Falling into The Abyss

A Heuristic Self-Inquiry into a Psychotherapist's Experience of Abrupt Endings

Dana Chue

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Psychotherapy

2021

Faculty of Health and Environmental Science
Department of Psychotherapy

Supervisor: Professor Keith Tudor

Abstract

The unexpected phone call in the middle of the night. The client who never returns for another session. The news of a community case of COVID-19. In our daily lives, and in the therapy room, the looming of an end is always present. Although endings, separations, and partings are a natural part of living, the abruptness of these experiences are often devastating.

This research aims to gain understanding of such experiences of abrupt endings specifically centring on the author's experiences as a beginning therapist. Within psychotherapeutic literature, there is an emphasis on the importance of endings in therapy. This includes an extensive literature on techniques and the client's experiences of endings. However, there is a significant lack of knowledge about the therapist's experience of abrupt endings in therapy.

A heuristic self-search inquiry into my experiences of abrupt endings was conducted from which I elucidate the core feeling of groundlessness in my experiences. I explicate this further into four successive micro-moments: the rip, the scramble, the tension, and the poignancy. A powerful realisation that my experience of abrupt endings relates to my terror of abrupt death re-organised my findings, revealing my dance around death and the ways I attempt to retain or regain power in my engagement with death.

The discoveries of this research have significant implications on the psychotherapeutic profession, such as the importance of including the therapist's experience of 'bad-byes' in research and training programmes. Profoundly, this research also holds important personal implications for our own inevitable confrontation with death, especially the power within our personal journeys.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Dana Chue

27 August 2021

Acknowledgements

This pilgrimage has summoned my entire life: the generations before, my family history, my blood, tears, my heart and soul. To all those who have been before me, and left too soon, your life has poignantly impacted me. I will always carry you and those final moments with me. My love especially for my mama, gong gong, and my dad, my life and blood pours into this because of you.

Thank you to my supervisor Keith Tudor, for your support, clever insights and patience. I am grateful for the permission to trust my process, I will continue to remind myself that 'it's my party (dissertation), and I can cry if I want to'. To my clinical supervisor, Lynne Dunphy, thank you for believing in me when I was yet to believe in myself. Your generosity, time and encouragement will not be forgotten. To the psychotherapy lecturers and students, thank you for seeing me, and embracing me for who I am. I have cherished being on this journey with you. A special thank you to John O'Connor, your gentle wisdom and holding has been there for me every step of the way. Thank you for supporting my editing process in this final step. To my therapist A.D., thank you for holding a light with me, and ahead of me, through my journey to become a psychotherapist.

To my family and friends, in Singapore and Aotearoa, thank you for your love and support, including your teasing and challenging. Thank you especially to my mum, your sacrifices kept our family together. I would not be who I am or where I am without you.

To Corey, thank you for being you. For putting me first, for supporting the pursuit of my passion and purpose, and for witnessing my growth and pain. Through the long nights, copious number of hugs, and essay planning sessions, you have been there for the tears, and created much of the laughter. We can finally start our life together, thank you for patiently waiting.

Prologue

I AM

I am four years old. We have a big house with ceilings the height of two storeys, and an entire wall is made of windows. It is a dark, stormy day, rain is hitting hard against the glass. When it rains in Singapore, it pours, with rumbling clashes of thunder and jolts of lightning. I am so little, standing there all alone, crying. I feel scared, like no one is able to hear me over the storm, like no one is going to come to my side.

Often times, I am unsure if this is a real memory. I don't even remember anything else about this house I lived in. However, I know I have always carried this sense within me – this vulnerability, this terror. I still recognise it in various experiences in my life. It is the feeling I get when I stand against the immensely tall glass of an aquarium, the reverberation within my bones when there is thunder, the fear when I feel I am unable to rush to have someone by my side.

I will not recognise the significance of this memory until now, 25 years later.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

In The Beginning

> There's something inexplicable in me that yearns for expression and growing strength
> – a sense about life that has always been in me, ever since I can remember feeling and
> thinking about what life was for, and what I was to give back to life; it is not a selfish
> sense, rather, an essential sense of life's rich and valuable hold on me, and in many
> ways, a mysterious communion with life, in which there is a silence filled with creative
> meanings and imaginings that yearn for concrete expression.
>
> —Paul Jensen, *Finding Yourself, Finding Others*

Introduction

I want to explore my experience of abrupt endings; how it grips me, almost suspending me in a moment in time, unable to go back, yet unable to move forward. I have been preoccupied with the most final of endings, death, since my first significant experience when my mama (paternal grandmother) passed away in 2009. Even then, I *knew* that my life would never be the same, that I would forever be changed, and that this would be the first of many, of everyone else dying and leaving. I had lost my blitheness of living a life without loss, and there was no way of going back.

Death is Everywhere

In the decade since, I have been immersed in death. I lose eight elders in my family, including my mama, gong gong (maternal grandfather), grand aunties and uncles, and my father. Two peers from my high school die by suicide, and others from cancer or accidents. In the media, death seems to be inescapable as I read about war, vehicle crashes, drownings, suicides, shootings, cancer, disease, Covid-19. In social media, I am suddenly privy to reading about the death of other's loved ones, and the messages left, never to be read by the one it was meant for. In university, I studied the sociology of death, and I am confronted by its omnipresence, and just how much it permeates us in our living.

I find myself becoming obsessed with details when I hear about tragic, unexpected deaths. How did they die, how old were they, did they know they were going to die? What were their final moments like? What were their final conversations with their loved ones? How will their loved ones continue to live? I almost become ritualistic in remembering and reciting the names of those who have gone, afraid to lose them in my memory.

Personally, the deaths of my gong gong and my father affected me the most.

I still remember the anguish I felt when I landed in Singapore and heard that my gong gong had passed away while I was on the flight over. I was anticipating his death as he was very old and growing weary with years. However, the circumstances of not getting to say goodbye personally were heartbreaking for me. In the months after, I struggled to reconcile his

death within myself, always longing to have been there with him for his final moments, to honour and witness his death, and to communicate my love for him.

My father's death was very abrupt, he was only in his 50s. I remember my disbelief, hearing he had died while out for dinner; such a normal day that will change my life forever. How surreal it felt, staring at his body on a gurney through a window of glass. We had a difficult relationship and I was trying to make sense of how I felt about my proud father lying there, vulnerable and gone. Feelings of guilt, relief, shock, and sadness were with me, and are still with me now, never to gain the closure we needed. Closure I always thought we would get in years to come.

Through these experiences, my being was turned towards death, advertently and inadvertently. I came to acknowledge the power of death and its inescapability, and fear it. I became interested in confronting and understanding death, and facing my death anxiety, in the hopes of learning to live a meaningful life and die a dignified death.

My Shift From 'Death' to 'Endings'

Taking this gusto into my psychotherapy training, I was eager to learn about existential therapy and how death impacts the therapeutic space. However, this did not present in the way I anticipated. In my first year of client work, both my clients terminated therapy via text or email without returning for a final session. As I read the initial lines of their messages and realised they were requesting to terminate therapy, I felt my blood drain as different feelings washed over me. Feeling an immediate urge to turn away from this, I quickly put my phone away without reading the entire message.

I was struck by how affected I was when this happened. When I discussed these experiences with my supervisor, she highlighted a possible pattern in my practice. We explored my history, and I shared about my father leaving my family around the time I was born, only to come back within the year. In sharing this, coupled with my father's sudden and unexpected death, I remember my supervisor gently reflecting that this also seemed to be a pattern in my life.

Throughout my training, I was also connecting to memories in personal therapy. I was surprised that my earliest memory, shared in the prologue, was more significant than I thought. The felt sense of that memory connected me to various experiences of endings: how I felt as a teenager with the end of another year in high school, and how I felt during twilight as the day began to fade.

These experiences percolated within me. I realised that although death has been my focus for many years, it was the feeling of endings that has always been with me, likely since I

was in my mother's womb. This shift from 'death' to 'endings' expanded my focus to experiences of endings in all its natural forms, including death.

I Didn't See It Coming – Abrupt Endings

Endings do affect me a lot, and none more so than abrupt endings. In reflecting on the endings I have experienced, I realised that abrupt endings grasped me in a particularly intense way. It was the sudden, unexpected deaths that would captivate me, compelling me to search for information, to fill in the gaps and understand the chaos. I want to understand my feelings and my process surrounding abrupt endings, including aspects of power, control, finality, impermanence and expectation. I also want to understand how my experiences of abrupt endings might impact my personal life and developing clinical practice. Therefore, my research question is 'what is the therapist's experience of abrupt endings?'.

I have chosen the term 'abrupt endings' because it specifies the force within the experience, while still remaining open to various types of endings in life. The word 'abrupt' is defined as "sudden and unexpected" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), "lacking continuity" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and "the impression of being broken" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). 'Ending' is defined as "something that constitutes an end" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), in which the word 'end' is defined as "the point where something ceases to exist" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

In this dissertation, I will focus on my experience of any sudden changes that break the continuity of life and result in a cessation of some form. As the intention of this research is to remain experience-near, this requires a precise scope of research with certain exclusion criteria. The focus of my research question is on the experience of the abrupt ending itself, this will exclude the experience of what may follow an abrupt ending, such as grief. As my research centres on my experience of abrupt endings as a therapist, I will rely on literature written from a therapist's personal experience of abrupt endings, be they in therapy or in life. This will exclude literature on the therapeutic decision of when and how to end therapy. It will also exclude the therapist's experience of client's speaking of abrupt endings within therapy.

The Gravity of It

From the psychotherapy training, I experienced and learnt first-hand the significance of endings. I appreciated that the lecturers often created the space to process feelings about an ending. The opportunity to work through an ending was new for me, it further emphasised how deeply they affected me, and I realised my own relational pattern of skimming over the pain.

The training was consistent in acknowledging the importance of endings within the therapeutic relationship, especially the value of having a final session with a client. I learnt to listen out for the client's relational pattern of endings, to encourage working it through together. I found it beneficial that the training modelled and taught the process of an ideal ending, however, I felt there was inadequate consideration for endings that were abrupt, endings that provided no opportunity for a final session.

After three years of clinical practice, I had experienced more abrupt endings than ideal endings in therapy. I was unsure if this was normal, and often felt I was doing something wrong as a training psychotherapist, because I was not able to achieve the ideal ending recommended. As mentioned from my supervision, I also wondered if it was my own history that resulted in these experiences.

Personally, I would have appreciated learning and sharing more about the experience of abrupt endings, instead of only focusing on how to manage difficult scenarios to achieve ideal endings. It would have been normalising to hear that abrupt endings were common, and that it was natural for the therapist to be emotionally impacted in various ways.

My experience of the training seems to reflect the literature, in the focus on techniques and ideal endings, and the gap in the literature on abrupt endings (Limentani, 1982). Through this self-search inquiry, I wish to demonstrate that there is a need to learn more about abrupt endings, within the psychotherapeutic research and training, and within life in general. Ultimately, I hope this brings the experience of abrupt endings into the conversation about endings in therapy, to normalise and explore its impacts on the therapist.

Overview of Chapters

This chapter introduces my beginning context and what lead me to embark on this journey. I have outlined my question, stated my aim, and highlighted the potential significance of my inquiry. In Chapter 2, the heuristic methodology and method is defined. I explain why I chose heuristics for my research, and describe the heuristic concepts and phases. In Chapter 3, I delve into the existing literature on abrupt endings, providing my view of the texts that have resonated with me. I then reflect on my experience of engaging with the literature. Between chapters, I include a significant moment of illumination. In Chapter 4, I trace my deepening emotional process. I highlight key moments of my heuristic journey and relate this to the concepts of resistance and surrender. In Chapter 5, I elucidate the findings of my research, including vignettes and a depiction of my experience of abrupt endings. Chapter 6 then discusses these processes and findings. Here, I discover new meaning in my journey and create a new depiction of my experience as a final creative synthesis. Throughout the dissertation, I also include various memories that relate to my experience of abrupt endings.

From lectures and conversations with others about my research, I also note personal communications from three colleagues, all of whom gave verbal permission to cite them in this dissertation.

The Lift

I am eight years old. The family is going out and I'm the first one ready. We live in an apartment building, so I get the lift. My family are taking longer than expected, and like any child, I playfully push the buttons to keep the doors open and hold the lift. Suddenly, the power of me 'pushing the buttons' doesn't work anymore. I watch in horror as the doors begin to close while I am alone inside, disconnecting me from my family. Panic immediately sets in, it feels as though I have no way out and I am at a loss as to what I should do.

Looking back, I am unsure why this is such a prominent memory for me and why I felt so panicked – after all, it was a lift I took nearly every day. To this day, I am still slightly nervous when I get into a lift of a very tall building all by myself, when I feel there is a chance the lift might take me somewhere I don't want to go.

Chapter 2 – Method and Methodology

I'm Going on an Expedition

And I've seen it in the flights of birds, I've seen it in you.
In the entrails of the animals, the blood running through.
But in order to get to the heart I think sometimes you have to cut through …
Just keep following the heartlines on your hands.

—Florence Welch, *Heartlines*

Introduction

This chapter introduces my chosen methodology and method for this research. I begin by sharing why I have chosen heuristic research, before briefly explaining what it is and its philosophical foundations. I establish why this methodology fits with the field of psychotherapy and my research question. I then outline the heuristic method's concepts and phases. From a brief description of my research journey, I discuss the limitations of the heuristic methodology, before considering its validity.

The Strands – Why Heuristic

This chapter might be viewed as the most practical, yet as I reflect on why I have chosen heuristic research as my methodology, I feel stirred. I find myself in awe as I realise I am experiencing synchronicity. Synchronicity refers to the psychic experience of meaningful coincidences occurring over time (Jung, 1987). These unique events appear to have no connection and are independent of space and time, yet they have a spiritual feeling of 'it was meant to be'.

I feel this synchronicity in my chest, a feeling of a 'coming together' within me, that is both peaceful and heart-blowing (similar to mind-blowing). I feel a strong connection to my life force, pumping with each beat, and yet my heart can barely contain the power within this moment of connection. I am connecting to the full force of my being and history behind this research. It is the culmination of my life experiences that have lead me to this place: choosing heuristics, to research my experience of abrupt endings, within my psychotherapy training. Two significant moments within this web of synchronicity stand out: when I chose psychotherapy, and when I chose heuristics. Both meaningfully explain who I am as a being, and, thus, define my ontology.

I had known for more than a decade that I wanted to become a therapist, but it took me awhile to discern what kind. From various experiences, I realised I wanted to become one that was not the 'expert' and who was personally involved in the therapeutic relationship. I feared this was unacceptable in society, illegal even, until I sat in Te Tuinga (the meeting room at AUT North Shore campus). Here, I experienced being held by this psychotherapy department and I felt the permission to feel, alone and together. I could not

believe I found what I was looking for, what I thought did not and could not exist. It was in this moment, that I felt a sentimental sense of 'finding home', finding where I belong.

I chose heuristic research when I learnt about it two years ago. It was mentioned in class that the heuristic research question is one of a personal nature, one that might have been present for years before the research process even formally began. I felt an immediate connection to this, an awakening within me. *I* had one such question within me, one I had been grappling with for nearly a decade – I just didn't know what the question was and I didn't even realise I was asking. It was as if my question was speaking to me, telling me it has been there all along. I *knew* in that moment that I had to choose heuristics, or perhaps it would be more fitting to say that heuristics chose me.

Heuristic Methodology

Heuristic research was developed by Clark Moustakas (1990), an American humanistic psychologist, from his personal experience of investigating the phenomenon of loneliness. Heuristics refers to the "process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). It provides a framework to investigate and understand human experience.

The focus of the heuristic methodology is to foster the researcher's lived experience of a phenomenon, by drawing on their life events, relationships, thoughts, and feelings (Moustakas, 1990). Through this rigorous searching and re-searching within, and engagement with the raw material of one's own experience, heuristic research seeks to illuminate the heart and soul of one's lived experience (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990).

The Tree of Knowledge - Philosophical Foundations

At the heart of research, there is a quest to generate conversation, a striving towards a better understanding of our human encounters (Greene, as cited in Grant & Giddings, 2002). Ontology and epistemology form the foundation of research, as they define beliefs about the nature of reality (what exists) and the relationship of the researcher to that reality (how we know what exists), respectively (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Differing ontologies and epistemologies, therefore, determine certain research paradigms and methodologies. Whilst the positivist research paradigm assumes and seeks an objective truth to research phenomena, the interpretivist research paradigm assumes multiple realities, and seeks the understanding and meaning of individual human experience (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Ryan et al., 2007). The interpretivist paradigm was developed within the social sciences in response to the reductionist positivist paradigm, and it focuses on what it means to be human.

Phenomenological research sits within the interpretivist paradigm, it contends that the subjective self is the closest connection to the phenomenon itself, and it therefore, aims to use stories to reveal understanding and meaning through human experiences (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smythe, 2012). Phenomenology attempts to remain experience-near, to get back to the phenomenon itself, and capture its essence without a prescribed viewpoint. Within phenomenological research, the heuristic research methodology is unique for the explicit involvement of the researcher, in which the focus of the research is, in fact, on the researcher's lived experience (Hiles, 2012).

Heuristic research holds the view that the deepest, most profound source of meaning and knowledge lies within us and our being – in our feelings, senses, perceptions, and beliefs (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristics truly honours the knowing and knowledge within the individual, knowing and knowledge that cannot be obtained outside the individual's frame of experience (Hiles, 2012; Moustakas, 1990). The research requires a personal encounter with a phenomenon, in which the heuristic methodology provides a framework to access the researcher's inner knowledge of the encounter (Hiles, 2012; Moustakas, 1990). This facilitates the inner exploration of the researcher's experience of the phenomenon, to thoroughly map out its terrain, in the hopes of discovering and illuminating the nuances of its landscape (Moustakas, 1990; Rose & Loewenthal, 2006; Sela-Smith, 2002).

From her own heuristic research, Sela-Smith (2002) contends that there is a natural resistance to remaining experience-near. She highlights Moustakas' resistance by including other participants to validate his self-experience. Sela-Smith distinguishes between the researcher's internal experience and their observed experience, identifying that this resistance can result in a shift to the observed experience. As a result, she proposed the heuristic self-search inquiry, a heuristic methodology that acknowledges this resistance and emphasises the researcher's focus on their experiencing-self. The heuristic self-search inquiry is suitable for my research because I am the sole participant and the focus is on my personal experience of abrupt endings.

It's the Only Way for Me

Endings are never easy; the experience connects me with confusing mixed emotions and an intense visceral response, in which the addition of abruptness ramps this up a hundredfold. The phenomenon of abrupt endings has gripped me throughout my life. I have spent the last decade struggling to understand its grip, attempting to make sense of what this grip means to me and what I can do with it. Although I have found much wisdom and even some peace on how to deal with abrupt endings rationally, the grip is still pulsating in me: *what is my*

experience of abrupt endings? I realise I have been looking everywhere else and to everyone else for answers, except within myself.

Though the realm of human experience is closest to us, it is also the most resistant to our grasp of understanding (Hiles, 2001). In my search for understanding so far, I have definitely felt this sense of trying to grasp sand in my hands, but the tighter I grasp the quicker it slips away out of reach. Personally, I believe the nature of the experience of abrupt endings demands an interpretivist perspective, particularly a heuristic endeavour, as it provides a framework for me to 'enter the sand', and feel into its landscape (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990).

The heuristic methodology also fits particularly well with research in psychotherapy, with significant parallels between the heuristic researcher's endeavours and the psychotherapist's endeavours (Hiles, 2012; Kenny, 2012; Rose & Loewenthal, 2006). Both are unique for the involvement of the researcher/therapist in the process, in which the researcher/therapist is the main instrument and their individuality is prized (Kenny, 2012; McWilliams, 2004). The use of the 'self' in the researcher's intuition and the therapist's countertransference, is used to gather and make sense of the data received (Kenny, 2012; McWilliams, 2004). Both endeavours also value the process of deepening understanding, in which the focus is on the journey of the research/therapy, rather than arriving at a specific destination of truth or outcome (Kenny, 2012; McWilliams, 2004). Knowing becomes a process that is shaped along the journey, this allows for an engagement with 'I do not know' and it compels a commitment to searching for what feels true (Kenny, 2012; McWilliams, 2004).

The researcher/therapist's personal involvement and deepening understanding nurtures self-understanding, and this creates the self-transformative element that is essential to the heuristic and psychotherapeutic process (McWilliams, 2004; Moustakas, 1990). Through processes of reflection and discovery, there is greater awareness, and the researcher/therapist's discernment is sharpened (Hiles, 2012; McWilliams, 2004); a necessary tool when embarking on a personal journey of 'what feels true'.

The heuristic methodology recognises the personal and unquantifiable nature of the therapist's practice and countertransference process within the therapeutic relationship (Rose & Loewenthal, 2006). Therefore, using the heuristic methodology for research in psychotherapy is arguably relevant, as the framework allows for the integration of the researcher's experience and knowledge, ultimately generating research that is practice and experience lead (Kenny, 2012; Rose & Loewenthal, 2006).

Smythe (2012) suggests that the synergistic harmony between person-methodology-topic creates methodological congruence. My experience of synchronicity reflects this synergistic harmony, a coming together of the strands of my personal history and question, my

journey in psychotherapy, and now my heuristic journey. For me, these knots form my ontology, and there really is no other way for me to research what is calling out from within that is yearning to be understood (Sela-Smith, 2002).

An Explorer's Toolkit – Heuristic Concepts

While I am writing this chapter, my understanding and experience of the heuristic process is deepening. I am inspired by Sela-Smith's (2002) analogy of 'the final frontier', delving into the interiority of my experience. I picture myself as an explorer, venturing into an unknown terrain, with the task of mapping out its landscape: every contour, colour, shade, facet, angle, and crack. I feel excited and scared, eyes big with wonder and heart beating with life, or perhaps adrenaline. I am venturing where I have never been before, and I know I am the only one who can go.

I *am* an explorer, naïve and unfamiliar in this new terrain, but I am also an expert that has been called to lead the expedition, because only I have the necessary tools to navigate this journey. My expedition is illustrated in Figure 1. Moustakas' (1990) heuristic methodology is my aeroplane, my vehicle to transport me to this unknown terrain. The seven heuristic concepts are my tools and skills, including my map, my compass, and my shadow sidekick.

Figure 1

An Explorer's Expedition

Note. Illustration by Corey Khalil*.*

Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry – The Treasure

The focus of the inquiry is the research question itself. In heuristic research, this question begins with me, it is borne out of my history and life experiences (Sultan, 2019). This concept invites me to immerse myself in the question and explore different facets of it, with the aim of thoroughly knowing my relationship to the inquiry (Sultan, 2019). In this process, the researcher becomes one with the research question, living the question to get inside it and achieve a personal understanding of it (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990).

This represents the concept of 'treasure' while on a quest. The question holds my personal treasure, my own pot of gold that no one else desires the way I do. I live the quest to find this treasure. It consumes me, changing the focus of my life and the way I live my life, everything I do is in relation to grasping it and nothing else matters.

For me, this treasure is my passion and purpose in life. It was already there before I began my research, and it will still be there after this dissertation. It is not a choice, rather, it is my personal quest.

Internal Frame of Reference – The Map

The heuristic endeavour has to be placed within the context of the researcher's internal frame of reference (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990). This represents the map I am creating of the unknown terrain of abrupt endings, a map for others to see, know, and understand. It is I who is creating this map, I who decides what is included or excluded and what it will look like. It is through my eyes and perceptions that the map is created, and by looking at it, the perceiver will know something of my frame of experience. I will rely on this map to guide me, returning again and again to it, to get to my treasure (Sultan, 2019).

The internal frame of reference was my 'mind map' throughout my heuristic journey. It often entailed the mental task of re-orientating myself within a map that was already there, yet constantly changing. On a larger scale, I engaged with this concept in every chapter, constantly figuring out what the boundaries of my map were, while also referring to it as a guide, and updating the map as I went along. On the smallest scale, I engaged with this concept in every word I typed. Each word reflecting who I am and where this journey has taken me, revealing my frame of experience.

Tacit Knowing – The Terrain

Polanyi's (1983) insight into tacit knowledge forms the foundation of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Tacit knowledge refers to information that is known deeply, often without the individual's conscious awareness of how this knowledge has been obtained. Polanyi's

(1983) statement "we can know more than we can tell" (p.4), sums up the bizarre experience of 'I know I know, but I don't know how and I can't explain it'.

Tacit knowing refers to this implicit personal knowledge, it forms the basis of all explicit knowing (Polanyi, 1969, as cited in Sela-Smith, 2002). It belongs to the tacit dimension, the realm of the unknown known, in which knowledge can never fully be grasped and made conscious (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). The tacit dimension is the internal place where feeling, experience and meaning converge, creating the terrain of one's inner world (Sela-Smith, 2002).

This is the interior terrain I have been sent to venture: the rock formations, caves, stalactites and stalagmites. They are built out of each moment I have experienced, adding layer upon layer, to form the whole. This is the foundation of my 'physical' inner world, the source of my being and meaning making. It is an ever-present terrain that is ineffable.

Tacit knowing was my 'soul' in my heuristic journey, a spiritual realm of infinite wisdom that was impossible for me to consciously access. Instead, I needed to create an environment conducive to accessing this realm, usually this involved music. Connecting to my tacit dimension was a surreal experience, it was both comforting and unnerving to know that it existed. I sometimes felt sceptical of this realm and its knowledge, however, when the revelations came through it was undeniable. I recognised the material as mine, yet completely new to me.

Intuition – The Compass, My Sidekick

Intuition is the bridge that connects explicit knowledge (observable, describable) and tacit knowledge (unspecifiable), it supports the researcher to tune into the tacit dimension by drawing on clues, patterns or meanings that lead to enhanced knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). For me, this is my internal compass that mysteriously senses and perceives my 'north', drawing me closer to my treasure.

This is the experience of my question speaking to me. When I connected to this, I had an image of my intuition personified. She is a little shadow being. Alive, playful, she is reaching out to me, pulling me towards particular experiences or thoughts, desperate to tell me what is *really* going on. I liken her to the inner child within, except she is not me at every age. She is the me who has experienced everything I have experienced, but on another dimension, the tacit dimension. She is my sidekick on this journey.

Intuition was my 'heart' in my heuristic journey. My 'gut instinct' or 'hunch' that I could follow. There were many times when I got lost in my self-search, and I felt so confused and overwhelmed with all this information that was mine. I eventually learnt that what I

needed was to connect back to my heart, and once there, my intuition would eagerly lead the way. I simply needed to surrender, listen and trust.

Indwelling – Traversing the Terrain

Indwelling is the conscious process of turning inward with an unwavering concentration, to seek a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Hiles, 2001; Moustakas, 1990). It requires that I deliberately dwell in the experience, using a combination of tacit knowing, explicit knowing, and intuition to explore the phenomenon in its entirety (Sultan, 2019). There is a persistence and patience in continually returning to the experience, in the hopes of unearthing its essence.

For me, indwelling represents traversing the terrain first-hand. I have to stay with the experience of an abrupt ending, and map out the terrain. It is the voice that declares 'I'm going in!'. Full of intensity and wonder, I am experiencing the terrain and feeling it against my hands and knees as I crawl every rock, nook and cranny.

When an abrupt ending happened, I would explicitly dwell in the experience. Taking my heart and mind back to the scene of the crime to collect my evidence, I noted everything in my journal. Although this was a painful process, I realised I naturally had the persistence because this inquiry was linked to my purpose. In fact, I also often instinctively did this without my being aware. It felt like an unconscious obsession. I would catch myself trailing off into thought about the event, analysing the scene within my sub-conscious. I believe the grip that abrupt endings have over me, supported me with the indwelling process.

Focusing – A Midnight Campfire

Focusing is a concept and process developed by Gendlin (1978). It refers to an inner attention, a staying with the phenomenon in a relaxed and receptive state. This allows perceptions to be clarified, and insights that are out of consciousness to come to the fore (Moustakas, 1990). It requires a pause, an internal space clear of any tangling elements, to allow the essence of the experience to surface (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019).

Focusing represents a time away from the busy 'doing' of the quest. It is the act of setting up a campfire for the night. A space is cleared to connect in a more dream-like way, and there amidst the story-telling and discussions of the day's events, lies the essence of what is true and what really matters in this quest. It is a time to rest, to let go of the intensity of experiencing. I am not actively pursuing the experience, instead I am allowing the key aspects of the experience to come to me.

I have always been a creature of the night. Taking refuge in the dead stillness, I do my best work in that existential calm. Across my research, I recognised my '2am process', in which

I would wake up with key illuminations, clear felt-senses and even plans for my chapter all laid out. It was all dream-like and unconscious, but those illusive moments felt like the experience of swimming. Feeling every inch of the water around me, I could feel my way through my process so clearly. This was my experience of focusing, in which the night was my space of clearing, connecting me to the tacit realm.

Self-Dialogue – Connecting to Myself

Self-dialogue is the call to begin with oneself by entering into dialogue with the phenomenon. This facilitates self-inquiry, allowing the phenomenon to interact and speak directly to the researcher's experience, to discover deeper understanding (Moustakas, 1990). This reflects the mumblings of problem solving while on a quest, the 'wondering out loud' which way to go, the constant train of thought or conversation that leads me to my next move. It is also the interactions with my shadow sidekick, engaging with her experience of the tacit dimension's terrain.

Through all my experiences of death, I never did fully share how I felt with anyone. I have always been in my own self-dialogue, it is a place of comfort and familiarity. Music played a big part in this self-dialogue. When I did not know how I was feeling, this would be revealed when I listened to a song I wanted. In the rifts and crescendos, I could feel out my emotions, and in the lyrics, I could understand something of my own experience. Music helped me find my voice when I could no longer navigate alone in my self-dialogue. Throughout my research, I relied on speaking to myself as well as music to support my connection with myself, to navigate my journey.

An Explorer's Journey – Heuristic Phases

Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research method guides my journey through the unknown terrain, it includes six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the phases. I provide more details on my journey in Chapter 3, and expand on the initial engagement, immersion and illumination phases in Chapter 4.

Initial Engagement

> What in your life is calling you, when all the noise is silenced …
> What still pulls on your soul?
>
> —Rumi

The initial engagement marks the start of my inner search for that 'which calls out to my soul', that which is just beneath the surface yet hauntingly out of reach. This phase, therefore, is the beginning, yet not the beginning. It requires a process of encountering that which I already am

– my history, experiences, relationships – to elucidate my question of concern (Moustakas, 1990). The question is already within me. I rely on self-dialogue, intuition and tacit knowing to discern what the exact question is, that will become the focus of my inquiry (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). This question holds personal meaning and power, and this will likely translate to significant social and universal implications.

Immersion

Immersion is the active phase of engaging with my self-search inquiry. I am living the question and it becomes the air I breathe (Moustakas, 1990). Everything in my life is either about abrupt endings, or it is connected to abrupt endings. It consumes my thoughts, feelings and experiences, permeating my conscious, unconscious and dream states (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019). I am growing my knowledge and understanding of abrupt endings, seeking it out and letting it take up space in my mind, heart, body and soul (Moustakas, 1990). My antenna becomes hyper sensitive to abrupt endings, and I remain open to any information and where it may lead me.

Incubation

This phase marks an intentional retreat from the intense pursuit of my inquiry (Sultan, 2019). It requires a detachment from the research, that releases me from my immersion. During incubation, I am unconsciously digesting the information I have taken in thus far. I am allowing my intuition and tacit dimension to work in a way that is free from my active striving (Moustakas, 1990). Therefore, this gestation is a period of trust. I am surrendering myself and trusting my process, that my understanding will grow creatively and my tacit knowing will reveal itself to me, without my active control over the process (Moustakas, 1990).

In my heuristic journey, this was a forced incubation as I had to step away from my research to complete the final case study for my degree. It was difficult to retreat based on external demands, rather than choosing to as part of my organic journey. I believe this called for more surrender and trust, that although I was stepping away, my understanding was still developing – and it was.

Illumination

Illumination is the natural process of my tacit knowing revealing itself to me. By remaining open to the free workings of the tacit dimension and intuition, my tacit knowledge emerges and becomes explicitly known (Moustakas, 1990). Illumination may modify my present understanding, integrate fragmented aspects, clarify themes, or provide insight into previously unknown aspects of my research (Moustakas, 1990). For me, illumination felt like a 'lightbulb

moment'. There was a deeper sense of clarity and understanding, a coming together of sorts, from that which was already present. Ultimately, this reveals an essential truth of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

Explication

Following illumination, is the phase of explication. This is a process of 'laying it all out on the table', and analysing all the themes and discoveries that have been made conscious from the tacit dimension (Moustakas, 1990). The aim of this phase is to understand the intricacies of these findings and how these might connect to form a comprehensive depiction (Moustakas, 1990). For me, this is the process of sifting for gold, after I have mined my source. I rely on indwelling, focusing, and my internal frame of reference to carefully identify the gems of my treasure (Moustakas. 1990). I undergo a process of refining this gold, and understanding its essential aspects, in preparation of presenting the treasure of my expedition to the world.

Figure 2 illustrates my process of 'laying it all out'. Collating and examining over 50 pages of reflections, I created this mind map of themes and discoveries, which elucidated the gems and essences of my research. This formed a foundation for me to explicate my findings.

Figure 2

The Treasure Map

Note. This is the original and only map I created. It has been included to demonstrate the expansive process and is not intended for close reading due to the small font.

Creative Synthesis

Creative synthesis is the final phase in the research, it is both a process and a product. Now that all the knowledge and experience has been acquired and refined throughout the research journey, it is time to create an all-encompassing synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). This requires a space of solitude, to reflect on my whole journey. I continually rely on my intuition and tacit dimension to guide the production of this synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). This creative synthesis is completely personally inspired, capturing the essence of my journey and my discoveries. In viewing my treasure, my journey comes to life. The audience can resonate with my experience, understanding more of the terrain I traversed and the fundamental components of the phenomenon (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Near the end of my journey, I found myself drawn to the image of a web. This inspired the creative synthesis of my depictions in later chapters. However, the main creative synthesis was writing my dissertation. Every chapter, heading, paragraph, and word, is me and the essence of my experience.

My Journey Through the Phases

Overall, my journey differed greatly from Moustakas' (1990) heuristic method. This is illustrated in Figure 3. Most noticeably, I went through the phases multiple times instead of just once. My journey followed the chapters in my dissertation, in which I went through the phases in alignment with the focus of each chapter. I also did not follow the phases consecutively, I often jumped between phases because I was not ready to move on to the next phase outlined. For example, I sometimes needed to begin another process of initial engagement or needed to immerse myself again because I stepped away from the research for too long.

Figure 3

My Journey Through the Heuristic Phases
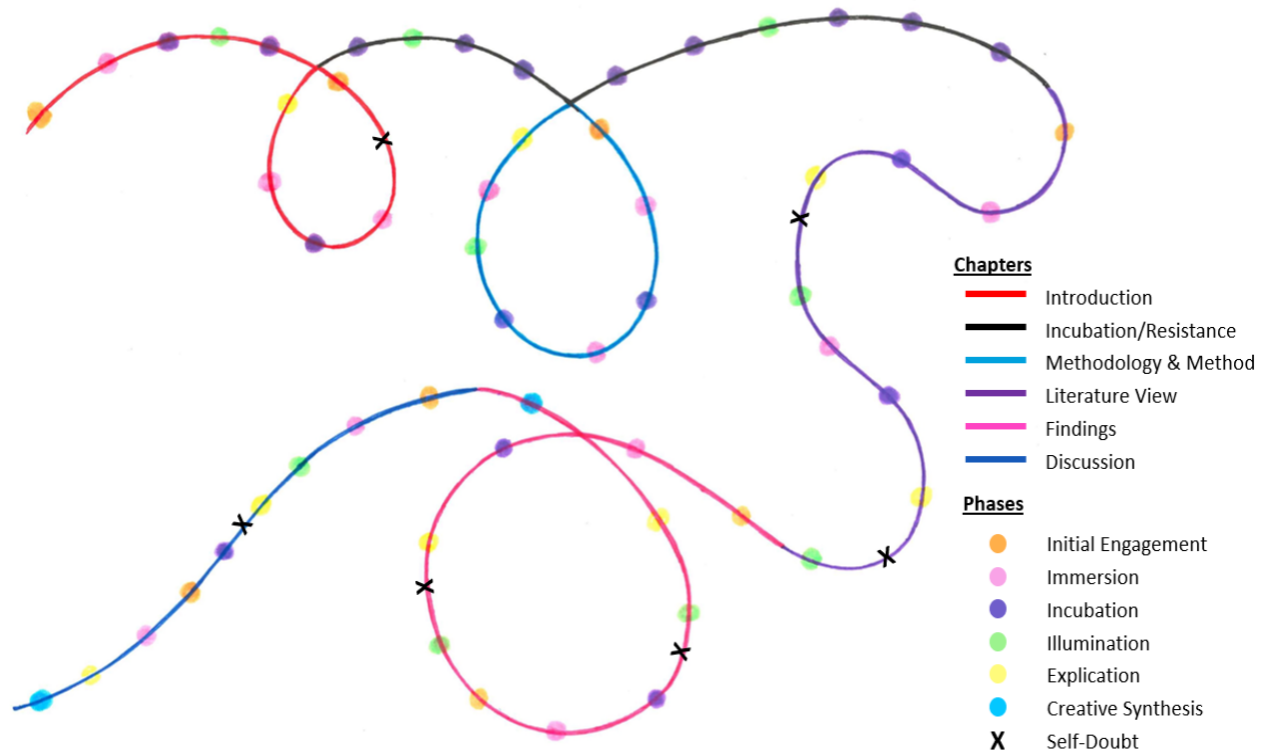
Note. The coloured lines represent the chapters within the dissertation, and the coloured dots represent the six heuristic phases. As I get further in my journey, I connect deeper to my process, as indicated by the plunges.

Limitations

The limitations of the heuristic methodology relate to the personal nature of the research. This occurs when the researcher's personal process conflicts with wider external requirements, and also when the researcher's personal process is too internal and narrow.

The heuristic method suggests that the phases occur chronologically and only once throughout the research process. However, specifically following the phases limits the researcher's organic process. I agree with Sultan's (2019) suggestion that the heuristic process is not linear, and that creative freedom is necessary for the research to unfold naturally. This might mean connecting to the phases out of chronological order, for varying lengths of time and at varying intensities. I sometimes struggled to move from incubation through to illumination and then explication chronologically. Sometimes I needed to re-immerse myself, to connect with my intuition and tacit dimension again, before moving to explication. I appreciate my supervisor's constant encouragement to be free in my process and trust where it takes me.

As this research was conducted in fulfilment of a Master's degree, my heuristic process was limited by the time restraints set out by the university. The time restraints created a battle between following my internal time and rushing my process to meet deadlines. This reflects the immediate conflict between chronos and kairos, in which chronos refers to quantitative time measured by the clock, and kairos refers to qualitative time that is measured in moments, such as 'the right time' (Smith, 1969).

I experienced this conflict most acutely in relation to the illumination phase. In Figure 3, I noticed a pattern in which I tried to move quickly from incubation to explication, to stay on top of writing my chapters. I would then hit a wall and doubt myself, and it was only when I experienced illumination that I could continue my process again. I suggest illumination is based on kairos, rather than chronos. Therefore, it is not a separate phase that can be timed after incubation, but rather it is a process that is alongside the heuristic inquiry, and it reveals itself in spontaneous moments according to my personal time (K. Tudor, personal communication, May 5, 2020).

On the other hand, the personal nature of heuristic research can also be limiting by being too self-referential, in which the researcher's own blind spots and resistances can get in the way of their research (Ings, 2011). Personally, I relied on openly sharing my process with my supervisor, clinical supervisor, therapist and close friends to support me with my blind spots.

Due to the emotional intensity of my inquiry, I often experienced resistance. I am grateful that my lecturer shared ways to identify and move through feelings of resistance. Although Sela-Smith's (2002) heuristic self-search inquiry addresses resistance, it is yet to be acknowledged within the heuristic concepts and phases. For lack of a separate phase, I have labelled periods of resistance under the incubation phase in Figure 3. It would be helpful to have resistance as a separate phase or process that is part of the heuristic journey, to allow it to be anticipated, recognised and worked through.

I also wonder about self-doubt as a specific type of resistance, and the ways in which this can limit the research. Throughout each chapter, I noticed I would always hit a moment of self-doubt. This was usually when I considered all the external requirements needed, such as time restraints or grading requirements. However, it was also when I felt the weight of researching my own experience where I questioned if I could really do this on my own.

In my illustration, I have labelled self-doubt separately with an X. I realised my experiences of self-doubt would often be followed by moments of illumination, and I wonder if self-doubt might in fact be an essential aspect of the heuristic process that forces me to examine if I am still connecting to myself. It would also be helpful to acknowledge that self-doubt is part of the heuristic process, and consider how it might limit the research.

Validity

Heuristic self-search inquiry is qualitative, it aims to explore individual experience rather than generalise findings to the wider population (Ryan et al., 2007). This necessitates that validity is concerned with meaning and processes rather than correlations and measurable data (Moustakas, 1990; Ryan et al., 2007). Validity is assessed by the researcher's rigorous self-examination, the exhaustive commitment to the heuristic phases and processes, and the comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). Only the researcher will know and be able to judge the validity of their heuristic research. If they have completed the research with integrity, the creative synthesis will resonate with the observer in a way that cannot be fabricated (Sela-Smith, 2002).

This reflects the necessary conditions for rigour: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Ryan et al., 2007). As illustrated in Figure 3, I engaged with each heuristic phase within each chapter of my dissertation, to elucidate my experience of abrupt endings. This heuristic process of returning to my focus again and again, through different chapters – exploring, reflecting, sifting and elucidating my experience – inherently facilitated prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Moustakas, 1990; Ryan et al., 2007). This strengthens my findings and creative synthesis, building credibility.

The Dive

I am 23 years old. I have courageously and outrageously decided to attempt deep-sea diving. I am not the strongest of swimmers, even when I swim at the beach, I panic when my feet are not touching the ground. This time, the surface is my solid ground. I feel my anxiety rise as the water rises over my legs, my chest, and finally above my head. The further away from the surface I am, the harder it is to breathe, the more intense my panic becomes. I try not to focus on the distance between me and the surface, and the fact that I cannot quickly rise back up to breathe or touch real solid ground. It consumes me. I want to go deeper, but I can't. To this day, I feel this viscerally in my chest when I think of this memory, making me take a big gasp of air.

Chapter 3 – Literature View

The Lay of the Land

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore my journey with the literature. I begin by sharing my initial process, before discussing my use of the term 'abrupt endings', and providing a brief overview of the psychotherapeutic literature. I then consider the relevance of death with regards to abrupt endings, and conclude with a reflection on my experience.

Finding My Voice in a Cave of Echoes – My Process with the Literature

With various strands coming together in the methodology and method chapter, I realise I have a strong conviction within me to explore my experience of abrupt endings. So much so that I am initially confident, arrogant even, that the literature *is* lacking and that no one else has done this research. I doubt it can provide me with much, yet I know I need to map it out.

As I immerse myself in the literature, I am overwhelmed by the enormity of its history. I am swept away by all the content, lost with each voice and what they say, stuck and unable to find my way through. It feels as though I am in an immense, dark cave – each book, chapter and article forming the historical rock structure. I know I stand within a gap, but where? How can I map this out to place where I stand, when there is so much I cannot see and cannot feel? My confidence wanes and my voice suddenly feels little amongst the echoes of the past.

When I begin writing my first draft, I am caught up with all these other voices, tangled in the technical know-how of terminations in therapy. I do not want to include this, but academically I feel I *need* to. I can feel my shadow sidekick in a ball of tension as I try to force something out of me that is not mine. I finally ask my supervisor for support and feel relieved when I am told to simply follow my intuition and tacit knowing with the literature. Upon reflection, I realise I had lost track of my internal frame of reference, I had strayed from my map and got lost in the world of terminations.

The heuristic research method calls for my personal experience of the literature, in which I am following my intuition as a "way of being informed, a way of knowing" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 10) to further elucidate my experience of abrupt endings. Thus, the intention is not to provide an exhaustive review, but rather *my view* of the literature that resonates most within me (K. Tudor, personal communication, November 24, 2020). In this way, I find my voice again. *I* am calling out to the literature, feeling which of *my* echoes reverberate and resonate back to me, to firmly place where I stand against the backdrop of this historical cave.

An Open-Ended Question: Abrupt 'Endings' or Abrupt 'Terminations'?

When I begin my search on 'abrupt endings' within the psychotherapeutic literature, I am immediately confronted with the fact that my chosen term is not the commonplace terminology used. The most common and defined term for endings is 'terminations'. I wonder if this is because Freud (1937) was the first to write on endings in '*Analysis Terminable and Interminable'*, and the term simply remained. 'Termination' is now recognised as a distinct phase in therapy with specific tasks. From this distinction, some authors reserve 'termination' for endings that are worked through between therapist and client, and the term 'ending' for when there is no opportunity for such working through (Schlesinger, 2005).

Personally, I dislike the term 'termination'. Perhaps, like Frank (2009), I find the overtone to be harsh, sterile and cold. In everyday life, it is used for *things* like terminating a contract, or in a medical context, it is used, for instance, to refer to terminating a pregnancy. It is not used for natural, meaningful processes like the end of a day or the end of a relationship. Pedder (1988) also suggests that 'termination' denotes something irrevocable and final. Similarly, I feel it only allows room to distinguish between 'yes, the existence of…' or 'no, the non-existence of…'. This leaves little space for considering the in-between aspects of endings or even 'after-endings'. I prefer the term 'ending' because it allows for a more open and complex understanding, and because I am not only referring to endings in therapy specifically; I am also referring to endings in life in general.

There is no current commonplace terminology that refers to the concept of 'abrupt terminations' within the psychotherapeutic literature. Different terms are used such as 'unplanned', 'unexpected', as well as 'abrupt'. I have chosen the term 'abrupt' because it captures the energy of my experience. It combines the urgency behind the sudden ending, and the shock behind the unexpected ending, as well as the aggression and force of a rupture or break.

To honour my experience, I will use the term 'abrupt endings' in this dissertation, and use the term 'terminations' only when referring to the psychotherapeutic literature in this chapter.

A Brief Overview of Terminations in Therapy

As Novick (1982) points out, it is striking how little is written about terminations in the early history of psychotherapeutic literature. Only since the 1970s and 1980s, has there been an exponential increase. Frank (2009) attributes this to the 'relational turn' (Lemma, 2016), when the importance of the analytic relationship and its emotional impact on the analyst was recognised. I am curious about the initial lack of literature, and wonder if this shift suggests

that the significance of terminations was beginning to be recognised within the psychotherapeutic profession.

The increase in the literature resulted in various perspectives on how terminations can be conceptualised and managed. This includes a growing list of goals, criteria, techniques and expected phenomena (Novick, 1982). I get overwhelmed and swept away in this, there are many aspects associated with terminating therapy that require careful consideration. Yet, despite the overload of information, I feel frustrated from my engagement with the literature and feel a sense that something is missing. I resonate with Novick's (1982) critique that the focus is on the criteria for a cure, rather than on the process of termination itself. Levin (1998) and Novick (1997) suggest that the success or failure of treatment is strongly affected by how the therapy ends. I wonder if this perspective has influenced the literature's view on terminations.

In defining different types of terminations, this same distinction seems to be made, in which 'timely terminations' that are mutually agreed upon between therapist and client are deemed successful, and 'premature terminations' that are initiated by one party are deemed failures (Novick, 1982). Within the category of premature terminations, 'forced terminations' refer to those prematurely initiated by the therapist, such as therapists retiring, while 'unilateral terminations' refer to those prematurely initiated by the client, such as clients moving cities.

Abrupt Terminations

As I am focusing on abrupt terminations from the therapist's perspective, the closest concept seems to be premature terminations, specifically unilateral terminations. The literature's focus on how to successfully manage a termination, and therefore, a treatment, is evident. I only find two journal articles and one chapter in a book dedicated to supposedly 'failed' premature terminations (Levin, 1998; Limentani, 1982; Murdin, 2000). From these references, it becomes clear that although premature terminations are associated with the idea of 'ending before its time', the considerations relate to *who* has initiated it and not necessarily the abruptness of the termination. The focus here is also on the impact of forced terminations on the client and, therefore, what the therapist needs to consider.

Out of these, only one journal article specifically relates to abrupt unilateral terminations. Writing on unexpected terminations, Limentani (1982) begins by acknowledging the difficulty in defining what is indeed "unexpected", as an ending might be building up without either party being aware. He highlights that abrupt endings are likely more prevalent than the literature suggests, and recognises the intensity of the experience for both therapist and client. Although there is extensive literature on abrupt endings with child and adolescent

therapy, he emphasises the 'remarkably scanty' literature on abrupt endings with adult therapy.

I feel encouraged when I find Limentani's article, it speaks to my experience within my psychotherapy training in which ideal terminations are suggested and taught, while abrupt terminations are not discussed – and this despite my personal experience of abrupt terminations being more prevalent in my clinical training. It is helpful to have at least found someone who has written on abrupt endings. However, Limentani's focus is on understanding how abrupt terminations occur, and how to successfully manage clients who might end abruptly, with the aim of prevention. I am, therefore, still left wondering about the therapist's experience of abrupt endings.

The Therapist's Experience

The literature recognises the significant impact of terminations on the therapist, particularly premature terminations (Levin, 1998; Limentani, 1982; Novick, 1982). It also recognises that most terminations are indeed premature. Yet, it is interesting how difficult it is to find literature on the therapist's *experience* of unilateral or abrupt terminations.

The significant impact is clear; strong countertransference responses often arise during terminations, and the therapist is ultimately the one who is ethically responsible in navigating both therapist and client through these strong currents (Feller, 2009). To add more impetus, there is a gap between the literature and what happens in practice, in which therapists often hold expectations about ideal terminations when, in reality, terminations are individual and far from this ideal (Feller, 2009; Golland, 1997; Schlesinger, 2005).

With such compelling need to explore the therapist's experience of terminations, why is the literature only full of clinical vignettes that focus on the client? I agree with Frank's (2009) critique that the focus is only on the client's half of the story. From reading the literature personally, I have learnt a lot about the *thinking* behind how terminations affect a client, but I am still left wondering: What does the experience *feel* like for the therapist?

I am not surprised to find only two studies specifically relating to this, that is, Frank (2009) and Viorst (1982). Frank emphasises the lack of literature on the therapist's subjective experience of terminations, and how this contributes to therapists often feeling a sense of fumbling through the final phase. Both studies acknowledge how isolated therapists feel, and truthfully are, with respect to terminations. Feller (2009) considers the vital element of confidentiality, which limits the therapist's ability to share of their experience, therefore, limiting the containing rituals for endings.

In their research, Frank (2009) and Viorst (1982) interview other therapists about their experiences of endings in therapy. These studies provide me with a little taste of how others

experience it. I observe that I resonate most with the snippets of first-hand experience included in the studies. These affective descriptions reflect my experience, such as describing terminations as a 'disturbing' time, or good-enough terminations as mostly 'bittersweet'. It is telling that *all* therapists experience a sense of loss with some terminations, while most therapists experience some sense of loss with *all* terminations (Viorst, 1982). For me, these findings further reinforce the need to explore the therapist's experience, as they stress the universality and the ache that surrounds terminations in therapy.

Knocking at Death's Door – Death and the Experience of Abrupt Endings

It is undeniable that at conscious and unconscious levels, endings are inextricably intertwined with death (Feller, 2009; Murdin, 2000). The process of ending therapy creates a microcosm of how one might confront, defend and respond to their own death. It is only when I engage with literature on death entering the therapeutic space, that I find therapists sharing their experience of various endings, including abrupt endings (Barnett, 2009; Willock et al., 2007).

Finally, experiences I can immerse myself in! I read about various experiences of abrupt endings: therapists working in palliative care, with HIV positive patients, refugees, and parents who have experienced the unexpected death of their child (Barnett, 2009; Sidebotham & Fleming, 2007; Willock et al., 2007). I sense my heart's shaky reverberation and the prick of tears in my eyes; I am arrested by these experiences, as they connect me to my own abrupt endings. However, I am still searching for the therapist's *own* experiences of abrupt endings in therapy, not their clients facing abrupt endings.

In thinking of death in the therapeutic space, Yalom (1980) immediately comes to mind. Existential psychotherapy is unique for its focus on death as an existential concern. In a personal book Yalom (2008) wrote on "overcoming the dread of death" (title page), there is a captivating chapter on his personal reflections of his experiences of death, and how this impacted his life and practice. This stirs me, but unfortunately, the experience of abrupt endings in therapy is not included in these reflections.

I am most excited when I find a chapter that is closest in relation to my topic: Sapountzis' (2007) writing 'On sudden endings and self-imposed silences'. Not only does Sapountzis provide a raw account of his experience of abrupt endings with clients, he also shares his own family's history of abrupt endings. He beautifully weaves his reflections on how those historical experiences have translated into his self-imposed silences, when abrupt endings have occurred in therapy. I find his story so touching, and I feel such satisfaction in getting his whole experience of abrupt endings, from history to present and future, from child to therapist and parent. It is shocking, yet expected, that this is the only reference that specifically relates to my inquiry within the psychotherapeutic literature.

Outside psychotherapy, many have written stories on endings and abrupt endings. In my pursuit to understand more about death, I have been engaging with this literature for the last decade: *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom (1997), *Veronika Decides to Die* by Paulo Coehlo (1998), and *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (2008). These books have become central in my personal library.

More recently, two books have truly captured the essence of abrupt endings for me: *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi (2016), and *Any Ordinary Day* by Leigh Sales (2018). The experience of reading Kalanithi's book is none like I have ever felt. I am present to the fact that he has written these words with the gravity of his life abruptly ending. For me, his words carry more weight because of this, they are infused with a sense of earnest that allows me to *feel* the loss of his future, that any moment can be his last. Poignantly, the book is unfinished, remaining true to the reality of abrupt endings.

I am drawn to the title of Sales' book because 'it started as an ordinary day…' is a thought I often have about abrupt endings. Reading that alone, my intuition knows this book is exactly about my topic; and it is. I am almost in disbelief that someone has written a whole book on the individual's experience of abrupt endings, in which she uses the term 'blindsides'. As a journalist, she has been reporting on the everyday experiences of blindsides for years. Sparking from her own personal encounter, she embarks on a phenomenological investigation of blindsides, including a terrorist attack, a mass shooting, natural disasters, and murder. For the first time while reading all the literature and frustratingly trying to define and place my topic, I have the experience of being met emotionally as she puts words to my thoughts and feelings.

Reflections on My Experience with the Literature

Throughout my process of being immersed in the literature, I notice I keep circling back to two prevailing reflections. Firstly, therapists seem to turn away from sharing their personal experiences of endings in therapy or life. Secondly, there is something about death that ignites a desire to share personal experiences.

A Turning Away and My Turning Towards

While I am engaging with the psychotherapeutic literature, I notice how hard it is to find what I am looking for, that is, the therapist's experience of abrupt endings in therapy. No one really talks about the everyday 'I won't be coming back next week' type of endings, and what this experience is like. With such a gap in the literature, I wonder if it has turned away from the experience of abrupt endings, or if I have gratuitously focused on it. I suspect both are true.

Novick (1997) echoes my perception that, as he puts it: "there is something in the reaction of therapists to the end of treatment which seriously interferes with learning about and conceiving of terminations" (p. 147). He thoughtfully considers aspects that contribute to this, including the history of psychoanalysis and the intellectual focus on technique. What catches my attention is his acknowledgement that the vast literature lacks the therapist's reactions to terminations, such as denial and defences in avoiding feelings of loss. Personally, when an abrupt ending happened, I felt embarrassed, inadequate, and feelings of not having mattered to a client. Perhaps there is shame surrounding this vulnerability for therapists, creating a reactive response of 'I'm fine, it happens, why harp on about it?", which hinders the acknowledgement and sharing of the experience.

If avoidance is the prevailing stance, why am I so curious and almost enthralled by the experience of abrupt endings that I am *willing* to undertake this research? What is it about my family history, experiences and personality that beckons me? I contemplate how my experiences of abrupt endings have cast a shadow over my life, fuelling my pursuit to understand death. One commonality I noticed within the literature is that true experiences of abrupt endings are all very personal accounts, borne out of direct encounters. I believe it reflects the captivating aspect of the phenomenon, and I feel heartened by this. I am not alone.

Death and All His Friends – Abrupt Endings in Life, without Death?

In reviewing all the literature that resonates with me, I have to name my partiality to death, as I am suddenly aware that I have not read much about other abrupt endings in life. My engagement with other abrupt endings is mainly in passing from the news about natural disasters or economic impacts – bushfires, tsunami warnings, evictions, job losses. Although, perhaps it is not simply about my personal bias, because even the news predominantly focuses on deaths or near-death experiences that have occurred – shootings, bombings, car accidents, COVID-19.

Perhaps every true experience of an abrupt ending is borne out of direct encounters with death. Sales' (2018) book also reflects this, in which each extraordinary blindside is always related to it. I begin to realise how difficult it is to separate death and abrupt endings. Is it that death is always an abrupt ending, and that abrupt endings are always about death? With regards to psychotherapy, what is the literature reflecting, that death needs to be involved for therapists to bring themselves in experientially?

I wonder if this has to do with the nature of death and our relationship to it. Although we rationally know we will die someday, we collude to deny the reality of death and find ways to not expect it (Willock et al., 2007). Thus, when death occurs, it often feels like an

unexpected abrupt ending. Death suddenly becomes present and personal, no longer out there in the ethereal universe of possibilities. In our anxiety, we become obsessed with it, we want to know all about it and we want to talk about it.

This is paralleled in the general literature and media, and even in the way I drive past the scene of a car crash. I am slow in my approach, but I *want* to look, to gawk, before quickly driving off thinking 'thank God that isn't me today'. Sales (2018) writes about how media frenzies are an expected product of the community's morbid fascination with tragedies. We want to know about another's encounter with death, we are desperate for details, as it provides a safe way for us to grapple with the confronting reality of 'that could have been me' or 'what if that was me'. Likewise, when we have a personal encounter with death, we usually want to share about it, to process the experience, and ultimately, feel less alone in those experiences.

An Exploding Lightbulb Moment

It's not about Good-byes, it's about Bad-byes

As I am finishing my literature view and beginning to think about my findings, I feel excited to move on. Yet, I cannot seem to shake the feeling of being disenchanted, that it does not add up or something major is still missing somehow. After all that reading on abrupt endings and death, why am I still left asking: where is the pain? Despite a deep knowing within me that most endings are indeed abrupt, why do I fail to get that same sense from the literature?

In my journal, I write:

I feel a sense of 'still the general literature has focussed on good-byes', and how to turn bad-byes into good-byes. That is, how to cope. I feel torn within myself too. I feel like I am doing what everyone else has done – showing how important it is to reflect on death to live a good life. I feel disappointed in that. Because it doesn't honour the experience of 'there isn't anything good about this', the pain and ache of it.
(Journal, 20 March 2021)

I am captured by the fact that all this writing is about 'dying well to live well', looking on the bright side of death. Even the books I initially think will reflect my experience, also seem to turn away from the pain. They provide the rose-tint that if we live a certain way, if we connect enough, reflect enough, love enough, we can prepare for any endings and make them good endings. In this way, the literature feels protective and idealistic, by not delving in and staying with the pain of bad-byes.

This leads me to a powerful illumination that blows up the light bulb, shattering glass everywhere. I realise what I am focusing on is the experience of abrupt endings itself – not the processing of, not the making sense of, not the managing of. It is *the moment of*, the punch in the guts, and not what comes after. It feels strange to be writing this moment of illumination with such power, because I have had thought this before. Yet, I feel without a shadow of a doubt, this clarity within me, that finally knows what I mean when I say: 'it's about the moment of an abrupt ending'. I believe this is an experience of connecting to my tacit dimension.

Almost immediately after this illumination, I am confronted with the immense task of just facing that moment of an abrupt ending. I write:

Yet, do I dare just leave my dissertation on such a 'bad note'? Can I stay true to the experience, and provide no sunshine or rainbows? Dare I remain in that limbo state, of just the feeling of falling, before hitting the ground and making sense of it? Is it tolerable? Is it possible? No wonder everyone else has coloured it positive, has 'painted over the hole'.
(Journal, 20 March 2021)

At the time of writing this, the thought of ending my dissertation on a 'bad note' feels sweaty-palms-frightening. Like I'm about to skydive out of a plane, and I am terrified of

heights. I do not yet know if I can stay with the feeling of falling, without landing on some sort of solid ground. Will I survive the fall?

Chapter 4 – My Journey of Resistance and Surrender

> A command rings out within me: "Dig! What do you see?"
> "Men and birds, water and stones."
> "Dig deeper! What do you see?"
> "Ideas and dreams, fantasies and lightning flashes!"
> "Dig deeper! What do you see?"
> "I see nothing! A mute night, as thick as death. It must be death."
> "Dig deeper!"
> "Ah, I cannot penetrate the dark partition! I hear voices and weeping. I hear the flutter of wings on the other shore."
> "Don't weep! Don't weep! They are not on the other shore. The voices, the weeping, and the wings are your own heart."
>
> —Nikos Kazantzakis, *Finding Yourself, Finding Others*

Introduction

This chapter explores the process of my journey as I experienced the phases of initial engagement, immersion and illumination. I begin by describing my initial apprehension, before sharing three significant illuminations that helped refine my self-search process. I relate my journey to Sela-Smith's (2002) concepts of resistance and surrender, while using psychotherapeutic literature on the 'Fear of Breakdown' by Winnicott (1974) and on surrender by Ghent (1990) to support my understanding. Finally, I provide an overview of my research journey.

The Dissertation Disconnection

During my initial engagement, I struggled to work on my dissertation. In fact, I was actively avoiding connecting to abrupt endings. I thought this was my procrastination, but then I noticed how fearful I was to *begin* my research. Having to take that first step, I was awakened to just how personal this was for me, and I felt my resistance to go there.

> *I feel like it's stuck in my throat, this fear of many abrupt endings. I fear that if I say it and state it, it will materialize into reality. So, I am afraid to even think it, to connect to it, to acknowledge it.*
> (Journal, 23 March 2020)

The early months of my research also coincided with the first half of 2020. True to the nature of abrupt endings, there was no easing into the experience. As it dawned on the world that COVID-19 was a global pandemic and the world started to abruptly shut down, the magnitude of abrupt endings was dawning on me and I wanted to shut it out. I have never felt the sense of 'it's the end of the world as I know it' so acutely. I was confronted with the cutting reality of just how ever-present and inescapable abrupt endings were, and perhaps as with the virus, I feared becoming uncontained. I feared losing myself in the heuristic process and the world losing itself in the face of the virus. My fears intertwined throughout this parallel process:

I'm afraid of connecting to how I really feel, because I'm afraid I will be overwhelmed and that I can't contain it. I'm so scared. I almost feel like I could have a panic attack. I feel the existential fear in me, as my world shuts down. It feels like the end of the world as we know it.
(Journal, 25 March 2020 – The First Day of Alert Level 4 'Lockdown')

At the start, it seemed unfathomable that no one knew what our lives would become over the next month or year. It also felt unfathomable not knowing where this dissertation would lead me. Will we make it through this pandemic? Will I make it through this dissertation? Who will we/I be at the end?

There was so much unknown within me and all around me, and like Sela-Smith (2002), I was afraid to take the leap and fall into a "forever darkness" (p. 57). My safe and known ways of organising my world were being threatened on all fronts. I feared experiencing what Winnicott (1974) termed 'fear of breakdown', in which engaging with the unknown meant an unravelling, a falling apart of 'my world as I knew it'. I doubted I could survive the unknown of my dissertation during the unknown of this pandemic.

The Personal Connection

Although it did not feel like it, I had started to immerse in my topic. I mostly trusted that I had the right research question. However, part of me also questioned if there was more for me to find, as I had thought about death and endings for years.

One April evening, I was on my daily lockdown walk, listening to a podcast. It mentioned that psychotherapy was about going into those difficult places, into that lifetime terror, the very thing we design our lives to avoid. In that moment, my mind instantly flashed back to the lift incident mentioned earlier. That experience always haunted me, but I was still surprised how powerful and immediate the memory was. I thought I would need more time to ponder what my lifetime terror was, yet unconsciously, my being intuitively knew.

Three nights later, I went for another walk. The sun was beginning to set earlier and it was dark and stormy. I felt scared and I was immediately transported back to my memory of that stormy day in my prologue. I sensed that somehow these memories were related to abrupt endings, and to my lifetime terror, but how? In my journal, I wrote:

I thought of the incident with the lift, being left and having the doors close on me. Is it 'being left', 'being alone' or 'being abandoned', that I fear?

I thought of my fear of not being grounded, physically. My fear of flying and diving. Feeling detached from the world and unable to get any form of help. It's terrifying. The immensity and the feeling of being floaty, into the unknown... I'm not sure if any of this is linked. But somehow, with abrupt endings, I feel it touches on that young memory of being left and alone on that stormy day. My fear that I'll cry and no one will hear me, or even be there to hear me.
(Journal, 8 April 2020)

I realised these core memories of mine all revolved around my fear of feeling physically groundless. It was a feeling I could only access through my body, the feeling of my heart dropping as I lost contact with the ground. I became tingly with fear and excitement, feeling I was on to something, but not yet knowing how the pieces all fit together.

Connecting to my lifetime terror felt like an engagement with the tacit dimension, an unknown known that I knew so well yet could not name. Ghent (1990) poetically conveys how I felt about my lifetime terror, when he highlights an aspect of dread as being "so shrouded in history as to feel nameless and 'existential'" (p. 127). I never quite understood the intensity of my terror, that felt existential and annihilating, in response to my seemingly benign fears of heights and being alone.

This realisation beckoned me to question if my connection to abrupt endings went deeper and further back in my history than I initially thought. This was scary to consider, yet, it felt true. As Winnicott (1974) proposes, the fear of breakdown is, in fact, the fear of a breakdown already experienced but not integrated, thus rendering it to the realm of the unknown known.

Although it remained unclear what the original breakdown or terror was, this was a moment of illumination that jolted me. It became a torch within me, providing the fuel and power for my search, and lighting a clearer path for my findings to come. Like passing a signpost along a hike, I felt reassured I was on the right track. There *was* more to find, keep searching. My self-search was now more than a personal question I wanted to answer, it was my lifetime terror that I needed to know and understand.

The Emotional Connection – Connecting to my *I-who-feels*

I was now more connected to my research question than ever, but I was still wrapping my head around the heuristic self-search process. Throughout those early months of journaling, I felt unsure of myself, unsure if what I was doing was 'on track'. I did not know what to reflect on or how to reflect, and I often felt the process was futile. Almost every day I was having a different, incomplete reflection on abrupt endings. It was frustrating not knowing if something was an important lead to delve deeper into, and I was sceptical that this would all eventually amount to something.

A monthly heuristic seminar group was invaluable in developing my understanding of the heuristic process. I clearly remember my lecturer emphasising a vital point, that as psychotherapists we were trained to analyse, and as such we were often attached to the thoughts that came after an experience (M. Solomon, personal communication, May 5, 2020). The heuristic challenge, therefore, was to keep bringing myself back to the experience itself, not to explain it away or be quick to attach meaning to it.

This reflected Sela-Smith's (2002) call for researchers to surrender to the *I-who-feels* and immerse themselves in the realm of feeling, instead of connecting to the thinking-observing self. I am grateful this distinction was highlighted early in my heuristic process, because I realised I was *observing* and *reflecting* on the experience of abrupt endings, rather than *feeling* my experience.

When I first tried journaling from the *I-who-feels*, I struggled. Without the meaning I normally attached, it felt silly to journal the felt experience. In this struggle, I was directly grappling with the known and unknown. I so desperately wanted to know, wanted to rely on my already mapped out roads. It was difficult not to approach my experiences from a knowing place, in which I could observe and make meaning, to immediately know where I was going. I realised I needed to surrender and allow myself to engage with what Keats termed "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1817, as cited in O'Connor, 2020, p. 65). This was a necessary shift if I wanted to truly encounter the tacit dimension.

Surrendering to My *I-who-feels*

With each abrupt ending, I became more comfortable connecting to my *I-who-feels*. Slowly I opened myself to engaging with the unknown and feeling deeper into my experience. Interestingly, the key experience that plunged me deeper into the tacit dimension and helped me value connecting to my *I-who-feels*, was not an abrupt ending.

One evening, I was feeling nauseous and dizzy. I tried to sleep it off, hoping I would feel better in the morning, but I got up in the middle of the night and realised I could barely walk.

> *Everything is spinning around me, I am off balance, out of kilter. I am lying still yet my head is swirling and nothing is okay. Closing my eyes doesn't make it better either. I'm nauseous, stomach churning. I am trying desperately to stop spinning, trying to hold on to something, anything.*
> (Journal, 12 September 2020)

I suddenly clicked that I was experiencing vertigo, a sudden internal or external spinning sensation, in which it feels like the surroundings are moving when there is no movement (Ministry of Health, 2014).

> *I realise it is not a physical 'holding on to' that I need, it is an internal one. I do not know which way is up, and there is no ground on which I can stand. It feels terrifying, not being able to control anything, not knowing my centre, my foundation from which I emanate. That same experience of having an abrupt ending, the inability to move, the focusing on one thing, yet being unable to focus on anything. I feel a sense of losing myself to the atmosphere around me, like I don't exist anymore. The world keeps spinning but I am standing still.*
> (Journal, 12 September 2020)

I was puzzled. This was not an experience of an abrupt ending, yet it mirrored the same upheaval. It was a purely internal and physical experience, but I still felt the mental whirlwind of disorientation, the fear of being out of control, the inability to move and the sensation of not feeling the ground supporting me. This was all without an actual ending or being physically off the ground.

I was surprised it activated the internal scramble and scream I experienced whenever I was physically up in the air, ever bracing for the fall. It helped me realise that my fears of being physically groundless were about an internal groundlessness, which abrupt endings threw me into. The bodily experience of vertigo helped me connect to my *I-who-feels* in such a physical way that it accessed a different facet of my experience of abrupt endings. I was beginning to trust the importance of my bodily response. Without the need to mentally process an event, and with no ability to stop the physical sensation of spinning, I had to stay with feeling from my *I-who-feels*. I could stay purely with how it felt in my body and the emotions it evoked.

Up until this experience, I thought I had surrendered to the heuristic process. However, as I felt the terror of not being in control of my physical body and my internal mind, I connected to a depth of vulnerability that truly forced me to surrender. I was powerless to escape, forced to engage in negative capability and be with the terror.

Despite my initial discomfort and resistance, there was a sense of liberation when I surrendered. Ghent (1990) makes the distinction clear that surrender relates to a 'letting go', a "letting down of defensive barriers" (p. 108), rather than defeat. For me, this meant it was not just about falling into the abyss, but allowing a freefall into the abyss.

This experience of surrender opened up new experiences and provided me with a deeper understanding of my research, inevitably confirming that the feeling of groundlessness was the link between my fears, lifetime terror and abrupt endings. I had finally arrived at the very landscape I was meant to explore.

A Wild Adventure

My journey was fraught with the tension between resistance and surrender, the known and the unknown. Each time I engaged with a new chapter, it felt like "leaping into the unknown" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 54). It was a cycle of fearing the breakdown and holding myself together, breaking down and falling apart, and then a surrender and coming together.

A continual process of getting lost and finding myself again, it was confusing and overwhelming, yet oddly familiar and soothing. In getting lost, I was confronted with unnerving feelings of terror, doubt, uncertainty, the free fall into the unknown, and thoughts of 'I'm not good enough', 'I can't do this', and 'I can't survive this'. Many times, it was anguish. I could not

stay with the unknown as it felt unbearable, and I could not tolerate being in a state of 'pieces' and re-organisation.

I simply wanted to flee from all the intense yucky feelings and thoughts. Except, I needed to stay. In considering the task of staying with the unbearable, O'Connor (2018, 2020) suggests the need to surrender and connect to vulnerability, to be receptive to the ineffable and unknown, and engage with negative capability to allow deep exploration. This necessitates that the question inhabits my being, including its accompanying terror, so that I might be able to digest and create a new understanding of it.

I felt like a blind soul, relying on my feelings (intuition) and the sound of my voice (self-dialogue) to navigate me, all along never really knowing where I was going, never quite able to make out the entire landscape before me. Each experience of an abrupt ending provided a thread for me to hold, and to follow wherever my feelings and reflections took me. Down one train of thought, up a mountain of feeling, through blind spots and known territory… sometimes I lost the thread, sometimes I hit a dead end, other times I went down the same thread again and again, or connected to other threads I had already followed.

As I opened to a way of being that could slowly tolerate and engage with the unknown, I came to experience the power of surrender and thus, acknowledge my powerlessness and vulnerability in my research process. I learnt to trust a different process of tacit knowing to experience what feels true for me. This allowed me to encounter deeply meaningful experiences, in which I found a sense of wonder at the vast unknown, and strangely, the freedom to be myself.

Relying on my inner torch to guide me, I carved a deeper connection to my *I-who-feels* and continually brought myself closer to the experience itself. Each illumination connected me with a different facet of abrupt endings, and slowly I mapped out more of the landscape. It became easier to traverse the terrain, easier to feel my way around as I began to recognise familiar landmarks. I noticed my self-search becoming more refined and focused, I was more able to discern what truly related to my inquiry and what did not.

At some point, there were more connections than loose threads in the web of my experience. It was wonderful to feel it all coming together and that I was getting closer to the thing itself. After continuously digging deeper, and deeper still, I could not quite believe I had reached the flutter of my own heart, my precious discoveries that I had found while on this self-search journey.

Chapter 5 – The Findings of My Journey

Reality will break your heart, survival will not be the hardest part.
It's keeping all your hopes alive when all the rest of you has died.
So, let it break your heart.

—Hayley Williams, *26*

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the findings of my journey. I begin with a depiction of my felt experience, before sharing vignettes of significant abrupt endings I experienced over the period of my research. From these, I elucidate the four micro-moments (Stern, 2004) that I found which encompass the essence of the phenomenon. I conclude with a depiction that illustrates my core experience of abrupt endings.

Falling – A Depiction

Having the rug pulled from under my feet.
        Grasping for something, anything to hold on to, to ground me, to be okay.
Like someone has pulled the seat away as I'm sitting down, and I've been falling ever since.

        I am feeling that suspended feeling again. Like I am not settled, scrambling, I'm not okay. I feel it in my body, almost like a panic, but not quite. An urgency, I need to do something, I need to find out what happened. I need to search, I need it to make sense. It doesn't make sense.

        There is something about feeling a sense of safety, then it being RIPPED! away.
My 'limbo' sense that I get, where it feels frighteningly timeless and other worldly.

(Journal, November 2019 – March 2021)

That Moment

This is about *that moment*. That moment when the news stops me, forcing me to sit down. That moment of the *gasp*, when my gut seizes and my breath catches. That moment of the shatter, when I realise life will never be the same again. These moments are my personal encounters of abrupt endings, and these findings are about what happens for me within those moments.

        In my heuristic self-search process, I became present to many such moments. From a global pandemic to micro endings within a therapy session, I thought I was aware that abrupt endings were everywhere. Yet, I was still struck by just how many I experienced over the last 19 months. The most significant included the sudden moves into lockdown restrictions, two clients abruptly ending therapy, three suicides and three unexpected deaths.

Abrupt Endings in Therapy

As mentioned in my introduction, during my first year of clinical practice, I was deeply affected when my client ended therapy. In my third year of clinical practice, I experienced yet another abrupt ending.

> *I am surprised my client has not confirmed our appointment for this week. I go about my day normally when I notice a text.*
>
> *"I'm feeling supported enough…I don't really have the time… Thank you for everything…"*
>
> *What is happening?*
> *Where is this coming from? I just saw them last week and there was no indication that they wished to end therapy. Was that really our last session? I immediately want to run away from this experience, want to close the message down and not see it again.*
>
> *I feel shaky, thrown into an emotional spiral of anger, confusion, shock, sadness and hurt. Did I do something wrong? Did I not see the signs? What do I mean to them? What do they mean to me? It is hard to admit to myself that I feel used, like I do not matter. Abandoned. I feel desperate, weak. Vulnerable.*
>
> *I feel light headed. I need to sit down.*
>
> *I have a strong gut and bodily response. I feel it physically in my chest, it feels so yuck. Like I am being winded, slowly, the air being pushed out or crushed out of my lungs. I feel adrenaline pumping in my heart. My vision blurs a little.*
> (Journal, 16 March 2020)

This experience happened soon after I chose abrupt endings as my research question. I was shocked that even after two more years of developing my practice, I still felt the same intense reaction when a client abruptly ended therapy. This was significant because it confirmed that abrupt endings really affected me, and that this was the topic for me. I started to wonder if I would always be this affected when clients ended therapy, or if I would ever stop being affected.

Abrupt Endings in Life

When September 11 happened, I was too young to understand what was going on, but I felt the enormity of this event and the impact it suddenly had on the world. This was my first experience of a global abrupt ending, in which I felt a change in the way the world operated. I remember wondering about what this meant for the future. As I got older, I would read about everyday people suddenly getting caught in unimaginable unforeseen circumstances – natural disasters, accidents, war. I would feel the shock and horror of those moments, and empathise with the heart-breaking suffering.

For the most part, I have personally experienced abrupt deaths, rather than abrupt endings in my life. Then 2020 came. The year that would be marked in history, the year no one

ever thought we would have. COVID-19 changed the world and how we lived on every level and in every sphere of life. A globally shared experience, there was not one person that was not impacted by the many abrupt endings caused by COVID-19. It allowed me to experience abrupt endings, such as lockdown, on a personal, national and global scale.

> *It is Tuesday night when I suddenly receive messages that there will be a COVID-19 update soon. An update this late? This catches me off guard. My mind immediately assumes it is something serious and that there will be a very abrupt change in alert levels.*
>
> *While I set up to watch the announcement, I notice I already feel an internal shakiness. I feel scared, rattled and close to tears. An alert level 3 lockdown is announced, plunging me back into the heavy reality that COVID-19 exists and has profound impacts on the entire world, including me. Life, as I know it, ends again. I hold back tears as I instinctively go into action mode – I need to re-organise my appointments for this week.*
>
> *Over this lockdown, I am in a state of limbo and uncertainty. I don't know what to do with myself. I can't start anything, can't focus on anything. I am existing, but not living, suspended in time.*
>
> *One afternoon, I am looking forward to hearing an update on the levels, but this is delayed. I didn't realise how much I was waiting for the certainty in the update, because this extended uncertainty throws me. I then connect to how scared and anxious I have been feeling. I have just been holding my breath through this time, waiting for certainty, waiting until I can relax and breathe again.*
>
> *In my body, my throat feels tight, like it is being constrained, gripped, nearly suffocating. It is hard to breathe, and I feel immobilised. Like I am standing there, willing my body to move, but it can't. I can almost feel the strain and exertion, trying, but nothing is happening. I feel the frustration of that, and fear, that I am not in control, unable to even mobilise myself when I want to. I am frozen, stuck in a state I can't shift from and unable to find a way to 'feel better'.*
> (Journal, 22 August 2020 – The Second COVID-19 'Lockdown')

In the constantly developing situation and the entirely new modus vivendi of 'lockdown', it was difficult to make sense of how I felt in this unfamiliar experience. I was surprised I felt so stunned through this. I did not realise I was in this state of limbo, waiting with bated breath for the other shoe to drop. This abrupt shift into and out of lockdown was significant because it was an undocumented, never experienced situation that I needed to blindly feel my way through. Here, I realised I became paralysed in the face of uncertainty.

Abrupt Endings by Death

When I started my research, I had experienced a lot of death. I did not anticipate that I would experience so much more death in these past 19 months. To be fair, I never do.

> *I wake up and groggily check the messages on my phone. I gasp out loud as I read that a friend from high school has died. How can this be? We're still so young.*

The initial shock feels artificial somehow, a typical knee-jerk response to hearing that anyone I know has died. I think the lack of information surrounding their death contributes to this. Without the details to fill in the gaps, it does not yet feel real. As always, I feel the impetus to search for information as I trawl online, trying to find a trace of what has happened here. I find nothing.

*I find it difficult to leave the bed, difficult to start my day. I start a meditation, and as my mind and body settles, I begin to feel the quiver in my teeth. I realise I am physically shaken. My **core** is shaken and trembling, a ball of energy quivering out, needing release. At the same time, I feel a desire to physically turn away from this, a desire to keep it contained.*

As I listen to the meditation, my senses shift in and out of focus. I feel like someone has just struck me on the head and I am trying to use my senses to focus and orient myself. But everything is buzzy, in slow motion almost. My mind is somewhere else, my body is someplace else. Like in the movies, when they blur out the scene and voices, when the actor has lost their way in the world.

My breaths are slow and controlled, yet there is such a shakiness to it, an inconsistency as I find myself holding my breath and then gasping for air. In my body, there is almost a paralysis, and yet a gasp for life at the same time. A wail in me that wants to cry out, emotions and tears that are bursting to be expressed. Yet, I tear slowly, quietly. It is not a thunderous roar, but a pained gasp... hold, and release.

I need to run away from feeling like this, but it is incredibly hard to move from this position, it feels like moving through cement. I also feel like just sitting and being, not doing. Doing feels so jarring. How can life continue?

I am both still, and utterly alive. Unable to move, yet grasping for life.
(Journal, 11 October 2020 – A Friend Dies by Suicide)

This event was very significant and personal for me. It connected me to the first suicide I experienced 9 years ago. It was shocking how similar this felt, even though all the details were different and I was different. It was an experience that was still in me, pulsing in my veins, and it was still as strong as the first time. This time, it was closer to home. This time, I felt a strong confirmation within me, that this, *this was it*. Death, especially abrupt death, was the absolute experience of abrupt endings, that gripped me in a way no other abrupt endings did.

The Four Micro-moments

I am still living but I am not present, like I am just stopped in time.
There is an ache, a longing. A hanging. It feels like I am not grounded. Flung off my feet. Disorientated. Floating, yet heavy. Holding my breath and being unable to breathe.
(Journal, 25 May 2020)

With each of these significant abrupt endings, I discovered that the feeling was always the same for me – a permeating, inescapable feeling of groundlessness. The blow from each blindsiding abrupt ending threw me, disorientated me, suspended me in time, in feeling, and

in being. This feeling of being suspended seemed key. I was unable to move forward or back, unable to ground my feet, or come up to breathe. It felt eerily similar to my experience of diving mentioned earlier. In that moment, I lost my entire sense of safety and I became incapacitated, not knowing what to do with myself to feel safe again. There was almost a dead stillness, a floating away.

From my journals, I realised there were certain descriptive words I used time and time again – rip, scramble, tension and poignancy. I believe these words spoke to particular nuances and emotions that were evoked in me within those moments of an abrupt ending. These four words loosely organise my experience into four successive micro-moments.

The Rip

This refers to the micro-moment of 'oh my gosh, this has happened', when I first become aware of an abrupt ending. It is the point of first contact, the blow that throws me into the air. The main feeling is that of shock. The news grabs my full attention, it creates the 'punch in the guts' response. I can feel the blood drain in my body, a ghastly atmosphere settling in around me. My internal voice cries 'I didn't see it coming' as my jaw hangs in disbelief.

The word *rip* speaks to the violence of having someone or something taken from me, it is not something I have given up, it has been snatched out of the grip of my hands. It reflects a break in continuity, a cut between me and that which I have lost, a shattering of everything I think I can expect up until that moment.

I am left stunned, broken into pieces, longing for what was. The ending has been stolen from me, 'the last conversation' robbed. Our last moments together and the final moments of their lives play on my mind, as the painful realisation hits that those moments were indeed 'the last time'.

This micro-moment confronts me with the dialectic between continuity and impermanence. In an instant, anything can change, here one moment, gone the next. I battle between the time I have had and the time I have now lost. There is a wish in me, for a little continuity, just one more time, one more chance to do… or say….

The illusion of continuity is shattered, I am awakened, forced to remember the fact that nothing is permanent. Time runs out. Time *has* run out, and not on my time. It connects me with the beginnings of feeling how powerless I am, that I can never know when any moment will be the last.

The Scramble

The scramble refers to the micro-moment of 'has this *really* happened?', when I react instinctively to the blow. It is the fight or flight response that immediately takes over as I am

tumbling in the air, kicking and screaming. There is an emotional rollercoaster of feelings…fear, anger, sadness, hurt… however, the main feeling is that of panic. It feels overwhelming and suffocating. Heart pumping, mind racing, I feel the adrenaline and cortisol burning in my body as I despondently mutter 'no way'.

The word *scramble* communicates my desperation and frantic attempt to hold on to what has been snatched from my hands, to grasp anything that is tangible. It reflects the frenzy in my initial desire to run away and in my need to search for information. I am looking for a way out of this or around this, a way to go back to undo what has happened. I am replaying my memories on fast forward, as my mind hastily sifts for facts and hunts for inaccuracies, trying to find ways to conclude that 'this cannot be true'.

This aspect confronts me with the dialectic between chaos and control. I am desperately trying to cling on, to prevent myself from being pulled into the chaos of the unknown. I am trying to make sense of what happened. It is a time of 'maybes' and 'what ifs', the 'should have', 'would have' and 'could haves'. I swing between chaos and control while I question *everything*, and work out all the possibilities imaginable. I am even more connected to how powerless I am and I feel the force in me, fighting to re-gain a sense of control over this chaos, fighting to feel okay again.

The Tension

This refers to the micro-moment of 'it really has happened', when the certainty of the abrupt ending is sinking in. I have begun my descent from being thrown, and part of me is trying to push against the air as I fall, while the other part carelessly allows the plummet. The main feeling is that of angst and helplessness. There is a lingering desperate fight in me as I am still reeling from the experience, yet there is also a deadness to me as I am mostly incapacitated. I sigh, 'can nothing else be done?'.

The word *tension* conveys how torn I feel, and the energy behind this frustrating conflict. I am torn between three options: feeling injustice and still trying to fight, feeling tired and wanting to give in, and realising nothing can be done and giving up. This conflict creates such anguish, my body feels tense, tight like a clenched fist. An explosion of emotions is happening within, yet on the surface all appears calm and still.

This micro-moment confronts me with the dialectic between dreams and reality. I am caught between the dreams I cannot have, and the reality I do not want. Stuck. Trapped. Time slows, and it feels like I am suspended. All I have is the present, except it feels as though I have been cornered there. I do not want the past with what has happened, I do not want a future without what I have lost, and I do not want the present with all the pain I am feeling.

Even if I wanted to rewind to the past, it is impossible. Even if I wanted to move forward into the future, I do not know how to. Perhaps I even *want* to stop time, to feel some relief from being in this tension, but this is not to be. There is no comfort no matter what I do, no way out of this ordeal. I am in the final throes of feeling powerlessness in its entirety. Holding on to what has been lost feels like the only power I have left, and I do not want to relinquish it, do not want to be truly powerless. I am feeling utter helplessness, it is unbearable.

The Poignancy

This is the micro-moment of 'ahh, it happened', the lingering aftermath when I become present to ephemerality. I have landed. Eyes closed, lying face down on the ground, I am feeling the weight of my body against the earth, breathing in life. There is no main feeling to this, but rather a state of being that I can only define from the Japanese term *mono no aware*, literally translated as the "pathos of things" (Longhurst, 2018). *Mono no aware* represents an awareness, a sensitivity to the transitory nature of existence. It is witnessing the intense, wild adventure of life, all the while knowing nothing lasts forever. This encompasses the experience of many emotions, a quiet joy and wistfulness, a gentle sadness and deep appreciation that this is the reality of life.

The word *poignancy* expresses the ache, the tenderness I feel. I am touched and deeply affected. I am in with the experience of the abrupt ending, holding it in my hand, feeling its weight and impact. It is both the weight of the world and the fragility of life, the significance and insignificance of every moment. There is a zooming in and zooming out, between the big picture and the details, an air of soft contemplation while I re-focus on what is really important, *what really matters*.

This poignant space confronts me with the dialectic between life and death. How? How do we tolerate this? How do we survive and thrive in life, all the while knowing death is there? Yet, we do survive, we do thrive. There is an awe to this, there really is a method to the madness that is life. I must surrender, and accept my powerlessness. I am in contact with the full breadth of human existence, in contact with life and death, with all its wonder and suffering. It feels difficult to be with both at the same time. I can only be with death for so long, before I want to grab life and inhale it in, then exhale slowly as I say, 'ahh, such is life'.

Abrupt Endings – A Depiction

My experience of abrupt endings is visually depicted in this web in Figure 4. Each straight line represents the dialectics I have highlighted within the four micro-moments. The circular red line illustrates time – the past, present, and future. There is also a split, in which half the web

represents the 'powerful known' position and the other half represents the 'powerless unknown' position.

Overall, this depiction communicates the tension I feel while I grapple with these dialectics. I am trying to hold the opposite ends, yet I am also always fighting to stay in the 'powerful known' position. The very nature of the web formation captures the feeling of suspension and groundlessness that I experience with abrupt endings. The image of this web also connects me with different aspects of my experience.

Figure 4

The Web of Life
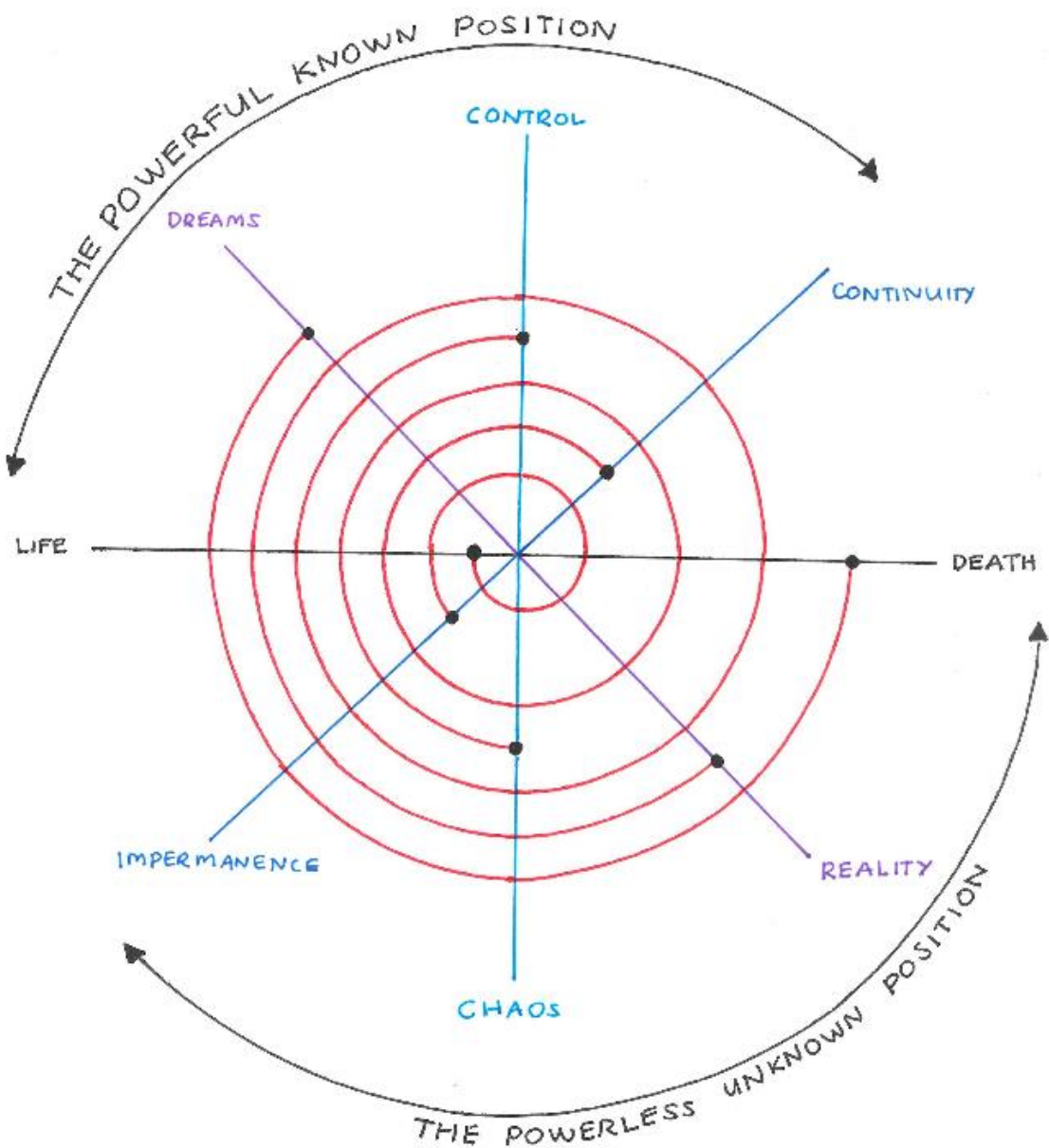
The Web of Power

The 'powerful known' and the 'powerless unknown' positions represent the overall sense of either feeling grounded and in control of my life, or feeling groundless and out of control in my life. The 'powerful known' position consists of the half of the dialectics that are within the realm of the known: continuity, control, dreams and life. When I am in this position, I feel some sense of safety and certainty. I feel powerful, because I feel confident in my ability to control my life. This is the position of the 'expected' that I wish to be in and constantly maintain.

The 'powerless unknown' position consists of the half of the dialectics that are within the realm of the unknown: impermanence, chaos, reality and death. When I am in this position, I lack certainty and I do not feel safe. I feel powerless, unable to have any say over what happens in my life. This is the position that abrupt endings plunge me into, a position I actively avoid and work towards getting out of.

The Web of Experience

The web is interconnected, creating a structure that organises my life experiences. This represents a schema of my being in the world, that holds my meaning, understanding and expectations of life. In this way, an abrupt ending has the power to ripple through the entire structure. It can impact the present, past and future, therefore, altering some aspect of my experience of being in the world. Depending on the intensity of the experience, parts of the structure can crumble and require a rebuilding, or parts can be shaken and require a re-organising of my meaning, understanding or expectations of life.

The Web of Life

The circular movement of time around the web represents the journey through life. Beginning with life, time circles around. Each abrupt ending stops me in my tracks and confronts me with the 'powerless unknown'. This creates a pause, before I connect back to the 'powerful known' and continue, finally ending in death. This illustrates the cycle of life, in which I am constantly oscillating between the 'powerful known' and the 'powerless unknown'.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

In The End

No blinding light or tunnels to gates of white.
Just our hands clasped so tight, waiting for the hint of a spark …
If there's no one beside you when your soul embarks,
then I'll follow you into the dark.

—Ben Gibbard, *I Will Follow You into The Dark*

Introduction

In my research, I have been on a journey into the experience of abrupt endings. Having arrived at the end I must now take a step back to make sense of this journey and my findings, and how this all relates to the bigger picture.

I begin by connecting the strands of my internal process, summarising and acknowledging what this journey has meant for me. Zooming out, I relate my experience of abrupt endings to the bigger picture of death, providing a revamped depiction of my experience. The emerging discoveries shed new light on my findings, and critical links are drawn between these findings, my heuristic process and my literature view. The significance of this research is then discussed, including implications on the psychotherapeutic profession. The strengths, limitations and future research of this dissertation are then considered. I end with a final reflection on my inquiry.

The Tapestry

From my heuristic journey, I can see how abrupt endings have woven into the tapestry of my life. It is poignant to realise there is a much deeper personal connection, one I never imagined I would discover. Abrupt endings are not simply an external event that happens *to* me, it is an experience that happens *within* me. I believe it is my original breakdown, an experience that was embedded into my way of being without my capacity to 'take it in' (Winnicott, 1974). It is my unknown known I have been attempting to go back to and integrate. It is no wonder that abrupt endings have such a grip over me, and I now understand more about the hold it has over my life.

Abrupt endings are the intersection, connecting the roads of my earliest life experiences, my anxieties, and my lifetime terror. When an abrupt ending happens, the experience cuts directly through me. It connects me to these potent roads all at once, creating the feeling of being physically groundless and exposing my vulnerability of feeling internally groundless.

I realise that my experience of being in the world is permeated with this groundlessness. There are two distinct parts to this. There is the *abrupt* part, that relates to the moment when my feet are no longer on solid ground, in which I scramble and panic and

feel *anxious* to get back. Then there is the *ending* part, that relates to the moment when I feel there might be no way out, no way back to solid ground, in which I feel *terror* that I will be left in the chaos, and that things will end this way.

As I reflect on those core memories shared within this dissertation, and how they relate to my fear of heights and my terror of being groundless, it feels as though my body has been trying to communicate to me this whole time. My intuition attempting to tell me something deep within myself that is so *known* to me, yet just out of my grasp, making me *feel* that which is implicit and cannot be put into words.

As I consider this thoughtfully, I am suddenly speechless.

Of course, **THE** *abrupt ending* I am most terrified of is *death*. Death is always there, yet unable to be grasped and put into words. Admittedly, I was relieved at the beginning of my research when I shifted from 'death' to 'endings'. I cannot believe I have come full circle, having to shift back from 'endings' to 'death', or, perhaps it really has been about death all along.

Make Way for Death

It is about death. *My* death. Except the feeling I have differs from a more general death anxiety. Rather, the terror relates to my powerlessness in the *how* of my death. It is the fact that on any given day, at any given moment, the ground *can* just give way, and my world can crumble around me, or end entirely. I can be ripped away from life, scrambling to get back, held in the tension of my last gasping breath, grasping for more time… before slipping away, becoming irrevocably unreachable. Abrupt death is my lifetime terror. I am most terrified of dying young, dying a tragic death well before my time. It is not just about my death, for I can only want and imagine a death I am ready for. It is about the possibility of my abrupt death, a death that rips me from life before I can prepare, the bad-bye that rattles and unravels me in my core.

I cannot help but wonder if the possibility of my abrupt death has been underlying this research. It is both shocking and somehow weirdly expected to think that I have unconsciously 'tricked' myself into doing a heuristic study about the experience of abrupt death. This realisation reminds me of Moustakas' (1990) experience of illumination, in which he too, had missed or ignored death, going across the same scene over and over, and not noticing the dominating graveyard. Similarly, in my research, death has been present all along, yet somehow it was beyond my immediate focus.

With this illumination, there is a new understanding that re-organises my entire research. **I need to make way for death**. This is a jarring experience, and I feel as though I have done my research 'wrong'. Yet, slowly, I allow death into the picture.

The Labyrinth of Death

In the middle of the night, a revamped image of my web comes to mind. This is illustrated in Figure 5. At the centre is death, it is the 'powerless unknown' position. It is my future, that which is unknown to me, a place that connects me to impermanence, chaos and reality. The circular red line now illustrates my lifeline gradually circling in towards death, it is a web that is spun out of my life, time, and experiences. The surrounding external area is the 'powerful known' position, it is my past and present, that which is known and immediate to me. It is a place that connects me to continuity, control and dreams.

The dialectic between the 'powerful known' position and the 'powerless unknown' position is still present, however, it is now delineated into two processes. The black-dotted gentle curve from my lifeline represents my leaning in toward death, while the sharp spike in represents death confronting me. In this confrontation, the purple line illustrates being plunged from life into death, and the blue line illustrates a resurfacing from death back to life. The solid black line represents the pause: I am with death in the 'powerless unknown' position, yet still alive, unable to resurface back to life. It is a space of groundlessness. Sometimes I am there for a moment, sometimes I am suspended for a while.

This labyrinth represents my life and my experiences of connecting with death. I need to navigate my way through this shifting maze, it is my life's task. My perspective is constantly changing with each circle and each encounter with death. I am hoping to come out alive, yet eventually I must learn and accept that there is only one way out.

Figure 5

The Labyrinth of Death
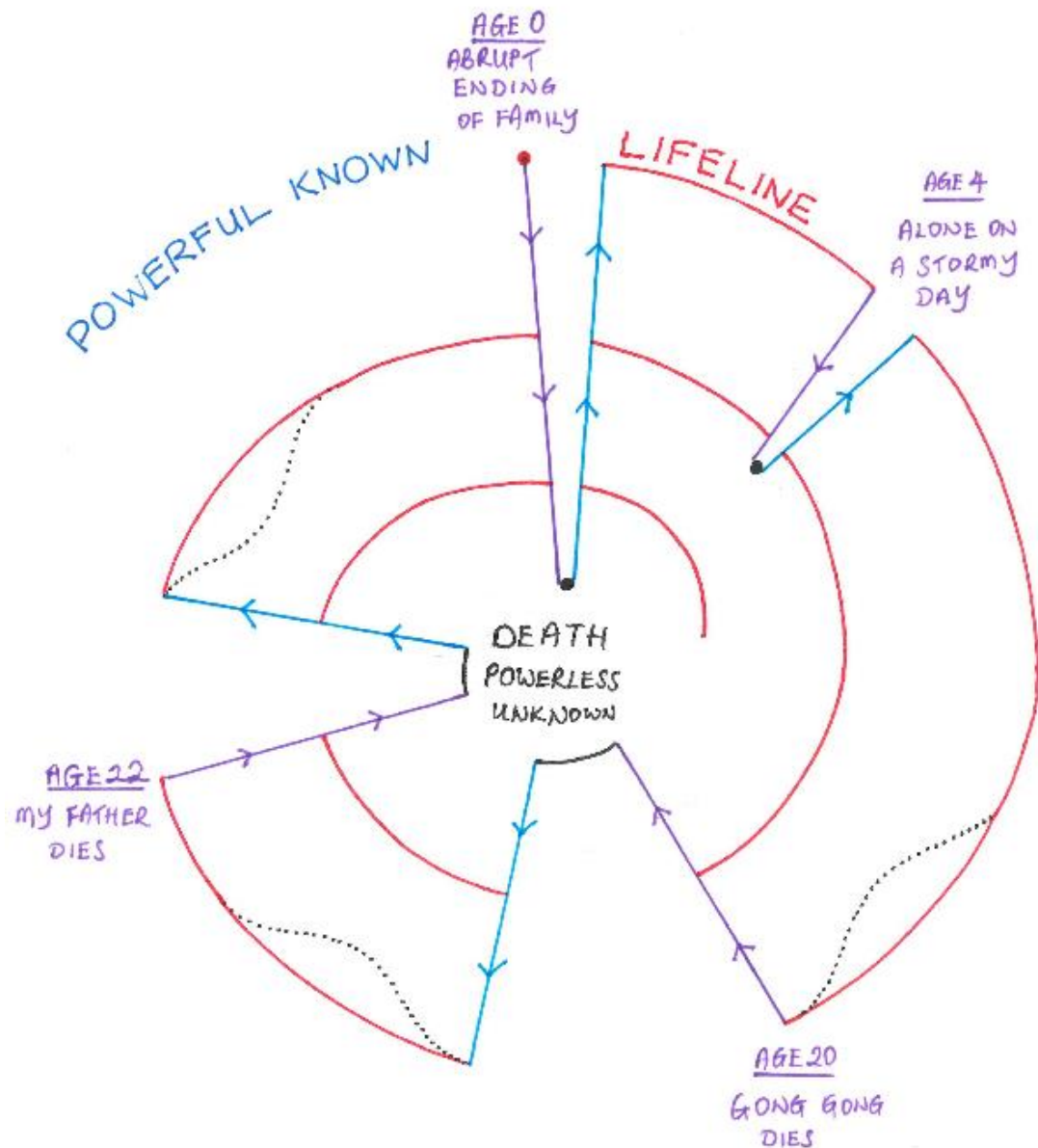
The Dance Around Death

> Because I could not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me.
>
> —Emily Dickinson

With death in its rightful place, my new depiction is gripping. Death is the core, it centres and frames my experience of abrupt endings. I have finally found the key puzzle piece, and suddenly all the other pieces start to fall into place and make sense.

This labyrinth further elucidates my research process from my original web. Within each line and curve, I can feel my dance with death. I have a vivid image of me dancing wildly, freely in circles around a campfire. Swirling around, I am continuously drawn in to the fire, before I suddenly become aware of my increasing trepidation. I am scared, yet curious.

Leaning in, I try to get as close as I can without getting burnt. Then unexpectedly, death comes for me. Holding me in its grip, death takes the lead, plunging me towards the ground. I feel terrified. Finally resurfacing, I must continue circling in, before being plunged in and out again… the never-ending dance continues. This reflects how I engage with death, in which there are three moves to my dance around death: circling in, leaning in and plunging in.

Beginning from birth, my lifeline circles in, every moment leading me ever so slightly toward my death. There is an invisible force, a forward momentum that constantly shifts me closer. It is no wonder death is a constant presence in my life. I realise I may have mistaken my inherent circling in as an 'active engagement'. I believe I am actively engaging with death while I am circling around it, when in fact, this is simply how I am naturally positioned, as a living being whose lifeline revolves around death.

My active engagement with death actually relates to my terror, and the subsequent desire to slow this forward momentum. I want to be ready for everything that is to come, to have power over my circling in. To gain this, I must maintain my continuity, control and dreams, and when that is not an option, I must find a way to overpower death and the unknown. Thus, I either send myself in, leaning in to understand as much as I can about death and what is to come. Or when death confronts me, plunging me in, I try to turn this into an opportunity to steal some power from death itself. My ultimate hope is that I can eventually conquer death, and make the excruciating pain of connecting to death worthwhile.

When I lean in toward death, I am careful. I can only lean in so far, as I need to remain within the realm of the 'powerful known'. This provides me with solid ground and ensures I have an escape plan. When I stray too far into the powerless unknown, I retreat immediately, knowing I can return safely to my lifeline. In venturing toward death, my focus is on retaining my power. I am aware of the constantly decreasing distance between me and death. Therefore, my attention is on trying to control the distance between, rather than on death itself. Taking great care to maintain 'social distancing' and stay as far away as possible, I am vigilant in measuring the distance between and finding ways to increase the distance.

This all works fine and well, that is, until death confronts me. Reaching in to grab me from the safety of the 'powerful known', I am ripped from my lifeline. As I am plunged directly into death, I am scrambling to cling on to life. I feel the tension of being plunged in, yet wanting to surface. I am lost and disorientated, not knowing how to resurface. I am in limbo as I am suspended between life and death. Until finally, I surrender and begin to resurface back to life.

When death comes to me, that, is the experience of an abrupt ending. It is an unexpected confrontation I can never be ready for, it is always abrupt. It is the moment the ground gives way, and I am suddenly falling into the abyss. It renders me completely

powerless, and I am in a fight for my life. My only focus is to regain power. However, I need to relinquish my power and surrender in order to resurface. Thus, I place a positive spin on it, focusing on what I have gained from the experience, rather than my loss of power.

This is my dance around death, this is my discovery that has been present throughout my entire research process. It is a discovery I have been attempting to clarify for a long time, for I myself have danced this in my heuristic self-search, and it is a dance I also felt in my literature view.

The Dance Around Death in My Heuristic Process

Throughout my research on abrupt endings, I felt the dance of leaning in and retreating, plunging in and fighting. From its inception, without realising, my self-search inquiry has been my attempt to lean as far in to death while still being able to retreat. In focussing on my experience of abrupt endings instead of abrupt death, I created an assurance that I would remain a hair's breadth away from death.

Within my research, I tried my best to remain as close as I could to my experience of abrupt endings. I read and thought a lot about endings and death, and I constantly tried to stay emotionally connected. However, it was incredibly difficult to do this on my own. There was always a pressure to retreat to thinking and intellectualising, instead of feeling. I believe this is the resistance Sela-Smith (2002) highlighted. To overcome this resistance, I noticed I always needed a segue to feel emotionally open to endings and death. I relied on watching movies, reading books, poetry and listening to music, anything that emotionally moved me, to support me in my process (the poems and lyrics of which I have included as epigraphs). Even then, as soon as I felt too emotionally exposed, I would immediately retreat to the safety of my lifeline. I could only go so far, for so long.

Only when death confronted me, could I truly connect and stay with my experience, and that was because *I had to* surrender. That was when I really felt thrown and groundless, and I experienced the four micro-moments of an abrupt ending. The rip, scramble, tension and poignancy, illustrated my emotional gradient as I plunged deeper into the 'powerless unknown', as shown in Figure 6. In being forced to connect with death with no escape, I felt immense powerlessness. I was continually fighting to regain power in any way I could.

Figure 6

The Plunge into Death
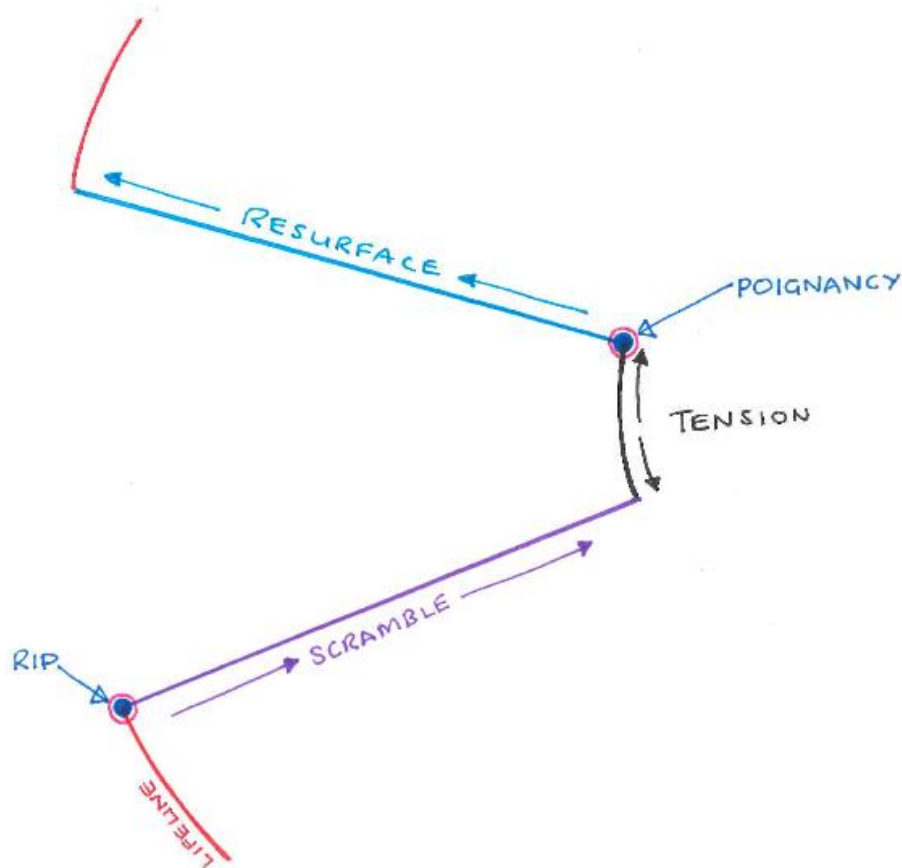
When all else failed in the face of death, the only option was to positively transform my experiences of abrupt endings. Many times, I thought about the necessity of abrupt endings, and how they positively contributed to life's experiences. I could only stay with the powerlessness for so long, before I felt the urge to use these confrontations to gain a deeper understanding of death, in the hopes of stealing some of its power. It was vital that I gained something from death. I could not resurface with nothing after I had lost all my power.

Doing this dance was frustrating, I often wondered why I could not connect to endings even when I wanted to, and questioned the impetus I felt to move on to the positives. I often judged myself for this, however, I now understand that this simply reflects the necessary dance of getting closer to death. I now realise that in my pursuit to understand death, I could only go so far in truly connecting to it, as I needed to remain within the power of my lifeline to safely retreat.

The heuristic methodology supported my personal challenge to face death, by providing a safe method to inch closer to the powerless unknown. As illustrated in Figure 7, the heuristic phases provided a framework for my lean in toward death. I had space to slowly

engage, before immersing myself and stepping back to incubate, and then moving on to reflect and explicate. The heuristic concepts also provided tools to encourage my process of surrendering and engaging with the unknown, allowing me to connect as much as I could to feelings of powerlessness.

Figure 7

The Lean Toward Death
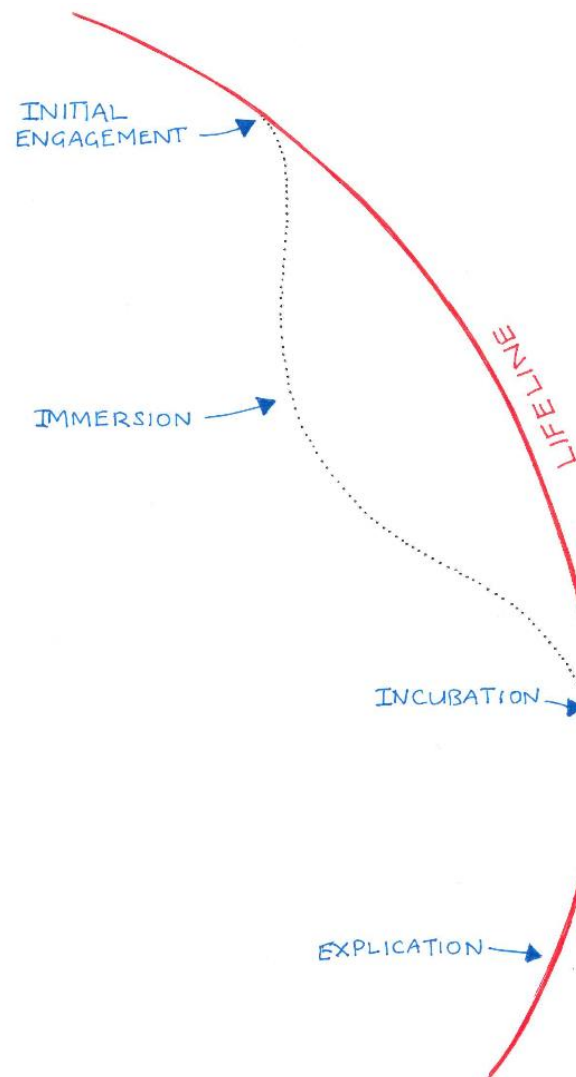
The Dance Around Death in My Literature View

The dance around death also echoes what I found in my literature view. I reflected that therapists seem to turn away from sharing personal experiences of endings in therapy or life, and that generally there was something about death that ignited a desire for people to share their encounters with it.

In the same way that my constant focus on death has been on gaining power over death, I believe the literature has also done this by focusing on the techniques and 'how tos' of endings in therapy. The measuring of the distance between me and death is paralleled in the

literature's assessment of a client with regards to endings. There is so much information on these measurements, including how to gauge the time needed in therapy, how to prolong time in therapy if needed, and how to anticipate signs of an ending. I believe these are all ways in which therapists can retain their sense of power over endings in therapy.

It is not a new reflection within the literature that we collude and deny the reality of our own death (Willock et al., 2007), and I wonder if this relates to therapists turning away from their own experiences of endings in therapy. In considering Novick's (1997) reflections, he acknowledges the inconceivable nature of terminations in therapy, in which he suggests that this is related to death. In a similar vein, I believe therapists might resist exploring their experiences of endings in therapy because it has the power to confront the therapist with their own death, and unravel their sense of power in their professional role and personal life.

Interestingly, the opposite is true when death encounters therapists in their work. There are many stories of therapists sharing personal experiences of working with trauma survivors, in palliative care, with suicide, and even the experience of their own therapists and supervisors retiring or dying (Barnett, 2009; Willock et al., 2007). I believe there is something about death, and the experience of facing it, that drives the desire to share these experiences. Perhaps this is the act of regaining power, when nothing else can be done except to share and connect with others through these terrifyingly powerless experiences.

Initially, I expressed my frustration at the literature's excessive focus on how to achieve a good-bye and its resistance to connecting personally and emotionally to abrupt endings. I have since realised that this likely reflects the natural process of engaging with death. I wonder if this was also a necessary first step, from a profession that did not acknowledge endings until the recent 1980s (Frank, 2009; Novick, 1982). Perhaps it is the case that we need to first establish endings from a position of power, before we inch toward facing our experiences of powerlessness in death and endings.

The Denouement

I believe my dance around death is one way to understand the nature of engaging with it. These three moves of circling in, leaning in and plunging in, all hold the pattern of retaining or regaining power over death. This is reflected most clearly in the distance I am always trying to maintain, even when I choose to lean in or when death is abruptly plunging me in.

This reminds me of Yalom's (2008, p. 5) metaphor of 'staring at the sun' when confronting death:

> It's not easy to live every moment wholly aware of death. It's like trying to stare the sun in the face: you can only stand so much of it. Because we cannot live frozen in fear, we generate methods to soften death's terror.

Indeed, there is something about death that calls for a different way to engage with it. It requires a roundabout method that mitigates and softens the terror. This method is about retaining or regaining power over death, and the most accessible form of this is by removing ourselves from the equation.

By removing ourselves, we can venture so close to the sun, learning about its dimensions, its composition, its nature, and its power. We can also learn about the relationship between death and other factors, like people, things, and nature. We can often even tolerate witnessing someone else's experience of death, and rationally imagine what it might feel like for them, all the while knowing we can safely retreat to our lifeline. When we remove ourselves, we can easily answer the question 'what is death'. We are aware of the facts and the process of what happens. However, all the knowledge in the world on death can only support a small percentage of my understanding of *my death,* if I do not personally connect to my terror.

To gain a real understanding, I need to add myself back into the equation. The question then becomes 'what is death, to me'. What does death mean to me and what is my relationship with it? How does it feel to have the sun's rays upon my skin, to feel it burn stronger as I get closer? It is about learning how I feel and respond to my inevitable circling in toward death. How I feel when the reality of death confronts me, when the prospect of impermanence is a breath away and there is only chaos. To understand the answers to these questions, I must learn to tolerate connecting to the full breadth of my experience with death, especially my terror. Only by surrendering, feeling true powerlessness and vulnerability, can I personally and emotionally connect to death. Ironically and poignantly, this provides me with an opportunity to know myself deeply, and reveal the power of my experience and story.

Without being entirely aware, I believe I chose the heuristic process to add myself back into the question. It supported the process of continually bringing myself back into the picture and writing my story. I also believe this is why the stories of others' personal experiences of death were the most gripping for me in my literature view. Stories are the gateway to accessing and digesting that terror, offering the opportunity to gain a real and personal understanding of death. We are the key, that unlocks death, if only we can place ourselves into the powerless unknown of the lock.

Implications of this Research for the Discipline

As I reflect now, I recognise more fully than ever how this research reflects my process of dancing with my terror, and perhaps our terror, of death. I have explored this dance on a personal level, as well as in relation to my heuristic journey, and the discipline of psychotherapy. Within psychotherapy, my research will contribute to the limited knowledge

on the personal experience of abrupt endings from a therapist's perspective. Generally, my findings will contribute a unique understanding of how humans engage with and resist death, specifically when death encounters us with an abrupt ending.

At its core, this research suggests that abrupt endings are related to the experience of being confronted by death, and that this reverberates the terror of abrupt death. The unbearable nature of this terror evokes a strong resistance, a running away that renders abrupt endings inconceivable. The challenge then, is to surrender to the unknown, to allow the terror to occupy my being and disrupt my knowing stability, to be with it long enough to be digested and conceived (O'Connor, 2020).

These findings have significant implications within the psychotherapy discipline. It identifies gaps in the research, informs considerations for psychotherapy training curriculums, and offers a new tool to theoretically understand a client's relationship with death. In light of the recent shift into Alert Level 4, I also consider the implications of these findings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, and perhaps most vitally, this research holds important personal implications for our inevitable confrontation with death.

Within therapy, abrupt endings bear the same reverberation, in which the therapist experiences the same potent terror of the ground having given away. The experience of losing all power and control over the 'ground' of the relationship, with no way of reaching the client, creates a devastating experience for the therapist, who is usually in a position of power. These findings suggest that therapists might protect against this terror and powerlessness, by focusing on ways to retain or regain power when managing endings in therapy. Within the psychotherapeutic literature and training programme, I believe this has resulted in the goal of an ideal ending, in which the emphasis is on techniques and the client's process, rather than the therapist's experience (Frank, 2009). With such potent power to unravel the therapist, this research argues that it is crucial for therapists to encounter their experiences of abrupt endings, in life and in therapy.

Firstly, these findings assert the need for more research on the therapist's experience of endings, with an emphasis on personal experiences and stories. This research demonstrates the significant lack of understanding about the therapist's experience within the psychotherapeutic literature. It suggests this gap reflects the terror of death, in which therapists have removed themselves from this equation when engaging with endings in therapy.

In a profession that values the therapist's countertransference, it is paradoxical if therapists are not acknowledging their part in the experience of a therapeutic ending. This has serious implications for the profession, and for the efficacy and, ultimately, safety of the therapeutic relationship. It is vital that the prevalence of abrupt endings is acknowledged, to

allow the experience to inhabit space in the profession, to then be thought of and explored. Ultimately, these findings suggest the need for research that centres on the therapists personal and emotional experiences of abrupt endings. That is, research in which the therapist is added back in the equation, engaging with negative capability, connecting to their vulnerability and powerlessness, and digesting the terror of endings in therapy.

Secondly, this research contends that psychotherapy trainings need to realistically prepare students for abrupt endings or bad-byes in therapy (Limentani, 1982; Novick, 1982). My experience in the psychotherapy training reflected the literature, in its predominant focus on techniques, the client's experience and ideal endings. There was not a lot of space to share experiences of different types of premature endings in therapy – the feelings that can arise and how this might relate to the therapist's countertransference of earlier experiences. The prevalence of abrupt endings was also not considered.

This research suggests that abrupt endings are related to the experience of being confronted by death. With the expectation that a psychotherapist is likely to experience many abrupt endings across a career, I believe there will be significant impacts on the therapist, professionally and personally. Therefore, it is crucial that psychotherapy trainings prepare developing therapists for abrupt endings in therapy. Specifically, it is important to create a safe space for training therapists to share their personal and emotional experiences of abrupt endings, in the hopes of encouraging self-reflection on their history with endings. It is also important to acknowledge the prevalence of abrupt endings to normalise the experience and create realistic expectations within the profession.

Thirdly, the four micro-moments and the labyrinth from this research can offer a theoretical model for understanding one's experiences with death. When drawn personally, the labyrinth allows the individual to experience their connection with it. For the client, this can be used as an experiential tool, to connect to their feelings surrounding death. For the therapist and significant others, this can be used as a theory to understand the client's history and relationship with death.

Personally, suicide has always been the most difficult for me to make sense of, and I imagine I am not alone in that. The labyrinth can be used to support general understanding of mental health, particularly for depression and suicidal ideation. It can demonstrate how someone who is mostly in the 'powerless unknown' position might just be a step away from death or how they might feel there is no way out except through death.

As I write this, Aotearoa is facing yet another abrupt alert level 4 lockdown with the COVID-19 Delta variant. It is an extraordinary time of abrupt endings, with death's confrontation a mere breath away. These findings on the dance of death can provide insight into the public's natural response of complacency and panic in the face of such terror. When

death comes to us, what lies behind seemingly careless behaviour of conspiracy theories or the fight for toilet paper, is the desperate need to retain or regain our power by shutting our own death out any which way we can. This can inform ways of self-care that engages with one's 'powerful known' position. Dare I say, this might even inform governments and news reporting of the importance of remaining personal and emotional in their communications, even openly acknowledging and speaking about death, instead of shying away from it and hiding behind numbers.

Lastly, as a human being who will inevitably die, this research demonstrates the importance of the human story. As a psychotherapist, perhaps I am more comfortable by removing myself from the equation in the therapy, in lieu of the client, or perhaps it is also safer for me to remain removed. However, my journey through this research has shown me the power and value of my story, as a therapist and a human being, even with all the chaos, pain, and powerlessness. There is so much power in staying and learning to be with negative capability, to digest, understand and ultimately, to share these personal stories, for the glorious mess that they are. Authentically being who we are, is the only power that can never by relinquished, even in the face of death.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Heuristic research is especially unique for its philosophy of "swimming into an unknown current" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13). Throughout this research, I have been most cognisant of the dialectic between the known and the unknown. It is a constant tension in my journey through life: in facing the future, in working as a therapist, and in knowing myself. The greatest strength of this research is the framework that supports the process of learning how to be with, and ultimately surrender, to the unknown. As a beginning psychotherapist, this heuristic research has developed my courage and patience to bear the unbearable in the journey of discovery, which will translate into my clinical practice. Learning to let go of what is safe and known has been the biggest challenge, and I am proud to say I am more open to 'the fall'.

As a consequence of surrendering to the unknown, the second greatest strength of this journey has been my process of learning to trust myself. By focusing on my experience alone, I only had myself to rely on. This became a task of understanding and overcoming my resistance, especially by accepting that self-doubt is inevitably part of my process. Ultimately, I have learnt to value my voice and honour my experiences. I have learnt the simple lesson that I have everything I need within me. This is a gift that will continue to support me in life, and as a developing psychotherapist.

This research is my story, at this point in time. It is personal and exclusive to me. My experiences of abrupt endings influence my understanding and relationship with death

uniquely. I am a woman in my 30s, who is healthy, privileged and at the beginning stages of my career as a psychotherapist. I am aware this limits my experience to that of death happening to those around me, rather than my own personal close call with death. Even within my own timeline, I know my experience and story will change as I grow older and circle closer to death, or possibly have a health diagnosis or an accident. As a recent graduate, I am also limited in my experiences of abrupt endings in therapy, and I do wonder what the impact might be of experiencing many abrupt endings throughout my career. I also acknowledge the privilege of my politically and financially stable upbringing, that limits my experiences of abrupt endings that occur in everyday life.

I am aware that cultural understandings of abrupt endings and death were outside the scope of this dissertation. However, I am curious that my own cultural experiences around death and endings were not present throughout my inquiry. As an Asian immigrant to Aotearoa's Māori and Pākehā bi-culturalism, perhaps this reflects my straddling of worlds, cultures, and religion, in which I am yet to understand my own cultural rituals with endings and death.

In a conversation with my lecturer during the editing process, a glaring blind spot was highlighted: What about the therapist's experience of clients dying by suicide? (J. O'Connor, personal communication, August 23, 2021). It shocked me that this had not come up throughout my entire research, as I had experienced suicide outside of therapy. It is the ultimate abrupt ending for a therapist within the therapeutic relationship, and I suspect the terror of that renders it completely inconceivable for me, and others, as therapists.

These limitations provide stepping stones for future research in this area. As mentioned, there is a need for more stories on the therapist's experience of endings in therapy, to build on the existing knowledge that relates to technique and the client's perspective. The therapist's experiences of endings and death in their life, and how this might impact their practice will also be valuable knowledge in the literature.

On the other hand, because of the intensity of abrupt endings, I believe it will also be crucial to explore the 'occupational hazard' of experiencing abrupt endings in therapy, and the impact this might have on the therapist's personal life. Specifically, the therapist's experience of clients dying by suicide will be invaluable. This research can also be expanded to other professions that share a similar occupational hazard of being particularly exposed to abrupt endings, such as doctors, nurses, emergency services and even journalists. During a pandemic like COVID-19, this becomes even more pertinent, when those on the healthcare frontline are more likely to experience the abrupt deaths of their patients and colleagues.

It will be valuable to explore cultural understandings of abrupt endings and how this might differ and impact the experience of death's confrontations. For example, I would be

interested to learn about how abrupt endings are understood within Te Ao Māori, as the spiritual realm of ancestors and the dead are often held close in mind and acknowledged in everyday rituals such as a pōwhiri.

A Final Reflection

How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.

—Winnie the Pooh

If difficult endings in therapy are likely to be disturbing, and good-enough endings are likely to be bitter-sweet, I understand why Freud (1937) empathised with psychotherapy being an impossible profession. As a beginning therapist, I was wary of experiencing many endings in my career, and I believe this research has supported my coming to terms with this 'occupational hazard'. Perhaps it is a gift that I will be affected either way, maybe that is the cost of having something worthwhile. This pilgrimage is my final written piece in my psychotherapy training, and it feels like I am finally ready to step into that abyss.

During metamorphosis, the caterpillar creates a safe cocoon for the process of transformation. Breaking its own body down, the caterpillar digests itself, and with the same essence, morphs into a butterfly (Jabr, 2012).

In true heuristic fashion, this self-search inquiry has demanded all of me. In my journey inward, I have encountered myself in a way I have never experienced. Breaking myself down, I digested my history, experiences, terrors, and 'knowns'. As my illuminations and discoveries have emerged, so have I. I realise that it is impossible to stare death in the face, but more importantly, I realise I no longer need to always attempt to do so. I no longer need to constantly remain in that groundless limbo. I feel as though I have slowly resurfaced from my decade of being cocooned with death. My experiences, thoughts and feelings are no longer just my own.

I am no longer alone with death.

There is so much more than can be said, but there is nothing more that I can say. There are no grand conclusions, no saving graces or takeaways. In the stark glare of death, it is a treasure to know who we are and not be alone as we walk blindly into the dark.

Epilogue

WE ARE

From the play J.B.:

We can never know …
He answered me like the …
                                        stillness of a star
That silences us, asking.
We *are* and that is all our answer
We are and what we are can suffer …
But …
        what suffers, loves …
                                    and love
Will live its suffering again,
Risk its own defeat again,
Endure the loss of everything again
And yet again and yet again
In doubt, in dread, in ignorance, unanswered,
Over and over, with the dark before,
The dark behind it …
                            and still live…
                                    still love.

(Archibald MacLeish, as cited in Moustakas, 1974, p. 109)

References

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson.* Sphere*.*

Barnett, L. (Ed.). (2009). *When death enters the therapeutic space: Existential perspectives in psychotherapy and counselling.* Routledge.

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Abrupt. In *Dictionary.Cambridge.org.* Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/abrupt

Coelho, P. (1998). *Veronika decides to die*. HarperTorch.

Feller, A. (2009). Termination. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 57*(5), 1185-1195. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065109344340

Frank, K. A. (2009). Ending with options. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 29*(2), 136-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690802274843

Frankl, V. E. (2008). *Man's search for meaning: The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust.* Rider. (Original work published 1959).

Freud, S. (1937). Analysis terminable and interminable. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 18*(4), 373-405.

Gendlin, E. T. (1978). *Focusing*. Bantam Books.

Ghent, E. (1990). Masochism, submission, surrender – Masochism as a perversion of surrender. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 26*(1), 108-136. https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.1990.10746643

Golland, J. H. (1997). Not an endgame: Terminations in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 14*(2), 259-270. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079720

Grant, B. M., & Giddings, L. S. (2002). Making sense of methodologies: A paradigm framework for the novice researcher. *Contemporary Nurse, 13*(1), 10-28. https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.13.1.10

Hiles, D. (2001, October). *Heuristic inquiry and transpersonal research* [Paper presentation]. Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education Conference, London, United Kingdom. http://www.psy.dmu.ac.uk/drhiles/HIpaper.htm

Hiles, D. R. (2012). Heuristic inquiry. In L.M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vol. 2, pp. 390-392). https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909

Ings, W. (2011). Managing heuristics as a method of inquiry in autobiographical graphic design theses. *International Journal of Art and Design Education, 30*(2), 226-241. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2011.01699.x

Jabr, F. (2012). *How does a caterpillar turn into a butterfly?* Scientific American. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/caterpillar-butterfly-metamorphosis-explainer/

Jung, C. G. (1987). *Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle.* Ark Paperbacks.

Kalanithi, P. (2016). *When breath becomes air: What makes life worth living in the face of death?* Vintage.

Kenny, G. (2012). An introduction to Moustakas's heuristic method. *Nurse Researcher, 19*(3), 6-11.

Lemma, A. (2016). *Introduction to the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy* (2nd ed.)*.* Wiley Blackwell.

Levin, D. (1998). Unplanned termination: Pain and consequences. *Journal of Analytic Social Work, 5*(2), 35-46. https://doi.org/10.1300/J408v05n02_03

Limentani, A. (1982). On the "unexpected" termination of psychoanalytic therapy. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 2*(3), 419-440. https://doi.org/10.1080/07351698209533462

Longhurst, E. N. (2018). *Japonisme*. Thorsons.

McWilliams, N. (2004). *Psychoanalytic psychotherapy.* The Guilford Press.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Abrupt. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.* Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abrupt

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). End. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.* Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/end

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ending. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary.* Retrieved June 25, 2020, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ending

Ministry of Health. (2014, April 15). *Vertigo*. https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/vertigo

Moustakas, C. E. (1974). *Finding yourself, finding others*. Spectrum Book.

Moustakas, C. E. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications.* Sage Publications.

Murdin, L. (2000). *How much is enough?: Endings in psychotherapy and counselling.* Routledge.

Novick, J. (1982). Termination: Themes and issues. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry 2*(3), 329-365. https://doi.org/10.1080/07351698209533458

Novick, J. (1997). Termination conceivable and inconceivable. *Psychoanalytic Psychology 14*(2), 145-162. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079712

O'Connor, J. (2018). Madness of the mind: Growing the self in the mind of the other, and in the psychotherapeutic relationship. *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand, 22*(1), 63-84. https://doi.org/10.9791/ajpanz.2018.06

O'Connor, J. (2020). "Fear of breakdown": Staying close to the terror. *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand, 24*(*2*), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.9791/ajpanz.2020.13

Pedder, J. R. (1988). Termination reconsidered. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 69*(4), 495-505.

Polanyi, M. (1983). *The tacit dimension*. Peter Smith.

Rose, T., & Loewenthal, D. (2006). Heuristic research. In D. Loewenthal & D. Winter (Eds.), *What is psychotherapeutic research?* (pp. 133-143). Karnac Books.

Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2007). Step-by-step guide to critiquing research. Part 2: Qualitative research. *British Journal of Nursing, 16*(12), 738-744. https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2007.16.12.23726

Sales, L. (2018). *Any ordinary day: Blindsides, resilience and what happens after the worst day of your life.* Penguin Books.

Sapountzis, I. (2007). On sudden endings and self-imposed silences. In B. Willock, L. C. Bohm & R. C. Curtis (Eds.), *On death and endings: Psychoanalysts' reflections on finality, transformations and new beginnings* (pp. 303-318). Routledge.

Schlesinger, H. J. (2005). *Endings and beginnings: On terminating psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.* The Analytic Press.

Sela-Smith, S. (2002). Heuristic research: A review and critique of Moustakas's method. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 42*(3), 53-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/002216702128803116

Sidebotham, P., & Fleming, P. (2007). *Unexpected death in childhood: A handbook for practitioners.* John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Smith, J. E. (1969). Time, times, and the 'right time': Chronos and kairos. *The Monist, 53*(1), 1-13.

Smythe, L. (2012). Discerning which qualitative approach fits best. *New Zealand College of Midwives,* (46), 5-12.

Stern, D. N. (2004). *The present moment in psychotherapy and everyday life*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Sultan, N. (2019). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically.* Sage Publications.

Viorst, J. (1982). Experiences of loss at the end of analysis: The analyst's response to termination. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 2*(3), 399-418. https://doi.org/10.1080/07351698209533461

Willock, B., Bohm, L. C., & Curtis, R. C. (Eds.). (2007) *On death and endings: Psychoanalysts' reflections on finality, transformations and new beginnings.* Routledge.

Winnicott, D. W. (1974). Fear of breakdown. *International Review of Psycho-Analysis,* (1), 103-107.

Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy.* Yalom Family Trust.

Yalom, I. D. (2008). *Staring at the sun: Overcoming the dread of death.* Piatkus.