

*The Infant's Emotional World: Psychic
Development, Feelings, and Subjectivity*
A Hermeneutic Literature Review

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Abstract

This work pursues an interest in understanding *something about* the nature of an infant's emotional world. This is realised through a hermeneutic literature review of the question: what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy? A key finding of this research is that subjectivity begins in earliest infancy and intersubjective experiences within this period can support discovering a life based on being so that they may,

live the identity that they feel is essentially their own....feel more coherent, more whole, more secure....[seem] happier, more centred and at peace...profoundly relieved (Landsman, 2018, pp. 104-105)

As the approach to this research is hermeneutic, the writer's subjectivity plays an important part in the meaning made of the topic. Throughout this study the researcher interpolates personal experience with psychoanalytic literature to maintain the hermeneutic impetus to 'provoke thinking'. Traditional and contemporary psychoanalytic theory is engaged with in 'seeking meaning' of the infant's experience. The research concludes with a discussion of the research findings, which coalesce around ideas about the elaboration of felt experience and an infant's developing subjectivity. The extended understanding emerging from this research about psychic development in earliest infancy comes from considering how qualities of the *capacity to be alone* and mutual recognition enhance the mother-infant dyad relationship based on relating on intersubjective terms. Following this, implications for psychotherapy research and practice are offered, which bring together intersubjectivity, support for not rushing to action, and knowing as an embodied experience. The dissertation concludes with considering the strengths and limitations of this research and the attempt to expand understanding of the infant's emotional world by wondering about psychic development, feelings, and subjectivity in earliest life.

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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 in the acknowledgements), 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.

13/5/22

Signature

Date

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And to my son who patiently enquired along the way “can you see the light yet Mum?” I can finally say “Yes! I can! I am standing in it. Let’s go now and do something else, something fun together!”

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Chapter Introduction

The struggle to understand the parent-child bond touches us deeply because we intuitively sense that our first relationships hold many clues to how we've become who we are. (Karen, 1998, p. 3)

Tell me what you fear and I'll tell you what happened to you (Winnicott, as cited in Music, 2019, p. 17)

The quotes above evoke elements of the overall position I am taking in this research; they suggest something about the nature of the interplay of internal and external worlds on being. Whilst calling to mind that relational experiences in early life are important, often arise from the mother-infant relationship and traces of this relationship are captured in the infant's subjectivity, or sense of being in the world, which travels with them as they make their way in the world (Scharff & Scharff, 2005).

At the beginning of this dissertation, I held hints of this position in my mind. Then on my research journey into new territory and reclamation of forgotten meanings they gathered depth and texture as I engaged in a hermeneutic literature review of the research question, "what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy?"

In this chapter I consider the context of this question, definitions of the research phenomena and provide an overview of the balance of the dissertation.

1.2 Context: Beginnings of a research question

At the beginning of this dissertation my research question was different than stated above. Initially it was "how does a child psychotherapist understand defences against learning?" and my research aim was to create an account of new insights about learning from experience and look at how this understanding may support psychotherapeutic work with children (Bateman & Holmes, 1995; Bion, 1962; Canham, 2006; Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999). To do so, I intended to select texts from psychoanalytic literature detailing psychotherapeutic work with young people up to the age of twelve years old, as this age range covers the developmental phases of childhood prior to adolescence and would allow for "[r]etrieving a small set of highly relevant documents" (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010, p. 136) to re-view and re-interpret.

This initial research question was spurred on by a combination of factors, including my own experience as a mother, the space to think about this experience in my personal psychotherapy and engaging in the study of child and adolescent psychotherapy at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The coming together of these factors nurtured a capacity to

reflect on my current life and to wonder about my experience as a child, particularly around learning at school. To the outside world this appeared straightforward and effortless, and I was considered competent and bright. Yet by the end of secondary school, I lacked confidence and felt shocked and embarrassed about barely passing high school. Reflecting on this experience, provided me with an embodied sense of the interplay of internal and external worlds, where the feeling of being misunderstood is enacted in arrested development. This insight inspired my initial research question as I was curious to expand my understanding of the factors that may inhibit or promote learning, not academically, but more widely, as captured by “the kinds of [emotional] experiences...that may enable a [person]...to grow to their fullest potential” (Waddell, 1999, p. ix).

1.2.1 Initial literature review: Inaugural research question

For this phase, regarding the inaugural wording of my question, literature initially addressed learning from a psychoanalytic perspective, and focused on the phases on childhood prior to adolescence. Two key texts I first engaged with were Henry (1999) and Canham (2006). The former text was a chapter from a book that addresses the emotional factors that can help or hinder learning within the environment of school and how this transfers out to wider sense of learning from experience. This chapter selected addressed the reparatory quality of allowing space for thought in the relationship between a teacher and student rather than reacting impulsively. This space facilitates understanding about behaviour rather than unthinkingly reacting to it, and that understanding gradually leads a child to a healthier motivation and pleasure in learning. The latter text was also a chapter from a book about psychoanalytic thinking in the educational context. This writing framed learning and defences against it in relation to the epistemophilic instinct, which Melanie Klein proposed that every child was born with. This primitive reaction to new knowledge has an inherent tension where something has to be given up, for something to be gained, the “tension between a desire to find out, and a desire not to know” (Canham, 2006, p. 10). Literature beyond these inaugural texts were selected from the results of a “library search” the main search tool on AUTs Library website using the key terms ‘learning, child, psychoanalysis’ followed by citation tracking to generate potentially interesting material.

1.3 A shift: rephrasing my research question

This inaugural research question was my step into the hermeneutic process by entering the first iteration of the hermeneutic circle, which places the researcher in a dialogical relationship to texts with the aim to expand understanding of the research topic (Smythe & Spence, 2012). However, entering research based on the hermeneutic methodology means there is space for the initial work “to resist the conscious intentions of the researcher and...to

twist and turn in another way” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 47) so research with the soul in mind can proceed. Romanyshyn labels this “*re-search*, a searching *again*, for something that has already made a claim upon us, something we have already known...but have forgotten” (2020, p. 4) and signals making place for the unconscious in the research as there is a “shift from what the researcher wants from the work to what the work wants from the researcher” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 48). Therefore, with time “working with literature in ways...congruent with hermeneutic methodology” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 12) and following its twists and turns I decided to refine my research question, so it was attuned with my *re-search* for something already known but forgotten. This new question is, “what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy?”

1.4 The infant’s emotional world: Psychic development, feelings, and subjectivity

Considering this shift, using psychoanalytic literature to understand psychic development in earliest infancy means I am interested in grasping a sense of the infant’s feelings. This elaboration of felt experience in infancy may also be called an infant’s subjectivity. Thinking along these lines means this research seeks to expand understanding of the emotional world of earliest infancy. This will occur by engaging with texts as partners in a dialogue, and akin to free association wait for themes to emerge.

I came to the decision to rephrase my question from reviewing my dissertation journal writing and noticing my increasing focus on understanding how the unconscious influences emotional development from the beginning of life, and how these experiences can extend forward and impact on later learning in life and shape subjectivity. For example, after watching a documentary I write about the way the pianist’s fingers fly across the keys, striking them with ease and from memory to evoke wonder and beauty with his musical performance. I write about this awareness in my journal and how I desire for this ease when writing-up my dissertation, to type freely after reading and journaling. Months later, I link this desire to my evolving research topic regarding deepening my psychoanalytic understanding about how children learn and what are the factors that make the difference between some seeming to take-in experience and fly freely while others seem stilted and stuck in their efforts.

Considering such reflections, I sense being pulled away from my initial intentions for my research and drawn towards work of the different nature, as marked by rephrasing my research question. My reshaped question still links to my original intention, to create an account of new insights about learning from experience, and subsequently how this understanding may support psychotherapeutic work with children (Bateman & Holmes, 1995; Bion, 1962; Canham, 2006; Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999). However, refocuses attention onto the first year of life, the time where the “kind of learning that has been going on from the

earliest phases of life” (Waddell, 2018, p. 61) becomes the prototypical experience re-evoked throughout life that can facilitate or impede our psychic development and mental health (Scharff, 2012; Youell, 2006).

1.4.1 Secondary literature review: rephrased research question

The shift in wording of my research question, initiated a re-searching of literature via the use of revised key terms. The main impetus was to generate texts to define the ‘psychic development’ and ‘earliest infancy’. This was achieved by searching AUT google scholar via the library website based on the terms ‘psychic’, ‘development’, ‘emotional’ and ‘earliest infancy’. The literature I was first drawn to was interpretations of traditional psychoanalytic thinkers by current professionals, such as Abram and Hinshelwood (2018). The literature showed that pioneering child analysts Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott both agreed that a psyche existed from birth, but Winnicott’s theory emphasised its utter helplessness and need for external support; that the infant’s psyche only comes into being through maternal handling.

Searching from this point was again unstructured and iterative and based on citation tracking. This process led me to contemporary psychoanalytic writing on psychic development in earliest infancy developed by Jessica Benjamin (2005; 2013; 2018), which reframed the context of the mother-infant dyad to subject-to-subject relating rather than subject-to-object as in Winnicott’s theory regarding maternal handling. This shift in theory to intersubjectivity meant that mother and baby live in the one theory and the mother’s subjectivity is recognised and considered in the context of an infant’s developing psyche. The final selection of literature for this research was also unstructured and iterative with the texts included only coming together as I wrote my findings chapters fitting with the intuitive, inclining towards aspect of the hermeneutic process (Smythe & Spence, 2012) .

1.5 Pre-understandings: About me, about the research

Gadamer (1982) uses the word ‘prejudice’, to mean “preunderstandings, assumptions, ready-made notions that we unthinkingly accept as truth” (Smythe, 2007, p. 400). This concept has been difficult for me to grasp and put words to, as they are “what is silenced, missing and taken-for-granted...all that is already in our thinking” (Smythe, 2007, p. 400). However, discerning them is key to hermeneutic research as adopting this qualitative methodology recognises the researcher as part of the research, not a neutral observer relaying objective data, but integral to the meaning-making process and the research outcome of expanded understanding and to provoke thinking in others (Smythe & Spence, 2012). Therefore, it is important that we “inform readers how our prejudices shape that understanding....colour the

way we understand...[by spending] time looking back to see who we are, how we have been shaped, and therefore what we bring to a particular encounter” (Smythe, 2007, p. 401).

Considering this, the following is an attempt to put words to my preunderstandings, something I have struggled with, yet is also succinct with the nature of preunderstandings, or our ‘prejudice’ “what is silenced, missing and taken-for-granted....[those] ready-made notions that we unthinkingly accept as truth” (Gadamer, as cited in Smythe, 2007, p. 400).

1.6 About me,

I am writing my dissertation in Aotearoa New Zealand as a tauwi person born and raised in Melbourne, Australia. I have lived in Auckland for the past fifteen years, and for the nine years prior I lived between Melbourne and Auckland, due to meeting my now-husband when I was 21 years old. I identify as a cisgender, heterosexual female. I am a mother to one child, a wife, daughter, sister, aunty, cousin, and friend.

My family of origin was a western notion of a nuclear family. Before I started school my mother was my primary caregiver and my father the primary breadwinner. Once I started school my mother worked as an accounts clerk for a company close to our home. I remember her work being framed as flexible, which I equated with meaning it posed minimal disruption to our family’s existing way of functioning. Yet now I feel like this paid work would have added physical and emotional stress on top of an already demanding job as the family’s primary caregiver. This often entails a high level of invisible unpaid work and revolves around meeting the demands of others without acknowledgement or reflectiveness in a family structure like ours positioned in a western cultural context and being white and middle-class.

In addition to the above experiences that silently inform how I take-in experience and affect how I see the world; I am also Australian. In Aotearoa, this places me as tauwi, a non-Māori person who lives permanently in Aotearoa New Zealand but wasn’t born here. To me, this means I have a bank of experiences different than a person who identifies as tangata whenua or pakeha or tauwi of other descent but isn’t an all-encompassing definition of my identity nor a universal way to characterise an Australian way of interpreting phenomena. I am unable to describe the totality of experiences I ascribe to being Australian, but they inform my interpretation of texts and makes this dissertation an expression of my spirit, my way-of-being in and responding to the world. As Aron (2007) discusses,

we learn from any interpretation as much about the interpreter as about the text....What Paul says about Peter tells us more about Paul than about Peter....Each author selects and highlights certain elements, words, phrases, characters, and actions. In each case, the overall interpretation is an expression of the author’s subjectivity (pp. 12-26).

1.6.1 Me & Aotearoa New Zealand: Colonisation and biculturalism

This research is situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, where Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi is a constitutional document. This document was signed in 1840 and details the nature of the relationship between Māori who are tangata whenua (people of the land) and tauwiwi the non-Māori citizens of Aotearoa. Consequently, Te Tiriti implies that day-to-day life in Aotearoa is lived as a bicultural reality, yet the dominant social values are predominantly western-based that undermine the three broad principles embedded within the treaty of partnership, participation, and protection. As Hall (2015) details “the provision of most services to Māori in Aotearoa are established upon western theoretical perspectives and empirical research...that...have often excluded Indigenous knowledge” and perpetuate the established hegemony (pp. 3-4). This conflict invisibly underpins day-to-day life in Aotearoa and informs my research as a pre-understanding. Considering my adoption of a hermeneutic methodology for this research I recognise that this conflict will infiltrate my work, and is amplified by my psychotherapy studies being predominantly based on Western models of infancy (Smythe, 2019).

1.6.2 “I am a turtle”: The unconscious silently informs conscious life

In my personal life I have been identified as “the turtle”. This characterisation was framed as a term of endearment, yet I took it as a criticism, and felt slighted by being referred to in this way. I identified being a turtle with the message that “I am wrong”, due to the negative connotations of being slow; slow to achieve, move, think, finish tasks, which was amplified by living in a western society that is goal-driven, values doing over being and doing multiple tasks as fast as possible. However, over time this has shifted. In the recent past, a friend and I developed a routine of meeting for lunch at a café named The Turtle and The Hare and it was after one lunch that I came away with a renewed way to think and feel about the label “the turtle”. From being one with negative connotations to one imbued with feelings that allowed me to embrace the label. This shift from a coalescing of experience into an embodied knowing has allowed me to view afresh my identification as “the turtle” and is an important experience to take with me on my hermeneutic research journey. This is because this research will be based on my re-interpretation of existing texts, a critical “viewing-afresh” of what psychoanalytic literature says about psychic development in earliest infancy and my experience ‘viewing-afresh’ my identification as the turtle has given me a real understanding of how this is possible (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14).

1.6.3 “I am a turtle because”: Intergenerational transmission of pre-understandings

In their seminal writing *Ghosts in the nursery* Fraiberg et al. (1975) establish there are times when parents conflicted past will be repeated with their child in the present. Similarly,

attachment patterns may also be transmitted intergenerationally because of parents' childhood experiences (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). This thinking may be applied to pre-understandings, which is "all that is already in our thinking" similarly to attachment patterns and my identification as a turtle may offer a way to put into words how my subjectivity may prejudice this research (Smythe, 2007, p. 400).

If being a turtle is used as a metaphor for my attachment style considering its exoskeleton aids survival, then this would equate with an avoidant attachment. Music (2019) explains for avoidant personalities "early adaptation to their families of origin would have meant deactivating their attachment needs" (p. 1) meaning a decrease of displaying their dependency and neediness. Resulting in a lack of capacity to understand the emotional states of self and other, as this ability is "first shaped...in our early primary relationships" (Cooper, 2017, p. 38). Therefore, my identification as a turtle may also be thought of as a psychic defence, inferring a mental retreat against feeling vulnerable as a result of inhabiting an environment imbued intergenerationally with avoidant attachment patterns and amplified by living in a society that "privileges achievement over self-actualization" (O'Loughlin & Merchant, 2012, p. 157). These identifications are deeply important and deeply ingrained and putting words to them will assist me in recognising how they infiltrate my work and contribute to the meaning I make from this hermeneutic literature review.

1.7 About the research,

1.7.1 Definitions: Psychic development

For this research the definition of psychic is "of or relating to the psyche" and psyche is defined as the psychological sense of the developing mind. The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides a specific example defining psyche in Freudian psychoanalytic theory where the mind is visualised as divided into three distinct but interacting agencies; the id, ego, and superego, which operate wholly or partly unconsciously (Gay, 1989). This example is apt for this research not for its specificity to Freudian-type psychoanalytic theory, but psychoanalytic literature's general regard of psychic development as formed from both conscious and unconscious factors.

The concept of the unconscious is central to psychoanalytic theory and is considered "a part of the mind which is active in influencing thoughts, feelings, relationships, attitudes and behaviour in a way which is completely unknown to the person" (Hinshelwood, 1994, p. 10). Therefore, in this research psychic development will be defined as focusing on the emotional over rational capacities of the mind and explicitly acknowledge the workings of unconscious processes on the formation of an infant's psyche. As a result, this research aims to

expand understanding of the emotional world of earliest infancy; how they feel about the world through taking-in experience consciously and unconsciously.

1.7.2 Earliest infancy

Earliest infancy for this research will be defined as the first 12 months of life from birth. Defining earliest infancy in this way is supported by Schore (2015, p. 19) who states “early infancy [as] in the first year and late infancy in the second year” and other writers (Aguayo & Salomonsson, 2017; Fraiberg, 2008; Segal, 1982). This is not to discount experiences in the womb and psychological continuities between pre-natal and post-natal life, which is a period researched and proven to impact on an infant’s psychic development but as a limit regarding the scope of this dissertation (Piontelli, 1992).

Also, when defining this phenomenon for my research it is important to hold in mind its preverbal nature. Earliest infancy is a period of life that “none of us remembers...at all” (Fraiberg, 2008, p. xv) however, it is a period of life during which experiences have consequences in later life, as they become “the spectral and silent presence in...subjective experience of self” (O’Loughlin, 2009, p. 100). It is gaining a deeper understanding of the impact these unconscious experiences in preverbal life can have on later life that psychoanalytic theory and literature enables exploration and extrapolation of, and why this theoretical lens has been chosen for this research (Music, 2016).

1.7.3 Psychoanalytic literature

The research phenomena “psychoanalytic literature” refers to writing that acknowledges the workings of the unconscious (O’Loughlin, 2012) and a “body of ideas...[whose] principal focus...[is] that which cannot be known” (Ogden, 1992, p. 2). Texts based on psychoanalytic theory and practice also consider infancy a period of fundamental importance wherein a prototypical experience based on early relationships forms as latent unconscious content, which is re-evoked throughout life at transition points that can either facilitate or impede psychic development (Abram & Hinshelwood, 2018; Youell, 2006). Suggestions about the infant’s mind have been a feature of psychoanalysis since its early development, as indicated by Freud (1900) that our adult character is based on “the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us—those of our earliest youth—are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious” (p. 539).

The psychoanalytic approach then extended and developed because of the theoretical debate, commonly referred to as the ‘controversial discussions’ due to Anna Freud and Melanie Klein both resettling in London before the second world war. The debate arose due to the different positions they held regarding early mental life and the origins of the psyche.

When consensus wasn't reached at the conclusion of the debate, the British Psychoanalytic Society deemed to accommodate "three schools of thought...classical Freudian, Kleinian and a further independent group" (Likierman & Urban, 1999, p. 27). These three schools of thought underpin the literature selected for this research yet in the contemporary landscape many more derivatives of psychoanalytic theory exist, and these will be encapsulated in literature based on more recent clinical theory and practice.

1.7.4 Mother-infant dyad

Considering this, the theory developed out of the 'controversial discussions' is embedded in the western notion of a nuclear family of the mid-1900s within which the mother is considered the primary caregiver. Nowadays, families are made-up of increasing diverse compositions, so using the term *mother* may seem divisive, myopic, and out of step with contemporary life. However, the term *mother* is still often used in contemporary psychoanalytic literature whilst carrying the caveat that it encompasses "the person who is centrally responsible for the daily care of the child. This person may be the actual mother (biological or adoptive, the father (or partner), an older sibling," a grandparent or a paid employee such as a nanny, or a combination of these *mother figures* and this is the case for this research. The term *mother* will denote the figure or figures that completes the parent-infant dyad (Scharff & Scharff, 2005, p. 8).

However, considering that this research is being conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand using the term *mother* to represent the primary caregiver requires appreciation of cultural context. This is due to the positioning of the researcher as tauwi of European descent, meaning if the primary caregiver was considered a combination of *mother figures*, as addressed above that it would most likely be linked to a hierarchical rather than horizontal arrangement of support. This contrasts with the caregiving arrangements more closely aligned with a collective parenting approach found in te ao Māori, and detailed by Alayne Hall,

a collective parenting approach does not dismiss the idea of a central caregiving figure such as the mother-infant dyad, rather a bi-lateral arrangement operates where physical and emotional care is continuous, consistent and supported by the mutually significant other or others (2015, p. 45).

This research is mindful of this dialectic but is not attempting to engage in the task of considering the vicissitudes of culture on the mother-infant dyad.

1.7.5 Exclusions

This decision not to engage with considering the vicissitudes of culture on the mother-infant dyad is an exclusion of this research to bound its scope. In addition, psychoanalytic

literature will be sought that attends to the period of earliest infancy only where possible. Furthermore, the scope is bound by time and space, due to academic requirements and means that certain lines of enquiry will be excluded due to the limits imposed by submission deadlines and word limits.

1.8 Why this research?

This research's relevance revolves around expanding understanding of the emotional experience of earliest infancy; the elaboration of felt experience. This is important because it can support psychotherapeutic work in the countertransference. This is the "clinician's feeling space....[wherein] internal images and emotional reactions to clients communications....become a rich source for comprehending the client's internal world" (Shaw, 2017, p. 5).

In addition, through expanding understanding of the felt experience in earliest infancy, my wish is to contribute to developing psychotherapists acceptance of their subjectivity; their sense of being in the world. Much like an infant within the first year of life where their sense of self evolves within a reliable environment that supports floundering and existing for a time without having to act. I seek to show the value of acceptance by detailing my journey in this research to acceptance by tuning into embodied responses and developing the capacity to trust these would guide me and my research.

This research's validity arises from the attunement inherent in a hermeneutic approach where new insights provoked from interpreting texts reveals and conceals the author's "conscious and unconscious interests a play" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 241) and will likely "be read by others with similar conscious and unconscious interests" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14).

1.9 Overview of chapters

In this chapter I have introduced my topic, how this developed from rewording my research question and given an insight into how I plan to approach this hermeneutic literature review. I have presented my pre-understandings that will shape the meaning I make as I interpret literature and provided definitions of key terms that will be referred to during this dissertation.

In Chapter two I detail an expanded understanding of my methodology and method. Chapters three and four present the findings of my research; the literature reviewed. Chapter three addresses the research topic considering traditional psychoanalytic writing, whilst chapter four engages with contemporary psychoanalytic theory predominantly intersubjectivity and mutual recognition. Chapter five presents a discussion of these findings

according to themes that emerged. Implications for psychotherapy practice and future research are then offered and the chapter concludes with the strengths and limitations of the study, and a closing reflection.

1.10 Chapter summary

My research aim is to expand understanding of psychic development in earliest infancy according to psychoanalytic literature. This equates with attempting to grasp a sense of an infant's subjectivity; the elaboration of felt experience that informs their emotional world. This interest extends from my own experience as a mother, space to think about my experiences in my personal psychotherapy and my child and adolescent psychotherapy training at AUT.

This research will be conducted as a hermeneutic literature review, which recognises the researcher as part of the research. This is because our prejudices, what is silenced and already in our thinking shape how we engage with literature and the meaning-made, the product of this research. Existing literature frames the interplay of internal and external world as influencing an infant's subjectivity and places the mother-infant dyad at the centre of this dynamic. The literature selected explores the relationship of the dyad and sees it as either subject-to-object relating or subject-to-subject relating. The difference being how the mother is recognised, as an object facilitating her infant's psychic development or as a subject in her own right participating in this developmental process.

Chapter 2 Methodology & Method

2.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter covers the methodology and method that I will use to consider my research question: what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy?

2.2 Why I chose a hermeneutic approach

I have chosen to conduct my research as a hermeneutic literature review. Hermeneutics “refers to the science or art of interpretation, which...is the essential nature of understanding within human science research” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 13). This aligns well with my work which is situated within the field of health science where understanding is recognised as dynamic and contextual.

This decision is based on examining and defining my ontology and epistemology. Ontology is about depicting how an individual views the nature of reality and beliefs about being human, whilst epistemology develops from ontology and is about clarifying “the relationship between enquirer and known [and] what counts as knowledge” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 12). These terms can be confusing for the beginner researcher, and I found considering the question “[w]hat kind of truth am I interested in hearing?” helpful in naming my basic beliefs that underpin my dissertation research (Marecek, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 31). Ontologically, I resonate with critical realism. This means that reality is contextualised by our experience, including our culture, our history, and our gender. Epistemologically this means that knowledge about an individual’s experience is particular and nuanced and meaning is borne out of intersubjective relationship (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Ogden, 1992b).

Hermeneutics is a qualitative research methodology and sits within the interpretive paradigm. Qualitative research is an approach to research positioned on a continuum of research methodologies that differs to quantitative research. The two approaches can be differentiated by how each regards truth. Qualitative research regards truth “as a subjective reality that is experienced differently by each individual” and is interested in the meaning people attribute to their experience of the world (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 738). Whilst quantitative research regards truth as objective and implies that a definitive view of reality may be generated from the analysis of data and often seeks findings that can be generalised to a wider population to explain or predict social norms or behaviour (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smythe & Spence, 2012). I am interested in a qualitative approach to truth and my dissertation is a

hermeneutic literature review which means that my research will focus on engaging with texts that “are concerned with experiences, feelings and attitudes, as opposed to precise measurement and statistical analysis” (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 738).

However, the interpretative paradigm also contains a spectrum of methodologies, and some are very closely aligned. This is the case with hermeneutics and phenomenology, as the assumptions that guide and shape their particular approach to research can easily be confused (Smythe, 2012). Though, if a differentiation of the two is possible it may be that phenomenology has the aim of revealing meaning within experiential stories, whilst hermeneutics seeks meaning from the analysis of ‘text’.

Using my research question as an example to explore this differentiation, to take a phenomenological approach would require rephrasing it as “what is the psychoanalytic meaning of psychic development in earliest infancy?” To elicit meaning stories may be sought from those involved with the care of infants up to 12 months old and the work of the research would be detailing the understanding revealed through the telling of an experience, in a way that is more than recounting what is said and can lead to finding insights hidden between the lines (Smythe, 2019; Smythe, 2012). Whereas, a hermeneutic approach, and as my question stands, means that my dissertation aims to view-afresh psychoanalytic literature regarding psychic development in earliest infancy to expand understanding via the interpretation of more generalised data, rather than experiential stories is the work of the research (Smythe & Spence, 2012; Smythe, 2012).

Yet this is an intellectualised comparison by a novice researcher whereas, a refined understanding of methodology comes with Gadamer’s concept of “*phronesis*, or practical wisdom” (McCaffrey & Moules, 2016, p. 4). This notion is the formation of tactful judgement, an attuned inclination that comes with experience. This applies to a researcher developing a clearer understanding of the assumptions that guide and shape their chosen approach to research through repeated engagement. As with the clarity acquired by the experienced and active qualitative researcher Smythe (2019) who came to refine her research approach as phenomenological hermeneutics because, “[i]t seems there is a continuum [phenomenology to hermeneutics]. I suspect one finds oneself somewhere along its stretch” (p. 1).

2.3 Gadamerian hermeneutics

As a novice researcher, to limit confusion and support my aim for a hermeneutic approach to research I will be guided by the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). My understanding of Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy has been greatly supported by Smythe and Spence’s (2012) article, as well as other articles authored and co-authored by

Smythe (2019; 2008; 2007). Gadamer's philosophy prefaces that texts in hermeneutic research be engaged with as conversational partners to provoke thinking and it is by sharing this experience, the researcher's "present involvement in what is said" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14) that new meaning about the topic is created particular to the researcher's subjectivity. This manner of engaging hermeneutically with literature is distinctive and the thinking that emerges from the researcher's attunement to texts is the work of hermeneutic literature review; expanded understanding borne from prejudiced interpretation (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

2.3.1 Prejudices: Our historical consciousness and interpretation

Key to Gadamerian hermeneutic research is the notion of 'historically effected consciousness' which recognises the researcher as part of the research, and the limitations of conducting research as a detached, neutral observer (Smythe & Spence, 2012; Smythe, 2007). This hermeneutic concept recognises the researcher's inability to deny their historicity, the actuality of our prejudices "how we unthinkingly judge before we have examined all the elements of a given situation" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 13) which Gadamer labelled our historical horizon. And it is bringing into consciousness an appreciation for how this historical horizon governs understanding and influences interpretation that gives hermeneutic research its impetus (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

2.3.2 Reverie: making prejudices (the unconscious) conscious

Prejudices, according to Gadamer, are the understandings that are held in common in a discipline or research community, as well as, those personal understandings that have "become common knowledge...sink back and become self-evident" and we bring with us as reader and as interpreter, as a result of "our positioning in time, place and culture" (Gadamer, as cited in Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14). These are also something I have found challenging to think about self-evidently, as they silently inform my reality, colour my thinking and reading. Considering this, I found it helpful to think about prejudice from a psychoanalytic perspective, as the unconscious processes that shape our conscious experience in the world and how reverie may be used to elaborate connections between these experiential moments (Blake, 2021).

Reverie is a psychoanalytic concept linked to Freud's distinctive and foundational psychoanalytic method, the practice of free association. Free association is defined as a "method of investigation of psychic reality, and its unconscious processes" that occurs during psychoanalysis when a patient is encouraged to talk-freely and say anything that comes to mind, whilst in the company of an analyst "in a specific state of mind called "free-floating

attention”....[who] use their own unconscious to decipher the unconscious of the patient” (Rabeyron & Massicotte, 2020, p. 2).

A more recent and preeminent thinker on psychoanalytic work is Thomas Ogden (1994, 1997, 2007), and he has addressed the experience of reverie in numerous papers. Ultimately, reverie has the mood of dreaming, and is usually associated with the analyst’s waking-dreaming of the analysands free-association so understanding of the unconscious can emerge. This mood of dreaming applies to expanding understanding from hermeneutic engagement with texts, as meaning emerges when the researcher “is content to dream with the text, to linger in reverie in the moment of being questioned” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 223) so not to irritate the work into meaning, but instead open a path to other knowing that comes with patience and hospitality, “knowing that healing and redemptive” or in the case of analytic work “helping the patient to become more fully alive to his experience, more fully human”(Ogden, 2007, p. 576).

To further facilitate awareness of my prejudices, I found reading O’Loughlin’s (2009) discussion of pedagogy very helpful. In this, he advocates for fostering teaching practices open to self-reflexivity to ensure that “we can have confidence that they are working in the interests of diverse children in diverse socio-political and socioeconomic contexts” (p. 13). This approach is needed because “pedagogy...[is] fundamentally designed to support, legitimate and even extend the hegemony of the status quo” (O’Loughlin, 2009, p. 18). As my inaugural research question focused on defences against learning and was stirred-up by my childhood schooling experiences, these lines of thought coalesced with reading O’Loughlin (2009) viewing-afresh of education using a psychoanalytic lens. These connections enabled me to grasp a new understanding of pre-understandings, as I recognised the feeling of misattunement of *my way* with the hegemony of the status quo at school; a turtle in a hare-world. From this insight, I found a way into thinking about how to put words to the hegemony of my pre-understandings to grasp the unconscious stories silently informing my conscious experience.

2.3.3 My prejudices: A turtle in a hare-world

Prejudices are autobiographical. They are what has been concealed by the unconscious, the ghostly interjects inherited down the generations or the “unthought knowns” (Bollas, 1987; O’Loughlin, 2013; Smythe & Spence, 2012). However, these can be unveiled through reflectiveness, which underpins the capacity to learn from experience (Bion, 1962) or provoked from dialogue with texts (Maxwell et al., 2020). For me, reflexive capacity comes from the convergence of natural curiosity and an observant disposition, which has been honed, in my personal psychotherapy and aided by my psychotherapy training. These

elements have dovetailed with the hermeneutic space of this dissertation to allow me to name my prejudices.

Prejudices are important as they will inform and effect my understanding of this research and support its impetus as hermeneutic. They are encapsulated in the metaphor of *being a turtle in a hare-world*, as I grew-up in a familial environment silently informed by the dominant cultural values of western, capitalist society; the hare-world. Upon reflection, this resulted unconsciously in a need to satisfy external demand through a high-level of conformity and compliance, enacted at school as the focus on the “mastery of skills and facts” during earlier years and “the pursuit of grades and credentials” later (O'Loughlin, 2013, p. 31). As a result, the opportunity for self-actualisation and understanding subjective possibility was in short supply, along with space to tolerate uncertainty and not-knowing; “space necessary [for] meaning to emerge is collapsed” (Gentile, 2015, p. 38). Out of this push for action and valuing of doing over being, an overwhelming and unspoken internal sense of not being good-enough manifests (O'Loughlin, 2013).

I have also shared aspects of my prejudices in Chapter One, under the subheading *Pre-understandings: About me, about the research*, which were relevant to introducing my dissertation and they expand on some of the elements included above.

2.3.4 My discipline: Understandings held in common

Furthermore, prejudices pertain to the understandings held in common in a discipline and as my research topic prefaces a psychoanalytic lens then psychoanalytic prejudices need explicating. To do so, I will draw on O'Loughlin's (2008) article, which I found helpful in drawing out the negative and positive connotations of the discipline. Firstly, due to the origin of psychoanalysis, it has an acknowledged Eurocentric bent and this plays out in Aotearoa as possibly viewing experience with “colonial myopia” (O'Loughlin, 2008, p. 175). This is due to a history of conceptualising subjectivity in terms of autonomy and individual over collective experience, and valorising verbalization over other forms of knowing. Yet as O'Loughlin (2008) highlights,

[n]evertheless, psychoanalysis has been blessed with schisms and splits that reveal its resistance to totalization and....[f]or all its limitations, psychoanalysis gives us a vocabulary for speaking about loss and creativity through conceptualizing the unconscious, and it offers mechanisms for conceptualizing individual and collective responses to pain and suffering (p. 177).

2.3.5 This, instead of that? Methodology and psychotherapy

According to Grant and Giddings (2002) the selection of one paradigm and methodology over another depends on the researcher “recognising its ability to solve a

particular problem or address a particular question, more successfully than another” (p. 12). Considering this, my selection of hermeneutics, a methodology from the interpretive paradigm, is because it aligns well with the theory and practice of psychotherapy: expanding the understanding of subjective experience through the art of interpretation (Aguayo & Salomonsson, 2017; Ogden, 1992b; Rasmussen, 2005).

For Gadamer, “[u]nderstanding is born...when an agreement about the possible meanings is achieved between partners which leads to a fusion of horizons” (as cited in Mook, 1991, p. 187). This kind of understanding applies well to the psychotherapeutic process wherein a “receptive therapist...[becomes] caught up in the inner movement of the unfolding play or narrative and is grasped by the meanings expressed by her/his client” and if considered appropriate leads the therapist to offer this knowledge to the client in a way that they can make use of (Mook, 1991, p. 187). This is an example of hermeneutics ability to address my research question more successfully than another methodology from another paradigm, as the research is about expanding understanding of subjective experience in infancy. Whereas, a quantitative survey from the positivist paradigm, would emphasise locating the objective and scientific truth of experience that is generalisable, which would be a mismatch with the impetus of hermeneutics and the research findings might incline a therapist to misattunement and away from “meaningful encounters that...are critical to our capacity to experience recognition” (O’Loughlin, 2013, p. 32).

2.3.6 My chosen methodology & my way: The hermeneutic spiral

My key attraction to hermeneutics is how it supports the literature selection that will be reviewed to expand my understanding. This is framed as the researcher “inclining towards [texts] which draws one into thinking” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 23). This aspect comes-alongside my own way-of-being in the world and validates the iterative and non-linear tendency I have identified during my study of child and adolescent psychotherapy at AUT, and experiences earlier in life when completing schoolwork (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). This meeting of theory with experience is supported by Romanyshan’s (2020) writing on the hermeneutic spiral. This variation deepens the hermeneutic circle by twisting it into a spiral that allows for the unconscious aspects of researcher’s engagement with texts, which creates a space for what “Christopher Bollas (1987) refers to as “the unthought known”...a latent subjectivity embodied in unconscious desires and ancestral memory” (O’Loughlin, 2009, p. 79). Equating hermeneutics with being a good fit with *my way* of being presently and in the past.

2.3.7 The alchemical hermeneutic method

Romanyshan (2020, p. 223) regards the hermeneutic spiral as part of the “alchemical hermeneutic method, [which is] an imaginal approach to research’s take on method” and

encourages loitering in the vicinity of the work. My understanding of this method is it is less reactive much like the main point to be gained from engaging in an infant observation during child and adolescent psychotherapy training. During this year-and-a-half-long opportunity, a student is invited into the home of a (m)other-infant pair from the earliest days of newborn life, for weekly, hour-long visits. A main learning taken from this time as observer is for the student to be able to bear the unconscious feelings stirred by the (m)other-infant relationship as they navigate preverbal life. There is a focus on working at being with and resisting the flight to action in the face of, at times, unbearable primitive anxieties stirred by the infant and dependent on the (m)other's capacity for reverie and curiosity about their baby's needs (Bick, 1964).

Additionally, the lengthening of space in the alchemical method is supported by hermeneutics approach to data, which tends to be presented in a way that allows the reader to 'think-along' rather than being told. Again, these complementary aspects are a match with the spirit of hermeneutics that takes one on *a way* and with *my way* of processing information that is enacted metaphorically as being slow like a turtle. It also suits the practice of child and adolescent psychotherapy, which favours engagement with young clients that is non-directive way, evoking a hermeneutic manner of being free to play and in playing-as-wakeful-dreaming "help the person dream, that is, to unconsciously process their emotions" (Blake, 2021, p. 4).

2.4 What is a method?

"[M]ethods are the practical means, the tools, for collecting and analysing data" and the method of my research is a literature review congruent with a hermeneutic methodology (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 12). This approach means selecting and reviewing literature will be distinctively interpretive and understanding gained is dynamic and contextual. This is a good fit with the paradigm and field of this study (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

2.4.1 Gadamer: No prescribed method, trust the process

However, being guided by the philosophy of Gadamer, there is no prescribed way to conduct hermeneutic research, as cited in Smythe (2019, p. 3) Gadamer states:

I did not intend to produce an art or technique of understanding...I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences...My real concern is philosophic; not what we do or what we ought to do but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.

This permissive quality advanced by Gadamerian hermeneutics took me some time to grasp. I initially thought it meant that there is no way to describe the steps I will take to conduct my literature review before it has happened. However, I came to understand that

research based on this philosophy means the researcher is freed from “trying to apply a prescribed method” (Smythe, 2019, p. 5) and with time, instils them with a sense of trust that thinking will come and will lead to insights that uncover “new and different perspectives in order to understand in a different way” (d’Entremont et al., 2014, p. 302).

2.5 My method

Holding in mind this insight about trusting the process provoked by Gadamer’s quote, led me to understand how I will describe my method for this dissertation. To do so, I will take note of what I am doing as my research unfolds in a journal, and as my literature review comes together, I will return to this chapter and detail my way retrospectively. Most importantly this means that my method will be congruent with the hermeneutic approach, being open to “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” and instilling a sense of trust in the process (Gadamer, as cited in Smythe, 2019, p. 3).

2.5.1 The hermeneutic circle

In addition, the unfolding process of my research will be guided by the hermeneutic circle, a framework that describes the iterative way interpretive understanding emerges from a hermeneutic literature review (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). This framework captures the movement generating hermeneutic understanding, the work of this research. In seeking meaning of the whole (the research work) we need to make sense of the parts, and then understanding the parts illuminates a broader whole (Green, 2016). This is an iterative and expansive process where meaning made from the parts and the whole is always changing. This is due to the fusion of horizons of the reader and the text through dialogical encounter with each other (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014)

2.5.2 The hermeneutic circle and “reading/writing/thinking”

How the hermeneutic circle applies to my research and method arose from my engagement with a journal article by Smythe and Spence (2012). I was drawn to this article for their explanation of engaging the hermeneutic circle through “the manner of approach, of reading, of thinking, and of writing” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 21). An embodied understanding of this emerged during my dissertation when I noticed that I had read and re-read one copy of this article over several years in relation to different classes and assignments. After a discussion with a peer about my dissertation I made the link between my engagement with this one printed copy of Smythe and Spence’s (2012) article and the hermeneutic circle (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). I realised that each revisiting, with each new class or assignment, I highlighted different elements and added and expanded on notes written in the margins, and that these were tangible examples of iterations of the hermeneutic circle. The

literature review (the whole) develops iteratively through numerous hermeneutic circles as texts (the parts) are engaged with dialogically, as conversational partners. Smythe and Spence (2012) explain below the hermeneutic circle and the manner I adopted for my research method,

the manner...of reading, of thinking, and of writing. There is no logical, linear process that moves from start to finish. Reading the work of others expands one's own understandings, which one takes to the data, to conversation, to writing. Through such immersion one's own thinking comes to new questions. Reading the same text again can draw forth key insights passed over in an earlier read. Similarly, there is no one place for the literature to be cited within a research report. It rather comes-along as a dialogical partner, supporting, building, challenging, showing (p. 21).

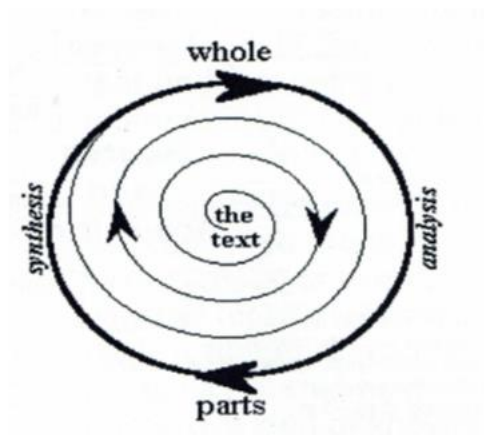


Figure 1: A hermeneutic circle capturing the manner of reading/writing/thinking, as inspired by Smythe and Spence (2012)

The diagram above depicts the hermeneutic circle that captures the tenets of the reading, writing, thinking process that underpinned my hermeneutic literature review. I resonate with the idea that the means of moving from the 'whole' to the 'parts' is often from searching for texts, and the means of moving from the part to the whole is reading (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). Referring to figure 1, this means *analysis* equates with searching, and *synthesis* with reading.

This diagram also fits my hermeneutic process as it infers the circle can become a spiral, a task of the alchemical hermeneutic process that deepens the relational aspect of engagement with texts and allows for the unconscious of the researcher and the research work (Romanyshyn, 2020).

2.6 The process: Returning to what I have done

As mentioned previously, I have returned to detail how I collected and approached reviewing the literature for my dissertation. These are the practical steps I took in creating a hermeneutic literature review based on my research question: what does psychoanalytic

literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy? The following details on how I conducted the research reflects my subjectivity, an important tool in the hermeneutic process but the theoretical underpinnings of these steps have been addressed in the balance of this chapter above.

2.7 Searching, gathering, and reading

2.7.1 Identifying literature

Finding material for my literature review began with psychoanalytic texts; one recommended by my supervisor and another from a book I owned and inclined towards. These texts were Henry (1999) and Canham (2006). Literature beyond these inaugural texts were selected from the results of a “library search” the main search tool on AUTs Library website using the key terms ‘learning’, ‘child’, and ‘psychoanalysis’ followed by citation tracking to generate potentially interesting material.

During my dissertation, my research question was re-worded as the hermeneutic approach creates space for the initial work to resist the conscious intentions of the researcher and twist and turn in another way, making a place for the unconscious in the research (Romanyshyn, 2020). As a result, the literature search detailed above was redone. This time to accommodate defining the key terms of the rephrased research question. This was achieved by searching AUT google scholar via the library website based on the terms ‘psychic, development’, ‘emotional’ and ‘earliest infancy’. The literature I was first drawn to was interpretations of traditional psychoanalytic thinkers by current professionals, such as Abram and Hinshelwood (2018).

Searching from this point was again unstructured and iterative and based on citation tracking. This process led me to contemporary psychoanalytic writing on psychic development in earliest infancy developed by Jessica Benjamin (2005; 2013; 2018). Benjamin reframes the context of the mother-infant dyad as subject-to-subject relating rather than subject-to-object as in traditional psychoanalytic thinking.

Much of my searching, gathering, and reading was unstructured. It relied on snowballing or citation tracking to identify relevant literature while reading. In addition, literature was selected by attunement to bodily responses provoked when reading or wandering the library shelves. These approaches are supported by the hermeneutic approach that prefaces the researcher’s subjectivity and engages it as a research tool; “[w]e learnt to be attuned, to incline ourselves to the texts that called....and ‘wondering’ down new paths....that opens new territory” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, pp. 21-23)

2.7.2 Other kinds of texts: Quotes and songs

Literature in hermeneutic research is expanded beyond academic texts to include anything that engages the researcher in “a thought-full encounter” as the key purpose of the hermeneutic endeavour is to provoke thinking (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14). Therefore, along with psychoanalytic literature, I engaged with quotes and songs as conversational partners along the way for their evocative manner to capture a notion otherwise hidden.

2.8 Writing, organising, and thinking

2.8.1 Gathering ‘wholeness’: no clear ‘part’ & no clear ‘whole’

Reviewing literature in a hermeneutic way is an iterative process where movement back and forth between the parts and the whole is the dynamic from which understanding emerges. Yet as my unstructured way of searching and identifying texts progressed and my understanding gathered wholeness, I recognised that it was difficult to say, “this is a part and here is a whole” (Smythe, 2019, p. 4). Extending from this is the difficulty revealed in identifying a point in time when a final selection of literature was isolated as ‘the texts’ that form the basis of the research findings chapters; the literature to be reviewed. Instead, the selection emerges from a coming-along “as a dialogical partner, supporting, building, challenging, showing” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 21).

However, at a point in my data collection I was felt a strong inclination to write down the major lines of thought that had become stuck in my mind, from the immersion in and saturation of reading. I then added references of academic literature that I felt associated with these lines of thought and returned and added more notes on emerging themes as my dissertation progressed (Figure 2). This process supported identifying the structure of my two findings chapters.

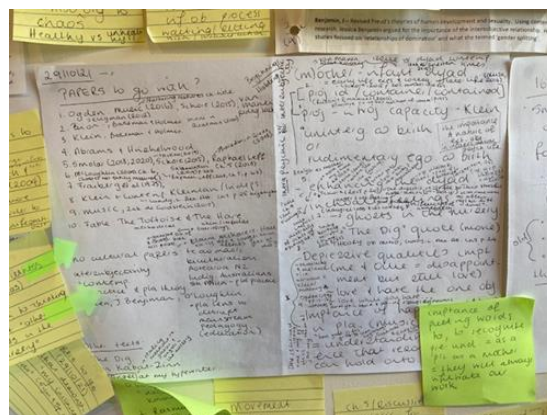


Figure 2: Data collection for keeping track of emerging themes and relevant texts

2.8.2 Reverie: Letting come

Linked to this aspect is the hermeneutic notion of 'letting come' or "the gift of grace" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 19). This is the act of stepping back from reading and writing to allow connections emerge or "await the coming of thought while at the same time being an active player in seeking new thoughts" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, pp. 19-20). For me, these connections and themes, or ah ha moments emerged while I was doing mindless tasks like washing the dishes or cleaning my teeth. Also, a large part of my organising process coalesced from reverie-like journal writing. I thought of it as writing-as-dreaming, or reading-as-dreaming, and then writing-as-dreaming (Ogden, 2017).

2.8.3 The wall: Introducing some organisation to the chaos

In hermeneutic research the research question is vitally important, as it needs to be congruent with the philosophical underpinnings. This is achieved initially through the wording, so it seeks meaning, and then through rewording during the research journey if the data is recognised as drawing the research in a different direction. After I rephrased my research question, I stuck a printout of the question on the wall in front of my desk. I then proceeded to stick many notes and other relevant documents around this, on the wall (Figure 3). This helped me with finding the structure of my dissertation and introduced some organisation to my natural chaotic way of processing information.



Figure 3: The wall: Introducing some organisation to the chaos

I also introduced organisation to my thinking by allocating a colour for each chapter in my dissertation. I had piles and piles of papers on my desk and on the floor of my study and started using colour-coded post-it flags to highlight important sections in readings as well as, sort readings per chapter into the same colour folder and files. This is part of the integration of my research that came from a sense of gathering together through doing, and indicates a shift from loitering in the vicinity of the work to symbolisation of the work or "the spontaneous

presence of a third between something that is conscious and something that is unconscious” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 224).

2.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology and method of my research, a hermeneutic literature review. Detailed the process and put words to the prejudices that silently inform my subjectivity. These will influence my interpretation and give this research its impetus. I have explained my choice of hermeneutics and presented how engaging the hermeneutic circle through Smythe and Spence’s (2012) manner, ‘of reading, of thinking, and of writing’ will underpin collecting texts and analysing data. These texts are engaged as conversational partners and will participate in expanding understanding of the research topic by provoking thinking. In the following chapter I present my findings.

Chapter 3 Findings

3.1 Section introduction: The research findings

The next two chapters will show the construction of my understanding of the research question “what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy?” These chapters encapsulate the findings of my dissertation, which are based on understanding created from a hermeneutic approach to research. This is particular to me and due to how I have applied methodology and method, which are the two elements influencing the researcher and the entire research process. As a result, the predominant feature of this research is the meaning I have made of the research topic through engaging with iterations of the hermeneutic circle; understanding developed through the repeated cycle of reading, writing, and thinking.

Furthermore, this process aligns with psychoanalytic theory by holding space for the unconscious of the researcher and their work to emerge. This is realised by allowing for the hermeneutic circle to twist into a spiral and become the alchemical hermeneutic method. Engaging alchemically with texts allows the work of the research to be a re-view, re-think and re-say of what the researcher has always known but forgotten and become re-search that keeps the soul in mind. This re-search, with the soul in mind, is drawn from the coalescing of my unconscious with the unconscious of the work (Romanyshyn, 2020; Smythe & Spence, 2012).

3.2 Chapter introduction: Beginnings

In this chapter I explore the concept of beginnings through a psychoanalytic lens and think about parallels between this perspective, the beginning of writing up this research and the beginnings of psychic development. To do so, psychoanalytic writings from pioneering child analysts to contemporary psychoanalytic theorists are addressed to detail my expanded understanding of psychoanalytic thinking about the beginnings of psychic life, the work of this research. Additionally, I reference popular songs, quotes, and fables, for their evocative manner to translate the gaps, the place where the unconscious appears when conducting re-search that keeps the soul in mind. This is needed as language is inchoate and carries hidden meaning. Therefore, metaphors found in songs and fables can be the catalyst to a new way thinking, and is something I have found helpful as a way into illuminating new insights to carry forward as a psychotherapist and elaborating my self-in-the-world (Romanyshyn, 2020; Smythe & Spence, 2012).

3.3 Memory in feeling

‘Aller Anfang ist schwer’ (every beginning is hard)

My research question premises the importance of beginnings by delineating earliest infancy as a period worthy of special consideration in understanding psychic development from a psychoanalytic perspective. In my introduction I defined earliest infancy as the first 12 months of life from birth. Psychoanalytic theory premises that feelings from the beginning of life as an infant, are carried with us and re-evoked in situations later in life that resemble the past. As such, situations later in life that mark a new beginning like, starting school, a new job, a new relationship, a new year, or a new baby echo feelings from earliest infancy not as a “conscious sense of remembering what it felt like; [but] it is rather a memory in feeling” (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999, p. 7).

The phrase *memory in feeling* is attributed to Melanie Klein (Britzman, 2016; Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999) and may be explained as the phantasies linked to preverbal experiences that are revived throughout life’s relations with others. Phantasy is the psychic expression of bodily sensations and feelings “dominating the mind at the moment” (Isaacs, 1948, p. 82). They occur at an unconscious level of the mind and Klein (1997) believed that they accompanied every experience of the infant from birth. For example, at the event of birth the infant’s bodily experience of being pushed out “from a familiar environment into one that is cold, strange, and terrifying” elicit feelings of helplessness and terror, and although these extreme feelings may be lessened postnatally by a warm and responsive environment “extreme anxiety states do remain as memory traces within all of us” regardless of our postnatal experience. These phantasmic expressions then unconsciously shape our emotional response to “any new situation [that] involves loss of the old, known one....[and] re-awakened by sudden or extreme changes” echoing the infant’s bodily and emotional experience at birth (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999, p. 7).

3.4 Beginnings, memories in feeling & a nose for hermeneutics

Whilst beginning to write this chapter and holding in mind the notion of memories in feelings, I end up feeling fraught, tense, and annoyed, and decide to go for a walk. As I leave my house, a line from a song, pops into my head,

‘From little things, big things grow’ (Kelly & Carmody, 1991)

Whilst I walk, I also sense that I need to see the water. I live in a place where I can walk and see a view of the Hauraki Gulf. As I walk and ponder the song line above, another comes to mind,

‘Take a stroll to the nearest waters, remember your place

*Many moons have risen and fallen long, long before you've come
So which way is the wind blowing, And what does your heart say'
(Rudd, 2012)*

I resonate with the thought that these moments and these song lines that emerge, are indications of having “a nose for hermeneutics...detecting the scent of the gods who linger in the ordinary” (Romanyshyn, 2020, p. 225) and arise in response to memories in feeling reawakened by the anxiety stirred-up by beginning writing. This sense of having a nose for hermeneutics is part of what drew me to the methodology for this research and these song lines that come to mind are a familiar response as I navigate life. These are examples of my subjectivity “the elaboration of felt experience” (McKay, 2019, p. 165) and responses that are important considering the method and philosophy influencing this dissertation.

3.4.1 Tension and paradox

Considering this, I return to my first dissertation journal entry hoping to discover a launching off point for detailing the construction of my understanding of my research topic. I re-read this first entry and I am struck by the words I have in bold; **given up, gained** and **tension**. These are an elaboration of my felt experience and parallel qualities of preverbal phantasies retained from infancy as *memories in feeling* linked to the primitive reaction to new knowledge. Melanie Klein named this the epistemophilic instinct and proposed that every child is born with it; “the desire to find out about the world....[yet they] may not like what they find out or innately know” (Canham, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Canham (2006) was one of the first psychoanalytic texts that I read at the beginning of my dissertation journey. It was selected by my first supervisor due to the wording of my initial research question, which prefaced expanding understanding of children’s defences against learning. The text by Canham (2006) was a chapter in a book titled “Where do babies come from? What makes children want to learn”. I was drawn back to this text to “read again with a different attunement” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 23) and was called to explore the tension that is created where something is gained while something is given up; the “tension between a desire to find out, and a desire not to know” (Canham, 2006, p. 10).

It seems that my interest in this tension has impetus for expanding my understanding of an infant’s psychic development. How is this research and having a better understanding of the development of an infant’s psyche connected to what I *desire to find out*, and what do I *desire not to know*. This amplifies my research question, not to supersede its current form but re-say it so I can take others along with my wondering and what is unfolding from my dialogue with texts in the construction of my understanding.

Unfolding is the notion of tension being inherent in developing subjectivity; mine and an infant, and points to this tension being an important consideration for psychic development in earliest infancy. O'Loughlin (2009) frames this as the challenge of subjectivity due to the fine line between subjectivity and subjection. He cites Judith Butler to explain, "enabling ourselves to become vibrant living subjects who identify with particular cultures and discourse practices, without simultaneously becoming totally subject to those same ideologies and discursive practices" (O'Loughlin, 2009, p. 61). This points to subjectivity developing from an interplay of internal and external experiences, which O'Loughlin links to "the tension these factors produce in children as they come to name their own subjectivities" as they develop within "the norms of family, community, and society, and...intrapsychic processes within each child" (O'Loughlin, 2009, p. 61). This dovetails with my thinking at the beginning of this dissertation regarding psychic development in earliest infancy being something that evolves out of the nature of internal and external worlds.

3.5 Earliest infancy and the mother-infant dyad

[T]his experience...that of being alone, as an infant and small child, in the presence of mother. *Thus the basis of the capacity to be alone is a paradox; it is the experience of being alone while someone else is present* (Winnicott, 2018, p. 30)

A common understanding of the psychoanalytic discipline is that early life experiences with significant others shape who we are; shape our subjectivity "our sense of being in the world" (O'Loughlin, 2009, p. 61). This psychoanalytic prejudice is encapsulated by Winnicott's iconic phrase "[t]here is no such thing as a baby" (1975, p. 99). I understand this to mean that at the beginning of life the total dependence of a human baby on their mother or primary caregiver for survival means that an infant only exists in relationship to this significant other. It is here that the purpose of my dissertation became clearer; using a hermeneutic approach to provoke my thinking and tease out an expanded understanding of the nature of the young infant's felt experience within this relationship with their significant other in earliest life (Tuber, 2020). This relationship is important as it shapes how an infant feels about being in the world from the beginning and later in life.

There are different schools of thought within psychoanalysis, which vary on their view of how these relational experiences in earliest life shape subjectivity, and in early iterations of my research it seemed delineating these historical differences was important. For example, I imagined recounting my understanding of what a Kleinian would say or a Winnicottian, however, after more reading, writing, and thinking I have come to see that this is not territory of my research. A main reason I was drawn to hermeneutics was due to its approach to expand understanding by inclining towards. Remembering this, I am drawn to understand that the

purpose of my research is not to provide a recount of psychoanalytic history, but about gaining insight particular to me and my prejudices about psychic development in earliest infancy. At this point I am wondering about the importance of the feelings from the beginning of life that become embodied and carried forward by an infant as memories in feeling spurred on by the desire to know and not to know (Canham, 2006; Klein, 1997; Smythe & Spence, 2012).

3.5.1 World of misrecognition and the fear of not knowing

Considering this, I drawn to O'Loughlin's (2013, p. 32) statement "I lived in a world of misrecognition" and Ogden's (1992a) paper titled "Misrecognitions and the fear of not knowing" to ponder how these relate to understanding an infant's developing subjective experience. Both avenues for thought have something to do with the nature of the mother-infant relationship. This relationship contextualises an infant's psychic development and being in the world. Ogden (1992a) sees this relationship echoed in analytic work within the transference-countertransference field as a set of internal object relations emerge that resonate with the client's experience as an infant based on being in relationship with a mother lacking the capacity to recognise and respond to their infant's internal state. These internal object relations evolve from an absence in this relationship in earliest infancy, wherein a mother or primary caregiver lacks the capacity to immerse themselves in the infant's sensory world and correctly name or give shape to the infant's internal state.

This lack is unconscious and Ogden associates it to some extent with the caregiver's "*agonies...the pain of the mother's experience of not knowing*" (Ogden, 1992a, p. 203). This state reduces the primary caregiver's tolerance for moments of tension in earliest infancy, such as when an infant is experiencing heightened feeling states like restlessness and inconsolable crying. In these heightened moments it may be thought of as the infant experiencing not knowing yet involved in the process of feelings *becoming* known (Ogden, 1992a). However, for a mother unable to tolerate not knowing these moments invite a reaction or response that closes down the space for meaning-making rather than holding space for meaning to emerge. With time and repetition, this way of relating leads to the infant internalising misnamed feelings, and generates confusion whilst also diminishing the "infant's potential to generate his own thoughts, feelings, and sensations" (Ogden, 1992a, p. 204).

An example is given by Ogden (1992a) of a mother who unconsciously defends against not knowing, by engaging in an obsessive-compulsive approach to feeding her infant by a rigid schedule. This imposed external order, by the clock, means that "[t]he infant is responded to as if he were not hungry between scheduled feedings" and the biological event of hunger becomes an externally generated event (Ogden, 1992a, p. 204). This approach collapses the space that supports an infant's fledgling capacity to elaborate felt experience. Overtime,

misnaming the infant's internal state means the infant internalises an unconscious sense that he has no idea how he '*really feels*' and subsequently, that only his mother or something outside has the capacity to know how '*he feels*'. However, such behaviour in a mother or significant other represents "an enactment of an internal object relationship" stemming from their own infant experience wherein their infantile feeling states were misnamed by a mother unconsciously defending against her own *agonies of not knowing* (Ogden, 1992a, p. 205). As such, an absence in the mother-infant relationship is passed on from one generation to the next.

3.5.2 Reconstructing infancy through adulthood

Psychoanalytic theory is underpinned by a history of reconstructing infancy from analytic work with adult patients. This process is captured in this research in the parallels noted between memories in feeling embodied from the beginning of life and my feelings about beginning to write my dissertation. This understanding emerged from engaging with texts hermeneutically and allowing space for reflexivity in my dialogue and interpretation of texts for this dissertation. For example, I am watching a documentary about the e-sport community, where people are paid to play video games as a profession. One of the gamers mentions his wish for people, such as, dismissive parents, to understand that the pleasurable escapism that accompanies playing video games can lead to enriching subjective life. I ponder this documentary about professional gamers and a link emerges between subjectivity and the fulfilling notion of '*getting paid to do what you love*' which I see as an inclining towards a life based on reality instead of futility (Winnicott, 2018).

Furthermore, this notion of escapism to enrich subjectivity links to the soothing quality I have recognised on my research journey. This began by recognising a particular feeling of peace when reading for my dissertation in contrast to the overwhelmed and stuck feeling associated with 'having to write', and the similar soothing sense that accompanied writing later in my dissertation when I allowed myself to be a turtle and go slow-and-steady rather than set goals to achieve each day. I write in my journal around this time,

I don't know how I am going to get my dissertation finished. And that is all I need to know. I need to tolerate not knowing.

I imagine this insight and the accompanying soothing feeling is akin to that which arises when a mother is increasingly able to tolerate not knowing and feels less overwhelmed and less likely to enact "misrecognition as a defense" against her own agonies (Ogden, 1992a, p. 212). O'Loughlin (2013) names this a "place for the 'silent and deeply meaningful encounters' that...are critical to our capacity to experience recognition" (p. 32).

In psychoanalytic literature I also recognised these experiences in Winnicott's concept of the capacity to be alone. This is a psychic development extending from an ego-supportive and facilitating environment in earliest infancy. Wherein the infant is not necessarily aware of a reliable mother, yet progressively becomes so from mindful doses of reality managed by her in a responsive environment. This kind of thoughtful management lends itself to a sense of being in the world based on truly personal experience rather than reaction to impingements and leads to the infant developing the capacity for recognition of their felt experience over misrecognition. These thoughts coalesced from my wondering detailed in this chapter and Winnicott's words below,

It is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his own personal life....When alone in the sense I am using this term, and only when alone, the infant is able to do the equivalent of what in an adult would be called relaxing. The infant is able to become un-integrated, to flounder, to be in a state in which there is no orientation, to be able to exist for a time without being either a reactor to an external impingement of an active person with a direction of interest or movement....In the course of time there arrives a sensation or an impulse. In this setting the sensation or impulse will feel real and be truly a personal experience....A large number of these experiences for the basis for a life that has reality in it instead of futility (Winnicott, 2018, p. 34).

This notion also applies and was recognised in the soothing-sense I felt from accepting *I am a turtle* and that I needed to go *slow-and-steady* when completing this research. Furthermore, this connects with Winnicott's message in his later writing that "the only true basis for *doing* is *being*. Creativity is the *doing* that arises out of *being*" (Winnicott, as cited in Davis & Wallbridge, 1991, p. 37). These connections have expanded my understanding of psychic development in earliest infancy by showing the importance of holding space to flounder and reflect on feeling states in adulthood, and the capacity begins to develop in earliest infancy.

3.6 Chapter summary

This is the first of two chapters of research findings, which reveal the construction of my understanding of my research question. In this chapter I explored the concept of beginnings through a psychoanalytic lens and wondered about the parallels with beginning writing this dissertation. From this exploration the research revealed that psychic development begins in earliest infancy and is shaped by the relationship between mother and infant.

Furthermore, unconscious feelings or phantasies are embodied from this preverbal period and carried forward as memories in feeling. These are re-evoked in later life when situations revive feelings and sensations from early life, which then unconsciously shape our emotional response to the world and our sense of being in the world. This denotes a link

between psychic development in the first 12 months of life and subjectivity; the elaboration of felt experience. This was corroborated in this research by the researcher reflecting on their feelings about beginning to write up this research and parallels with what psychoanalytic literature says about beginnings regarding the feelings evoked by the primitive reaction to new knowledge; feelings of anxiety due to the tension inherent in a desire to find out, and a desire not to know (Canham, 2006; Klein, 1997).

In the balance of this findings chapter the importance of the mother-infant relationship on psychic development in earliest infancy is confirmed and the mother's capacity for tolerating not knowing influences how this capacity is passed down the generations.

The next chapter continues presenting the findings of this research and engages with contemporary psychoanalytic thinking about the mother-infant relationship around enhancing the dyad on intersubjective terms.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Chapter introduction: Contemporary times

In the previous chapter I began detailing the construction of my understanding of the research question “what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy?” This was addressed via the parallels between psychoanalytic thinking about beginnings and the beginning of writing up this research, and by exploring how the concept of subjectivity is relevant to understanding psychic development in earliest infancy. These points were captured in writing about how my personal experiences and the research phenomenon intersect and were exemplified by the feelings I noticed when beginning to write up my research findings with the psychoanalytic concept of *memory in feeling*. These are feelings from the beginning of life that are carried with us and re-evoked later in life when situations revive preverbal phantasies, the psychic expression of bodily and emotional experience at birth. These traces of extreme anxiety states then unconsciously shape our subjectivity, our emotional response to any new situation that involves loss of the familiar and known.

In this chapter the understanding gained in the previous chapter is expanded by exploring how psychoanalytic literature’s premising of the mother-infant dyad may be enhanced. To do so, I consider contemporary psychoanalytic writing, and engage with the Aesop fable ‘The Tortoise and The Hare’ (Appendix A) to provoke my thinking and extend my horizon on the research question (Aesop, 2010; Benjamin, 1988; 2005; 2013; 2018; McKay, 2019; Smolar, 2018; Yeatman, 2015).

4.2 Enhancing the dyad: On intersubjective terms

The phrase ‘*enhancing the dyad*’ is the title of a journal article I inclined towards when identifying literature to review for this research. I was drawn to this text as a possible catalyst to extend my horizon regarding the mother-infant dyad beyond my current preunderstandings based on western, nuclear family ideals. The article ‘Enhancing the dyad’ by Smolar (2018) explores whether combined treatment; adding group therapy to psychoanalytic treatment promotes psychic change otherwise unavailable to clients engaged only in individual psychoanalytic treatment.

The main point emerging from this article relevant to expanding my understanding of the research topic was that other ways of relating, such as found in group therapy, can enhance dyadic relationships. This is facilitated by relating on intersubjective terms, which creates space and frees dyads from the “doer-done-to dynamic” (Smolar, 2018, p. 258). Smolar’s (2018) reframing of relational experiences is supported by the psychoanalytic concept

of mentalization, which is a capacity that ideally begins in infancy, when “[a]n infant develops a mind because the caregiver has the baby’s mind in mind” (Fonagy et al., Cooper, 2017, p. 45). This article activated my thinking about the possibilities of psychic development being enhanced by other ways of relating in earliest infancy.

4.3 It’s not about coming up with an answer; it’s about understanding

My thinking initiated by Smolar (2018) was furthered by reading Ogden’s (1992b) discussion of the concept of subjectivity in psychoanalytic theory, which he states relies on a theory of interdependence with intersubjectivity. The notion of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis is an area I have felt under pressure to understand in the past, to come up with an answer regarding what it is and how this is different than psychoanalytic thinking prior to the relational turn (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). However, I have learnt from this hermeneutic research that coming up with an answer is not the goal, but rather expanding understanding is, and by holding this in mind I found my way to understand intersubjectivity.

This understanding can be illustrated in relation to Winnicott’s phrase that “there is no such thing as a baby”. At the start of my research, I held a different understanding of this phrase, I took it as discounting the baby’s subjective experience from birth. Now I understand that this stance was informed by a pre-understanding that prized hierarchical knowledge and silently pushed me to rank whose experience counted most in the mother-infant dyad. However, as my thinking was provoked by texts my understanding of Winnicott’s phrase has expanded so I am now able to value it as a statement to ‘wonder about’ the interplay of their early relationship without ranking whose contributions are most valuable.

4.4 Intersubjectivity: Mutual recognition and tension

To support this understanding, I was drawn to writing by Jessica Benjamin and writing about her theory regarding earliest infancy (Benjamin, 2005; Benjamin, 2013; McKay, 2019; Yeatman, 2015). This is based on intersubjectivity; subject-to-subject relating where mother and baby live in the same theory. This is because the theory insists on the mother as a subject in her own right and on subject-to-subject relationship from the beginning of life (Yeatman, 2015). This lessens the prizing of hierarchical knowledge and a pattern of relating based on domination as it considers both subject’s needs in the relationship. As a result, mother-infant relating in earliest infancy is reframed as,

two-subject interaction. For the baby, freedom begins with self-assertion in mutuality. In this phase, both baby and mother enjoy ‘a relationship of mutual influence’ and ‘affective attunement’...[and even though it is] mothers responsibility for facilitating the baby’s sense of being:...[through her] recognition. At the same time, the mother is also dependent for her sense of reality and efficacy as a self on the baby’s recognition. If all goes

well, mutual recognition...accompanied by rhythms of co-existence and pleasure (Yeatman, 2015, p. 13).

Pleasure and joy then underpin the subjectivities of mother and infant, and the infant's developing sense of being in the world is based on the feelings of vitality more than futility (Benjamin, 2005).

Benjamin's (2005, 2018) reconfiguration to two-subject interaction is not to discount the infant's needs, as mother is still there to meet these, but without denying or forgetting, her own needs and subjectivity. The tension that arises from considering that there are two subjects in one relationship means that mutual recognition comes to the fore as a dynamic that can be a,

container for something much more complex....[able to] negotiate the sticky compromises and paradoxes of the dyad in which there is mutuality but asymmetry, identity of needs but conflict of needs, deep attunement but also difference....transcends the either/or of needs and unlocks the impasse that leads to domination...to show that there can be two subjects in one relationship (Benjamin, 2013, p. 6).

4.4.1 "All roads were leading to recognition and intersubjectivity"

The subtitle above is a quote from Benjamin (2013) and points to a development in her perspective on mutual recognition in the parenting relationship. This development is supported by bringing together feminism, critical social theory, and infant research. From infant research Benjamin discovered "the interpersonally active infant" in studies by Trevarthen (1977, 1980) which confirmed "the idea of primary intersubjectivity" and the work of Stern (1974) on face-to-face play that "mutual recognition is possible" in earliest infant life (Benjamin, 2013, p. 5). These repositioned the baby from birth as a centre of self-experience yet still didn't consider the mother's subjectivity in this experience and Benjamin (2013) was determined to explore how to bring baby and mother into one theory about relating in earliest infancy. A theory that was equally preoccupied with what infants and mothers need, and able to hold their, at times, paradoxical qualities (Benjamin, 2013). For Benjamin (1988) a theory of intersubjectivity reorients the infant's psychic development "from a subject's relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject" which creates the opportunity for life-giving exchanges rather than one dominating the other (p. 20).

My understanding about this was expanded from reading Benjamin (2005). In this text Benjamin (2005) presents her ideas on thirdness in the mother-infant relationship. Thirdness is an aspect of mutual recognition that arises as a tertiary perspective co-created by two partners, such as mother and infant out of the "ongoing process...of breakdown and restoration of recognition" (Benjamin, 2005, p. 37). More recently, Benjamin (2018) explains

thirdness as a quality that correlates with a “kind of internal mental space...closely related to Winnicott’s idea of potential or transitional space” (p. 23). This is because thirdness is paradoxical; being invented and discovered. An example given is the rhythm that coheres out of the early feeding situation. It was found that infants fed on demand were more adaptive and able to discern day from night, shown by feeding more in the day and sleeping longer at night, when compared with infants fed on a rigid schedule ‘*by the clock*’. In this example, Benjamin (2005) sees thirdness being invented and discovered in the *on-demand* feeding relationship. This intersubjective relating promotes life-giving exchanges between mother-infant based on the unconscious message of “the caregiver accommodates, so does the baby” (p. 43).

The co-created rhythm borne out of moments when the mother-infant are in sync, has also been described by Benjamin (2005) as a sense of oneness in the third, where the mother identifies with her baby’s needs and feels satisfaction from fulfilling them. However, this cannot last in the normal toing and froing of early life, and at a certain point with exhaustion, the problem of twoness arises. This is when the mother and baby’s needs are in conflict and can leave the relationship stuck between opposing binary poles in which one dictates, the other complies. When this happens, the mother can unconsciously submit or self-abnegate; feeling like she is being done-to and quashed into mere duty and self-denial, whilst the infant unconsciously internalises feelings of fear and guilt as the ‘the-doer’ in the doer-done-to dynamic (Aron, 2012; Benjamin, 2005). However, Benjamin (2005) proposes that this twoness can be transcended if the mother has a third in her mind,

[t]his third is the understanding of necessity, such that the conflict between needs is resolved as a surrender to reality rather than a submission to a tyrannical demand. Rather than feeling “I am being done to,” the mother feels “I am doing what must be done” (pp. 42-43)

This mindful approach can be thought about as thirdness in the one, and akin to an observing function. Whilst oneness in the third has an emphatic, identificatory sensibility. Both are found in subject-to-subject relating where the tension between the subject’s wills are acknowledged, held and not resolved but “kept in play” (Yeatman, 2015, p. 3). The life-enhancing exchanges that result from such mutual recognition and mutual pleasure arise from the movement from oneness to thirdness and scaffold a way out of the submission to duty of complementary twoness.

4.4.2 The tortoise and the hare: An intersubjective reading

As a child I remember thinking after hearing the tale of The Tortoise and The Hare, “why couldn’t the tortoise wake up the hare and then cross the line together?” And this notion is linked to a dream I had whilst writing my dissertation (Aesop, 2010).

I dreamt that there are two houses sitting adjacent each other on the edge of a reserve, a suburban grass park and like a place I know. The two houses are exact replicas and resemble the home I have recently moved from. In the dream I am aware of a feeling of not being allowed in the home I am in, on the edge of the reserve, and so I continue to glance over at the adjacent house to notice whether its blinds are opening. This, I knew, was an indication that the new owners are awake and that I needed to leave the home I am in.

In discussion with my therapist, we came to an understanding that felt congruent about my feelings about moving. That my environment was blind to my feelings of reservation about moving, and that I desired someone to understand; empathise by holding replica feelings in mind and be adjacent/alongside me even if they didn't feel the same way. This may also connect to an intersubjective understanding of my feeling about the fable of The Tortoise and the Hare as a child and the desire for the tortoise and the hare to be alongside each other, not in opposition. In my strong sense that I wanted the tortoise to wake the hare and finish the race together, resonates with the importance of feeling like someone is alongside you, able to hold in mind that there are two subjects in one relationship and recognition of each other having needs is life-enhancing rather than facilitating a life based on domination (Benjamin, 1988, 2013). Psychic development from earliest infancy based on the mutuality of intersubjective relating leads to an elaboration of subjectivity based on truly personal experience and a life predominated by feelings of possibility over futility (Benjamin, 2005, 2018; O'Loughlin, 2009; Ogden, 1992a; Winnicott, 2018).

4.5 Intersubjectivity & the mother who cannot identify her needs

Lyons-Ruth and Spielman (2004) and McKay (2019) explore presentations of mothers who require a supportive space to identify their needs, so they can enter a subject-to-subject relationship with their infant or young child. I was drawn to these texts as they seemed to capture something about the nature of mother-infant relating that are subtle manifestations of relationships in a state of complementariness and say something important about understanding psychic development in earliest infancy.

In McKay (2019) a mother Lila expresses anguish due to worrying that her own needs are damaging her four-year-old daughter. Often her daughter wakes early and seeks her mother's company for play whilst the mother desires sleep. Yet, Lila can't face denying her daughters wishes and often submits to her early morning demands whilst feeling increasingly resentful towards her daughter and then guilty for feeling this way. There are historical reasons for Lila's fear of her destructiveness, however, McKay (2019) places the collision of Lila and Grace at 4.30am at a wider relational level unconsciously imbued with a sense that it is inconceivable that both mother and child can have their needs met and both thrive.

Whereas Lyons-Ruth and Spielman (2004) discuss from an attachment perspective Janie, a mother whose implicit hostile-helpless mode of relating to her baby, although greatly intensified by her past experiences, is amplified by “the belief that the needs of the parent and child are in contraindication” (p. 331). Considering this, whilst holding fast to a rigid and idealised view of good parenting, there is little space to discuss Janie’s needs and their integration into her relationship with her baby Brad. As a result, the mother-infant dyad functioned in complementary twoness and means Janie “frequently collapse[d] into a sense of resigned helplessness” (Lyons-Ruth & Spielman, 2004, p. 330). These texts present clinical pictures of mothers identified with “[t]he image of sacrifice as the ultimate expression of maternity” arising from subject-to-object relating (McKay, 2019, p. 167). This is to the detriment of the mother-infant relationship and their pleasure in each other and the world.

To explore this further, McKay (2019) draws on Berman’s (2012) analysis of the book *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein (1964) to look at the implications of such a clinical picture. The analysis reveals that without mutual recognition the infant and mother’s relationship slip into complementariness and resonates with feelings of self-abnegation in the mother and guilt and fear in the infant/child. In the Silverstein’s (1964) story this equates to initially a bountiful tree and a happy little boy with, by the end, a tree stripped of all it has to offer and an unhappy man unable to offer love to others or himself. In such a situation, an infant’s psyche would extend from experiencing the world as depriving and their subjectivity be depressed with a tendency for bitterness (McKay, 2019). Yet, this trajectory would benefit from a shift to relating on intersubjective terms. This would support thinking about both subjects needs and the likelihood of finding a way out of twoness and a relationship based on domination. As a result, feelings of pleasure and joy underpin the subjectivities of mother and infant and psychic development would incline towards living a life enriched by true personal experience and bound by feelings of worthiness over futility.

4.6 Chapter summary

This is the last of two chapters of research findings and completes detailing the construction of my understanding of my research question. This chapter addressed enhancing the dyad under intersubjective terms and based on the research findings means the mother’s subjectivity and needs are recognised in the mother-infant relationship from earliest life and extends from mutual recognition. This differs from the more traditional understanding of the mother-infant dyad based on subject-to-object relating, which places the mother as the object and downplays the vitalizing qualities of her idiom.

This shift in thinking about dyadic relating brings mother and infant into the one theory and that healthy psychic development begins with relating on intersubjective terms

from birth. This leads to pleasure and joy underpinning the subjectivities of mother and infant, and the infant's developing sense of being in the world is based on the feelings of vitality over futility. This shows that from birth an infant is interpersonally active and that a mother's subjectivity is important in the development of the infant's subjectivity. However, reframing mother-infant relating in this way means that some mothers require support to be able to identify their needs and enter two-subject interaction with their infant, and this is possible by engaging with psychotherapy underpinned by contemporary psychoanalytic thinking.

In the following chapter I discuss the findings of my research. I present implications for psychotherapy research and practice and outline the strengths and limitations of this research.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of my research based on the question: what does psychoanalytic literature say about psychic development in earliest infancy? This discussion will offer a perspective on these findings according to my subjectivity and means the understanding presented is not definitive but open to different interpretation by another according to their position in time, place, and culture. I will explore implications for psychotherapy research and practice based on these findings and outline the strengths and limitations of my research work.

5.2 My research aims and key findings

At the beginning of this research journey both my research question and I were different. The shift in both has emerged from engaging in the process of this hermeneutic literature review. Wherein the key endeavour is to provoke thinking by engaging with texts as conversational partners. However, this is an iterative process and creates space for the initial work to resist the conscious intentions of the researcher and become *re-search*, a searching *again*, for something that has already made a claim on us and signals making a place for the unconscious in the research (Romanyshyn, 2020).

The process of rewording my inaugural question shows that my *re-search* connects to a desire to know something more about the nature of on my own and an infant's emotional world. My position at the beginning of this research journey was informed by prejudices that silently informed how I took-in experience and understood the world. Yet as I engaged in reflexive reading, writing, and thinking I found a way into putting words to them which allowed me to be mindful of how they colour my thinking and interpretations.

A main shift in my position from the beginning came from drawing out the unconscious influence of western society on my subjectivity. This is encapsulated in my recognition and acceptance that I am a turtle in hare-world. This coalesced into an embodied knowing, felt as a soothing sense, when I went slow and steady. This experience also supported my research journey, which is based on my re-interpretation of existing texts, a critical "viewing-afresh" of what psychoanalytic literature says about psychic development in earliest infancy (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 14) as my personal experience 'viewing-afresh' my identification as the turtle has given me a real understanding of how this is possible.

A key finding recognised in this research, which based on my interpretations is that subjectivity begins developing in earliest infancy and from experiences where the infant can

become un-integrated and flounder, to exist for a time without reacting, fosters opportunities for discovering a life based on *being*. From this an infant feels creative rather than futile, and with repetition and time leads often to a life based on *doing* that arises out of *being*. In intersubjective terms this is a life extending from earliest infancy based on life-enhancing exchanges of mutual recognition. The feelings of which may be encompassed in the following quote from Landsman (2018),

live the identity that they feel is essentially their own....feel more coherent, more whole, more secure....[seem] happier, more centred and at peace...profoundly relieved (pp. 104-105)

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Subjectivity: Elaboration of felt experience

The iterative process of the hermeneutic approach has brought me back to my dissertation, to engage with it as another text. In doing so I read with a different level of understanding. From this engagement I have recognised that the embodied understanding of the soothing quality of felt experience is another key finding. It seems to align with Winnicott's (2018, p. 34) developmental notion of the capacity to be alone in infancy "[i]t is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that an infant can discover his own personal life". Therefore, because of this research, I have internalised an understanding of something about the nature of an infant's emotional experience via the alignment of my recognition that *I am a turtle* with the time in infancy when an infant discovers their personal life. This soothing sense replicates something of what an infant feels when discovering personal life from experiences of embodied knowing, and with time leads to a life based on *doing* that arises out of *being*.

5.3.2 Intersubjectivity: Enhancing the dyad

On intersubjective terms, this aspect of the infant's emotional experience correlates to Benjamin's theory of mutual recognition, wherein the mother is recognised as a subject in her own right and her subjectivity is crucial for the baby's psychic development. This is because an infant's sense of self originates from knowing a separate subject and the experience of being seen through mutual recognition; "we can only feel known by another *whom we perceive* as a separate subject" (McKay, 2019, p. 166). This progression in thinking about earliest infancy places mother and infant in the one theory and enhances the dyad through intersubjectivity and brings something more to psychic development. This arises from the awareness and appreciation of the mother in relation to her child and the child in relation to his mother (McKay, 2019).

Benjamin (2005; 2018) sees this as arising because of *the third*, the internal mental space co-created by two partners, mother and infant from co-created rhythms, or oneness. The third and oneness supports the dyad to transcend twoness, freedom from the feeling of doer-done-to dynamic. This reorients the infant's psychic development to being based on life-giving exchanges from mutual pleasure, rather than feelings of futility arising from complementary twoness where one dominates the other. Berman's (2012) analysis of the book *The Giving Tree* paints a picture of the emotional resonance of complementariness as self-abnegation in the mother and guilt and fear in the infant/child.

The third is also the space where the mother/therapist facilitates "inchoate desires and fears...[evolve] into feelings that could be felt and named" (Ogden, 1992a, pp. 212-213) for herself and her baby and is a place critical to our capacity to experience and give recognition. In psychotherapy practice this allows for the elaboration of felt experience to be an end in itself, as well as, as a signpost to what was going on unconsciously (McKay, 2019). This points to an infant's emotional world developing from Winnicott's (2018) capacity to be alone and Benjamin's (2005) mutual recognition. Where floundering and rhythms come together as a paradox that informs an infant's psychic development through being and doing out of subject-to-subject relating.

5.4 Implications

In the following I suggest implications for psychotherapy practice, training and future research based on the understanding I gained from a hermeneutic approach to considering what psychoanalytic literature says about psychic development in earliest infancy.

5.4.1 For psychotherapy practice

Support for not rushing to action

Infant observation is an important aspect of child and adolescent psychoanalytic and psychotherapy training. This is premised on it equipping a clinician with experience that "enable them to take time to watch, listen and reflect without rushing to action" (Youell, 2014, pp. 124-125). This has been amplified by my hermeneutic research, which provided me with the time and space to integrate the importance of not rushing to action. This was particularly noticed in my engagement with the hermeneutic spiral, which is a less reactive approach to engaging with texts that encourages loitering in the vicinity of the work.

Furthermore, as a foundation of psychotherapeutic work is being aware of the emotional response's clinicians gain in the countertransference, expanding the understanding and recognition of felt experience, as this research has allowed me to do, is an important personal capacity to develop. Considering these points, a reader of this research may be

encouraged to engage in hermeneutic research to allow themselves to flounder and be able to exist for a time without reacting. This is so, in time, the sensation or impulse that arrives can feel real and truly personal and with repetition become opportunities to recognise their subjectivity, which in turn can support their practice as a psychotherapist.

Knowing as an embodied experience

Leading from this, knowing as an embodied experience has implications for practice. For me, this connects to embracing that *I am a turtle* and recognising the soothing sense I experience when working slow-and-steady, rather than hare-like and to external demand, which lessens feelings of anxiety and overwhelm, facilitating confidence in a creative self emerging from “doing that arises out of being” (Winnicott, as cited in Davis & Wallbridge, 1991, p. 37). In practice, this has the potential to support psychotherapeutic work with children, which often involves helping young clients put words to their feelings. Supporting the development of this capacity, to think about their emotional experiences not readily available to conscious thought is often done by the therapist interpreting or holding feelings states arising in the countertransference; the elaboration of felt experience from the intersubjective relationship of therapist and client, which is underpinned by knowing as embodied experience.

5.4.2 For psychotherapy training

Through expanding understanding of felt experience in earliest infancy, my wish is to contribute to developing psychotherapists acceptance of their subjectivity; their sense of being in the world. Much like an infant within the first year of life where their sense of self evolves within a reliable environment that supports floundering and existing for a time without having to act. I sought to achieve this by detailing my journey to acceptance by tuning into embodied responses and developing the capacity to trust these would guide me and my research.

Considering the implications that may apply from this aspect of my research, I anticipate that beginning/training psychotherapists would greatly benefit from being provided a space to experience support for attuning to their embodied responses as a way into accepting and defining their personal approach to practice. This may resemble the experiential class that was part of my psychotherapy training at AUT, with some additional support from inviting practicing psychotherapists to talk to about how they elaborate their felt experience and use this in their work.

5.4.3 For further research

Engaging with texts on intersubjectivity opened my thinking to the power relations inherent in relationships that slip into complementariness and revolves around the doer-done-to dynamic. This is a potential area for further research regarding bi-cultural practice in

Aotearoa by considering how the therapist-client relationship may be enhanced under intersubjective terms. This is because when it is acknowledged that there are two subjects in one relationship, mutual recognition opens the way for *the third*. This co-created space can then be a container for something more complex that transcends the *either/or* of needs and unlocks the impasse that leads to domination. This instead facilitates life-giving exchanges for both subjects, as they are supported by relating where *both/and* predominates and deep attunement and difference, or identity of needs but conflict of needs can be recognised.

Extending from this, is exploring the integration of psychoanalytic, feminist, and queer theory to further reflect on the implications of the prejudices of western culture on psychotherapeutic practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. This thinking was initiated from reading Gentile (2015, 2016) who addresses the concept of *time and space* as being the foundation of the relational self. I anticipate that future research, extending from the integration of these theories, may support thinking about reframing our understanding of *time* and how this may reframe our understanding about subjectivity. This is based on the current understanding of time in western society being equated with linear time, which reinforces asymmetrical power relations, versus queer temporality wherein time is asynchronous and power relations have the potential to be reapportioned.

5.5 Strengths and limitations

5.5.1 Balanced integration

The strengths of this research extend from its methodology based on Gadamer's philosophy that text be engaged with as conversational partners to provoke thinking and the notion of 'historically effected consciousness'. This research shows balanced integration of philosophical underpinnings in the researcher's recognition of prejudices on the research findings and the research aim to understand something about the infant's earliest emotional world where traces of feelings are carried forward and influence subjectivity throughout life. These elements reflect Gadamer's (1989) assertion "that we cannot step over our shadow", meaning ontologically that we *are* historical beings and our subjectivity is formed from living "in a world that recedes into the past and extends into the future" (Moules, 2002, p. 2).

5.5.2 Resonance

A strength of this research arises from the attunement inherent in a hermeneutic approach where new insights provoked from interpreting texts, reveals and conceals, the author's "conscious and unconscious interests at play" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 241). This means that this research will likely be read by others with similar conscious and unconscious interests. This aspect also supports its transferability, which can only be assessed by whether readers of

this dissertation view “its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences” (Moules, 2002, p. 16).

5.5.3 Openness

The openness of this research is exemplified in the details of my hermeneutic method. This is captured by my recognition that I needed to take note of my methodological steps and return to the 2nd chapter and retrospectively add details about how I did my method, my way. This insight adds validity to this research through openness, by being open about decisions and processes. This is congruent with the hermeneutic methodology and encapsulated in this work by the researcher recognising and letting go of her unconscious need to satisfy external demand and instead trust the process and be open to “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (Gadamer, as cited in Smythe, 2019, p. 3).

5.5.4 Scope

A limitation of this research is its scope. As I drew to the end of my time to write and submit my dissertation I was still drawn to more reading and moving between the parts and the whole. These called me to wonder down paths regarding systemic, feminist and queer theory, and would have further expanded my understanding about psychic development in earliest infancy.

5.6 Conclusion: Every ending is a new beginning

As I am nearing my dissertation’s submission date, I notice being pulled from a hermeneutic approach. This is encapsulated in accepting my turtle nature, trusting it will get me through the research journey safely, by going at my pace, being attuned to my inclination to read the texts that call me to thought; to plod on slow-and-steady. Yet I catch myself being drawn to thoughts that “I am not going fast-enough, producing enough”, and I feel futile. It is like I am at the beginning again. I pick-up Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) and whilst reading the chapter I am drawn to the subtitle ‘Ending and Beginning Again’. This is what I sensed in my push *to do over be me*, and what I have identified as the values of the hare-world. I recognised that I was facing “[l]ike with any ending...having to face all over again the anxieties of the beginning” (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1999, p. 31). So, with this in mind, I recognise coming to the end of my dissertation as a new beginning and re-evoked is feelings of helplessness in the face of the unknown, and the song line below pops into my head.

Every new beginning, comes from some other beginning's end

(Wilson, 1998)

My dissertation has been a journey of *making up my mind*, as in the construction of, not decisive judgement on a matter and via the hermeneutic approach, I have had the space to

discover and re-examine any convictions I arrived with at the beginning. This means, I now land at this point, the end, feeling in my body that writing my autobiographical process has ‘developed my capacity to locate myself in work’ and this is something I will carry with me as I begin my practice as a child and adolescent psychotherapist in Aotearoa New Zealand. This also echoes the aim of this research, to understand *something about* the nature of an infant’s emotional world, which I have discovered is carried forward and influences their sense of being in the world and from this *being* the true basis for *doing* emerges. As I finish, one last song line pops into my head that captures this for me, and *is something* I can carry forward,

You know it’s not the same as it was (Styles et al., 2022)

Thank you for reading my dissertation.

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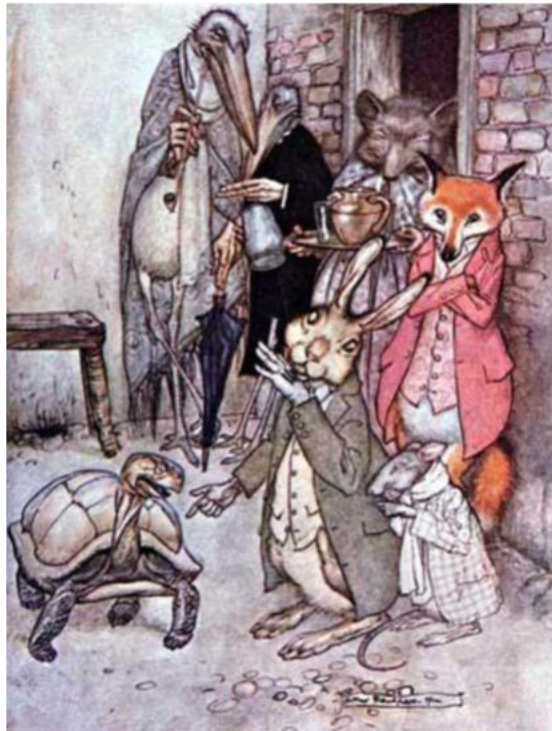
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Appendix

Appendix A – The Tortoise and the Hare (Aesop, 2010)



A Hare was one day making fun of a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet. "Wait a bit," said the Tortoise; "I'll run a race with you, and I'll wager that I win." "Oh, well," replied the Hare, who was much amused at the idea, "let's try and see"; and it was soon agreed that the fox should set a course for them, and be the judge. When the time came both started off together, but the Hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest: so down he lay and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile the Tortoise kept plodding on, and in time reached the goal. At last the Hare woke up with a start, and dashed on at his fastest, but only to find that the Tortoise had already won the race.

Slow and steady wins the race.