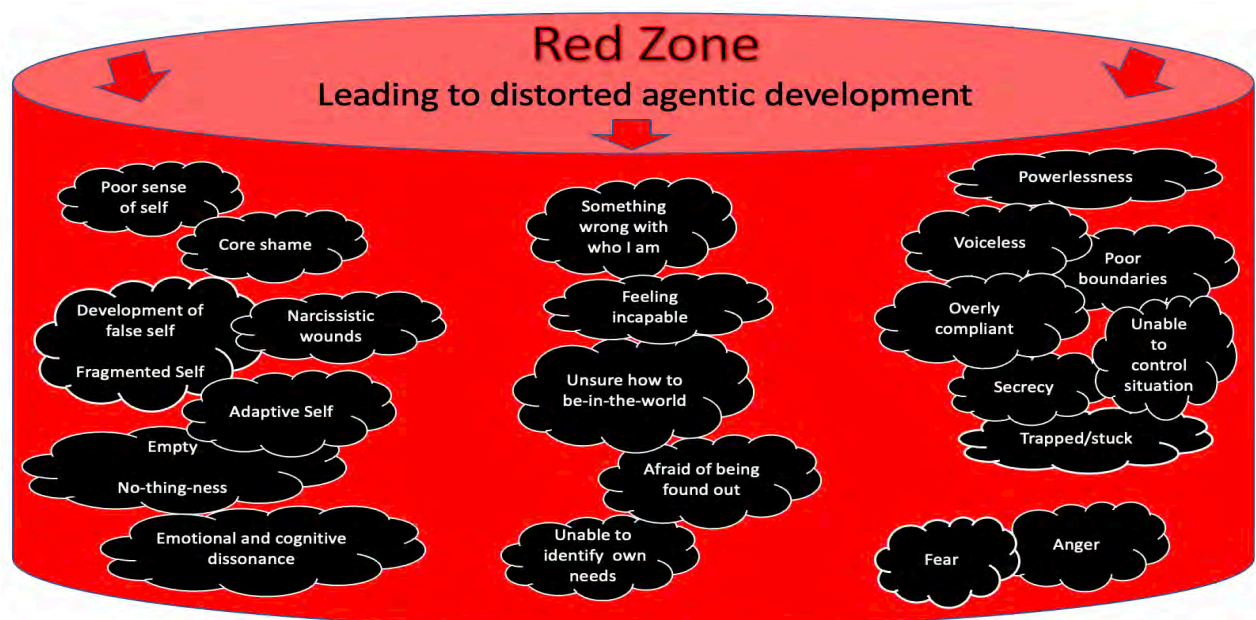
Red Zone Theory, which includes development of *F.A.C.E.S* and the *5 R's model*, originates from my years of experience as an arts-based practitioner-researcher drawing on both personal and professional insight, the literature review and the findings from doctoral research. **Red Zone Theory** also offers the arts-based practitioner a framework from which to recognise and support clients' movement from *saving face* towards the development of empowerment and *personal agency*. This may be lacking as a result of the *adverse childhood experiences* (ACEs) they have grown up with or, in the case of young people may be currently experiencing.

Why Red Zone Theory?

Quite simply, I chose the name **Red Zone Theory** because the term Melting Pot Theory (my original idea) was, as I discovered, already in use. Red is a colour

commonly associated with a warning or danger and so entering the **Red Zone** potentially becomes indicative of a threat to a client's sense of personhood and being-in-the-world. By supporting the development of personal agency the goal is to move out of the Red Zone towards a more agentic way of living. What does it mean to be in the Red Zone? This will be discussed in more detail but briefly, to be in the Red Zone one has experienced adversity in childhood, consciously or unconsciously had the need to 'save face' or mask a more authentic identity under the assumption that one's true self will be rejected. This may result in distorted agentic development for the developing child (0-18 years).

The image below shows the essential elements derived from the findings of my participants' textual and imagistic data, that lead a person towards entering the Red Zone. It is not necessary to have experienced all of the elements shown, however several will be recognisable. The potential qualities leading a person to enter the Red Zone are shown below (a larger image is at the end of appendix 19).



Red Zone – originally the 'melting pot'

Not only is developing personal agency important but the question of how do we avoid future generations of young people entering the Red Zone is equally crucial. Essentially this can be achieved through education and building an awareness of how we can re-enact patterns of behaviour (sometimes recognised as the Freudian trauma re-enactment or repetition compulsion) and by breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma. It is too simplistic and unrealistic to assume that we can avoid the experience of adversity in childhood: death happens, parents get divorced, socioeconomic poverty drives frustration, and poor emotional literacy means cycles of unhealthy and potentially damaging behaviours continue to flourish. Yet helping parents recognise how adversity in their own childhoods can impact their parenting and by supporting the development of their agency we may contribute to the reduction of childhood trauma and increase the likelihood of living a more authentic and fulfilling life.

Through my research it became evident that the participants, who had all experienced ACEs alongside insufficient protective factors were demonstrably affected, leading to a partial disintegration of the self and the development of distorted agency. That is to say, rather than have no agency development at all, their agency developed towards what Adlerian psychologists would suggest are 'mistaken goals of behaviour'. An example would be the potentially risky and unhealthy ways of seeking love and affection for a young person who has been abandoned by one parent with the remaining parent (perhaps due to their own ACEs) being incapable of expressing their own feelings and emotions.

One of the ongoing products of this research is concerned with how we identify and support those who are in the Red Zone. An arts-based model for therapeutic use will be described later.

I have included here the list of ten ACEs which resulted from the ACE study conducted in the mid-1990's.

Abuse	1. Emotional 2. Physical 3. Sexual
Neglect	4. Physical 5. Emotional
Household dysfunction	6. Family member depressed/mental illness 7. Loss of parent/carer through death/divorce 8. Family member in jail 9. Witnessing domestic violence 10. Family member addicted to drugs or alcohol

Theoretical anchoring

Red Zone Theory draws from the 1995-1997 Adverse Childhood Experiences research study (Felitti & Anda, 2020) in which ten core adversities in childhood were discovered to impact mental and physical health adulthood. Although I believe the list to be incomplete as a diagnostic tool, the study was produced as a broad screening tool and for this purpose the ten derived ACEs are sufficient. In therapeutic practice the ACEs may be more nuanced dependent on the individual client's experience. For example, my participant Ruby had spent a lot of her childhood in hospital which had been traumatic for her. In my mind this would be an adverse childhood experience yet no accommodation for such a trauma is made in the ACE study listing of adverse experiences.

Red Zone Theory emerges from the understanding that adverse childhood experiences between the ages of 0-18 years will potentially affect how the developing child views themselves within various contextual settings such as home, school and socially. Adversities such as physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or household and familial dysfunction may potentially lead to a sense of shame so

invasive we might describe it as '**core**' or '**toxic**' shame. A person may be said to have a sense of self which is underpinned by shameful feelings of being flawed, for example the implicit or explicit sense that '*something is wrong with me*' and the pervasive and disconnecting believe that '*I don't fit in*'. Fear of exposure and being *seen* by others leads to the behaviour described as *saving face*; a position a person consciously or unconsciously adopts to preserve dignity and the avoidance of potentially shaming exposure. Saving face may include presenting inauthentically, cognitive and emotional dissonance, shame-based lying, and incongruent-to-self behaviours.

Saving face

As will be demonstrated Red Zone Theory views saving face as either *cultural*, *personal* or *reactive*, or in any combination of the three. Saving face necessarily means the person is acting as and with a false self. Saving face, particularly over a prolonged period of time may lead to deep rooted feelings of inauthenticity leading to a conscious questions such as '*who am I?*' or '*what am I?*' or '*why do I do these things?*' Alternatively an unconscious yet *embodied felt sense* may arise with a feeling of nothingness or *no-thing-ness* leading to self-doubt, low self-esteem, low self-worth leading to further compensatory behaviours. These behaviours may lead to further shame and so the cycle continues. Red Zone Theory proposes that an often unconscious or sub-conscious preoccupation with saving face, meeting the perceived needs and expectations of others and continual hypervigilance towards the minutia of others' behaviours – in other words being on continual hyper-alert to the threat of disconnection - leads to the **Red Zone** which may result in poor agentic development. Personal agency is described here as:

*Personal agency is the capacity to identify goals, make informed **conscious** choices and be able to act upon them. Personal agency, then, is a person's **actual** ability to enact a task or deal with a given situation as opposed to self-efficacy which is a person's **perceived** ability.*

Red Zone Theory is underpinned by the key philosophical and theoretical influences in my personal and professional life. Both salient to my theory and model development, I will briefly describe in the following table key tenets of Existentialism (Adams, 2019; Burnham & Papandreopoulos, 2020; Cohn, 1997) and Adler’s Individual Psychology (Adler, 1992, 1998; Adler University, 2022).

Existential philosophy	Individual Psychology
<i>Individual human experience:</i> Driven from a first-person perspective and what it means to exist in a world we can never fully understand. This aligns with a critical realist position.	<i>Socially embedded:</i> an individual does not develop in isolation but rather needs to belonging and feel connected. Life’s problems are social problems and therefore healing is relational.
<i>Phenomenological:</i> Concerned with exploring the underlying structures of consciousness in order to understand ourselves contextualised in the world around us; an emphasis on lived experience.	<i>Social justice & systemic thinking:</i> Adlerians take a systemic perspective to encourage community healing. They are sensitive to conditions such as oppression that may lead to adversity. Adlerians argue for social equality.
<i>Existence precedes essence:</i> A belief that prior to developing an essence or essential quality we must first come in to existence. Non-reductionist, our essence is what kind of human we <i>choose</i> to become.	<i>Holism and humanism:</i> a person’s mind, body and emotions are viewed as an indivisible and non-reductional whole servicing the person’s final fictional life goal.
<i>Free will:</i> We are entirely responsible for the choices we make or how we respond to a given situation. However	<i>Self-determining & creative:</i> Adlerians take an optimistic view of human nature wherein people are not victims

<p>all this freedom may bring us <i>anxiety</i>; leading Sartre to suggest that we are 'condemned' to be free. <i>Angst</i> however differs from anxiety. With an awareness of meaninglessness it too places emphasis on freedom and responsibility. However, negative feelings of anguish may arise from experiencing one's freedom, a problem of existence rather than essence.</p>	<p>of pre-determined forces but creatively forge their own belief system which, if found to be unhelpful, can be changed. With encouragement and support a person will naturally choose to be socially useful, finding intrinsic meaning, purpose and value in this perspective.</p>
<p><i>Authenticity</i>: Facing up to who we are helps us overcome the anxiety we may feel from the responsibility and choice that we have. For example recognising that we are mere mortals who will one day die anyway encourages to live a life that is meaningful to ourselves, free from external pressure or dictated by societal norms.</p>	<p><i>Teleological (goal directed)</i>: all behaviour is seen as purposeful movement towards the final goal of finding one's significance in life. By recognising the meaning behind their behaviours, which are often out of conscious awareness, a person may choose to continue with or change how they behave.</p>
<p><i>The absurd</i>: Arising from the fundamental existential problem of meaninglessness in which we realise that life has no meaning other than the meaning we ascribe to it, we realise there is nothing bigger than ourselves. This absurdity leads to a crisis in faith with the realisation that faith means absolutely nothing. To fill the existence-</p>	<p><i>Philosophical orientation</i>: Adlerian therapy sits well within an existentially based philosophy with tenets of self-responsibility, finding meaning and purpose in life. It also fits well with systemic (birth order, generational influences, the systems within which we live) and narrative approaches. From a psycho-educational perspective</p>

meaning gap, humans develop 'the Look' in which the experience of existing amongst 'Others' gives a tangible sense of being.	Adlerian therapy also integrates well with cognitive behavioural approaches.
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Briefly, the development of Red Zone Theory has also been influenced by:

- Bowlby and Ainsworth's Attachment Theory
- Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory
- Neuroscience/Neurobiology
- Jungian approach to creative development and active imagination

Phenomenological development of the Red Zone

The Red Zone has developed phenomenologically (through the study of lived experience) .

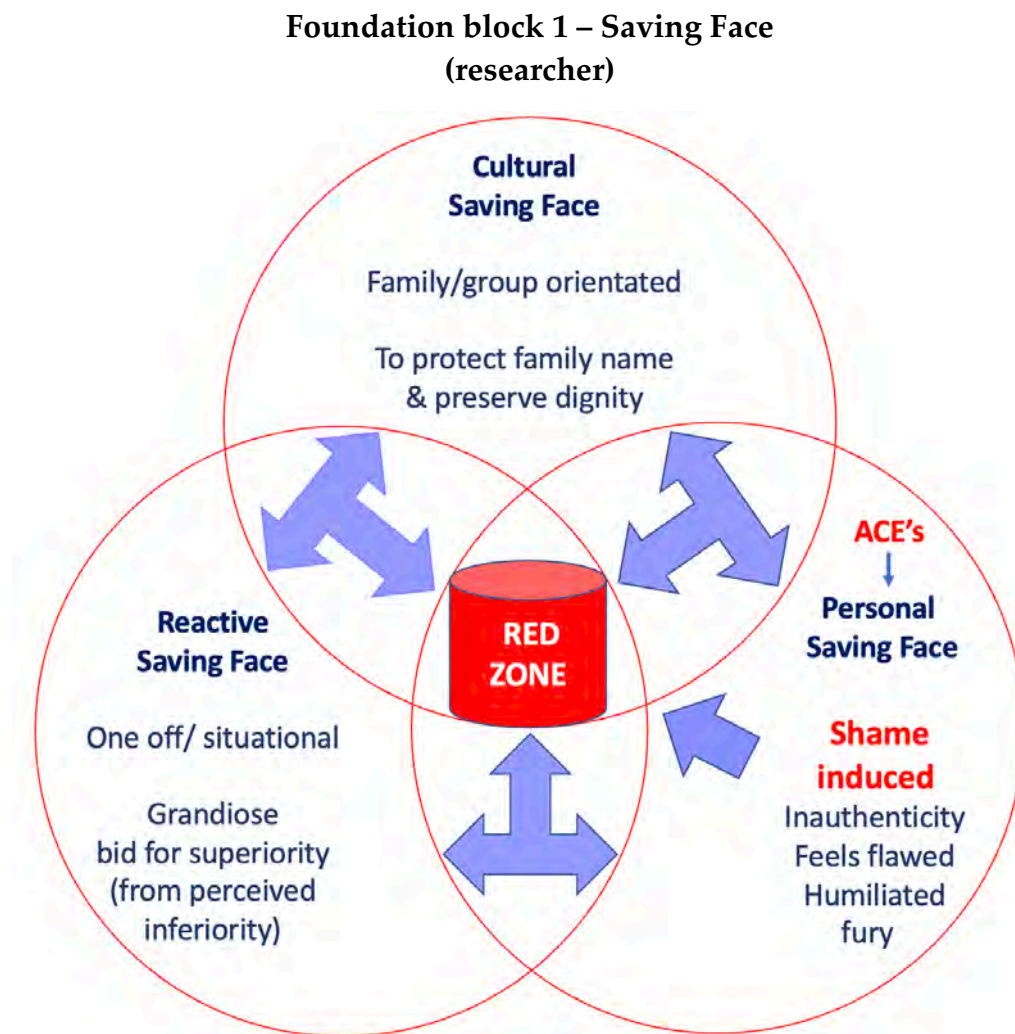
Red Zone Theory – developing a model for therapeutic practice

I have developed a model comprising three foundational building blocks to show the interrelatedness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), shame and saving face as causal in the prevention of agentic development. In common parlance, 'saving face' (as explored in the Literature Review) is typically associated with Asian cultures and/or business culture. Yet my contention is that we are missing a vital piece of the jigsaw by not linking it to the development of personal agency. My response has been to develop **F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's model** as my proposed way of recognising, healing and encouraging the development of the personal agency potentially lacking throughout childhood (0-18 years) as a result of childhood trauma.

Red Zone Theory is based on the following three foundational blocks:

Foundation block 1– Saving Face

Here I suggest that there are three significant aspects to *Saving Face*:



Foundation block 1 suggests that in order to enter the Red Zone two or more types of saving face may be required, however, in the case of personal saving face, the shame derived from the ACEs may be sufficient enough on its own to direct a person towards the Red Zone.

Saving Face

Saving face is cultural. Typically recognised in Asian cultures this is where the importance of not bringing shame on the family can be of paramount concern. An extreme response to the perceived bringing of shame on the family may be seen in the so-called 'honour' killings perpetrated by a family member in an attempt to protect what is viewed as the family's dignity or honour (Siddiqui, 2014). Typically inflicted upon women, such killings are a patriarchal form of violent subjugation enacted to dominate women's autonomy, often sexually motivated, and to ensure the continuation of male authority and the oppression of women (Reddy, 2014). In the UK, July 14th marks The National Day of Memory for Victims of Honour Killings (Kumari, 2017).

Saving face is reactive. The necessity of saving face may arise from a one-off situation where a person's sense of inferiority is triggered and as a consequence they need to demonstrate their worth or significance. This can lead to an assumed air of momentary superiority and is likely driven from positional self-esteem on any given day. For example a person may have had a poor appraisal at work so that evening they are compelled to 'show off' to their friend about the new flashy car they are thinking of purchasing. A child, not wanting to feel left out, exaggerates to their friends how late they were allowed to stay up to watch T.V. on Saturday night. Saving face reactively manifests not from a deep rooted sense of shame but rather occasional moments of inferiority and a subsequent bid for superiority or significance. Once the moment has passed the evaluative judgement of '*how am I doing?*' may return to the more socially interested '*what am I doing?*'

Saving face is personal. This is perhaps the most invasive and persistent example of saving face, tapping in to the very core of a person's explicit and implicit belief about themselves. *Red Zone Theory* argues that adverse childhood experiences

(ACEs) often lead to a core and toxic shame that fundamentally impacts a person's sense of identity and overall sense of *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 2010). With an innate sense of being flawed, 'as if' there is something shamefully wrong about a person's character or essence of being which must not be exposed. Saving face can necessarily be employed, often out of conscious awareness to 'mask' one's true nature and authentic identity. This pervasive and overwhelming experience of a self as shameful can be paralysing causing inauthentic behaviours such as unhealthy attachment seeking, a strong and absolute need to please for fear of rejection, and a need to control. Shame in this instance will typically be turned inwards (see block 2). When such attempts to save face are thwarted, the overwhelming sense of shame may lead a person to act out their shame as *humiliated fury* (Thomaes et al., 2011) (see block 2).

Foundation block 2 – ACE Shame

When a person grows up with childhood adversity as part of their developmental experience their sense of self may be significantly diminished and enmeshed with shameful feelings of inadequacy. As a result of this they may do one or both of the following:

Act inwards. When a person, who has shame at their core and feels inferior, *acts inwards* they may experience one or more of the following:

Act Inwards

Depression/ low mood

Self-loathing/ low self-esteem/ worth

Eating disorders

Poor emotional regulation

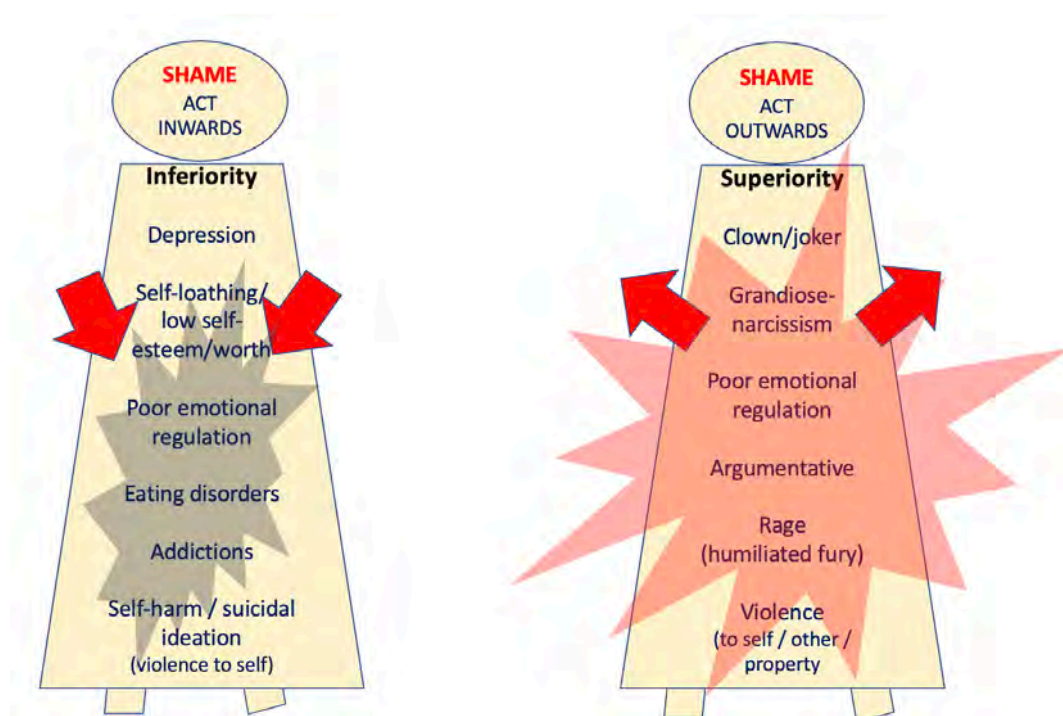
Addiction

Self-harm (violence to self)

Act outwards. Conversely when a person, who has shame at their core and strives for superiority, *acts outwards* they may present with one or more of the following:

Act Outwards
Clown/joker – grandiose-narcissism
Poor emotional regulation
Argumentative
Rage or humiliated fury
Risk taking
Violence (to self/ other/ property)

A visual illustration of acting in/acting out is depicted here:



Foundation block 2 – Shame
Act In – Act Out
Illustration (researcher)

Oscillation between acting in and acting out may occur and therefore both may present at different times for the same person. The purpose of a person's acting in

or acting out may be misunderstood by teachers, carers and those in the helping professions. Without conscious awareness or consideration of ACEs as a potential component in a person's 0-18 years of development, vital opportunities for healing and agentic development may be missed. It is possible to experience aspects of both concurrently.

Understanding the impact of shame

(Shame is discussed more comprehensively in the literature review)

It is necessary to have an understanding of the impact that shame can have on a person's developing sense of self. There is a type of shame that is typically termed 'healthy shame' which, as a social shame, serves to guide us towards the reparation of mistakes and movement towards personal growth. I prefer to think of this type of shame as a person's conscience and moral compass. I find it can be confusing to use the same term 'shame' for some very different experiences. Yet this shame, for example used in school to aid behaviour improvement, may, to a person who has shame at their core, exacerbate deep rooted feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, social disconnection leading to what I term psychic isolation.

The shame that is referred to in *Red Zone Theory* is what can be termed as a '**core**' or '**toxic**' shame. This is the shame that lies behind the ACE based need to save face and is the shame that *F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model* seeks to heal. For the purpose of this discussion, when I refer to shame, I am talking about a person's very being and sense of self as one which has shame at its core. We may also assume that core shame is indeed toxic and impactful upon a person's behaviour, social engagement and development of personal agency. In practice it is crucial to understand what kind of shame we are working with and be mindful that a person who has a core of toxic shame is likely to defend against this being discovered.

It is probable that for most people a minor indiscretion or embarrassment may lead to shameful feelings which are easily managed by presenting a socially acceptable facade and vowing to oneself not to get into that situation again. This shame is typically short lived with no long-lasting detrimental hit to a person's sense of self.

Many people will also have a shame that they do not want to admit to, for example not being seen as intelligent, feeling too short or recognising that they can be lazy. These are shames that a person can often adapt to and may be eased by allowing their vulnerability to be shared within a trusting relationship.

The story may be very different for a person who has experienced adversity in their childhood and in particularly often unrecognised emotional abuse and, as Kathrin Stauffer writes about, the shame arising from emotional neglect and being ignored (2021). Shame is not just a curse of the socioeconomically impoverished. Shame also pervades within 'middle' or 'upper' class families where so called 'privilege' can be seen to negate any belief that these children may also suffer. No matter who a person is or where they are from, this powerful emotion is ubiquitous. Shame can be so toxic it interferes with a child's developing self, often so catastrophically that the impact can last a lifetime, as evidenced with some of my elderly clients.

The toxicity of core shame is so powerful that it can be deeply absorbed into a person's nervous system, hence the feeling of shame being experienced somatically in the digestive system and gut. A young person growing up with a core of toxic shame may feel empty with a sense of no-thing-ness. They may be overwhelmingly burdened by feelings that they are unlikeable and that they don't fit in leading them to become hyper-vigilant to the slightest changes in others' moods as indicative of how acceptable they are in any given moment. Due to the fear of rejection shame causes people to act inauthentically to their true self leading to the necessity of '*saving face*', in other words hiding behind a mask of perceived acceptability.

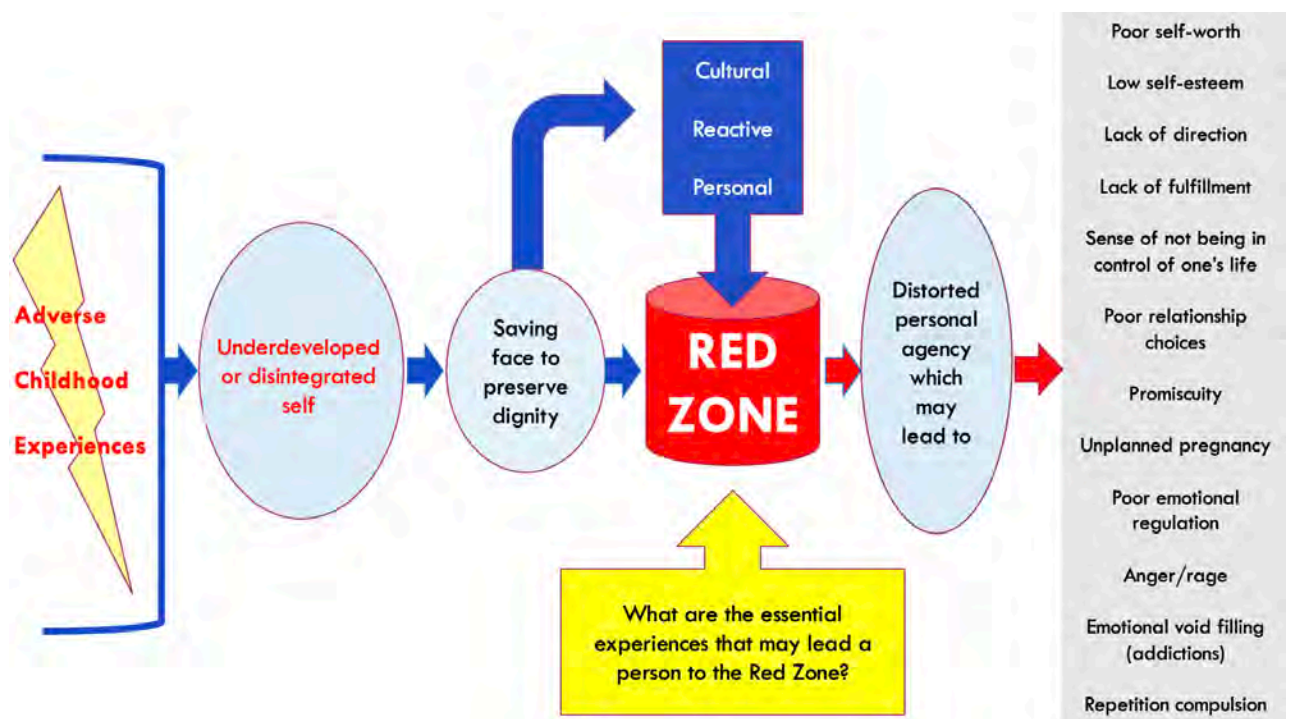
Paradoxically this 'false self', while serving to protect a person from the shame of rejection, also alienates them from finding the authentic connection they desire so strongly yet fear so greatly.

Experiencing oneself with a core of toxic shame can inhibit the desire to take part in normal everyday activities such as spending time with friends. In groups of more than one other, with shame's social awkwardness firmly in place, it can feel like the spotlight is upon them. Hyper-sensitive to the environment it doesn't take long to feel the shame which accompanies the perception of being the one who doesn't quite fit in, the one that makes clumsy or poorly timed comments. These behaviours are all exacerbated by a debilitating shame-born self-consciousness which can lead to feelings of negative self-judgement, depression and potentially unhealthy compensatory behaviours such as promiscuity, risk taking and addiction in an attempt to fill the void of emptiness and social disconnection.

Core shame can be very painful and challenging to live with. Shameful feelings may lessen and become more manageable when vulnerability is shared within a safe and containing environment. *F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model* supports therapists in supporting clients to work through their toxic shame and regenerate a core self that feels robust, resilient and agentic. In turn this will deepen their sense of authentic self and lessen the need to save face.

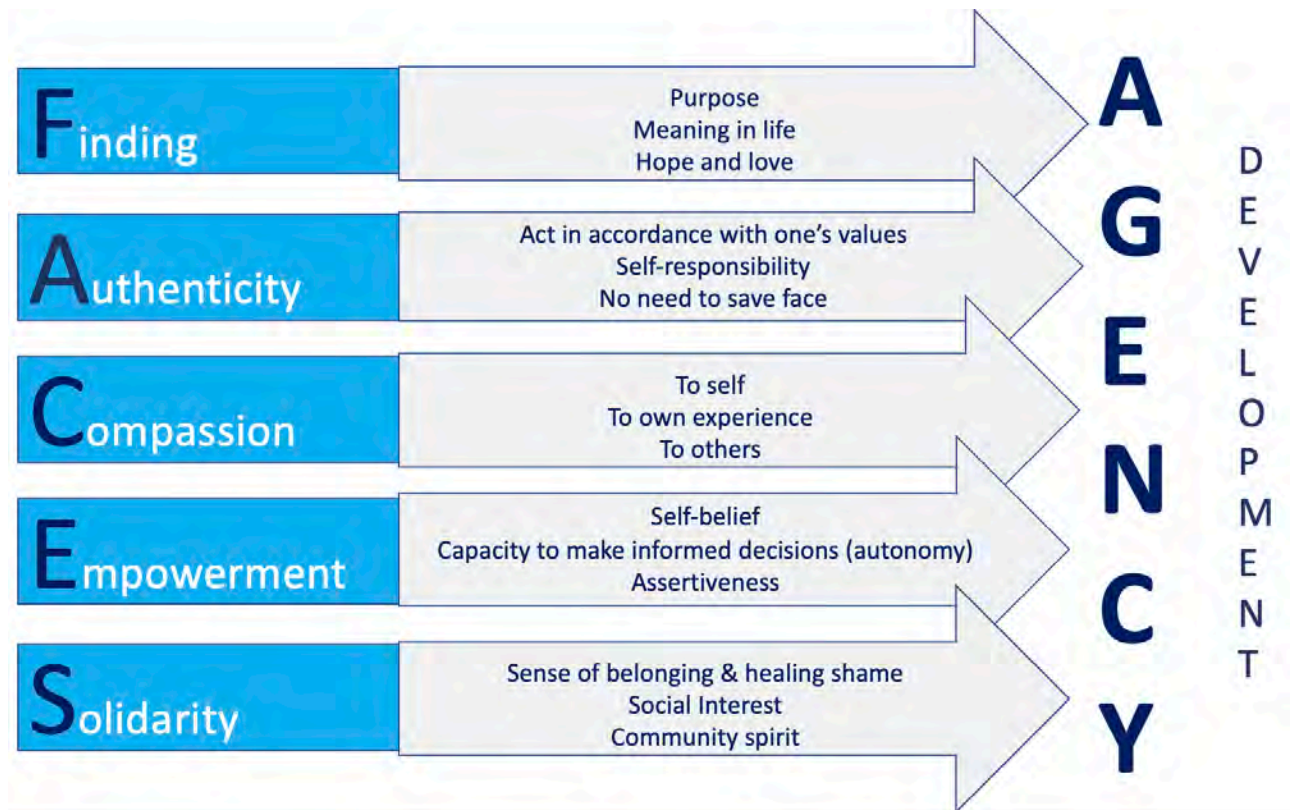
Foundation block 3 – Red Zone

The third building block shows the correlation between ACEs, shame and saving face which lead to the *Red Zone*. The Red Zone houses an amalgam of issues leading to poor agentic development. I have left the yellow box questioning what constitutes the Red Zone contents to show how the model progressed – however these contents have already highlighted in the Red Zone (p. 546).



Foundation Block 3 – Red Zone Progression

The three foundational blocks led to the birth of my model for developing personal agency. To consolidate the output of the three foundational blocks I developed the mnemonic **F.A.C.E.S (From ACES)** to represent the components I suggest will contribute towards development from *ACEs to Agency*.



Drawing upon the components as outlined I was able to develop my final working model as can be seen on the following page.

F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's

Therapeutic Model for Agency Development (researcher)



The 5 R's as a therapeutic tool

Recognition	This R stands for recognition of ACEs, recognition of the impact caused on agentic development and recognition of the necessity to save face.
Resilience	The R here stands for acknowledgement of the resilience shown in the face of adversity and the courage used in order to survive.
Relational	Adversity in childhood is a social problem. Healing comes from social engagement and from the building of safe and trusting relationships. Personal agency development therefore takes place within a relational context. In therapy a strong therapeutic relationship is a core requirement.
Resourced	To be resourced is crucial in aiding the development of personal agency. How a person resources themselves is very individual but may include good nutrition, exercise, psychotherapy (or similar), social activities, spirituality, friends and hobbies.
Regeneration	This R encompasses the regeneration of an authentic self and concurrent development of personal agency; regenerating the agency and sense of self that was prevented due to ACEs and saving face.

Saving face

To illustrate in more detail how my interpretation of **saving face** might manifest I have written the following fictional scenario, based on my experience, with four possible outcomes with example explanations.

Scenario:

Maya is aged 9. She is at primary school. Today they are making cake. Maya is excited. She is in a group of 4 or 5, one cake bowl, one helper, all taking turns to put ingredients in the bowl to make the cake. The helper pours the batter into the cake tin. Excited, Maya wipes the spoon around the bowl and licks it. The helper looks at her and, speaking in a loud voice, says:

'Maya, how could you do that? You're so greedy, now no one else can have a go!.'

Possible **outcome 1** for Maya – *no action*

Maya feels really embarrassed. Her friends giggle. Maya jumps off her stall and hides under the table for a couple of minutes. One of her friends, Mary, pokes her head under the table and pulls a funny face which makes Maya laugh. Maya comes back up to the table and chats to her friend. She's soon forgotten the helper was cross, laughs about it with her friends and enjoys eating a slice of the cake. She chats with friends until the end of the lesson. The bell rings and Maya goes off to play with her friends outside on the climbing frames. Maya goes home, looking forward to seeing her parents. She's excited as tomorrow is World Book Day and she's dressing up as Pinocchio.

Possible **outcome 2** for Maya – *acting inwards*

Maya feels really embarrassed. No one takes much notice of what's happened but her face heats up yet her body is frozen to the spot. She cannot move. Waves of shame wash over Maya as if her body is being hollowed out. Her gaze is fixated to one spot on the table. She wants to die. Her friend Mary can see that something is wrong and tries to make Maya laugh. She manages a strained smile but eats no cake as she's feeling nauseous. She's silent for the rest of the lesson. The bell goes, Maya goes off on her own to the toilet block where she shuts herself in cubicle. As she weeps she stabs herself repeatedly in her tummy with a sharp pencil. Maya wants to run away. She never wants to be seen again. She's dreading school tomorrow as she has no costume for World Book day and everyone will stare at her.

Possible **outcome 3** for Maya – *acting outwards*

Maya is immediately consumed by an overwhelming whooshing of familiar shame which engulfs her like a tsunami. The class is momentarily silent, the spotlight is on her. There's nowhere to hide, it's too late, she's been *seen*. Before she knows it, a rage is building, the red mist begins to appear. Seemingly from nowhere, Maya picks up the spoon and throws it as hard as she can at the helper; before the helper has had time to dodge, Maya picks up the bowl and throws it, narrowly missing her friend Mary. It smashes into tiny pieces as it hits the floor. Mobilised into action Maya runs as fast as she can out of the classroom, down the corridor and hides behind the large book rack in the library. Maya is soon found and marched in to the head teacher's office. Maya's foster carer is called in to the school to take her home as she has been excluded for the next two weeks. This means she will not be able to attend World Book Day. Maya is defiant and says she doesn't care anyway. It's just another stupid day. Maya is grounded until she returns to school and not allowed to watch any TV.

Possible **outcome 4** for Maya – *push on through by saving face*

Maya is embarrassed and feels very ashamed. She ruminates on *why she did that stupid thing*. She quickly apologises to the helper who can't understand why she was so greedy. Maya is now worrying that she won't be able to take part in cooking again. Maya has had to *save face*. Maya appears well-presented and tries very hard with her work although her grades are only ever under average. She is polite and always trying to help in class. To her teachers everything looks normal however no one knows what's going on at home behind closed doors and Maya needs to keep it this way. Maya's mum had an affair with her dad's best friend and dad has moved out. Mum and Maya have moved into a social housing flat on a notoriously dangerous estate. Last night two cars were burnt out near their flat. Mum is drinking heavily and her moods are chaotic and sometimes frightening. Mum hasn't cooked a meal for Maya in weeks and with little food in the house Maya's delight at the sweetness of the cake mix got the better of her. Maya doesn't want anyone to know how things are at home and pretends to everyone that she's happy. She's not sure whether to ask mum about a costume for World Book Day. It depends what mood she's in.

From one scenario I demonstrated four very different outcomes. Yet, with the exception of outcome 1, they all demonstrate the complexities arising when a child (0-18 years) experiences adversity leading to shame and the need to save face.

In outcome 1 Maya became embarrassed when the helper said she was greedy and 'saved face' by hiding under the table. But she comes from a loving and secure home where her parents care for her, support her and she feels safe and respected. She was able to be distracted by her friend and then return to her usual happy self. Maya was able to regulate her emotions and remain calm but involved. She's looking forward to school tomorrow because her parents have helped her and her

younger brother prepare for World Book Day by making them both costumes. Maya's dad has come from a loving home, and whilst her mum's upbringing was chaotic she had an aunt who consistently was loving and supportive and a lovely class teacher at school. Mum's protective factors were enough that she was able to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma she had suffered. As Maya has no ACEs, the embarrassment felt earlier at school has left no lasting impression.

In outcome 2 there is a very different story. Maya has not had a happy stable childhood with 'good enough' parenting (Winnicott, 1990). Mum, who suffers from EUPD, left Maya and her dad for another man when she was only 3. Dad lost his job three years ago, is depressed and began drinking alcohol more heavily to numb his pain. Some days are better than others but Maya always has to keep house. She cooks, cleans and goes to the food bank once a week. She is an only child. Sometimes Dad can be nice and buy her sweets but he's still angry with mum for leaving. When he's angry he screams at Maya and calls her names like 'mental, stupid, slut and it'. Maya is used to it but Dad frightens her and punched her twice in the back. There is no other family and she's scared to tell anyone in case she gets put in care like her friend Sally did. Dad's upbringing was unstable and volatile and now he has no one to help him. He unwittingly continues the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Maya has significant ACEs and 'saved face' at school by staying silent then taking herself off to the toilet block - she made herself invisible. She cannot regulate the shame she is feeling and so the only way to release the shameful pain is to stab herself with a pencil – Maya is 'acting inwards'. She doesn't want to go to school tomorrow but she doesn't want to stay at home either. Maya feels lonely.

In outcome 3, we see Maya 'acting out'. Maya has been in foster care for 6 weeks. Her two sisters have been sent to another family and she has not seen them now for

over a month. Their mum, a single parent has just been sent to prison again, this is the second time the children have ended up in care. The children don't know their father and mum has a drug addiction for which she was caught stealing again. Mum has had several boyfriends. Maya saw the last one hit mum after an argument about money. There was never much food in the house and Maya was often hungry. Fortunately the foster family are local meaning Maya can remain in the same school. In the foster home there are two older girls one of whom is also fostered. Maya was neglected by her mum both physically and emotionally and is like a rabbit in the headlights. When the helper told Maya she was greedy Maya felt very ashamed. She had simply seen some left over mixture and wanted to taste how sweet it was. Maya's shame was instant. She exhibited 'humiliated fury' (Thomaes et al., 2011), in other words, shame turned outwards. In her fury, what we might also call rage, she reacted by throwing the spoon towards the helper who had humiliated her and smashed the bowl on the floor in protest. Maya has then 'saved face' by running away as fast as she could and hiding in the library. Unfortunately Maya's actions have been met with the punishments exclusion, being grounded and not being allowed to watch TV. From the lack of insight or empathic attunement for Maya regarding her ACEs and purpose for 'saving face' we may predict, that instead of supporting her in healing, similar situations will be likely in the future.

On the topic of rage, I am in agreement with Sue Parker Hall (2009, p. 84) who argues:

...that rage is an experience-processing issue and relational issue that arises either because an afflicted individual has never developed the necessary emotional skills, because their earliest relationships did not engender 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1965) holding and soothing and they have been traumatised ever since, or because

of a later trauma which they have been unable to process and which estranges them from their previously functional experience-processing skills.

In outcome 4 Maya is an only child and living with her mum who is drinking heavily. The shame of what's happened to her family is more than Maya can bear and so she tries very hard to act as if nothing is wrong and to protect her mum from any external interference. She has seen what happens when other people get involved and doesn't want social services to take her away as there would be no one to look after her mum. Maya does have one close friend and goes to her house for tea sometimes as her mum childminds Maya when mum is at work. She prefers it there as Becky's mum doesn't drink alcohol or scream at her. Maya has had to save face time and again by never letting anyone know how bad it really is at home. She saves face so much that she's never able to be her authentic self and isn't able to say 'no' even if she doesn't want to do something.

In practice

In process – the development of an online training programme to explore using the theory and model in practice.

It is crucial to note that **Red Zone Theory** along with **F.A.C.E.S** and **the 5 R's Model** are specifically for use in the development of personal agency with the intention of decreasing the necessity to save face. I am using the generic term 'therapist' which encompasses psychotherapy, counselling, counselling psychology and all arts-based therapeutic practices.

An assumption is made that the therapeutic relationship and working alliance have already been established. It is also assumed that prior to using **the 5 R's Model** sufficient grounding and stabilisation pertaining to any trauma work has been put

in place and the client is in a stable enough place to deepen exploration of their agentic self, using the expressive arts.

F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model in practice – an expressive arts-based approach.

Once an understanding of the theoretical underpinning of *Red Zone Theory* has been gained, *F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model* may be understood either as a general guide for the practitioner to have in their therapeutic awareness 'toolkit'. Or, as recommended, the model may be explicitly utilised in therapy if saving face and poor agentic development have been identified as part of the therapeutic purpose as a result of childhood trauma. An expressive arts-based approach is recommended with focus on the therapeutic relationship as a fundamental agent in the facilitating of change.

Each of the three foundation blocks are used with clients to establish their unique perspective and deepen their phenomenological understanding of the issues leading them to the **Red Zone**. *F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model* may then be used with the client to purposefully move towards healing and agentic development. While an understanding and acknowledgement of childhood trauma is important, focus is on the here and now; encouraging the development of agency as a '*can do*' attitude rather than a '*done to*' victim stance. The aim is to build an agentic self that feels capable to consciously move towards a more meaningful and fulfilling life. This metaphor comes to me: **we may not be able to control the weather but we *can* choose what clothes to wear.**

F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model is for use by practitioners with prior knowledge of using expressive arts as part of the therapeutic endeavour and in supervision with a supervisor who has experience of Research has shown that irrespective of the modality used, the therapeutic relationship is the most important factor to facilitate positive outcomes for the work (Cooper, 2008; Wampold & Imel, 2015). While the

key influences to my therapeutic approach are existential-phenomenology, Adlerian psychology and Jung's approach to creative development and active imagination the idea is that *Red Zone Theory* along with *F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model* may be adapted as necessary to be used by within a therapist's own theoretical modality. I also suggest that of utmost importance is the therapist's willingness to adopt a curious and exploratory attitude to the images that are being created by the client rather than laden the work with dogmatic theoretical interpretations. There is a double hermeneutic at play in so much as the therapist's task is to make sense of the client's sense and meaning making and to offer a safe and therapeutic containment (Symington & Symington, 1996) to support their explorations and healing.

Beginning

To begin working with **F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model** it is crucial that a respectful and trusting therapeutic relationship is already in place with a strong working alliance (Bordin, 1979; Clarkson, 2003; Horvath & Greenberg, 1994). Either indicated explicitly by the client or emerging from the work is the sense that agency development has been inhibited due to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and that the client recognises their propensity to save face leaving them feeling inauthentic and 'as if' life has happened to them without them being fully present or in control of their contribution. To reiterate, due to the likely sensitive nature of working with ACEs it is also extremely beneficial to be aware of a trauma informed approach to therapy. It is suggested that this will be adopted when using this model; this will include, for example, attending to grounding/stabilisation, safety awareness such as 'putting on the breaks', an awareness of toxic stress, Panksepp's emotional system (Panksepp & Biven, 2012), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 2005; Holmes, 1993) and Polyvagal theory.

Polyvagal Theory

Stephen Porges (2011) and Deb Dana (2018) write extensively about Porges' Polyvagal Theory in which emotional and physical wellbeing arises through feelings of connection to others within the safety of mutually respectful and trusting relationships. Poly (many)-vagal (Latin for wanderings) theory focuses on the tenth cranial Vagus nerve which links the brain to the intestines forming a key constituent of the parasympathetic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system comprises the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight) and the parasympathetic nervous system (digest, rest, relate, connect). Polyvagal Theory suggests the parasympathetic nervous system as split between Dorsal Vagal (freeze) and Ventral Vagal (social engagement). Through a process Porges describes as 'neuroception' and out of conscious awareness our brain scans the environment for signs of danger or safety. A calmed autonomic nervous system will exist when co-regulation occurs through the communication of expressed safety and trust.

It can be helpful to share with clients that when the amygdala, the brain's emotional centre's smoke detector, senses danger a split-second decision is made whether or not to activate the fight or flight response before the neocortex, the higher functioning rational thinking part of the brain, takes over. When the fight or flight response is activated stress hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol are triggered boosting energy, blood pressure and heart rate in preparation to take on or flee from the threat. While this was once very necessary for survival, the *actual* threats to survival are typically much less now. Yet our bodies still respond in exactly the same way, making the biological changes that were once necessary to actually fight or flight.

It is crucial to have this understanding when working with children and young people who are growing up with ACEs or the adults who present in therapy having historically suffered from ACEs. A goal for working with clients who have

experienced adversity in childhood leading to shame and poor agentic growth is to encourage and develop a sense of their own internal safety. By having an attitude of acceptance, empathy and compassion towards a shame-based client as we explore their story we help them develop an internal sense of safety. Their shame may then begin to be externalised and seen as an unsurprising consequence of something(s) that happened to them rather than being an intrinsic and unquestionable negative trait or quality of their humanness.

For shame to be processed and agency to be developed painful feelings will necessarily arise in the process. Helping clients learn to tolerate the uncomfortableness of such emotions and feelings without psychic collapse is an integral part of their journey towards healing and growth. Emotional dysregulation is an unsurprising consequence of trauma leading to irrational thoughts and unhelpful coping strategies which in turn may lead to a sense of further social disconnection. The co-regulation that can emerge for a client working with a regulated other (the therapist) will help form the basis from which clients can learn to understand their unhelpful coping strategies and work consciously towards alternative ways of being.

How to use F.A.C.E.S. and the 5 R's Model

1) F.A.C.E.S.

The central aim for using this model is to develop agency through the exploration of each letter of the mnemonic **F.A.C.E.S.** and consideration of the **5 R's**. As a general guide the therapist suggests beginning with the top circle and the letter **F**, working then in a clockwise direction although some oscillation between the positions may also occur. The **F** relates to **F**inding purpose, meaning in life, hope and love – but it is also, as indicated by the arrows, relevant to the remaining four circles, i.e., **F**inding **A**uthenticity, **C**ompassion, **E**mpowerment, and **S**olidarity.

Under each of these headings, exploration may then take place using the suggested prompts in each circle. It can also be useful and validating for the client to find and express any other words that feel relevant to them.

2) The 5 R's

The R's are a tool for encouragement and for the client to already recognise or work towards recognising as qualities within themselves. The R's are indicated in red around the perimeter of the diagram and situated purposefully between two 'bubbles' as seen below. A guide to the meaning of each R can be found on p.555.

As the **F.A.C.E.S.** are discussed the therapist brings the associated R into a collaborative dialogue to aid and encourage movement towards the goal of agentic development.

Adopting an arts-based approach

While the use of clay and sand tray can be profoundly beneficial within a therapeutic context, it is not recommended that either be used when working with the **F.A.C.E.S and the 5 R's Model** without prior training. It is also advisable for the model to be used with art materials *only* if the practitioner has undertaken training in the use of art materials in therapy. For an arts-based approach these guidelines will be based on the assumption that art materials such as paper/card, coloured pens, pastels (oil or chalk), crayons, collage, or montage will be used. Whenever using arts-based materials in client work or clinical supervision the skills, competency and confidence of the practitioner must be taken into consideration [*an online training model for using this approach is currently being developed*].

The **F.A.C.E.S and the 5R's Model** adopts a pluralistic attitude (see Cooper & Dryden, 2016) whereby the client is active in the therapeutic process with sense making and meaning emerging for the client from the co-constructed therapeutic

space. Phenomenological reflection, that is, a sense of being-with and dwelling with the image that has been created is necessary in order to gain insight and new knowledge from that which has not manifest through words alone.

Themes, as emergent from the research are used as a guide to reflection throughout the process. This is for guidance and may be adapted as appropriate within the context of the client work. The importance lies in the organic expression created from the clients psyche; through their hands they produce what their eyes need to see in order to help them find sense and meaning. The images produced may be interpreted by the client with the support of the therapist who may 'wonder' or be 'curious' about aspects of the image offering only sensitive and tentative 'hunches' if and where appropriate but being careful not to lead the client. Meaning will have more importance for the client if they are able to find it for themselves.

The following 5 strands provide guidance for therapeutic use, shown in the following table and subsequently in larger print.

Strand	Focus	Guidance	Image guidance
1	The legacy of adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) – For context	The therapeutic relationship has already been established and awareness of saving face (inauthentic self), distorted agency and existential difficulty established.	A choice of art materials are offered to use explicitly as a tool to aid expression, not as a means to create an object of perfection. The invitation is for the client to create an image that arises for them as an expression of their overall experience of childhood adversity as they reflect upon it in the here and now.
2	Saving face – Towards self or other(s)	Cultural, reactive or personal (see Foundation block 1)	This image gives the client an opportunity to think about how they present to the world.
3	Interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics – Developing personal agency	Exploring client's understanding of relational dynamics towards self and others. Moving from child led default behaviours to awareness of their agentic adult self.	This image seeks to help the client visualise themselves relating to self and other with a growing sense of personal agency.
4	Experiencing the somatic and psychic self – The lived body	Gain understanding of psychosomatic responses to trauma and work towards recognition and integration of the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physical aspects of the lived body.	Here we ask the client to create an image to express their embodiment of an agentic self, particularly to do with emotions and feelings in the body.
5	Temporality (lived time) – Movement towards life	Recognise ACE's and poor agentic development as part of life's earlier narrative but focus on movement towards experiencing life as an agentic human being-in-the-world who no longer needs to save face, rather than an inauthentic victim-of-the-world.	This image creation invites a sense of the client in space and time, looking towards a more agentic future. How they might use their imagination to see themselves working towards a more agentic future.

Strand	Focus	Guidance	Using art materials
1	The legacy of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – For context. Also consider any protective factors	The therapeutic relationship has already been established and awareness of saving face (inauthentic self), distorted agency and existential difficulty established.	A choice of art materials are offered to use explicitly as a tool to aid expression, not as a means to create an object of perfection. The invitation is for the client to create an image that arises for them as an expression of their experience of childhood adversity as they reflect upon it in the here and now.
2	Saving face – Towards self or other(s)	Cultural, reactive or personal (see Foundation block 1)	This image gives the client an opportunity to think about how they present to the world.
3	Interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics – Developing personal agency	Exploring client's understanding of relational dynamics towards self and others. Moving from child led default behaviours to awareness of their agentic adult-self.	This image seeks to help the client visualise themselves relating to self and other with a growing sense of personal agency.
4	Experiencing the somatic and	Gain understanding of psychosomatic responses to trauma	Here we ask the client to create an image to express

	psychic self – The lived body	and work towards recognition and integration of the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physical aspects of the lived body.	their embodiment of an agentic self.
5	Temporality (lived time) – Movement towards life	Recognise ACEs and poor agentic development as part of life's earlier narrative but focus on movement towards experiencing life as an agentic human being-in-the-world who no longer needs to save face, rather than an inauthentic victim-of-the-world.	This image creation invites a sense of the client in space and time, looking towards a more agentic future. How they might use their imagination to see themselves working towards a more agentic future.

General guidelines for using expressive arts as part of the therapeutic process (to be further developed).

Once it has been established that art materials will be used, begin by asking the client to sit for a moment as they contemplate what agency or lack of agency means to them and how saving face has impacted them in their life. When they are ready invite them to choose whichever medium they prefer and then to begin making marks on the paper or begin using the montage/collage materials.

When they have finished creating the image allow a moment to reflect before beginning any conversation. Following Skov's (2015) suggestion, using curiosity and imaginative questions supports the therapist's facilitation of the client's exploration of the image without attempting to interpret what has arisen from the client's psyche and been expressed through their hands. By encouraging the client to take their time and to just 'be' with the image we are facilitating them to use their imagination and discover new ways of thinking and feeling. It is useful to ask them how they are experiencing the image, what stands out to them? What response do they have as they look at the image and importantly what, if any, are the sensations they experience as they embody the image before them? What might the image be communicating to them and what is their response?

Wonderful work can happen if client is willing to engage in dialoguing imaginatively but for some this may feel just too exposing so offering this as a suggestion must be communicated very tentatively and sensitively. What is important is the client's experience and what the image means to them.

It is important for the therapist not to immediately jump to and offer assumptions at what they see presented in the image. Rather, allow space to sit with the image and explore with the client by a process of curiosity and wondering.

In subsequent sessions a similar way of working can be used to think about each of the F.A.C.E.S. and the related R. It may be helpful to provide a 'scrap' book to collate images created so that the client's journey towards agentic growth may become a documented narrative told through the images they have created as part of the healing process.

Encouraging clients to be consciously aware of themselves in between sessions, to notice when they have needed to save face or have felt inauthentic and to be

prepared to work hard are all contributing factors towards the client becoming more agentic and reducing the necessity to save face as a default.

Protective factors

The adversity experienced by children (0-18 years) which potentially leads to toxic stress and trauma related issues can be mitigated, at least to some degree, by what are known as ‘protective factors’; so called because they offer some protection for the child against the trauma related response from the adversity they are experiencing. Protective factors may come in the guise of a teacher or teaching assistant, a family friend etcetera who show kindness to the child or perhaps offer a sense of safety. A regulating other in what might otherwise be a dysregulated living environment. The more protective factors a child has, the more likely they are to build resilience in order to manage that which is difficult in their life.

The following table demonstrates the links between the researcher’s origin training modality, based on the work of Alfred Adler (also known as Individual Psychology) and the development of Red Zone Theory.

Adlerian theory (IP)	Red Zone Theory
Constructivist (not deterministic)	Constructivist – construct reality based on experience
Fictive goal	Saving Face
Inferiority complex	Shame - acting in
Superiority	Shame – acting out
Influenced by feminist wife Raissa	Feminist underpinning of equality
Holism and creative self – being as an indivisible whole	Holism - integration of ‘parts’ into whole, innate creativity (saving face as creative)

**Humiliated
Fury**

Parent education important	Breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma through parent education
Crucial C's model	Crucial C's model applicable
Social Interest 'community feeling'	ACEs → saving face (Social Interest)
Teleological – goal directed	Saving face – compensatory goal direction
Dream interpretation	Imaginative (saving face)
Safeguarding behaviour	Saving face
Contextual – Adler believed that the psyche should be studied in the context of one's environment	ACEs are contextual and the psyche is developed in that context
Importance of early memories	ACEs stored as conscious/unconscious memory

Summary

While I believe the origins of Red Zone Theory and model for practice have been 'brewing' for years, it has emerged and developed as a direct result of the present research project. The work here is not completed. I offer, as part of this doctoral submission, a work-in-progress. I will be developing the theory and model for practice post-doctoral studies with a view to publishing the work and developing it into a training programme for those in the counselling and psychotherapy professions.

Red Zone

Leading to distorted agentic development



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