

The Therapist's Experience and
Understanding of their Client's Secrets:
A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

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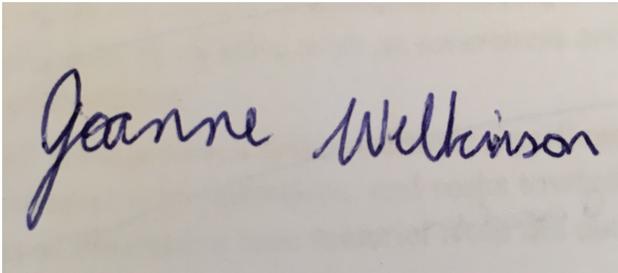
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Attestation of Authorship

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.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored surface. The signature reads "Jeanne Wilkinson" in a cursive script.

March 2017

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Abstract

Secrets and secrecy are ubiquitous phenomena that are also encountered in therapeutic relationships, with some studies indicating that over half of all clients have kept secrets from their psychological therapists. Despite psychoanalytic literature theorizing about the client's secrets and secrecy, I found little was written from the experiential perspectives of psychotherapists. To address this gap in the literature the study explored how psychotherapists experienced and understood their client's secrets. Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology/methods were utilized and I interviewed three psychotherapists and one psychologist. These participants discussed their clinical experiences and meaning makings when working with client secrets that had involved sexual abuses. An analysis of the interview transcripts found two experiential themes. Firstly, the Black Hole theme involved the therapists' inability to make meanings or know their clients' concealed secrets. Secondly, the Penumbrae involved a collection of obscure sensate and bodily experiences that gave these therapists an experiential knowing of aspects of their client's secrets and secrecy, whilst the secret paradoxically remained concealed and untold (until later in the work). I found that the therapists thought that secrets were, 1) hidden and buried in parts of the client's self, 2) both protective and threatening, and 3) aspects of their selves had an influence on their clients' secret telling and secret withholding. These subthemes comprised a theme of the therapists' understandings of client secrets. Analysis of the interview transcripts and a deeper level of interpretation across the texts gave rise to a theme of predation and innocence, and I called this relational configuration the 'wolf and the lamb.' This study suggests that the therapists' emotional, sensate and visceral responses may indicate the presence of concealed secrets. I hope this study contributes to future research on this complex and intriguing topic.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“And so hail to you, son of Zeus and Maia, with you I have begun”
(Evelyn-White, 1914/ca. 5th century B.C., Homeric hymn to Hermes).

Introduction

This hermeneutic phenomenological study will explore how psychotherapists experience and understand their client’s secrets. For many years the phenomena of secrets and secrecy have fascinated and intrigued me. Secrecy featured in the novel I loved as a child ‘*The Secret Garden*’ by Frances Hodgson Burnette (1962/1911), and as an adolescent I wondered about the ‘*sacra conversaciones*’ in the Renaissance paintings I studied. In this introduction I shall explore 1) definitions of secrets and secrecy, and 2) I will locate my topic of inquiry within the contexts of psychotherapy, 3) social and cultural perspectives, 4) as a topic of personal significance, and will include 5) my pre-understandings. I shall describe 6) coming to my research question, and lastly provide 7) an overview of this study’s chapters. Psychoanalytic literature informs my interpretive lens in this study.

1) Towards a definition of secrets and secrecy.

“The terms ‘secrecy’ and ‘secret’ derive from the Latin noun *secretus* (separate, set apart) and the verb *secernere* (se-apart, and *cernere* sift)” (Costas & Grey, 2014, p. 1425).

The organizational theorists Costas and Grey (2014) note that despite secrets and secrecy having the same etymological root they differ. A secret refers to hidden content, whilst secrecy denotes the process of keeping secrets. These notions are interrelated, and I found the terms ‘secrets’ and ‘secrecy’ were often used interchangeably in the literature. Kelly and McKillop (1996) differentiate secrecy from self-disclosure (i.e., revealing personal information), due to the active cognitive and emotional processes involved in the phenomena of secrecy. In this study, phenomena are defined as objects of lived human experience.

In the psychoanalytic literature, Gross defines a secret as being, “that a single person knows something and *all other* persons are denied this knowledge” (as cited in Margolis, 1974, p. 291). However Margolis (1974) observes that undisclosed secrets may be knowable to others, suggesting the *sine qua non* of secrets is the intentional concealment of information. Erel-Brodsky (2014) notes that secrets may be unconsciously hidden from the client’s self and others. Costas and Grey (2014) write that, “*secretus*”, “*arcanum*” and “*mysterium*” emphasize various aspects

of secrets and secrecy (p. 1425). For Horn, (2011) *secretum* is thought to highlight segregation, with boundaries distinguishing between exclusion and inclusion, and between the known and unknown. *Arcanum* refers to withdrawing from communication and knowing by locking something away through silence and concealment. In contrast, *mysterium* refers to the unknowable, mysterious, religious, cultic, soulful, ritual, or sacred dimensions of secrets or secrecy. The *mysterium* seems aligned with the way some Jungian analysts consider secrets, as being “what is hidden beneath the surface, in the roots of a tree, in the folds of a complex, in the experience of the mystic – the jewel at the bottom of the sea” (Greenberg, 2015, p. 81).

2) Psychotherapy, secrets, and secrecy

Psychoanalysis has been tacitly intrigued with the ubiquitous phenomena of secrets and secrecy. The very foundations of psychoanalysis were built upon Freud’s need to discover the answers to the secrets of nature, sexuality, and his own family’s secrets (Kulish, 2002). Freud (1913) espoused a fundamental rule that clients must reveal everything to the therapist, as it was believed the careful unearthing and interpretations of unconscious toxic secrets, ideas, desires, or traumas, could facilitate a cathartic cure (as cited in Skolnick & Davies, 2013). Farber, Berano and Capobianco, (2004) suggest many contemporary psychotherapists still consider the client’s revelation of secretive material to be a central ingredient in successful psychotherapy.

The therapeutic relationship provides space for the emergence of client secrets. Asher (2015) suggests secrets may surface in the presence of patience, love and a compassionate other. The therapist’s perceived acceptance and relationship building skills (i.e., attunement and understanding) are thought to facilitate the client’s ability to reveal secrets (Farber et al. 2004). Given the personal nature of secrets, it seems the real or perceived responses of the therapist will play a role in determining whether the secret bearer will profit from their revelation (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). I became interested in investigating the therapists’ role in client secrets, secret telling and secret withholding.

As a psychotherapist I have heard many client secrets, such as stories of sexual abuse, self-harm, personal terrors, and betrayals. Greenberg (2015) suggests clients want to share some secrets because they are so painful, shameful and taboo, and other secrets may be told to express courage, excitement, and joy. I noticed experiencing strong affective and

somatic responses when some clients shared their secrets with me. I thus wondered ‘What do other psychotherapists’ experience when their clients’ reveal a secret, declare a secret, or keep secrets that they realize as such? How do therapists make meanings of their client’s secrets and secrecy? The present study intends to investigate such issues from a qualitative perspective.

Greenberg (2015), a Jungian analyst, views the therapist’s experiencing as important, and writes that working therapeutically with secrets:

Involves listening to the soul – to the deeper and often unacceptable and feared regions of the self. It involves being willing to feel lost in darkness. It involves listening to the somatic, emotional, imaginal, and intellectual stirrings of the self from moment to moment, from session to session, in a kind of dance, a movement to and fro, between what is known and what wants to become known. (p. 80).

I wondered if and how psychotherapists used their subjectivity to ascertain, explore, or interpret their client’s secrets? I was curious about psychotherapists’ lived experiences of working with deliberately secretive clients. However the therapists in this study predominantly discussed secrets that were initially unknown or unconscious and this became the focus.

3) Social and cultural perspectives

Across cultures, myths and fairytales illustrate aspects of secrets and secrecy (Kulish, 2002). In the fairytale ‘Bluebeard,’ curiosity propelled Bluebeard’s wife to open the forbidden chamber, where she discovered the grisly corpses of Bluebeard’s murdered previous wives (Bettelheim, 1976). Uncovering the hideous secret saved this heroine’s life and enabled her freedom. It seems in fairytales, turmoil and pain are often associated with the secret revelation or betrayal and transformations may then follow. Sgarzi (2002) writes that in fairy-tales “the secret and its revelation often provide critical suffering, understanding, healing, transformation, and wisdom” (p. 115).

Powerful external forces in society may influence an individual’s inner secret keeping. For instance, in New Zealand prior to the Homosexual Law Reform Act (1986) some gay men concealed their sexuality to protect themselves from discrimination and prosecution (as cited in Neville, Kusher & Adams, 2015). The Adoption Act (1955) socially engineered secrecy in New Zealand, with sealed birth records hiding the identities of biological

parents and adopted children (as cited in Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Stolorow (1991) writes that, with the ascension of psychoanalytic relational theories of the mind, there has been increased recognition that an intra-psychic phenomenon requires therapeutic understanding within the contexts of the individual's wider interactional systems (i.e., the political, legal, relational).

Secrets may involve taboo topics, which are stigmatized or condemned by society (i.e., suicide, incest). Vrij, Nunkoosing, Paterson, Oosterwegel and Soukara's (2002) longitudinal study on secrets, secret keeping and revelations found that individuals might conceal secrets with taboo contents to avoid societal disapproval, discrimination, and shame. Kelly and McKillop (1996) write that stigmatizing hidden secrets may lower client's self-worth and impede the therapeutic process. I wondered about psychotherapists' affective responses and meaning makings to particular kinds of secrets, and have become curious about their understandings of the social and cultural influences on secrets and secrecy.

4) A topic of personal significance

During my formative years significant secrets were kept from me, and I kept secrets. At times living with secrets felt painful, alienating, hopeless, and anxiety provoking. Alternatively, a sense of alluring mystery accompanied my secrets, which Nativ (2011) considers a core aspect of secrets. This mystery perhaps fostered creativity as I imagined the possibilities that seemed frozen in my secrets.

When I revealed my 'truth' or secret as a child, I found myself overwhelmed by the un-containing responses of others. Secret keeping consequently became a reprieve to protect myself from unhelpful interpersonal responses. My experiences relate to the relational analysts Skolnick and Davies' (2013) assertion, "that a secret, or secret world, does not exist without an object. A secret is a piece of experience kept from somebody, and the object is inherently and inextricably involved in the phenomenology of keeping the secret" (p. 233). My personal history facilitated empathy towards the secret keeper, and a deep understanding of how the secret receiver's responses (real or imagined) may become significant in the genesis of secrecy.

I hid my secret during adolescence due to fears of negative judgments, potential betrayal of my confidences, and feelings of shame. Upon reflection, hiding secrets seemed both a retreat, and a burden depending on the circumstances and consequences. I was aware that whilst I did not explicitly divulge my secret, others may have known or intuited it. As Freud (1905/1953) wrote in relation to his analysis of Dora:

“He that has eyes to see and ears to hear can convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore” (pp. 77-78).

In Freud’s statement above, all secrets appear available for psychoanalysis. I became curious about psychotherapists’ understandings of their client’s secrets and secrecy and how they noticed /worked with the phenomena.

Over the years, my secret was exposed by others, which meant I had limited choice over either who knew - or who did not know. I often felt betrayed, powerless, and vulnerable, whilst the secret keepers appeared powerful and controlling. Hoyt, (1978) wrote that it is often the knowing of an individual’s secret that gives power, rather than the content. I thus wondered about psychotherapists’ power, as they receive and hold their client’s secrets.

When my secrets were revealed, I became aware of my familiarity with not knowing, and how secrecy had shaped my sense of identity. Facing my secrets necessitated going against the status quo to let myself know. I felt sensitive to my states of readiness because I did not want my secrets forced open. Having the choice in therapy to reveal secrets or to hold them privately felt empowering, and enabled my truths to gradually unfold. When my secrets were shared and faced into, I could incorporate more of myself, which felt grounding and enlivening.

5) My pre-understandings and horizons

The predominant Western culture that I am immersed in, values transparency and revelation of secrets. Farber, et al. (2004) suggests a ‘tell-all mentality’ is commonplace in contemporary Western society. For instance, ‘reality’ television, tabloid newspapers, and talk back radio. Kelly and McKillop (1996) claim those keeping secrets may be advised to “get it off your chest [and that]... confession is good for the soul” (p. 450). However despite popular culture, Greenberg (2015) suggests that some secret confessions may be harmful for others to hear. Or they may elicit negative consequences for the secret-bearer,

such as interpersonal rejection (Kelly & McKillop, 1996). I believe the phenomena of secrecy, is rich, complex, and contextual rather than simplistically inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

In accordance with Asher (2015) who writes from a Jungian perspective, I believe individuals’ benefit from some personal secrets as they help shape one’s uniqueness and sense of mystery. I experience sacredness in my creative and nourishing secrets. For instance my personal journal, my mysterious dream diary and my secretive place under the persimmon tree.

I respect the innermost secrets of others, and the various intra-psychic and relational functions of secrets. In my orientation to this topic of inquiry, I consider secrets and secrecy to be inherently relational. Through personal therapy I became aware of how secrets existed in relation to my internalized relational configurations, my ‘external’ others, and how socio-cultural mores shaped my notions of what needed to be kept secret. In relational theories, the socio-cultural and relational contexts of secrets are regarded as important therapeutically (Stolorow, 1991), and I am drawn to such conceptualizations.

My framework of meaning making is within the psychodynamic paradigm. I think that through the therapeutic relationship secrets or unconscious material may become consciously understood and integrated into the individual’s psyche. Timely, tentative therapeutic explorations and empathic interpretations may illuminate material (conscious and unconscious) tied to secrets and secrecy. I think this may facilitate clients’ increased insight, emotional growth, and greater wholeness. In the body of this study I further explicate my history and various pre-understandings where relevant.

6) Coming to my research question

I wondered about other psychotherapists’ lived experiences of working with secretive clients. I found little written from this perspective, after conducting an extensive review of the psychoanalytic literature at the beginning of this research study. I utilized the search engines of Psych-info, Pep, and I searched ProQuest for international theses and dissertations on secrets and secrecy. I read some empirical studies due to the limited amount of contemporary psychoanalytic and relational

literature on the phenomena. I stopped the literature review when I had read the significant authors' writings on the topic of inquiry.

To address the significant gap in the psychoanalytic literature on the psychotherapist's experiential meaning making of client secrets, my research question asks, "*How are the client's secrets experienced and understood by psychotherapists?*" Consistent with phenomenological studies, my research question relates to my deep personal interest in the topic of secrets (van Manen, 1990).

7) Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I critically review the psychoanalytic literature on the topic of secrets and secrecy. The research question and aims of this study emerge from the gap in the literature. Chapter Three will describe the qualitative methodology and methods used in this hermeneutic phenomenological study and the inherent challenges I faced in addressing my research question.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present my research findings. Extracts and crafted stories from the research interviews are included and explored. In Chapter Four, two subthemes of therapists being outside and inside concealed client secrets are explored. A psychodynamic interpretation brought me to the notion of the black hole. The theme of the penumbrae is discussed in Chapter Five, where the therapists got to know experientially aspects of their client's secrets or secrecy, yet these were unable to be linked to the secret itself, which remained concealed for a period of time. In Chapter Six, the therapist's understandings of their clients secrets are constituted from the sub-themes: 1) secrets were hidden or buried in the client's self; 2) secrets involved the dialectics of protection and threat, and 3) the therapists' selves were considered influential in secret telling and secret keeping.

I discuss the research findings in Chapter Seven and explore a relational constellation of predation and innocence that I discovered in the study. My findings are explored within in the contexts of psychoanalytic literature. The strengths and limitations of this study are critiqued and the significance of this study for psychotherapy is evaluated. Lastly, I identify areas for future research projects.

Chapter Summary

I have introduced this study's topic of inquiry, and placed this within the contexts of psychotherapy, socio-cultural perspectives, and my personal history. My research question has been provided, along with an overview of my chapters. In the following chapter I review the psychoanalytic literature on secrets and secrecy.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this review, I shall predominantly examine psychoanalytic theorizing and meaning making around secrets. I cite empirical studies, and to a lesser degree refer to authors of differing modalities. In the psychoanalytic literature, conceptualizations of secrets have largely followed diverging psychoanalytic theories, with various developmental approaches taken. I begin with defining ‘secret’ through reference to psychoanalytic and empirical literatures, and shall discuss clinically significant types of secrets, secret keeping, and secret revealing. I critically explore how secrets and secrecy have been understood within the literature from a classical Freudian drive perspective, an ego psychological approach and an object relations view. Orgad’s (2014, 2015) re-conceptualizations of Bion’s psychoanalytic theory are applied to family secrets. There has been a shift in the psychoanalytic literature from a one-person psychological approach to a two-person psychology. Relational understandings of secrecy are examined (Skolnick & Davies, 2013) and transference-countertransference constellations are discussed.

I shall argue that whilst each theoretical stance constitutes important new understandings of the phenomena of secrecy, the historical emphasis has tended towards a one-person psychology. The meaning making of secrets and secrecy has almost exclusively focused on the client’s experience. However, the psychotherapists’ experiential understandings of their client’s secrets remain largely unseen in the dyad within the literature. My study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Types of secrets

There are many types of secrets, such as those involving taboo topics, pleasures, intimacies, forbidden things, and secrets regarding deep fears, traumatic memories, or dreadful, shameful and embarrassing things. From an existential perspective, Yalom (1985) discusses universal secrets, and suggests the commonest secrets involve beliefs of personal inadequacy, feelings of interpersonal alienation, and secrets involving sexual material. Traditional psychoanalysts focused on searching for the secretive content, as its symbolic nature was thought to unlock the secret’s deeper hidden meanings (Skolnick & Davies, 2013).

Psychotherapy concerns itself with both the conscious secrets that clients deliberately conceal from others, and secrets that clients unconsciously hide from themselves (Hoyt, 1978). From a

psychoanalytic perspective Jacobs (1980) suggests conscious secrets may conceal within them multiple layers of other repressed unconscious secrets, drive derivatives, and central conflicts in the individual's psyche. Erel-Brodsky (2014) similarly observes that secrets may be simultaneously conscious and unconscious to their possessors. The implications are that it seems difficult to separate conscious from unconscious secrets.

Benedikt first formulated notions of the "pathogenic secret" (as cited in Meares, 1976, p. 263), which the psychiatrist Meares (1976) defines as having a negative value, relatively static qualities, associations with guilt, and fears that exposure will lead to interpersonal rejection due to the secret bearer's perceived evil. Poor physical health and low self-esteem have been negatively associated with secrets and secrecy (Pennebaker, 1997). Richards and Sillars' (2014) empirical study on the consequences of secrets and secrecy on mental and physical wellbeing identified a type of secret keeper who ruminated on secrets, felt troubled, and experienced greater instances of physical illnesses when compared to other participants with secrets. In the empirical and psychoanalytic literature that I reviewed the potential negative aspects of secrets and secrecy are recognized and explored.

In contrast to 'pathogenic secrets', Meares (1976) identifies the "creative secret" (p. 264). He describes this type of secret as being exposed in relationships where others are invited to elaborate, or modify the secret, to facilitate growth. For example, secret revelations may represent the clients' attempts to initiate intersubjective ties with the therapist (Skolnick & Messier Davies, 2013). It seems 'creative secrets' have adaptive developmental and relational functions. The relational analysts Skolnick and Davies (2013) observe that the therapist's perceptions of client secrets have clinical implications. For instance, when encountering a 'creative secret', therapists may explore the client's wishes for relational mutuality, versus working to understand and release the guilt or shame surrounding a client's 'pathogenic secret'. It seems the therapist's view of client secrets/secrecy may influence their choice of interventions and the direction of therapy.

Secret keeping and secret revealing

Several empirical studies using mixed methods and quantitative analysis found 40-65% of clients kept secrets from their therapists (Hill, Thompson, Cogar & Denman, 1993; Baumann & Hill, 2016). Interestingly, in Faber et al's. (2004) multi-method study investigating client perceptions of secret telling in psychotherapy, it was found that over half of the participants (21 total

participants) wanted therapists to actively pursue their secrets. Bauman and Hill's (2016) empirical study on the concealment and disclosure of secrets in psychotherapy found that client shame and perceptions of a weak therapeutic alliance (i.e., lack of trust) were factors in secret concealment. Clients were more likely to reveal secrets if they expected to benefit from the sharing and when there was trust in the relationship. For authors who are psychoanalytically orientated, secret keeping has been related to the client's avoidance of intense emotions (Freedman, 1998) and the need to create interpersonal distance (Hoyt, 1978). It appears that different authors emphasize different aspects of the relationship as influencing secret keeping in psychotherapy.

Hill et al's. (1993) multi-method study on the client's withholding or the revealing of material in psychotherapy found that secret keeping inhibited the work of therapy, whilst revelations enabled relief from distress and facilitated further disclosures. Kelly and McKillop's (1996) literature review of empirical studies on secrets suggest that secret revelations may benefit clients through interpersonally mediated facilitation of: self-acceptance and intimacy, a sense of authenticity, working through affects (i.e. shame, fear, guilt), and by the generation of new insights.

Although some analysts consider secret revelation a pre-requisite for positive client outcomes (Erel-Brodsky, 2014), this is challenged by Vrij et al's. (2002) longitudinal study that examined the everyday characteristics of secrets, secret keeping and revelations. They found no beneficial effects of disclosing secrets, however the secrets studied were not revealed within therapeutic relationships, which likely influenced their findings. The psychoanalyst Hoyt (1978) warns that working analytically to uncover secrets may be ill advised in fragile or psychotically organized individuals, where secrets may act "as a kind of 'germ' or core around which they can begin to restructure their identities" (pp. 238-239). The literature reviewed appears to indicate that careful consideration should be given as to whether revelation of a secret will benefit or disadvantage individual clients.

Social perspectives

In some psychoanalytic literature, secrets have been linked to various social functions. Meares (1976) writes secrets may be used as the "coins of intimacy, and the currency of its transactions" (p. 259). His use of metaphor is interesting, as he uses language suggestive of economy, which might indicate the value and worth of secrets. Meares regards secrets as a social process because

they involve at least two individuals, and Jacobs (1980) notes that secrets may be used to join individuals socially. For instance, some organizations bring members together in a common identity through use of secret rituals (Margolis, 1974). The theorists Piazza and Bering (2010) take a social psychological perspective and suggest a co-evolutionary model of secrecy. They propose that secrecy functions as a defense against information about the self/family that have (evolutionarily) been stigmatized and devalued in social exchanges. From a different angle, the organizational theorists Costas and Grey (2014) contend that secrets and secrecy may function to establish the insiders (those in the know) and the outsiders (those who don't know) in social groups and business organizations. It seems the wider social functions of secrets may be explored in therapy to generate insight.

Classical Psychoanalytic literature

In classical psychoanalytic thought, “the basic dynamic of the secret is anal, giving it up or holding it in” (Kulish, 2002, p. 153). During toilet training children learn they can withhold defecation/urination and secretively mislead the parent. Yet “by the nature of its identification with the eliminative function and bodily wastes, the secret intrinsically involves aspects of something dirty or unpleasant, something to be expelled” (Hoyt, 1978, p. 232). Conflicts between bodily retention and expulsion link with the psychological tensions frequently identified in having a secret: the urge to withhold telling, and a simultaneous urge to reveal (Margolis, 1974). I think the psychoanalytic focus on bodily instincts and drives may offer deep symbolic understandings of individuals and offer a way of understanding unconscious aspects of secrets.

Hoyt (1978) suggests that the therapists' attention moves from the way secrets are possessed (anal content), towards understanding the secrets function as the client matures developmentally. When a child becomes aware that their thoughts are inaccessible by others, rudimentary notions of secrecy are thought to occur, enabling the development of boundaries between the self and other. The child's first secret (aged two approximately) is considered a developmental achievement, as it “implies a sense of inner versus outer space” (Kulish, 2002, p. 152), beginning separation-individuation capacities, and a growing sense of self (Hoyt, 1978). Secrecy may function to maintain healthy personal boundaries (Richards & Sillars, 2014), however excessive secret keeping in adults perhaps has been thought to reflect a defense against fusion, attempts to maintain separateness, or difficulties with relational intimacy (Caruth, 1985; Schoicket, 1980).

Gross (1951) places libidinal concerns at the heart of his understandings of secrecy. For Gross, it is during Freud's anal stage of psychosexual development that the form of secrets becomes established - with the secretive contents being significant. Secrecy is thought to undergo further development in the Oedipal years as the child experiences secrecy surrounding adult sexual matters. During Freud's genital stage the focus is on conflicts between keeping secrets versus exhibition. This culminates in post-genital privacy, where secrets may function as gifts used to initiate friendships and intimacy in relationships.

Psychoanalysis traditionally considered client secrets as a form of resistance or defense to be overcome (Hoyt, 1978). However, I do not think secrets solely function to keep forbidden instinctual desires out of consciousness. In accordance with the contemporary theoretician Mitchell (2013), I believe the psychoanalytic model of drive, defense and conflict is problematic as it depicts the psyche as separate from cultural phenomena and the relational matrix (as cited in Skolnick & Davies, 2013). Kulish (2002) notes that implicit in having a secret is the existence of another, to whom one is concealing it from. There has been a shift in thinking around secrets with the move from a one-person psychological paradigm to a two-person theorizing in the literature.

The Ego psychology approach

When psychoanalysis shifted its attention towards the ego, secrecy became considered from the viewpoint of mechanisms of the ego. Sulzberger (1953) suggests secrecy actively involves the whole ego, rather than just being an act of omission (as cited in Skolnick & Davies, 2013). Margolis (1966) contributed to the psychology of secrets by emphasizing that secretive thoughts, feelings, and events were integral to establishing one's sense of an inner core, or personal identity. There was a shift in thinking with the view that some personal secrets were deemed valuable.

In ego psychology, secrecy was believed to resemble repression and considered a precursor to repression. Margolis (1974) contends that the conscious events in childhood that later become unconscious, involve issues that children decide to keep secret from their parents, followed by their own superego, and ego. For instance, it is thought the Oedipal wishes eventually become secretly repressed in the unconscious when the superego develops, sparing the child feelings of guilt and anguish. In ego psychology's view, working to reveal the client's conscious everyday secrets reverses this process, so that unconscious secrets no longer need to be hidden from the client's superego and ego. It was thought the affectively charged secretive material could then

become integrated into the client's psyche, freeing up psychic energies for growth (Margolis, 1974).

Object relations perspective

Khan (1978) took a new perspective on secrets, by conceptualizing them as 'potential space' (borrowing Winnicott's 1967, concept). Khan (1978) writes:

The location of a secret of this type in psychic topography is that it is neither inside nor outside a person. A person cannot say: 'I have a secret inside me'. They ARE the secret, yet their ongoing life does not partake of it. (p. 268).

Khan (1978) postulated that if a child's external objects are traumatizing or inadequately responsive, a child may absent a part of their self into a secret. The part of the self that is infused with the secret is considered unavailable to ongoing development - and placed in suspended animation. Khan considered this a self-protective mechanism from further trauma. However, he also thought the secret contains a hope - that in the future it would be shared, enabling the individual to become known and whole. Khan writes, "clinically, it is only if we succeed in gradually creating an atmosphere of *mutuality* with these patients that they can share their secret with us" (p. 268). For Khan, secret revelation only occurs if an opportunity arises with a responsive available other. I appreciated how this formulation emphasized an adaptive and creative aspect to secrets and secrecy and viewed the relational context as a negative/positive influencer on secret holding.

Bion

Orgad (2014, 2015) utilized Bion's psychoanalytic theory of knowledge to offer his interpretations of the processes that might be generated in family secrets. It is hypothesized by Bion that a -K process may occur where knowing is prevented and destroyed (as cited in Orgad, 2014). Orgad (2014) offers a re-conceptualization of Bion's theory to place emphasis on the intersubjective processes that he postulates prevents knowing in family secrets. From this perspective the relational dimension of secrets/secrecy becomes significant.

Orgad (2014, 2015) suggests that in family secrets communication patterns prevent mutual collaboration in meaning making. The relational co-construction of knowing is thought blocked by the joint efforts of family members to prevent narrative formation, which maintains the concealment of family secrets. Secrecy is thus considered a "coercive rather than a communicative dialogue in the sense that it is aimed in advance at the prevention of dialogism's

transformative power” (Orgad, 2014, p. 777). Orgad (2015) cautioned that family secret keeping might terminate in an individual’s hallucinating reality in order to fill the gaps in knowing. Deriving from this theoretical position, I wondered if or how psychotherapists experienced the secrets ‘gaps’ in knowing. I think a merit of this formulation is that a two-person psychology is thought to underlie the processes that constitute family secrets.

Relational approaches

It seems the classical psychoanalytic, ego psychology, and object relations’ approaches to secrets and secrecy have merits. However if one takes each perspective in isolation they seem insufficient to comprehensively understand the multifaceted and complex nature of secrets and secrecy.

Skolnick and Davies (2013) take a relational and developmental approach to secrets in psychotherapy relationships. I realize that relational theorists typically argue against inner and outer ‘realities’ and instead talk of the co-constructive nature of the interactional nexus. However, for Skolnick and Davies (2013) secrets are thought a “developmental-relational phenomenon involved in the growth and maintenance of the self and its inner world and in the relationship of that inner world to external reality” (p. 221). They contend dangerous early objects may be kept within the confines of a safely removed, secret inner world to give the client an illusion of omnipotent control and when the secret becomes shared this may signal a developmentally significant relinquishment of omnipotence. Trust in the relationship is considered a key consideration here, i.e., the other will recognize the secrets importance and not betray their confidence.

Skolnick and Davies (2013) write that the manner in which secrets unfold in the relational matrix enables meaning making. In particular the client’s ego development and self-object representations are considered illuminated through specific transference-countertransference constellations (discussed shortly). Despite their emphasis on the relational and developmental aspects of secrets, they still consider drive impulses, defensive concerns, and the symbolic meanings of secretive contents to be important. Their theoretical view may have clinical merits because it appears multifarious and expansive in its consideration of secrets. However, I noticed a lack in the literature around how therapists came into knowing about client secrets through the body, or the sensate, or the visceral responses.

Erel-Brodsky (2014) a relational psychoanalyst suggests that secrets may block psychic movement, and recommends that therapists endeavor to free clients from their unconscious secrets. For Erel-Brodsky, the restoration of psychic movement involves listening to the client's unconscious - via the therapists' own unconscious. The task is considered "not one of deciphering the unconscious and remembering the repressed, but of experience, of facing the horror and the madness" in the relationship (p. 93). Attunement to the emotions between the therapist and client are thought to facilitate the emotional space where a mutual structuring of new meanings regarding the secret may occur.

Countertransferences

We begin to hear a little about the psychotherapists' experiences in the psychoanalytic literature. Freedman (1998) contends that client secrecy often invokes strong countertransference responses, and she articulated the therapist's internal experiencing following the client's revelation of a secret. It is suggested that if a client has lied to a therapist in order to conceal their secrets then therapists may feel angry, manipulated, disrespected or incompetent. Freedman considers countertransference significant as it may be utilized to assist empathy and interpretive interventions. The literature indicates the significance of psychotherapists noticing and understanding their countertransference responses.

Erel-Brodsky (2014) uniquely observes that therapists may become aware that their client has a secret in therapy because they also experience the secret. The therapists' diminished thinking, absence of symbolization, fatigue, narrowed perspective, and the sense of being unknown to him/herself may indicate the presence of a client's secret. She emphasizes that therapists should listen to their own personal secrets and reverie, as this may impart important information about their client's secret. The importance of the therapists' attentiveness to their own experience and emotions, along with their analytic understandings are thought to help release secrets that are hidden. There appears to be a shift in thinking, as the therapist's subjectivity comes into the meaning-making, and the relational space is considered significant in its generative nature.

Caruth (1985) writes from a psychoanalytic perspective that the client's innermost secrets may be revealed through the transference-countertransferences. Skolnick and Davies (2013) propose a typology of four secrets that is based on the specific ways these secrets might emerge in the transference-countertransference processes. These are summarized as: (1) 'Secrets meant to be

shared with others' are characterized by an affective charge, trust, and mutuality in the dyad; (2) 'Announced secrets whose content is withheld' are thought to create a playful, tantalizing, and engaging therapeutic atmospheres; (3) 'Shameful secrets' are linked with feelings of paralyzing shame, humiliation, and client fears of rejection, and finally, (4) the client's pathological 'Secrecy as a character style' is thought to manifest itself in long silences, belated revelations, and illusions of omnipotent control. In analysis, Skolnick and Davies (2013) pay some attention to the therapists' experience of affect (i.e., feelings of tantalization); however, we do not hear much about how the therapist is experiencing secrets in this writing. They instead focus on the clients' experience of having secrets and how this may be played out in the relationship. I found the psychotherapist's subjectivity and consequent meaning making of their clients' secrets and secrecy appeared under-researched and this is the gap into which my study moves.

Chapter summary

The dynamics of secrets and secrecy appear multi-layered, with many types of secrets identified. The keeping of secrets and the revealing of secrets seems a complex process, with the literature indicating careful consideration of the potential benefits and disadvantages for clients' is required. The predominantly psychoanalytic literature discussed secrets and secrecy within libidinal, ego, object related, developmental, and relational frames of meaning making. I argued that reliance on one theoretical approach seems problematic, as the therapists work with secrets appear best understood from various platforms due to the complexity of the phenomena. It became apparent that the psychotherapists' experiential experiences, including their visceral and affective responses to their client's secrets and secrecy, remained largely unaddressed in the literature. The topic is important, as secrets are common phenomena in therapy yet are relatively under-researched in terms of how this may be felt in the relationship and consequently made sense of. This is a significant insight because it opens up an important new terrain of investigation that the current study seeks to explore. In Chapter Three following, I will discuss the method and methodology that I have employed to investigate the phenomena of interest.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The real voyage of discovery
consists not in seeking new lands
but seeing with new eyes. (Proust, 1934).

Part one: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative interpretive study, utilizes hermeneutic phenomenology, which is both a philosophy and research methodology. I specifically draw on the works of two significant hermeneutic philosophers, Heidegger, and Gadamer, and the contemporary descriptive-interpretive phenomenologist, van Manen (1990, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology does not include pre-determined procedures or rules that govern the research process as these may reduce openness and understanding. Instead, Heidegger discussed “following certain wood paths, towards a clearing where something could be shown, revealed, or clarified in its essential nature” (as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 29).

In part one of the chapter I will situate this study in the paradigm of qualitative research, and I critically examine the key characteristics of both phenomenology and hermeneutic interpretation. I shall explore philosophical assumptions about truth, openness, and Heidegger’s concept of ‘dasein’ (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991). Notions of pre-understandings and prejudices, the hermeneutic circle, and the dialogic nature of hermeneutic phenomenology will be discussed. The second part of this chapter will explore the methods utilized in the study. My personal ontological stance is multi-perspectival realism, and I have an interpretivist epistemology, which aligns well with the chosen research methodology (Orange, 2011; Dowling, 2005).

Qualitative research

The qualitative interpretivist paradigm appeared best suited to exploring the psychotherapists’ lived experiences and understandings of secretive clients, because it emphasizes subjective understandings and interpretations of human experience. Qualitative research is often employed when detailed understandings of complex issues are sought (such as secrecy), as qualitative studies recognize human life is inherently complex, unique and mysterious (Creswell, 2013; Grant & Giddings, 2002). I aim to capture the psychotherapists’ subjective lived experiences and therefore situate this study within the

qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research is often criticized for being unscientific, unreplicable, and too subjective (van Manen, 1990). However, this study does not ascribe to the positivistic paradigms aims of discovering knowledge in order to predict, control, generalize, or empirically explain events (Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Hermeneutics originally involved the interpretation and translation of ancient texts, with the Greek word '*hermeneuein*', meaning to decipher or interpret (van Manen, 1990; Dahlberg, Drew & Nystrom, 2001). It is thought that hermeneutics derived from Hermes the mythological divine messenger of the Greek gods (McLeod, 2011). Hermes appears to have links with psychoanalysis as Kermode (1979) writes:

Hermes is cunning, and occasionally violent; a trickster, a robber. So it is not surprising that he is also the patron of interpretersOf the psychoanalytic institution, as of all institutions of interpretation, Hermes is the patron. He is the god of going-between: between the dead and the living, but also between the latent and the manifest (god, one might say, of the third ear), and between the text, whether plain or hermetic, and the dying generations of its readers. (as cited in Sgarzi, 2002, p. 149).

The spirit of Hermes seems well suited to this study on the therapists' experience of client secrets in psychotherapy. I think hermeneutic phenomenology and psychotherapy have similarities that make this research methodology particularly conducive to the current study. For instance, both value the complexities and uniqueness of people and their life stories, both are dialogical and inherently interpretive (Miles, Francis, Chapman, & Taylor, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutics and psychodynamic psychotherapy are similarly interested in uncovering concealed meanings, in "drawing something forgotten into visibility" (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson & Spence, 2008, p. 1391) and both endeavor to facilitate new understandings.

Phenomenology

"Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a something what it is – and without which it could not be what it is" (Husserl, 1982, as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Phenomenology seeks thick, rich, descriptive accounts of lived experiences situated in time, space, the body, and in relationships, to enable understandings into the crucial essences of phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Smythe (2012) writes that the "aim of phenomenology is to reveal the meaning within experience" (p. 6). This approach

involves staying close to the participants' stories and experiences so that uncharted territories may be articulated and explored.

Smythe (2012) observes that a potential limitation of phenomenology is that the analysis may not evolve beyond the participants' viewpoint. Dowling (2007) similarly warns that a purely descriptive phenomenology without interpretive hermeneutics has the potential to become superficial. I chose a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology for this study to enable greater depth in understanding the topic of inquiry.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

A key characteristic of hermeneutics is the interpretive approach, which seeks to discover new understandings (McLeod, 2011). In accordance with Heidegger and Gadamer, I think interpretation occurs in all lived experiences (as cited in Dowling, 2007). This study therefore seeks to explore the psychotherapists' understandings of their client's secrets and secrecy. In hermeneutic research, the participants' experiences are not just described, but rather, the researcher "interprets the significance of their self-understandings in ways the participants may not have been able to see" (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 16). An interpretive leap may uncover new meanings or insights so that phenomena can be seen in fresh ways (Smythe, 2011). Interpretations are intended to stimulate thinking, raise further questions and guide thinking towards elucidating the mysteries and complexities of experience. Smythe et al. (2008) notes that this involves the researcher trusting that deep understandings will emerge.

Philosophical notions of truths, openness and dasein

Hermeneutic understanding contends there are multiple truths, infinite possibilities and many ways of knowing (Orange, 1993). For Heidegger, a phenomena or 'truth' never completely reveals itself, it lies concealed and requires uncovering. Meanings are thought to emerge through reading between the lines, and seeing what has been taken-for granted or assumed (Smythe et al., 2008; Smythe, 2011). The assumption that 'truths' are hidden, fits with my research aims of exploring the lived experiences of psychotherapists working with secretive clients. The quest to discover meanings outside of current awareness also relates to the epistemologies of psychodynamic psychotherapy, an approach to which I am committed.

The philosophical principle of openness is considered crucial, as it may enable phenomena to be seen, discovered, and understood in new ways. Through an open stance researchers may render themselves available to the phenomena as it shows or reveals itself. An open mind requires researchers engage in clear, discriminatory and critical ways of thinking. This is important because Heidegger cautions that something may appear to be what it actually is not, leading to *misunderstandings* (as cited in Dahlberg, et al., 2001). It seems openness encompasses the complexities of vulnerable engagements (i.e., with others, emotions, the self), and scholarly thought (Schuster, 2013).

Heidegger's concept of 'dasein' translates to 'being-there' or 'being-in-the-world', and is an expression that is concerned with both the meanings of human existence and the experiences of human beings (as cited in Polt, 2005). Heidegger sought to understand fundamental ontological questions of Being, both being-in-the-world (i.e., being-with others, thinking, actions), and the contextual being-of-the-world (as cited in Miles et al., 2013; Dreyfus, 1991). In other words, dasein is a being that engages in the everyday world (i.e., in relationships, as a psychotherapist), and is also a being with the capacity to ask questions (i.e., can self-reflect and interpret its experiences). The concept of dasein aligns with this study's intention to capture the experiences and meanings psychotherapists attribute to their work with secretive clients.

Pre-understandings and prejudice

There are significant differences between Heidegger, Gadamer, and their forbearer Husserl. Dreyfus (1991) discusses how Heidegger thought Husserl "overemphasized individual subjectivity" (p. 301), whereas Heidegger focused on 'being-in-the-shared world'. For Husserl, researchers' pre-conceptions required intentional 'bracketing' (putting aside) to allow *objective* descriptions of the phenomena's essence (as cited in van Manen, 1990; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Dowling, 2007). In accordance with Heidegger, I think Husserl's controversial notion of standing apart from the world (i.e., one's personal history and culture) to bracket one's pre-understandings seems an impossible illusion (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Heidegger (1995) thought that phenomena are always approached with pre-understandings, which he discussed in the following three distinct ways, being, 'fore-having' (prior knowing), 'fore-sight' (imagined possibilities) and 'fore-conception' (ideas brought) (as cited in Smythe, 2011). It is hypothesized that researchers' unexamined pre-understandings may result in superficial interpretations (unreflexive thinking), and violation of the text's meanings (Schuster, 2013).

Gadamer extended upon Heidegger's notions, and asserted all knowledge consisted of prejudices that are embedded in one's historicity. He thought historical and socio-cultural traditions both shape our ways of being in the world and our understandings of the world (as cited in Smythe & Spence, 2012). Gadamer (1982) writes of the importance "to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (as cited in Smythe, 2011, p. 40). A 'fusion of horizons' is thought to occur when the text's perspective merges with the researchers differing pre-understanding, to create a significant new understanding (Gadamer, as cited in Miles et al., 2013). It is important new insights emerge in relationship with the original text rather than from one's own preconceived ideas.

Researchers are encouraged to explore and explicate their pre-understandings in order to critically question their interpretations, which may deepen or expand the horizons of understanding (Smythe & Spence, 2012). I found my supervisor's questions and my reflective journal (that explicated my personal experiences with secrets) usefully increased awareness of my pre-understandings and historical horizons. Orange (1993) writes that explication of the researcher's prejudices is a crucial presupposition to the development of a receptive mind. She suggests that mental openness enlarges and deepens the researcher's capacity to confront and understand the *differing* perspectives of the other.

I regard a strength of hermeneutic phenomenology is its recognition that humans cannot be separated from their contexts of the past, the present, or the future (Dahlberg, et al., 2001). This fluid contextual nature of Being seems reflected in the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's (1936/1976) poem 'Burnt Norton':

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past. (p. 97).

Heidegger's focus on *dasein* considered human experience to be fundamentally contextual (as cited in Miles, et al., 2008).

The hermeneutic circle and dialogical processes

Hermeneutic thought considers understanding to be a repetitive circular process with the dialectics of past, present, and future; and whole and part necessary for understanding. "The imprint of the spirit of the whole is found in the individual part; the part is understood from the whole and the whole from the inner harmony of its parts" (Friedrich, as cited in Orange, 1993, p. 253). To facilitate understandings, researchers move between these various perspectives with both calculative and meditative thinking (Smythe, et al., 2008; Dowling, 2007). I think the hermeneutic circle is perhaps better thought of as a spiraling process that offers opportunities for gaining new and progressively deeper understandings.

A key characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology is that it is a dialogical process, with new understandings arising from interactions between the text and reader. It is through dialogue and language that lived experiences are communicated; however language may be considered both slippery and contextual (Dowling, 2007; Smythe, 2012; Dahlberg, et al., 2001). Gadamer (2007) suggests texts simultaneously hide and reveal the conscious and unconscious interests of the author (as cited in Smythe & Spence, 2012). I appreciate how in hermeneutic phenomenology, understanding is like a conversation, always dialogic and reciprocal, with the interplay of researcher and text creating different and new understandings (Orange, 1993).

In summary

This study is located within the qualitative paradigm and utilizes hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. I think this approach is ideally suited to study how the client's secrets are experienced and understood by psychotherapists. This methodology utilizes phenomenological approaches that seek thick rich descriptions of lived experiences, and includes hermeneutic interpretive understandings of the phenomena encountered (van Manen, 1990). I have discussed the studies underlying philosophical notions of multiple truths, the importance of openness, *dasein*, and the significance of pre-understandings and prejudices in the research process. Lastly, I discussed the hermeneutic

circle and the dialogical nature of hermeneutic phenomenology. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the research methods employed.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Part two: Methods

Introduction

In this section of the chapter, I will outline and justify the hermeneutic phenomenological methods that were utilized in the study. I will discuss, my research question, ethical considerations, recruitment and participants, use of van Manen's (1990) framework of six methodological methods, and measures that I took to promote trustworthiness in the research.

The Research Question

At the beginning of this study I formulated a research question, which arose from both a gap in the literature as reviewed by me and my curiosity about the experiences of therapists who worked with clients who kept secrets. I asked: *“How are the client’s secrets experienced and understood by psychotherapists?”*

Gadamer (1975) writes, the essence of a research question “is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities” (as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 43). Therefore the word “How” begins my research question to reveal my quest to uncover something and my openness to what may emerge in the study. I use the word “experienced” in my question to denote my intention to seek stories from the psychotherapists to illuminate their experiences phenomenologically. In accordance with Heidegger and Gadamer's views, I postulated that psychotherapists interpret their lived experiences (as cited in Miles et al., 2013), and I therefore sought to capture how they “understood” their client's secrets.

My research question sought to elucidate and make meanings of the psychotherapists' experiences of 'being-in-the-world' with client's secrets, rather than predicting, arguing, theorizing, or objectively answering my question. Hermeneutic phenomenological research questions wonder what it is like to have a particular experience, and what meanings may be attributed to the phenomena (Smythe, 2011; van Manen, 1990, 2014). The design of my research question aligns well with these aims.

Ethical Considerations

In the initial design phase of this study I consulted an ethics advisor to ensure that the research was ethically sound. I sought ethical approval from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK) and this was granted on the 18th of May, 2016 (after making the required minor alterations to my first application, see Appendix A). The ethical principles of beneficence (doing good), nonmaleficence (avoiding harm), justice and respect for human dignity underpin this study (Vallance, 2005). I found some literature on ethics took a paternalistic approach, whereas I emphasized negotiation and dialogue with my participants regarding ethical considerations and the research arrangements in this study (i.e., confidentiality measures, location and times of interviews).

The confidentiality/anonymity of the therapist participants and their clients were crucial ethical considerations in this study. I asked psychotherapists not to reveal identifying details about their clients during the interviews, and pseudonyms were used. In several interviews, non-identifying details were revealed, which I later altered whilst carefully retaining the text's essence as per my methodology. Lowrance (2012) notes de-identified material is an acceptable way of protecting personal information and confidentiality in research.

One participant asked me not to email my supervisor her interview transcripts in case this was inadvertently sent to the wrong person, and I obliged her request. I sent all of the participants their full interview transcripts and their textual extracts (prior to inclusion in this dissertation). This measure enabled participants to check the accuracy of their accounts, provided them with an opportunity to alter their texts (this did not occur), and enabled them to ascertain confidentiality was maintained. Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy (2010) note that the sharing of transcripts can be an empowering experience for participants, or they may be embarrassed or surprised by their accounts. I therefore offered to discuss the transcripts/extracts with the participants if these raised concerns or questions. The participants gave positive feedback and consent for the use of their extracts and crafted stories in the study.

I decided not to link the textual extracts with specific therapists across the dissertation to prevent a body of information forming (albeit disguised), as several therapists discussed

their work with one client in depth. Protection of the participant's confidentiality also involved providing generalized demographic information that is non-identifiable as the psychotherapeutic community in Aotearoa is relatively small.

Respect for human dignity included the participant's rights to self-determination (autonomy). Participants were given written and verbal information about the study's aims, processes, potential risks and possible benefits of participation in the study (see appendix B). The therapists freely gave informed consent to participate in this study, which was documented on the consent form (see appendix C). Participants were aware they could withdraw from the study without negative consequences and no participants left. The potential benefits for participants in this study included the opportunity to share complex clinical experiences, to reflect, and deepen their insights. The risk of harm appeared small and related to potential emotional discomfort in the interviews, which was mitigated by the researcher's attunement.

Recruitment and Participants

Participants were recruited through an advertisement (see Appendix D) emailed to members of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists (captured one respondent). I attended a branch meeting (New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists: NZAP) to discuss my research (recruited two respondents), and one psychotherapist was recruited through public sources of information after expressing an interest in my study.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study was that the psychotherapists identify as psychodynamic or relational therapists, with a minimum of three years post graduate clinical experience. These measures aimed to recruit participants with advanced clinical knowledge and reflexive capacities to add depth to the phenomena of inquiry; and I am familiar with psychodynamic/relational theory. Psychotherapists that I had dual relationships with were excluded from participating in this research, to protect pre-existing relationships and prevent power imbalances or biases compromising the study.

There were four participants in this study, which included one man and three women. One participant is a Psychologist with psychodynamic education, and the other therapists hold qualifications recognized by the Psychotherapists Board of Aotearoa New Zealand. All

participants had worked in agencies and private practice and identified an orientation towards relational or psychodynamic practice. Post qualifying, one participant had practiced for five years, two participants for ten years, and one respondent had thirty-five years' experience. I interchangeably refer to the participants as either therapists or psychotherapists in the study.

Van Manen's (1990) framework

I utilized van Manen's (1990) framework of six methodological themes and methods: This involved: 1) Turning thoughtfully to the phenomena of interest; 2) investigating the experience as we live it; 3) reflecting on the essential themes; 4) writing and rewriting to describe the phenomenon; 5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, and 6) balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole of the study. I found these research activities were non-linear and dynamically interacted.

Van Manen (2014) writes:

Phenomenological method... is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions. But in this questioning there exist the possibilities and potentialities for experiencing openings, understandings, insights... giving us glances of the meaning of phenomena. (p. 29).

1) Turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world

Experiencing the phenomena of secrets and secrecy from the inside out involved 'living' the research question, as advocated by van Manen (1990). This posed challenges initially as I felt resistant to immersion in some interview transcripts due to the hideous nature (i.e., sexual abuses) of the secrets discussed (i.e., I felt nauseous and like embodied concrete). I therefore came into relationship with it slowly, and the more I thought and 'digested' the material the more I found my capacity for meditative thinking grew.

Thoughtful inquiry into my own personal journey with secrets and secrecy stimulated curiosity and highlighted my pre-understandings. During the writing of this dissertation I openly experimented with keeping a personal secret, and I uncovered a significant secret. This assisted reflections on my prejudices, assumptions and my pre-understandings of the research topic. My personal historical experiences with secrets / secrecy are discussed in the introductory section of this study and later on in the study where relevant. Gadamer and

Heidegger emphasize the importance of differentiating the researcher's pre-understandings and historical horizons from the other/text, as these influence interpretative understandings and meaning making (as cited in Miles et al. 2013). I kept a reflective journal throughout the study to explore my responses to the research material as the researcher's reflexivity is an important consideration (van Manen,1990).

2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize

Van Manen (1990) discusses how the researcher's being in the fullness of life enables full explorations of lived experiences. A phenomenological characteristic of this study involved recursive turning "to the things themselves", that is, the lived experiences of psychotherapist participants (Husserl, 1911, as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 31) via immersing myself in the interview transcripts.

In accordance with van Manen's (1990) notions, I consulted wide sources of literature (i.e., poetry, myths and fairytales) to stimulate my understandings or insights into the participants' lived experiences. This was a rich process that vividly stimulated my thinking, and deepened my capacity for insights. I also turned to Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophies to deepen my reflections on the transcripts. I found it challenging to constantly become aware of when I was thinking as a psychotherapist versus when I was thinking as a hermeneutic researcher. In my presentation of findings in chapters four, five and six, I articulate when I view the texts with a psychoanalytic lens based on my pre-understandings as a psychotherapist.

Research Conversation (Interviews)

The method I used to collect the data involved semi-structured conversational interviews with my participants. I prepared (with my supervisor) open-ended questions to guide the interviews. The one-to-one interviews lasted an hour, and were conducted at the therapists' places of work. To safeguard the interviews from technical mishaps, I used two audio recorders that converted the interviews into digital sound files. All research data were stored in locked facilities to maintain confidentiality. Darlberg, et al., (2001) contends that the analysis begins after transcription of the interviews. However, I found that my hermeneutic phenomenological analysis started when I immersed myself in the research interviews and as I transcribed the interviews into verbatim texts.

The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to enable focused conversation on the topic of inquiry, whilst simultaneously giving participants the freedom to express themselves. My open receptive approach related to Gadamer's notion of "the leeway, the space between structure and freedom" (as cited in Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391), where I hoped the phenomena could become visible in new and unexpected ways (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Walker, 2011). In the research interviews I aimed to gather narrative material that had rich, thick descriptions of the psychotherapists' lived experiences of working with clients who kept secrets. I used open questions to stay close to the therapist's personal accounts, anecdotes and storytelling, and as a hermeneutic researcher I sought the participants' own interpretations and meaning makings of their experiences (Smythe, 2011).

In accordance with Seidman (2013) I think researchers influence the interview through their particular focus, the questions asked, and their responses to participants. Dahlberg et al. (2001), observes that research interviews create collaboratively produced narratives due to the researcher's inextricable influence on the conversation. It seems that meaning making in interviews relates to the participant's unique dialogue and interaction with the interviewer.

3) Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon

Van Manen's (1990, 2014) three approaches to theme analyses were employed to uncover the themes in this study. Firstly, I read the transcript/texts with a 'wholistic reading approach', where I tried to capture the overall significance in a few sentences (Appendix E). The 'selective reading approach' involved repeatedly seeking out the essential nature of the phenomena being described and I focused on the phrases that seemed revealing or significant in some way (Appendix F). These statements were highlighted in the texts and reflected upon. The third approach involved a 'detailed line-by-line' reading of the texts, with thoughtful explorations of specific words, sentences, or phrases (Appendix G). I unpacked these in an attempt to reveal the phenomena. This was not a rule-bound linear process, but rather an act of dwelling with the transcripts and being open or curious about what resonated for me. The analyses of themes point the reader towards my understanding of what seemed significant and do not claim any definitive 'truths' (van Manen, 1990).

It was important to ascertain that the themes I identified reflected the unique essence of the therapist's experiences and understandings of client secrets, rather than being incidental occurrences (van Manen, 1990). To find the themes I played with multiple possibilities, the assumed, and the taken for granted notions. "It [was] to ask of every appearance, could this seem to be, but not be, the thing itself at all?" (Smythe, 2011, p. 39). In distinguishing the incidental themes from the essential themes I also asked: "Does the phenomena without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 107). Discussing the emerging themes with my supervisor and others helped clarify my thoughts and unlocked new ways of thinking. The interpretative processes were multifaceted, dynamic, and occurred in dialog with the text and others.

4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting

Van Manen (1990) contends hermeneutic phenomenological research involves bringing something to articulation. I wrote, drew and re-wrote what I thought the therapists' narratives might mean and I crafted stories from some transcripts. The crafting of stories involved condensing pages of transcripts into succinct evocative stories that retained their original meanings and used the participant's own words, and thus enabled a distilled reading of the research material (Smythe, 2011).

I initially found learning to write about the findings hermeneutically was a challenge. However, in accordance with Smythe et al. (2008) I did find writing externalized my thoughts and brought the unsaid into the open, and re-writings facilitated increasingly deeper insights into the therapist's experiences and understandings of the phenomena. I discarded writings that were relatively distant from the phenomena of inquiry (i.e., the compelling stories of secret revelations), to ensure my focus remained on my research question. Dahlberg et al. (2001) notes that language falls short of the lived experience itself, and I wondered what was left out of this study due to the hermeneutic emphasis on language.

5) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon

To be strong in one's research orientation van Manen (1990) recommends not settling for superficialities and falsities, so that the phenomenon can be known deeply. I continually

orientated the interview texts, theoretical readings, and my creative intuitive processes towards my research question. I felt immersed in the unknown, and it was challenging at times to trust the research process and remain open to thinking when I felt confused and exhausted with the ineffable phenomena.

6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

I used the hermeneutic circle, which involved familiarizing myself with the whole of the text, and then focusing in on parts of the text. In a spiraling movement, the analyses of small portions of text were then fed back into the hermeneutic circle, and used to question or reinterpret the whole of the text's meanings (van Manen, 1990; MeLeod, 2011). I thought hard to understand how each part may relate to the whole, and vice versa. Dahlberg et al. (2001) observes this involves both staying in dialogue and seeing the relationships that exist within the texts. Reflective questioning stimulated dialogue and my understandings, which Bengtsson (1991) articulates:

Knowledge of the whole generates questions about the parts and knowledge about the parts [pose] new questions about the whole. The answers to these questions have with them that new detail knowledge and whole knowledge comes into existence. (Bengtsson, 1991, as cited in Dahlberg, et al., 2001, p. 187).

Interpretations and new understandings came from moving to-and-fro between viewing the psychotherapists' experiences at a distance, and closely reading between the lines (Smythe & Spence, 2012). Alongside the texts I wrote my responses, prejudices, questions and thoughts on the emergence of meanings (e.g., similarities, differences, patterns). Analysis of themes stopped when the texts appeared emptied of all the meanings I could personally uncover at this point in time (Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Trustworthiness

To promote trustworthiness in this study, I safeguarded the research from my own idiosyncratic meanings (or misunderstandings) by discussing the emerging themes with my supervisor and others. I include in my presentation of findings (chapters four, five and six) textual extracts and crafted stories so that readers can follow my journey of thinking. I am clear in the findings chapters about my relevant pre-understandings and prejudices and it is my hope that these measures enable the reader to decide if my interpretations seem valid.

Chapter summary and concluding comments

In the second part of the chapter, I focused on the methods utilized in my study. This chapter as a whole has reported my methodological approach, data collection and analytic methods. I discussed the research question, ethical considerations, recruitment and participants, use of van Manen's (1990) methodological framework of research methods, and trustworthiness in the study. The research methods I utilized are intertwined with the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology that underpins this study. In the next three chapters I discuss my research findings, and I begin with Chapter Four, which elucidates the black hole theme

Chapter Four: The Black Hole

“You don’t see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it”
(Robert Stetson Shaw as cited in Van Eenwyk 1997, p. 14).

Introduction

In this chapter I explore two therapists’ lived experiences of being with clients that had concealed secrets. The first therapist knew about his client’s secret, however the secret was unable to become known, this led to identification of two clusters of inter-related experiences. I shall next present the second therapist who experienced a shift in her psyche regarding her client’s secret, whereby the therapist’s thinking was suspended and her client’s secret seemed to become un-thought. My interpretation of the research material and my subjective experience in an interview led to a fusion of horizons, and this opened up my perception of the black hole metaphor. This is discussed at the end of the chapter because it illuminated important aspects of both therapists’ experiences. The black hole forms the title of this chapter since it captured how the therapists were powerfully drawn into to a place of not-knowing their clients secrets. The chapter is structured as follows:

1) The Concealed Secret: On the outside looking in

- 1.1) Crafted story – first therapist’s experience
- 1.2) Conflicts, confusion and gaps in discourse
- 1.3) Blankness, walls and blockages

2) The Concealed Secret: Moving into the interior

- 2.1) Crafted story – second therapist’s experience
- 2.2) Metamorphosing and suspended thinking

3) The Black Hole.

- 3.1) Fusion of horizons – text and researcher
- 3.2) The black hole metaphor

I will begin with the first of the themes that led to my eventual interpretation of the black hole metaphor that signified the therapists’ experiences of their client’s secret.

1) Concealed secret: On the outside looking in

The therapist in the following crafted story experienced his client’s secret, following his client’s confession, as both superficially known and yet not known. The therapist found that he could not engage his client in articulation, exploration or meaning makings of the

client's secret sexual exploitations. The following crafted story uses the therapist's words, and illuminates the therapist's experiences of being kept on the outside of this secret.

1.1) Crafted story – first therapist's experience

It was extremely difficult working with this very evasive client who didn't want to explore what he had confessed to. A lot was not being said, which felt most uncomfortable. It was frustrating, as whenever we got anywhere close to it [his unacknowledged abuse of someone else] he skimmed over the surface altogether. My instinct was that I should pursue the issues underneath his sexual offending. It was a hard line to hold, both being with him sympathetically and empathically, and trying to help him become more honest with himself and hold him responsible for abusing her. I did not confront him directly because I thought I'd lose him if I did, but I did keep exploring it by questioning. Because he focused therapy on his mother, neither of us felt satisfied with where we were going.

I felt really confused because I wasn't sure whether he was actually lying, or simply avoiding, or maybe just inarticulate about emotions. Or maybe he simply couldn't go deeper. I didn't know just how bad it was going to be for me feeling a wall of blankness in him. There was a blockage.

1.2) Conflicts, confusion and gaps in discourse

In the crafted story the therapist identified conflicts in the therapeutic dyad. The therapist described his instinct was to "pursue" the secrets underneath his client's sexual offending, whilst the client evaded discussions of his secret and preferred the therapeutic focus to centre on his relationship with his mother. Internal conflicts were also identified within the therapist, between wanting to provide his client with optimal responsiveness (i.e., empathy, following the client's lead), and exploration or meaning making of his client's sexual offending. The therapist appeared motivated to know his client's secret, which contrasted to the client's stance. Their conflicting aims of therapy were thought to cause mutual dissatisfaction in the dyad.

The therapist described feelings of confusion as the client appeared to know his secret (i.e., he confessed), and yet his secret simultaneously seemed unknown (i.e., he denied exploitation). The therapist's attempts to make meanings of the client's confession were reportedly met by the client's evasiveness and superficiality. In response the therapist named feeling frustrated and uncomfortable. It seemed the client's silence disconcerted the therapist, who in the interview discussed fearing that the silence and lack of understanding surrounding this secret may perpetuate further sexual offending by the client.

In this story, the therapist described struggling to make sense of the gaps apparent in knowing his client's secret. He questioned whether his client was deliberately lying to him, if he was consciously resistant and purposely avoiding knowing. On the other hand, the therapist wondered if his client was incapable of emotional and cognitive understandings of what he had confessed to. As these questions remained unanswered, the therapist discussed feeling confused and frustrated at his client's lack of articulation and foreclosure of meaning making. The story suggests that it was important for the therapist to understand his client's intentions and motivations around the secret's concealment, and the inability to do so seemed deeply disturbing. Hinton (2007) observes that gaps in discourse provoke a sense of absent meaning or loss of understandings, which may trouble or challenge therapists.

1.3) Blankness, walls, and blockages

I was struck by the therapist's depth of feeling when he said, "*I didn't know just how bad it was going to be for me feeling a wall of blankness in him*". In my pre-understandings as a psychotherapist, I wondered if primitive anxieties arose in this therapist in response to the blankness or nothingness felt. For I was reminded of Bion's theory of the "no-thing," which hypothesized that an infant's awareness of 'the absent breast' (or mother) is experienced as a terrifying presence, a space of "no-thing that stimulates fears of starvation and annihilation" (as cited in Reiner, 2008, p. 618). In other words, Bion theorized that the presence of a 'no-thingness' might constitute a primitive terror. The therapist's feeling of blankness in relation to the client's secret seemed to convey the experience of nothingness, a void, emptiness and uncontained spaces. Blankness is devoid of thoughts, memories, impressions, images and understandings.

The therapist described feeling a "*wall*" within his client, which is suggestive of an experience of being shut out, and this seemed related to the "*blockage*" named by the therapist. The metaphors of a 'wall', and a 'blockage' seemingly communicated the therapist's experiences of obstruction, or the impossibility of therapeutic movement towards the mutual knowing of the client's secret. The thwarted meaning making in the dyad seemed a significant experience, and I think, was a communication of some sort from the client.

The therapist's experience of being unable to engage with his client's secret appears related to Bromberg's (2006) belief that therapists' may experience words to be inadequate in reaching clients holding secrets. He suggests that there may be a rising sense of futility about deeply knowing secretive clients, which Bromberg discusses in relation to Frost's (1942) enigmatic poem "The Secret Sits".

"We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows"

(Robert Frost, 1942, as cited by Bromberg, 2006, p. 15).

In the first line of Frost's (1942/2006) poem "The Secret Sits", he says "*We dance round in a ring and suppose*" which suggests that words may be insufficient in uniting the therapist and client in knowing or understanding the secret. In this poem the secret that "*sits*" seems to allude to the secret's refusal to shift, or to become known (Frost as cited in Bromberg, 2006, p. 15). The secret that "*sits in the middle and knows*" seems related to this therapist's experience of being on the outside of knowing the secret, full of questions, but feeling the futility of being told nothing by his client. For Bromberg (2006), the therapist's sense "of futility is a small sample of the abysmal hopelessness felt by his patient at being unable to communicate" (p. 15) in words the secret, or speak from the place Frost calls "*the middle*". Bromberg (2006) hypothesizes that the secret that "*sits in the middle and knows*" (p.15) is an unformulated and incommunicable experience in the psyche.

2) Concealed Secret: Moving into the interior

In the following crafted story, another therapist discusses her experiences and understandings of working with a client who kept his sexual offence a secret. The therapist's awareness of this potential secret appeared to shift as it moved in the therapist's psyche until it became unknown.

2.1) Crafted story – second therapist's experience

At the beginning of therapy he vehemently denied committing the offence he was convicted of in the criminal justice system. There was a query in my head - did you or did you not do it? But I had to suspend that in order to come into relationship with the more vulnerable parts of him. I ended up not being able to think about his potential secret, which I think was his experience as well.

The potential for the denied sexual offence to be a truth sat somewhere in my unconscious. Other things took over in the work and it wasn't talked about. It's really only on reflection that I wonder if we were both unconsciously trying to avoid talking about it. I think that it was too painful for both of us to think about. There was something that couldn't be done, you know, when he completely denied it.

2.2) Metamorphosing and suspended thinking

In this crafted story, the therapist described a metamorphosis of the secret as it shifted in her psyche. At the beginning of therapy, she said "*There was a query in my head - did you or did you not do it?*" Initially she held in mind the potential secret, despite her client's denial of the secret's presence (the client eventually revealed he was guilty of the crime that he was convicted of). However the therapist later expressed that she became unconscious of her client's secret, and communicated a powerlessness to know this secret. She said, "*There was something that couldn't be done, you know, when he completely denied it*". It seemed that the therapist had entered into the inside territory of her client's concealed secret. This story led me to ponder Heidegger's concept of *dasein*, which involves "being-there in the midst of what is, where all that is meld[s] into an interconnected oneness" (as cited in Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1396). I wondered about the therapist's psyche shifting in accordance with her client's psychic processes around his secret.

The therapist identified an initial wondering about this secret's existence, and said, "*But I had to suspend that*". I was drawn to the therapist's use of the word 'suspend,' and was reminded of Gadamer's (1982) contention that words and language "bears its own truth... that it reveals something" (as cited in Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1392). The definition of the word 'suspend,' means, "to hang something up, postpone, or stop something temporarily" (Bardsley, 2006, p. 395). In suspending her thoughts or queries about the secrets possibility, it was as if her client's secret were packaged away and able to be temporarily un-thought. It seemed there was a suspending of knowing, a secret put into remission, or a suspended un-thought. This is interesting, as a suspension seems to imply the therapist thought this client's secret may become unfrozen or re-thought in future times. The therapist's notion of suspension seemed like a seed of potential existing in the unknown present, and the therapist perhaps awaited the secret's resurrection.

It seemed this therapist was powerfully drawn into a grey, formless vacuum where no words were to be found. I noticed that this un-thought secret eventually left no experiential gap, void, or felt sense of absent symbolization. In comparison to the first text presented, this absence seemed to become unnoticed by the therapist, and I therefore thought this therapist had experienced an unrealized absence at the time. My understanding of this significant detail was illuminated by hermeneutically moving back and forth between this part of the text and the other texts (Dreyfus, 1991).

In retrospective meaning making, the therapist thought she became unaware of her client's secret in order to establish a relationship with her client's vulnerabilities. She thought that they, together, avoided the secret because it was too painful to think about together. It appeared the therapist thought she had chosen to prioritize the therapeutic relationship over pursuing her client's secret. One interpretation of this could be that holding separate views about the client's secret threatened their relationship and there may have been an unconscious agreement to not know the secret in the dyad.

3) The Black Hole

3.1) Fusion of horizons

During the interview with the participant discussed above, I had an intense experience where I momentarily felt powerfully drawn into an altered reality. I described my mysterious and frightening experience in the following way (Appendix H) in my reflective journal:

Suddenly the room dramatically darkened and my participant started sliding in her couch into the distance. I felt powerless before an immense force that robbed me of my ability to think and hear. It felt like a magnet was pulling me against my will into a dark, eerie, frightening and terrifying space.

This powerful experience prompted my open curiosity and wonderings about its potential meanings. For instance, did I feel my way into something existing in the therapeutic dyad? Was there a potent gulf or void between the therapist and client? Why was I unable to think in those moments? Despite feeling confused and frightened by my experience, I intuited that it communicated something important about the research phenomena. In accordance with Heidegger's notions I awaited with trust that new understandings may emerge (as cited in Smythe et al., 2008).

The circular research process of thinking, reading and writing about this text enabled me to glimpse something of how the therapist experienced her client's secret disappear from her mind, as if it didn't exist. When I brought this particular horizon together with my potent experience in the interview (i.e., terror, darkness, altered reality, and immense forces that stopped thinking) a 'fusion of horizons' occurred (Miles et al., 2013). I suddenly grasped it was like a black hole engulfing or obliterating this secret for the therapist, causing it to disappear. Smythe, et al., (2008) writes, "Specific knowing can only come in the moment. Time, past, present and future come together and are torn apart amidst such moments" (p. 1390). I will now explore this metaphor in relation to my findings here.

3.2) The black hole metaphor

I shall broadly elaborate upon the black hole metaphor as it seemed to symbolize aspects of the therapists' inner experiencing when located both inside, or outside, their client's concealed secrets. The therapists' experiences involved the sense of a void, absence, nothingness, lack of life, absent meaning makings, and not knowing their client's secret. I subsequently found that in psychoanalytic discourse, the black hole metaphor has been employed by some authors to represent the experiential states of deficits or absence in the psyche (Kogan, 2015), and indescribable states of nothingness (Hinton, 2007). This metaphor seemed to elucidate both therapist's experiences discussed in this chapter, and expanded my understandings.

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Figure 1. An Astrological Black Hole

The image of an astrological black hole (Figure I, p.40) evoked for me a sense of powerfulness, deep mystery and a sense of isolation in the no-thingness. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the black hole signifier has been employed to describe a collection of experiences that includes any of the following: voids, absence, no-thingness, emptiness, anxiety, terror, lack, chaos, confusion, a sense of reaching an absolute limit, or radical shifts in the experience of time and space (Hinton, 2007; Kogan, 2015). The inner experiencing that the therapist participants noticed (i.e., blankness, absence, no-thingness, confusion, badness) when working with clients who had secrets encompassed much of what Hinton (2007) identified in the experiential nature of psychic black holes. This is explored in greater depth in my discussion chapter (Chapter Seven) after dwelling with the black hole theme and my research material.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explored two crafted stories where the therapists described their experiences of being with their clients' secrets. I found these therapists could not make meanings of their clients' secrets, as thinking, knowing, linking, and symbolization appeared impossible for the therapist. I wondered if these therapists' experiences of absent meaning making (at the time of their clients' secret concealment) had a meaning in itself and was perhaps an important communication. The crafted stories elucidated how powerfully these therapists' got to experience being kept out, or drawn into a place of no thinking. In response, the therapists' identified feelings of confusion, frustration, blankness, and badness.

The personal experience during an interview of a tremendous force pulling me into an altered reality where I felt terror and my thinking stopped, was pivotal in opening up my understandings. In accordance with Heidegger and Gadamer's notions, a 'fusion of horizons' occurred between the texts and my potent experience, which expanded the horizon of understanding (as cited in Miles, et al., 2013). I came to the black hole metaphor, which appeared to elucidate important aspects of the therapists' lived experiences. The psychoanalytic writer Grotstein (1990) contends that black holes are "felt not just as a static emptiness, but as an implosive, centripetal pull into the void" (as cited in Kogan, 2015, p. 65). In the hermeneutic process of ever deepening reflections on the texts and readings of psychoanalytic literature I began to conceive that 'the black hole' was

related to psychic trauma within the secret. In the following chapter, I will discuss the penumbrae theme, which involved the therapists' collection of obscure experiences in relation to their client's secrets.

Chapter Five: Penumbrae

“In astronomy, the penumbra (noun) is the shadow cast by the earth or moon over an area experiencing a partial eclipse. Penumbrae (plural)” (English Oxford dictionaries, n.d.).

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore a collection of five obscure, veiled, shady, ineffable, or indeterminate experiences that the therapists’ encountered when their client’s secrets were still concealed from them. I shall expand upon the textual extracts to examine the five following key experiences:

- 1) Hovering, and knowing
- 2) Bodily experiencing (pent-up, bursting, holding-on, tension)
- 3) Ongoing enactments
- 4) An unbidden visual image (shadow and wolves)
- 5) Percolating

I interpreted that the above experiences related to the secret’s presence in the therapeutic dyad. It seemed that the therapists in this study had unknowingly experienced clues to, or aspects of, their client’s secrets prior to the secret telling. Hinton (2007) writes:

New signs and symbols...may emerge from the upsurge of primal sensory elements that the ‘black hole’ can engender. This manifests within a sort of penumbra, a cloud, a ‘beam of darkness’ (Bion’s term) – not ‘out in the light’. (p. 442).

The therapists’ experiences that I explore in this chapter seem like a penumbra, which involves a region of partial illumination, where something exists to a lesser or uncertain degree, in “an area that is partly but not fully shaded” (Bardsley, 2006, p. 283). In the relevant sections of this chapter I will explicate my psychotherapeutic pre-understandings and prejudices of embodied responses, countertransference and enactments.

1) Hovering and Knowing

The following extract illuminates the therapist’s opaque experiences of being with a client who was keeping his secret concealed.

When he was keeping his secret from me I wasn’t aware of it. But I don’t think it was a secret to himself, I think it was a burden, like a rucksack on his back full of rocks that he carried everywhere he went. I felt something hovering...[silence]. I think shame came up around his secret. Huge toxic, sticky shame and yeah a need to

hide, a need to conceal, I got a sense of that, I knew something, and then one day his secret all came out...I had no more sense of this hovering after he told me his secret.

In the extract above, the therapist identified and named her experience of something 'hovering'. The word "hover" is defined as to "remain suspended in one place in the air, loiter, [to] be in a state of indecision" (Collins pocket English dictionary, 2008, p. 270). The therapist's use of the word 'hovering' evoked for me a state of suspended oscillation or uncertainty. I thought her experience of hovering may have communicated the presence of an unseen psychic energy that moved between the client's (supposed) knowing of the secret, and the therapist's not-knowing. Hovering perhaps denoted an experience occurring in an intermediate area. The therapist's sense of a 'hovering' reportedly discontinued after the client's secret had been told, which seems suggestive of its relationship with the secret's presence.

I inquired into the therapist's felt experience and understanding of her hovering feeling, however she did not elaborate, and fell silent. The silence appeared before me like a full stop, that seemed to communicate an inability to articulate her experience further. One interpretation of the therapist's silence was that her hovering subjectivity was a barely perceptible sense, which seemed too elusive to articulate, that it was perhaps indescribable.

The therapist discussed how she gathered something needed to be concealed or hidden by the client, and said, "*I got a sense of that, I knew something*". It seemed the therapist used her own subjective sense of intense painful shame to ascertain the client's emotion of shame. In the extract the therapist spoke of feeling into shame's concealing edges, which appeared to constitute a form of implicit knowing that something needed to be hidden. The feeling of shame named by the therapist seems to have provided her with an opaque clue to the secret's underlying presence.

2) Bodily experiencing

A note on my Pre-understandings

In my pre-understandings as a psychotherapist, I view the therapist's bodily and affective experiences in a relational context. In accordance with Ogden (1994) I think that "no thought, feeling, or sensation can be considered to be the same as it was or will be outside of the context of the specific (and continually shifting) intersubjectivity created by the

analysand and analyst” (p. 8). For Gabbard (1995), countertransference is thought to be a joint creation by the therapist and client, and a rich source of potential information about the client’s inner experiencing. These traditions or horizons formed my pre-understandings that influenced my viewpoint on the following extracts. Heidegger and Gadamer recognized that researchers are immersed in their own contexts and that this inevitably impacts interpretation and understandings (as cited in Miles, et al., 2013; van Manen, 2014).

In the following extract a therapist describes awareness of her bodily experiences when working with a client who was keeping an unconscious secret from her.

I used to have quite interesting sort of bodily experiences in the room with him. I remember feeling like I was bursting, almost like being pent up, like I was holding on, holding on all the time. I just wanted to shout and wave my arms at him, which was very similar to his experience as a child, where he was very much overlooked and alone.

In the extract above, the therapist described her experiential bodily responses to her client. The therapist said, *“I just wanted to shout and wave my arms at him, which was very similar to his experience as a child”*. She interpreted her response as a similar experience to the client’s childhood feelings of being alone and overlooked. However, I wondered if the therapist’s responses related to what her client learned in childhood regarding secrecy: such as what could be visible or known, and what needed to be an invisible secret. In this extract the therapist’s desire for an energetic release (i.e., shouting and waving her arms) is the polar opposite of the tight constriction of her holding-on and pent-up feelings.

2.1) Pent-up

The therapist said she felt almost like she was ‘pent-up’, which is suggestive of an experience of something being confined, or holding onto something that cannot be expressed or released. The particular manner in which the therapist described her feelings led me to believe her bodily experiences felt intense and pressured.

2.2) Bursting

The therapist described feeling an inner “bursting” which suggests the experience of fullness, saturation, or internal pressures that had the potential to suddenly or violently break open. In a psychotherapeutic lens, I wondered if the therapist’s feelings of bursting communicated a significant aspect of her client’s experience, for instance, the primitive

“terror of falling apart or spilling away” (Tustin, 1984, p. 282). It seemed this therapist contained the experience of bursting that her client perhaps could not as she was able to find a home within herself for the bursting subjectivity.

It is possible this therapist’s feeling of inner bursting communicated that the secret was energetically pushing to be released and expressed. That it perhaps spoke of an unconscious wish in the dyad for the secrets release. Johnson (1974) similarly links secrets with a sense of inner bursting when he wrote:

Secrets are so seldom kept that it may be with some reason doubted whether the quality of retention be generally bestowed, and whether a secret has not some subtile [authors spelling] volatility by which it escapes imperceptibly, at the smallest vent, or some power of fermentation, by which it expands itself, so as to burst the heart that will not give it way. (as cited in Margolis, 1974, p. 291).

2.3) Holding-on

I thought this therapist’s experience of prolonged “holding-on”, went hand-in-hand with her experience of inner bursting. Her feelings of holding-on seemed to communicate that she was trying to hold something back from bursting open, and suggested that something needed to be contained. One interpretation is that she was holding onto the client’s secret. This perhaps prevented the secret’s release, that is, the secret was stopped from bursting open in an uncontained manner. Or the therapist’s feelings may be framed as relating to the psychological tensions Margolis (1974) identifies in keeping conscious secrets: the urge to withhold telling (i.e., holding on), and a simultaneous urge to reveal (i.e., bursting).

I associated the therapist’s use of the words ‘bursting’ and ‘holding-on,’ with matters regarding toileting. This reminded me of the hypothesis that secrets develop during the anal phase of Freud’s psychosexual theory of development, as the child learns to control defecation and keep it a secret (Gross, 1951). Hoyt (1978) contends in my literature review that because secrets are identified with bodily wastes, secrets involve aspects of dirty excrement that requires evacuation. I pondered how these concepts might have related to the therapist’s somatic experiences.

2.4) Tension

In the following textual extract, the therapist names a felt sense of tension, which she located between herself and the client in the intersubjective space. She directly related this experience of tension with the client's secret.

There was this tension felt between us. I think his secret was between us in the intersubjective space.

I wondered if the therapist's experience of tension, linked with Margolis's (1974) assertion that unconscious secrets have continual psychic pressures to be expressed. She discussed how the return of the repressed requires constant opposing pressures to maintain the secret's containment. As I reflected upon the above texts, I thought about the value and emphasis phenomenology places on uncovering the participant's specific stories and lived experiences (Smythe, 2012).

In this section I discussed the therapist's bodily experiences, and these were linked with the unconscious presence of the client's secret. Heidegger's notions of the researcher being immersed in their own contexts (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001) led me to explicate my pre-understandings as a psychotherapist because this influenced how I viewed the texts. Although the therapist did not consider a relationship between the secret and her bodily responses (with the exception of tension), Grant and Giddings (2002) note that a hermeneutic researcher (like myself) may arrive at understandings not perceived by the participants. My interpretations of the relationship between the therapist's bodily responses and the client's secret are "tentative, suggestive, possibilities" (Smythe, 2011, p. 37), rather than any claims of definitive truths.

3) Ongoing enactments

Therapists' repeatedly seemed to experience aspects of their client's secrets during the ongoing course of therapy. A therapist named this phenomenon as 'enactments' in her retrospective meaning making during the research interview. This term derives from a psychotherapeutic epistemology, in which the participants and I are immersed. Grebrow (2014) emphasized that enactments may capture non-symbolized emotional experiences and relational patterns, generating possibilities for thinking. I discuss one therapist's

experience of the secret's enactments and stay close to the therapist's phenomenological understandings.

A note on my Biases

I take a relational psychoanalytic approach to enactments, which considers the therapist as 'observing-participant' in transference-countertransference constellations (Ivey, 2008; Aron, 2003). Relational psychoanalysis has tended to focus on the beneficial aspects of enactments, rather than the potential difficulties or counterproductive aspects (Aron & Atlas, 2015). In viewing the texts I attempt to stand outside this particular bias to view these enactments comprehensively.

Crafted story

In the following crafted story a therapist describes her salient responses to her client during the ongoing therapeutic process, and she links these with her client's secret sexual offence. At the time the therapist was unaware of how her experiences related to aspects of the client's secret, which he later revealed.

The client, an elderly narcissistic man, had been accused of a sexual offence that he vehemently denied - he protested his innocence. He was used by a narcissistic parent... it all ties into the work. I felt very much the used object. He was constantly asking me to do things for him. When he was vulnerable he was so tender I wanted to mother and reassure him. I felt myself constantly being seduced if you like into soothing him. Which is when I think about an enactment in relation to what happened with his victim, being seduced to satisfy a need. Something in the work very much replicated that. I felt easily drawn into his web of need. When I was in it, I couldn't see that this was like what might have occurred for his victim. But in supervision I was constantly working with him pushing the boundaries, that was a real struggle. He was really clever I would find myself saying hang on a minute why am I doing this.....?

In the crafted story, it appears the therapist and client enacted various relational constellations during the therapy, both new and old (i.e., the used child of a narcissistic parent went on to use the therapist). The therapist described struggling with her client's boundary violations, and felt used in order to satisfy the client's needs. The therapist said, "*When I was in it, I couldn't see that this was like what might have occurred for his victim*". In the therapist's framework of meaning making she retrospectively realized in the research interview that her ongoing experiences during therapy replicated aspects of her client's secret, and she identified these as being enactments.

The therapist discussed finding herself drawn into meeting her client's various needs and later questioned her actions. I was intrigued by the therapist's use of the word 'web', she said: "*I felt easily drawn into his web of need*". I thought about how spiders construct webs to snare, trap, entangle, or catch unsuspecting prey. This could be interpreted as indicating an experience of her client as predator, and she as his prey:

Like the spider's web, secrets also attract and entwine the curious in a maze of interconnected realities...When confronted with a web, we instinctively hesitate, wishing to avoid becoming ensnared in an unpleasant tangle...As with secret, fear of being unable to extricate oneself competes with an impulse to discover what lies trapped within. (Sgarzi, 2002, pp. 203-204).

The Jungian psychoanalyst Sgarzi (2002) elucidates a competing fascination or impulse to discover secrets, with fears of being entangled or caught in secrets' unpleasantness. I found that the literature of varied sources assisted me to keep delving deeper into the extracts by opening critical spaces for thinking. Tennessee Williams's (1945) following words led me to wonder if this therapist felt deceived when the client's secret was concealed:

"I have tricks in my pockets, I have things up my sleeve...."

I give you truth in the pleasant guise of illusion"

(Tennessee Williams, 1945).

I wondered if this therapist felt tricked or hoodwinked by her client, she said, "*I would find myself saying hang on a minute why am I doing this.....?*" It seemed her experiences with the client regularly became irksome. The therapist's experiences were retrospectively understood to replicate what might have occurred for the client's victim, and this raised questions in my mind about whether the therapist had received a sinister experience of her client's sexual grooming and trickery. Although the therapist brought her struggles with the client's boundary violations into supervision, they were unable to bring together the incoherent parts into a knowing of this secret.

This therapist's story led me to think about Heidegger's view that discovered phenomena (i.e., a secret) may be later covered up, denied or disguised, and may indicate a motivation to hide the 'truth'. Heidegger warned, "This covering up...is... the most dangerous, for here the possibility of deceiving and misleading are especially stubborn" (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991, p. 33). This led me to ponder upon the disguises of the penumbræ and how secrets may be hidden in plain sight.

The therapist was impacted by her client's secret and received an experiential form of knowing the secret, via his *modus operandi*. Through a different language in the guise of enactments, aspects of the client's secret were expressed during the ongoing therapy. It seems there was an underlying paradoxical essence, as the therapist got to experientially know about aspects of the secret, and she did not know the secret.

4) An Unbidden Visual Image

The following extract describes a therapist's experience and meaning making of an unbidden visual image, which appeared behind her client during a session. In hindsight, the therapist made links between her image and the client's secret.

I had a very strange experience that had a bizarre feel to it. I was looking at the wall behind the client during a session, and the wall seemed to have two wolves appear in the shadows, you know how light causes shadows, it had formed these wolves. It was weird. I thought I was imagining things, and I wondered if this was something mad from me. I talked about it in supervision, but didn't make sense of the wolves until after he revealed his secret. I was thinking wolves, I like wolves, they are really lovely animals, yeah but in actual fact they are a predator. And in this situation, that was the secret, the client later revealed pretty odd sexual predator kinds of things.

I think my seeing the wolves was about what I was not able to see or feel. In hindsight he was telling me something from his unconscious to my unconscious. I remember thinking I didn't pay enough attention to the wolves. He needed to tell me his secret, he needed to do some work with it. It was very powerful what I picked up on, and it helped me to trust my instincts more.

4.1) Shadow

Two symbols appeared in this extract that seemed significant, being the shadow and the wolf. In my fore-conception as a psychotherapist, I think that, "a symbol is the best possible expression for an unconscious content whose nature can only be guessed because it is still unknown" (Jung, 1954, as cited in Sgarzi, 2002, p. 58).

In the extract above, the therapist discussed how she thought her imagery of two wolves formed by the light casting shadows. She said, the "*two wolves appear[ed] in the shadows*" indicating that the wolves seemed a shady or dark visual image. The therapist pointed out the shadow aspect of her visual image, which was interesting as a shadow is an area of darkness caused by light being blocked. A possible interpretation of the shadow itself, is that it symbolically communicated something was blocked, in obscurity, or not clearly seen in the therapeutic relationship. I thought this penumbra was perhaps the client's secret. The therapist's shadowy imagery also reminded me of Jung's (1953)

personal shadow, which he described as “the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide” (as cited in Van Eenwyk, 1997, p. 94). This raised more questions in my mind about the shadow’s characteristics and its potential meanings in relation to the secret.

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Figure II. The wolves

4.2) Wolves

The therapist’s experience was discussed in the extract *as if* the wolves were seen vividly outside her mind, in a hallucination-like image. The therapist’s imagery was paradoxically thought to be imaginary and arising from the therapist’s mind. She seemed to convey that her visual image of wolves appeared simultaneously real and unreal, which the photographic image (Figure II, above) captures for me. It seemed the therapist’s image of wolves activated her curiosity, wonderings and her fears that it derived from an inner madness. I thought within this extract, the therapist seemed to experience a blurring of ‘reality’, and I dwelt with this as I reflected upon the extract and my other texts (explored further in the discussion chapter, Chapter Seven).

The therapist identified feelings of strangeness, bizarreness, and weirdness, and I noticed her subjectivity seemed to mirror something of the client’s secret, which she described as “pretty *odd* sexual predator kinds of things”. This extract illuminated a reoccurring theme

whereby meaningful understandings of the therapist's experiences (i.e., the shadow/wolf image and her subjectivity) could not be achieved until the client later told his secret.

It was retrospectively understood by the therapist that her wolf imagery expressed something that she could not perceive or contemplate consciously. She thought her visual image was a direct communication between the client's unconscious and her unconscious, suggesting an attunement between their unconscious minds. De Peyer (2016) supports this therapist's meaning making by claiming that uncanny phenomena such as visual imagery may be transmitted in therapeutic dyads to communicate unconscious material that is beyond words.

The image of wolves was retrospectively considered by the therapist to be a symbolic communication revealing her client's secret of sexual predation and his readiness to work with his secret therapeutically. This understanding seems culturally mediated (cultural perspectives on wolves discussed on p. 59) and her meaning making aligns with depth psychology's view that symbols emerge to help mediate unconscious contents, and push the psyche forward towards new opportunities for growth and wholeness (van Eenwyk, 1997; Aron & Atlas, 2015). In hindsight the therapist expressed wishing she paid more attention to her visual image. It seems she learned from this experience to trust her phenomenological experiences as a form of important communication. The therapist's unbidden visual image revealed aspects of her client's secret, which was retrospectively noted as a catalyst for the secret to find a symbolic form.

5) Percolating

In the following extract, the therapist described her experiences in the weeks immediately preceding her client's secret revelation.

I felt that something was percolating. I picked up on a disquiet, he was not bringing in the same thing, there were more silences and he was soft, more vulnerable in the room. He seemed more authentic. It was a shift, less pomposity, and yeah I thought something is really on the move for you here, although I was not sure what. Then about the third session in [from the changes noted above] he told me his secret. I had sensed something was happening, but it didn't ever enter my head I was about to get a confession.

The therapist discussed her experience of sensing a shift within her client and she identified feeling that something was "*on the move*". She described a feeling of something

“*percolating*” and understood that this related to changes observed in her client. For instance, a newfound anxiety, different content in therapy, increased silences, and her subjective sense of more realness in the client. The therapist described noticing her client seemed soft and had a perceptible vulnerability. She sensed the start of something being ‘digested’ in her client, although she did not understand what this related to until he revealed his secret. The therapist noticed changes in her client and interpreted a psychological shift, which relates to Heidegger’s view that humans are self-interpreting beings (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991).

The definition of percolating is to “flow through small holes or spaces” (Bardsley, 2006, p. 283). Percolation seems an alchemical process whereby there may be a shift in form (i.e., water percolates through coffee grounds to form coffee). In the therapeutic relationship the therapist senses a movement occurring, perhaps just as the client’s secret shifted from the unknown into the known-about, like the water flowing through the small holes or spaces in the process of percolating. I wondered if the client’s beginnings of knowing-about his secret signaled his movement away from the black hole.

Chapter summary

The therapists’ penumbrae of experiences constituted an important theme. A pattern emerged where the therapists’ had experiences that seemed to fall within a grey intermediate area of partial illumination. I found that therapists experienced obscure, shadowy and veiled clues about their client’s secrets or secrecy. In James’ (2014) photographic image on the following page (Figure III), the shadowy obscurity reminded me of the therapists’ penumbrae of experiences, as they could not clearly see or understand their client’s secrets.

In this chapter I explored the therapist’s varied experiences of 1) a hovering and sense of knowing, 2) bodily experiencing, 3) enactments, 4) an unbidden visual image, and 5) a sense of percolating. The client’s secrets seemed like ghosts in the therapy, with their incoherent presence sensed, but unable to be fully grasped by the therapists. As the secret moved away from the black holes obliteration, I found an underlying paradoxical essence emerged. The therapists’ got an experiential *knowing about* parts of their client’s secrets or

secrecy, whilst simultaneously *not knowing* the secret. In the following chapter, Chapter Six, I will explore the therapists' understandings of their clients' secrets.

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Figure III. Obscurity (James, 2014, 'Unconquered').

Chapter 6: Therapists' understandings of secrets

Introduction

In this chapter I focus the findings on the therapists' understandings or meaning makings of their client's secrets. I found that the following three themes captured how the therapists' in the study predominantly understood their client's secrets and secrecy:

- 1) Secrets are concealed within the clients' self
 - 1.1) Hide and seek motif
 - 1.2) Buried secret - Cryptonomy
- 2) Secrets as Protection (dialectics of protection and threat)
 - 1.1) Protection for the therapist
 - 1.2) Protection for the client
 - 1.3 Protection of the relationship
- 3) Therapists' selves influence secret telling or secret keeping
 - 3.1) Naivety and shame
 - 3.2) Naivety and masochism
 - 3.3) Naivety, sexual identity and religion
 - 3.4) Sexual identity and personal relationship with secrets

The above will be expanded upon, and discussed in relation to textual extracts and crafted stories.

1) Secrets are concealed within the clients' self

Therapists' understood that their client's secrets were hidden or buried within a part of the client's self. Therapists used notions of different self-states, which has resonance with contemporary relational views that the psyche is structured "as a multiplicity of self-states" (Bromberg, 1994, p. 519) that holds multiple 'truths' or 'realities'.

1.1) Hide and seek motif

In the following extract the therapist understood that his client kept secrets from different parts of himself, which he endeavored to find.

I think my client kept secrets from different parts of himself. I think people do hide things from themselves in various forms. So I looked at his different self-states, sometimes a secret was held in one self-state and not in others. Depending on which

part of the client was in the room with me at the time, I could explore other versions of his self, and sometimes get access to other information or secrets.

The therapist described in the extract his understanding that a person's self is comprised of various self- states. On the basis of this conceptualization, the therapist thought secrets could be kept in one part of the client's self, and not in other parts of the psyche. Therefore the client's secret could be kept hidden from different parts of the client's self and from others.

It appeared this therapist searched for secrets that might be otherwise unknowingly sequestered within one of his client's particular self-states. The therapist said, "*I could explore other versions of his self, and sometimes get access to other information or secrets*". It seems he sought access to invisible secrets, which suggests this therapist held in mind the potential for secrets to exist. This therapist sought secrets and his client hid secrets, which indicates that a hide and seek motif is hidden within this extract. Lockhart (1983) writes about the etymological roots of words and seems to take a similar approach to this therapist's searching for the hidden:

The secret mystery hidden in every name—even every word— requires a seeking after. We must search for the hidden image. It is looking for psyche. She hides, we seek. It is hide-and-seek. It is a game, a kind of play. (as cited in Sgarzi, 2002, p. 200).

Lockhart (1983) considers hiding and seeking as a mutually playful and alluring game. The above quote and extract stimulated reflections upon childhood games of hide-and-seek, which is characterized by disappearance and appearance, finding and being found. The game 'hide-and-seek' may thrill, it has rules and is played in relationship with others. I consequently wondered if this therapist's active seeking of his client's secret occurred in response to unconscious enticements by his client to find the hidden secret (i.e., clues). If this were the case, a psychotherapeutic lens might interpret this as an enactment between the dyad. Another possible interpretation is that this therapist was biased towards seeking his client's secrets.

1.2) Buried Secret - Cryptonomy

The following extract has a different flavour from the previous therapist's concept of hidden secrets. For this therapist, her client's secret was considered buried inside him.

He skimmed over the surface altogether whenever we got anywhere near his secret. I think his secret was deeply *buried* inside him, underneath a belief that he was obeying the will of God [referring to what he secretively did] and he wasn't going to let up on that.

In the extract above, the therapist thought her client's secret was "*deeply buried inside him*". The therapist's use of the word 'buried' intrigued me, and as Reiner (2008) notes "Certain words may... stand out, drawing ones attention to them as if they had the sufficient heat or energy to carry news of the unconscious, like pulsars beeping from a vast distance in an endless sky" (p. 599). One possible interpretation of the therapist's understanding of her client's secret being "*buried inside him*" is that she thought something was dead, or had been killed off and silenced. The therapist discussed how her client's superficiality moved them away from his secret and I wondered whether she experienced the client's secret as an annihilating presence. Van Manen (1990) notes that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach continually raises questions, which enables deepened insights.

Several other therapists' use of language in this study (i.e., "*haunted by his secrets*" and "*there seemed something quite deadened*") also reminded me of Abraham and Torok's (1984) terminology that has associations between death and secrets. Abraham and Torok theorized within the psychoanalytic paradigm a self-governing psychic mechanism of cryptonymy. They hypothesized that a trauma, or memory (i.e., a secret) that is unable to be psychically metabolized (i.e. thought, known, articulated) gets buried or entombed in the psyche. They propose that undigested experiential fragments are split off, and then kept in closed-off parts of the self, which are inaccessible and incomprehensible. These are thought to remain in a "psychic no-mans-land or blind zones around which large segments of the symbolic field of the individual comes to gravitate" (Abraham & Torok as cited in Leg, 2002, p. 83). The *crypt* is likened to a sealed intra-psychic tomb for the secret, trauma, or lost object, where the unspeakable experience is preserved (reportedly introjected as a 'swollen whole'), and hidden (Abraham & Torok, 1984; as cited in Leg, 2002;).

Abraham and Torok (1984) offer intriguing conceptualizations, and I found that the therapist in the preceding extract evoked similar ideas and language in her framework of meaning making. She thought her client's secret was inaccessibly buried inside him, and said, "*He skimmed over the surface altogether whenever we got anywhere near his*

secret". The therapist seemed to understand that her client's secret was buried in an isolated psychic region that was split-off from meaning making in the dyad, which was reminiscent of Abraham and Torok's notions of cryptonymy (as cited in Leg, 2002).

2) Secrecy as Protection: Dialectics of protection and threat

Therapists understood client secret keeping as a form of protection for the therapist, the client's self, and the therapeutic relationship. I interpreted that underlying the protective function of secrets identified in this study was an implicit notion that secrets can threaten, harm, or wound. There seemed a symbiotic relationship between the therapists' understandings of secrets as protection, and perceptions of secrets as a threatening presence.

2.1) Protection of the Therapist

Extract One

The following extract describes a psychodrama occurring in a group setting, and the wolf symbol emerges again. The therapist understood that her client stopped the psychodrama to protect the therapist from the emergence of a threatening secret.

My client began crawling on all fours, growling and howling like a wolf - with the intensity of her focus on a central point in the room as she circled it...I had a sense of imminent discovery and was trusting the process. I thought what we were getting very close to was a core issue that had been kept secret. But then she suddenly stopped. She kind of looked at me, and thought – am I ok? I think she feared what might emerge next and she feared that there were sides to herself that I couldn't cope with, and she may have been quite right about that. It kept me on edge, a bit anxious before each group with her after that.... Years later she revealed her history of sexual abuse.

In the extract above, the therapist described sensing the imminent discovery of a core secret. She discussed trusting that the potential existed for something new to emerge from a place of not knowing. When her client abruptly halted the psychodrama, the timing was interpreted as significant. In this therapist's framework of meaning making, she thought her client stopped both due to fears about knowing the secret, and the client feared this therapist "*couldn't cope with it*". The therapist said, "*She kind of looked at me, and thought – am I ok?*" It seemed the therapist believed her client had checked that she (the therapist) had survived the experience of her as a wolf. Interestingly, the therapist conceded that she might not have been able to manage knowing this secret at the time. As I

reflected upon this text, I was reminded of Heidegger's notions of 'sorge' and 'fallenness,' which elucidates the tendency of humans to care and become absorbed in being-with-one-another (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991).

Following this psychodrama the therapist identified ongoing feelings of anxiety before seeing this client. One possible interpretation is that the therapist had become acutely aware of the secret's menacing presence. I thought that concealed within this extract was fear or terror, which seemed to be an important communication.

The therapist described her client as a wolf in a psychodrama that intensely focused, circled, growled, and howled. I am aware that the therapist and I are similarly culturally located in a New Zealand European Western bias. Within this framework, wolves are often said to have aggressive, predatory and instinctual characteristics. As in the fairytales 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'The Three Little Pigs', or in contemporary media reports of 'lone wolf terrorists' (The editorial board, 2017). Due to the historical and contemporary cultural bias, I wondered about the therapist's lack of curiosity or meaning making about the symbolic wolf. One possible psychoanalytic interpretation is that the therapeutic dyad had unconsciously linked the secret with the dangers of the wolf. If so, perhaps the client did not act as the lone protector of the therapist. But rather, together they kept the client's secret concealed to protect themselves from the threat of attack. It seemed that the therapist was "a part of, not apart from, their [client's] worlds" (Miles et al., 2013, p. 410), which might be thought about in terms of Heidegger's notions on the inseparableness of being-in-the-shared-world (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991).

Extract two

A different therapist thought that his client kept a secret in an attempt to protect him, and in the following extract the therapist discusses how he worked with this.

He kept it..... a secret because he thought he had to protect me, as he wasn't sure how I would cope with knowing his secret. I said 'it's ok you don't have to protect me. I know plenty of men that...' I will often do whatever I need to do to let clients' feel like the secret is not going to knock me off my perch, I am not going to clutch my pearls and faint. Clients' have to know that people can work with their secrets and survive.

In the extract above, the therapist understood that his client felt uncertain about his (the therapist's) capacity to bear knowing the secret, and in the therapist's meaning making this

was linked to the secret's concealment. The therapist said, "*Clients have to know that people can work with their secrets and survive*" and there seemed an underlying assumption that his client considered secret revelation as unmanageably threatening, damaging or destructive.

In this extract the therapist described reassuring his client that he did not anticipate being harmed or shocked by knowing the secret and he had survived working with similar secrets. He said to his client, "*it's ok you don't have to protect me*". I wondered if telling his client this made a difference? I am cognizant that my wondering here derives from my personal history, where I learnt that my secrets could be survived and transformed through the lived emotional experiences of coming to know my secrets in the presence of another. In this extract, it seemed that the therapist communicated his interest and openness to knowing his client's secrets, which may be considered invitational. Interestingly, Balmforth and Elliott's (2012) qualitative study using a comprehensive process analysis found that the therapist's invitation to disclose the secret was a key determinant in secret revelation.

2.2) Protection of the client

A therapist discussed how client secret keeping might prevent secrets being reported to authorities and therefore protects some clients from law enforcement (i.e., incarceration). Therapists' also understood that secrets functioned to protect clients' with a fragile sense of self, and this later aspect is illuminated in the following extract.

My client had limited self -value and self -esteem and his self -concept was really poor, and so he was hanging onto the threads of his identity by keeping secrets. I think that may have been all that he had, all that was left in his life was his secrets. He seemed haunted by them, the most awful things, and yet that's all he had defining his personality, defining his life. If I ripped away all those structures he would have collapsed.

In the extract above, the therapist understood that the presence of secrets was of crucial significance in protecting his client's psychic cohesiveness. The therapist said secrets "*may have been all that he had,*" and it seems secrets were thought to protect what was private, unique, and personal for this client. The therapist understood that his client's mind was inhabited by ghastly or disturbing secrets that nonetheless functioned to maintain his client's sense of identity. The therapist said secrets were "*all he [the client] had defining*

his personality, defining his life". This therapist's framework of meaning making appears similar to Margolis (1966), who emphasized within an ego psychology paradigm the relationship between personal secrets and identity. Margolis proposed that secrecy enables a sense of separateness from others, and that secrets may establish or maintain a person's tenuously held sense of identity or individuality.

The therapist described thinking his client would 'collapse' if his secrets were exposed suddenly. He said, "*If I ripped away all those structures he would have collapsed*". It seemed the therapist considered the client's secrets were like a structural thread, keeping this very vulnerable client's psyche tenuously stitched together. In the interview the therapist discussed being cautious of the client's potential for psychic fragmentation if his secrets became known before other psychic structures were constructed. It appeared the therapist felt cautious of the potential dangers of cavalier revelations with this client. This extract highlights the therapist's understanding of the protective or adaptive use of secrets in a client with a fragile sense of self.

2.3) Protection for the client and the relationship

In the following extract, the therapist understood that her client's secret protected both the client and their relationship.

He hadn't been ready to admit the secret to himself. In a way, he was keeping it a secret from himself, and we both could not think about his secret. I do think he thought that he really hadn't committed the sexual offence. He had to believe that in order to function, I think. And he had very few enduring interpersonal relationships so he was really reluctant to have me potentially hate him.

In the extract above, the therapist understood that her client kept his secret from himself because, "*He hadn't been ready to admit the secret*". The therapist thought her client functioned in the world because the secret was not admitted, suggesting that admitting this secret might have precipitated dysfunction or disintegration of the client's self.

Interestingly the secret was considered to be powerful enough to elicit the therapists' hatred of the client if revealed. The therapist said, "*he was really reluctant to have me potentially hate him*". Utilizing a psychotherapeutic lens to think about this text, I wondered if perhaps *both* the therapist and client were intolerant of the therapist's hatred. From this perspective, I hypothesized the secret 'sat in the middle,' un-confessed and

hidden to prevent the potent release of hate in the dyad (i.e., the secret protected the dyad from hating and being hated).

In summary, I found that therapists made meanings of their client's concealment of secrets as protection for the therapist, the client and the relationship. The secrets discussed in the study were assumed to be threatening and highly dangerous if known. I think this is related to the types of secrets discussed, which predominantly involved survival of sexual abuse, perpetration of sexual abuse, or both. Heidegger emphasized the context and thought removal of stories (i.e., a secret) from their background contexts (i.e., the content) stripped away meanings and understandings of lived experiences (Smythe, et al., 2008).

3) Therapists' selves linked to client secrecy

The therapists' in this study made links between various aspects of themselves (real or perceived) with their clients' secret keeping and secret telling. The parts of therapists' selves that were considered influential included naivety (in three out of four participants), character traits, shameful parts, religious faith, and personal sexuality.

This section reminds me of Heidegger's thoughts on *dasein*, and how 'being-in-the-world' involves experiences within relationships (as cited in Miles, et al., 2013).

3.1) Naivety and shameful parts

In the following extract, the therapist identifies an inner naivety in relation to her client work, and she made a link between the shameful parts of herself and the secret's concealment in the relationship.

I had previously worked in a different therapeutic specialty, so when I started with this client I was a beginner and a learner in working with clients that had been sexually abused and had perpetrated sexual crimes.

I think his secret brought up and challenged my own sense of shame; we all have our shameful parts.... I remember experiencing a block or collusion as my client's shame met with my own shame and that became intolerable. Maybe it was me wanting to go NO to knowing his secret! Maybe I wanted to hide from the feelings of shame surrounding this secret. Shame is very powerful and very hard to look into. If his shameful secret couldn't be known or be seen, it had to be kept hidden.

The therapist in the extract above, said that she was an in-experienced "*beginner and a learner*". She identified a specific naivety or innocence in working with this client's secrets of both survival of sexual abuse and perpetration of sexual offences.

In this therapist's meaning making her client experienced shame associated with his secret, and the client's shame was thought to activate her own shame. The therapist described how the shameful parts of herself met with her client's shame and this highlighted her relational perspective. The therapist described her experience of shame as feeling "*intolerable*", "*powerful*" and "*very hard to look into*". Her use of the word 'intolerable' seemed indicative of an intense painful aspect to the shame experienced in this dyad and the shame seemed to stop or derail important secrets from being known. In attempting to understand her experience of a "*block*" or "*collusion*", the therapist questioned whether she did not want to know her client's secret and therefore hid from it. This therapist considered the secret's concealment to be a mutual relational undertaking in the dyad, rather than her client singularly hiding his secret from her. The therapist's communications here could be thought about in relation to Heidegger's fundamental notion of being-in-the-shared-world (as cited in Miles et al., 2013).

3.2) Naivety and masochism

In the following crafted story, another therapist identified a sense of naivety and she links one of her character traits to her work with a secretive client.

I was this naïve inquirer that was fresh, I had this youngness, a greenness, I had a hope. Apart from that... [which enabled the above to transpire] something also happened in the work where I felt young, naïve, and easily drawn into his needs. He would beat me back session after session. I think about my own sort of innate masochism and I think there were some things that allowed me to sit with sometimes extra-ordinary current acting out in the room. He would say the most preposterous things and I think I let him get away with things like the tardiness. There was something about my own slightly masochistic way of being in the world that allowed me to tolerate it. Now I'd like to think that I would do it quite differently but I don't know if he'd have stayed in therapy and been able to eventually confess his secret if I did.

In the story above, the therapist named her own sense of inner naivety that related to an external factor, and she identified in this specific therapeutic relationship also feeling "*young, naïve, and easily drawn into his needs*". It seemed her subjectivity of innocence was a dynamic particular to this therapeutic relationship, as well as being related to another factor.

It was understood by the therapist that her "*slightly masochistic way of being in the world*" enabled her to tolerate her client's consistent punishing manner, his significant acting out

in the room, and his lateness. In her meaning making she thought her unique capacity for tolerance, enabled her client to stay in long-term therapy with her (he had left other therapists), wherein he eventually became able to know his secret. It seemed her self-identified masochistic tendencies enabled her to tolerate an assigned relational role as the masochist in this dyad.

3.3) Naivety, sexual identity and religion

In the following extract, the therapist also names an inner naivety in relation to herself, and she describes how this was thought to impact on secrecy in the relationship.

I was shocked that there were a whole lot of secrets about my client being sexually abused that he hadn't told me for years. I think he had been withholding because he perceived that I was too naïve. This was probably accurate as he was much more street-wise than I was! Perhaps the fact that I live in a long-term heterosexual marriage and acknowledge having a Christian faith suggested to him that I might disapprove of him. He may have been too ashamed to tell me.

In the extract above the therapist discussed how her client had kept his history of being sexually abused a secret from her. In the therapist's meaning making she said, "*I think he had been withholding because he perceived that I was too naïve*". I explored her interpretations of the client's supposed perception, and she said her client would be "*probably accurate*" in perceiving her naivety.

The therapist positions herself as naïve and her client as street-wise. This suggests the therapist considered her client possessed a greater awareness of, exposure to, or an ability to survive difficult and dangerous situations than she did. To be streetwise, suggests a knowing that the innocent one does not possess. I was curious about this therapist's feelings of naivety considering she was a therapist with extensive years in practice. When I read this text with a psychotherapeutic lens, I wondered if the streetwise aspect located in the client was actually a disowned and split-off aspect of the therapist. It seemed possible that the therapist's sense of innocence might have also been her client's projected disowned innocence.

In the therapist's framework of meaning makings, her client's ability to tell her his secret was thought to relate to her heterosexual identity and Christian faith. She imagines that these identities (or associated beliefs) may generate in her client a sense of being disapproved of, in relation to his historical experience of sexual abuse. The therapist

suggests here that her client made cultural assumptions about her values due to holding a Christian faith and being in a heterosexual marriage. This extract illuminates the unique ways in which parts of the therapist's self ('real' or perceived), were thought to come into relationship with the client's self or history, and were thought to inhibit secret telling.

3.4) Sexual identity and personal relationship with secrets

In the following crafted story, a therapist discusses how his sexual identity and personal relationship with secrets created interpersonal dynamics in the therapeutic relationship.

I am a gay man. So the coming out process is about secrets. I think as someone that comes from that community I am used to talking about secrets. And that makes it a certain place [therapy], I would like to think of it as a safe place where clients can reveal their secrets of sexuality, and we can talk about holding the secret. Clients will assume that I am out and proud and therefore can easily share my secret. In gay affirmative therapy there is a sense of empathy but the counter of that can be trouble. I can get this thing initially where I am the hero, the person to aspire to, we are on the same team, and a couple of weeks later an intense anger when they realize the distance between them telling their secret and me having told my secret. There can be a flip and a rage as well.

As a gay man who has come out, the therapist in the story above identified having experienced secrets around his sexuality. He seemed to understand that his personal experiences with secrets enabled him to facilitate his clients sharing of secrets regarding their sexuality and experiences of secrecy. In the interview, he discussed gay affirmative therapy, which was described as being built upon empathy, warmth, and use of his legitimate authority as a gay man.

The therapist discussed how "*Clients will assume that I am out and proud and therefore can easily share my secret*". He described how clients holding this particular perception often initially admired him as the "*hero*" who had exposed all his secrets. He discussed a converse side to this, as some clients' later expressed an envious rage towards him when they "*realize the distance between them telling their secret and me having told my secret*". I think this story offers an insight into the therapist's experience of his clients' secrets interweaving between the collective (i.e., gay identity), the inter-personal, and the intra-psychic. This therapist's story led me to reflect upon the complexities of Heidegger's emphasis on being-in-the-shared world (as cited in Dreyfus, 1991).

Chapter summary and concluding comments

The presentation of findings in this chapter were thought about in relation to Heidegger's thoughts about being-in-the world, "which includes humans relating to and within the whole context of their world, within the milieu of relationships, rituals, symbols and languages that constitute their shared meanings"(Miles, et al., 2013, p. 410). I discussed three themes that the therapists identified as being significant in their understandings of their client's secrets. Firstly, I found that therapists thought their client's secrets were hidden and buried in parts of the client's psyches. Secondly, client secrets were understood by therapists' to offer the therapist, the client, and the relationship protection from the secrets ability to wound, harm or injure if exposed. Thirdly, all therapists' made links between various aspects of their selves ('real' or perceived), with their clients' secret keeping or secret telling. The findings of my themes are tentative suggestions that remain laden with complexity and mystery, and are not viewed as definitive 'truths' (Smythe, et al., 2008). I was curious that the majority of participants identified within themselves a subjective experience of naivety or innocence in their work with secretive clients, and I will elaborate on this in the following Discussion Chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter deepens my interpretive process through engagement in literature. In the study I remain close to my research question which asked “*How are the client’s secrets experienced and understood by psychotherapists?*” The meanings of two key themes emerging from the research: the black hole and the penumbrae will be interpreted in greater depth in relation to a Bionian reading. My third theme involved the therapists’ understandings of client secrets/secretcy. This comprised three subthemes: a) secrets being concealed within the client’s self; b) secretcy as protection (dialectics of protection and threat), and c) the notion that the therapists’ selves were thought to influence secret telling and secret withholding. The understandings that I offer here for thinking feel like a continuation from the interviews and offshoots from continued close engagement with the research material.

A relational psychoanalytic reading is used to elucidate and advance understanding of the phenomena of secrets. I reflect upon the relationships between parts and the whole of this study utilizing the hermeneutic process. From this I derive and explore a relational constellation that I entitle ‘the wolf and the lamb’. I also illuminate the therapists’ paradoxical experiences when encountering their clients’ secrets. The chapter concludes with a critical analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study and, the implications for psychotherapy. Finally I make recommendations for future research.

The Black Hole

In astrophysics a black hole is defined as:

“A body that sucks all the life forces of gravitation into it. It is described as a region of space-time where infinitely strong gravitational forces literally squeeze matter and photons out of existence” (Penrose, 1973, as cited in Kogan, 2015, p. 65).

Reflections upon the texts and my potent experience in an interview created a fusion of horizons that led me to the ‘black hole’ metaphor. This was used to signify the therapist’s experiences of working with clients whose secrets appeared unavailable for thinking. I found that therapists experienced confusion, frustration, gaps, blankness, blockages,

suspended thoughts and no thinking. This seemed related to psychoanalytic literature where it is suggested that psychic holes are experienced as voids, absence, gaps, or nothingness (Kogan, 2015; Hinton, 2007).

Kogan (2015) observed that psychoanalysts have frequently applied black hole imagery to extreme disturbances (i.e., psychosis, or borderline states). Tustin (1990) applied the term ‘black hole’ to autistic children, where she hypothesized a black hole at the psyche’s centre represented the mother’s absence. In some psychoanalytic literature, psychic holes have been associated with disrupted attachment and object loss, leading to deficient internal self-object relations, with resultant inner deadness, and unavailability (*or pockets of unavailability*) to self and others. For instance, Green’s, (1983) internalized ‘dead’ mother (as cited in Kohon, 2001); or hole object transferences in adopted clients (Quinodoz, 1996). Psychic holes have been further linked with catastrophic trauma, as torn psychic structures may render experience un-symbolized and un-represented, leaving a psychic void or hole (Kogan, 2015; Laub, 1998). I reflected upon how the therapists’ experiences of their client’s secrets of sexual abuses likely involved deep traumas, and I conceived the black hole experience related to psychic trauma in the therapists’ clients.

Hinton (2007) uniquely hypothesized that the black hole “may evoke the new events of possible, but unrealized, meaning that we call imagination and consciousness” (p. 434). It is suggested that out of the formless black hole, the psychic birth of new forms, or thoughts may occur. In contrast, the material I found in this study indicated the black hole is a dreadful, destructive phenomena that obliterated the therapist’s and their client’s comprehension of the secret. I argue that therapists must first conceive, symbolize, and ‘dream’ the black hole, before it can become the hopeful space of potential creation that Hinton proposes. In other words, once therapists contain the black hole, it may then become a space to be thought about in therapy. I think this crucial step is necessary so that it may then be transformed into the creative space of psychological change that Hinton refers to.

Attacks on reality

In Chapter Four, a therapist discussed her experiences of being with a client who confessed his secret, and yet he told her nothing, and the secret remained unknown. This therapist

discussed powerful countertransferences in being given an experience of being kept out or excluded from knowing. Another therapist described being drawn into a place of no-thinking about her client's secret. There seemed an unrealized absence as the secret disappeared, and I hypothesized that the therapist entered into the black hole alongside her client. This reminded me of Erel-Brodsky's (2014) contention that reduced thinking and absence of symbolization might occur in therapists working with clients that keep secrets.

I found that both therapists' absence of meaning making in their dyads regarding their client's secrets constituted a significant phenomenon. It seemed to be an important communication of some sort. I turned to Bion to further my understandings of the research findings as Bion places the capacity to know at the heart of one's mental life (O'Shaughnessy, 1981). In accordance with Bion (1965) I believe that meaning-making is a psychological need, and it seemed that the lack of meaning initially encountered by these therapists was "felt at primitive levels as destruction, rather than as a stage of the not yet evolved" thought (as cited in Mawson, 2011, p. 141). I think the therapist's use of language in the study that had associations with death seemed to highlight their experience of the annihilating power of secrets.

Bion's K, -K and no K.

I return to Bion to explore in greater depth application of his psychoanalytic ideas about knowing and not knowing to the findings in this study. For Bion, "thinking is an emotional experience of attempting to know oneself or someone else. Bion designates this fundamental type of thinking – thinking in the sense of trying to know by the symbol K" (O'Shaughnessy, 1981, p. 181). Bion's process of knowing is thought to begin within the infant-mother relationship. He proposed that 'ultimate reality' (designated O) creates raw meaningless sensory impressions that are unprocessed and unthinkable thoughts (beta-elements). The infant may split-off and project these beta-elements into the mother through projective identification. If all goes well and the mother is capable of reverie, the infant's beta elements are transformed by the mother's/analyst's mind through a process of alpha function. They may now be returned (introjected) to the infant/client in a more tolerable and manageable form. These 'digested' mental contents or alpha-elements are considered the early building blocks of thought. It is suggested that this process transforms experiences of O into knowable, usable, memorable, and meaningful mental-contents that

connects the self with its reality (Bion, 1962a, 1962b; Mawson, 2011; O'Shaughnessy, 1981; Edwards, 2015). In this study, there appeared to be a significant absence of K in regard to the client's secrets, which brings me to Bion's interrelated concepts of –K and no K.

Bion (1962a) designated –K the attack on the K state of mind, which contaminates curiosity and the urge to know. Bion's (1959) paper "Attacks on linking" discusses "destructive attacks on the link between patient and environment, or between different aspects of the patient's personality" (p. 313). The destruction of linkages is thought to destroy thought and perception, so that experience becomes insignificant and meaningless. O'Shaughnessy (1981) observes that "–K is understanding denuded until only misunderstanding remains" (p. 184), which may engender a cruel, empty, and nameless dread in the psyche. Bion's concept of –K involves a crucial perversion of one's urge to know or make meanings.

Bion's (1962a) notions of –K can be applied to deepen understandings of my research findings. For instance a client confessed his secret to the therapist, yet the secret was unknown. This confession was stripped or denuded of any meaning, and the therapist described struggling with intense feelings of confusion and frustration, as he could not understand his client's lack of curiosity or meaning making. I also think that therapists' in this study had an experience of their alpha function being attacked, so that their dreaming, knowing and thinking was shut down and the client's secrets initially remained un-thought (i.e., an unprocessed beta element).

For Bion (1959), hatred of emotion is central to the psychotic withdrawal from reality, and Fisher (2011) claims that a significant factor in –K is the fear that emotional experiences are un-survivable (as cited in Mawson, 2011). This is interesting, as in my study I found an underlying theme that if the client's secrets were released they were thought able to threaten, wound, injure, harm, or even annihilate the client, the therapist, and the dyad. One therapist discussed the importance of client's knowing that therapists could survive working with their secrets. In accordance with Grand (1997) I think that for a perpetrator's secrets to become known "is a terrifying journey into an abyss of emotional terrors and [*potential*] social repudiation" (p. 468).

In this study, I found that the ‘black hole’ communicated significant destructive elements, whereby the capacity of the therapists to think and know their clients’ secrets seemed obliterated. Bion (1957) writes that ‘no K’, is the psychotic state of mind, and this part is unable to know the self or others. “Psychosis comes with the destruction of those parts of the mind potentially capable of knowing” (O’Shaughnessy, 1981, p. 183) and the capacity to think is lost. It seems possible that my brief terrifying experience in an interview involved falling into a psychotic pocket as I felt reality shift and my thinking momentarily stopped. Deepening reflections upon the texts, my pivotal experience, and Bion’s writings led me to eventually conceptualize the black hole as a psychotic space that destroyed knowing the secret.

Interpretations of the findings were not a static process they involved a forward movement of deepening insights as I dwelt with the transcripts and literature. The interpretation of my findings within psychoanalytic literature, illustrates Heidegger’s contention that understanding is always immersed in the researcher’s context (as cited in Miles, et al., 2013).

Dreaming

An implication for practice is that in order to endure and contain the experience of secrets disappearing into black holes, open curiosity and a state of reverie (Ogden, 1997) is advocated. Giegerich (2005) described a “dissolving through the process of negation into a more spacious ground or clearing [reminiscent of Heidegger], and expanded interiority in which the particulars of existence may emerge more fully in the form of what they always, already were” (as cited in Hinton, 2007, p. 439). This is not a synthesis, but instead the emergence of previously unconscious material – so that new reflection and symbolization becomes possible.

Reflecting upon Bion’s (1982) own dream helped clarify my research findings, he wrote:

The dream was grey, shapeless, horror and dread gripped me. I could not cry out, just as now, many years later, I can find no words. Then I had no words to find, I was awake to the relatively benign terrors of real war. Yet for a moment I wished it was only a dream. In the dream I must have wished it was only a war. (p. 237).

I thought Bion’s (1982) dream illustrates how the therapists’ knowing and thinking (in relation to their client’s secrets) seemed to shift within this study. I thought that when my

participants discussed the phenomena I signified as ‘the black hole’, it seemed there were ‘*no words to find*’ about their client’s secrets. It is possible these therapists had encountered the primitive pre-conceptual mental space that Bion (1962b) describes of formlessness, nameless dread, fear, and the pre-thought. Later in the work, it seemed the therapist’s could ‘*find no words*.’ For instance, a therapist could find no words to describe the dyad’s enactments where she felt like a victim and how this repeated something of the secret that her client had initially denied.

In Chapter Five, a therapist discussed her unbidden visual image of wolves that appeared on the wall behind her client. This seems related to Bion’s (1962) proposition that alpha-elements may be elaborated into narratives and pictograms (i.e., reverie, fantasy) that constitute organized mental activity (as cited in Mawson, 2011). The therapist’s image of wolves perhaps exemplified that her alpha function had converted her raw senses of the client’s secret into an alpha-element. This may have enabled her to dream an aspect of her client’s secret (i.e., the predatory wolf), and this seemed an important catalyst that moved the dyad towards being able to know the client’s secret.

The transitional area

In Chapter Five, I presented the penumbræ of therapist’s experiences that I found in the texts. This theme encompassed five key areas of the therapists’ experiencing being: a sense of hovering and knowing, bodily experiencing (bursting, holding-on, tension, and pent-up feelings), ongoing enactments, an unbidden visual image, and the sense of percolation. I interpreted that these experiences had a similar essence of shadiness and obscurity, which enabled only partial illumination of their client’s secrets or secrecy. These experiences seemed unable to be understood by the therapists’ at the time, although some were retrospectively linked to their client’s secret.

I intuited Reiner’s (2008) poem ‘Ode to O,’ expressed something of significance, and I sat with my not-yet-knowing. This resonance seemed related to Heidegger’s (1992) reflections on the nature of thought. “[He] asks: To what? To what holds us, in that we give it thought precisely because it remains what must be thought about” (as cited in Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1393).

Ode to 0

There is a Woman in the room you cannot see.
No, not me.
She is the future coming soon
though how can the future be in this room
except by a trick of sub-atomic sleight-of-hand
which even the quantum physicists can't
understand.
But I feel her
whom I am becoming at this and every moment
disappearing like a quark
only to show up over there in the past
which was me
now lying like a sloughed off skin
while the Woman alive in transitional being,
still broken into my component parts,
with no cause for alarm,
it's just $Me = mc^2$
now you see me, now you don't...
me neither...
oh oh ... 0. (Reiner, 2008, p. 602)

Reiner's (2008) imagery of the 'Woman' in this poem evoked for me the 'Secrets' that my participants had encountered. The therapists' seemed to have received an experiential knowing of aspects of their client's secrets, but the secrets could not be fully known. Reiner (2008, p. 602) writes, "*even the quantum physicists can't understand. But I feel her*". She seems to speak of an experience here that is felt, but unable to be grasped. In this poem the 'Woman' sounds like a transitional being that was on the way to transforming into something more alive. Then she oscillates back into more primitive states that were, "*still broken into my component parts*". I reflected upon transitional states, and how Reiner's words "*now you see me, now you don't....*" were reminiscent of my findings in the penumbrae. This eventually clarified in my mind how the oscillations between knowing-something of the secret, yet not- knowing the secret, increasingly seemed to come into the therapists' later experiences, as the dyad seemingly started moving away from the black hole.

I came to think that the penumbrae existed on a continuum, where some therapists' experiences seemed in deeper shadow and were perhaps closer to beta-elements (i.e., the bodily experiencing) to the more illuminated visual imagery that I considered a beginning alpha-element of the secret. I thus came to locate the penumbrae of therapists' experiences within a transitional area, that is, between beta and alpha-elements. Shortly afterwards, I found that Bion (1990) illustrates this transitional area by quoting the poet Donne:

“the blood spoke in her cheek...as if her body thought”

(Bion, 1990, p. 41).

Relational perspectives

I shift gears now, as I think about the findings using contemporary relational literature (Davies & Frawley 1992; Grand, 1997). This study found that therapists considered their client's secrets and secrecy from various relational perspectives. All of the therapists thought aspects of their selves (real or perceived) had an impact on the relationship and influenced the telling or withholding of client secrets. This relates to Heidegger's notions that human beings are always being-with (*mitsein*) others and ourselves, which has an influence (Dreyfus, 1991).

Naivety

Three out of four participants identified a felt sense of innocence or naivety during their work with client's who held secrets of committing predatory sexual abuse, had survived sexual abuses, or their secrets pertained to both. The leitmotif of naivety running through this study seemed significant and I sought to make meanings of the phenomenon psychotherapeutically. Mitchell (1988), a relational theorist writes:

The analyst is regarded as, at least to some degree, embedded within the analysand's relational matrix. There is no way for the analyst to avoid his assigned roles and configurations within the analysand's relational world... he plays assigned roles even if he desperately tries to stand outside the patient's system and play no role at all. (as cited in Gabbard, 1995, p. 480).

Fusion of horizons

I was confused about the findings of naivety, and let this percolate within. Later during a conversation with a psychotherapist I discussed how many of the therapists felt naive, and the symbolic wolf emerged in half of my interviews. In dialogue I suddenly realized and

said, “Its like there is the wolf and the lamb”. I saw a relationship existing between the two, whereby the wolf (discussed in pages 50, 58 & 59) appeared to symbolize the predatory, aggressive, cunning and terrifying aspects of the client’s secrets embedded in the texts, and the lamb symbolized the therapist’s innocence, i.e., as the wolf’s prey, and the one who needed protection (see pp. 58-59). My use of the lamb to symbolize the therapists’ subjectivity of innocence appears to be culturally and historically determined. Within Christianity, Jesus came to be known as ‘the lamb of God’, and interestingly ‘The wolf and the lamb’ is an Aesop fable (1909-14/ca. 6th century B.C.). As a hermeneutic researcher this new understanding of ‘the wolf and the lamb’ relational configuration (that expressed aspects of the secrets) was born in dialogue with another and required an interpretive leap in thinking (Smythe, 2011; Smythe et al., 2008).

I interpreted that therapists in this study experienced and played out their client’s secret internalized relationships between predation and innocence, and I name this configuration ‘the wolf and the lamb’. As a psychotherapist I am familiar with the concept of transference-countertransference relational configurations, and I am aware that this pre-understanding locates my interpretation of ‘the wolf and the lamb’ within a psychoanalytic lens.

In the early phases of this research, I traveled to South Africa where I witnessed wild animals as predator and prey on Safari. These deeply personal experiences in the wild possibly brought the archetype of predator and prey closer to my consciousness, and enabled the ‘wolf and the lamb’ from the texts to come into ‘*the clearing*’ (*Lichtung*) and become able to be seen (Heidegger’s metaphor as cited in van Manen, 1990).

Another personal experience that seemed pertinent in arriving at this theme was a dream I had several years ago where I morphed into a wolf and started running towards home after reading Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ (a Jungian psychoanalyst) book, ‘Women Who Run With the Wolves’. This book influenced me to reclaim and re-establish contact with the wild and sacred wolf within my own psyche and I wondered if my intra-psyche connection enabled the participants to tell me about their encounters with the wolf. The instinctual wolf within, perhaps also guided my writing processes for I noticed when thinking and writing felt stale and deadened, and conversely recognized when I was enlivened by creative energies and deep curiosity.

The wolf and the lamb: A relational constellation

‘The wolf and the lamb’ relational configuration was uncovered by moving to and fro between parts of the texts and the whole of the texts utilizing the hermeneutic circle (Miles et al., 2013). The circular processes of reading and writing also deepened my understandings. I reflected upon Davies and Frawley’s (1992) suggestion that when therapists access their client’s dissociated parts, the clients’ archaic objects (i.e. a whole person, or abusive relationships) may appear in the transference-countertransference configurations, via the mechanisms of projection, introjection and enactments.

The therapists’ experiences of naivety have been considered openly so that questions continually arose in my mind. I thought the therapists sense of naivety or innocence could be related to the therapist’s entering into a dissociated split-off part of their client’s psyche as discussed by Davies and Frawley (1992). Therapists perhaps got to experience their clients innocence as the victim and the preyed upon. Alternatively this seems to have been a shifting ground, with the therapist’s subjectivity of naivety also a potential communication about something of their client’s victims’ experiences.

In my findings, a therapist discussed enactments whereby she realized she played the role as naïve victim, and experienced her client’s abusiveness towards her. Davies and Frawley (1992) contend that adult survivors of sexual abuse have an internal object world that is organized around three significant configurations, being “a victim, an abuser, and an idealized omnipotent rescuer” (p. 26). It is thought that both the therapist and client may experience all of these various, ever-changing configurations. This relates to my research texts, where on the other hand, a therapist participant discussed her experience with a client who had initially professed his innocence of the crime he was convicted of (see p. 48; he later confessed to committing this). Did I glimpse here this therapist’s experience of her client as the lamb (i.e., the innocent victim)? I conversely wondered if the wolf resided within the therapist who had discussed searching for the client’s secret (see pp. 55- 56). Did this therapist (as the wolf) sniff out and hunt the secret, finding satisfaction when the client’s secret was caught? I also became curious about the therapists who did not identify as wolves. Smythe (2011) observes that use of the hermeneutic ‘as’ “may open possibilities that reveal new meanings” (p. 45).

From the texts, I thought that the wolf and the lamb formed a mutual dyadic system, with the predatory wolf only existing in relationship with the innocent lamb or prey. In the image below (Figure IV), there is an intense meeting between the powerful, dominant wolf and the innocent lamb. This picture led me to wonder if the wolf smelt the therapist's innocence, was drawn to it, and sought to destroy it? I thought about the tensions between a wolf and lamb well before an attack, it may look innocent but the wolf is in the picture, watching intensely and waiting. The unconscious presence of a menacing wolf was perhaps a factor in the fears associated with the secrets in this study. My discovery of a relational configuration seems to illustrate the relational theorists Skolnick and Davies' (2013) contention that "the secret will emerge clinically as a characteristic interplay between analyst and patient" (p. 221).

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Figure IV. Wolf and the Lamb

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Figure V. The Lamb and the Wolf (Shion, n.d.).

In the image above (Figure V) the wolf and the lamb have merged, and the words in the artwork: “And everywhere the Lamb went - Wolf was sure to follow” suggest a compelling relationship. I thus wondered if the wolf and the lamb could not meet together in the therapeutic dyad, should no transformation of the secret occur?

I considered ‘the wolf and the lamb’ from Khan’s (1978) conceptualization of secrets as inherently creative and adaptive. From this object relations perspective one could alternatively hypothesize that the therapist’s subjectivity of innocence functioned to stop the therapists from knowing their clients’ secrets. Thus giving the client and therapist time to achieve a state of readiness to know (i.e., develop trust in the relationship, strengthen the client’s emotional resilience). It is possible the client’s secrets incubated in a safe cocoon until the conditions ripened for the secrets revelation. If the therapists in this study had interpreted the secrets before their clients were ready to know, admit, or reveal them, I

wondered if the secret could (in such conditions) only be superficially known about (i.e., - K), but not ‘truly’ become known (Bion, 1962a).

Secrets as protection and threat

The therapists’ discussed their lived experiences and understandings of client secrets in the study. I thought the therapists’ experiences of their client’s secrets as threatening, destructive and fearful entities were inextricably linked to the secrets contexts of abuse. This insight drew on Heidegger’s assertion that human experience and meaning making is fundamentally contextual (Miles, et al., 2013).

Hand in hand with the underlying view of secrets’ destructive potential, were the therapist’s explicit understandings of secrets/secretcy as a protective function for the therapist, the client, and or the dyad. This finding of secrets as a form of protection was supported by the psychoanalytic literature I reviewed. For instance Khan (1978), thought secrets protected the self from non-responsive environments, whilst other psychoanalytic authors emphasized secrets protection of one’s sense of self and identity (Margolis 1966; Hoyt, 1978).

Notions of the secrets protective functions seemed related to Heidegger’s descriptions of *Sorge* (an important structure of *dasein*). For Heidegger, “*Sorge*, or care, or concern, is relational and relationships are not possible without caring or concern... *sorge* is always-ahead-of-itself” (as cited in Miles, et al., 2013, p. 411). It appeared that an aspect of secret keeping in the study was a concern about the impacts of secret disclosures (i.e., on the dyad). There seemed an implicit concern (i.e., protection as care), because the therapeutic relationship mattered. Articulation of this perhaps taken for granted notion illustrates my hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

Paradoxes

A paradox may be defined as that which embraces two opposing pairs or contradictory things (Sgarzi, 2002). Jung (1940, 1989) observed that the paradox:

Does more justice to the unknowable than clarity can do, for uniformity of meaning robs the mystery of its darkness and sits it up as something that is known. That is an usurpation, and it leads the human intellect into hybris... The paradox therefore reflects a higher level of intellect and, by not forcibly representing the unknowable as

known, gives a more faithful picture of the real state of affairs. (as cited in Sgarzi, 2002, p. 181).

Jung emphasizes the importance of not seeking clarity or knowing prematurely, because it would not be a 'true' knowing. For me, the paradoxical notion gathers together the diverse experiences therapists encountered, and embraces the phenomena's complexity. I apply the notion of the paradox later in the secrets' process, as the secrets seemingly started to move in the psyche.

Paradoxes emerged in this study as the therapists experienced aspects of their client's secrets as a dynamic play between: The concealed and revealed, silence and expression (i.e., enactment), hiding and seeking, secrets as protection and secrets that threaten and 'the lamb and the wolf' relational constellation of innocence and predation. Sgarzi (2002) observes, "As in other diverse arenas, the complex, paradoxical innermost nature of secret exposes itself.... Both paradox and the play of opposites appear deeply embedded in secret regardless of the field of experience" (p. 105). I found Rumi's (1995) poem expresses a sense of the mystery and dynamic nature of the secret's paradoxical aspects as encountered in this study.

*A secret turning in us
makes the universe turn.
Head unaware of feet,
And feet head. Neither cares.
They keep turning.* (Rumi, 1995, p. 278).

I have now finished my interpretative discussion of the findings and will now move into exploration of the strengths, limitations and implications of this study.

Strengths and limitations

There are some limitations in hermeneutic phenomenological research relating to its subjective nature. This study is unique to what occurred between the participants and myself in the interviews, therefore this study is not replicable. Another researcher might have gleaned other themes from the interview texts and come to different findings. The therapists spontaneously discussed with me their lived experiences of working with clients

whose secrets involved sexual abuses as victims and perpetrators. ‘The wolf and the lamb’ relational configuration seemed specific to these types of secrets, or to the participants themselves and therefore this finding may not be transferable to other contexts.

Although positivist notions may critique my study’s small sample size and consequent limitations on its ability to replicate, or to make predictions (Grant & Giddings, 2002), I was not seeking to replicate the findings. Rather, as a qualitative study, I sought theoretical generalizations of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994, as cited in Flick, 2006) and within psychoanalytic relational literature my finding of a relational constellation had resonance (i.e., Davies & Frawley, 1992; Grand 1997; Skolnick & Davies, 2013). The findings of the black hole and penumbrae of experiences may resonate with other practitioner’s experiences, which Miles and Huberman (1994) note is of interest as a measure of validity in qualitative research (as cited in Flick, 2006).

There was a coherent fit between my research question, hermeneutic phenomenological method and methodology, and my research findings. The participants articulated thick rich descriptions of their lived experiences, which I think positively contributed to the study. To promote transparency I included textual extracts/crafted stories from the interviews to show that my interpretations were grounded in the research material (Coyle, 2007). To a more limited extent (for confidentiality reasons) I provided examples to exemplify the various ways in which I worked with the transcripts to derive themes (found in the appendices). Yardley (2008) observes that validity in qualitative study’s involve a coherent research approach and transparent processes.

The strength of this study for me personally, has been the development of my thinking capacity. I stayed with what was unknown, uncertain, mysterious, and ineffable so that premature interpretations were not drawn. The subsequent growth of my negative capability (Adams, 1995), and the extension of my capacity for reverie (Ogden, 1997) have in turn enriched my practice as a psychotherapist. I also deepened personally through revisiting my history with secrets as I continually sought to explicate my biases and pre-understandings.

Moving beyond what I got from the study, I think it may be of use to researchers, psychotherapists’ and those working with people who experience traumatic secrets.

Because this study highlighted that client secrets may be experienced by the therapist/other through the sensate, somatic, imaginal, emotional, intellectual, and a relational configuration it may usefully give individuals new ideas to think about (i.e., their own experiencing) in relation to the phenomena of secrets and secrecy.

Implications of the study and recommendations for research

I think my unique application of the 'black hole' metaphor to the experience of working with some client's secrets may provide psychotherapists with a way of conceptualizing clinical experiences that involve a lack of meaning making. I hope my thinking and 'digestion' helps to contain a black hole experience for others, so that client secrets have a space to be dreamed or thought in the therapists mind.

This study found that the therapist's subjectivity was a powerful medium that communicated important information about their client's secrets and secrecy. I hope my study stimulates therapists' curiosity about their responses, such as those of "innocence". This is important as it is thought that the therapist's ability to enter into, and then interpret the client's relational configurations may facilitate important insights, change, and the integration of dissociated secretive material (Davies & Frawley 1992; Grand 1997).

This hermeneutic research illuminated the fluid, complex, and nuanced unfolding of secrets in a process of becoming known in the dyad, and may open new ways of thinking about secrets. It offers insights into the experiential 'realities' of psychotherapists involved in working closely with traumatic secrets. It may therefore be useful beyond the therapeutic context to help individuals understand such experiences (i.e., gaps in knowing, the presence of absence, sensate experiences of bursting and holding-on etc). The study also perhaps points towards the power of secrets in human interactive relationships, including couples, families, and institutions, so it may offer a useful set of ideas for thinking about the phenomena of secrets and secrecy within wider contexts.

Potential avenues for future research projects have been highlighted by this study. I think qualitative studies into psychotherapist countertransferences to client secrets could investigate if certain responses are contextually linked to specific types of secrets. Exploration of therapists' responses of "innocence" when working with client secrets of

sexual abuses would be an intriguing area for future investigation. Another implication for further research is looking into where the wolf/beast is in the therapist. For instance, if this is disowned, how can it be acknowledged, and could this benefit therapy? This study focused on the intra-psychic and inter-psychic aspects of secrets and secrecy. There seemed a paucity of research into the cultural influences on secrets and secrecy in the literature reviewed, and I think studies exploring this may usefully widen the lens of current understandings.

Conclusion

I found going to the depths in this study required my trust in the methodological research process, sustained curiosity, meditative thinking, space for reverie, dialogue, and sensitivity to the complexities encountered. I think this enabled the nuances and paradoxes of the therapists' experiences and understandings of their client's secrets and secrecy to be seen. I endeavored to take the reader on a journey with me as I engaged in thinking and sought understandings, so "that they too may have their own [calling] to think" (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 21).

This research process has changed the way I view secrets. At the beginning of this study I was interested in conscious deliberate secrets, and this shifted as I became engrossed and intrigued by the participants' experiences of secrets that had been unknown and unconscious. I now have a fuller appreciation of the various ways therapists may experience their client's secrets, and the multiplicity of secrets' possible functions. As I started this journey I considered secrets had positive and negative values, and it surprised me to find that some secrets may reside in a destructive psychotic space. I was taken well beyond my horizons of knowing, which I feel most grateful for.

I used the evocative 'black hole' metaphor to signify the therapists' experiences of being drawn into a place of not knowing the client's secret. In the penumbrae of therapists' experiences it seemed the beginning knowing of secrets emerged in clinical work as opaque experiences that were multi-dimensional and dynamic. From the texts I made an interpretive leap to 'the wolf and the lamb' relational constellation. This linked to the very nature of the secrets therapists discussed in this study, and seemed to exemplify an inextricable relationship between the type of secret kept and the therapists' responses.

Although the study concludes at this point in time, I hope that my research generates further thinking and dialogue about psychotherapists' experiences and understandings of their client's secrets. I farewell the reader who has travelled along on this journey of thinking with me, and I complete my study with the Homeric Hymn to Hermes:

And so farewell,
Son of Zeus and Maia,
but I will remember you
and another song also.
(Evelyn-White, 1914/ca. 5th century B.C.).

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Appendix A

18 May 2016
Paula Collens
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Paula

Re Ethics Application: **16/96 Secrets in psychotherapy: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 17 May 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECH:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 17 May 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 17 May 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTECH is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTECH approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECH grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organization for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Joanne Wilkinson
14 April 2016
Paula Collens
Faculty of Health and Environmental Science

Dear Paula

Ethics Application: 16/96 Secrets in psychotherapy: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 11 April 2016, subject to the following conditions:

1. Provision of a time maximum limit for participants to think about the research prior to making a decision, and advice of this in the Information Sheet. In general terms the Committee recommends two weeks;
2. AUTECH recommends that all participants receive koha or a token of appreciation, and that participants who incur expenses relating to the research are reimbursed for these;
3. Removal of advice of counselling in the Information Sheet;
4. Use of the exemplar provided by the committee for the Confidentiality Agreement;
5. Amendment of the recruitment advertisement for nontechnical language, the AUT logo, and AUTECH's approval wording.

Please provide me with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTECH also requires copies of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum.

Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

I look forward to hearing from you,
Yours sincerely



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: February, 21, 2016

Project Title: Secrets in Psychotherapy: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

Researcher: Joanne Wilkinson

An Invitation

- Hello my name is Joanne Wilkinson and I am inviting you to participate in my research on secrets in psychotherapy. I am exploring how client's deliberate secrets are experienced and understood by psychotherapists.
- Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time prior to the transcription of data.

What is the purpose of this research?

- To increase awareness of how psychotherapists experience and understand clients that keep /have kept deliberate secrets in therapy.
- Add to knowledge on the phenomenon of secrets in psychotherapy. It aims to stimulate thinking, dialogue, and understandings, to promote improved client outcomes.
- This research will be used in my dissertation, which contributes to my Masters of Psychotherapy degree.
- I may use the research data in other academic presentations and publications.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

- I am recruiting psychotherapists', with a minimum of three years experience that identify as relational or psychodynamic psychotherapists.
- I identified you as a potential participant in my research on the suggestion of colleagues, or through public sources of information.
- I obtained your contact details either when 1) you responded to my advertisement/recruitment flyer, or 2) I obtained your contact details through public sources (inter-net).
- I have excluded from my research any psychotherapists that I have dual relationships with (i.e., colleagues, supervisors).

What will happen in this research?

- The research involves a semi-structured conversational interview of 60-90 minutes.
- I will ask open-ended questions into the essential nature of your experiences and understandings, of working with client(s) that have kept/keep deliberate secrets in therapy (i.e., client declared having a secret, or revealed a secret later in therapy). I am interested in your stories from practice, your experiences, and your understandings.
- The location for interviews is arranged so that it best suits you, either at your place of work, your home, or in the interview rooms at AUT (North shore campus).
- Your interview will be audio-recorded, converted to digital sound files, and then transcribed into verbatim texts.
- The transcript will be emailed to you, so that you can ensure it conveys what you intended. You may add to this if necessary.
- A summary of the findings will be sent to you on completion of the study if you indicate this. I will report the findings in a way that ensures that you (and your client work) cannot be individually identified.

What are the discomforts and risks?

- There may be some emotional discomfort when discussing your emotional experiences or practice.
- Confidentiality breeches – low risk.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated

- To eliminate the risk of confidentiality breeches **I request that you do not reveal identifying material/details when discussing clients**, and your work together in the interview.
- The transcription will be sent to you, if you believe any material is identifiable it can then be altered/disguised so that yourself, your client, and your work together will in no way be identifiable.
- Any emotional discomfort may be alleviated by being heard, having a break in the interview if needed, not answering questions, and by having the interview at a location where you feel most comfortable.

What are the benefits?

- Contributing to the body of knowledge on the phenomena of secrets in psychotherapy.
- An opportunity to reflect upon and make additional meanings of clinical experiences.
- This research will assist me obtain a Masters of psychotherapy degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

- I will alter personal details (i.e., age, gender, name).
- As a participant, you will not be revealed to third parties. The exception being my supervisor, who shall be informed when I conduct the interview.
- If I use a professional transcriber, they will be bound by a confidentiality agreement.
- Safe storage of data: I will comply with AUT ethical guidelines.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The cost will be the time spent participating, which is estimated to be between 90-120 minutes in total.

If you decide to travel to AUT to have your interview there (as opposed to your place of work or home) travel costs will be reimbursed with a \$20.00 petrol voucher offered.

A Koha will be offered to all participants as a token of my appreciation.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

The maximum time limit to think about the research prior to making a decision is two weeks.

I will recruit on a first-come basis until my quota of participants is filled.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

- 1) Contact me to indicate your agreement to participate (contact details on following page).
- 2) Complete the Consent Form. I will email this to you and go through it with you before beginning the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I will send you a summary of the research findings if you indicate wanting this.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Paula Collens, paula.collens@aut.ac.nz, Phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 5780

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research? Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Joanne Wilkinson.....(deleted)

Project Supervisor Contact Detail

Dr Paula Collens, paula.collens@aut.ac.nz, Phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 5780

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *18 May, 2016*, AUTEK Reference number *1696*

Appendix C

Consent Form

Project title: **Secrets in Psychotherapy: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry**

Project Supervisor: Dr Paula Collens

Researcher: Joanne Wilkinson

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated:
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes may be taken during the interviews and that the interview will also be audiotaped and put into digital sound files and transcribed. Transcription will either be done by Joanne Wilkinson or will be professionally transcribed (if professionally transcribed the researcher will ensure a confidentiality agreement with a professional transcriber).
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to data transcription, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including digital sound files and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- The data obtained in this research may be used in the researchers future academic publications and presentations.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes No

Joanne Wilkinson requests: Please do not reveal or discuss identifying material about your client(s) and client work in the interview to protect their confidentiality.

Participants signature:

.....

Participants Name:

Participants Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date **Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 18th May, 2016-08-29**

AUTEC Reference number 1696

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D

Joanne Wilkinson is Researching Secrets in Psychotherapy

This content has been removed by the author due to copyright issues.

Figure VI. Retrieved, April, 17, 2016 from <http://www.timesofsicily.com/the-myriad-of-sicilian-secrets/>

Research Project: *Explores through conversation how the client's deliberate secrets are experienced and understood by psychotherapists'.*

This research involves an interview focusing on **your** stories from working with client's that keep / have kept deliberate secrets.

Involvement in the study: 1.5-2 hours total involvement.

I am recruiting psychotherapists' that identify as psychodynamic or relational therapists, with a minimum 3 yrs of experience.

If you are considering participating in this interesting research please contact me for further information at: wjoanne55@gmail.com

\$20.00 Petrol costs given if travelling to AUT for interview, otherwise interviews can be conducted at your place of work or home. A Koha will be given as token of appreciation for participating in this study.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 16th May 2016 final ethics approval was granted, AUTEK Reference number 1696

Appendix E: Wholistic reading approach for theme analyses (van Manen, 1990). Interview 1.

(1) Wholistic reading approach (van Manen, 1990; 2014)

1) Secrets have relational properties: with the client's secret keeping or secret revealing influenced by the therapist's self, and the client's perceptions of the therapist. There were inclusion and exclusion properties (i.e., who is told the secret & who it is kept from).

paradox - reveals conceals

2) Secrecy and secrets had conscious and unconscious elements - layered in the psyche.

paradox - Cs + UnCs.

3) A web-like structure in secrecy (i.e., client, therapist, supervisor, supervisees, professional bodies, external relationships, God). *Silencing.*

The therapist's experiences of client's secret keeping:

Not knowing induced anxiety, fear, frustration, and discomfort. There was some sympathy, and empathy, with fantasies/intuition arising about the secret. The therapist felt shame, a sense of being deceived, and silencing.

The therapist's experiences of the client's secret revelations:

Included feeling deceived, unsure, shocked, and surprised. Third party revelations of client secrets both confirmed the therapist's suspicions, and shocked, surprised.

Link to reveal.

Appendix F: Selective reading approach for theme analyses (van Manen, 1990). Interview 1.

to the responsibility to what he was not acknowledging his own responsibility for abusing her, instead of referring her to an experienced health professional. It is like it is a difficult process - quite possibly on reflection I should not have taken him but then I didn't know how bad it was going to be. *

I - Can say any more about how bad it was being with this particular client for you? *Experiencing. **

T - Feeling a wall of blankness in him, and not knowing whether he actually could not put words to his experience, or was deliberately resisting going deeper. I actually wanted him to go to the SAFE programme (a group process with skilled facilitators) but he wasn't interested. *Links with T.3*

CIS
secret avoidance + trying to hold him to his s. offending
Hard forth. to understand.
A wall Blankness knowings???

Appendix G: Detailed line-by-line approach for theme analyses (van Manen, 1990).
Interview 1.

T - I don't know, but his supervisor would have urged him to be honest.

I - **So what was this like for you?** Confession to begin with

T - A bit startling, a bit unusual, somebody to confess straight away. But you see he was confessing that in order to get that out of the way, to focus on what he wanted - which only dawned on me slowly as we proceeded. He didn't want to explore into the reality of what he had confessed to. He had only confessed to the

Confession unusual for quality therapist understanding of the confession

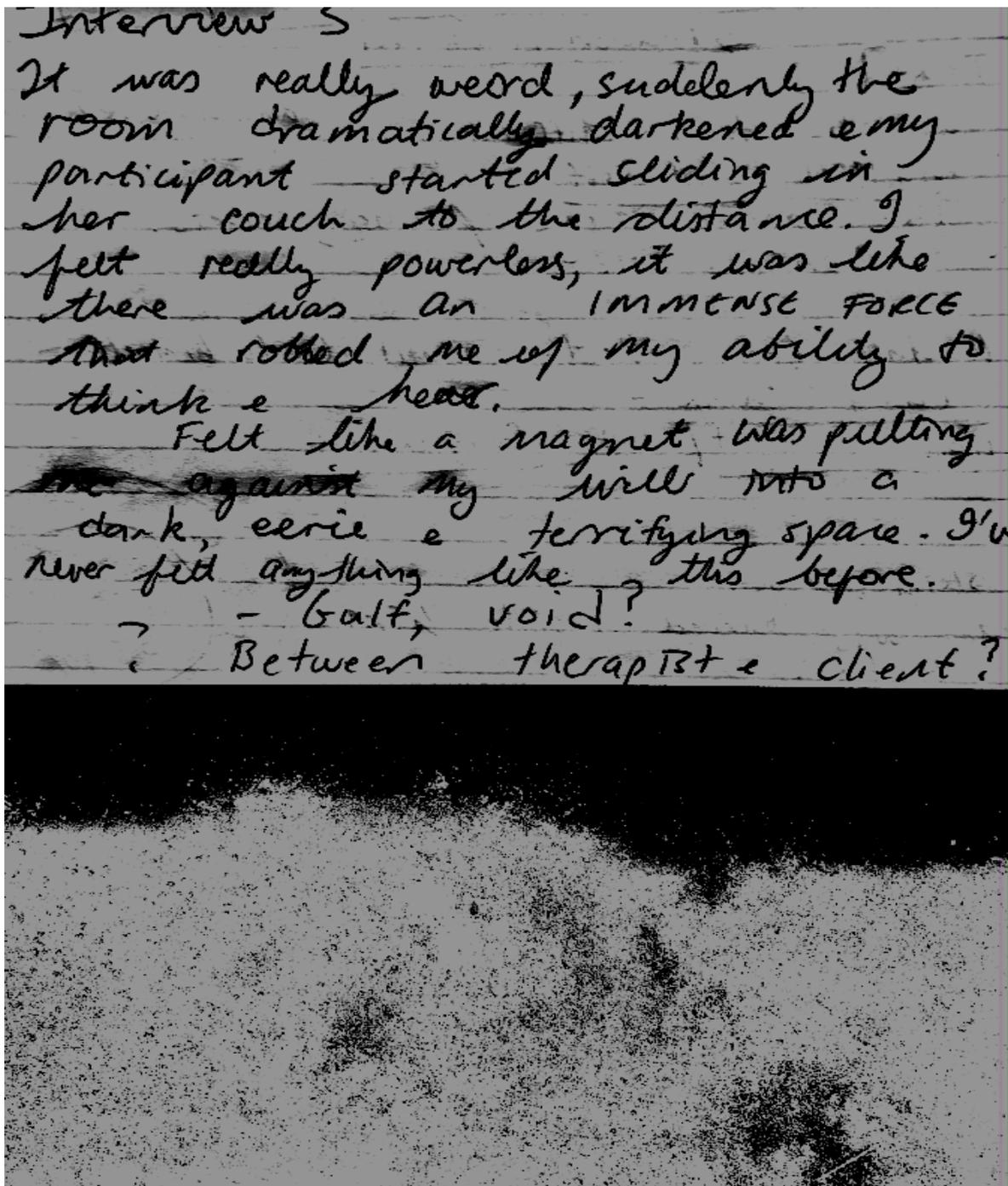
unclear hidden

Secret has been confessed to, but therapist finds client is unwilling to explore this secret.

Why? Not?

3

Appendix H: Entry from my reflective journal



My artwork above expresses my response to this interview, light, shade, darkness and obscurity. A colourless landscape.