Attempting to capture the ineffable quality: An interpretative phenomenological analysis and embodied interpretation of the experience of sudden personal transformation

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Attempting to capture the ineffable quality: An interpretative phenomenological analysis and embodied interpretation of the experience of sudden personal transformation

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The University of Manchester
Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Abstract

Background and aims: The qualitative literature that has examined the topic of sudden and profound transformation has mostly focused on the antecedent and facilitative factors associated with this form of change. However, previous empirical research has noted the great difficulty participants experience when trying to arrive at an explanation for their change. Within this study, I have aimed to explore the lived experience of sudden personal transformation. Having experienced a life altering epiphany myself, I was compelled to investigate how others, who also identified as having experienced a sudden, transformative change, made sense of it. Participants’ struggle to find the ‘words that work’ when retelling and interpreting their transformation experience developed to become one of the central focuses of this thesis. The lived body is conceptualised as an essential source of meaningful understanding, and therefore, is sought to be used as an instrument of data analysis.

Method: Six participants took part in unstructured interviews which were transcribed, before applying an interpretative phenomenological analysis. With the aim of facilitating the development of emotionally receptive forms of understanding, an embodied interpretation was applied to each account, via the application of Gendlin’s method of focusing. Found poems were also constructed. Findings: Five master themes were identified: 1) Making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of; 2) Who I was, what happened, who I am now; 3) Illuminating purpose; 4) Compelled to act; and 5) Attempting to capture the ineffable quality. Each master theme was identified as having two related sub-themes. The acceptance and appreciation of the experience as one which can never be fully explained played a vital role in the emerging meaning of the experience. Participants appeared to make sense of their transformation through the separation of their lives into the temporal categories of before and after the event. The lives of the participants were changed. New life paths became clear, and purpose was suddenly illuminated. For all the participants in the study, purpose appeared to be intimately linked with the creation of positive connections with others. Conclusions and Implications: Examination of how people experience positive change outside of the therapy room is of use to those seeking to support people who want to change within the realms of psychological therapy. Attendance to the researcher’s bodily response to the research data was understood as enabling movement towards a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under examination, as well as facilitating the production of ‘words that work’. It is concluded that therapeutic practitioners and other mental health professionals may benefit from understanding the dimensions of transformative change described here, in such qualitatively rich terms. Key words: sudden personal transformation, counselling psychology, interpretative phenomenological analysis, embodied interpretation
Declaration

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Firstly, I would like to thank ‘James’, ‘Elisabeth’, ‘Firelight’, ‘Patrick’, ‘Louise’ and ‘Bill’ for sharing their amazing change stories with me, and making this thesis possible. It was a pleasure, and a privilege, to listen to you talk about the transformations you have experienced.

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I would also like to acknowledge the tireless support of my mum Joanne, dad Bruce and sister Jade. I could never have done this without you. I love you!

And, just for you Slim...peanut butter x
‘Patrick’

30 July 2012

I felt it come off me
I felt it leaving
I don’t know how

Today’s the day
Today it’s all over
Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I share my personal rationale for conducting the research project, and hence, I locate myself in relation to the subject matter under investigation. In seeking to contextualise the study, a consideration of knowledge for counselling psychology practice is discussed. The contribution of qualitative research to serve such knowledge relevant to therapeutic practice is explored. The aims of the study, and research questions are introduced to the reader, as well as an orientation to how the reflexive elements of this research study are incorporated. Finally, an outline of the thesis is summarised.

Telling the story of my epiphany: Seeking the phenomenological nod

‘It was as if I had just….’

I am sitting opposite a friend and attempting to share with them the story of my epiphany. This was a moment, on 3 June 2013, in which I was transformed, and it felt like my life had suddenly begun. I am struck by the challenge of how best to describe my epiphanic experience in order to produce a feeling of understanding in such a captive audience. I am aware of just how important it is to me to get it right. My hand rotates in the air, as I search for the word that feels accurate enough, as well as capable enough, to elicit her understanding. I notice that there is a felt sense of a situation continually unfolding, as I manage to find the words that work. I feel a sense of discomfort each time the words do not quite resonate, and of warmth every time the words fit with what my body appeared to already know.

* * *

‘If words don’t cut it, how I am I going to cement it [the experience] for myself?’ (Personal journal)

‘It is beyond words what happened to me. I wasn’t even looking for it. I was resigned to a different destiny, and then in a flash it hit me…like a sensation hit me…an alternative way of experiencing this life was suddenly clear. All in a moment.’
My epiphanic experience can, at times, feel as though it is more than words can say, and yet the experience continues to look for the words. The language I use does not present itself separately from the felt sense of the situation I am trying to capture. Nor does the felt sense exist independently of the words I am attempting to express. Instead, the language and the felt sense appear to be entwined, developing together, enabling the words I use to carry forward the meaning I intend. There is a specificity and sophistication in how accurately my body appears to know the experience. It is far from imprecise, and yet the process of locating the words seems more so. My recurrent experience of struggling to find the words is an authentic expression of how language does not appear equipped to offer a simple reflection of my epiphany, and yet the longing to find those which are most faithful becomes a central priority every time I seek to share it. And I want to share it. More than anything.

When I witness an expression of recognition on my friend’s face, I am overjoyed. She nods in agreement. She has understood me; perhaps, she has even recognised elements of which she has had some experience. Gadamer (1989) suggests that the joy of recognition is the joy of knowing more than is already familiar to us: ‘In recognition what we know emerges’ (p. 113). Descriptions which are rich and evocative have the capacity to elicit ‘the phenomenological nod’ (Van Manen, 1990). It is a recognition of a phenomenon so richly described that the listener, too, resonates with the experience of it. Phenomenological research description aims to stimulate in readers the sensation of connection to actual or potential experience: ‘In other words, a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience - is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience’ (Van Manen 1990, p. 27). As the research process has progressed, I have become increasingly interested in the circumstances, challenges, and ‘art’ of human understanding. In positioning myself as a trainee counselling psychologist and qualitative researcher, it may be important to consider how I conceptualise forms of knowing within each of these areas before articulating the purpose and aims of this research study.
Counselling Psychology Practice

Developed within the humanistic movement, the emergence of counselling psychology in the United Kingdom has been influenced by counselling psychology as it is practised in the United States (US), in European psychotherapy, as well as in mainstream psychology. With an explicit focus on a humanistic value base, counselling psychology is built on the understanding of people as ‘relational beings’, and it is this conception of the human which informs the way in which counselling psychologists practise, adopting a strongly relational stance (Cooper, 2008). Counselling psychologists do not seek to ‘assume the automatic superiority of any one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing and knowing’ (Division of Counselling Psychology, DCoP, 2005, pp. 1–2). A firm emphasis is placed on the client’s subjective and inter-subjective experience. The therapist is aware that she is not the expert on the client’s perception of their distress and their experience of it, but instead, is receptive to the client’s first-person account, which is viewed as valid in its own terms (DCoP, 2005). On this basis, practitioners seek to cultivate democratic, non-hierarchical client-therapist relationships, preferring to take a collaborative position alongside their client. The counselling psychologist possesses ‘respect for the personal, subjective experience of the client over and above notions of diagnosis, assessment and treatment’ (Lane & Corrie, 2006, p. 17), and as a result, places the therapeutic relationship at its core, giving it priority over therapeutic techniques (Loewenthal, 2011). The activity of the therapist is not passive, simply acting as a witness to the client’s phenomena; rather it is conceptualised as a position of openness to the emerging experience between the therapist and the client, a responsiveness which is not solely informed theoretically, but which requires bodily and emotional participation.

The postmodern turn in psychology and in the field of counselling and psychotherapy was prompted by an epistemological disenchantment with the psyche professions’ beliefs in grand and unifying theoretical systems and singular forms of knowing (Lowe, 1999; House, 2010). Orthodoxy was challenged. Counselling psychology itself developed distinct from its fellow forms of applied psychology because of its philosophical underpinning. The emphasis of counselling psychology on engagement with notions of subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, values, and beliefs is often considered to be at odds with the empirical-positivistic approach to ‘science’, which underlies scientific psychology as it is traditionally defined. Ideas about
‘science’, especially within western psychology, may not appear compatible with the concept of ‘the person’. The diversity of influence on the development of counselling psychology, for some, creates a tension for the profession. Counselling psychologists are required to negotiate diverse, and at times competing, ideologies, which inform both their research activity and clinical practice. As a result, practitioners and researchers within the field of counselling psychology are tasked to hold this tension and to form a professional identity which seeks to coherently integrate the thinking of the varied influences which have shaped its development.

One key debate within the field of counselling psychology refers to the way in which counselling psychologists conceptualise their practice in relation to research. Woolfe and Strawbridge (2010), when considering this relationship, assert that counselling psychologists are scientist-practitioners, and suggest that there should be an increasing recognition of what constitutes the scientific aspects of the counselling psychology identity, and hence how this transpires in practice.

In therapy, I am very used to using my body as an instrument. I am continuously drawing on my felt sense and bodily responses to my clients as a way to gain insight into their experience. Cozolino (2004) comments that ‘successful therapy demands that we use our heads and hearts, minds and bodies, and knowledge and instincts because they can all be important course of information’ (p. 134). I can often find myself ‘shuttling’ over the course of a therapy session - shifting my attention down into my body to become aware of what is going on there, and then using it appropriately. Raingruber and Kent (2003) demonstrated how therapeutic practitioners tune into their own bodily senses in order to detect the meaning of their clients’ experiences. They concluded that ‘when clinicians listen to the piercing wisdom of and the immediate knowledge of their body...they are more likely to make time to reflect and to develop an understanding…in personal, professional and human terms’ (p. 466). Within the therapeutic endeavour, bodily forms of understanding are seen as essential in guiding sensitive practice. In any act of empathy, bodily and relational resonance is required in order for the imagination to connect to, and thus participate within, the joint encounter (Satir, 1987). This leads to an exploration of the potential of qualitative research to support the development of these personal resources of the practitioner, which are deemed so essential to practice.
Qualitative Research

***

Something struck me today in practice [placement] supervision. We were talking about the ending of therapy with a client of mine. I was reflecting on how I have been transformed by the process. I took a moment in the session to make a note of this. I am changed, transformed even, by the therapeutic process. The same has got to be said for the research process. I will be changed by it. The participants too perhaps. So too might the reader. How will this research affect those involved in it? (Research journal)

***

First-hand experience of the difficulty in finding ‘the words that work’ in order to induce another’s empathy led me to contemplate the surrounding qualitative research endeavour and the notion of care. I resonated with the question posed by Todres (2007), who asked, ‘What kind of qualitative descriptions produce a feeling of understanding in the reader?’ (p. 5). Clearly, different qualitative researchers seek to produce different kinds of knowledge, driven by different purposes. An articulation of what kind of knowledge the research study intends to generate, and a justification for doing so should be offered (Holloway, 2005). I care deeply about my epiphanic experience; therefore, I care about how I present it to others. I care about the stories of the participants who have taken part in this research study. So, too, do I care about any individuals who find themselves reading this research thesis. I care about the discipline of counselling psychology and about how this research study may be of use to practitioner psychologists. I, as the researcher, am the apparatus that connects the participant and the reader, and therefore, I must seek to remain responsive to both. I agree with Ellingson (2006), who conceptualises the enterprise of qualitative research along a continuum. Rather than notions of art and science existing dichotomously, they are instead located at two ends of the spectrum within which a vast and diverse middle ground exists. I consider qualitative research to be most effective when it is both art and science. Research findings are ‘expected to be accessible, relevant, significant and credible, and to hold the prospect of change to those who have a stake in them’ (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1368). The question of the utility of qualitative research emerges as a central one. Qualitative research findings should demonstrate the potential to meaningfully affect the person and their practice (Galvin &
Todres, 2011). What is sought is description that is alive to the reader, who ‘would feel alert and quickened by the writing’ and not ‘yawning uncontrollably and yearning for a nap’ (Anderson, 2002, p. 40). The aesthetic aspects of language are inevitably implicated. Later, in the methodology chapter, consideration is given to the conceptualised tension which exists between the lived body and language, as it has significant implications for qualitative researchers in pursuit of understanding, interpreting, and presenting the experiences of others. Before seeking to articulate the specific aims of this research study, contextualising the relationship between qualitative research and professional practice as it is conceived within counselling psychology may assist in providing an understanding of the consequent aims of this research study.

**Qualitative research and counselling psychology practice**

As scientist-practitioners, counselling psychologists are expected to forge a relationship with research to inform their clinical practice. A research attitude and dedication to conducting research is a key characteristic of the professional knowledge base of practitioners. Bridging the gap between practice and research is precisely the aim which the scientist-practitioner model achieves (Corrie & Callahan, 2000). It has been identified as an appropriate model for the training and ongoing development of counselling psychology practitioners and researchers. Since the advent of the evidence-based practice (EBP) movement in the 1990s, and the adoption of EBP as a key paradigm within the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK, professionals working in the field of counselling psychology have been confronted by a growing insistence that they produce and utilise research which has a high level of scientific rigour; thus, they seek to employ exclusively those therapeutic practices that have empirical support (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003). Clinical guideline groups, such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), have an increasingly influential role in the commissioning and delivery of psychological therapies. NICE offers guidance on conducting good quality research that can be used in the NHS. Viewing the quality of research evidence in a hierarchical manner, quantitative research approaches are favoured. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is considered much lower down in the levels of evidence deemed suitable to inform therapeutic practice. The instrumental utility of qualitative research is less obvious. Hence, within the paradigm of evidence-based practice, it is hard for qualitative research to get recognition (Olson, Young & Shultz, 2016). As a result, the therapist’s professional
knowledge is increasingly being construed as one of instrumental problem-solving and the employment of tested techniques supported by scientific theory (Westen & Bradley, 2005). However, there is an abundance of knowledge unrelated to the application of techniques and the implementation of interventions. There exists a knowledge that captures those essential components to which counselling psychology accords priority, namely, the relational aspects of therapeutic work. It can be articulated as the kind of knowledge that exists in that moment-by-moment, intimate therapeutic interaction.

Van Manen (2007) refers to the term ‘phenomenology of practice’ when discussing the different ways of knowing the world. He articulates theory to ‘think’ the world, unlike practice, which pathically ‘grasps’ the world. I agree with Van Manen (2007) when he says that:

‘It is much easier for us to teach concepts and informational knowledge than it is to bring about pathic understandings. But herein lies the strength of a phenomenology of practice. It is through pathic significations and images, accessible through phenomenological texts that speak to us and make a demand on us, that the more noncognitive dimensions of our professional practice may be communicated, internalized and reflected on’ (p. 21).

Qualitative researchers are required to produce findings which are relevant and useful to practitioners. Furthermore, they are required to present their findings in such a way that permits their practical use. ‘Usable’ and ‘useful’ are terms with diverse definitions, dependent on the research orientation (Baker, Norton, Young & Ward, 1998). Having said that, symbolic or conceptual utilisation is often cited as the most important objective of qualitative research: ‘Understanding is not merely a prelude to or basis for action but, rather, is itself action’ (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1373). If symbolic utility relates to the development and change in how stakeholders may think about the topic under investigation, then perhaps the role of the qualitative researcher is in making the value of symbolic utilisation increasingly apparent.

I am aware that I have not yet introduced the subject matter under investigation in this study. This is deliberate. So too is my decision deliberate, not to provide a commentary, just yet, on
the presence of a found poem encountered at the beginning of this thesis, or to define the key terms used within this study until following the literature review. My decision to do so is designed to reflect the nature of sudden and personal transformation. It can be confusing and disorienting, but in time becomes clearer!

In sharing what I have so far, I have sought to reflect how the purpose and aims of this research study came to be developed, and in particular, to provide an orientation regarding how I understand and interpret the pursuit of qualitative research. It now seems appropriate to present the purpose and aims of this study.

**The study’s aims**

Within this study, I aimed to explore the lived experience of six participants’ accounts of a sudden personal transformation (SPT). Having experienced a life altering epiphany myself, I was compelled to investigate how others, who had also identified as having experienced a sudden, transformative change, made sense of it. With a view to gaining insight into what it actually feels like, and to understand how individuals made these experiences meaningful, I developed the following two research questions:

**Research Question One:** How do individuals make sense of their SPT experiences?

**Research Question Two:** How does a SPT impact the lives of those who have experienced them?

My conception of innovative qualitative research in light of my own personal epiphanic experience also led to the development of a third research question, pertaining to a methodological concern:
**Research Question Three:** How can qualitative research facilitate the expression of lived experience which is considered as ‘more than words can say’?

I am enthralled by the concept of the phenomenological nod because it appears to encourage the development of psychological description which is recognisable and identifiable to those who engage with it. Within the context of counselling psychology practice, in which first-hand accounts of experience are considered valid in their own right, therapeutic practitioners appear faced with a difficult tension between ‘technicalising’ the therapeutic experience and supporting the agency of the client (Totton, 2003, p. 123). My epiphany, and the experience of both the difficulty and delight in retelling what it meant for me in my life, has resulted in my commitment to seeking the phenomenological nod within this thesis. I have given myself the task of generating qualitative descriptions which allow readers ‘to understand what a certain experience must have been like without having gone through it themselves’ (Armino & Hultgren, 2002, p. 457). What we understand is intimately involved in how we learn it, while how we learn is intimately involved in what we come to understand (Anderson, 2002). In seeking to write an embodied account, I believe a fuller understanding of the lived experience of a SPT can be offered.

Given my understanding of the purpose and utility of qualitative research, it follows that the purpose of this research study is two-fold. In seeking to appreciate and embrace elements from both art and science within the process of qualitative research, it is my intention to explore potentially innovative ways in which to consider the concepts of sense-making and representation. Therefore, not only does this research study aim to contribute to the current understanding of transformative change, but it also attempts to do that in a way which attends particularly to the aesthetic and expressive dimension of understanding.

**The reflexive element**

It is considered paramount that my personal assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon under examination are made known (Etherington, 2004; Finlay, 2002, 2006). As I developed an understanding of my qualitative-researcher identity, a clearer conception of the kind of knowledge my research intended to produce developed simultaneously. The role
of the researcher and the inherent vulnerability in inquiry (Behar, 1996), rather than the research product, is invited to take centre stage at appropriate times. Chapter Six presents a research report which aims to offer insight into this development. However, this does not mean to say that I intend to withhold my research voice until the final chapter. Embedded within the next chapters are acknowledgements of my role as researcher and its subsequent impact on the development of the research process and findings. I seek to offer a layered account providing reflections on my experience of crafting my story alongside the data (Charmaz, 1983, Ronai, 1992). This is sometimes referred to as a metanarrative (Jago, 2002), meta-autoethnography (Ellis, 2009), or writing-story (Richardson, 2001), and is intended to invite readers to consider the emergent experience of doing and writing qualitative research. The use of three asterisks are employed to indicate the inclusion of personal reflections. Descriptions are deliberately layered and disjointed so as to reflect the muddled and complex nature of the research process and the simultaneous progression of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1983).

Overview of the thesis

This chapter has introduced the motivation for the investigation into the lived experience of SPTs and into how such experiences can be explored. This thesis comprises a further five chapters. The next chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the area of psychological change. Chapter Three gives an overview of the philosophical paradigm, the theoretical perspective, and the methodology informing the study, and provides a rationale for the choice of methods employed. It also includes an explanation of the integration of an embodied interpretation and the representation of research findings in the form of found poems. The reader may have already noticed at the beginning of this chapter the presence of the first of six found poems. A found poem is presented at the beginning of each of the remaining chapters. An evaluation of their impact is provided later. Chapter Four presents the findings, making use of quotations from participants to support interpretations and to shed light on the analysis procedures used. Chapter Five then discusses the results of the study in relation to each of the original research questions and methodological aims. In addition, it provides a reflective account of the strengths and limitations of the study. Chapter Six concludes by detailing the research’s contribution to the area of study.
‘Elisabeth’

My mind flashed back

This is what they talk about when they talk about epiphanies
Guided to something you never knew
Wake up call to our greater purpose
Huge and always for the good

My mind flashed back
I had an epiphany

It was as if time stood still
My whole body shifted
A weight snapped free

My mind flashed back
I had an epiphany
What a gift it was

My fear revealed and released
Me in a whole new direction
A bigger blessing that I ever knew

My mind flashed back
I had an epiphany
What a gift it was
Finally able to take action
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This literature review emphasises two key areas relevant to the conduct of this research study. It begins by acknowledging several stories of change and transformation as depicted in fictional and autobiographical accounts. Then, provision of an overview of the historical and conceptual background of the study of change within the psychological sciences, including research highlighting the significance of sudden and profound change and its relationship to psychological wellbeing, is offered. Relevant descriptive findings from the humanistic study of peak experiences, writings on quantum change and the contemporary study of posttraumatic growth are reviewed. The definitions of key terms are purposely presented following the review of the literature to aid clarity. Elucidation of the empirical research related to the study of nonlinear change in the context of psychotherapy specifically is introduced. Finally, a review of the literature pertaining to the expression of research findings and arts-based representation in qualitative research provides the foundation on which to present the chosen methodology for this research study.

Literature search strategy

The search strategy employed for this literature review was informed by Bates’ (1989) ‘berry picking’ model. Bates (1989) describes the process as follows: ‘Users begin with just one feature of a broader topic, or just one relevant reference, and move through a variety of sources. Each new piece of information they encounter gives them new ideas and directions to follow and, consequently a new conception of the query’ (p. 409). References from identified articles and texts were utilised to facilitate the retrieval of additional relevant journal papers. Author searches were conducted in order to locate any further research on the topic conducted by previously identified authors. The search was considered to be an iterative process where the question was treated as ‘a compass rather than an anchor’ (Dixon-Woods et al. 2006). Findings which emerged from the analysis were also used to determine what literature was reviewed. As themes were developed, this stimulated further research of the literature.
The current understanding of sudden and transformational change

Stories of transformation
The term *epiphany* is most commonly associated with the Christian feast held at the turn of each new year. The holiday marks a celebration of three Christian miracles, namely, the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Christ, and the miraculous transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (Eliade, 1987). The word ‘epiphany’ comes from the Greek word *epiphania*, meaning ‘to show, make known, or reveal’. In literature, James Joyce is considered the first person to illustrate sudden moments of insight, or epiphanies. In *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce describes an experience which occurred in a split second; however, he implies the impact on an individual’s life after the event as profound and indisputable:

‘Pause, J. J. O’Molloy took out his cigarette case. False lull. Something quite ordinary. Messenger took out his matchbox thoughtfully and lit his cigar. I have often thought since on looking back over that strange time that it was that small act, trivial in itself, that striking of that match, that determined the whole aftercourse of both our lives.’ (p. 140-141)

The idea of transformative change is not new. Biographies and autobiographies offer real-life accounts of sudden transformation change. These appear common among spiritual figures, such as Mahatma Ghandi, Moses, and the Buddha. They are also found amid the lives of social reformers and activists like Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale, Malcom X, and Bill Wilson. Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky documented their transformative change experiences in their written memoirs. In each of these cases, a commitment to enlightenment was initiated by a singular transformative event.

Victor Frankl (1985), in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, shares with us the moment in which he recognised the role of hope in surviving the most horrendous circumstances as a prisoner in Auschwitz concentration camp:

‘We were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I
felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious ‘Yes’ in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. ‘Et lux in tenebris lucent’ — and the light shineth in the darkness.’ (p. 51)

In this moment, Frankl appears to suddenly comprehend his life’s purpose: to endure inexplicable suffering and to find meaning in this suffering in order to survive. His experience seems best described as a sudden, abrupt, and positive transformation that has profound and enduring effects. Reading the personal account of Victor Frankl, amongst others, we are struck by the power of these transformative moments. Sudden and profound change happens, epiphanies occur, and they have enduring positive effects. I know it personally.

***

It happened on the 3 June 2013, and I was travelling on the train from London Kings Cross to Cambridge. It’s very hard to explain it, actually. When someone asks you to put it into words, it is actually very difficult. Where should you begin? Should you say all the stuff that happened before, or where you were at when it happened or...quite tricky to know where to start. But I will say that I was not in a great place mentally. On paper, I was moving through life and looking quite good, but I wasn’t really. I had a diagnosed eating disorder for some years, and sometime later, with support, I got the behaviour under control. I wasn’t engaged in eating disorder behaviour anymore. But I still felt very, very low, and for ages, for years after that, I wanted to go back to the time when I had my eating disorder. I had always imagined that I was better then. The reason I say that is because when the epiphany took place, that was the crux of it really, it was kind of...in a moment...so I’m sat on the train and all of a sudden, it just occurred to me ‘things can be different...and I can be the author of that, I can make that happen...I have all the power’ and also, all of a sudden, I visualised a way of living that was more appealing than going back, for the first time in years. I felt like there was an alternative. There was an alternative and it actually was more appealing. That just felt life changing. I haven’t felt the same since. I am different. I have never been able to feel again that depth of sadness I felt. I see everything differently. I see the world differently. I see my life differently. Most of all, I see myself differently. I’ll never get over it...I mean in
The study of change in the psychological sciences

One enduring question for the field of psychology has been related to the principles, processes, and mechanisms of human change (Higginson & Mansell, 2008). Two broad areas appear to be most commonly examined in relation to the concept of change. The first is developmental changes that occur over an individual’s life span. These are most commonly understood to occur as a gradual process over the course of an individual’s life (Baban & Craciun, 2007). The second area focuses upon more specific change occurring within the context of psychotherapy. Although studies have found that individuals often experience change spontaneously and independently without any therapeutic intervention at all (Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2004), when it comes to positive growth, Fosha (2006) explains that ‘we become sceptical, cautiously maintaining that enduring change need be slow and gradual’ (p. 590). Regardless, ‘some transitions, some periods of change stand out as especially significant in the life course’ (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2001, p. xv), and these moments have been the subject of psychological research.

Early proponents of transformational change were interested in spiritual conversion (James, 1902/1944). Religious traditions have long acknowledged the human potential for transformation, most commonly witnessed via the process of conversion. The term ‘spiritual conversion’ exists under the wider umbrella of ‘religious conversion’, a concept that encompasses a wide range of cultural, social, theological, and psychological issues. Philosopher and psychologist William James (1902/1944) made a distinction between two types of behaviour change, that is, between the educational or volitional variety, in which change occurs incrementally, and the all-or-nothing type of change indicated by a relatively dramatic shift. His contribution of The Variety of Religious Experiences depicts the primacy of the transcendent experience in the transformation of personality. Spiritual conversion is described as ‘a change of the core destination of a person’s life’ (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004, p. 483). Specifically, it is the identification of the self with the sacred that becomes the ultimate source of significance. Other strivings, while still potentially very important, cease to be the highest categorising principle of existence.
The mechanism of transformation conceptualised within Alcoholics Anonymous is described as spiritual in nature. Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, offers an account of a mystical experience which resulted in the end of his alcoholism. The point of desperation for Wilson arrived in 1934 when he was hospitalised for the fourth time for alcohol-related health problems. He recalled exclaiming, ‘If there is a God, let Him show Himself!’ He experienced the room suddenly blazing with light and was overwhelmed by a vision of being at the summit of a mountain. He sensed the words, ‘You are a free man’ surrounding him and, following this epiphanic experience, he never again returned to alcohol.

The term ‘epiphany’ has been used among a variety of academic disciplines including social theory (Denzin, 1989), humanistic education (Goud, 1995), clinical psychology (Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998), and gay and lesbian studies (Jensen, 1999). In 1997, Jarvis sought to define an epiphany as a ‘sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive and enduring transformation through reconfiguration of an individual’s most deeply held beliefs about self and world’ (p. 5). However, slightly over ten years later, despite the term’s broad use, McDonald (2008) commented on the largely static development of the term’s conceptual, empirical, and theoretical development. Psychologists have used various terms in order to capture the capacity of the human organism for profound and sudden change. William Miller and Janet C’ de Baca (1994, 2001, 2004) observed how behavioural science lacked a term to describe sudden transformation, and went on to coin the term ‘quantum change’ to describe the ‘sudden, dramatic, and enduring transformations that affect a broad range of personal emotion, cognition, and behavior’ (Miller, 2004, p. 453). They invited 55 people to recount their stories of spiritual conversion, personality transformation, and sudden extensive cognitive and behaviour changes, and uncovered two categories of quantum change, with defining features (Miller & C’ de Baca, 1994). The first, the mystical (epiphany) type, contained elements similar to that described in the change accounts written by Malcolm X, Tolstoy, and Joan of Arc and was akin to James’ descriptions of religious conversion. Similar to known reports of near-death experiences (Lorimer, 1990), transient states of consciousness were described, often lasting for no more than a few minutes. Not the product of will or control, the experience is most commonly felt as intensely positive and joyful. Mystical type experiences have been revealed to be reasonably common (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999); however, most accounts of this type of change do not seem to have a permanent effect on the individual’s life and personality, which is described as one of the defining features of
quantum change. When the mystical type of change does lead to definin
g change, Miller and C’ de Baca (2001) proposed that there is an overwhelming sense that ‘life will never be the
same again’ (p. 20). The insightful type was described as containing an element of revelation, or an unexpected knowing of a novel truth. It features the element of sudden realisation or a
sense of knowing. Miller and C’ de Baca were explicit in their distinction of such insights
from the commonly understood ‘a-ha’ moment evident in ordinary experience. Rather, ‘these
awakenings break upon the person with great and sudden force, and in the moment of seeing, the person recognizes them for authentic truth’ (Miller, 2004, p. 457). The effect of such an experience is likely to be a restructuring of perceptions of the self as well as of the world
view.

Miller and C’ de Baca discovered particular commonalities among respondents across the
two types of change which led them to conclude there were four defining features of quantum
change: distinctiveness, surprise, benevolence, and permanence. Quantum changers knew
something extraordinary was happening to them and recalled the details of their experience
vividly. They were not seeking such an experience, and many referred to the feeling of
having not contributed to it themselves. The experience was felt to be exhilarating and
liberating, accompanied by a profound sense of safety, love, and acceptance. The change was
enduring: ‘They knew instantly they had passed through a one-way door through which there
was no return’ (Miller, 2004, p. 456).

Ten years on from the original interviews in the study, C’ de Baca (2004) conducted follow-
up research with 30 of the original respondents to discover whether the impact of their
quantum change experience remained. Participants were still able to recall their experience in
vivid detail and reflected on the feeling that the impact of the experience grew deeper over
time. C’ de Baca’s findings from the follow-up interviews reaffirmed her observations made
in the initial study, where some transformations were experienced as insightful, and others
viewed it as more affiliated to the experience of connecting to spiritual powers outside of
themselves. She reported on the participants ‘enduring experience of personal peace and
transformed interactions’ as ‘striking’ (p. 539), confirming for her that quantum change is an
encompassing and essentially permanent personality change.

Much of the qualitative literature examining sudden and profound transformation has focused
on the antecedent and facilitative factors associated with this form of change. The empirical
literature to date does not suggest that transformative change is likely to be experienced at any particular point over the course of a person’s life span (Jarvis, 1997), and nor has research been able to provide a full and comprehensive understanding of what may be the cause or underlying foundation whereby sudden transformative change is most likely to occur. Explanatory claims have been most commonly aligned with the antecedent of inner emotional turmoil. The most frequently reported antecedent of sudden change appears to be negative life events and emotional states (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005; Murray, 2006). In many cases, quantum change experiences were reported to have been preceded by some psychological disturbance, in the form of profound loss, prolonged distress, and even points of desperation (Miller & C’ de Baca, 1994). In the face of an intense and enduring negative affect, transformations have culminated in new perspectives (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; Baumeister, 1991; Heatherton and Nichols, 1994), and in deep shifts ‘in core values, attitudes, or actions’ (Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001, p. 258). Fifty-six percent of the research participants interviewed in Miller and C’ de Baca’s (1994) research study described being in crisis or at rock bottom at the time of their transformation experience. Themes of feeling trapped and/or defeated were categorised as salient antecedent factors. Murray (2006) reported participants to have described themselves as feeling lonely and unhappy, some with a history of suicide attempts prior to their ‘unencumbered moment’. Qualitative reports of having run out of options and finally reaching a ‘low point’ (p. 64) were described. Similarly, experiences of inner turmoil before the transformation event were also reported by Jarvis (1997) and McDonald (2005), including suicidal ideation, loneliness, depression, anger, and anxiety.

It may be important to note, however, that whilst half of the participants in Miller and C’ de Baca’s (1994) study reported having been emotionally distressed at the time of their transformation, the other half consequently did not report having been experiencing distress prior to their experience of change. Distinctly fewer positive or even neutral facilitative factors have been identified in relation to the occurrence of sudden change, although Miller and C’ de Baca (1994) have speculated whether some individuals reporting on the experience of this form of change may have been searching deliberately for a deeper meaning to their lives. Moreover, a spiritual openness has also been cited as a possible facilitative factor, despite neither of these assertions being evident within their empirical studies to date.
The mechanisms of such change are understood to refer to the processes in which sudden and profoundly positive change is most likely to occur, and there does appear to be some agreement that the process of change is largely unconscious. Murray (2006) concluded that a transformative moment ‘presents itself without thinking’ (p. 290), whilst Miller and C’ de Baca (2001) referred to the possibility of a period of subconscious incubation in which the resolution of a significant life impediment is gradually prepared before appearing in an ‘a-ha’ like manner. Later, Miller (2004) went on to describe the process of quantum change as one of a personal maturation process, somewhat of a ‘developmental metamorphosis’ (p. 458). Profound positive change following experiences of trauma has become a central topic of research and is considered the flagship theme of positive psychology (Joseph, 2014). It is this we turn to next.

Posttraumatic growth (PTG)

‘Trauma is the definitum of quantum transformation’ (Fosha, 2006, p. 569). All in a moment, everything changes, and there can be no return. However, such transformation does not operate only negatively, like it does in trauma; but it also occurs in healing. Contemporary psychologists have examined positive transformational experiences following trauma in the form of adversarial or post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG or experiences of benefit finding (Tennen & Affleck, 1998), positive changes (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991), thriving (O’ Leary & Ickovics, 1994), or adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004) appear to occur amongst people who share the common factor of a struggle with adversity following an experience of any type of trauma, which appears to ‘propel the individual to a higher level of functioning than which existed prior to the event’ (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 11). For decades, philosophers and psychologists alike have explored the paradoxical positive effects that may occur in the wake of severely traumatic events (Chodoff, Friedman, & Hamburg, 1964; Mechanic, 1977).

It is now well established that stressful and traumatic events may serve as a trigger for personal growth and positive change. Studies have reported growth following a range of stressful and traumatic events, including bereavement (Parappully, Rosenbaum, van den Daele, & Nzewi, 2002; Polatinsky & Esprey, 2000), sexual abuse (Draucker, 1992; McMillen, Zuravin, & Rideout, 1995; Woodward & Joseph, 2003), and illness (Evers et al.,
Within the literature, five broad domains of growth have been discussed (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Firstly, positive transformations in the beliefs and behaviour associated with improved relations with others have been reported. Individuals report having a much increased value of friends and family in addition to feeling greater compassion and altruism toward others. Secondly, individuals have reported identifying new possibilities for their life. Some authors have referred to this as an alteration in an individual’s life philosophy, which may perhaps involve a renegotiation of values and of what is considered most important to people in their lives (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Pals & McAdams, 2004). Thirdly, an increased perception of personal strength has been expressed, that is, the discovery of ‘unleashed, re-awakened traits, talents or strengths that had hitherto been dormant’ (Schwartzberg, 1994, p. 597; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000). Fourthly, spiritual growth or a modification of spiritual beliefs has been evident (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). Finally, an enhanced appreciation of life appears frequently, perhaps manifesting itself via an appreciation for each new day, which sees a shift in emphasis towards a more ‘here and now’ attitude (Hassin, 1994; Siegel & Scrimshaw, 2000, p. 1550). The development of PTG is theorised to lead to a sense of wisdom about the world, and, eventually to greater satisfaction with life (Stanton, Bower & Low, 2006).

From a psychological perspective, development of the concept of PTG has been influenced by several theoretical movements including existential theory (Frankl, 1985; Yalom, 1980), Rogers’ person-centred theory (1961, 1964) and the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The recent increase in interest in experiences of growth can be seen as an indication of the expansion of the positive psychology movement (Snyder et al., 2002), which aims to balance the mainstream psychology perspective, currently dominated by theories pertaining to the more negative elements of human experience. In a systematic review of experiences of PTG among people living with HIV, conducted by myself, I made reference to the potential benefit to counselling psychologists of an increased awareness of the potential for PTG to occur among their clients (Amos, 2015). Whilst there is much literature pertaining to supporting people to manage stressful and traumatic events, the literature on the facilitation of growth following trauma is much more recent (Bonanno, 2004). Authors have begun to explore and untangle the complex relationship between posttraumatic stress (PTS) and PTG (Bluvstein, Moravchick, Sheps, Schreiber & Bloch, 2013; Schuettler & Boals, 2011), and have come to the conclusion that
the facilitation of growth within psychotherapy may be considered as a clinical intervention that is different from interventions designed to alleviate distress (Woodward & Joseph, 2003; Turner & Cox, 2004).

In 1998, O'Leary, Alday, and Ickovics identified eight models seeking to explain incidents of adversarial growth. These were divided into models of intentional and incremental change (Nerken, 1993; Mahoney, 1982), and models of sudden and unexpected transformative change (Miller & C' de Baca, 1994; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Schaefer & Moos, 1992; Calhoun & Tedeschi; 1998). There has also been an upsurge in research related to religious and spiritual issues in psychology and psychotherapy (Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005) and, in particular, a rise in the number of studies considering the links between religiosity and experiences of PTG. The literature does suggest that personal relationships to religion and spirituality can play a significant part in facilitating PTG. Furthermore, traumatic experiences may form a catalyst for religious and spiritual growth (Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005).

**Non-linear change in psychotherapy**

The history of psychology mostly suggests that discontinuous forms of transformation have been overlooked in favour of conventional theory and research on linear incremental change. Psychotherapy and psychological therapy are endeavours that are designed to facilitate important life changes.

However, the personal accounts of dramatic life changes which occur in naturalistic contexts, some of which have been recounted here, have clear applications to the study of change in psychotherapy. The experience of insight has long been a topic of interest among psychotherapists, researchers, and philosophers alike. There exists an extensive body of theoretical literature which explores the relationship between the concept of insight and psychological change; however, a definition of the term remains elusive (Levitt et al., 2004). The concept has been known to refer to the intuitive alteration in awareness that enables an individual to experience a phenomenon differently (Metcalfe & Wiebe, 1987; Sternberg & Lubart, 1996), whilst the concept is also used to specify a general level of self-awareness, for
example, when referring to patients’ insight into their mental health conditions (McCabe, Quayle, Beirne & Duane, 2000). For some, the experience of insight is synonymous with change (Miller & C’ de Baca, 1994), whilst for others, it is considered as insufficient to facilitate change alone (Gaylin, 2000). For others still, insight is considered as the awareness that can only exist following the event of change (Levenson, 1998). Psychologists have employed the term within the context of the psychoanalytic process (Freud, 1901), as well as with reference to spiritual epiphanies or types of experiential knowing (Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001; Miller, 2004; Zack, 2001). Levitt et al. (2004) comment that as the word ‘insight’ has fallen into common usage, it often appears without any clarification at all (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky & Ross, 2001).

On the whole, the notion that change within the context of psychotherapy occurs gradually is supported adequately by empirical research evidence (Lambert, Hansen & Finch, 2001; Lutz, Martinovich & Howard, 1999). Models that describe change as progression through a series of stages, such as the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC) (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984), are cited as conventional approaches to change. The TMC proposes that stages of precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance follow one after another, and are considered a product of active and deliberate attempts to change. Despite the potential to move between stages in a spiral pattern being acknowledged by its authors, an assumption of continuity through stages remains predominant (Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente, 2013).

Several theorists have suggested that principles of destabilisation prior to evidence of change may also apply in the context of change facilitated in psychotherapy (Mahoney, 1991; Hagar, 1992). Whilst therapy seeks to provide a stable environment with the aim of increasing patients' readiness and resources to create change, the therapeutic encounter also introduces a variety of interventions which interrupt, challenge, and ultimately aim to destabilise negative perpetuating patterns. Thus, therapy is understood to produce gradual, linear adjustment, but it also produces discontinuous and nonlinear change (Hayes, Laurenceau, Feldman, Strauss & Cardiaciotto, 2007). Jauregui (2003) conveys something of the mystery and familiarity of the phenomenon of epiphanies in her description of sudden change in the context of psychotherapy. She says;
‘A revelation usually brought on by some simple, homely, or commonplace experience… Something big is occasioned by something little, something easily missed. And it unfolds from there - sometimes as a flash, sometimes in exquisite slow motion - out of conventional time and space and language [at such times it can strike you] … The universe is bigger than it was a minute ago and so are you.’ (p. 3)

A range of terms have been employed to describe significant moments of in-session change, including significant events (Elliott, 1988), good moments (Mahrer et al., 1987), helpful events (Grafanki & McLeod, 1999), moments of meeting (Stern, 2004), and sudden gains (Tang & DeRubeis, 1999). The concept of sudden gains was first acknowledged by Tang and DeRubeis (1999) among clients undergoing cognitive therapy for depression. Clients were observed to make marked improvements in their experience of depressive symptoms after particular therapy sessions. Furthermore, their progression appeared to represent stable changes in symptom severity rather than provide evidence for random fluctuations (Kelly et al., 2005). Despite the breadth of research on sudden gains, there is surprisingly little understanding of what factors may be associated with the phenomenon. One promising and expanding branch of this area of research focused on the possible association of clients’ narrative meaning-making processes with experiences of sudden gains in their mental wellbeing. A study by Adler, Harmeling and Walder-Biesanz (2013) found significant evidence to suggest that participants in psychotherapy demonstrated a noticeable increase in their capacity to create a coherent story about their experiences just prior to experiencing a sudden improvement in their mental health.

Half a century ago, Maslow (1968) coined the term ‘peak experience’, which was defined as a positive moment of highest happiness (Privette, 2001). Maslow (1970, 1971) regarded peak experiences as having powerful effects on personality growth, creativity, and learning, and as a result, he went on to regard the notion of peak experiences as essential to an approach of counselling and psychotherapy that is centred on strengthening individual potential. Carl Rogers (1957) hypothesised that a tendency towards self-actualisation, described as a need for personal growth and discovery present throughout a person's life, is central to behaviour. Rogers (1963) said,
‘In these situations [therapy, groups, education] the most impressive fact about the individual human being seems to be the directional tendency toward wholeness, toward actualization of potentialities. I have not found psychotherapy … effective when I have tried to create in another individual something that is not there, but I have found that if I can provide the conditions that make for growth, that this positive directional tendency brings about constructive results.’ (p. 4)

A growing body of work within the field of psychotherapy has developed, which seeks to challenge the assumption of linear symptom improvement over time in treatment (Liang & Zeger, 2000; Resnicow & Page, 2008; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Accelerated experiential dynamic psychotherapy (AEDP; Fosha, 2000, 2001) has been developed based on the notion that naturally occurring discontinuous change can be harnessed within therapy, and can be designed to support clients to increase their ability to act adaptively.

**Defining terms**

I have sought to define the term ‘sudden personal transformation (SPT)’ via the comparison and contrast of the term in relation to existing phenomena. Despite the term ‘quantum change’ most similarly reflecting the definition of SPT, employment of the word ‘quantum’ was considered problematic within this study. I agree with Illivitsky’s (2007) comment related to the potential confusion when using the term ‘quantum’ to refer to unrelated concepts of quantum physics or New Age psychology (Wordsworth, 2007). Furthermore, the absence of the element of profundity within their definition appears, to me, to overlook a central aspect of such an experience, one that I related to long before conducting the research interviews. The word ‘change’ refers to the making of something different. There are many labels to describe the kind of change that has life-altering effects. The word ‘transformation’ was chosen to capture the ‘marked’ or ‘complete’ change that is characterised by epiphany-like experiences. I also consider it important to make explicit reference to not only the distinctive and memorable facts of such an experience, but to the lasting transformative quality it contains. The use of the word ‘personal’ indicates this transformational change to be ‘something to do with me’, rather than the alteration of circumstances or external environment in which we may find ourselves. In this study, the definition of SPT was drawn from Illivitsky’s study (2007) and the definitions described in this literature review. As has been elucidated here, transformational change has been referred to in a variety of ways.
Research into unencumbered moments (Murray, 2006), epiphanies (Jarvis 1996; McDonald, 2005), and quantum change experiences (Miller & C’ Baca, 2001) has sought to define, describe, and propose explanations for such phenomena, attempting to document common antecedents and facilitative factors. I personally have referred to my transformation as an ‘epiphany’. Given the intimate and personal nature of such an experience, I anticipate that people will label their experience in different ways. The phrase ‘sudden personal transformation’ has been selected as being inclusive of all the experiences that involve sudden transformational change, as described in both the literature and in psychology. Given the number of terms that have been used to refer to positive, profound, and lasting change, the term ‘sudden personal transformation’ is considered a broad and neutral definition.

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined my conception of innovative qualitative research as requiring the integration of aesthetic and ontological dimensions whilst still supporting the contribution of scientific knowledge. So far, this literature review has offered an overview of the existing empirical research as it relates to the subject of SPT. Equally important to the conduct of this study is the use of qualitative research to support therapeutic practice. Discussion of the ways in which we build personally meaningful knowledge often results in acknowledgement of the process of sense-making as fundamental. Qualitative research is predominantly concerned with the pursuit of making sense of human experience, and its relevance to practice disciplines, such as counselling psychology, is considered next.

**The communicative concern**

The literature reviewed here offers a multitude of evidence for the legitimate existence of experiences of sudden, personal, profound, positive, and permanent change, which can fundamentally alter the lives of those who experience it. If transformational change, such as has been described within this literature review, is considered the most dramatic, yet the least understood mechanism of human change (White, 2004), then perhaps it might be safe to assume that therapeutic practitioners may not be prepared to identify, appreciate, comprehend, or respond appropriately to incidences in which this type of change occurs. However, the extraordinary potential for healing which has come to be associated with the type of sudden and profound transformation experiences explored in the literature so far suggest that this type of change is of particular clinical interest. Whilst there has been some
research concerned with the capacity of this type of change to be induced in individuals within therapy, psychologists and psychotherapists familiar with the concept can seek to allow their preparedness to validate and assist the client’s interpretation of such an event.

Counselling psychology practice routinely engages with the client’s personal accounts of significant life events. More often than not, these are associated with negative psychological outcomes. As has been demonstrated from the relevant literature reviewed for the purpose of this research, many of the reported experiences of an SPT were preceded by periods of self-reported depression, hopelessness, fear, and helplessness. The experience of transformative change appears to herald a major positive change in multiple aspects of the individual’s life. Braud and Anderson (1998) stated that ‘many of the most significant and exciting life events and extraordinary experiences - moments of clarity, illumination and healing - have been systematically excluded from conventional research’ (p. 3). The intention of this research study is to do exactly that: to place a spotlight on six experiences of sudden and personal transformation which resulted in enduring and positive change. In doing so, I remember the words of Miller (2004), who described the respondents of his study as having ‘a difficult time expressing the experience in words’ (p. 457). Indeed, the introduction to this thesis included my own reflections on the difficulty I have experienced in attempting to find the words that describe my epiphany accurately and most effectively, in a way that my listener is most likely to understand.

The introductory chapter to this thesis provided some context to the current climate within counselling psychology and the conceptualised relationship between research and practice as exhibited by the adoption of the scientist practitioner model. The endorsement of EBP has seen the expansion within the NHS of approaches such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) (Boucher, 2010), which is considered to be situated at the technique end of the spectrum and which focuses on brief and solution-focused interventions (Sanders, 2010). This progression towards a more problem-solving approach to working tends to ignore the relational and dynamic aspects of therapeutic work. Many practitioners, from all schools, have contested that there are other areas of a therapist’s professional knowledge which are much harder to articulate and which are not easily characterised as ‘scientific or ‘evidence-based’ and, therefore, are not easily measurable (Clegg & Slife, 2005; Totton, 2003). Kaye
(1995) offered an insight into the implications of psychotherapy research predicated upon natural scientific modernist assumptions, stating that it results in the reduction of the phenomenon under study. Flyvberg (2006), in his paper exploring the utility of case study research within the social sciences, argued against the provision of exclusively context-free knowledge, otherwise known as ‘technical rationality’. Flyvberg (2006) referred to phenomenological studies of human learning (Bourdieu, 1977; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986), which indicate the existence of a qualitative leap in the learning process of adults ‘from the rule-governed use of analytical rationality in beginners to the fluid performance of tacit skills’ (p. 222). Case knowledge is central to human learning (Christensen, 1987).

In relation to psychotherapeutic practice, Gendlin (1974) shared his concern that a thin pattern of knowing takes the place of a more detailed thinking further into the thickness of living that is ‘the alive, changing, unique and context bound circumstances of practice situations’ (p. 3). This argument has significant implications for how the nature of understanding may be conceptualised. Todres (2010) stated that practice requires a form of understanding that ‘is relationally alive and open as an ongoing, unfinished activity rather than as something we possess’ (p. 270). Commitment to seeking an embodied relational understanding is advocated.

Van Manen (2007) referred to the term ‘phenomenology of practice’ when discussing the different ways of knowing the world. He articulated theory to ‘think’ the world, unlike practice, which pathically ‘grasps’ the world. By this, Van Manen (2007) was attempting to capture aspects of the professional knowledge of the practitioner that are dependent on ‘the sense and sensuality of the body, personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and practices, and other aspects of knowledge that are in part pre-reflective, pre-theoretic, pre-linguistic’ (p. 20). These pathic dimensions of practice are understood to reside within the lived body. They are corporeal, relational, and context-dependent categories of knowledge, as opposed to intellectual or technical. They are not easily, or even necessarily, expressed in theoretical terms (Van Manen, 1997). In fact, it could be argued that our embodied sense of experience is greater than any conceptualisation (Todres, 2008); any experience of struggling to find the words is a genuine demonstration of how words are not a simple reflection. It follows then,
that a special kind of language may be required in order to communicate such understanding. The question is whether it is possible to find an epiphanic quality of language which can be used to generate in the reader what Gaston Bachelard (1964) called ‘phenomenological reverberation’ (p. xxiii). If, as Gadamer (1989) stated, practitioners are ‘a locus of intersection’ of specialised knowledge, and historical, personal and professional experience, it is precisely at this junction whereby transformation becomes possible. In the context of the engagement with qualitative research, the reader may not leave the same as when they arrived.

One often cited indicator of the trustworthiness of a qualitative description is the capacity of the interpretation to impact on or resonate with the reader (Richardson, 2000; Elliott et al., 1999). How is this achieved in research practice? A communicative concern surfaces for the qualitative researcher who aims to offer an authentic, rich insider perspective of lived experience. There does appear to have been an upsurge in the amount of research related to the implicit dimension of experience, that which is in some sense known, but not yet available to reflective thought or articulation (Preston, 2008). Moreover, research practice is being produced that has the intention of generating different kinds of knowledge relevant for the caring practices. Within nursing research, there has been some effort towards the translating the ‘technical and jargon-driven language’ (Galvin & Todres, 2011) evident in many qualitative methodologies into language more relevant to everyday nursing practice. Within grounded theory research, Rennie and Fergus (2006) developed the technique of ‘embodied categorisation’, which they described as:

‘An approach to interpretation in which subjectivity is drawn on productively. It begins by interpreting text as openly as possible, to facilitate receptivity to its nuances of meaning. While attempting to understand the text, the analyst feels its meaning in his or her body.’ (p. 494-495)

The aim of the embodied categorisation technique is to facilitate the researcher’s persistent engagement with the depth of meaning occupied within each research transcript. Willis (2004) proposed that we should make ‘living texts and other artistic art forms to create a portrayal which carries the immediacy and impact of experience’ (p. 8). The process of embodied categorisation is to insure against the often reported failure to capture vividly the
intricacy of the experiences which the research sought to examine (West, 2001; Sandelowski, 2002). This aesthetic dimension in the practice of sense-making in qualitative research has been highlighted as a key concern of this thesis, and one which I turn to now for exploration.

**Expressing findings to evoke an empathic understanding: Arts-based representation in qualitative research**

With a view to facilitating empathic understanding in readers of qualitative research, phenomenological approaches that give specific attention to the aesthetic merit of descriptions have also been identified as appropriate (Todres, 2007). Increasingly, artistically shaped representations of research findings are developing (Richardson, 2000; Anderson, 2001; 2002; Ellingson, 2006; Anderson & Braud, 2011), and are deemed to be more meaningful for those working in the caring practices or in education (Sharma, Kirkham & Cochrane, 2009; Latimer 2009). Anderson (2001) reflected on her journey into an embodied writing style which stemmed from her realisation that ‘continuing to write in a Cartesian style no longer seems acceptable’ (p. 84). In her opinion, the object-subject divide is perpetuated by disembodied writing, which further divides the world of our bodies from the world we live in.

Phenomenology justifies the use of descriptions of individual experience as a starting point for enquiry (Husserl, 1900-1901). In effect, experience, as it appears, is considered our earliest access to understanding anything at all. The phenomenological approach to qualitative enquiry therefore grounds itself in concrete human experience, seeking to explore meaning rather than obtain measurement. More often than not, theme structures are established which seek to organise meanings with a shared value. However, some research studies have supplemented their data analysis with further interpretative phases designed to highlight the aesthetic dimensions of phenomenological description. In a phenomenological study exploring the experience of caring for a partner with Alzheimer’s disease, Todres and Galvin (2006) offered an ‘embodied interpretation’ of the research findings, supplementary to the presentation of the general structures generated by their phenomenological analysis. In seeking to enhance the ‘emotional intelligence’ of their readers, the authors attempted to find the ‘I in the thou’ (Buber, 1970) by engaging in a bodily way with each descriptive general structure. After disseminating the results of their embodied interpretation to local support
groups for carers of people with Alzheimer’s diseases and experiencing a positive reception, they concluded that health professionals may benefit from qualitative descriptions which facilitate a deeper understanding of the experience of caring for a partner with progressive memory loss (Todres & Galvin, 2006).

Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic research paradigm is seen by some as an adaptation of the phenomenological method. The approach extends beyond the acknowledgment of the researcher’s position and their influence on the development of the research, to the extent that the lived experience of the researcher becomes the central focus. Six interrelated steps of heuristic inquiry are explicated, in which the final phase, ‘creative synthesis’, involves the drawing together of core themes identified in the data, which can be expressed in a variety of forms, including narrative accounts, report style writing, poetry, storytelling, or painting.

Autoethnographic stories have offered moving and tender accounts of human experience. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method, using tenets of autobiography and ethnography to extend the understanding of a societal phenomenon. Autoethnography utilises data about the self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between the self and others within the same context. Writing yourself into the research challenges the traditional views surrounding silent authorship, freeing the author of the constraints of typical academic writing and identifying the method as self-consciously value-centred rather than attempting to make it value free (Bochner, 1994; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997).

Autoethnographies can be presented in a variety of ways using multiple sources of evidence, thus resulting in the method’s capacity to serve the purpose of diverse authors, telling unique tales in unique ways (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). Amongst one of the many papers related to autoethnography I selected to read was an article entitled ‘When the personal becomes professional: Surveillances of a professor’s eating disorder personae’ by Chatham-Carpenter (2009). The paper chronicles the author’s struggle with anorexia, within which she offered this poem:
You were truly my friend, my confidant, my partner,
And I loved you.
And in loving you,
You entered into me.
I trusted you to love me.
To love me back like I needed.
But, instead, you betrayed me.
You became an abusive lover.
You became me,
And I became you.
And people began to accuse you
Of things that I was doing.
I no longer knew who I was.
I lost my voice,
As your voice became all I could hear.
(2009, p. 140)

I recorded my responses to the poem in my research journal.

***

I cried as I read it. It is like an immediate apprehension and recognition of her experience that echoes so closely to mine. That poem is me. Was me. Once. Never been moved by poetry until now. Its power overwhelms.

***
Reading the words, there was a resonance to an experience personally lived and a bodily feeling which confirmed it. Words are not just tools: they are experienced for how they feel (Tracy, 2012). It is this aesthetic quality which is considered central to the process of understanding, and hence provides the motivation to attempt to write words which are not just technical but are human.

The basis for the inclusion of arts-based representation in qualitative research is that form mediates understanding (Eisner, 1991), and different forms are understood to qualitatively change how we might understand phenomena (Langer, 1953). Poetic inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2004) has become one form of representation utilised by qualitative researchers across the social sciences. It is a method in which the tenets of qualitative research are merged with the craft of traditional poetry writing (Leavy, 2009). The method has been given various other labels, including poetic transcription (Richardson, 2002), research poetry (Langer & Furman, 2004), transcript poetry (Luce-Kapler, 2004), poetic representation (Prendergast, 2009), and found poetry (Glesne, 1997). Unlike generated or interpretive poetry (Faulkner, 2007), which is used as a means of data analysis, found poems are mainly concerned with the representation of participant interview data. Found poetry in particular has been incorporated into research methodologies aimed at informing practitioners, policy-makers, and the public about the experiences of living with HIV (Poindexter, 1998) or undergoing cancer treatment (Kendall & Murray, 2005) and other accounts of psychological distress (Clarke, Febbraro, Hatzipantelis & Nelson, 2005). Experimentation with different forms of presenting research findings has frequently been cited as the result of what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to as the ‘crisis of representation’ in which scientific descriptions of research findings came to be considered as less than adequate to represent human experience as it is lived. However, Sandelowski (2004) warned that artistic experiments in representation may run the risk of intensifying this so called ‘crisis’ rather than resolving it. Artistic modes of research reporting are considered least proficient in demonstrating the instrumental use of qualitative findings, as neither the concepts of findings nor their utility are significant in literary presentations. Moreover, Sandelowski (2004) considers the endeavour of experimental writing methods to eschew the researcher’s responsibility of interpretation, which is available for comparison and critique.
The purpose underlying the integration of arts-based methods of representation and qualitative research, particularly that of poetry, is similar to the rationale offered by Todres and Galvin (2011) in their development of embodied interpretation. It is designed to evoke ‘intellectual, aesthetic and affective responses’ (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 4) and to facilitate entry into knowing and feeling what it is like to ‘go through something’ (Galvin & Todres, 2011, p. 523). Sjollema et al. (2012) shed light on their experience of constructing found poetry, emphasising how the process invited reflection on ‘not only the subdivided categories of themes but also the overall theme that she [research participant] may have wished to convey’ (p. 210).

This chapter has provided an overview of the empirical research and the theoretical literature deemed relevant to the investigation of SPT. In addition, an exploration of innovative qualitative research methods previously used to present research findings has offered an understanding of how alternative representations of qualitative description can be used effectively to inform the therapeutic practice of counselling psychologists.
‘Louise’

I kind of have a real vision
I’ve had it ever since it happened
I see myself from the side and I am in and out of it
Like I’m here but I’m there
And I have long grey wiry hair
And it’s in a ponytail
And I am wearing a blue old jumper
And all I’m looking out to is fields
And I’m holding a warm mug of something
And I’m drinking it
Sipping it
And the wind is blowing through my hair
And I feel absolute knowing that I have had a life well spent
I’ve had that since the moment it happened
And it never changes
The vision never changes
I know that it’s ok
It feels so safe
Nothing is there apart from me and the land
The old jumper
And the drink
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter initially presents the methodology selected for this research study, namely, interpretative phenomenological analysis. Firstly, a discussion of the key influences aims to provide an informed understanding of the relevant theoretical foundations in their own terms, before reflecting on how these key influences combine to establish the basic character of IPA. In addition, those aspects most relevant to the development of the study, including the role of the lived body and the integration of embodied interpretation with IPA, are discussed. Epistemological and ethical considerations are explored, before the process of data generation and data analysis, and the creation of the found poetry are explained. Worked examples are incorporated to facilitate transparency. The issue of trustworthiness is explored. Finally, the reader is introduced to each of the research participants.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The persistent view that IPA lacks a sound theoretical basis, for example, Sousa (2008) suggested that it can be presented in ‘two pages’ (p. 149), appears to have contributed to the widespread view that IPA is ‘easy to do’, as it does not require the researcher to tackle complex theoretical issues (Shinebourne, 2011). IPA draws on theoretical ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics and on engagement with subjective experience and idiographic accounts. A lack of engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, as would appear to be encouraged by the opinions of Sousa (2008) and Georgi (2010), would result in a missed opportunity to explore these theoretical approaches which inform the distinctive epistemological framework of IPA. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography are the three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge which are identified as having provided the foundation for the emergence of IPA, and it is these key influences on the development of IPA that are considered first.

Phenomenology
Phenomenology is an umbrella term, conceived by Edmund Husserl in 1901, which encompasses a philosophical movement related to the study of experience. Understood as being more a way of being than a method, phenomenology incorporates a range of research approaches with different degrees of extensions and revisions of the phenomenological procedure, varying how they enact phenomenological ‘being and seeing’.

Husserl (1901) defined the goal of the phenomenological method as seeking an understanding of what he described as the essence of conscious experience. The aim is to describe and analyse everyday experience, evoking what it is to be human; thus, Edmund Husserl encouraged phenomenologists to capture the richness and ambiguity of the ‘thing’. ‘Zurück zu den Sachen selbst! (We must return to the things themselves!)’, he famously argued (Husserl, 1901, p. 252). Husserl campaigned for a new kind of science, one that moved away from the scientific ideal of positivism towards a focus on lived experience, which does not utilise natural science theories or knowledge. This abstention, known as the epoché of the natural sciences, encourages us to leave aside previous knowledge and, instead, to clear the researcher’s access to the phenomena on its own terms, ‘as is it given (i.e., how it appears) in experience’ (Finlay, 2006, p. 44).

In order to engage this study of consciousness, Husserl requested that phenomenologists also adhere to what he referred to as the epoché of the natural attitude. Together, these reductions make possible a process of direct seeing, of looking beyond or bracketing constructions, preconceptions, and assumptions in order to dwell on concrete manifestations of the matter under exploration. Some contemporaries of Husserl, such as Heidegger, have since rejected the concept of bracketing, thus contributing to an ongoing philosophical debate between those who believe looking beyond preconceptions is both possible and desirable, and those who question whether humans even have the capacity to bracket at all (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The implications of the concept of bracketing in IPA, and the position assumed by myself in relation to this particular phenomenological project, are elaborated upon later in this chapter. This reduction to the purposes, meaning, and values of objects as they present themselves in experience facilitates the comprehension of consciousness as intentional (Husserl, 1901) in the sense of always being directed towards something. Constructs such as subject and object are replaced with the terms ‘noema’ and ‘noeis’, or ‘what is experienced’
and ‘the way it is experienced’. The phenomenological researcher does not seek to reduce mental life to a set of ready-made elements, but instead reaches beyond immediately experienced meanings in an attempt to articulate the pre-reflective level of lived meanings, ‘seeking after meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity’s mode of appearing’ (Moran, 2000, p. 229). As Smith et al. (2009) suggested, ‘We are busily engaged in activities in the world … in order to be phenomenological we need to disengage from the activity and attend to the taken-for-granted experience of it’ (p. 13).

IPA is also influenced by the phenomenological and existential perspectives of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, who considered the person as both immersed and embedded in the world, in a particular historical, social, and cultural context. The subject matter of phenomenology that began with consciousness and experience was expanded by Heidegger to include the human life world, and by Sartre to include human action (Kvale, 1996). In developing Husserl’s work, Heidegger (1962) moved attention away from a commitment to the descriptive towards a more interpretive focus. Indeed, he questioned the possibility of knowledge existing outside of an interpretative stance at all. His emphasis centred on personal involvement in the lived world, an endeavour which Heidegger (1962) insisted was a property of our relationships to the world and to others, rather than to us alone as self-contained individual subjects. This view of human existence embedded within a worldly context results in the inseparable nature of language and understanding, as only via language can our Dasein, or being-in-the-world, be manifest and hence, be understood (Heidegger, 1962). Furthermore, Dasein is ‘always already’ thrown into the pre-existing world of objects, people, relationships, language, culture, and history from which we are unable to detach ourselves. The view that our being-in-the-world is permanently perspectival, temporal, and always ‘in-relation-to’ something requires that the interpretation of people’s meaning-making process be central to the phenomenological inquiry. Following the original Greek etymology of the term ‘phenomenon’, meaning ‘to show itself’, Heidegger understood the tasks of phenomenology as being to ‘bring to the light of day, to put in the light’ (1962, p. 51), or ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’ (p. 58). This sensation of disclosing, uncovering, or revealing what in some sense lies hidden exposes the process of interpretation as one which can never be presuppositionless, therefore problematising Husserl’s notion of the reduction.
Understanding depends on recognition of our ‘horizons of understanding’, which penetrate any perception of the world we may have, and therefore, whenever something is interpreted, the interpretation will be founded upon having ‘fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception’ (Heidegger, 1962, p. 191). For some commentators, Heidegger’s explicit expression of interpretation sets him in direct opposition to Husserl; however, it is important to acknowledge what Heidegger went on to say. Commenting on the constant task of interpreting, Heidegger (1962) insisted that it is essential to never allow our fore-conceptions to be ‘presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves’ (p. 195).

The fore-structure is always present, and for Smith et al. (2009), represents a potentially significant obstacle to interpretation. Moreover, Heidegger’s deconstruction of the relationship between interpretative work and the fore-conceptions of understanding forces us to reconsider the role of bracketing within an interpretative phenomenological approach such as IPA. The hermeneutic lens through which Heidegger understood phenomenology is expanded in the following section on hermeneutics, and the role of bracketing adopted in this study is also considered. However, before exploring the hermeneutic turn, it seems appropriate to consider first the contributions of both Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. It was Heidegger’s life work to illuminate the nature of being and existence. Reading the work of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre also invokes a sense of the stabilities and discontinuities within the development of the phenomenological project, and particularly the expansion of existential and dialectical themes.

For phenomenologists, varying degrees of priority are given to the physiological realm of the researcher as well as the participant. Merleau-Ponty emphasises the interpretative quality of knowledge in the world, but in a deviation from Heidegger, sought to describe the embodied nature of our relationship to the world, and us as body-subjects in which the body is ‘no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it’ (1962, p. 106). Replacing Heidegger’s being-in-the-world with the concept of flesh-of-the-world, Merleau-Ponty captures the embodied way of being in which the world and the body are within one another and intertwined. Despite Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) argument that ‘the lived life is never entirely comprehensible’ (p. 347), making the lived experience of being a body-in-the-world impossible to capture and absorb entirely, the understanding that the body
shapes our fundamental view of the world is of utmost importance to qualitative researchers (Smith et al., 2009) and is of central concern to this study.

Extending the existential phenomenological project, and in his key existential work ‘Being and Nothingness’ (1956), Sartre uses phenomenological description to explicate the fundamental aspects of lived experience. Similar to Heidegger, he applies emphasis to the worldliness of our experience, yet extends this by developing the point within the context of personal and social relationships. For Sartre, the absence of things is as important as those things which are present in defining who we are and how we see the world (Sartre, 1956). Our projects in the world inevitably lead us to encounter others who unavoidably shape and influence our perceptions. Drawing our attention to this through his use of vivid portraits and vignettes of ‘embodied, interpersonal, affective and moral’ encounters (Smith et al., 2009), Sartre makes possible our conception of experience as reliant upon the presence - and absence - of our relationships to those around us. The endeavours of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have each contributed to the evolution from the transcendental pursuits of Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology to provide an understanding of the individual as a creature immersed as opposed to isolated, a creature at one with a directed involvement in the lived world which, within IPA research, phenomenologists seek to interpret.

**Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation. Originally used to describe the process of biblical interpretation, the term ‘hermeneutics’ is now used to refer to the art of interpretation generally. It is important to draw attention to the fact that hermeneutics has long been engaged with, and informed by, other concerns. It provides a rich and sophisticated philosophical background for the practice of qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 1988; Lalli, 1989), and therefore, requires careful handling in highlighting its resonance for the research practices relevant here.

As has already begun to be explored, one of Heidegger’s aims was to communicate the case for a hermeneutic phenomenology by highlighting that our access to lived time and
engagement is always by means of interpretation. His articulation of the relationship between interpretative work and the fore-structures of our understandings results in engagement with a hermeneutic circle when working out fore-structures in terms of the things themselves, moving between ‘implicit pre-understandings and explicit understandings; between the reciprocal relationship between the interpreted and the interpreter; between understanding parts and the whole. Understanding deepens by going round the circle again and again’ (Finlay, 2006, p. 53). Analysis resembles that of a dance in which the interpretations of the observer and the observed are interwoven as a sophisticated understanding is developed (Ezzy, 2002). Thus, ‘the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole’ (Gadamer, 1989, p. 291), continually re-developing the interpretation via the continuous movement between pre-existing interpretative frameworks and the data. The manner in which the hermeneutic circle is enacted within this study is returned to later in this chapter.

Idiography

Concerned with the ‘particular’ rather than the ‘general’, qualitative approaches which subscribe to an idiographic approach stand apart from the nomothetic research approaches commonly found within psychology, which aim to establish laws of human behaviour to be applied across groups and populations (Smith et al., 2009). An idiographic sensibility, such as the one subscribed to in IPA, is demonstrated in the researcher’s commitment to understanding experiential phenomena from the perspective of a particular individual contextualised in a particular place and time. Furthermore, the detail with which individual accounts emerge during data collection results in the offering of in-depth analysis. Such micro-level analysis can be, and has been advocated by Smith (2011) to be, an end in itself. IPA advocates for the re-evaluation of the importance of the single case study, much like Flyvberg (2006) highlighted in Chapter Two. Analytical procedures in IPA which do involve a sequence of similarly detailed cases should still permit the identification of particular claims for any of the individual participants involved, drawing attention to the commitment to present across case themes idio graphically.
The character of IPA in this study

Drawing on Ricoeur (1970), Smith et al. (2009) described a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion as a way in which to explicate the double hermeneutic. Within IPA, a hermeneutics of empathy is considered as an approach to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms. It is the means by which it is possible to enter into the words of the participants and gain the insiders’ perspective. The hermeneutics of suspicion or questioning invites the interrogation of participant accounts to ‘puzzle’ over why a participant says something in a particular way that therefore constructs a certain meaning. Smith et al. (2009) were clear that ‘successful IPA combines both stances’ (p. 36). However ‘within such an analysis the empathic reading is likely to come first and may then be qualified by a more critical and speculative reflection’ (Smith, 2004, p. 46). Whilst this research study has sought to embrace the hermeneutics of empathy, the critical and interrogative level of interpretation advocated within IPA presents some problems for this study. Willig and Stanton-Rogers (2007) argued that this second level of interpretation raises some ethical concerns regarding the imposition of meaning and the denial of a participant voice. A hermeneutic of faith (Josselson, 2004), however, invites the researcher to engage in the interpretative activity of examining ‘the various messages inherent in an interview text’ (p. 1). Then, rather than seeking to problematise the participant’s narratives, the researcher explores various ways in which to give the ‘voice’ to the participants.

Going further: Integrating an embodied interpretation with IPA

Having reviewed the literature related to the development of embodied research practices in the previous chapter, within the context of this research study, embodied research is defined as seeking to bring together both participant and researcher’s understandings. In addition, the aim of embodied research involves the organisation of understanding into coherent, reflexively processed, and empathically imaginative conceptualisations of lived experience.

In the previous chapter, I offered some detail about Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic approach to research. Exploration of the phenomenon of SPT through internal self-search, exploration, and discovery could have been used as a frame for this research, amongst others. Autoethnography and current forms of narrative analysis also offer less focus on linearity,
offering instead a fluid approach to data analysis. However, ultimately, IPA was selected as an appropriate methodology because, within the realm of qualitative research, the phenomenological approach accords the lived experience primacy over what is known (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011).

Though some may debate this, IPA is considered to be ‘iterative, inductive, fluid and emergent’ (Finlay, 2006, p. 142), and a ‘healthy flexibility’ (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79) in the analytical development of IPA is encouraged. However, Smith et al. (2009) have offered their own data analysis guide aimed at novice researchers utilising IPA. As has already been indicated, the hermeneutic circle offers a helpful way of considering the method of IPA. Todres (2007) asked where this sense of the whole of an understanding carried by the researcher is located. Eugene Gendlin would suggest that it is carried in the body. So, the focus initially turns towards the involvement of the lived body as a means of instigating the sense-making process.

Though he is best known for his establishment of the psychotherapeutic method of focusing, Eugene Gendlin is considered foremost as a philosopher seeking to articulate the role of the lived body as a source of meaningful understanding. Gendlin (2003) appeared to celebrate the element of postmodernism, which claims that we cannot seek to copy or represent experience; however, he argued against the idea that we can have no relationship to experience. Gendlin (1992) proposed that it is via our bodies that experiencing can be accessed directly: ‘The body knows the situation directly’ (Gendlin, 1997, p. 26). It concretely senses interaction between itself and a situation; eternally exceeding culture history, and language. The body acts as a background knowing of how the situation is, providing a sense of it all before perceiving any of its distinctions.

As I discovered upon attempting to give words to my transformation experience, Gendlin (1997) highlighted the close relationship between language and experience: neither is able to work alone; instead, both are required in order for knowing to occur. Gendlin’s reference to the concept of the felt sense seeks to capture the implicit dimension of experience, which is more than just abstract cognition. Meaning is first sensed as an inner feeling in the body.
before it is reflectively articulated and labelled by language. Language functions to provide
an elaboration of what the body senses in a situation. Gendlin’s work to emphasise
embodiment in making understanding significant for the person serves to highlight the crucial
role of the body in nourishing language most effectively. It is viewed as being equipped to
make possible the articulation of language which is ‘up to the task of bringing alive enough
meaning’ (Galvin & Todres, 2012, p. 4) into the shared arena. This type of knowing is
responsive, meaning that it is awake to the bodily dimension that makes words personally
relevant and workable. The felt sense is ‘a single (often puzzling and very complex) bodily
feeling’ (Gendlin, 1981, pp. 32-33). It is a deep-down level of awareness that does not
communicate itself in words. It therefore is not necessarily easily articulated. Despite the felt
sense always being larger than words, language is required! Thus, it makes sense that it is
hard, at times, to capture the feeling in language. In my own example, offered at the
beginning of this paper, as I seek to describe my epiphanic experience, my body informs me
when I have named it correctly, and when I have not. It appears as the starting point for any
communication. The process of focusing, as described by Gendlin (1997), makes access to
this implicit knowledge possible.

It is here where my argument for the incorporation of embodied interpretation into IPA
resides. Embodied interpretation is understood as a body-based hermeneutic in which
qualitative meanings are developed via a back-and-forth movement between the emerging
words and their felt complexity in the body (Todres & Galvin, 2008). If the meaning-making
process is considered to be a bodily inclusive hermeneutic cycle (Gendlin, 1997), then the act
of incorporating the bodily felt sense into the data analysis procedure further makes the
iterative process of analysis possible. It makes possible the movement back and forth, and
utilises an alternative way of thinking about the data, which contributes towards a fuller
understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Embodied interpretation is considered to be a supplementary phase within the process of IPA.
It pays explicit attention to the aesthetic aspects of the experience and works as a reference to
check the responsiveness of the organisation and labelling of themes generated by the IPA
procedure. In this application of embodied interpretation, the involvement of the lived body is
seen as an authenticating procedure (Todres, 2007) seeking a correctness of fit (Gendlin,
Resonating with the way in which Rennie (2006) described the process of his notion of embodied categorisation, ‘It is deduced that exegesis of the whole text should produce evidence bearing on the accuracy of the concept articulating the meaning of the part’ (p. 391). Within the context of embodied interpretation as it is presented here, the process is deemed as effectively making possible an intricate experiential reference against which any critical explanation or interpretation of the data set can be validated. Later, the process in which an embodied interpretation is integrated with IPA is explained, along with a worked example of the analysis.

**Epistemological Considerations**

The process of selecting the most suitable qualitative research design requires a comparison and evaluation of established qualitative methodological approaches, a process which is concerned less with choosing ‘the tools for the job’ and more with identifying ‘what the job is’ (Smith, 2009). An explanation of the epistemological basis and methodological requirements of the particular approach is therefore required in order for it to be possible to meaningfully evaluate them. Willig (2013) proposed three questions to guide the researcher’s identification of a methodology’s epistemological origin:

- What kind of knowledge does the methodology aim to produce?
- What kind of assumptions does the methodology make about the world?
- How does the methodology conceptualise the role of the researcher in the research process? (p. 12)

IPA is committed to favouring participant voices via the presentation of a contextual understanding of idiographic experience. A central spirit of an epistemology for phenomenology is the assumption that understanding can never be simply cognitive. Instead, it is always interweaved with senses, mood, and intersubjective contexts. IPA research assumes that the data collected is able to ‘tell us something about people’s involvement in and orientation towards the world’ (Smith et al., 2009, p. 47); however, it does not make any claims about what may be ‘true’ or ‘false’ about the participant’s experience or its connection
to an external reality; what matters to an IPA researcher is how the experience is experienced. In this sense, it subscribes to a more relativist ontology, and that reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively. It is recognised that the production of knowledge occurs through meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It is accepted in IPA that any understanding of a participant’s accounts gained by the researcher are reliant on their personal engagement and interpretation. The researcher is unavoidably implicated in analysis. The conceptualisation of the researcher’s role in IPA is further explicated in a later section in relation to the notion of reflexivity as understood within this study.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethics provide the basis for conduct in research (Munhall, 1988). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) delineated two dimensions of ethics. The first is procedural ethics, pertaining to protocols which satisfactorily handle notions of informed consent, confidentiality, deception, and protection from harm. The second, situational ethics, pertains to ‘the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field’ (Ellis, 2007, p. 4).

I conducted the research study after ethical approval had been granted by the University of Manchester (UoM) Research Ethics Committee. During the planning and the process, the British Psychological Society’s (2010) Code of Human Research Ethics informed my decision making. Everybody would agree that among the highest duties is that of ensuring that human beings are treated with dignity and respect (Shea, 2000), and in order to fulfil this, constant critical reflection on ethical practice is required at every step (Canella & Lincoln, 2004). The way in which these ethical principles were brought to life is now discussed.

Participants were recruited via word-of-mouth referrals from people known to me. This convenient sampling method was selected to increase the level of safety to myself and to the participants. Referrals came from people who had a certain level of understanding of the nature of the research subject, and who had a degree of responsibility in the field and to the
researcher. This sampling method was also chosen to ensure that the psychological/behavioural history of interviewees was known beforehand.

An important ethical starting point for any research study is nonmaleficence, or the avoidance of harm to both the participants taking part in the study and myself, as the researcher. I ensured that before signing a consent form (Appendix A), all of those interested in taking part in the study were fully informed about the nature and aims of the research, on a face-to-face basis, by phone, or by email correspondence. Furthermore, by making initial contact with potential participants, I was able to apply the pre-informed inclusion/exclusion criteria to ensure their suitability. Details of the exclusion/inclusion criteria are located in the Appendix B.

Before the interview began, participants were invited to select a pseudonym for themselves. One participant requested that her real name be identified; however, I did not agree to disclose her identity. The relevant participant was made aware that the anonymising of names is intimately bound up with my notion of ‘care’ underlying the motivation for this project. Furthermore, the participant was reminded that she had consented to have extracts from the thesis published, and that it may be that despite her initial judgement, in the future, her decisions regarding this matter may be subject to change.

I ensured that any identifiable characteristic, such as occupation, geographical location, or other significant life events, were changed or obscured to ensure anonymity, and participants were invited to verify these descriptions. It was considered likely that participants in the study would also include the voices of other people in their narratives. My ethical responsibility also extended to any other individuals who were implicated in the telling of the participants’ SPT experience. Tolich (2004) warned researchers of internal confidentiality, referring to the relationship at risk not being the one in which the researcher exposes confidences to outsiders, but the one in which those confidences are exposed among the participants or family members themselves. Participants were made aware that the names of other people referred to in the study would be changed and that all geographical locations relating to significant others would also be withheld. Interviews were conducted in a pre-
booked private room at the UoM or at the participant’s work place. Ethical clearance was granted for this from the UoM.

Participants were informed and reminded of their right to withdraw from participation and were assured their data would be kept securely in line with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) in a password protected file in my home office computer, which only I can access.

**Going beyond procedural and situational ethics: relational ethics**

By a stroke of good fortune, before I had begun to gather my own research data, I answered a research advert posted by a fellow trainee counselling psychologist who was investigating a topic for which I fit the criteria. I enthusiastically responded to the advert, not only because the research touched on a subject I am particularly passionate about, but also because it felt right to offer myself as a participant, given that I would be trying to recruit respondents for my own study in the near future. The day came, and towards the end of the interview, after she had switched off the audio recorder to reiterate the conditions of the research that I had so eagerly agreed to an hour or so before, I was suddenly met with an unanticipated anxiety. Questions flooded my head: ‘How is she going to ensure that I am unidentifiable in the final write up?’, ‘Will she take the same ethical responsibility towards others whom I have implicated in the telling of my story?’, ‘What if I remember something I said in the interview and wish I had not said it?’ I had spent an hour talking about a subject important to me and that I really care about. As my personal contribution to her research study came to a close, I suddenly felt vulnerable, as I realised that in order to proceed, I would need to trust that, despite her unquestionable authority over what will ultimately get said and done within her research, she would treat my contribution with the same extent of care. The experience gave me a broader understanding and fresh appreciation of what the term ‘research ethics’ means. While I may have given due attention to the guidelines set out by research ethics committees, my ethical work was by no means over with the granting of the institutional ethics committee approval. My experience as a research respondent afforded me an unexpected insight into the researcher I wanted to be with my participants, and prompted the realisation that I should make any ethical decisions in the research in the same way that I would make them in my personal life (Ellis, 2009). Ethics are not just a means to an end, but rather constitute a
universal end goal of qualitative quality (Tracy, 2010). With this in mind, I move to consider a third dimension of ethical consideration so central to the process of psychological research: relational ethics.

Closely related to an ethics of care, as advocated by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), relational ethics has been described as doing what is necessary to be ‘true to one’s character and responsible for one’s actions and their consequences on others’ (Slattery & Rapp, 2003). It requires that we as researchers ‘act from our hearts and minds’ and ‘acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others’ (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). The relational ethics impulse fits neatly with the ideas of phenomenological philosopher Levinas (1969), who put a concern for the Other at the centre of his ethics. As a phenomenological researcher, I embrace an effort to produce research which listens to, values, and gives voice to those involved; however, when undertaking any research, it is important to recognise the complexity of the power relations inevitably at play. I understand that power is never unidirectional and is continually enacted in a multitude of ways. However, it is the researcher who usually initiates the research relationship and has control over what gets said (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), and as Lincoln (1995) declares, it is the researcher who earns prestige and power from the research results they derive from the data. As Krüger (2007) stated, ‘To live with this inherent power is to enter the realm of ethics. The only way of surviving as a true professional is to … live with the paradox: to behave ethically and exert power- simultaneously’ (p. 21). Imbued with the knowledge of how my position in the hierarchy of power might affect my perceptions, I sought to consistently challenge the possibility of maintaining a distanced relationship with the participants (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2005), and instead fostered one of mutuality and reciprocity.

The practice of ‘process consent’ was enacted during the research study, with me checking at each stage to make sure participants still wanted to be part of the project (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2005). Participants were required to confirm their consent before taking part in the interview; however, they were also asked to confirm their consent upon arrival at the interview and upon their receipt of the interview transcript for verification.
My choice to conduct an unstructured interview was made in part to reduce the status differences between the researcher and the researched. Finlay (2006) highlighted the almost inevitable position that researchers may find themselves in, ‘pushing hungrily ahead’ (p. 219) to obtain data. Ellis (2007) referred to ‘dialectical oppositions’ (p. 20) in which the researcher is required to move between expression and protection, disclosure and restraint (Bochner, 1984). There has been some debate surrounding the process of inviting participants to read the final work (Onwuegbuze & Leech, 2007). In this research study, after each interview, the participants were sent a copy of the transcript and invited to read it and to make any changes they felt necessary to ensure confidentiality. The participants were also invited to read their found poems. In this manner, member checks were related less to a concern over validity and were not returned to ensure correctness. Member checks were initiated based upon an ethical concern, with the intention to aid dialogue. As a phenomenological researcher, I never set out to seek a ‘truth’ that could be verified. I acknowledge that the data generated were produced in a specific context and reflected a specific moment in time.

SPT experiences are, by definition, non-traumatic, so it was not foreseen that any of the participants would experience any negative effects in retelling their stories. The telling of personal stories has been considered to be a source of healing for participants (Fletcher, 2008); therefore, their contribution to the research was anticipated as being a positively beneficial experience, which is an important aspect of ethical research (BPS, 2010; Levine, 1988). However, beyond questions of power, researchers have a duty of care to ensure the emotional and physical safety of their participants. In the event that distress did manifest in the interview, I was prepared to utilise my counselling skills first, to ascertain whether the interviewee wished to terminate the interview, and second, to offer follow-up support as appropriate.

**Generating data**

Within phenomenological research, the task of gathering data is not reduced to procedures and protocols, but instead necessitates a receptive and reflective engagement with the Other. I agree with Finlay (2006), who suggested that the concept of ‘generating data’ seems more
closely aligned to the phenomenological philosophy than that of ‘data collection’ so commonly seen within the positivist paradigm.

Interviewing is a core method employed in many qualitative research methodologies (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Within IPA, semi-structured, one-to-one interviews have been the most common means of generating data (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Smith and Osborn (2003) recommended that semi-structured interviews, which allow for movement away from the schedule, are the ones most likely to make possible the discovery of novel avenues which may be the most valuable to the investigation. In its capacity to explore unanticipated paths, an unstructured interview could be considered a demonstration of the implementation of IPA’s inductive epistemology to its fullest extent (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, consistent with IPA, one lead question informed data generation, and within an unstructured interview, was used to drive a meaning-centred approach. Although the researcher plays an active role in the interview, mostly via means of focused listening, central to the process is the interviewee, who commands most control of the process and content of the interaction (Morse, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, it is presumptuous to contend that that researcher has no influence over the interview process at all (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Indeed, wearing the label of ‘researcher’ bestows on the researcher a certain degree of power over the research situation, before the interview has even begun (Corbin & Morse, 2003). However, it is possible to suggest that within an unstructured interview, control exerted by the researcher is minimal, and elsewhere, some have argued it increases the benefits experienced by the participant as a result of taking part (Cutliffe & Ramcharan, 2002). The unstructured interview is not organised around a priori issues, or researcher-led topics. Instead, the researcher assumes the role of facilitator, encouraging both exploration and expansion of the lived experience as it is brought to the interview situation by the participant.

Conducting the interview
The decision to use the unstructured interview technique was taken in response to its capacity to offer the chance to dwell upon the experience brought by the participant ‘as concretely as possible’ (Finlay, 2006, p. 197, emphasis in original text). As Smith et al. (2009) stated, ‘A good interview is considered essential to IPA analysis’ (p. 58). Therefore, it was imperative to spend some time considering the concept of quality as it exists within the context of
qualitative interviewing. Viewing it as a position called ‘methodology-as-philosophy’, Hammersley and Traianou (2011) contrasted this with the approach of ‘methodology-as-technique’, which endorses the procedural aspects of the research over and above the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings. As is often the case, Hyland (2000) situated the concept of quality within qualitative interview studies in relation to the theoretical assumptions engaged in the study. However, Hammersley and Traianou (2011) equally cautioned against the counter-productivity of an approach which is based entirely on the ‘methodology-as-philosophy’ position. I agree with Crouch and McKenzie (2006), who concluded that interview research requires ‘a participant-responsive epistemologically informed flexibility’ (p. 19). Miller and C’ de Baca (1994) made reference within their work to the relative ease with which participants were recruited into their initial study. They commented that among those who offered to be interviewed were ‘diverse and largely ordinary individuals’ (p. 260) who appeared eager to tell their stories: ‘We found, though, that all we had to say was, “Tell me what happened” and people would talk for 20-30 minutes’ (personal communication, 2014). Each interview was therefore opened with what McCracken (1988) called a ‘grand tour question’. I asked participants: ‘Can you tell me about what your sudden personal transformation means to you?’ The data generation phase is less concerned with the application of techniques and increasingly informed by the intention to ‘encounter’ and ‘dialogue’ with the Other. With that in mind, three interlinked assets which appear to characterise the qualities of the phenomenological researcher informed the conduct of the interviews undertaken in this research study. They are openness, authenticity, and willingness.

**Openness, Authenticity and Willingness**

An openness to the participant and the phenomenon under scrutiny was fostered by my assuming a ‘not-knowing’ approach to the interview encounter. I conducted a series of bracketing interviews throughout the research process. The way in which bracketing is conceptualised within this study and how the bracketing interviews were conducted is elucidated further on in this chapter. To some extent, the bracketing interviews served to help me maintain an open attitude; however, my conduct within the interviews themselves required an attentively open-minded attitude and receptivity. Moustakas (1990) suggested this of his heuristic research methodology: ‘To truly know this person in the stirrings and
deepenings of heart and mind … must not pressure, direct, or control, but rather must wait and permit awareness and meanings to generate in their own time’ (p. 109-110).

My current training on the professional doctorate in counselling psychology requires the completion of 450 face-to-face client therapy hours. At the time of the research interviews, I had completed a year of training in person-centred therapy (Rogers, 1957). My understanding of the core conditions of congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard translated well into the context of the research interview, as it afforded me the luxury of being genuine and authentic in my approach as well as being open. In addition, I had completed more than 150 hours of psychological therapy and therefore had a significant amount of experience in sensitive and empathic interviewing skills, which I was sure I would need to draw upon in my research interviews. Hanley, West and Lennie (2012) commented on the largely transferable skill set of counsellors to the pursuit of research, emphasising their capacity to be effective researchers. Given my own personal epiphanic experience, I considered it crucial that I epitomised what Van Manen’s referred to as ‘the unwilled willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar’ (Van Manen, 2002, n.p.).

Introducing the participants

In order to provide context to the themes and illustrative extracts presented in the findings chapter, a demographic description of the participants who took part in this research study, as well as a brief description of their SPT story is offered.

James

James is a white British male in his fifties. James experienced a transformative spiritual education experience whilst listening to the music of Jimi Hendrix for the first time in 1969, aged nine. The experience has guided him every day since, and has remained the one and only constant in his life. Seen to unleash a potential within him that he had not previously recognised, the medium of sound and vibration he experienced whilst listening appeared to open up and lift both mind and spirit; in that moment, he knew he was not alone. What
followed was a search for God and a desire to understand the human condition. Furthermore, James has been driven to understand what it was that occurred on that day in 1969, which he describes, at times, as ‘trying to articulate what I consider to be ineffable’ (personal communication, 2015). James currently works as the creative programmes manager of a charity supporting homeless people. He is a talented artist and used to study martial arts.

**Elisabeth**

Elisabeth is a white American female. She described her greatest SPT experience as occurring in her mid-thirties whilst struggling in her marriage. She had started her career working as an actress, and one morning, when she woke up and realised her life had completely changed, she recalled a single, solitary moment, a couple months before in which everything had begun to change. Whilst preparing to play the lead role of a female desperately trying for a baby, Elisabeth found herself standing in front of a display of adoption brochures, choosing one to use as a stage prop. As she was doing so, a thought suddenly struck her. In that moment, she knew that one of the major reasons for staying in her marriage was the fear that if she left, she might never have a baby. Her fear was uncovered, and at the same time, it was released. Elisabeth felt a weight snap free from her body; she knew she did not have to stay in a struggling marriage, and she left. More recently, Elisabeth has been working as a writer and filmmaker.

**Firelight**

Firelight is a white British male of 70 years. He is now retired, after working many years in show business. His series of SPT experiences began seven years ago. After struggling for a number of years with substance misuse problems, Firelight turned to meditation practice for help. During his spiritual engagement, Firelight experienced a series of SPT experiences, after which he describes enjoying the constant availability of two spiritual companions, the first, an unbleached woollen cloak, and the second, a sparkling pinpoint star in the exact centre of the void that he had for many years been attempting to fill. Firelight now runs a meditation and discussion group in his local area.
Patrick

Patrick is a white British male in his thirties. He describes himself as having been a functioning alcoholic for fifteen years, but his problem developed into chronic alcoholism for a further seven years. His SPT experience occurred on 30 July 2012, in which he found himself, for the first time, speaking with God. As he fell to his knees with his hands clasped, Patrick felt a weight leave his shoulders. The following morning, Patrick did not wake and reach for the bottle, as he usually would, but instead found himself tipping the contents down the sink, and walking towards his local GP surgery to ask for help. He has not had an alcoholic drink since that day, and now works as an intervention practitioner, supporting people with alcohol dependency.

Louise

Louise is a white British female in her forties. She recalls having an awareness of body shape from the age of seven. In her teenage years, Louise developed anorexia, and later bulimia. Her eating disorder persisted into adulthood, until ten and a half years ago, when she experienced an epiphany which woke her up. Sat on the end of her bed, cradling her son in her arms, Louise heard a quiet voice, which said, ‘This is no good’. She nodded in agreement, and knew from that moment that she would never engage in eating disorder behaviour again. Feeling immediately liberated, Louise was finally able to begin the work needed to stop tirelessly being what she was told she needed to be, and instead, unashamedly, to begin to be herself. Louise currently works as a psychological therapist specialising in eating disorders and trauma and runs her own lifestyle health company.

Bill

Bill is a white British male in his late 50s. Bill recalls a significant period of a week in which he experienced an SPT. At the time, he was remanded in custody following an arrest for shoplifting. Bill would commonly shoplift in order to maintain his heroin addiction. His change in circumstances meant that Bill was unexpectedly confronted with the chance to reflect on the life he had been leading up until this point. His mission statement up till then had been to ‘live fast, and die young’. He realised this was unsustainable. Furthermore, he
realised that there might be something different, and suddenly, his future began to look very
different. He recalled his teacher years before saying, ‘Your life is like three legs of a stool;
mind, body and spirit, and if your life becomes unstable, it is because one or more of these
legs are broken’. Bill identified that it was the spiritual leg that was damaged, and set about
finding how to fix it. Through self-reflection and meditation, Bill found that he had the
solution to his problems, and since then, has been leading a life he describes as ‘totally
fulfilling’. He developed a thirst for knowledge and a desire to serve others. A new mission
statement appeared: self-service through world-service. Bill now works as a management
consultant in the voluntary sector.

Transcription

A verbatim record of each interview was produced in the form of a line numbered transcript.
The transcripts were written by me. Though the process of transcription is considered a
laborious one, and an activity which is often outsourced to save time, my decision to
transcribe the interviews personally was understood as an immediate way to begin the
process of dwelling with the data. Wertz (1985) suggested that when we stop and linger with
something, as we do when we commit the audio recording of the interview to the page, ‘It
secretes its sense and its full significance becomes […] amplified’ (p. 174). Within the remit
of IPA, where the focus remains on the interpretation of meaning of the content of the
participant’s account, the transcript was considered a semantic record, meaning that every
word spoken during the interview, from either the participant or myself, was transcribed.
However, though some instances of non-verbal utterances were identified, detailed notes
pertaining to all occurrences, as well as lengths of pauses etc. were not included (Smith et al.,
2009).

Data Analysis

Smith et al. (2008) encouraged a ‘healthy flexibility’ (p. 79) in the analytical development of
IPA. However, the step-by-step guide to data analysis provided by Smith et al. (2008) and
Eatough and Smith (2007) was used to model the analytic procedure undertaken in this study.
Van Manen (2002) recommended that phenomenologists adopt an attitude of wonder to
combat against taken for granted views of the world. Applying this to the analytic endeavour, my intention was not to plough through the transcript with the aim of accounting for every last word spoken; instead, I sought to dwell with the parts which resonated for me. Jarman, Smith, and Walsh (1997) suggested that themes selected by IPA researchers are not chosen simply on the basis of prevalence, but also consider ‘articulacy’, ‘immediacy’, and the manner in which themes assist in the explanation of other aspects of the participant’s account. With this in mind, the particular eloquence and expression of points made by the participant were given due attention, and moments in which I was touched, surprised, challenged, or puzzled by the text were approached with curiosity.

Incorporation of an embodied interpretation involved two additional stages of analysis which were implemented before and after the application of the six analytical stages outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Integrating the embodied interpretation in this manner, enabled the procedure to effectively act as an intricate experiential reference against which the IPA interpretation of the data set could be validated. Each of the steps, including the embodied interpretation, are summarised here. A worked example relating to one research interview transcript is provided at each relevant stage, with the aim of demonstrating the analytical development from immersion to a deeper level of interpretation and of paying attention to an embodied expression.

**Pre IPA supplementary stage: Focusing process applied after listening and reading each transcript**

In the first manifestation of embodied interpretation, after the first full reading of each individual transcript, which is read alongside listening to the audio recording of the interview, a modified version of Gendlin’s (1997) process of focusing is applied. I tune-in empathetically to the words of the participant, and through use of my bodily sensations as intuitive clues, I record my own felt-sense in response to their words written in the transcripts. This is conducted before any thematising of the research phenomena begins, and is aimed at capturing the impact of the description as a whole. Following the reading of the transcript five steps are moved through sequentially, as follows:
Step 1. Clear a space – I am silent with myself, paying attention inwardly and asking myself, ‘How do I feel?’

Step 2. The felt-sense – I allow myself to feel the unclear sense of all of that.

Step 3. Get a handle – I dwell with the felt-sense and attempt to uncover its quality, allowing a word/phrase/image to form which captures its meaning.

Step 4. Resonate – I move back and forth between the handle and the felt sense stirred by the transcript and check if there is a signal that it fits. If there is not, I allow the felt sense or the handle to change accordingly until its feels as though the felt-sense has been captured accurately by the handle.

Step 5. Record – I make a note of the handle.

The recording of these initial experiences are set aside to be returned to in the final stage of analysis. Figure 1 shows the practical application of this stage.

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Standing before the transcript, I enact each of the following stages:

Clear a space –
‘How do I feel?’

The felt sense –
Forced to think/reflect
Always with a purpose- before/after
Uncovering
Game of life/book of life
Commitment to the downhill, then to the uphill climb
A struggle
Freeing
A weight gradually lifting

A handle –
Uncovering the purpose
Resonate –
Downhill and uphill had meaning? Not uncovered- both need recognising

Record –
Each moment permeated with a purpose

Figure 1. Pre IPA supplementary stage in practice

**IPA 1: Attunement**

I listened to the recordings again, re-familiarising myself with the interview as a whole, before reading and re-reading the interview transcript. This enabled a re-familiarisation with the voice of the participant; ensuring that they became the focus of the analysis. This process of entering the world of the participant signified an active engagement with the raw data, which continued as the transcript was read and re-read, permitting a detailed acquaintance with the natural flow and rhythm of the interview and the tone of the transcript.

**IPA 2: Immersion and initial noting**

With a view to developing the growing familiarity gained during the first phase of analysis, the second stage involved a process of free association, that is, writing down whatever came to mind when reading the text, and underlining parts of the text which appeared important. I then revisited these highlighted sections, recording any initial notes pertaining to its importance in the left-hand margin. These exploratory comments developed from a close analysis of the transcript in which exploratory comments were generated in a number of ways attending to discrete processes evident in the participant’s narrative. The descriptive comments focused specifically on the content or the ‘subject of talk within the transcript’ (Smith et al., 2009, p. 84). Parts of the text which were highlighted because of a linguistic significance drew attention to how the participant used language to represent both the content and meaning of their SPT experience. Finally, the noting of conceptual comments made possible a shift in focus towards the participant’s overarching understanding of their experience, beginning to move from the particular towards an increasingly all-encompassing account of the meaning making process. Figure 2 demonstrates this stage in practice.
And I believe that, that every action that you perform, it might not appear to be positive, but you can trace it back to positive intentions. That downward spiral was actually a form of learning, a form of exploration, but it was negative direction, and so resulted in very negative outcomes. And while I still remember the term ‘enlightenment’, to think of that defining week or period as being a period of enlightenment does feel, under a different lens, in that so from there, from that understanding, that kind of realisation, from that change of trajectory, change of direction, from solely downhill and into the abyss to hang on a minute there might be something different here. One of the things I concluded of I’ve got a broken spirit, to find out what mine is and fix it, because that’s what I’m picking up, the broken leg in my stool is the spirit, but I don’t know what it is, and I don’t know anything about it. So what happened next, I started going to the prison library, and getting out books on spiritual and personal development topics. **On this purpose of finding out what this spirit is and how you fix it**

**Figure 2. IPA 2 stage in practice**

**IPA 3: Identifying themes**

In order to begin the process of identifying and developing emergent themes, I worked predominantly with the initial notes which had been generated, rather than with the transcript itself. Attempting to recognise and connect the patterns evident in the exploratory comments involved a shift in the type of engagement required with the interview transcript. In a manifestation of the hermeneutic circle, the re-organisation of fragmented segments of the data resulted in the ‘movement of understanding […] from the whole to the part’ (Gadamer, 1989, p. 291), in which I sought to create concise statements related to the initial notes, and
therefore, to the relevant aspects of the transcript to which the initial note was attached. Figure 3 denotes the application of this stage in practice. Statements were intended to demonstrate an adequate grounding in the data as well as indicating an emergence of conceptual abstraction (Smith et al., 2009). Unlike the initial notes, the emergent themes appeared to capture and reflect an understanding of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Initial Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention/Purpose</strong></td>
<td><strong>Downward spiral also form of learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traced back</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I believe that, that every action that you perform, it might not appear to be positive, but you can trace it back it positive intentions. That downward spiral was actually a form of learning, a form of exploration, but it was negative direction, and so resulted in very negative outcomes. And while I still remember the term enlightenment, to think of that defining week or period as being a period of enlightenment does feel, under a different lens, in that so from there, from that understanding, that kind of realisation, from that change of trajectory, change of direction, from solely downhill and into the abyss to hang on a minute there might be something different here. One of the things I concluded of I’ve got a broken spirit, to find out what mine is and fix it, because that’s what I’m picking up, the broken leg in my stool is the spirit, but I don’t know what it is, and I don’t know anything about it. So what happened next, I started going to the prison library, and getting out books on spiritual and personal development topics. On this purpose of finding out what this spirit is and how you fix it.</td>
<td>Sense of one moment leading to the next purposeful a question picking up something needs to be fixed action taken purpose to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discovery/ disclosure of problem and purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. IPA 3 stage in practice

IPA 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes
Using the set of individual themes established within the transcript, the reorganisation process began again. However, this time, the development of mapping how the themes connect together became the task. With the intention of producing an interesting and comprehensive account of the participant’s narrative, a number of different methods were undertaken. Clusters of themes were grouped together, and themes which appeared opposing were taken note of. I sought to find a means of drawing the emergent themes together into a structure that embraces all the most significant and engaging aspects of the participant’s account, as shown in Figure 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes for transcript (drawn together) –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention/purpose traced back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery/disclosure of problem and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction is clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of circumstances - out of my control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions leading to here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two end of the spectrum inhabited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything happens for a reason</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing structure of potential master theme – Purpose

Figure 4. IPA 4 stage in practice

**IPA 5: Moving to the next case**

After the end of the engagement with the first transcript, I moved onto the second case and repeated the process of the pre IPA supplementary state and the IPA stages as described in step 1 through to step 4. The systematic nature of the analysis undertaken in this study enabled me to more successfully bracket themes from the previous case and remain open-minded about the individuality of each new transcript.
IPA 6: Looking for patterns across cases within the study

At this point in the analytical process, I was in possession of a set of superordinate themes and themes for each individual case. Laying them out side by side facilitated the process of finding patterns of shared higher order qualities across cases. This advanced into a particular creative phase of the analysis, as a reconfiguring and relabelling of themes was required in order to progress to the developing interpretation to a theoretical level. Tentative interpretations were made, with care being taken not to present them as generalised or generalisable truths, but to ensure that convergences and divergences in the data were made clear. Smith et al. (2009) referred to the ‘best IPA’ as having a ‘dual quality’ (p. 101). Figure 5 demonstrates a sample of additional emergent themes drawn from other transcripts in the corpus, which contributed to the development of the theme in this example. Here, as Smith and colleagues stated, is the crucial attention that is paid to the idiosyncratic instances which occur amongst cases, as well as the higher order interpretation that exists throughout the data corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript 1</th>
<th>Transcript 2</th>
<th>Transcript 3</th>
<th>Transcript 4</th>
<th>Transcript 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosen for it</td>
<td>Sequence of events that are connected</td>
<td>Was I chosen?</td>
<td>Time enabled me to get here</td>
<td>A clear, new direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going through it for a reason</td>
<td></td>
<td>I had to experience it to get here</td>
<td>No other way it could have been</td>
<td>Revealed purpose to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developing theory of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Master theme label (following the drawing together of relevant emergent theme from complete data set) – **Purpose is disclosed**

Figure 5. IPA 6 stage in practice

**Post IPA supplementary Stage: Movement back and forth between original recorded handle and theme structure as it stands to check resonance**
It is at this stage that the second manifestation of embodied interpretation is fulfilled. What follows is an attempt to reach what Todres (2007) referred to as ‘aesthetic satisfaction’ (p.) I retrieved the recorded felt-sense responses articulated at the beginning of the analytic process, and used these as an experiential reference in which to check against the expression of the findings generated after the IPA.

Moving back and forth between the two interpretations, I check whether there is a sufficient resonance between the initial felt-sense and the communicated expression of the theme structure as it stands. In particular, I pay attention to ‘what the presence of the communicated phenomenon is like’ (Todres & Galvin, 2008, p. 577). I ask myself, ‘What does the configuration of these themes communicate about the experience being studied?’ and ‘Do the words capture the quality of the felt-sense?’ It is from here that new words may emerge, or old words may be rearranged in order to ‘re-enliven the phenomenon’ (Galvin & Todres, 2013, p. 167). Figure 6 highlights the process of reaching the point in which the findings that have emerged reflect a rigour and an evocative resonance. Within this example, the theme evolved from being labelled as ‘purpose is disclosed’ following the IPA, to ‘illuminating purpose’ after the embodied interpretation was completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master theme label</th>
<th>Following IPA</th>
<th>Original record of handle of the felt-sense – each moment permeated with a purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>purpose is disclosed</td>
<td>Movement back and forth</td>
<td>Checking resonance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is past tense appropriate? Sense-making is an ongoing process</td>
<td>Revealing? Discovering? Illuminating?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose coming to light</td>
<td>Illuminating purpose?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evocative resonance felt</td>
<td>Finalised wording of master theme following embodied interpretation –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illuminating purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alternative modes of representation: The Findings

The question of representation has been fiercely debated since the capacity of scientific modes of reporting to capture human experience was questioned. This ‘crisis of representation’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 16) led to the acceptance and adoption of literary and artistic styles of representing lived experiences, which appeared more suitable to the goals of qualitative research.

Following the IPA, a traditional report of the findings was written, and this is offered primarily within the next section. This includes the introduction to five identified master themes and related sub-themes, verbatim illustrative quotations, and my analytic interpretation of the text. The process of embodied interpretation, which resulted in the modification of theme labels as initially produced, is also presented and evaluated in the discussion chapter. Following the IPA process and write-up, the data were revisited, this time ‘with a fresh eye that poetic transcription offers’ (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxviii). Six found poems were created, and these are presented at the beginning of each chapter of this thesis. The implementation of research poetry will also be evaluated in chapter five.

Creating found poetry

The review of the relevant literature, presented in the previous chapter, identified research poetry as an alternative means of data representation. Expressions of poetic character have previously been used in relation to phenomenological inquiry (Ohlen, 2003). Poetry is viewed as being able to capture the whole or holistic nature of the themes conveyed by the research participants, while having the capacity to surpass discrete categories. Within the context of this research study, seeking to facilitate a sympathetic resonance in the reader is conceptualised as essential in order to honour the voices of the participants and unite them with the reader. It was identified that the creation of research poetry offers one unique mode of reporting research that may further extend the aims of this research thesis: to explore ways in which to portray participant data that may facilitate the readers’ ‘knowing what something feels like’ (Tracy, 2012, p. 110).
In seeking to create found poetry, I took each interview transcript in turn. As mentioned in the previous chapter, found poems are created by taking the words of others and transforming them into poetic forms (Prendergast, 2009). I began by revisiting the annotated transcripts, which had been highlighted during the phases of the IPA. Within the second stage of IPA, known as initial noting, ‘The analyst notes anything of interest within the transcript’ (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 83). In revisiting the already highlighted transcripts, I selected previously ‘nuggeted’ words and phrases from the chained prose, in particular picking out any manners of expression that appeared to repeat themselves (Sjollema, 2012). I then began to create line breaks in the narrative, breaking it up into the form of a poem. Through the creation of line breaks, I was careful that significant attention was paid towards keeping discrete units of meaning together, so as not to distort the essential features of the narrative. Although no words were altered during the course of constructing the found poems, I did use some ‘poetic license’ (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 87). Words were sometimes rearranged in a different order than in the original text in order to punctuate specific themes. Where it was deemed appropriate, I used the poetic device of repetition to create emphasis. By reading the poem aloud many times, the accuracy and emotional integrity of the poem was verified. In Figure 7, I illustrate how the found poems correspond with the verbatim transcript of the interview with Louise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem ‘Louise’</th>
<th>Excerpt from interview transcript with Louise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I kind of have a real vision</td>
<td>I kind of have real vision; I've had it ever since it happened. The vision may not happen, I may get knocked down on the way home, but I kind of had a vision since that moment, and it’s ridiculous, but at the same time, it feels very solid. I have a vision: I am there and it’s me, and when I see the vision, I see myself from the side, and I am in and I’m out of it, like I’m here, but I’m there, and I have long grey wiry hair, and it’s in a ponytail, and I am wearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve had it ever since it happened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see myself from the side and I am in and out of it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like I’m here but I’m there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I have long grey wiry hair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And it’s in a ponytail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I am wearing a blue old jumper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And all I’m looking out to is fields</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I’m holding a warm mug of something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I’m drinking it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sipping it
And the wind is blowing through my hair
And I feel absolute knowing that I have had a life well spent
I’ve had that since the moment it happened
And it never changes
The vision never changes
I know that it’s ok
It feels so safe
Nothing is there apart from me and the land
The old jumper
And the drink

a blue old jumper, and all I’m looking out to is fields, and I’m holding a warm mug of something, and I’m drinking it, sipping it whilst holding it up toward my mouth, you know how you hold it here, and the wind is blowing through my hair, and I feel absolute knowing that I have had a life well spent, and I have had that since the moment it happened, and it never changes, the vision never changes, and it's not that I’m with anyone, but it’s that I know that it’s ok, I don’t know whether it’s a vision of being old and knowing that my time is up, or that it is just knowing I have left generations behind me of people that are all ok, and that is why it feels so safe. But it’s something about in that vision; nothing is there apart from me and the land, and the old jumper and the drink

Figure 7. Example of creation of found poem

**Trustworthiness: combining structure and texture**

Qualitative research has long been required to demonstrate, argue for, and justify its value, and within the context of psychological research, there is an increasing demand for the establishment of coherent mechanisms for the quality assurance of qualitative research (Seale, 1993). In previous formulations of quality standards for qualitative research, evaluative criteria used to assess the value of quantitative research have been adapted and used to evaluate qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). However, qualitative research is rooted in concepts of reflexivity, subjective meanings, and emergent researcher perspectives; therefore, criteria for validity that are relevant to quantitative research studies are not so easily applied within qualitative research paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Furthermore, where concepts of credibility, dependability, and confirmability have
been put forward as legitimate ways in which to evaluate the public/shared dimension of qualitative research, the personal/experiential dimension is overlooked (Gendlin, 1997).

Differences between the various qualitative approaches and their epistemological bases are significant (Reicher, 2000; Madhill et al., 2000). As highlighted by the three epistemological questions posed by Willig (2013), the different philosophical roots and assumptions result in different types of research questions. So, too, do these differences culminate in the necessary application of different evaluative criteria.

The intention of this study is to provide a rich and comprehensive description and interpretation of SPT experiences and their impact; however, an acceptance of the validity of alternative interpretations that do not invalidate the interpretations which emerge in this study also remains. Studies conducted from a contextual constructionist epistemology require that interpretations are evaluated according to the extent to which they are a result of the meeting between researcher and text (Smith et al., 2009), and are demonstrably grounded within a sensitivity to the context in which they were generated (Yardley, 2000). Close engagement to the idiographic and the particular is considered a pillar of the IPA method; hence, my adoption of IPA itself goes some way in demonstrating the centrality of a sensitivity to context, which is ensured from the outset.

A number of guidelines for assessing the validity of qualitative research are available to be used (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Elliott et al., 1999; Yardley, 2000), though Smith et al. (2009) warned against choosing to use ‘checklist’ style assessments, which can force the process to become simplistic and prescriptive, and increasingly likely to overlook the subtle elements of the research that require attention. IPA is considered a creative process (Smith et al., 2009); however, it requires its conduct to be systematic and coherent (Finlay, 2006). Therefore, in keeping with the goals set out at the beginning of this study and with the terms and values laid out by IPA research, the concepts of rigour and resonance are bestowed with mutual value. Todres and Galvin (2006) argued the case for evidence of both ‘structure’ and ‘texture’ within phenomenological projects in which scientific and communicative concerns are held
in equal regard to ensure prevention from ‘scientific malpractice at the same time as it preserves the richness and beauty of the lifeworld’ (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Rigour: ‘Structure’

Yardley (2000) suggested that the criteria labelled ‘commitment and rigour’ are ‘straightforward, as they correspond to the usual expectations for thoroughness in data collection, analysis and reporting in any kind of research’ (p. 221, emphasis added). The Oxford College Dictionary (2007) defines rigour as the quality of being extremely thorough, exhaustive, or accurate. The term ‘rigour’ implies rigidity, harshness, and inflexibility. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggested the term ‘qualitative rigour’ itself to be an oxymoron, since qualitative research is a journey of exploration that does not lend itself to unyielding boundaries. Despite this, the effectiveness of the research conducted requires demonstration (Shenton, 2004).

Within the context of this study, rigour refers to the systematic nature of the research process required by IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The participants were selected carefully to ensure that their experience corresponded with the topic being investigated by the research question. Prolonged empathic engagement with the data made a complete analysis possible, and the intention was to move it beyond a simple description of the phenomenon of an SPT towards an interpretation of what it means to experience such an event. I aimed to share something of each individual participant as well as the themes which emerged across cases. Verbatim extracts taken from the participants’ material are embedded into the findings and developing discussion to support the emerging argument I present. Furthermore, a commitment to qualitative rigour requires a sufficient degree of transparency whereby stages of the research process are described in detail. The reporting of this research aims to demonstrate reflexivity and, moreover, to justify the research choices made throughout the process, from the initial outline and through the development of the methods and the reporting of the findings. This allows the reader full insight into the researcher’s analysis and interpretation of the data, and thus is open to external audit.
Resonance: ‘Texture’

This study aims to explore transformation experiences which resulted in enduring positive change. Akin to Bochner’s (2000, 2001) call for greater emphasis on the artistic and ethical dimensions of qualitative research, finding ‘the words that work’ and that are authentic to the phenomenon in all its complexity, sense, and texture becomes just as important as the demonstration of scientific rigour (Todres & Galvin, 2008, p. 576). In this context, texture refers to the communication of the evocative qualities of each participant’s unique experience, to convey ‘what the experience was like’, and to do so in a way which captures the richness in which the participants themselves expressed their lived experience to me. Polkinghorne (1983) alluded to his conception of the notion of resonance, calling for phenomenological research projects to demonstrate ‘vividness’, ‘accuracy’, ‘richness’, and ‘elegance’ to ensure their trustworthiness. Phenomenological research seeks to capture the ambiguity. The integration of an embodied interpretation, as outlined earlier in this chapter, draws attention to my personal commitment to offer an authentic and evocative account of the lived experience of SPTs. Van Manen (1999, 2006) has written about what it takes for a text to ‘speak’ to us, or to ‘call’ and ‘stir’ us, and it is via embodied interpretation and reflexivity that the aesthetic dimension of the phenomenon is expressed within this study.

Reflexivity

An important criterion for evaluation within the context of this study is reflexivity. Understood as the manifestation of rigour, resonance and ethics simultaneously, it is considered as an objective for self-awareness and openness about the research process which is to be successfully communicated. Within this research study, reflexivity is conceptualised as a critical reflection of how I, the researcher, constructed knowledge throughout the research process. I endeavour to share with the reader the influences upon my construction of knowledge. I have attempted to ensure my commitment to the process of ‘stepping back’ from the conduct of data collection through to data analysis in the hope of providing a critical look at my personal role within the research. I have aimed to achieve this via the implementation of bracketing interviews.

The role of bracketing
Bracketing helps the researcher to remain constantly vigilant to the ways in which their personal and intellectual investments might distort the description of the phenomenon. Despite the fact that Heidegger’s complex and dynamic notion of fore-structures of our understanding indicates that bracketing can only ever be partially accomplished, the strength lies in the phenomenologists’ refusal to ‘ground an investigation in unexamined beliefs’ (Drew, 1997, p. 438). In order to support this process, I devised a set of bracketing interviews designed to make possible the investigation of the experience of research (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000). Finlay and Gough (2003) linked bracketing with reflexive practices in qualitative psychology, as the ability to bracket is more a question of how reflexive we are as opposed to how objective we can be (Ahern, 1999). It is within the reflexive realm that the role of bracketing has been positioned within this study. If ‘at every point in our research- we inject a host of assumptions’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 17; emphasis in the original), it is understandable why Rolls and Relf (2006) encouraged an engagement with bracketing throughout the research process, rather than simply at the start as others have advocated (Glaser, 1992). The conception of bracketing has not been considered as a one-time event in which preconceptions are held in abeyance for the remainder of the project. Rather, a process of self-discovery was embarked upon, and, as a result, concealed emotions and experiences were invited to the surface (Drew, 2004).

The way in which a researcher seeks to bracket his or her influence on the construction of knowledge can appear in a number of different guises. Within this study, I value bracketing interviews over other forms of reflective practice, as I agree with Polkinghorne when he argued that ‘the meaning and contents of experience are not within but between persons’ (p. 47, emphasis in the original), referring to the value of participating in a ‘we’ experience as opposed to an ‘I’ experience. This is not to say that other methods of bracketing were not undertaken during the progression of this study. Supplementary means of bracketing are discussed below. The manifestation of any kind of bracketing within this research was recognised as tools to increase my understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Four bracketing interviews were conducted over the course of the research process: the first before the initiation of data collection, the second after two interviews had been conducted, the third after completion of data collection, and the final during development of the analysis. The bracketing interviews symbolised the creation of a new and negotiated process within a novel context. Unlike the academic research supervision, which provided theoretical and practical
support, the bracketing interviews provided support internal to the phenomenological experience of the parallel process (Rolls & Relf, 2006). The interviews were conducted by a colleague, who was a PhD candidate undertaking research within the Faculty of Humanities. Each bracketing interview was treated as a form of data and was therefore audio recorded and transcribed. They were embedded into the research process and were considered part of the terms by which knowledge was generated, and hence were made available for analysis.

In addition to the contracted bracketing interviews, I also audio recorded my immediate responses following the termination of each interview. These were also transcribed for analysis. Writing memos naturally evolved as an effective way to capture both theoretical notes pertaining to the procedural aspects of the research, as well as the observational remarks, which made it possible to explore emotional responses to the process (Cutliffe, 2003). I agree with Tufford and Newman (2012), as in my experience, creating memos also became central to the reflexive element so crucial to this study. Throughout data collection analysis, the method of creating memos freed my capacity to engage with the raw data at hand, whilst consistently making it possible for me to capture ‘hunches’ that I intended to release and explore later. As the reader will have already noticed, verbatim quotations taken from the bracketing interviews and memos are embedded throughout the write up of this thesis.

This chapter has aimed to provide an in depth discussion of the theoretical development and practical application of IPA as it has been conducted within this study. The procedural aspects of data generation and data analysis have been illuminated, and the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research have been clarified.
‘Firelight’

I can just go to those places
A place within that is constant
Just be there
Everything earthed, everything grounded
It’s always still there

I still have my ups and downs, but
Always still there

I have moved on, but
Always still there
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter firstly introduces an overview of the themes identified in the IPA and embodied interpretation. Each master theme and sub-theme is then taken in turn and presented using verbatim quotes from participant transcripts in order to demonstrate the emerging interpretation. The outcome of the embodied interpretation of each master theme is presented, including an illustration of the process of checking the evocative resonance of theme labels, via the method of focusing described in Chapter Three.

Introducing themes

From my application of an IPA and supplementary embodied interpretation, five master themes, each with two related sub-themes, were identified; these are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Master Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of</td>
<td>‘I’m still trying to make sense of it’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘It’s a miracle’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Who I was, what happened, who I am now</td>
<td>‘I won’t be coming back here’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘It’s always there’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Illuminating purpose</td>
<td>‘I believe you are chosen to experience that’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘I had to go through what I did’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Compelled to act</td>
<td>‘I was driven’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘The more I help other people, the more it helps me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Mere words just fall short’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attempting to capture the ineffable quality

‘I don’t know how to describe it other than I feel it’

Table 1. Summary of master themes and related sub-themes

All six participants contributed to every master theme generated; however, the contribution of the participants to the development of the sub-themes varied. Summary tables for each sub-theme are provided, highlighting which participants contributed to the emergence of the theme. In addition, each summary table refers specifically to the page and line number of the relevant participant transcript, highlighting how the themes are grounded in the raw data. In those cases where a participant has not been identified as a contributor to the theme, this variance has been elucidated.

Conducting an embodied interpretation required the application of two supplementary phases of analysis, located before and after the IPA was conducted. Intended as an experiential reference against which to check the embodied expression of the findings generated by the IPA, it is considered appropriate that the contribution, and the changes implemented as a result of the embodied interpretation, is presented after each theme has been discussed. An evaluation of the process of the embodied interpretation is explored in Chapter Five. Before presenting the findings, it seems appropriate to return to the first two research questions, which have guided the analytic process. This research study set out to answer the following:

**Research Question One**: How do individuals make sense of their SPT experiences?

**Research Question Two**: How does a SPT impact the lives of those who have experienced them?

Each theme is now presented and discussed in turn.
Master theme one: Making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of

Participants recognised the need to interpret their SPT experience, while simultaneously acknowledging that their feelings were experienced as unfathomable at times. Despite it appearing difficult to make sense of elements of their experience, applying a personal understanding of what they had lived through was crucial in order to integrate the experience into the narrative of their lives. Therefore, the first master theme I identified was entitled *making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of*. I identified two integral sub-themes related to this master theme: ‘I’m still trying to make sense of it’ and ‘It’s a miracle’.

Table 2 provides a summary illustration of how these themes are grounded in the participant data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Page/line number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>7/28-298; 16-17687-719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firelight</td>
<td>1/18-24; 2/6-68; 16-17689-719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>8/309-331; 8/333-337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>8/296-304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>10/388-389; 10/391-399 16/617-620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Master theme one and related sub-themes
Sub-theme: ‘I’m still trying to make sense of it’

I selected ‘I’m still trying to make sense of it’ (James, 2/71-73) as the first sub-theme in order to capture the current and ongoing process of sense-making, which all of the participants referred to. Elisabeth suggested that initially there was an impression of not interpreting the event at all, but instead feeling inclined to simply be with the experience. She said, ‘I was so much more with the sensation of it. I didn’t even think about it’ (6/242). Elisabeth described the physical sensation as a ‘weight snapping free’, which she said she would ‘never forget’ (4/171). The experience appeared without conscious thought. It was a feeling, a sensation, which lasted. The weight remained lifted from her shoulders. Later, Elisabeth found herself asking a series of questions, such as, ‘What just happened?’ (5/179), like Bill, who found himself asking, ‘What was all that about? What was going on there?’ (8/336). A period of questioning existed for some of the participants before the time came when they acknowledged the nature of what had taken place and the significance of it. For Elisabeth, this took place a month later:

‘I woke up the next day and looked around and was like, ‘How did I get here?’ And my mind flashed back, like a movie, to that moment at the printer, and I was like, ‘Oh my God! I had an epiphany; that is what they talk about when they talk about someone having an epiphany.’ (9/377-381)

The word ‘epiphany’ resonated for Elisabeth. She recognised qualities in the experience that seemed like something she recalled others having spoken about. She appeared to realise that she had had an epiphany, and suddenly, knew the experience personally. The sense-making process then appeared to continue and develop over time. Participants found themselves noticing things that seemed to add to, and elevate, their interpretation of what had happened. For example, Elisabeth described reading a quotation and relating it back to her SPT:

‘A quote came my way that literally was something to the effect of ‘a lot of times when you start the journey you are not even asking the right questions’ but you don’t realise that until…so an epiphany will get you on the journey.’ (Elisabeth, 5/202-207)
The quotation she found seemed to confirm to her that she had been looking in the wrong place for the right answers. Her epiphanic experience appeared suddenly and changed the direction of the path she was on. The epiphany served to set her on the right path to begin her journey.

A sequence of events that were not perceived as coincidence appeared to take place following four of the participants’ SPTs. A synchronicity which struck James as remarkable is highlighted by this interaction:

‘James: There was a lot of stuff that used to fall into place, that is, kind of synchronicity - is that what you call it? A lot of…
India: Ok, so things seemed to happen that didn’t appear like coincidence, do you mean?
James: Yes, absolutely, yes. It happens all, sometimes there is more stuff than others. But there has been lots of time when things have happened and it has been like ‘wow’.’ (9/350-359)

The word ‘synchronicity’ refers to the concurrent occurrence of events which seem significantly related but without any discernible causal connection. Events appear connected by meaning, and therefore, James did not appear to require an explanation in terms of causality, but instead, he was simply rendered in awe. Words used by Firelight also concurred with this perception. Firelight expressed experience of his life following his SPT as ‘coming together’ in a ‘sequence of events’ (2/67-68). The use of the phrase ‘coming together’ seems to reflect movement from a categorisation of conscious thought related exclusively to the self, towards an experience of greater wholeness and authentic connection to the world.

Cycles of reflection occurred for many of the other participants, too. Bill said, ‘You start reflecting, then you start linking it to other things, and you start learning’ (Bill 8/333). For him, to make sense of the change was likened to a process of learning, of educating himself via the process of reflection. Conscious reflection and seeking to actively link events occurred for Bill. In a sense, he worked it out for himself. For James, the significance of the event was only realised decades later, which he deemed to be because he ‘didn’t immediately equate’ the thirst for knowledge he experienced following the event as being linked to the
SPT itself (James, 5/164). Whilst he never forgot the moment, over time, James began ‘to think about the experience more’ (8/279-280). As he got older, ‘It just came more and more apparent that I had had this experience (13/490). As he gradually recollected aspects of the SPT over time, this appeared to increase its significance for James. He considered himself to still be in a process of understanding: ‘I’m still trying to make sense of it now’ (James, 2/71-73); ‘I only recently realised, maybe six months ago, that it was the sounds that did it’ (16/592-593). Forty-five years after the event, James found himself still to realise novel aspects of his SPT. This provides evidence of the impact of the experience on James after the event, and his evident reflection on it.

I observed the participants’ sense-making process occurring during the interview itself. Each interview was permeated with pauses, hesitations, and the discontinuation of sentences. This indicated that the participants sometimes struggled to articulate their experience, as well as their desire to get it right. As the participants responded to the questions, they often appeared to turn their curiosity to their bodies, waiting to see whether they could evoke an authentic answer to my questions. For some, this was difficult; Firelight articulated his process in action: ‘Let me get this…I am not sure I can get this back’ (Firelight, 1/18). He appeared to ask his body for the answer. Sometimes, he found the words to adequately fit the feeling; at other times, it was more difficult.

Over time, things became clearer for Louise, too, who gradually came to realise that she did not need to find answers as much as she initially may have thought. She recalled, ‘Initially, the experience was so intensely unique and special to me that I didn’t want anyone else to…but that’s changed now’ (17/703). I wonder if here she is describing an initial feeling of protectiveness over the experience. Gradually, Louise discovered the power to be had in relinquishing, to some extent, the desire to fully understand how she had come to experience what she had undergone. She referred to a sudden feeling: ‘Then, suddenly, it’s like “Bang!”…like none of that really matters; you can just choose a different way, and I think that the power in that transformation is the moment where you realise’ (Louise, 7/287-288).

Central to the sense-making process for participants was the recognition and acceptance that it was difficult to make sense of their SPT experience. For some, this extended towards the appreciation that it was not imperative that they fully comprehend what happened, but instead
that they should take pleasure in the significance of it. For some of the participants, this seemed intimately linked with their interpretation of the event as containing a magical, miraculous quality.

**Sub-theme: ‘It’s a miracle’**

Patrick described his SPT experience as ‘a miracle. An absolute miracle’ (3/117). I chose this as the second sub-theme because of the ability of the word ‘miracle’ to capture the essence of how some of the participants described their transformative change as being ‘out of this world’. Describing the experience as a miracle suggests a magical or supernatural element at play. In Patrick’s case, he suddenly found he was ‘on my knees, with my hands together looking up’ (2/42-43). He described talking to God, and asking for help. He had never before found himself praying. This added to his sense of disbelief:

‘And that’s when…I don’t know…I just fell to my knees. Never done it before. Fell to my knees. Elbows on my bed…please help me…’ (4/145-147)

He talked of there being no prior warning or sign of the SPT to come, and a question mark remains over his behaviour:

‘I don’t know why I done. Still to this day, I don’t know why I done it. There was no conversation leading up to with anyone. There was nothing.’ (/5194-196)

Patrick interpreted his experience as being acted on from the outside. He referred to a ‘somebody’ who ‘just goes, “There’s your chance!”’ (5/201). This describes a transpersonal experience, with the self acted upon by an Other, seemingly greater than oneself.

James talked of the necessity for him to clarify it, at times, curious as to whether the experience really happened. He described how he sometimes finds himself replaying the song in order to test whether the experience was real. When he did listen once again to the album of Jimi Hendrix, he described what he felt as follows:
‘It gave me goosebumps. All the time. It just cemented the idea that I had this idea, this experience was real. This was something else. This is not just sounds; this is not just music’ (16/617-620).

A juxtaposition appears in which the experience of an SPT is both out of this world and real. The inexplicable nature of the experience requires its verification, which James appeared to gain as soon as he replayed the music to himself.

Elisabeth used the word ‘magic’ when talking about her experience. When reflecting on her tendency to look back on the experience, she said, ‘I also look back on it with nostalgia, and all the magic that happened’ (1/27-29). She reflected on the gift in the magic:

‘The other gifts in these moments are even if you haven’t been able to take action before, they will compel people to take action. Then this quality called serendipity comes into play, where it’s that circumstances magic of life thing that is happening’. (8/304-308)

This use of the word ‘magic’ alludes to the power of her SPT as such a significant influence for her. The subsequent compulsion to take action, which Elisabeth referred to, is captured within theme four.

**Embodied interpretation of master theme one**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wording of theme following application of IPA stages</th>
<th>Finalised wording of theme following embodied interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of</td>
<td>Making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Embodied interpretation of master theme one

**Master Theme two: Who I was, what happened, who I am now**
The second master theme I identified is entitled *who I was, what happened, and where I am now*. All participants appeared to make sense of their SPT via the separation of their lives into the temporal categories of before and after the SPT occurred. James, whose SPT occurred when he was 9 years old, suggested, ‘I don’t remember much about before it’ (15/561). Similarly, Louise commented, ‘I genuinely feel like I lived the same day all my life until I hit that day’ (6/234-235).

Whether it was that the SPT event was the earliest memory, like it was for James, or that it acted as the catalyst for what felt like an entirely fresh start, as for Louise, there was an understanding, for the participants, that the event facilitated a significant shift. It felt as though the period before and the period after were entirely separate entities. Experiences of anorexia, alcoholism, drug addiction, and marital problems were reported to permeate some of the lives of the participants before their SPT. The shift manifested itself in a change of attitude to or outlook on life. For others, their SPT experience resulted in their waking up ‘a different guy’ (Patrick, 1/53). For all the participants, the shift was regarded as both permanent and positive, sharing their sense of safety of knowing that they would not return to their lives as they were before. I identified two relevant sub-themes: ‘I won’t be coming back here’ and ‘It’s always there’.

Table 3 provides a summary illustration of how these themes are grounded in the participant data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Page/line number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I won’t be coming back here’</td>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>5/173-177; 15/618; 13/531-539; 16/667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>4/139-148; 15/561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12/518-521; 8/337-338; 12-13/518-521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3. Master theme two and related sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme: ‘I won’t be coming back here’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| For all of the participants, there was a sense that aspects of their previous existence had been relinquished. Words spoken by Firelight were chosen to encapsulate this integral sub-theme: ‘I won’t be coming back here now’ (11/450-452), as they represent that knowledge of never returning to the ‘before’ chapter of their lives. For Elisabeth, the feeling of ‘misery’ (16/667) caused by the difficulties in her marriage disappeared. She described the following as ‘now, for me, it’s gone…I did heal’ (15/618). The physical shift that she could feel was simultaneously recognised as a signal that she would ‘never go back’ (5/174); the change was permanent. Patrick used the following statement to describe how he felt about drinking alcohol after his SPT experience:

‘No, it’s gone; it’s over. Completely gone. I ballroom dance on a Wednesday night. Everyone has a drink. It doesn’t enter my head once, ‘Oh, I want a drink’. It’s gone. As I say, the only difference between you and I is that I can’t drink, and you can. And if my life is the way it is because of that? Good. I wouldn’t drink now for all the money in the world. I might as well put a gun to my head. The good thing about it is I’m not ‘Oh I need a drink’; it’s gone.’ (4/154-160)
His urge to drink was vanquished. He likened the idea of taking another drink as turning a gun on himself. A death sentence. Yet he was clear that he does not experience the urge to take to drink again. Like Patrick, other participants reflected on what could have been if not for their SPT. The SPT was made meaningful not exclusively by what the participants had gained, but also by what they had lost as a result. Elisabeth said,

‘I probably would have died…I had this thought that I was, like, “You are going to die if you go back there.” I probably would have gotten really sick.’ (13/532-539)

Firelight, too, reflected on how things could have been different: ‘If it hadn’t happened to me, I would have stayed ordinary’ (11/434). This use of the word ‘ordinary’ suggested that there is an extraordinary, remarkable significance to the internal transformation. Firelight embodies a dimension of reality no longer characterised by the sphere he ordinarily inhabited previously. Bill, too, reflected, ‘If I hadn’t [SPT], I wouldn’t be here now, I think I would have fulfilled the mission statement; I would have died in the gutter’ (16/657-659). This reference to death by half of the participants goes some way to emphasising the seriousness of their distress before their SPT. Bill, Patrick and Elisabeth perceived their deaths to be the likely result if their psychological distress had continued. What could have been if not for their transformative change? A conversation with his children brought home to James just how pivotal his experience was:

‘Even the kids say to me, “Dad, what’s the most important day of your life?” and I have to say that it was that day, it wasn’t when they were born, because I genuinely believe that they probably wouldn’t have been born if I hadn’t had that experience, because I think it just set me on a different track, not particularly as a nine-year old kid; it just kind of set me from going that way to going that way [gestures]. It was so obviously that as I grew it just got wider and wider, different person definitely. They probably would not have been born if that had not have happened.’ (James, 4/139-148)

This sense of not returning to aspects of their former selves was shared by all participants. Often this was described as a sense of simply ‘knowing’ it to be true. Louise ‘knew’ she would never be the same again. She said:
‘There wasn’t work as far as feeling upset about my body and my eating; I relinquished that immediately, so I knew I would never be anorexic again, I knew I would never be bulimic again, and I knew I would not fuck around with my food anymore.’ (12-13/518-521)

Firelight also shared this same perspective. He described his SPT experience as a ‘re-birth’, perhaps relating to his movement towards a period of new life. Alcohol addiction patterns and eating disorder behaviours were suddenly dissolved, were no longer the battle that participants had been waking up to everyday for years previously. In an attempt to describe the difficulty of relinquishing his dependency on alcohol before his SPT experience, Patrick offered an example in the hope of gaining my understanding;

‘If you had offered me 50 million quid, I couldn’t have done it. If you had given me 100 million pound, I couldn’t have done it. If you had said to me…I would have chosen it over anything. I couldn’t…it was that powerful, the addiction especially alcohol. So, so very hard to beat.’ (4/120-124)

Firelight drew attention to the development of a broader outlook on life, which resulted from his experience:

‘You get to those places where you know there is no going back. So long as you keep your head above water, so to speak, things will work out when they are ready to work out, and take you further or whatever.’ (9/375-377)

This development of trust in the process of what the future might hold was also shared among Bill and Louise, who also reported a change in their attitude following their SPT. Moving from a preoccupation with how she was viewed by others and feeling ‘scared by everyone’ (6/264), Louise discovered a capacity to ‘not care’, a sensation that she was keen to articulate accurately: ‘It’s not that I don’t care; it’s that I don’t need to care’ (8/337-338). I sensed that Louise was talking about a new found confidence in herself, similar to Bill, who developed what he referred to as a why not? attitude, finding himself saying the word ‘yes’ rather more than the word ‘no’. In reference to a job application he made following his SPT, Bill said, ‘It was this attitude of “Why not? Why shouldn’t I be the chairman?”’ (15/646). A self-confidence developed, which was observed without any element of arrogance, but instead
was always permeated with a deep felt humility and appreciation of the transformative change, which enabled their self belief.

**Sub-theme: ‘It’s always there’**

James, Louise, and Firelight all described the legacy of their SPT experience as something which is always with them: ‘always there’ (Louise; 3/129). So, I selected this quotation to label the second sub-theme.

James and Firelight specifically used the word *constant* in relation to the impact of their SPT. James said:

‘So this thing, this experience that went with it was the only real constant I think that I had. In my darkest moments it was the thing that kept me positive, to a degree, and kind of just hanging onto it.’ (8/296-299)

Like James, Firelight emphasised that a key word for him was ‘abiding’, meaning his SPT enabled him ‘to find a place within that is constant’ (7/268). Two elements of his SPT experience which Firelight described as abiding with him were the existence of a white cloak and a space that was created within his torso. As Firelight described the white cloak, he commented that he was ‘describing it as I feel it now’ (4/155-156). This sense that something tangible, able to be accessed as he spoke, offered an insight into how these elements which abide with him provide him with an anchor, allowing him ‘to go to those places...just be there’ in those ‘ups and downs’ (9/356-358). Accessing the feeling of the white cloak in the interview itself appeared to better enable him to describe it: ‘It’s a bit coarse; it’s a very fine weave’ (4/155-156). Furthermore, this space he referred to appeared to enable the production of authentic answers to questions he might be asked, much in the way that I experienced him looking for his responses in the research interview. He described a conversation he had whilst running his weekly meditation group:

‘But I have a great privilege to run a meditation group, and you can’t fake it. If someone asks me a question, it is essentially whether this has an answer or an answer I can articulate. ‘Oh
what about blah?’ and I often have to go, ‘Hold on and let me just see if anything responds.’ (9/359-363)

For Louise, it was a recognition of the voice which spoke to her because the voice ‘is always there’ (3/129); hence, similar to how Firelight described his return to the feeling to find answers, Louise revisits it from time to time. However, she took this further, and began to explain how she came to see herself as ‘it’, as the transformation itself. She said:

‘…so every day from that moment, every day is that moment because it became me, and I am it. So every day I am it, it beats within me.’ (17/709-712)

Louise was the only participant to talk explicitly of her SPT in this way. All of the participants reflected on the bodily feeling experienced at the time of the SPT and a physical sensation which the experience left with them. Yet Louise talked about herself and her SPT as synonymous with one another, so closely associated that she regards herself as able to ‘breathe it’ (17/716).

There was also some contrast between participants’ views on revisiting sensations related to their SPT. Patrick claimed that despite going back, he is cautious, as our exchange demonstrates:

‘Patrick: I often go back, in times of…not often but I do go back…I don’t want to ruin it. But I go back to the moment.’

India: And you can access the same…

Patrick: I can get there yes. I can get there. Amazing. But I don’t ruin it.

India: Can you tell me about that. Not ruining it?

Patrick: I don’t want to take the biscuit. I don’t want to, you know…when I do it, I don’t know when I do it, I have probably done it three or four times maybe five or six in the three years just to see, go back and revisit how I felt.’ (10/333-344)

There appears to be a protective element present in Patrick’s account, a concern that to seek to return to the exact sensation felt in the moment would be to potentially fragment or reduce
it in some way. Patrick stood out in this respect, as the other participants referred to their return to the feeling in an entirely positive manner. It could be possible to interpret this solely, as unlike other participants who were unwavering in their knowing of not returning to their former selves, that Patrick experiences a concern that to attempt to return to the exact feeling of the experience would in some way ruin, or remove, its power or significance. However, my interpretation of this is one which is intimately linked to Patrick’s experience of his SPT as a miracle, bestowing on him such a feeling of humility and gratitude that to revisit how it felt too often might appear indulgent: ‘I am full of gratitude, every single day’ (Patrick, 10/368-369).

**Embodied interpretation of master theme two**

| Process of checking resonance:                                                                 |
|                                                                                               |
| There is an absence of the person, the ‘I’                                                   |
| Before and after resonates- the event must be captured as the turning point                   |
| Must capture the person, who ‘I’ am changed                                                  |
| Who ‘I’ am now?                                                                               |
| Who I was, what happened, who I am now                                                       |

_Evocative resonance felt_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wording of theme following application of IPA stages</th>
<th>Finalised wording of theme following embodied interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorisation of before and after</td>
<td>Who I was, what happened, who I am now</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Embodied interpretation of master theme two

**Master Theme Three: Illuminating purpose**

The lives of the participants were changed. New life paths became clear, new found confidence was discovered and purpose suddenly illuminated. The third master theme I therefore identified is entitled _illuminating purpose_. Elisabeth provides one examples of how the trajectory of her life, particularly with regards to the type of work she chose to pursue
after her transformation, was altered. This ‘wake up call to our greater purpose’ as Elisabeth (2/120) described it, enabled her to follow a path she had not previously imagined for herself;

‘So now, through acting and writing, everything had kind of synthesised and has turned into a career that I would have never pursued on my own.’ (13/543-545)

I identified two sub-themes related to this master theme: ‘I believe you are chosen to experience that’ and ‘I had to go through what I did’. Table 4 provides a summary illustration of how these themes are grounded in the participant data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Page/line number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I believe you are chosen to experience that’</td>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>14/593-601; 2/120; 13/543-545; 15/609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>8/290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>7/297-300; 11/474-476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>7/256-267; 8/316-319; 9/324-326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I had to go through what I did’</td>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>15/614-621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>13/472-472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>6/257-262; 8/320-322; 10/427-432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firelight</td>
<td>1/4-8; 10/418-422; 11/432-434 11/453-454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>8/328-331; 8/334-342; 9/361-370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>1/23; 8/306-316; 8/324-326; 10/366-369</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Master theme Three and related sub-themes

Sub-theme: ‘I believe you are chosen to experience that’
Through the process of applying meaning to their experience, some of the participants speculated over whether they may have been chosen for their transformation. Louise described not simply experiencing the transformation for yourself. Instead, her SPT occurred in order for her to serve others. She said: ‘You are chosen to experience that because it gives you a direct insight into the capacity of healing that can be momentary and instantaneous’ (Louise; 7/297-300). I selected her words for this sub-theme. What appears to come as a result of this perception is ‘that people have it for a purpose, and I think the purpose is that other people can be shown it’ (11/474-476). Sharing their stories of healing with others appeared centrally connected to the perception of being chosen for their SPT. Elisabeth likens the impact of it to ‘a job…to develop it to where other people can see it, understand it, embrace it’ (14/600-601). Participants wanted to share, and use the experience.

One aspect of Patrick’s questioning and disbelief regarding his sudden recovery from alcoholism was to speculate over whether he, too, was chosen. He said, ‘Maybe I was chosen. I don’t know. Who knows? Something happened. There’s a reason for it. Chronic alcoholic one day, next day sober…c’mon’ (9/324-326). Despite being unsure, part of his sense-making was to question why he was the one that made it through. He considered whether he ‘was strong enough to go through it, because what I went through, I think would probably kill most. I’ve come out with all my marbles. I’m all here.’ (8/316-319)

This potential to have been selected for the experience appeared to offer Patrick the rationale for why he felt he was able to help others so effectively. He appeared more certain of his experience as a gift that needed to be used to ‘give back’ (7/264). He viewed the insight he had gained from his own experience as an alcoholic, and of his remarkable story of recovery, as being inspiring for others. Patrick’s work as an intervention practitioner, supporting people with alcohol dependency, appears to confirm this.

Similar to the sensation of being chosen, was, for James, the sensation of feeling special. He described feeling ‘Safe. I felt special. I felt loved. I felt like I had something to hold onto’
To consider oneself as special is to perceive a divergence from what is usual. James’ experiences of feeling safe and surrounded by love made him special; it somehow seemed to stimulate a specific sense of belonging for him.

Sub-theme: ‘I had go through what I did’

For all the participants, part of the process of making sense of their SPT included reflection on the makeup of their lives before the transformation happened. This was captured and discussed in master theme one. This sub-theme, reflected by the words of Patrick (10/366), expands on this, specifically in relation to the theme of purpose. Experiences which the participants had undergone prior to their SPT were also considered as existing for a reason; in a sense, the participants, too, interpreted that they were chosen to experience psychological distress.

Elisabeth reflected on the struggles in her marriage which preceded her SPT, and her transformation, which led her to learn how to ‘be alone’ (15/609). She suggested:

‘I figured it out; for whatever reason, I needed that. Not everybody needs that. Everyone needs different things in life. Everyone has got a different thing they need to learn or strengthen. So for me that was important’. (15/614-621)

Elisabeth made sense of her difficult experience in marriage as an important and necessary element which contributed to her insight. If it had not have been for that, would Elisabeth have experienced her SPT? Louise referred to her life before her SPT as ‘part of her journey’ and as ‘one I wasn’t even aware I was going through’ (8/320-322). Only after her SPT was she able to recognise her earlier psychological distress as essential in making her the person she is. She said:

‘You are only ever taught fear to know courage, and you are only taught aloneness to know belonging, and you are only ever taught to feel that sense of lost to be found. It’s always there to teach. And I suppose that’s what happened more than anything.’ (6/257-262)
Her experience of fear, aloneness, and feeling lost are considered in equal regard to her discovery of courage, belonging, and sense of being found. They are seen as essential to her growth. Reference to the word ‘teach’ suggests she has learned through experience.

Louise also demonstrated a unique perspective related to the difficult experiences that she went through before her SPT. She suggested that after the SPT, the exploration of her psychological distress she experienced before her transformation suddenly became obsolete. She had participated in hours of personal therapy to explore past trauma experience; however, for her, it was ‘suddenly it’s like, “Bang!”…like none of that really matters’ (7/290-291). Firelight discovered his spiritual nature after years of experiencing suffering, and it was this which he perceived as integral to move him in the right direction. He suggested that he and others ‘need a big dollop of suffering’ in order to get ‘you off your backside’ (11/432). For Firelight, the interpretation that suffering is necessary in order for growth is apparent.

Confluence of location was central for Bill:

‘On reflection, by being put into prison. I was physically taken out of the experience and put in a place where you can’t have the experience. So there’s a logical thing. The next thing you do is start reflecting.’ (8/328-331)

His actions had led him to serve a custodial sentence in prison, which in turn offered him the time and space to begin to reflect. For Bill, if his actions had not led him to prison, then he ‘would have died in the gutter’ (16/656), unable to use the opportunity to review the success of his then ‘mission statement’. He had to go the lengths he did in order to be arrested, in order to receive a prison sentence, and in order to become enlightened. The sequence shows the events are inextricably linked.

Patrick also referred directly to his understanding of the necessity of his alcohol addiction:

‘And I think to be who I am, I think I had to go through what I went through. I didn’t know that I would have to go through hell to do it, but in a way, it’s a blessing what happened
because I’ve helped so many others. So if it took what I went through with the help of God, then I can now help others.’ (8/312-316)

The participants’ SPT illuminated a purpose in more than one way. For five out six participants, the SPT experience was intricately connected to their life experience beforehand. Following the SPT, the psychological distress experienced by the participants appeared to take on a new meaning. It came to be seen as a necessary and integral piece in the jigsaw that made up their life picture. I have already included some participants’ quotes, which begin to offer a sense of the action which individuals went on to take following their change experience. The next master theme focuses specifically on the action taken by the participants that appeared as a result of their transformation.

**Embodied interpretation of master theme three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of checking resonance:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed? - Does not capture quality of wonder/awe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlighted? Revealed? Discovered? Illuminated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is past tense appropriate? Sense-making is an ongoing process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealing? Discovering? Illuminating?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illuminating purpose?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Evocative resonance felt**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wording of theme following application of IPA stages</th>
<th>Finalised wording of theme following embodied interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose is disclosed</td>
<td>Illuminating purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Embodied interpretation of master theme three

**Master theme four: Compelled to act**

What appeared to develop from the participants’ illumination of purpose was a desire to take action, often referring to their desire in terms of feeling compelled, driven, or forced to act.
The action taken often pertained not only to the participants themselves, but even more importantly towards the service of others. The fourth master theme I therefore identified is entitled *compelled to act*. I identified two related sub-themes related to this master theme: ‘I was driven’ and ‘The more I help other people, the more it helps me.’

Table 5 provides a summary illustration of how these themes are grounded in participant data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Page/line number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>5/189-200; 8/304-308; 10/425-431; 11-12/477-488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>13/521-523; 13/533-539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firelight</td>
<td>1/12-15; 2/67-70; 9/374;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>2/74-76; 3/112-117; 8/284-288; 8/292-296;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I was driven’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elisabeth</td>
<td>16/657-658; 16/676-686;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>9/331-346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Firelight</td>
<td>8/325-330; 9/359-366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>10/486-491; 12/399-408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>16/669-672; 17/698-699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>7/269-271; 8/284-288; 8/296-304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The more I help other people, the more it helps me’</td>
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</table>

Table 5. Master theme four and related sub-themes
Sub-theme: ‘I was driven’

A compulsion to act on the insight gained from the SPT was described by all the participants. James, in reference to his thirst for knowledge, described having ‘no choice. It was not something I made a conscious decision about. I was driven’ (17/652-654). It was these words which were chosen to capture this interpretation, which was shared by all the participants.

Following his SPT experience aged 9 years old, James described developing a passion for many things. In the moment of his transformation, ‘It was as if I had started to understand about art, and science, and love and sex and death and rebirth and music and God’ (2/44-46). It instigated a lifelong interest in learning. He recalled how ‘it felt like I got the knowledge, but then I forgot it as soon as I walked back out of it’ (2/66-70). Since then, James has been determined to go and find out what that was: ‘I’m still doing it now; I’m still coming across things now and being like “Yes - I remember that, I knew that, I remember something about that”’ (3/110-114). Again, reference to the ongoing sense-making process is alluded to here.

Bill also experienced a thirst for knowledge following his transformation. He reflected on his movement from ‘having no interest in learning’ to having ‘sort of developed this thirst for knowledge’ (8/307-309). He shared an example of this thirst being quenched when he happened to stumble across a building of significance to him following his SPT and his release from prison:

‘I was walking up the road and found the Brahma Kumaris (BK) spiritual university. I was like ‘Ok well I wanted to find out about the spirit, and here’s a university. That’s handy!’ Went in - hair down to my shoulders ‘What do you know about meditation?’ She said, ‘We run a foundation course,’ and I said, ‘How much is that?’ She said it was free, and I was like, ‘Just as well because I haven’t got any money.’ So I took the course.’ (15/612-618)

Bill is referring to the BK, a world spiritual university, an organisation with the aim to offer ‘people of all backgrounds an opportunity to deepen their understanding of universal spiritual principles and learn a range of spiritual skills through a variety of educational programmes’
The impact of this discovery appeared to strengthen the positive effect the SPT had on Bill. After its influence had seemingly plateaued, Bill reported:

‘Finding the BK on my doorstep just went zooooom. I had plateaued a bit when I got to London, after the enlightenment in prison, and the BK…subsequently the enlightenment has got stronger.’ (15/618-621)

For Patrick, it was the drive to help himself and help others that surged. He said that following his SPT:

‘[I] found myself sitting in the GP’s room, and letting it all out, and freeing myself all the guilt and all the pain I was in.’ (2/74-76)

and

‘[I] found myself walking from my house to the [GP] surgery. Sat there. My doctor, who had a good relationship with me, [and I] said, ‘Help.” And from then on, I haven’t drank.’ (3/115-117)

Taking himself to the GP to ask for help was significant for Patrick. He had spoken at length about how alone he had been with his alcohol addiction for so long, and had then suddenly discovered the courage to ask for support. He explained how he was finally able ‘to free myself of all the guilt and all the pain’ (1/75). For Patrick, the word ‘responsibility’ seemed fitting when reflecting on his subsequent behaviour:

‘I do feel a responsibility to speak and share my story with others, because it gives other people hope, and I know it does because I work with these guys and girls on a regular basis. So I should do that. I should do that. I should do that. If I wouldn’t have done it. When I look back on reflection and think, “If I wouldn’t have felt the way I do, those people would not have come into contact with me; they could either be dead or still drinking”. So I’ve got to. This isn’t a gig for…I’ll be doing this til…” (8/292-296)

His words ‘I’ve got to’ again indicate the impression of being driven or completed. The word ‘forced’ comes to mind, yet it is not interpreted in this way, as a tedious obligation. Louise described it appositely during her interview when I checked with her whether the word
‘responsibility’ was what she meant when talking about her forging of positive connections with others. Our exchange demonstrates her process of clarifying what she meant about her feeling of acceptance:

‘India: So it came with a responsibility.
Louise: Yes, but in a way that feels different. I think the responsibility and the term ‘responsibility’ feels fairly frightening, you know, responsibility to write a thesis, and it’s not that. For me, it’s a joyful acceptance that there is endless amounts, and in giving that to a client or a stranger you just meet momentarily.’ (11-12/477-488)

The participants’ sensitivity to words is clear to see here. An authenticity for the language they apply is continually sought: a joyful responsibility - the feeling and the action are linked to the illumination of meaning and purpose for participants. Their purpose became known, and it was synonymously linked to their seeking a connection to others.

Sub-theme: ‘The more I help other people, the more it helps me’

In building further on the previous theme, a key aspect of the participants’ drive to take action was their desire to help others. This, in turn, appeared to help them. Elisabeth described how she discovered an energy in connecting with others: ‘I found it is not only are you energised in your life, personal and work, but when you are energised to reach out to the world in bigger ways’ (16/676-680). A movement towards a greater wholeness is implied again here.

James finds himself regularly recounting his story as part of his job:

‘And people come here in teams, and I meet them and greet them and talk about, my story, is how I landed here, and my transformation from getting here, is kind of like it epitomises what [the charity] is about. It is very extreme, my story, but it really, people appreciate it because they are kind of like ‘Wow!’ (9/331-336)

The participants experience the awe and wonder of their experience, as do those who have the opportunity to hear their stories of change.
Bill used to live, prior to his SPT, by the mission statement inspired by singer Jim Morrison: ‘Live your life hard and fast, die young, and leave a good looking corpse.’ When asked what his mission statement would be now, he offered this response:

‘Self-service through world service; the bottom line is coming back to what I was talking about with volunteering. I found that when I started doing things for others, it brought a huge benefit to me.’ (16/669-672)

Gaining the relevant qualifications and assuming roles of responsibility was an experience shared among the participants. Patrick found that ‘every single day, I felt compelled to help others. I went and got my qualification straight away. Went and did voluntary work. When I felt ready went for my first job, I got it’ (8/284-286). Firelight also connected his SPT experience with the connection and impact it has on others: ‘So we overcome some kind of difficulty in our lives which has effects on those who we come into contact, albeit tacit. If you are more open, people are naturally drawn to that’ (8/327-330). This key aspect of the participants’ accounts offers an insight into a shift from the egocentric conceptualisation of self to the forging of connections with others. The self of the participants seemingly became larger and more fulfilled when they began seeking a kinship with others and the wider world. Their worldview and sense of self is contingent upon their engagement with others. What appeared to result was the strengthening of their own positivity.

**Embodied interpretation of master theme four**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of checking resonance:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation implies an application of a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The felt-sense quality does not feel like a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of being driven to it, not forced but feels like no choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did I get here? How did I get to be doing this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A compulsion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsion to action?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action implies process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it to act?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act implies behaviour - resonates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compelled?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compelled to act?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master Theme Five: Attempting to capture the ineffable quality

Whilst conducting each interview, I witnessed the participants, at points, struggle to find the words to capture accurately the transformation experience and its impact. Throughout the discussion of each master theme so far, this experience of the participants has been repeatedly reported. Firelight found himself, more than once, trying to tell me what it was he wanted to share, but he was finding it hard to find the right words. He reflected on his process of trying to find the words: ‘See? Again, I know it exactly right, but it’s getting the word to fit the feeling the experience, the recollection’ (Firelight; 1/18-24).

The fifth master theme I therefore identified is entitled attempting to capture the ineffable quality. I identified two related sub-themes: ‘mere words just fall short’ and ‘I don’t know how to describe it other than I feel it.’ Table 6 provides a summary illustration of how these themes are grounded in the participant data.
Table 6. Master theme five and related sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme: ‘Mere words just fall short’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putting their SPT experiences into words was difficult at times for all the participants recounting their stories: ‘It is difficult to describe that sensation of awe’ (Elisabeth; 8/317-318). Part of the process of sense-making appeared to be an acceptance of this impossibility to completely and precisely capture the nature of an SPT in its all complexity and wonder. James expressed this explicitly when he said, ‘Mere words fall short when trying to express this part of my life’ (16/619). I chose his words to title this sub-theme.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Patrick, on several occasions during his interview, simply found himself saying, ‘I don’t know’ (1/41; 3/89; 3/92). It appeared as though he had to acknowledge what he did not know, rather than attempt to seek words to fit what he was unsure of. Louise, who often referred to a sense of knowing after her SPT, also implied the challenge of trying to seek my understanding of it. She said, ‘And just having a…it’s really hard to describe…an absolute knowing that it was done…does that make sense?’ (Louise, 3/125-126). Her question, ‘Does that make sense?’, highlights the importance to Louise of others truly understanding and grasping her perspective. She went on to say that ‘when I am saying it, I suppose it is still important that people understand, that they don’t get confused about what it meant, or about
what I am trying to say it is’ (17/692-695). The notion of protection is implied again. There is a sense of the importance of gaining the listener’s understanding when sharing with them the SPT moment and the impact of it. However, when participants themselves are unable to fully comprehend the experience, how easy will it be for others to understand? Can those who have experienced sudden, positive, and dramatic change articulate their felt sense of awe and disbelief, as has been characterised here, to those who wish to hear? Louise described to me an image of herself in the future, which evocatively and honestly communicated her sense of knowing that ‘it’s OK’ (18/767):

‘I have a vision, I am there and it’s me and when I see the vision, I see myself from the side, and I am in, and I’m out of it, like I’m here, but I’m there, and I have long grey wiry hair, and it’s in a ponytail, and I am wearing a blue old jumper, and all I’m looking out to is fields, and I’m holding a warm mug of something, and I’m drinking it, sipping it whilst holding it up toward my mouth, you know, how you hold it here, and the wind is blowing through my hair, and I feel absolute knowing that I have had a life well spent, and I have had that since the moment it happened, and it never changes, the vision never changes, and it’s not that I’m with anyone, but it’s that I know that it’s OK.’ (18/756-767)

I also want to note how retention of the authenticity of the experience appeared a particularly important element for James, who commented on the importance of not labelling the experience simply for the sake of it, as the following quotation draws attention to: ‘I am very mindful that I don’t want to make things up’ (James; 8/407-408). The words have to be right, or not used at all. Patrick often answered, ‘I don’t know.’ This appeared as a genuine and entirely accurate response when trying to make sense and come to terms with the experience. In James’ case, and similarly with his fellow participants, other ways of seeking to describe their SPT experience came to the fore, as the final sub-theme explores.

**Sub-theme: ‘I don’t know how to describe it other than I feel it’**

Louise, when talking about the location of the voice that spoke to her in the moment of her SPT, to which she so often returns, premised her description by saying, ‘I don’t know how to describe that other than I feel it’ (8/350-353). I chose her words to fit this sub-theme, as Louise, along with all the other participants, attempted to use alternative methods of explaining their experience in a bid to aid my understanding. Her words were taken to capture
the experience of having a feeling much more than words can say. Louise went on to say, ‘The voice kind of...the feeling of the voice...starts somewhere above the solar plexus and finishes somewhere near my throat.’ I observed Louise pinpoint the location on her body as she recounted the moment she heard the voice speak to her.

James referred to his SPT as a ‘thing’ (8/296), implying that it is an experience which one need not, or cannot give a specific name to. For James, the sense that he did not wish to label his SPT specifically appeared to exist. Instead, his reference to the experience as a thing in all its unclear fuzziness felt apt.

In the discussion of the theme ‘it’s always there’, it was highlighted how Firelight referred to the abiding presence of the felt sense of his SPT experience on a number of occasions, often calling on it for guidance. He recalled a moment doing this whilst conducting a meditation class, when someone asked him a question. He reflected that they had said, ‘Oh what about blah?’ and his response, ‘I often have to go, “Hold on and let me just see if anything responds”’ (Firelight, 9/359-363). It seems to me that Firelight actively asks his body, ‘How am I now?’ The abiding place in which the legacy of this SPT is located provides him with his authentic responses. I experienced him as nothing other than utterly authentic.

Living through the difficulty of trying to attribute appropriate words to their experience led to many of the participants using alternative methods to seek my understanding. This included the identification of the physical locality of the legacy of their SPT, or an image which better captured the impact of their experience. Firelight referred to the aliveness and energy which still exists with his SPT experience:

‘Now what came with that, at the same instance, was really amazing. Again, funnily enough, it’s the feeling that accompanied that. What came with that was the peace that passes all understanding. Very vibrant - it’s not dead at all; it’s just the opposite, very vibrant, but the energy isn’t, it doesn’t dissipate. It stays as a vibrant entity. That white robe, now, I’ve always got it now. But what’s really interesting...it is made of unbleached wool...I’m describing it as I feel it now: it’s a bit coarse; it’s a very fine weave.’ (4/147-157)
He described the vibrancy with which he feels the impact of his SPT and one which remains constant. It is not dead. Patrick spoke directly about the physical relief he felt following his SPT and the way in which his body felt suddenly active:

‘But I just found myself speaking with God, and as soon as I did, I asked him for help, and as soon as the prayer ended, I felt a weight just leave my shoulders, as if something had been taken away.’ (1/24-27)

And later, he commented, ‘I just felt so much lighter. I felt as if I could jog, I felt that light. I felt free’ (2/56). He felt lighter. No longer weighed down, he became mobilised. His action was jogging. He was going somewhere, and was no longer static or stationary. Elisabeth too tried to capture the feeling of a weight suddenly lifting, using an image in order to describe it best:

‘I had that thought, and it was as if time stood still, but in that [moment] my whole body shifted, and the sensation was a weight snapping free from my body. It was roughly 60 pounds. And it was a weight I didn’t even realise that I had been carrying. I don’t really know how to describe that sensation, but if you think about a weight lifting, but you had not even been aware that it had been on you. Maybe like if you are walking out of water, and you walk up on shore, but you didn’t really realise because you had been in the water so long.’ (6/227-237)

Elisabeth quantified the weight. It felt like 60 pounds of heavy load had been lifted from her. She was adrift at sea. Finding her feet on the sea floor, she walked out onto land, finding the stability with which she had been without for so long.

Interestingly, Bill also used an image related to the water, as a way to explain how he felt his SPT had changed him;

‘If I think back to those times leading up to prison, my lifestyle and those last couple of years leading up to jail, hitting rock bottom. I like imagery, and the image that is in my mind is of this deep sea diver trudging through the weeds, and the murk at the bottom of the ocean, in the darkness. That’s what life’s like: it’s just a struggle, it’s such an effort to place one foot in front of the other, nothing seems to work, everything is going against me, and then this sort of
turning point, where this realisation I don’t need to carry on, I don’t need to do this, there is another way you know. And then sort of releasing the weight, the baggage, the belt...almost like that drops away, and you kind of pull your feet out of the lead boots, and you are actually starting to rise up. There’s something happening here, and you throw up off the big chest plate, and eventually, and as you do that sort of moving further towards the light, towards the surface, and the final moment you take that last big step, and you take the helmet off and then sssss you burst out, and you are in the light, you know, wow, different. So that is very much...it’s an image that I look back.’ (10/413-432)

Feeling the weight of the ‘baggage’, Bill had been forced to trudge his way forward through life. The word ‘trudging’ suggests a struggle, of feeling the effort of each step taken. Gradually, those things weighing him down began to withdraw from him. Just as a deep sea diver might, no longer weighed down by the weight of his/her diving equipment, Bill rose to the surface. The image of breaking through the surface of the water and being bathed in the light was a relief for him. Bill experienced ‘light’ in both senses of the word. He no longer dragged his heavy feet, at the same as he suddenly saw the light, and was away from the darkness.

**Embodied interpretation of master theme five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process of checking resonance:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is physically felt, but why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words cannot capture it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an ineffable quality, indescribable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sharing?**
| Suggests it comes easily but communicating it is the problem? |
| Even capturing it appears difficult |
| An attempt to capture? |
| Attempting to capture the ineffable experience |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wording of theme following application of IPA stages</th>
<th>Evolution of theme label via resonance process</th>
<th>Finalised wording of theme following embodied interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The physical</td>
<td>Sharing an</td>
<td>Attempting to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

115
This chapter has presented the findings of the IPA and embodied interpretation. The next chapter will discuss the significance and implications of the findings in reference to the area of study and the qualitative research methodology more broadly.
‘James’

It’s difficult to explain

Nine years old, sneaking into Joe’s bedroom
Picking up the album
From the opening bar…bam bam bam
Wow, what was that?

I put it back on again
Nothing like the first time
I am wrapped in pink silk
Caressed, loved, I feel safe
Special

Still trying to make sense of it now you see

I had to know, I had no choice
Started to understand, absorbed into everything
Art, and science, and love and sex and death and rebirth and music and God.

It’s difficult to explain

I never forget it
Forty-five years…I listen to it through headphones
Goosebumps
Cemented
This experience was real
This is not just sounds, not just music
It still feels very deep

Still trying to make sense of it now you see
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings in relation to the existing literature, drawing attention to the prevailing convergences and divergences that are present. The concept of ‘re-authoring’ is drawn from narrative therapy and offered as one way in which to understand the participants’ sense-making process as posed in research question one. In the discussion of research question two, an exploration of the relationality to others following the participants’ transformation is informed by Freeman’s (2014) perspective on the priority of others in our lives. Rogers’ (1971) concept of the fully functioning person is also implicated. Given that the central thrust of this research study pertains to the exploration of an applied methodology to find ‘the words that work’, a significant proportion of this chapter is centred on the discussion and evaluation of the methodological decision-making and outcomes evident within this research study. In effect, the first two research questions have developed, over the course of this research journey, to provide a context for a broader methodological discussion. An evaluation of the contribution of the integrated embodied interpretation and found poetry creation, the strengths and limitations of this research study, and future research recommendations are presented. The significance of the study and its potential translation into therapeutic practice is elucidated before the chapter is brought to a close by offering some final comments.

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Returning to the aims of the research

It may be useful to be reminded of the aims of this research study, including the research questions. Within this study, I aimed to explore the lived experience of six participants’ accounts of an SPT. Having experienced a life-altering epiphany myself, I was compelled to investigate how others, who also identified as having experienced a sudden, transformative change, made sense of it. With a view to gaining insight into what it actually feels like, and to understand how individuals made these experiences meaningful, I developed the following two research questions:

**Research Question One:** How do individuals make sense of their SPT experiences?
Research Question Two: How does a SPT impact the lives of those who have experienced them?

A third research question was also posed in response to my understanding that innovative qualitative research is required to attend to the aesthetic and the ontological aspects, as well as the integration of scientific knowledge. This aspect of the research endeavour has become increasingly central to this thesis, as the research findings emerged to provide a context for a broader discussion regarding the presentation of qualitative description. With that in mind, the following methodological research question was posed:

Research Question Three: How can qualitative research facilitate the expression of a lived experience which is considered as ‘more than words can say’?

The IPA and integrated embodied interpretation resulted in the identification of five master themes, each with two related sub-themes, which were presented in the previous chapter. The findings are now contextualised within the current literature.

Convergence and divergence: The research findings in relation to the existing literature

The findings from this research study reflect and/or further extend the existing research in the study of sudden and profound change. The SPT experiences described within this research study cohort appeared to correspond with the first kind of quantum change delineated by Miller and C’ de Baca (2001), namely, the mystical type. All of the research participants described their SPT experience in terms of the wonder and awe which they felt at the moment it occurred; this is congruent with the mystical type of change. Furthermore, the participants, as highlighted within the theme I was driven talked about there being no question about their transformation, and, for a significant number, there was ‘no choice’ (James, 17/652). The impact of a mystical type of change as described by Miller and C’ de Baca (2001) tends to be
an ‘enduring sense of peacefulness…the beginning of lasting and often pervasive changes in people’s lives...a significant alteration in how one perceives other people, the world, oneself and the relationships among them (pp. 20-21). Each of these aspects is reflected in the accounts of the participants who contributed to this study. Life paths were suddenly altered, new directions and an illuminated purpose prompted individuals to pursue goals which were endorsed by a dramatically renewed life perspective. More often than not, this involved an authentic and honest connection with other people, those known and unknown to them. Altruistic acts of helping others became central to many of the participants’ lives; in all cases, this was understood to further reinforce the positive impact of their own SPT experience. A sense of acceptance and peacefulness with oneself permeated each participant’s account, as they drew upon the distinctions between themselves both ‘before’ and ‘after’ the event.

Explanatory claims within the existing empirical literature propose that some experience of inner emotional turmoil often serves to anticipate the onset of SPT-like experiences (Jarvis, 1997; McDonald, 2005). Similarly, within the theoretical literature, painful emotion has been conceptualised as preceding epiphanies (Denzin, 1989) and posttraumatic growth (Tennen & Affleck, 1998). Expressions of ‘accelerated transformation’ have also been known to be facilitated via meditation practice, which reportedly enables access to a significant depth of emotional distress (Chodron, 2005). Within this study, five out of the six participants explicitly referred to a period of psychological distress, which existed prior to their transformative experience. Largely negative life experiences characterised by alcohol/drug addiction, interpersonal problems, and disordered eating behaviour patterns were described. However, as well as discontent being described at the level of a single behaviour (e.g. drinking), it was also witnessed at an existential level, in which the participants reported a dissatisfaction with their life and person more generally. However, the sudden and sweeping change which took place did not immediately change the circumstances in which the participants found themselves at that time. None of the participants suggested that life suddenly became perfect following their SPT, either immediately or later. As James said, he ‘still went into the family business’ (4/153), which was characterised by crime. He continued by saying, ‘Even though I felt like I was spiritually and intellectually changed to look that way instead of going that way [gestures], I was still not getting out of that’ (5/187). Change occurred ‘at a cellular level’ (Louise, 16/674). This suggests a transformation of the individual’s sense of self. Their self-conception (who I am) fundamentally changed. ‘Self’
makes up the most central of the concentric circles within Rockeach’s (1973) model of personality and may be considered useful here in attempting to understand such sudden but permanent reconfigurations of character. I conceptualise, as Miller and C’ de Baca (2001) have previously, that an enduring transformation would most likely emanate from change felt at the deepest level. It is perhaps unlikely that the occurrence of change in one of the more peripheral levels, such as beliefs or attitudes, would result in a ‘cellular’ felt sense of change in ‘self’, such as has been described by the participants of this study. However, this fundamental alteration of the person of the participants was shown to have a significant impact on what they considered important: their values, beliefs, and attitudes towards living. In turn, the participants’ newly informed values went on to shape their subsequent behaviour. As Rockeach’s (1973) model suggests, the more central elements, which contain an individual’s core personality, have considerable implications for those personality aspects that are located more peripherally.

Miller and C’ de Baca’s (1994, 2001) research on quantum change also supported the notion that psychological distress precedes, and therefore may facilitate, transformative experiences. However, 44% of their sample of respondents did not report any experience of distress prior to their transformation. In this study, James, whose SPT occurred at the age of 9 years old, was the only participant not to talk in direct reference to any difficulty he was experiencing at the time of his SPT. He indicated his experience of a ‘happy childhood’ (p. 12), though did report on the sensation that he could not recall much of his life before his transformation. However, this did not negate James’ articulation of a distinctive change that he underwent immediately following his SPT and that therefore appeared to separate his movement forward from his life before it happened. In the cases in which SPT experiences were reported to relate directly to difficult life events and the participants’ negative inner states, they were soothed as a result of the transformation. Moreover, for all the participants in this study, they were perceived as having been resolved.

**Discussion of research question one and two**

While interpretations of the experience varied, there were some salient aspects across the entire data corpus which emerged within the findings and that are worthy of discussion. In their study, Miller and C’ de Baca (2001) commented that ‘while many features of quantum
changes were similar, the meaning and interpretations given to them varied widely, guided in part by the persons prior conceptual framework’ (p. 29). Some of the participants interpreted their experience by using spiritual language and categories, and some did not. This highlights the essential point that transformation experiences become hermeneutical, leading individuals to interpret their meaning and impact in a variety of ways. All of the participants expressed the feeling of their experience in terms of being acted upon by something greater than themselves. Similar to the conception of the insightful type of change coined by Miller and C’ de Baca (2001), the experience was not remembered as an entirely wilful or volitional act. For most, the SPT appeared without thought and conscious control, presenting itself unlike most accounts of psychological change, which are understood as intentional and self-initiated (Prochaska, 2003; Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Louise identified the voice which spoke to her as familiar, but certainly not her own. Both Patrick and Elisabeth referred to a weight suddenly being lifted, which for both parties felt like ‘something had been taken away’ from them (Patrick, p. 1/27). James, over the course of many years of making sense of what happened to him, rested on his understanding that it was the vibration of the music which moved him.

Whilst Bill’s sense-making of the event appeared to suggest an element of self-initiated change, via his cycles of reflection whilst in prison, the overall tone of his account highlighted his experience as one of ‘enlightenment’ (8/347). A sequence of events, which Bill appeared to experience as being more than simply a coincidence, was captured when he said, rather sarcastically, ‘I was walking up the road and found the BK spiritual university. I was like, “Ok, well I wanted to find out about the spirit, and here’s a university. That’s handy!”’ (p. 14-15).

All of the participants alluded to the process of change as ongoing. This appeared mostly through the helping of others, which they saw as directly connected to their SPT experience, and the sharing of their transformation story with others. These two aspects appeared to consolidate and further heal the participants. For Firelight and Elisabeth, other smaller yet significant epiphany-like experiences followed over the years, which despite not being ‘these great huge ones which actually change our lives’ (p. 3/116-117), still served to create a further change in their lives.
Narrative therapy, in its re-authoring version, was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s by White and Epston (1990). One of the key considerations within their world was how stories shape individual identities. Contrary to the commonly held view that motivation for change is a process of firstly acknowledging a problem and then taking action (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986), proponents of narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) postulate that transformative change in therapy results from the intentional exploration of alternative life stories. The concept of re-authoring conversations in narrative therapy is translated into practice as a technique in which to move clients away from ‘problem-saturated stories’, and instead assist them to re-script their lives to bring about enduring personality change and healing. All the participants in the study contributed to the master theme titled ‘who I was, what happened, who I am now’. One way in which they appeared to make sense of their SPT was through the separation of their lives ‘before’ and ‘after’ the transformation event.

Participants reported a felt difference in their characters, in their bodies, and in their lives. This capacity to identify this novel felt sense and hence distinguish it from the past self appeared paramount. A reconceptualisation process of the previous self, the future self, and the change event which linked the two, aligns closely with a research study conducted by Goncalves, Matos, and Santos (2009) within the context of psychotherapy. They concluded that innovative moments in therapy are integral to the development of enduring psychological change because those that identify and describe such unique instances do so through engagement with meta-reflection: ‘a kind of meta-position over change . . . involv[ing] a reflexive position toward the change process—the person is not only an actor of that process but also its author’ (p. 12). The participants’ identities were overhauled, resulting in an entirely altered view of themselves. This process of sense-making appeared to reinforce the significance of their experience as a result.

Pennebaker and Beall (1997) repeatedly found that, in therapy, expressive writing supported positive health-related outcomes for a wide range of populations. This evidence suggests that narrative may play a vital role in organising and giving new meaning to experiences that may be associated with distress. Joseph and Linley (2005) commented on how ‘meaning as comprehensibility’ may not be as significant to growth as ‘meaning as significance.’ Central to the sense-making process for the participants was the recognition and acceptance that it was difficult to make sense of their SPT experience. For some, this extended towards the appreciation that it was not imperative that they fully comprehend what happened, but instead they should take pleasure in the significance of it. Findings from this study support the notion
that processes of making sense as well as finding the worth and value in the context of the participants’ lives were vital and existed above and beyond the desire to completely comprehend the mechanisms of change which may have been at play. Searching for meaning, and finding meaning are essential processes in existential meaning-making. SPT experiences were made meaningful through the participants’ sense of coherence (reason for existence) and purpose (direction). The impact of the participants SPT’s on how they engaged in their lives and with others around them was an integral part of their healing and growth, and the development of existential meaning could be considered an important psychological construct in the promotion of wellbeing (Taylor, 2000).

In ancient Roman religion and myth, the god Janus was depicted as representing beginnings, gates, transitions, time, passages, and endings. He is portrayed as having two faces since he looks to both the future and the past. Some conceptions of PTG have imported the use of the Janus face in conceptualising such experiences (Maercker & Zoellner, 2004).

While the phrase ‘Janus-faced’ may be used colloquially to imply being ‘two-faced’ or deceitful, the original connotation associated with this two-headed god referred to new beginnings, as in the word ‘January’. Louise, James, Elisabeth, Bill, Patrick, and Firelight appeared to make sense of their SPT experience through the separation of their lives into the
temporal categories of before and after the SPT occurred. The participants are, as Janus was, ‘blessed with the necessity of facing in two directions at once’ (Arnold, 2003, p. 231). For the participants, experiences of psychological distress prior to their transformation are considered essential in the narrative of their lives. Movement away from a problem-saturated story is evident, but not forgotten. In making sense and strengthening the impact of their transformative change, they choose to stand at the threshold, looking both forward and back. Participants’ reconceptualisation process of the previous self, the future self, and the change event which links the two, allowed them the chance to integrate their life experience into a coherent whole. While their reconceptualisations may not be entirely comprehensible to them, it was of the utmost significance, and this was adequate enough: ‘That which before seemed dry and empty takes on a new light, a new meaning, a kind of perfect imperfection’ (Miller & C’ de Baca, 2001, p. 143).

The literature review included a presentation of the story of Victor Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist, and a survivor of the holocaust. His development of the therapeutic practice of logotherapy (meaning therapy through meaning) was based on the premise that human beings are motivated by a ‘will to meaning’ or an inner pull to find a meaning in life (1946/1985). Meaning can be found in all circumstances. In conducting an existential analysis, meaning in one’s life may be uncovered. Frankl (1985) emphasised that meaning can be discovered according to subjective and phenomenological experience, and within the context of therapy, may be facilitated via meaning-centred interventions. Consolidation of the participants’ new self was an ongoing process, one that was aided significantly through the participants’ illumination of purpose and change of direction in their lives. For all of the participants, this included the honest and authentic connection with others. The participants reported becoming compelled to help others. Psychologist Mark Freeman (2014) outlined his perspective on the thinking and living beyond the self, as one which does not argue for the dismissal or minimisation of the self, but for an increased openness to the experience of others.

The SPT experiences of the participants in this study appeared to induce a realisation that there may be something beyond their existence that, in some way, can guide and shape the remainder of their lives. For all the participants, this purpose was specifically bound to the accordance of priority to the Other. As illustrated in the theme ‘the more I help others, the more it helps me’, the self of the participants seemingly became larger following their SPT.
They felt evermore fulfilled when seeking a kinship with others and the wider world. Their worldview and sense of self became dependent on their engagement with others. This chimes with what Freeman stated: ‘Self is secondary; the Other comes first and is thus the primary source of meaning, value, and existential nourishment’ (p. 5). Moments which result in a disruption to our inward facing orientation make possible a shift towards a wholeness of self. The participants repeatedly referred to their actions of reaching out to the wider world, connecting to people, even if only momentarily. The participants’ descriptions of themselves seemed closely aligned to what Rogers (1974) called the fully functioning person and what Maslow referred to as self-actualisation (1970). A state of congruence is considered essential for the self-actualisation process to occur. The ‘ideal self’ (who you would like to be) becomes congruent with the individuals’ actual behaviour, and they are on the journey to becoming fully functioning, according to Rogers (1971). An openness to experience is listed as a key characteristic of the fully functioning person. Considered as the opposite to defensiveness, the person becomes increasingly able to listen to himself or herself and to experience what is going on internally. For participants in this study, development of trust in themselves and trust in the process of living as an experience was paramount; a willingness and confidence to experience fully the ups and downs of existence was embraced. This increased existential living, stemming from the discovery of existential meaning, manifested itself for participants via a fluidity in living. As a result of their experience, aspects of self emerged. Rather than experience being fitted into a pre-conceived structure of self, the self emerged from experience. The meaning-making process they subsequently applied gave the participants a psychological freedom to move in the direction of their choosing. More often than not, this was intimately linked with a relationality to others, which appeared to give rise to meaning for them, and offered the nourishment required to continue fuelling their positive growth.

Jerome Bruner (1990) made the case for making meaning a central construct within psychology. The research findings in this study provide support for both meaning-orientated research and the subsequent therapeutic applications. The third research question, related more broadly to the research pursuit, is considered next.

**Discussion of research question three**
A principal question for consideration throughout this study has been related to the nature of knowledge deemed relevant to inform therapeutic practice. Commentators have argued against the over reliance on predictive research as the exclusive basis for knowledge, which results in less attention being bestowed on the suitability of rich description to inform practice (Giacomini & Cook, 2000). This thesis began by considering the kind of knowledge this research study was intended to generate. As well as the intention to contribute propositional knowledge to the academic discourse related to the current psychological understanding of sudden and positive transformational change, I have also been explicit about the empowerment of experiential knowledge which this research also aimed to offer. An SPT is deemed to be a deeply emotional experience. The intention was to implement additional data analysis methods to make possible the translation of the evocative elements of the participants’ accounts into the writing, as well as to explore methods of presenting findings which are also intended to engage the audience at an emotional level. An alternative means of representation, through the creation of research poetry, was applied in a bid to enable the reader of this thesis the optimum opportunity to relate both emotionally and personally to the findings.

Whilst part of the participants’ sense-making and consolidation process following their SPT was defined by the integration of the experience via language, metaphor, and new patterns of thought and action, a sense of wonder and disbelief in relation to their SPT always remained. The acceptance and appreciation of the experience as one which can never be fully explained played a vital role in the emerging meaning of the experience. The SPT itself was considered to be miraculous or magical, and the participants repeatedly showed signs of struggling to find the words to do justice to the extent of the meaning of their personal change. In Illivitsky’s (2007) research study on SPT, the author briefly noted the great difficulty participants had when trying to arrive at an explanation for their change. This appeared to be responded to by her ‘prompting’ (p. 86) of the participants in the research interviews and a recommendation to future researchers to be mindful of this potential challenge. Similarly, Miller and C’ de Baca (2004) offered a fleeting insight into their observation of participants’ ‘difficult time expressing the experience in words’ (p. 457); however, they did not elaborate further on any exploration of this. This aspect of the participants’ experience, the struggle to find the ‘words that work’ when retelling and interpreting their SPT experience, developed to become one of the central focuses of this thesis, a seeking to investigate much further the
significance of such a tension within the lived experience of transformative change, an aspect which has not been examined elsewhere in the empirical literature.

Applying an embodied interpretation: Did the words work?

Wertz (2015) commented that phenomenological analysis utilises procedures which are systematic but not uniform. He encouraged ‘the unique talent, spontaneity, thoughtfulness, creativity, critical presence, collaborations and reflexivity of the researcher at every step’ (p. 93). This research study has presented one example of qualitative data analysis, which can be incorporated into more traditional analysis methods, and which specifically attends to the embodied interpretation of the research data. Embodied enquiry originated within the phenomenological tradition and is a practice which attends to the relationship between language and the living and experiencing body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In the beginning chapters of this thesis, a rationale for incorporating an embodied interpretation of qualitative research data was outlined. Research driven by a notion of care results in the seeking of words to reflect the lived experiences of participants in their richest form. The concern soon becomes one of aesthetics. In seeking to resolve this aesthetic tension, attendance to the researcher’s bodily response to the research data was understood as enabling movement towards a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under examination, as well as facilitation of the production of ‘words that work’ for the participant, author, and reader alike. At this point, it seems appropriate to question whether the process fulfilled these aims, and ultimately, whether it added any value to the way in which the master themes were labelled and therefore how they communicated the lived experience of an SPT.

The worked example offered in the methodology chapter highlighted a subtle change in the wording of one master theme: ‘purpose is disclosed’ became ‘illuminating purpose’. What, if any, are the differences between the resonant validity of these two labels? The word ‘disclose’ refers to making something known. This seems an appropriate word to describe the way in which the participants spoke about the meaning they applied to their experience both before and after their SPT. However, the word did not resonate for me. Why? When focusing on the word ‘disclosed’, a feeling of formality and stiffness enshrouded me. The word did not ignite a felt sense of the wonder and awe which I had felt during the pre-IPA stage of
focusing. The ‘aliveness’ embedded in the way the participants talked about their overwhelming sense of purpose coming to light remained in the process of developing a handle, which was finally recorded in the pre-IPA phase as ‘uncovering the purpose’. Furthermore, use of the present tense reflected the ongoing process of sense-making which participants referred to. This element was not captured by the label formerly assigned to this theme, and as result, it communicated a dispirited sensation which was detached from the texture of individual experience. The embodied interpretation resulted in preventing movement away from the richness of the participants’ narratives, moving instead closer to the living meaning which they applied to their SPT experience.

The fifth master theme moved through three stages of change by means of the resonance process. Crucially, the wording was finally modified from ‘sharing an insight…’ to ‘attempting to capture…’ the ineffable quality. This reflection of the participants’ experience of trying to find the words suitable to describe the impact of their transformation was deemed essential. The word ‘sharing’ indicated that the participants were already in possession of and yet could not communicate their sense-making. However, the issue for the participants was one of trying to ascertain their felt sense in the first place, in addition to finding the adequate language to describe it. The wording ‘attempting to capture’ was considered to reflect this accurately.

Not all the wordings of the themes were altered as a result of the embodied interpretation. The fact that the wording of one theme out of the five did not change as a result of the embodied interpretation highlights the capacity of IPA to generate evocative words which work sufficiently on their own. The theme labelled ‘making sense of what it is difficult to make sense of’ remained the same, as it generated a sufficient resonance when subjected to the embodied interpretation process. This may suggest that it is the ability of the researcher to apply IPA accurately and effectively which ultimately decides whether the analysis remains close to the experience or strays further away from an empathic and authentic qualitative description. As the saying goes, ‘A good workman should never blame his tools’. Smith et al. (2009) defined IPA on the grounds that it seeks to conduct the examination of human lived experience in a way which ‘enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms’ (p. 32). Furthermore, the analysis should seek to enlighten the reader (Smith, 2011). In seeking to
fulfil these aims, a reliance on the adeptness of the researcher to produce a thoughtful and engaging account of the phenomenon under their investigation is acknowledged as crucial in fulfilling this aim.

The wording of the two other master themes are noted to have also changed significantly from the label assigned to them following the IPA. Whilst word count restraints limit the extent to which the provision of details of how the analysis process was enacted for these themes, it is hoped that the worked example provided in this paper sheds sufficient light on how an embodied interpretation can be integrated into IPA and conducted in the practice of qualitative data analysis.

To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to integrate an embodied interpretation within IPA. Whilst this thesis has sought to highlight the potential for an embodied interpretation to ‘enliven’ the wording of themes as they emerge within an IPA of participant narratives, there is a potential for the process to be extended further. Explicitly following Todres’ (2007) four phases of ‘showing a qualitative phenomenon’ (p. 39) means these phases could be incorporated. This could include the translation of his concepts of ‘the informant’s task’ and ‘the interviewer’s task’ explicitly during the data generation stage in order to pay increased attention to the participants’ bodily sense of meaning from the outset (p. 36). In research interviews, the interviewer could seek to pay attention both to how the words are ‘working’ for the participant, as they talk, and to how the words work interactively between the participant and the researcher (Todres, 2008). The aim of the researcher would be to remain open to their own bodily sensations whilst also seeking to minimise the extent to which the participant’s connection with their own felt sense is obscured. It may be possible for the researcher to share, or check out the accuracy of the shared embodied experience with the participant. This may act to further facilitate the participant’s capacity to bring their felt sense into language. This strategy would, however, need to be implemented with care and conducted at a concordant level with the participant.

Furthermore, by employing an embodied approach and seeking to integrate it with IPA, it is possible that the tension between seeking to retain the richness and texture of individual
accounts at the same time as attempting to establish what is characteristic about the phenomenon under investigation is further soothed. As I have alluded to elsewhere, I agree with Todres’ (2007) concept of the ‘notion of care’: ‘care for our informants, care for the phenomena, care for how our own voice reveals, conceals and co-creates, and care for our readers’ (p. 42). Underneath my attempt to find an analytic procedure which produces the ‘words that work’ is a deep-felt consideration for the meaning represented in the accounts of individual research participants. Gendlin (1997) identified the body as the tool in which ‘to nourish’ the kind of language which may generate the empathic understanding of the reader and which I seek in order to respectfully connect the two. As with most qualitative description, the reader is considered best situated to evaluate the resonant validity. Gendlin (1997) described the reader, or understanding being, as implicated in both the logical and responsive order. I hope that readers might involve both their ‘head’ and ‘heart’ when engaged with this thesis. However, I am also reminded of a fruitful conversation with fellow IPA researchers who were very clear about their autonomy and ownership when applying their own interpretation to research findings. One cannot be told how to respond. Readers are invited to conclude whether it worked for them and can be asked to reflect on the extent to which the incorporation of an embodied interpretation to a traditionally applied IPA may serve to generate words which are not just logical but also responsive.

The process of sense-making requires standards that are still under debate (Todres, 2007). Within this research study, the lived body was also considered as an authentication device (Gendlin, 1997). The researcher’s body can be used as what Milloy (2010) called a ‘somatic compass’, drawing on felt senses and bodily responses to the narrative of participants in order to gain further insight into their experience. There is always ‘more’ to be said about any phenomenon placed at the centre of research. In the process of making sense of the participants’ sense-making, my bodily felt sense became a meaningful reference in my developing ownership of understanding. The modified process of focusing I applied served to verify whether words were evocative and coherent. The importance of bringing attention to the embodied self and to the personal, historical, and perceptible aspects of understanding has been highlighted. The emerging analysis was not an attempt to duplicate the participants’ meanings. Rather, through my own commitment to the double hermeneutic, I paid equal attention to my embodied experience and my emerging conceptualisation of the meaning of the SPT accounts. I was open to receive ‘something’ about the experiences of SPTs and relate
to them personally; seeking then to carry that ‘something’ forward in imaginative categories that go to the heart of the phenomenon. If the role of the researcher is one which aims to continue the conversation regarding a research interest, then the researcher should therefore encourage the use of words which are both structurally coherent and experientially resonant in order to carry the meaning forward into future exploration. The venture into the utility of found poetry aimed to build further on this notion.

**Developing the notion of finding the ‘words that work’: The value of found poetry**

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‘When reading the interview transcripts I have been struck time and time again by the sense of awe and wonder embedded in the words of the participants. I feel something when I read their words. Something I am so keen to convey to the reader.’ (Research journal entry)

‘When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates just as the beautiful captivates us’ (Gadamer, 1989, p. 484)

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At the beginning of each chapter, a found poem for each individual participant has been presented. The poems have purposefully not been presented consecutively within the findings chapter. It was intended that the analysis of the data be accompanied by a parallel presentation of the findings in the form of found poems that are dispersed throughout the thesis. The aim was to offer the reader the crucial opportunity to simultaneously engage responsively and rationally with the research throughout. Moreover, this style of presentation may offer the reader more space and time to notice, observe, and reflect on the impact of research poetry as they move through each chapter.

Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick (2014) reminded us that outside of the arts, poetry continues to occupy a marginal space and is still considered an unusual output. The cautions against incorporating poetry into research are plentiful. Piirto (2002) and Neilsen (2004) questioned the capabilities of the research poet and the often inferior poetry which, if considered within the literary arena, would not make the standard. Prendergast (2009) concisely captured a
concern I experienced when considering entering into the world of research poetry when he said, ‘In an empirical evidence-driven research world, to rely on openness, intuition, and an approach that privileges the itself-ness of things feels radical’ (p. 683). Despite the growing trend for research poetry, particularly in social justice-oriented research (Hanauer, 2014; Poindexter, 2013), researchers have not yet utilised found poetry to provide an insight into the lived experience of sudden transformational change. Similar to how counselling psychology advocates for the validity of first-person accounts of psychological distress, the construction and inclusion of the found poems act to advocate for the privileging of the itself-ness of things as Prendergast (2009) suggested.

It is important to consider how meaningful and/or useful such a representation of findings has been. Consistent with a hermeneutic of faith, the exploration into poetry and its ability to convey the richness which was sought enabled me to think with as opposed to about the participants. Is it possible that, unlike some research study write-ups in which the participants are spoken for, or words are used on them, I have been able to speak with them? Not only have I been able to listen in greater depth to the stories of the participants via the process of constructing the poems, but I was offered an opportunity to share the richness of experience with the reader. Poems should generate a visceral experience. These found poems are designed to invite the audience to experience, albeit for a moment, the actual lived experience of an SPT and its enduringly positive, wondrous, inspiring, magical impact. Faulkner (2007) stated that she was ‘tired of reading and listening to lousy poetry that masquerades as research and vice versa’ (p. 220). She offered her own assessment criteria, as did Laurel Richardson (2000), whose evaluative criteria for creative analytic practice include assessment of scientific and artistic elements, both of which resonate with the aims of this study. They also include; substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of a reality. Writing in a different genre does not automatically assume a more effective result, simply because of its novelty. ‘Does it offer a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience?’ Richardson (2000, p. 254) asked when devising her evaluative criteria for personal narrative papers. Anderson’s concept of efficacy validity hinges on whether the reading of the report fosters a compassion and depth of understanding about the self, the topic, or the world. The found poems offer a different window into the lived experiences of the research participants. Through the replication of the participants’ words, the central units of meanings, which have been conveyed through the developed thematic structure, were
retained. It is hoped that the six found poems produced in this study serve to ‘crystallise’ (Ellingson, 2009) the themes emergent in the IPA into an aesthetic and accessible form. Their creation alongside the IPA acts to further communicate the phenomenon, as well as offering the reader optimum freedom of interpretation of the topic under investigation.

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Writing in my research journal before the evening of a presentation to an IPA interest group about the development of my study, I write:

‘I feel nervous to share these poems. I have never written a poem before, and even though I have not written the words, the participants have, I feel so scared that they won’t somehow make the grade. I wonder why I feel like that? I feel like I have ventured into a territory I shouldn’t have. How do I know if the poems are good? What does good even mean in this context?’

The next day, I share my reflections after the presentation:

‘I read one of the poems. I almost choked up reading it out. The other people in the seminar said too that they were moved. Maybe it does work?! I asked the group whether they thought I should offer a commentary on each poem; where I was coming from and they firmly said no. To tell someone how they should have interpreted a poem seems absolutely wrong. So I won’t do that.’

***

Research which chooses to make use of poetic representation often takes the position that it should be able to speak for itself. However, some researchers who have incorporated found poetry within their work have offered a corresponding commentary to draw attention to the intention underlying the final construction of the poem. O’Connor (1997) made a convincing case for not talking too much about the process of constructing research poetry when she said, ‘If the poem does not succeed without these words, these words cannot succeed even with the poem. If I were you, I wouldn’t read them’ (p. 20). I decided to let the found poetry speak for itself. Within the principle of hermeneutics of the whole-the-parts-the whole, the found poems in this study represent the final understanding of the whole, the goal being to present the interpreted whole complete with the appropriated meaning of the narrated
phenomena. The decision not to offer a commentary on the meaning that was meant to be captured by each poetic narrative was also informed by the relationship between the poem and the experience of the reader conceived by Bakhtin (1982). He introduced the concept of ‘multivoicedness’, in which meaning resides in neither the speaker nor the receiver, but instead is created through the interaction between the two. As my colleagues at an IPA interest group confirmed, it is not possible to define how poetry should be interpreted.

I did, however, share the found poems with the participants. This was with the intention of empowering the participants to share in the meaning-making process. Poems were received positively, and their resonant validity was confirmed. The participants responded that they felt honoured, thrilled, and appreciative to have their own words reconstructed in this way. One participant observed how good it was to read their own words back, whilst another remarked on the power of the words and the ability of the poem to bring about a feeling of lightness and warmth. I felt pleased with these responses because they reinforced my intention not just to settle with the communication of propositional knowing but to consider how this can be turned into the possibility of experiential knowing as well (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994). Given that the participants were moved by the poems, perhaps understandably so, as they recognised their own words and hence their own experience, it would be interesting to share the poems with therapeutic practitioners and other mental health professionals, who may benefit from understanding the dimensions of transformative change described here in such qualitatively rich terms.

Further exploring the strengths and limitations of the study

Whilst the nature of psychological change, and its mechanisms has long been a focal point for psychological research, the examination of transformative change remains a relatively unexplored area within psychology. Even though there has been a developing conversation within the theoretical literature regarding sudden positive and profound change, a dearth of empirical studies still exists. The qualitative literature which has examined sudden and profound transformation has mostly sought to elucidate the antecedent and facilitative factors associated with this form of change.
The methodological approach of this research study was never to construe the data as inextricable from the findings, as may be advocated within the data-as-constructed line of argument (Sandelowski, 2004). Rather, the aim was to complement the IPA with further interpretative phases which ultimately sought to offer the kind of descriptions which may better equip the reader with an understanding of the lived experience of an SPT. The objective was to complement the phenomenological rigour of IPA’s ‘scientific concern’ with a ‘communicative concern’ (Todres & Holloway, 2004). I have argued for greater attention to be placed on the aesthetic dimension of phenomenological narrative structures as presented within qualitative research. However, this has not been at the expense of the researcher’s responsibility to interpret the data, as Sandelowski may propose (2004). I agree with Lawless (1992), who proposed that experimental methods of representation do not allow the researcher to abdicate from the role of observer and interpreter. IPA draws on conceptions from the hermeneutic tradition, which argues that all description constitutes some form of interpretation (Willig, 2013; Van Manen, 1990). My journeying into the hermeneutic circle is illuminated within this thesis and is prized for its availability to be subjected to other interpretations.

Employing the principles of both science and art, I have attempted to present the research findings of this study in a way that will engage the reader while potentially informing their conceptual utilisation of the topic under investigation. As Lomas (1997 cited in Estabrooks 2001) asserted, ‘Research must be translated into common knowledge by its purveyors before it will be taken up readily’ (pp. 291-292). Symbolic or conceptual utility is considered vital in order for practical use to occur. As Sandelowski (2004) explained, ‘Users develop the capacity to articulate the change experience and to translate it into more observable or material form’ (p. 1372). The way in which qualitative findings are perceived directly influences their usability. Artistic modes of reporting are considered least amenable for instrumental utility, as the concepts of findings or utility are not considered relevant among literary representations. The research findings within this study are considered to be ‘data-based’; they are composed of the interpretation applied by myself, as the researcher, from the data collected in the research interviews. The show of validity in this study has been to demonstrate how the findings are empirically anchored in the data generated. A considered strength of this study, then, is the use of direct quotations from individual participants to illustrate essential insights and interpretations to the reader and allow them ample opportunity
to ‘find personal meaning in the descriptions, and find themselves in the language’ (Todres & Galvin 2008, p 570).

By embracing the hermeneutic of faith, I have endeavoured not to fall victim to the ‘slicing, dicing and cutting out’ approach to analysis (Bochner, 2001, p. 141). Instead, I have sought to offer a ‘many voiced’ qualitative account (Koch & Harrington, 1998). I offer a tentative interpretation here, but it is not considered privileged. The found poems created from the words of the participants are provided alongside the analysis and are intended to further demonstrate the grounding of the emergent thematic analysis in the raw data. Moreover, they seek to enable the audience to hear directly from the participants themselves. Found poetry is also understood to involve an interpretive element. After all, I selected which sections and lines to make up each poem, and to some degree, the poems do represent the subjective experience of me as researcher; the reader only has access to that which I have chosen to report (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It is understood that the accounts presented in any qualitative research study will never be wholly complete (Holloway, 2005).

It could be argued that the small sample size in this study is a limitation, as it prevents the generalisability of the findings; however, this is not the intention of the idiographic commitment of IPA (Smith, 2004). Given that larger datasets can inhibit the time, reflection, and dialogue required in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2007), six concrete experiential accounts of an SPT experience were deemed appropriate to enable exploration to be conducted of the phenomenological meanings of such transformative change, to the level of depth required. In seeking to say something about the texture of each individual experience, I was required to stay mindful of each participant’s concrete experiences. My intention was to become present to the way in which ‘the thing’ was shown to me. Attention given to the nuances and idiosyncrasies within the sample is considered a hallmark of validity. Furthermore, the attention given to the elucidation of ‘contrary occurrences’ (Holloway, 2005, p. 273) among the data should go some way to recognising the potential for alternative interpretative accounts whilst ensuring that no interpretation is consequently invalidated (Webb & Kevern, 2001).
Member checks are not viewed as consistent within phenomenological approaches due to the opinion that if a description is deemed credible to the researcher who has written it, then it is considered valid. In IPA, member checking is not widely used. In accordance with the notion of care which has driven this project, interview transcripts and found poems were returned to the participants. This procedure was motivated by ethical reasons: to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the accounts and information they offered and to maintain an open dialogue with the participants throughout the research process. A detailed description of the audit trail has been included (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have attempted to clearly and coherently offer an explanation of how each stage of the research process was carried out. A formal external audit was not sought; however, research supervision was used as a space in which to share the developing interpretation of the data.

I enjoy sharing the story of my transformation with others; however, at the outset of the research process, I was hesitant to disclose details of my own epiphanic experience to the participants. My training as a counselling psychologist has taught me to minimise bringing my own agenda to the therapeutic relationship, and so, too, with the development of research relationships. Over time, and informed by the concept and importance of enacting a relational ethic (Ellis, 2009), I gradually became increasingly open and responsive to requests for sharing the motivation for this research topic and my own SPT. My subscription to the collaborative nature of the research process enabled me to embrace the building and nurturing of reciprocal relationships with the participants (Pillow, 2003), offering honest answers when invited to do so by questions from them.

Reflexivity made it possible to conduct an ongoing audit which sought to illuminate my decision making at each juncture, and hence, maximise the transparency of the research process. Some commentators may position me as an ‘insider’ in relation to the research topic. Despite personally positioning myself in the ‘space between’ the outsider and insider perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), I do not necessarily believe that an insider researcher is in either an advantageous or disadvantageous position when it comes to conducting qualitative research. However, locating oneself as such, or even as a researcher in the space between, does have implications for the type of research produced. It is possible that the participants made assumptions about the similarity in our experiences and therefore did not explain their personal experience as fully as they may have done in the presence of a
researcher who did not identify as having experienced an SPT. A different researcher may have generated alternative insights than the ones offered here. The account I have offered is not intended to be a definitive or generalisable ‘story’ of the experience of having an SPT; rather, it is offered as one account that tries to offer insights that have a communicative value.

IPA’s focus on cognition has commonly been seen as more closely affiliated to psychology than to phenomenology. Accusations of a ‘cognitive bias’ within sociology and psychology more broadly have led commentators to comment on researchers who ‘neglect the affective, visceral and subjective dimensions of experience’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 57). Specific to IPA, Murray and Holmes (2014) remarked on the risk of such a bias of the methodology ‘losing those elements that make a phenomenological analysis phenomenological’ (p. 18, emphasis in the original). Phenomenology attaches primacy to embodied experience in the sense-making process, and therefore requires the acceptance of understanding as never simply cognitive, but as eternally entangled with multiple inter-subjective and cultural contexts. If the role of the body is not considered within a phenomenological study, then it could be argued that a complete connection to the phenomena will not have been gained. I would argue that IPA in fact offers a critique of the notion of cognition being reduced to thought alone, and instead, connects more with the ‘developing field of embodied cognition’ conceptualising cognition as an ‘embodied, situated and inter-subjective process of meaning-making’ (Smith, 2011, p. 199). A chain of connection is conceptualised between embodied experience, talk in relation to that experience, and the making sense of and emotional reaction to that experience. It is on these grounds that this thesis has argued for the suitability of IPA to the embodied nature of understanding, alongside the cognitive dimensions of understanding, while simultaneously recognising the necessity of language to be used in powerful and evocative forms.

The significance of the research: Engagement with qualitative research findings for counselling psychology practice

Issues of knowing have been highlighted by the rise of qualitative research methods (Patton, 2005). Within psychotherapy research, and counselling psychology research more recently, analyses predicated on natural scientific assumptions have been criticised on the grounds of a
demonstrable reduction in the number of phenomena under investigation (Kvale, 1994, Lane & Corrie, 2006)

I believe that bodily and relational forms of understanding are paramount for competent, client-centred, and collaborative therapeutic practice. Bearing witness to another’s experience is one fundamental aspect of therapeutic practice that, in and of itself, offers a source of knowledge of a particular kind that is relevant to practice. Going further, I agree with Hobson (1985), who says that a ‘psychotherapist’s task is to assist in discovering a precise expression for personal feeling, for a felt-meaning in and between himself and his client’ (p. 28). Anderson (2002), in her eloquent portrayal of her own personal ascent into embodied writing, spoke about how the opposite, that is, disembodied writing, serves only to reinforce the object-subject division between ‘the world of our bodies and the world we inhabit’ (p. 41). It was she, amongst other prominent authors in the field of qualitative research methods, who brought to my attention how the lived body provides the intimacy necessary in order for knowledge to be applied as meaningful practice. As a result, I considered the potential of applying a fresh approach to qualitative data analysis.

Examination of how people experience positive change outside of the therapy room, whether it is characterised by a sudden or a gradual movement, is of use to those seeking to support people who want to change within the realms of psychological therapy. The field of counselling psychologists is heavily influenced by humanistic theories, and therefore, has long been interested in the endeavour to foster human growth and development. Although Carl Rogers (1957) conceived that self-actualisation is a universal growth tendency, we have relatively little understanding of how humans experience sudden and personal transformation and healing in their everyday lives. This study has advocated for the consideration of qualitative research findings as central to the education and training of counselling psychologists, and mental health professionals more broadly. Atkinson and Delamont (2006) assert that the process of abstraction and the formulation of theory are essential within qualitative research and that this can sometimes be overlooked as a result of the desire for innovation and the production of evocative work. However, in this study, the authenticity of qualitative description or interpretation is valued on the grounds that it may deepen personal insight in the audience. Brinkmann (2013) referred to his own process when set amongst the
task of reviewing qualitative research manuscripts. He begins with Plato’s tripartite structure of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Translated into a series of virtues, Brinkmann (2013) drew on the work of Pelias (200) to demonstrate the importance of the aesthetic virtue:

‘Science is the act of looking at a tree and seeing lumber. Poetry is the act of looking at a tree and seeing a tree.” (Pelias, 200, p. 9). If we want to understand trees rather than lumber, poetry, as an aesthetic practice, can be as precise as science. The poet, therefore, might in certain cases really be the one who can see the world clearly as it is, whereas “scientific” perspectives risk reducing the phenomena to something else, or instrumentalising them’ (p. 157)

A concern that a thin pattern of knowing takes the place of a more detailed thinking further into the thickness of living that is ‘the alive, changing, unique and context bound circumstances of practice situations’ (Todres, 2010, p. 3) has been at the centre of the argument of some commentators who share the concern that therapy in the United Kingdom is in danger of losing its way (Dryden 2003). Flyvberg (2006) proposed that what is common to all experts is their operation based upon intimate knowledge. Yet, the profession has been subjected to increasing regulation and proceduralisation. The concern that such a narrow definition of what constitutes evidence to inform EBP may result in the ingredients which ‘work’ being in danger of being lost.

As theoreticians, psychologists, therapists, counsellors, consultants, and designers of mental health services and educational training, we can make use of those qualitative research studies which promote the opportunity to develop experiential knowledge to better understand the lived experience of humans and to promote the welfare of clients across diverse social contexts. The notion of the Janus head is relevant again here. I advocate that the epistemological debate over how it is we know loses strength when scientific methods in western culture are considered exclusively suitable for the basis of psychological knowledge. This prevailing discourse as the only acceptable format for 'truth' is viewed as inappropriate and dangerous. The symbol of the Janus head represents a commitment to the respect and openness of a pluralistic approach to research evidence (Hanley & Winter, 2015), in which
various manifestations of truth in the human experience are fostered through diverse expressions of qualitative description (McLeod, 2014).

It is hoped that the accounts captured within this research study go some way to normalise the experience of sudden and profound change within the wider community. Amazing examples of change exist! With this in mind, the question of whether it is therefore possible for therapists to facilitate such dramatic transformations might arise. Quantum change, as it is articulated by Miller and C’ de Baca, is, by definition, surprising. Therefore, it appears unlikely that therapists will discover a way in which change such as this could be induced. Indeed, the ethical implications of seeking to do so would be questioned (Chilton, 2015). A better question might be, as Bien (2004) posed: ‘Are there things therapists can do that may create the proper climate to allow for his kind of change to occur? (p. 495). Two implications of this research for therapeutic practice are identified.

**Story telling as healing**

Many of the participants commented on the positive feeling gained from having opened up in depth about their SPT experience in the research interview. Whilst, for some, the nature of their job role invites them to share their change story often, for others, this was a unique opportunity to have someone to listen to the account of their experience. Following the interview with Patrick, the following exchange took place:

‘Patrick: It’s been nice to…it’s been quite emotional this morning. I wasn’t expecting that. I haven’t revisited it as closely really, so it’s been emotional in a good way, it’s been quite good.

India: Something about having the chance to retell your story?

Patrick: I feel different now inside as I did when we first started talking. I feel very warm. I feel lovely. I can’t explain it. I feel even more at peace. It’s amazing I have never been in touch with…I would run away from feeling...so to be able to do this is amazing. Beautiful.’

(9/10-357-369)
Braud and Anderson (1998) commented on how the interaction in a research interview is aimed at collecting novel information that can contribute to the progression of the researcher’s discipline. However, a research session is also characterised by the invitation extended to participants to engage with an opportunity to learn more about themselves, perhaps to continue an integration and accommodation of significant life events into the grand narrative of their lives. The same could be said for psychological therapy, and in particular, it strikes a chord with the principles of narrative therapy discussed earlier.

Personal stories offer an insider perspective, illuminating meaning that in itself can be a source of healing, and providing a means by which individuals do not just tell their story, but ‘relive’ it. This has been a significant finding in this study and has important implications for therapeutic practice. As Braud and Anderson (1998) state: ‘The opportunity to tell one’s story and to speak one’s own voice has healing power’ (p. 43). Despite the foundation of counselling psychology being built upon the emphasis away from pathology and problems, and towards the creativity and the potential of human beings to move towards growth, within the wider European psychology and psychotherapy movement, a degree of scepticism towards the striking claims related to epiphanies, or ‘quick fixes’, has been evident (Fletcher, 2008). Jaregui (2003) described the term ‘epiphany’ as a thunderclap of a word. She proposed that

‘An epiphany is supported by almost nothing on the street. The transcendent experience that seems truer than anything has ever seemed before will not be believed by this world. We hedge. “If we speak of it”, we say, “I will expose it to ridicule, or diagnosis, or, worst of all the realm of the ordinary. If I don’t speak of, it will be hidden away, by me and from me.”’ (p. xxv)

Jaregui (2003) used the image of tending the garden when considering how one might counsel someone who has had experienced such a transformative change as described in this study. What has been illuminated here is that the experience of an SPT appeared to open participants’ eyes to their possession of everything they already needed but were not aware they had within them. It is possible that within therapy, tending to transformation moments
experienced in clients’ lives may facilitate their recognition of inherent resources of strength. In doing so, this may provide the conditions necessary for healing to occur.

**Finding the words that work in therapy**

The approach towards data analysis undertaken in this study was viewed as a fusion of the participants and me, engaged in a double hermeneutic which inevitably produces an analysis originating within the realm of a fusion of understanding (Gadamer, 1989). This can be mirrored in the therapeutic practice of a counselling psychologist. Personifying a phenomenological perspective practice means that the practitioner is not simply listening or observing, but is receptive to the impact of the experience. An allegiance to this way of working would indicate a process which is more holistic than simply theoretical. The activity of the therapist is not merely theoretically informed but grounded in the felt participation of the emerging experience. In this way, the client experiences movement away from the smaller space of isolation towards the relational space of ‘between’.

In the research interviews conducted in this study, the participants were observed to ‘check in’ with their bodies in order to find adequate words to describe their experience. My own use of focusing during data analysis encouraged me to listen to my felt sense and welcome what came as a result. Talking therapy may typically be predicted to be an energised conversation between two people; however, anyone with experience of counselling or psychotherapy will know that this is not always the case. The words do not always come. The bodily felt sense, as it has been used in this research study, is also used in therapy (Gendlin, 1984). The method of focusing is used to enter into a special kind of awareness that is turned inward and centred on the body’s inner sensations. Just as the participants in this study did, a therapy client, too, is likely to find themselves seeking to put words to the ‘unclear, fuzzy, murky “something there”’ (p. 77). Gendlin (1984) would argue that the process of change is not instigated through recognisable feeling, but rather from the unclear inward oriented sense of more than words can say. He offered an example of therapy dialogue which demonstrates attention to the felt sense;

‘Client: (silence)... (breath)..., feels sort of heavy.... like it wants to stay angry...
Therapist: something there wants to stay angry.

Client: Mhm... (silence)... Oh (breath)... yah... if I stop being angry I won't do anything about it... yes... I'd love to just say it's OK and not have to cope with the situation. I've done that so often.’ (p. 78)

It is clear that these steps of change did not come directly from the feeling of anger. The ‘heavy’ quality of the felt sense described by the client is what appears to aid his progression. The method of focusing appears to have the potential to transform talking. Gendlin (1997) was clear that a handle for any felt sense may not come in the form of words necessarily, but may be more appropriately represented by an image. All of the participants in this study offered visual representations of their SPT and its impact. Images of walking out of water or freeing oneself from heavy loads were particularly salient.

**Recommendations for further research**

All the participants in this research study reported the overwhelmingly positive effects of their SPT. In other studies, SPT experiences that were deemed negative have been reported, albeit they represent a significant minority. Further research on examples of sudden and profound negative transformation may contribute further to the understanding of the impact of trauma. This study has highlighted how research itself can contribute to therapeutic effects and healing. Consideration of this growth potential may facilitate an expansion of research into the positive effects which can result from trauma. It may offer an opportunity to demonstrate how personal narratives can be used to promote growth in the context of concrete conversation. Participant involvement in research has the capacity to reinforce and embed transformational change. Life story interview approaches in particular may offer maximum potential for this to occur.

Embodied interpretation has been developed in response to a growing trend towards an aesthetic phenomenology which aims to ‘carry forward’ the meaning of a phenomenon in all its complexity and texture. A novel integration and application of data analysis methods has been demonstrated in this research study. This has been shown particularly to enhance the analysis and representation of lived experience which is considered to be ‘more than words can say’. Research which seeks to further develop the use of embodied interpretation and IPA
is encouraged. Incorporation of explicit embodied research practice from the outset may act to further facilitate the participants’ capacity to bring their felt sense into language. In particular, the facilitation of embodied responses within the data collection process could be an interesting area for development.

**Final words**

I set out at the start of the research process with the intention to explore six accounts of sudden and personal transformation and to discover how those who have a lived experience of such a profound change have made sense of it. I completed this research having gained a deeper knowledge of the experience of positive and enduring change. The research findings which have emerged in this study have both supported and extended notions existent in the current literature, which were presented in the literature review.

According to Todres and Wheeler (2001), the methodological status of phenomenological hermeneutic research ‘is progressive but always on the way’ (p. 4). This study set out to speak truthfully about an experience, rather than seeking to arrive at the truth (Farber, 2000). It has been a study of discovery, and so has resulted in the generation of further questions with regard to experiences of transformative change and the pursuit of qualitative research. As Rapport and colleagues (2004) cautioned, in a climate where therapeutic practice and policy is determined by the outcomes of RCTs, situating one’s self in research at the ‘edgelands’ is not without danger (p. 38). However, if the aim is to refocus the ‘understanding of what it is to be fully human; the reuniting of technical and humanistic knowledge and practice the metaphorical edgelands is probably the place to do it’ (Rapport et al., 2004, p. 6).

As qualitative researchers, we should consider moving from the well-trodden territory to the edgelands in order to develop a new interface of qualitative research between new and established methods. In doing this, we may find ourselves developing methodologies which stumble on the unexpected and make possible the recognition of original insight. The experience of conducting qualitative research has the potential to be a unique version of a sudden and personal transformation experience itself.
This chapter has aimed to provide a discussion of the research findings in relation to the existing literature, as well as the methodological implications of the study for both qualitative research and therapeutic practice. The identified strengths and weaknesses of the study serve to highlight those characteristics of the study design that affected or influenced the interpretation of the findings in this study. In the spirit of extending this critical lens, the next chapter provides an insight into my experience as the researcher in this study and takes the form of a research report. This reflexive component is designed to further contribute to the transparency of the research by contextualising the research process as it evolved, as well as by providing a commentary on my personal journey through the design, conduct, and analysis of this project.
‘Bill’

Discontent
Beyond Caring
Take, take, take, take
Live life hard and fast
Self-destructive rebellion
A downward slippery slope
An unsustainable chaotic existence
Taken out of the experience and put in a concrete box

After counting the tiles twenty times, what else can you do but think?

We all have the answers, it’s whether you choose to listen
I start reflecting, A space to change
No choice but to listen
Feet out of lead boots
The more I give
Fulfilment
Reward
Chapter Six: Research Report: Reflecting on ‘the space between’

One way to deconstruct my writing or researcher identity is through an examination of myself. Stories of the self allow for the observation of the elements in our researcher lives that shape our identity. This research emerged partly from my own personal experience and from a desire to share and amplify my experience through study of the change experience of others. That was an attractive prospect. Reading Anderson and Braud’s (1998) book ‘Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: honouring human experience’, in which they consider the motivation for conducting research, I resonated with the aspiration to conduct research in the ‘service of wonder’ (p. 53). I wanted to discover.

As has already been acknowledged, the worldview and background of any researcher affects the way in which he or she poses research questions and understands the information generated by research participants. Just as an interviewer who had lost her father could use the lens of the experience in making sense of stories of bereaved individuals (Valentine, 2007), I was driven to research this topic of transformative change because of own personal epiphanic experience. As discussed in the previous chapter, I identify myself neither as an ‘insider’ nor as an ‘outsider researcher’, but instead, occupy some ‘space in between’, hence the title of this chapter. However, I agree with Horsburghs’ (2003, p. 308) definition of reflexivity as an ‘active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation’. I am aware that my position has the potential to both assist and hinder the co-construction of meaning in this study (Lietz et al., 2006).

‘I had an epiphany.’

‘I am a researcher.’

The boundaries of these identities converged and blurred and dispersed throughout my time writing this research. In the spirit of making accessible as many ways of knowing as is possible, this research report aims to provide an ‘impressionistic sketch’ of my research
experiences so that the reader may fill in the gaps. The contents of the four bracketing interviews in which I participated are used as evidence of my personal experience at various junctures of this research endeavour.

My emotional investment in the study could be perceived in more than one way. It is possible that the element of the ‘shared experience’ between myself and the participants meant that I was better equipped with insights and an ability to understand any implied content they might have shared. My resonance may have helped me to lean gently into the experiences of others for a deeper understanding.

At times during the data generation phase, I reflected on my apparent sensitivity to certain dimensions of the participants’ narrative accounts. In the bracketing interview conducted following the research interview with Louise, I recorded my reaction to the time spent with her:

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‘It was like the comprehension of my own experience just expanded during that interview. I felt like I knew exactly what she was saying or at times trying to say. At so many points I wanted to stop her and follow up on something but before I could do that there was something else. Time and time again this kept happening. I feel the need question this though-how can I simply accept that I ‘got it’- how do I know if I did?’

(Bracketing interview)

‘There is no self-understanding without other-understanding (Fay, 1996, p. 24)

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Awareness of the risks associated with the aforementioned benefits of our shared experience was ever present throughout the research process. The extent to which I imposed my own values and perceptions onto the research was continually questioned (Drake, 2010). In seeking to stay mindful not to confuse my experience with theirs, I implemented a similar
attitude as the one I might embody within my therapeutic practice, that is, of monitoring transference responses.

The four bracketing interviews captured the account of my emotional journey as a researcher, moving from the experience of apprehensiveness and excitement, to ambivalence and doubt, and finally, towards an acceptance of the complexity and my desire ‘not to present answers but attempt to capture something of the mess’ (Finlay, 2011, p. 244). My inclusion of excerpts from bracketing interviews serves to evidence some of these themes.

In the first bracketing interview, I begin to elucidate some of my expectations of the research process to come:

‘I suppose I feel like it’s my hope as well that it will match mine. Not just an expectation, but a hope. It feels important to acknowledge that. I want their experience to be close to mine, I want to share that with them. Am I really ready to be met with the differences? Coz I am so protective of my experience, when I tell other people it’s so important to me that people understand it, that they get the enormity of it and they don’t undermine it. One of my worries is that a) I will meet people and they will present me with an experience that they have had which is vastly different and that’s going to be quite difficult to me, it’s going throw me off of my own thing, it’s going to make me question. And that’s exciting but also worrying. Considering my protectiveness, and the way I feel about mine, do they feel the same way about their own experience, how do they connect to their own experience, do they feel protective. And ultimately I am researching it, and I have got to interpret it and present it in a report, and that feels like a worry.’ (Bracketing interview one)

In this passage, I am examining some of my expectations of the research participants’ accounts. I am in hope that they will be similar to mine, and that it might therefore reinforce the power of my own experience. I seem less prepared to confront the diversity that is likely to exist in their personal stories. After all, it is much more likely that the comprehension of my own experience will expand if I am faced with difference. I go on to talk about the notion of care that I feel for the participants and their stories;
'I want to do them justice basically. Do their stories justice. If I am thinking about how important it is for me to do my story justice, even when I’m the one telling it, and it happened to me, the stress that I gives me, not stress because it is a beautiful thing but there is always a part of me that worries I am not communicating its power, can this thing be put into words. The important thing about the research is doing the participants justice. But then I might meet them and they might not feel like that about their experience. Who is to say that they will be so protective? That’s another assumption I guess.’ (Bracketing interview one)

Some research interview encounters appeared to leave me feeling awkward and consumed by a sense of doubt about the validity of my study. I developed into a phase of thinking I had obtained nothing from the research interviews, feeling as if I was not getting the information I needed for the study. I wanted to discard what I perceived to be ‘bad interviews’, in which I had not demonstrated my competence, and in which the participants appeared not to have expressed what I had hoped. In the second bracketing interview, recorded after I had conducted two research interviews, I reflected on the following:

‘I think it’s interesting to think about if I had not had an epiphany how I would be experiencing the same process. I see the fact that I have lived it as massive advantage, but also disadvantage. I suppose you want to be really open to fresh understanding, and being really open to hearing someone else versions of events and how they understand. But the disadvantage is the discomfort, if I allow that discomfort to stop me being open. But we are sharing in this experience, and I have immense amount of passion for it, and by meeting others who might enhance my understanding of it. I like to think that I am open to fresh understanding, and I think that’s the discomfort. If I don’t acknowledge the discomfort then I’m preventing myself from learning something new. Learning comes from discomfort I think. But in order to learn I need to bring my stuff to the fore. So it’s a pro and a con. I think it’s more than a pro than a con, otherwise why am I doing this?’ (Bracketing interview two)

I used a metaphor to capture this feeling of discomfort:
At the moment I feel like I’m…feel like I’m on a little rowing boat in the middle of the sea. I would just like to come back to this image of being on a rowing boat in the middle of the sea…I’m stuck with this image at the moment. The waves are a bit rocky and I’ve got no oars…no I’ve lost an oar…that’s a bit too strong maybe? I just feel a bit unsteady at the moment. I have got the oars but the sea is a little bit too rough at the moment but what I am doing at the moment is sitting in the boat, and just feeling the waves. I think that is the most important thing to just feel the waves’ (Bracketing interview two)

The metaphor of the boat was used to capture the feeling of being at sea, somehow being out of my depth, but simultaneously attempting to roll with the waves. I was later to discover that the ‘nothing’ was something so central that I was not yet able to see it. In engaging with analysis, Finlay (2011) referred to ‘dwelling, wonder, evidencing and ambivalence’ (p. 228) as key words to watch for. My experience is indicative of my embodied lived experience of conducting the analysis. It is not simply an intellectual exercise; it mirrors my conduct in therapeutic practice. It is important to dwell on this before considering how best to shape and represent the analysis.

The research process has been characterised by oscillations;

‘I’m feeling lost amongst it all. Sometimes I question whether I have got anything worth discussing at all. But then I discover something and it surprises me. I am OK for a while, then it might fluctuate again. There seems to be a recurring theme of doubt; scared I will have nothing of value to say’ (Bracketing interview three)

Fischer (2006) referred to phenomenology as a method which brings to light the obvious. During the analysis phase, I found myself worried that the emerging findings were mundane, and so I would be unable to make a significant contribution. I recognised what Fischer (2006) called ‘the “Oh I knew that” variety’ of contribution (p. xxxiv-xxxv). However, as the analysis progressed, I came to realise that I did not comprehend aspects of the accounts that emerged in master themes and sub-themes as fully as I may have thought. When walking
recently and reflecting on my experience of conducting this research and its impact on me as a person who had herself suddenly transformed one day in June 2013, I realised something new about my experience which I later recorded and which I think will stay with me. It is as if I am able to appreciate the depth of complexity (and pain) that exists in the things I can feel. Yet, I am also able to embrace the utter simplicity which exists there too, since my eyes were opened on that day. Ever since, I have stood on the threshold between these two perspectives – each time confronted with pain, but able to choose which way I experience it. My experience of carrying out this research has been a challenging yet joyous one. It, too, has been permeated by a complexity as well as a simplicity. Unexpected turns have been taken which have served to expand my understanding of my own personal transformation experience as well as the phenomenon of SPT itself. I wish to end on an excerpt from my research journal, which seems to appropriately capture this experience as a whole:

“There are aspects emerging here that are significant. The experiences of the participants appear to mirror so closely the experience of doing research. How do we find the words which serve the lived experience? I am beginning to see how this thing of research develops. I have been surprised and moved by the way in which the study has progressed. I was not prepared to find what I did...and therein lies the beauty. I am changed. (Research journal entry)
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant consent form

You are being invited to take part in a student research project which is being carried out in partial fulfilment of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at The University of Manchester. Before you decide whether to take part I would like to inform you about why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully. At the bottom of the information sheet is a consent form, which contains conditions of this research which you are asked to consent to. Please do ask if there is anything that is unclear, or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the study?

The study is being conducted by India Amos, who is a second year trainee on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at The University of Manchester.

What is the aim of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore how people make sense of their personal experience of a sudden transformation. This research does not aim to provide final answers but rather will seek to understand the unique perspective of each person and hope to explore any common themes which appear to be part of the meaning making process.

What would I be asked to do if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in an interview, with myself, which will be audio-recorded. I will invite you to fill in a short questionnaire asking you some demographic questions. I will then begin recording the interview and ask you to tell me about your transformation experience and what your transformation experience means to you. I do have some further questions which I may use during the interview to prompt our conversation.

After the interview takes place I will write a transcript of the interview. You will be asked if you would like to be sent a copy of the transcript so that you can review it for accuracy and make any necessary amendments. You are not obliged to take part in this process. However, if you do decide to review the transcript; from the date in which you are sent the document, you will be asked to return your amended transcripts within one month. If the transcript is not returned within one month, then the research will proceed with the transcript as it stands. This is to ensure that the research process is not held up considerably.

What happens to the data collected?
The interview transcript will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The aim of IPA is to capture the ‘lived experience’, so I will be using the method to look specifically at the experience of the individual participant and their understanding of their personal transformation, before looking across the interview data as a whole, and identifying emerging themes. In the final report, I may use direct quotes from the interview to illustrate the development of themes. By consenting to take part in this research study, you are asked to give consent to the use of anonymous quotes in the final write up.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

To ensure your anonymity, no information that can be used to identify you will appear on any document associated with the research. For example, some of the demographic information you provide may be altered to further ensure your anonymity. Full transcripts of the interview will only be seen by the primary researcher and up to two research supervisors.

Encryption software will be used to ensure that access to the interview data can only be gained by the researcher.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign at the bottom to indicate your consent, and will be given a copy to keep.

I will ask you to reconfirm your consent to continued participation in the study before and after the interview, as well as the stage in which you are returned the interview transcript for review. If after one month (from the date in which you are sent the transcript) you have not withdrawn your participation from the study, there will be no further opportunities to withdraw your participation.

**How long will the interview take?**

I anticipate that the interview may take around one hour, however in some cases it may be more than an hour, and in some it may be less.

**Where will the interview be conducted?**

You will be invited to attend The School of Environment, Education and Development at The University of Manchester, where the interview will be conducted in a pre-booked room.

**Will I be paid for participating in the study?**

Any travel expenses incurred by participation in this study will be reimbursed.
Will the outcomes of the study be published?

There is potential that the final research report might be published. If you consent to take part in the research, you will also be asked to consent to the possibility of the work being published. If you would like further information on this, please feel free to contact me.

Problems regarding the research

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to ‘The research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 (PI’ by emailing: Research-Governenance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 01612757583 or 275 8093

Contact for further information

For further information or if you have any questions, you can contact the researcher on the following email address: India.amos@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk, or the research supervisor for this project, Dr Terry Hanley; Terry.hanley@manchester.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you would like to participate in the study then please complete and sign the consent form below. Your signature indicates that you have understood and consent to the conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please write your initials in the box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information; and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy.

3. I understand that I will be asked to reconfirm my consent
to continue my participation in the study on two occasions once my involvement commences, and that after one month of receiving the interview transcript for review I am no longer able to withdraw my contribution from the study.

4. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

5. I agree to the use of anonymous verbatim quotes within the final research report.

6. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to the conditions described above and consent to take part in the above project:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant</th>
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<th>Signature</th>
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<th>Name of person taking consent</th>
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Appendix 2: Participant exclusion/inclusion criteria

Participants must be:
Males, females, and transgender individuals
Age 18 and above
Able to provide informed consent
Self-identifying as having experienced a positive, lasting, profound personal change, which followed a relatively brief and memorable inner experience
Judged by primary researcher as able to provide rich, detailed, articulate first-person account of their experience and meaning-making activities

Inclusion Criteria Questions
Participant to be asked exclusion criteria questions if they answer ‘Yes’ to all the following screening questions:
Did the experience take place more than a year ago?
Did this experience deeply change your feelings, thoughts, values, and/or behaviours?
Would you describe this change as positive?
Was the experience memorable?
Was the experience relatively brief compared to other personal changes in your life (lasting less than a week)?

Exclusion Criteria Questions
Participant is excluded if ‘Yes’ is answered in response to any of the following questions:
Do most of your friends and/or family believe the change was negative?
Did this experience occur as a direct result of a positive external event – for example, getting married, having a child, winning the lottery?
Were you under the influence of a chemical substance at the time of the experience?