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On Becoming a Reflexive Practitioner

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Research thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology.

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2010

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Section A - Preface

"He who would know the world, seek first within his beings depths; he who would truly know himself, develop interest in the world"
(Rudolf Steiner)

Overview.

The purpose of this section is to summarise each of the elements included in this portfolio, research, professional practice and critical literature review. I will then move on to explain the thread that runs throughout the pieces linking the portfolio together.

The Research.

In our society the numbers of what have been named 'beanpole' families (those made up of only one child), has increased and is expected to continue doing so (Carvel, 2003). According to a British only child website, recent figures in the press, report that the numbers of families in western societies with one child are estimated at 17% in Britain and that last year there were 300,000 more households with one child than in the year 2000. The trend continues across Europe, with similar figures in Germany and Portugal (www.beinganonly.com). However, these only children will be born into a society where there are many 'taken-for-granted' beliefs, as to what they are like, spoilt, unsociable and selfish (Laybourn, 1994; Sifford, 1989). These assumptions and preconceptions appear to be stronger and more negative for only children rather then other birth order positions.

Much of the existing research on the only child appears to have focused on disproving the stereotypes. In order to achieve this, it has predominantly relied on quantitative methodologies to make comparisons between only children and those with siblings, in relation to cognitive and personality development. The overall findings are that there is in fact, very little difference between the two groups. Though this is interesting research, it does not further our knowledge of the actual experiences of the only child and in particular the only child as an adult. In order to change this, more recent research has begun to recognise the potential of using qualitative methods to focus on the subjective experience. Sorensen (2008) used a narrative approach to look at the experiences of female adult only children. Overall she presents the experience as being different and that only children do miss out by not having siblings.

The impetus for this research was the strong message that something was lacking in the life of the only child, evident in the accounts of Sorensen's co-

researchers. On a personal level (I am an only child) this interested me as it did not resonate with my own experiences. As I am also a counselling psychologist in training, I was interested on a professional level, to further our knowledge about the only child for when we encounter them in the therapy room; due to the increasing numbers of only children this will be happening with greater frequency. The decision was made to adopt Grounded Theory Methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for the study as this was most appropriate to address the research question. I wished to move on from the narrative approach of Sorensen, which sort to give a voice to the unheard only child, in order to look at the social processes within the adult only child experience.

Client Case Study and Process Report

These two pieces provide examples of my clinical work with a single client that I have named Anne (all identifiers have been changed to preserve client anonymity) and are a reflection of my development within the person-centred approach. The personal and professional journeys I have taken through the training have caused me to move beyond the work of Carl Rogers and include the more recent work of Rennie (2007) and Mearns and Cooper (2006). I have therefore sought to develop a more experiential focus; allowing myself to work in the here and now with my clients and ultimately move beyond surface observation to work at relational depth. This has only been possible by developing a greater degree of reflexivity through training and supervision, than was present in the initial stages of my training. These early experiences with clients were full of trepidation and caution, as there was a greater focus on acquiring techniques, resulting in a lack of 'naturalness' with clients. However, as time has progressed, I have been able to bring more of myself into the therapy room and am much more congruent in the relationship. Greater transparency has been important and I am more willing and able to share my felt responses with my clients when it is appropriate to do so.

The critical literature review.

This explores the literature around the use and non-use of therapist self-disclosure. It begins by looking at how the different theoretical approaches view

self disclosure and it becomes evident that there are many similarities on how and when it can be used. The discussion then moves on to clarify the varying definitions that exist and how this can make comparing studies difficult. The research has been dominated by quantitative, analogue designs, which limits their usefulness in relation to a real therapy context. Few studies have used qualitative or mixed designs in order to explore real therapy sessions. The ones that have, found that self-disclosure had the main effect of strengthening the alliance between therapist and client. A consistent point is also made regarding a need for the therapist to possess a high degree of reflexivity, in order to decide when it is appropriate to make a disclosure, that is to say, when it would be beneficial for the client and not serving a need within the therapist.

The Thread.

The thread that runs throughout the portfolio is my own process of developing as a reflexive practitioner.

In a therapy session I am sometimes required to lead, at other times it is the client, but for most of the journey we walk side by side as I hold the lantern to shine the way. It is a collaborative process where I learn as much about myself as the client does about herself. Ultimately what I have learnt is that being a therapist is not a separate part of my identity, it is not a persona I put on when I walk through the door and drop after fifty minutes. This has been noted to be common within many trainee therapists (Mearns & Cooper, 2005). I have found that as I have become more comfortable in the therapy room, I have begun to develop a greater fluidity to my approach, being able to draw on a range of internal and external resources. I have been able to develop in my clinical work and the person centred approach, as previously stated and learn more about what appears to be on the surface a simple approach to understanding the complexities of working at varying depths with a client.

Through the research, I have learnt much about how adult only children experience the world and how they construct relationships with others. As I have engaged in this process it has also been necessary for me to reflect on my own experiences as an only child; an aspect of my identity that I had not previously given much consideration to. In relation to the training itself there are parts that I

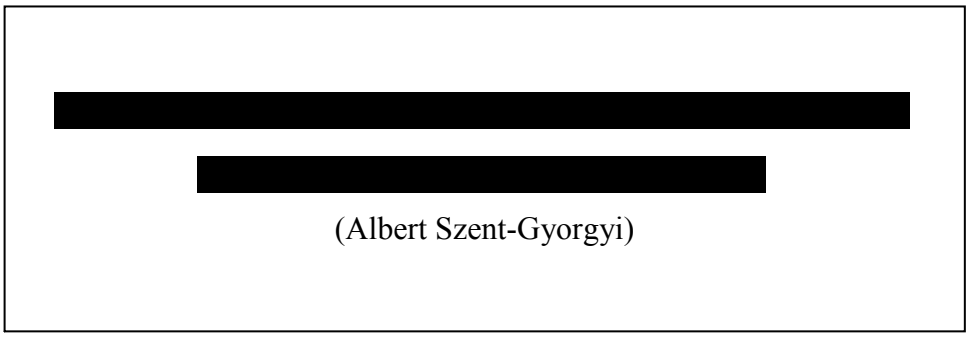
have found particularly challenging which link to my personal experiences of being an only child. I have been required to open up and expose more of myself then I have ever done before in regard to personal therapy and clinical supervision. In particular I have needed to reach out to others for guidance and move away from the 'self sufficient role' that I have commonly adopted. As an only child I feel that I have always engaged in a high degree of self-reflection but this has previously been an internalised process. It has become necessary for me to vocalise these processes and risk exposing myself to others. With regard to the strengths that I bring as an only child, colleagues have often commented on the calmness and containment I bring to the work. Being able to distance myself from others has been useful and can be seen as necessary for self-preservation as a therapist (Wheeler, 1997). David Mearns (an only child) has also commented on these aspects of the only child experience and writes of the part of him that can exist in 'total isolation' (2005, p.148) and it is this part that enables him to remain calm in fearful situations and to contain large amounts of distress.

As I have learnt more about myself, it has enabled me to have more to offer to my clients. I now have much greater awareness of how the therapeutic encounter evolves, and emotions and associations are stimulated in the therapist. Also how similarities and differences arise between client and therapist, which can enhance or paralyse the process (Kantrowitz, 1997). Anderson and Goolishian (1992) stress how the therapist takes on the 'not knowing position' to facilitate the process but that this requires openness, willingness to let go of prior experiences and the development of a strong knowledge base. Wheeler (1997) highlights self-awareness and possessing sufficient personal insight as being key parts of therapist competence. The importance of developing self-awareness is also linked to the literature review relating to therapist self disclosure. This highlights its strength, when used appropriately, in strengthening the therapeutic alliance. This is significant as previous research as found that a strong therapeutic alliance is a key predictor for a positive outcome in psychotherapy (Roth and Fonagy, 2005). Consequently by learning more about myself I have been able to develop as a therapist. Alongside this greater personal insight has been the acquisition of new skills and building a solid theoretical knowledge base from which to interact with clients.

As you will also see I have selected quotes for each of the sections within the portfolio, beginning with the quote by Rudolf Steiner. This quote in particular relates strongly to the experience of the only child and the balance that they attempt to achieve between knowing the internal and external world. On a personal level, it relates to the depth of reflection I have been encouraged to engage in through training and it certainly has heightened my interest in the world of experiences around me. Throughout my life I have spent a considerable amount of time reading all sorts of books (no choice, no siblings!). However it can still surprise me how much the words of someone else can speak to me and crystallise my experiences, even though we might be separated by centuries of history or different cultures. Further quotes, relate to the research process itself, and to the wider therapeutic endeavour.

Within this preface I hope to have presented the significance of the reflexive journey I have undertaken and set the scene for what follows.

Section B – Research



Abstract.

Research into the world of the only child has been dominated by the existence of the enduring stereotype of the spoilt and lonely child. This has resulted in a wide range of studies that vary in opinion and have tended to polarise the experience from a negative and damaging one, moving to a more positive and advantageous one. A literature review highlighted the dominance of quantitative methods, used to make comparisons between the personality and behaviour of only children and those with siblings. The majority of this research showed that there was very little difference between the two groups. The impetus for this current study was that very few other studies had utilised a qualitative approach to gain a greater understanding of the only child experience without making comparisons to the sibling experience. In addition to this, it was seen to have a wider relevance to the counselling psychology community, since research had demonstrated that therapists were not immune to making assumptions about only children. Principally that they are considered to be more likely to have problems due to their birth order status. In order to explore further these experiences, with the intention of developing new understandings, a study was designed using Constructivist Grounded Theory. In total, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult only children between the ages of twenty-six and sixty-four years old. Through the constant comparative method, two core categories were developed, Aloneness and Encountering Others; these were then integrated to construct a Model of Only Child Relatedness. This model has then been used to consider how the experience may impact on the therapeutic relationship.

Chapter One - Review of Literature.

Overview.

Within this chapter I intend to set the scene for my research regarding only children. For the purpose of this study, I have used the term only child/children to refer to individuals who do not have biological siblings and who did not have any other children living in their childhood home. Firstly the origins and pervasiveness of the only child stereotype will be considered and the implications of this on only children and their parents. I will then move on to discuss existing literature. As I eventually made the decision to use Grounded Theory Methodology (see Chapter Two), I felt it would also be useful to state here, that there are disagreements relating to when a review of the literature should take place. This will be expanded on within Chapter Two but it is perhaps necessary to say that the literature that I read before starting data collection was used to identify sensitising concepts. Further areas of relevant research were identified during the analysis process and served to refine categories and will be discussed in Chapter Six.

1.1. The Stereotype.

Only children have been routinely described as dysfunctional from the beginning of the last century. Fenton (1928) quoted psychologist and educationalist G. Stanley Hall as saying that, "being an only- child is a disease in itself [...] because of the undue attention he demands and usually receives, we commonly find the only-child jealous, selfish, egotistical, dependent, aggressive, domineering, or quarrelsome" (p. 547). Bohannon too in the late 1890's pronounced that only children were unhealthy, nervous, below average scholastically, socially immature, selfish and over-indulged (Stein, 1995). The list of adjectives used to describe the only child is quite exhaustive and includes the following: "spoiled," "self-centred," "maladjusted," "selfish," "immature," "perfectionistic," "unfriendly," and "rigid" (Day, 1991; Feiring & Lewis, 1984; Gee, 1992; Leder, 1991; Nachman & Thompson, 1997; Nyman 1995; Sifford, 1989). Thompson (1974) depicts only children as being "generally maladjusted, self-centred and self-willed, attention-

seeking and dependent on others, temperamental and anxious, generally unhappy and unlikeable, and yet somewhat more autonomous than a child with two siblings" (pp. 95-96). Many of these characteristics would form part of a persistent stereotype of only children, which is still readily referred to over a century later. Therefore, it is with this stereotype, that I feel I have an appropriate place to begin. I would propose that due to the strength of this stereotype, anyone that reads this piece of research would have already accessed their assumptions about the only child. Perhaps it is one or all of these different characteristics that come to mind; spoilt, lonely, socially disadvantaged, high achiever, selfish.

Stereotypes are partial, biased and inadequate and can prevent the observer from gaining a real perception of how someone really is, (Lippmann, 1922 cited in Wetherell 1996). According to Synder and Uranowitz (1978), people are more likely to remember information about a person that is consistent with their stereotype. In addition to this, the stereotypes can influence how individuals perceive a situation (Duncan, 1976). Later research into stereotyping goes beyond a social cognition perspective, to see stereotyping as serving a social and political purpose. A powerful example of this would be the stereotyping of African races as inferior in order to justify the slave trade.

1.2. Possible Explanations for the Stereotype.

It has been suggested, that from the start, the label of '<u>only</u>' child carries negative connotations, in that it is generally used to indicate a lack of something. However, Laybourn (1994) includes in her work the French translation of only child, 'enfant unique' to refute this, as unique means both 'sole/only' and 'unrivalled/unparalleled'. However few people consider a one-child family to be ideal, with the main disadvantage being related to character traits, e.g.. self centeredness (Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). The stereotype of the only child extends across cultures as research in China has demonstrated (Chen, 1986).

Another explanation for the negative view of only children is offered by referring to our basic survival instincts. In order for a species not to become extinct, it is necessary for them to keep reproducing and therefore not be left open to attack. Therefore having only one offspring is a risky proposition and the human race would eventually become extinct if everyone had only one child. This would

highlight the importance of maintaining the negative stereotype in order to keep the numbers of children up and thus form a stable population.

These ideas could be supported by looking at our social history. When we were a farming culture before mechanisation, a larger family was an advantage, as it provided more labour to work on the land. This became less important as we moved to industrialisation. The need for an increased population continued into the late 19th Century and early 20th Century as a larger population was linked to increased economic growth and ultimately a nation's increased political power. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's there was an increase in the number of only children, which caused some countries such as the USSR, Germany and Italy, to start actively promoting larger families. An increased population was seen to provide economic, political and military strength. The fall of France in the Second World War, has been attributed to a decline in its population by some historians (Laybourn, 1994). This led to government calls for larger families to revitalise the country after the war, which was encouraged by wage supplements and cash benefits. Towards the 1950's in the U.K. birth rates were dropping again and a royal commission was set up in 1949 to advise on how to reverse the trend. This argued for better childcare provision, investment in state education and cash handouts for parents of larger families (Brockes, 2006). It can easily be seen that stressing any positives of having an only child, would not be advantageous for Society as a whole. Since the 'baby boom' of the 1950's and 1960's, birth rates are now in decline across Europe. In the UK 1 in 5 women reach the end of their fertile life with no children, compared to 1 in 10 in the 1940's. (ESRC).

1.3. Implications of the Stereotype.

In reference to individual psychology, Laybourn (1994) notes the occurrence of generalising behaviour in relation to the only child experience. This appears in the form of linking any difficulties experienced throughout life to the lack of siblings. In contrast, she suggests that when we look at the sibling experience, we are more likely to particularise, meaning that difficulties are put down to parental mishandling not linked to sibling status.

According to Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner in the 1970's, once a person begins to identify themselves as part of a particular group

(e.g. only children), their sense of self-esteem then becomes linked to the fortunes of that group (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Consequently, if only children internalise the predominantly negative stereotypes about their 'group', then this is likely to have negative effects on their self-esteem and self-concept (Mancillas, 2006). Some researchers have identified the pressure placed on parents to have more than one child, as due to the strength of the idea that not providing siblings will damage their child in some way (Falbo and Polit, 1986; Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989). This could result in unnecessary tension within a household and even put children at greater risk of abuse and pathological development (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989). Research has also found that parents of one child have been stereotyped as being less socially acceptable, more self-centred, less friendly and good natured than those that had more then one child (Polit, 1978). Parents have also commented on the tightrope they are required to walk between healthy attention and overindulgence and that they are also frequently met with the criticism that they are selfish for only having one child (Hawke & Knox, 1978). More recent figures from the U.S. stated that only 3% of American adults think that one child is the ideal family size, even though there is an upward trend in the number of single-child families (2004). Baskett (1985) asked adults to state their beliefs about a child based on their sibling status. The findings show that more positive ratings were given to oldest children than youngest or only children. It is suggested that these opinions might actually affect the child's development, causing them to self fulfil. Mancillas (2006) also noted that stereotypical thinking about only children exists across different populations and cultures. Due to its widespread nature, research psychologist Thompson suggests that it has become a "cultural truism" – rarely questioned or challenged (Blake, 1981, p. 43).

1.4. Birth Order Research.

Much birth order research argues that the ordinal position of a child and the specific experiences related to this family position, determine a child's behaviour and personality as an adult. Early research tended to either exclude only children entirely or include them in the categories of first-born or last-born children (Polit & Falbo, 1987). However, as time progressed, more interest developed into this group which held no specific ordinal position within the family. Falbo (1977)

states that whereas the presence of siblings was described as resulting in the development of both positive and negative characteristics, it was argued that being the only child in a family had only negative consequences on development (Falbo, 1977)

It was in the 1930's that Alfred Adler formally developed his theory of Individual Psychology and birth order effects. In this he proposed that birth order was a significant factor in personality development and later interpersonal relationships. In regard to particular birth order characteristics, he said of "only children" and significantly older first borns, that they are likely to be spoiled due to parental overindulgence and 'pampering'. In addition to this, Adler hypothesized that only children in particular, would remain frozen at a developmental age where they thought the world revolved around them, due to the lack of 'dethronement' by a second birth (Eishens, 1998; Warner & Baumer, 2003).

Sulloway (2007) suggests that the only child represents a 'controlled experiment' due to the lack of sibling effects. He places them as in an intermediate position between first and later borns on most aspects of personality, but that they resemble first borns particularly in their conscientiousness and high academic achievement. Due then to this 'non' position, they are able to occupy a variety of niches.

The interest in possible birth order effects has played a significant role in sustaining the negative stereotype since the beginning of the last century (Stewart, 2004). There is some evidence that first borns score higher on intelligence measures but other effects are unclear. Ernst and Angst (1983) conducted a review of published research and concluded that birth order does not appear to have strong influence in moulding personality. Also in one of the largest studies conducted on the effect of birth order on the 'big five' personality traits, data from a national sample of 9,664 subjects found no association between birth order and scores on the NEO PI-R personality test (Jefferson, Herbst, & McCrae, 1998). However findings are variable due to different research designs and longitudinal changes and it is unlikely that a definitive answer will be given as to their significance, but it is equally unlikely that interest in birth order will diminish, due to its widely accepted status in society (Herrera, Zajonc, Wieczorkowska & Cichomiski, 2003).

There have been several studies that have focused on people's perception of birth order positions. The first of these in 1983 by Baskett, gave college students

a list of pre-selected adjectives and asked them to rate each birth order position. Only children were rated most academic, spoiled and least likeable; interestingly, this study was repeated by Musun-Miller (1993) using parent participants with the same results. What was equally important with this latter study was that parents continued to hold a negative view of a hypothetical only child, even when they had rated their own only child more positively. This would imply that due to the persistence of negative beliefs they exist even among parents of only children (Mancillas, 2006). The findings of a more recent study by Herrera et al. (2003) was consistent with the earlier examples; college students yet again viewing the only child as the most disagreeable birth order position. A further study by Nyman (1995) demonstrated how only children ranked their own birth order position in the same way that others viewed it – negatively. He asked 139 undergraduate and graduate students to list three adjectives, which described each birth order position and to then rate these as having positive or negative connotations. The familiar characteristics of 'lonely', 'selfish' and 'spoiled' were present, but alongside these were more positive descriptors of 'independence', 'sociableness' and 'responsibility'. There is also research suggesting that mental health clinicians hold similar beliefs and assumptions regarding the negative impact of being an only child (Stewart, 2004). This all has implications for children and parents who may internalise this pervasive negativity affecting self concept and parenting decisions.

1.5. Siblings Research.

According to the research, siblings can make different types of contribution to development within the family structure, both direct and indirect (Brody, 2004). If we firstly consider the view of 'siblings as resources', this posits that older siblings adopt a teaching and care-giving role. This process of teaching encourages them to take on other people's perspectives and balance their self-concerns with the needs of others' (Maynard, 2002; Zukow-Goldring, 1995). The Confluence Model (Zajonc & Markus, 1975) puts forward the view that as the number of children in a family increases, the intellectual environment decreases. Though this may then support the view that being an only child is advantageous due to the undivided adult attention they receive, they add a further component, that acting as a tutor increases the older sibling's intellectual ability (Zajonc &

Sulloway, 2007). Therefore only children as well as last borns are considered to be at a disadvantage as they "do not [have the opportunity to] serve as intellectual resources to their siblings…" (Zajonc & Markus, 1975 pp. 82-83). Overall, the research findings on the intellectual ability of only children are varied, showing both lower level scores to those achieved by first borns (Zajonc & Sulloway, 2007) and higher level scores (Falbo & Poston, 1993).

However there does need to be a balance, where the care-giving demands are too great, the school performance of older siblings can be compromised (Marshall et al., 1997). In homes where there is a high level of conflict, having sibling support has been shown to act as a buffer to stress, though there was no similar association found in low conflict homes (Caya and Liem, 1998, Jenkins, 1992). Siblings also make indirect contributions to development, such as where younger children's language development is facilitated by observing older siblings interactions with parents and also motor development in the way of modelling behaviours such as walking (Berger & Nuzzo, 2008). Additionally, the parents experience with an older child can influence their parenting of younger children. In a longitudinal study Brody, Kim, Murry, and Brown (2003) found that a mother's self-esteem increased with an older child who was academically and socially competent, with this having a positive effect on their parenting strategies for younger children, leading to higher levels of self-control and lower levels of behavioural problems. This would therefore suggest that the opposite would be true, that negative characteristics of an older child would affect the parent's psychological well-being, causing greater levels of tension and leading to less positive parenting of the younger child (Brody, 2004). Siblings have also been shown to be part of the socialisation process, in that they provide a safer testing ground for relationships. Mueller and Vandell (1995) discuss research pertaining to children without older siblings initiating significantly less interactions with peers, instead there was greater teacher directed behaviour and solitary play than peers with older siblings. This would be quite a natural finding; it does not say that children without siblings are unable to interact with peers, just that they do it to a lesser extent.

Undoubtedly siblings do play a significant role in a child's development, however does this mean that having a sibling is inherently better then not having one? Having a sibling does provide certain unique opportunities for learning within

the home, but development is still influenced most by the parent-child and parent-parent relationship. This is supported by research that found that if the mother-child relationship was a very close one, then the first child could develop a hostile relationship with their new sibling; on the other hand if the relationship was confrontational, they then tended to be especially friendly to the new arrival (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982 cited in Durkin, 1995). Additionally, if we place greater weight on the resource dilution model (Blake, 1981; Downey, 2001), this states that parental resources such as time, finances, and energy are finite. Therefore, as the number of children in a family increases, the resources received by any one child decreases. This model would therefore suggest that being an only child is advantageous, as they are the sole recipients of parental resources. Overall then, if we consider the research as a whole, it would suggest that the sibling relationship can provide both a positive and negative impact on development.

1.6. Quantitative Research

Academic Ability and Personality.

The question, 'are they different?' is what has driven much of the published research relating to only children and this appears to be in response to the negative view of the only child presented in early psychological research. The bulk of research conducted since the 1970's has been U.S. based and involved a key researcher, Dr Toni Falbo, an educational psychologist at the University of Texas. She has conducted various studies alone and working collaboratively, as well as several quantitative reviews of only child studies in order to gain a larger picture on the development of only children (Falbo, 1984; Falbo, 1978; Falbo and Cooper, 1980). In 1986, along with Denis Polit, she conducted a review of five hundred only child studies, using meta-analyses, examining a range of social and personality attributes (Falbo and Polit, 1986). Their analysis showed that the only significant difference between only children and those with siblings was a higher score on achievement, motivation and self-esteem. A further review in 1988 of 74 studies, found that only children scored higher in all types of ability test, with a particular advantage on verbal ability tests (Polit & Falbo, 1988). Studies of achievement have shown that only children perform equally to first-borns and significantly better

than children from larger families, possible reasons for this being parental expectations, greater financial resources and the uninterrupted relationship with parents (Polit & Falbo, 1988; Falbo, 1983). These similarities in performance are supported by further cross-cultural research from the Netherlands (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989) and Korea (Doh and Falbo, 1999).

Social Relationships.

In relation to the social skills of only children, Falbo (1979) found that only children did report having fewer friends and belonging to fewer clubs than those with siblings. However when this was explored further, it appeared that this difference was due to the only child forming a different type of social network, as they reported having a comparable amount of close friends and leadership roles in the clubs that they did attend (1979). In other more recent studies of pre-school and elementary level children, no differences were observed in social behaviour or social competence, measured by number and quality of close friendships (Zheng & Colombo, 1989; Kitzmann, Cohen & Lockwood, 2002). Riggio (1999) found similar results with adult only children where no difference was found in terms of social skills or social competence as measured with the Social Skill Inventory.

Ann Laybourn, in her book `The Only Child: Myths and Realities` (1994), cites a 1977 study by Hawke and Knox, who interviewed 50 married only children about what they felt were the effects of not having siblings on their marital relationships (Hawke and Knox, 1977). Although the majority said that there had been no effect, just over a third said that they had experienced problems when it came to compromising, expecting too much attention, or were torn between parents and spouse. However as a control group was not used, these problems may be present in all marital relationships to a greater or lesser degree. This would be an example of the tendency to generalise, assigning all difficulties to not having a sibling. Other research relating to marriage, using much larger sample sizes, suggests that only children do marry later and are likely to have their first child later. They are less likely to have large families (Gee, 1991), but they are not more likely to have had a previous marriage than to those with siblings, once other factors have been controlled for, such as parent's educational and social backgrounds (Claudy, 1984).

Parental Relationships.

Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) investigated the well being of only children and found that within families where the father was unemployed, female only children reported less life satisfaction and lower self esteem then peers with siblings or male only children.

Many only children are also likely to have older parents and therefore the possibility that they will have to care for them at an earlier stage in life is more realistic. Contrasting views exist on how the only child copes with caring for sick or ageing parents. One view is that this is the only child's "greatest dread", having to take on sole responsibility as there are no siblings to share it with (Pitkeathley & Emerson, 1994). Roberts and Blanton (2001) also found that caring for elderly parents and being the sole survivor of a family were particular concerns. However other research suggests that at these times, sibling rivalry and resentment can lead to more arguments and greater distress (Lewis & Meredith, 1988; Levin, Sinclair & Gorbeck, 1989).

The One Child Policy in China.

In China the increase in only children began to raise concerns in the 1980's, as research found them to be more likely to have personality and social behavioural problems, leading them to become more egocentric (Guo, 2000). Chinese psychologists feared that the rise of the "little emperors", as they became to be known, would go against the collectivist values of Chinese society. In the late 1980's as the only child became the norm, parents encouraged their only children to participate in pre-schools and day care, which reflected a more collectivist attitude (Guo, 2000). Recent studies have now shown there to be little difference between only children and those with siblings. In the early 1990's, Falbo focused her research on China, investigating the implications for personality development of the one-child policy. Falbo's extensive research has shown similar results to studies conducted in the West. One 1993 study involved a sample of 1000 school children from four provinces in China and compared "only children" to those that were first born or later born. In three out of four provinces, "only children" scored higher on

verbal tests, but there were no significant effects on personality differences (Falbo and Poston, 1993). However, more recent research does suggest that only children experience parental overindulgence and a pressure to achieve academically, in order to live the life that was not available to their parents due to the constraints of the Cultural Revolution (Fong, 2006). This is causing wider problems as China is unable to provide the lifestyle that this generation of only children desire and there has been reported an increase in anxiety and depression; the leading cause of death for 20 to 35 year olds is now suicide (Clark, 2008). It is difficult to make too many comparisons between the experiences of only children in China, to those in the West, as there are undoubtedly effects that are particular to their culture and society.

Summary

As I have demonstrated, research has been fairly limited in its breadth of exploration. The impetus for much of the previously discussed research appears to be an attempt to rebuke negative constructions of 'only child' traits. Throughout this literature search, the identified focus of the bulk of studies has been on the personality attributes and social abilities of young only children and adolescents. This highlights a particular lack of research into the more developed personality traits of adult only children, how do they interact with others in work environments for example. In addition to this narrowed focus, researchers have also predominantly relied on the use of quantitative methodologies, which although very appropriate for some purposes (e.g. identifying academic abilities) allows only limited exploration of the overall experience of being an only child.

Sorensen (2008) offers an interesting critique of the research on only children and highlights the evidence of wider political motivations behind it. In China the increase in only children is part of a government policy to reduce the size of the population, therefore it would be beneficial to stress the lack of difference in relation to only children and those with siblings. In relation to the U.S., where the vast amount of only child data originates, she stresses the over positivising of the experience. The reason for this is the cultural context, the only child epitomises the American ideal, in that they are successful, independent and self sufficient, they are also popular and conform to social norms (Sorensen, 2008).

In relation to the question 'is there a difference?' there seems to be a division in opinion between the likes of Falbo and Laybourn on the one side and Sorensen and Pitkeighley and Emerson on the other.

1.7. Qualitative Research

As has been stated, there is very little qualitative research relating to only children. A researcher that has sought to remedy this is Bernice Sorenson, a UKCP registered psychotherapist. In her recently completed doctoral research, entitled 'Not special but different: The female adult only child experience', she has adopted qualitative methods to explore the world of the adult only child (Sorenson, 2005). Using a phenomenological heuristic method, she has sought to explore narrative accounts collected by several different means (e.g. unstructured interviews with female only children, adult only child workshops, interviews with therapists, the researcher's own experiences of being an only child). As Sorenson notes, much research has focused on making comparisons between only children and those with siblings, which feeds into the belief that a difference exists and creates 'us' and 'them' thinking (www.onlychild.org.uk). In her research she wanted to move away from these comparisons and explore the inter-subjective world of the only child. Her findings were that the vast majority of only children experience a sense of something missing in their life, that they do experience themselves as being different and that there is a strong feeling of separateness (2008).

I also include reference to an interestingly titled book by Pitkeathley and Emerson 'The Only Child: How to Survive Being One' (2005). The authors conducted interviews with sixty only children and use extracts from these interviews throughout the book. This book, from the start, presents the idea that being an only child is a struggle. In their introduction, the author's state that they are only children themselves and writing the book helped them in 'coming to terms' (2005, p.4) with the experience. The concept of survival is continued with the provision of a ten-point survival guide for only children and additional guidance for partners on how to live with them. They state that all interviewees had expressed strong negative feelings about the experience and although some did express happy experiences, the overarching theme was a sense of regret, which they illustrate with extracts "There hasn't been a day of my life when I haven't wished for a brother or

a sister" and "Of course it's a life sentence – it never gets better." What is unclear when considering this book, is what type of analysis was conducted; there are no details on any aspect of the research process, which makes it impossible to assess its trustworthiness. However there is the clear expression that there are differences in the only child experience and that there are only children that feel they are at a disadvantage by not having a sibling.

Another piece of research was conducted in the U.S. by Roberts and White-Blanton (2001) which used thematic analysis of twenty in-depth interviews with young adults that revealed four main themes:-

Having no sibling relationships - Most participants commented that they were not upset by the lack of siblings and they were pleased that they did not have to compete for resources or parental affection. On the whole they enjoyed time alone but if there was tension in the family they missed the support of siblings. Also some expressed a tendency to become self-isolating.

Closeness of the child and parents relationship – The majority were thankful for the close parental bond. Some did feel a pressure to succeed and felt that the undiluted attention of parents had affected their development, manifested itself in a desire to control situations and people. Others felt that they had not been given enough self-responsibility.

Being a 'small adult' – Being predominantly in adult company was associated with increased maturity. This could be experienced in a negative way in that they found it difficult to interact with their own peer group.

Ageing Parents - This arose as a main concern for all interviewees. Some regretted that they would never be an auntie or uncle and also felt the pressure to produce grandchildren.

Summary.

These are important pieces of research, as they move beyond making comparisons of academic abilities. The use of interviews allows a greater depth of

exploration of the experience. The work of Sorensen, and Pitkeighley and Emerson suggest that the only child experience is indeed different and that there are particular disadvantages in an only child's ability to relate to others due to not having siblings and the resulting concentration of the parental relationship. However they do not reiterate the view that being an only child is a 'disease' and something to be avoided at all costs. On another level however, do these findings demonstrate how deeply ingrained negative constructs are in our Society, when referring to what being an 'only child' means? The picture is not a clear one and there appears to be much variation in the findings, which would suggest that more research would be welcomed.

1.8. The Only Child in the Media.

In the last few years more and more articles are appearing in the media relating to only children and there is a common theme of loneliness and aloneness with titles such as "Only the Lonely" and "Sole Survivors" (Blinkhorn, 2005; Brockes, 2006; Patrick, 2006). Other articles have included first hand accounts by only children such as article in the Guardian newspaper (V, 2002) discussing relationship difficulties for only children. The author suggesting neither friendships nor intimate relationships are taken lightly by only children, and are therefore are 'under constant scrutiny for being 'real', love and relationships are constantly tested' (2002). This increased interest would support the statistical data that there is an increasing number of one child families in the U.K. There have been newspaper articles, radio programmes and also advice in parenting magazines about how to prevent your child from being 'lonely'. (Practical Parenting Oct 2006).
There is also an increasing amount of parenting texts targeted at parents of only children such as 'Parenting an Only Child: The Joys and Challenges of Raising Your One and Only' (Newman, 2001); 'The Seven Common Sins of Parenting an Only Child' (White, 2004); 'The Future of Your Only Child: How to Guide Your Child to a Happy and Successful Life' (Pickhardt, 2008). This increase is also interesting in that a similar rise has not occurred in relation to published research, with the majority of texts making reference to previous studies conducted in the 1980's and 1990's. If the titles of these articles and texts are considered, then they appear to still refer heavily to the negative only child stereotype.

To conclude if we consider the pervasiveness of existing stereotypes, previously limited and varied research literature and the greater focus on the only child within the media, then further exploration of the only child experience would be beneficial. The aim is therefore to move the discussion from whether it is good or bad to focusing on the experience. The next chapter will focus on the development of the research question and methodology.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

Overview.

Within this section I intend to present the initial research questions and to outline the chosen methodology. I intend to consider qualitative methods and their relevance to psychology and counselling psychology in particular. The issues around providing 'quality' in qualitative research will also be explored. I will then move on to discuss Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) and its epistemological underpinnings at greater depth, as this was the methodology adopted for this piece of research.

2.1. Development of the Research Question.

By embarking on the journey to become a counselling psychologist, it has been necessary to engage in a continuing process of self reflection. This has led me to become interested in what makes me who I am, as both person and therapist; through personal therapy I have become more aware of how my only child status impacts on different parts of my life and particularly how I relate to those around me. It is my personal interest into how I perceive myself and how I relate to the world around me, that is the impetus for this research, along with informal dialogues with other individuals, both only and non-only children, from adolescence to adulthood. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) discuss the need for a researcher to have a particular connection to a chosen research area, which can sustain them through what can be an arduous process. Consequently an interest in systematically exploring the experiences of other adult only children developed. After conducting a brief review of the existing literature for the purpose of the research proposal, it was evident that only children and particularly the adult only child, were a somewhat neglected group in research terms. The bulk of the research stems from the United States and it contains a predominance of quantitative studies of children's individual intellectual and social development (Falbo &Polit, 1986) this has most commonly entailed comparative studies with children who have siblings. Alongside this, the literature highlights the existence of a strong only child stereotype, which may or may not effect how the only child perceives itself.

Interestingly in the US, there has been a push for developing a more positive construction of the only child, with an emphasis placed on advantages. In other parts of the world, the only child continues to be constructed as selfish, spoilt and lonely, it's general status being considered disadvantageous. What is clear though, is a significant increase in general interest about the only child experience, particularly highlighted by the increase in media coverage. The work of Sorensen in the UK, has used a qualitative methodology in order to enrich our understanding of the female only child experience (2005) and has then, more recently been extended to develop an only child matrix of experience, that demonstrates the intertwined nature of the social and psychological aspects of growing up an only child (2008). I intended to move on from this point and extend our knowledge further, by conducting a systematic analysis of the perceived experiences of only children. The aim of this was to develop a model that was grounded in the data (only child narratives), which offered a conceptualisation of how only children construct their relationships with the world around them. The broad research question which acted as a starting point, but would become further developed as a result of the research process itself and my own reflections (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was "How do adult only children make sense of the world around them?".

2.2. Qualitative Methodology.

Within Psychology there is an ongoing debate between the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Scientific, quantitative methods remain well established within the discipline of psychology. Positivism forms the epistemological underpinning of quantitative methodology and holds that there is a single, knowable external reality and that through hypothetico-deductive method, it can be observed and quantified. However, during the 1960's and 1970's, a period of crisis (Spears, 1997) arose around the role of interpretation, meaning and the nature of psychology being a 'human science'. As Parker (1993) points out, psychology is a complicated subject due to its subject matter, namely, human individuals. Researchers are part of what they are studying, whether they choose to recognise this or not. Consequently, they are not unbiased observers, detached from the phenomena they are studying as in other scientific disciplines. Additionally,

there is the circular nature of knowledge, the source of theories being everyday accounts and experiences, these theories are then used in peoples everyday accounts of themselves and their lives. The 'crisis' highlighted several problematic issues with regard to experiments, such as ecological validity, demand characteristics and important ethical considerations; these are problems that in practice are virtually impossible to overcome. It was from this 'crisis' that a call for a more qualitative methodology could be heard. Perhaps the inevitable outcome of the 'crisis' for some was to turn in the direction of language. Psychologists looked to their colleagues in sociology and anthropology, where attention was turning to semiotics and ethnomethodology, with an emphasis placed on researchers entering the world of their participants. This was an idea that was somewhat antithetical to the traditional view in psychology, where there was a boundary placed between the expert who observed and the subject. Sampson (1991) argued that the adoption of an ethnomethodological approach would lead to the 'democratisation of psychology'; in that a dialogic relationship would develop between the 'researcher' and 'researched'. In Sampson's words:

> "…we not only learn about 'them', but a great deal about 'us' as well."

Other researchers have taken this argument further. Fine (1992) talks of 'working the hyphen' in order to engage with power relations endemic to the 'researcher' and 'researched' relationship. By this she proposes that the 'self' and 'other' relationship, is impossible to disentangle, and therefore it is necessary to:

> "…probe how we [the researcher] are in relation with the contexts we study…"

Qualitative analysts do not seek to make universal assumptions and do not believe in a fixed external reality; rather they place the importance on understanding how individuals operate within a wider social context. Here, the inclusion of context relates to the overall meaningfulness of human experience deriving from what social and linguistic conventions occur in specific contexts. The approach enables the researcher to look at how people make sense of their own actions and how they interpret these 'actions and experiences' (Parker, 1994), and rather then

develop universal truths, strive to build meaningful 'local knowledges' (McLeod, 2003).

As Willig (2001) highlights, researchers can use qualitative methodologies in varying ways, depending on their epistemological stance, however, a 'shared concern' is that of meaning. The focus is generally on the 'how' and 'what', rather then the 'why' and 'whether', the aim not being hypothesis testing but generation and exploration (Finlay, 2006). In order to achieve this purpose a different set of 'data' is required and is in the form of words, rather then numbers; interviews, newspaper articles and literary texts are most commonly used. Interviews used to collect qualitative data can vary from the use of a structured interview schedule, to a more open format and they allow a more flexible approach, offering a deeper exploration of experience under observation. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the subjective experience of the interviewee in relation to the research area. It is an interactive process where meanings can be clarified during the interview by both party's, allowing the researcher and interviewee to create a shared understanding.

2.3. Qualitative Methodology and Counselling Psychology.

The adoption of qualitative methods within Counselling Psychology has been quite slow; though there is now a greater recognition of their usefulness. The advantages of qualitative methods are that they are highly consistent with the values of Counselling Psychology, particularly acknowledging the importance of understanding the subjective world of the client, their individual experiences, feelings and meanings (Strawbridge & Wolfe, 2003). This would suggest that knowledge generated by these means would consequently be perceived as more credible and relevant to practitioners. They would also find using the methods akin to the counselling process, in that empathy, genuineness and acceptance is required to develop good relationships with informants and the gathering of rich data (McLeod, 2003). This strong link with counselling psychology is particularly emphasised by a special issue of the Journal of Counseling Psychology, that aimed to promote the use of qualitative and mixed method approaches. There was a call for greater flexibility of methods, in order to counter the risk of bifurcation, which would prevent useful dialogue between the qualitative/quantitative camps

(McMullen as cited in Havercamp, Morrow & Ponterotto, 2005). Pluralism of methods could occur in two ways, firstly by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same study. Secondly, by combining and adapting different qualitative techniques in response to the particular field of inquiry (McLeod, 1996). Human experience is not fixed and there is an unending amount of variation possible, by adopting a more flexible attitude to research, we can then 'respect the reflexive nature of the human subject' (Blumer as cited in Reicher, 2000). In relation to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) put forward the notion of researchers as 'bricoleurs' (jack of all trades), in that they bring together a variety of tools, techniques and materials or develop new ones in order to construct their bricolage (a pieced together solution). This emphasises the creativity that qualitative methods offer researchers in trying to understand the meanings behind the experiences and problems that clients present with.

Many have suggested that embracing qualitative methodology will move knowledge and understanding forward within the discipline. However, Ponterotto (2005) expresses his concern, that there is evidence of a lack of understanding relating to the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative methodology. He warns that this could lead to a 'post positivising' of methods. Examples of this, would be the inclusion of literature-driven interview questions or the use of apriori categories for analysis purposes. In relation to the publication of qualitative studies, they have often been judged using the criteria of validity and reliability attributed to quantitative methodology (Reicher, 2000; Smith, 2003). An additional publishing issue, is the difficulty for researchers in deciding how to present the richness of a qualitative study, where there is limited space available to present the voice of the participants. Lastly, it is also important to recognise that the umbrella of qualitative methodology is a large one and it encompasses a range of methods and varying epistemologies that highlights the need for the researcher to be clear and transparent about what stance they take.

2.4. Grounded Theory Methodology

GTM is widely used in qualitative research and has been called the 'market leader' (McLeod, 2001), with research in the 1990's showing that two out of three published qualitative studies utilised this method (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter

as cited in Charmaz and Bryant, 2007). However, as Dey (2004) stresses, there is not one single, unified GTM, in reality there are different interpretations. It can therefore be described as a neutral analytical process, which fits well within either positivist or constructivist paradigms (Urqhart & Fernandez, 2006).

The approach was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's in response to the dominance of quantitative methods. At this time, qualitative methods were often considered to be unscientific, due to their unsystematic nature and subjectivity. Consequently they were often seen as no more than a preliminary stage of quantitative research and not given recognition in there own right. Glaser and Strauss developed a systematic approach that had at its core a focus on new theory development, which would be grounded in the data. It offered a means to systematically collect data that could be interpreted through a clearly delineated process, providing verification and validation. Above all, the developed theory would be useful in advancing knowledge and be applicable to practice (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theory would evolve during the actual research process by means of the researchers' simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis. An enabling feature of this was theoretical sampling, which is the "purposeful selection of a sample according to the developing categories and emerging theory" (Goulding, 1998, p.66). The researcher must therefore remain open to possible changes in direction and should continue this process until theoretical saturation is reached; where "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories" (Chamaz, 2006 p.113). However, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, in reality this will often be heavily influenced by outside factors, such as funding or course deadlines. Therefore it is perhaps more appropriate to see saturation as a 'goal rather then a reality' (Willig, 2001).

The other fundamental feature of GTM, which is used in conjunction with theoretical sampling is the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This involves comparing like for like, to look for emerging patterns and themes, exploring the similarities and differences within and between your data and guiding future data collection. Therefore data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, an important part of the methodology, as it means emerging concepts drive sampling and these are tested for 'fit' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). While also keeping the researcher in touch with the original data and minimizing the effects of

apriori understandings (Rennie, 2000). The overall aim of this process is to facilitate the identification of theoretical concepts, therefore moving the analysis from mere description to abstraction, by defining the properties of each category (Charmaz, 2006). Developed categories and subcategories are compared, to identify similarities and differences (Willig, 2001). A specific technique described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is 'flip flop' and involves looking for opposites and extremes to explicate categories. The process of constant comparison, therefore serves to strengthen conceptualisations and increase the credibility of the final theory.

Another element of GTM is the use of memo writing throughout the research process, without them, Glaser (1978) considers the researcher not to be using GTM. There use will be considered further in section 3.5, but simply put, they are an ideas bank, containing the researchers thoughts about codes, categories and the relationships between them. Importantly they encourage the researcher to begin analysing their data and codes at the earliest stages of the research process (Charmaz, 2006). They are also used for different purposes, but generally grow in complexity and density as the research progresses, leading to greater abstraction and conceptualisation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

After the publication of their seminal text, Glaser and Strauss went their separate ways, and in so doing took GTM into two separate directions. This split was marked by Strauss' publication of 'Basics of Qualitative Research' (1990) with Juliet Corbin, in which the emphasis was placed on a structure of highly complex techniques for coding, i.e. axial coding and further procedures for the comparison of data i.e. conditional matrices. According to Glaser this has moved GTM away from its original focus on emergence and can result in forcing the data rather then letting the data tell the story. Charmaz on the other hand suggests that usage of these techniques and in particular axial coding is down to the individual researcher, and that they should be seen as flexible guidelines rather then a pre-set structure to follow.

2.5. Grounded Theory Methodology and Counselling Psychology.

The term Grounded Theory is used to refer to both theory that is clearly grounded in research data and also to the procedures developed to generate these

theories (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). In order to increase the clarity of this distinction I have used the term Grounded Theory Methodology (G.T.M.). As a method, it is well regarded and has been widely used with counselling and psychotherapy research (Charmaz, 2008). A reason for this is that it can be seen as a way to address the gap that often exists between academic research and clinical practice. This gap can result in academic ignorance about the reality of clinical practice and cause the development of literature that is difficult to apply in the real world. Fassinger (2005) wrote that it is a "methodological exemplar of the scientist-practitioner model" (p. 17) as at its core, it seeks to link theory to practice through a structured analytical process. Glaser and Strauss's aim for the approach, was that it would encourage the development of useful theories (1967). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, its value "lies in its ability to generate theory but also to ground that theory in data" (p. 8); it is also contextual and process driven which fits well with furthering evidence based practice. Charmaz (2008) highlights its promise as it has provided a trustworthy approach, with working practices that both discipline and stimulate the theoretical imagination.

2.6. Epistemological Underpinnings.

A key criticism of the approach has centred on its varying epistemological underpinnings. Although Glaser and Strauss did not focus on the epistemology of their method in their original writings, it is evident that it is based on an ontologically realist position. This focuses on the existence of an observable external reality, which is waiting to be discovered. This has led to suggestions that it is fundamentally flawed, due to its underlying positivism and naïve inductivism (the collecting of observations, making generalisations from these and in turn forming a theory (Chalmers, 1999). GTM has been shown to involve both inductivism and deductivism, even if this was not accepted by Glaser and Strauss. Inductivism is evident through the development of categories from the initial data. Whereas theoretical sampling is an example of deductive reasoning, as new samples are identified to check the emergent categories (Dey, 2004). However, more recently, researchers have linked GTM with abductive reasoning (Rennie, 2000; Dey, 2004). This type of reasoning was identified by C.S. Pierce, an American pragmatist. Abductive reasoning offers 'plausible interpretations rather then logical

conclusions' (Dey, 2004) and is a means of generating new knowledge. In relation to G.T.M, Rennie (2000) states, "any category is an abduction awaiting validation [or not] as the analysis proceeds".

As time has moved on there is now a very different philosophical and epistemological landscape and this is evident by the varied used of GTM. Where there was once one method, which divided into two, there are now many other approaches. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) have used the idea of a methodological 'spiral' to reflect this, with traditional GTM in the middle and other approaches moving around it, depending on the ontological and epistemological stance taken by the researcher. The use of the objectivist – constructivist distinction is suggested by Charmaz and Bryant (2007) as a means to "distinguish between the *essences* and the historical *accidents* of GTM" (2007, p.50). This is in reference to the original language used by Glaser and Strauss, which was aimed to make quite a revolutionary approach more palatable to the dominant quantitative paradigm (Coyne, 1997).

Rennie (2000) has added another dimension, describing GTM as 'methodological hermeneutics', as it involves the application of method to the interpretation of text. He suggests this allows for a greater recognition of the double hermeneutic and that researchers are engaged with the interpretation of a phenomena that has always already been pre-interpreted (Rennie 2000, 2006). He puts forward the task of the researcher, as defining meaningful categories that develop into a 'grounded understanding of the phenomenon' (Rennie, 2006, p.490).

2.7. Constructivist Grounded Theory.

It was previously stated that GTM can be used in varying ways depending on the epistemological stance of the researcher, it is therefore important that I clarify my own position. Firstly my ontological standpoint is that of the relativist, I believe in the existence of multiple realities rather then one true reality. Secondly, I believe that there is also a co-creation of meaning, that the knower and the known interact and shape each other, which would be considered to be epistemologically subjectivist/interpretivist. As a consequence of this, in conducting this research, I have adopted the constructivist approach espoused by Charmaz (2006). Constructivism assumes that there are multiple constructed realties, which hold

equal validity, thus challenging the assumption of objectivity and the existence of one observable external reality. Therefore constructivist grounded theory holds that due to the existence of multiple realities, the theoretical analyses and resulting 'grounded theory', are 'interpretive renderings of a reality, not objective reportings of it" (Charmaz, 2008, p.51). Consequently the context, the participants experience and perceptions and the social environment influence what is constructed as 'reality' (Ponterotto 2005). Rennie (1996) commented on the realist language used by Glaser and Strauss particularly around 'discovery' and the implication that "the phenomenon exists 'out there', awaiting discovery, like a fossil in a stratum" (p. 322). Charmaz (2006) rejects this language of discovery and stresses the process of construction.

In terms of the axiology or the role of researcher values, the researcher believes that they cannot separate out their values, biases or their Erlebnis (lived experiences) from the research process. They seek to recognise and acknowledge their subjectivity and consequently do not present it is as a problem that has to be controlled as in quantitative methods (Parker, 1994). This approach strongly acknowledges the interactive relationship between researcher and participants, thus demonstrating the co-construction of meaning evident in the research process. The researcher should therefore be seen as 'co-producer', immersed in the data and allowing for the participants narrative to be embedded in the research process (Mills et al 2006).

Multiple meanings and interpretations are possible within a constructivist approach, as it is not the aim of the researcher to find a single 'truth'. Therefore, it is also acknowledged that different researchers can arrive at different interpretations that will have equal validity, if shown to be grounded in the data, which in turn makes the process of seeking outside verification of results redundant (Ponterotto, 2005). Consequently the rigor of the overall method is enhanced by reflexivity and transparency within the process and the provision of thick description (Ponterotto, 2005; Hall and Callery, 2001).

2.8. Appropriateness.

The argument for the use of qualitative methods for this research topic has already been made, but to be more specific, a decision was made to use G.T.M. It

was felt that this method would be most appropriate for the area of inquiry, as it has been identified as particularly useful for gaining a better understanding of areas about which little is known and also for providing fresh perspectives on more familiar situations (Stern, 1995; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This would relate well to the adult only child experience, as there was also evidence of a predominant negative only child stereotype; the pervasive nature of these assumptions was demonstrated by their existence across cultures and also within therapist research (Stewart, 1994). The inductive nature of qualitative methods are therefore appropriate for exploring an area, where there is a desire to create new understandings, away from 'taken-for-granteds' that exist in the wider social context (Ashworth, 2003; Cresswell, 1994).

In addition to this, G.T.M. is used to create a model or theory, that provides a description of a social process, which related well to the aim of this study, to explore the way only children relate to the world around them.
Additionally, it provided a set of flexible guidelines for the systematic analysis of data, with the aim of developing a theory, that represented the meaning, that participants (adult only children) gave to their experiences.
A final consideration was that I am myself an only child, therefore more so than in any other piece of research: I am what I intended to study. As I believed that the researcher could not divorce their self from the research process, it would be necessary for me to embrace my subjectivity. Embracing subjectivity entails developing awareness of preconceptions and considering how culture and context influences participants and data, which roots the data in a relational encounter (Luca, 2008). It would therefore, be necessary for me to reflect on my own experiences and assumptions and be aware of how these may impact on the research process and findings. By following the guidelines that Charmaz puts forward and working in a reflexive way, using the constant comparative method, I would be able to be transparent about my position within the research.

2.9. Reflexive Statement.

As has been previously mentioned, a key component of qualitative methodology is the reflexivity of the researcher and it is argued that it is through

this that the rigor of GTM can be increased (Hall and Callery, 2001). Robson (2002) describes reflexivity as:

"an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process."

Though reflexivity has gained increased value, the way that researchers purport to be 'reflexive', can be seen to hold underlying objectivist thinking. What is the purpose of the 'tools' of reflexivity that researchers state they use, such as member checking and triangulation? If it is to gain some agreed interpretation, then surely this is placing some belief in a particular 'truth' existing (Gough, 2003). Additionally, in line with postmodern thinking, I believe that my interviewees and myself, as the researcher, exist in multiple horizons of meanings. As I do not take the stance of an objective observer, I am present in this research from its conception and have agency. This is also evident from the way that I write, using the first person singular; this acknowledges my role as the "author of a co-construction of experience and meaning" Mills et al 2006, p.7). I would argue, along with Rennie, that a level of self-awareness is even more important, as I am myself an only child and therefore an 'insider', with my own meanings of the experience. However, this can enhance the process, as it has helped to establish a rapport with participants (Fassinger, 2005) and reflecting on my own experiences has stimulated thinking around categories and concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Mruck and Mey (2007) also suggest, that personal experiences of a research area, can lead to insights and perspectives that may be less accessible to those unfamiliar with the phenomenon. However they highlight the usefulness of the supervisory relationship in encouraging discussion of personal experiences and for determining the extent that these are precluding new insights (2007).

In order to engage in the necessary process of,"personal interrogation" (Mills et al., 2006, p.10) the use of a self-reflective journal is suggested; this offers a space to record and therefore highlight thoughts, assumptions and biases throughout the process (Morrow 2005). This personal record has been useful in allowing further reflection of my own experiences, emerging assumptions and in particular how they interact with those of my participants. Although it is undoubtedly impossible to have full awareness of all our presuppositions and

biases, by making those that we can available to ourselves and the reader, their influence can be evaluated and to a certain extent contained (Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro, 1988; Morrow, 2005). Articulating the researchers personal views of the phenomenon also serves to enhance the credibility of the research (Chiovitti and Piran, 2003). The use of a research team is another strategy for enhancing reflexivity (Hill et al., 2005) but this would not have been appropriate for this piece of research. However, I have been holding regular discussions with fellow researchers in order to promote my thinking about the process of G.T.M itself. A colleague has also looked at my coding and the developed categories, in order to see if they made sense to her and to identify any biases that I may have had in identifying categories. In their original work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that a grounded theory is relative to the perspective of the person producing it and that different researchers will emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon; these will be considered equally valid if grounded in the data. Engaging in member checking, that is checking with participants for accuracy and adequacy of interpretations, is suggested by some researchers as a means to increase validity (Morrow, 2005). However, I made the decision not follow this particular procedure, as my intention is not to identify one particular truth, but to provide my interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon. Rennie (2000, 2007) suggests that member checking/data triangulation, results in less coherence, as it leads to the collation of more accounts that are themselves open to interpretation. Instead I relied on the constant comparative method and theoretical sampling, to check the authenticity or representivness of categories; if they were solely by beliefs or 'hunches', then they would have no meaning for participants and be discarded (Cutcliffe, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Another reflective tool, as previously stated, is memo writing. They represent a place where I can be transparent and state my thoughts and ideas; these memos were created throughout the research process. Above all, memos acknowledge the interplay between my ideas and experience with those of my interviewees and allow creativity in exploring theoretical links (Charmaz, 2006).

As I am an only child, I already possess knowledge about the experience I am exploring. In addition to this, a prior literature review was required as part of the doctoral programme. I do not feel however ,that this prior knowledge has hampered the research process, but has highlighted areas to explore and in

particular my own biases in relation to the only child experience. I have included below an extract from my journal, which not only reflects my subjective experience of being an only child, but also makes explicit to the reader, my beliefs of the only child experience being a positive one. This was an important part of my reflective journey, in that I needed to be aware of my position and biases from the very start of the research process.

Fig. 2.9.1. Journal Extract.

Being an only child has never been an issue for me. My childhood memories are happy ones, never once do I remember being bored, this is shared by my mother stating that she can never remember me complaining of boredom. Yes I spent a fair amount of time alone; my mother did not work and would spend time drawing, painting, baking with me. I loved reading and still do, but would play board games on my own if necessary. I did go to a local play group but I have no recollections of this. I spent time alone with my father as well, out in the woods, down on the beach and invariably came back from these outing covered in mud and muck. It was father that I would play fight with, be thrown around by or rolled round the garden in my favourite toy the humble cardboard box! I was considered to be a quiet well behaved child. I have never gone without but I have also been taught the value of money. Never have I been disappointed at birthdays or Christmas time, but then again I never (to this day) know what I will receive. It is all about the unexpected in our household. Likewise when I went on my first holiday alone with friends at 17 I saved up all the money to go but in the end my parents gave me the money as a reward. I have a very close relationship to my parents but a security that has allowed me to live away form home since university (only returning home for holidays) and to spend fifteen months away travelling the other side of the world. Never have I felt lonely or homesick.

Have I ever wished for sibling? Well no I haven't. I am an only child due to fertility problems not by lifestyle choice. My parents tried for eight years, through many miscarriages and a still born, before they got me. Perhaps this is

why I feel so cherished and longed for but this has never felt smothering. I have been encouraged to make my own decisions in life and live by them.
I did not have any cousins that were my age when I was growing up the closest in age being eight years older. This did mean however that I spent a great deal of time with my grandparents seeing them once a week till I went to university. Although I did not have siblings I did have close friends growing up and I do have two people that I do consider to be the closest thing to siblings that I can have. These were the children of our neighbours and our gardens backed on to each other with a gate in between. I have known Bec since I was three years old and she was around the age of 1. Her younger brother Matthew I can remember being born, he followed a few years later. It has been since adulthood that I have realised how big a part they play in my life and when we get together we have such a wealth of memories . Christmas mornings I would go through to their house after I had opened presents. I have helped Bec with school projects; she came to university to visit me. They are my siblings but with less bickering as we can always go home to our separate houses! They have been there at the most difficult times in my life as I have in theirs.

I think that another interesting part of my growing up has been that in my close group of five or six friends at senior school, two others were in fact only children. I wonder now what influence this had on me? Not having a sibling was therefore not a strange thing and I can't remember it ever really being discussed it was just as normal as having one.
I would say that I am definitely not an extrovert but I have never been prevented from doing anything. I quite often prefer to go and do things on my own, that may be travelling to New Zealand or going to the theatre. This is not to say that I wouldn't like to have someone to share these things with and I was in a long term relationship and engaged but this did not work out. I do certainly like a sense of control and feel the most uncomfortable if things are not in my control. I am aware that I perhaps rely on myself too much and can be reluctant to ask for help from others.

My own thoughts and reflections were also noted after each interview and during the transcription process. Further along in the process, as categories began to be develop, I included my own thoughts on memos, keeping them distinct by bracketing them or using italics. The purpose of recording these, was so that they could be scrutinised and reviewed during the research process. The researcher is therefore engaged in a process of 'turning back' on previous life experience and prior reading, in order to appraise their effects (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007). Thus enabling the early identification of biases in my interpretations and hopefully avoiding what Morrow (2005) has termed, "lopsided interpretations" (p. 255) which do not represent participant's views equitably. Additionally, I was able to make comparisons between my experiences and those of my participants and identify similarities and differences, which stimulated further analysis.

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Method.

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to further detail the stages of the research process itself, including ethical considerations. It will conclude by looking at specific criteria for judging the quality of the research.

3.1. The Process.

For Charmaz (2000) the methods of grounded theory should be used with greater flexibility, as a set of heuristic principles which allow creativity in theory development, not as a "recipe for the production of an analytic straitjacket" (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003, p.160). The stages of the process are perhaps most simply described by Pidgeon and Henwood (1996) as shown below in Fig 3.1.1. However, it is important to stress the iterative nature of GTM and that it involves what has been termed a 'flip flop' process, moving between the researchers conceptualisations and the data (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996). Consequently, although Fig. 3.1.1. presents four stages, data collection and analysis happen simultaneously. Early analyses prompt new data collection, which in turn prompt further analyses of earlier codes and categories (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996; Charmaz 2006).

Fig. 3.1.1.

Data Preparation

Semi structured interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher, creating a permanent record to work with.

Initial Analysis

Initial line by line open coding of the transcripts: "the process of breaking down" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.61) data in order to examine and compare. Initial codes are then grouped into theoretical categories; the analysis therefore occurs from the ground up (Charmaz, 2006).

Core Analysis

Refining of categories through the constant comparative method and further data collection. Memo writing helping to move from description to conceptualisation. Use of diagramming to examine relationships between categories.

Outcomes

Key concepts are refined in memos and then presented in a narrative.

3.2. Ethics.

As required by the Department of Psychology at City University, an ethical release form was completed prior to commencement of the study. In addition, the research project adheres to the British Psychological Society's ethical principles for conducting research with human participants (BPS, 1993). As participants were volunteers from the general public, there was no further ethical permission required.

- Confidentiality – This was the first thing that was stressed to interested participants, with this being particularly important due to my having prior connections with some of the participants. Participants were clearly informed that I would not be talking about their interview to any mutual acquaintances and that all data would be treated anonymously, with pseudonyms being used.

- Consent – Interested participants were given details regarding the focus of the research and what their involvement would entail prior to interviewing. This would allow them time to make an informed decision whether to take part or not. Written permission was then obtained from the participants to audiotape at the beginning of the interview (see appendix three). Participants were also made aware that they could choose to opt out at any stage of the research process and by doing so their data would not be used. Additionally on the consent form they were informed that tapes would be erased after completion of the research. I was the only one with access to

the original recordings and these were kept in a secure cabinet, identified only with interview numbers.

- Avoidance of Harm – Interview procedures have the potential to leave participants quite distressed, as they have often explored highly personal and emotive material. Therefore, at the end of the interview (once the tape recorder was turned off) I allowed time for a debriefing period, giving participants the opportunity to express how they felt and explore any problematic issues that may have arisen.

- Interview Environment. – Interviews were arranged at times and settings suitable for the interviewee. These were either done in the home of the interviewee or at the university. They were also informed prior to the home interview that they might wish to insure that we had a level of privacy within the family home, due to the subject matter.

3.3. Sampling and Participants – The 'good' informant.

Firstly, it is clear that sampling in qualitative research is not intended to be representative of the population, with the aim of generating generalised results, rather it is to be representative of the individual experience (Morse, 2007). Within qualitative research there has often been the criticism that the sampling procedure has not been clearly described and that this then has a profound effect on the perceived quality and trustworthiness of the research, making it difficult to fully interpret and replicate (Coyne, 1997). A particular criticism levelled at GTM is that key parts of the process are not being adhered to i.e. theoretical sampling (Becker, 1993). This lack of clarity, Becker (1993) suggests, can lead to 'method slurring', causing confusion around the terms 'purposeful' and 'theoretical' sampling. Within the original work of Glaser and Strauss, theoretical sampling is a key part of the verification process and is required to produce a theory.. Glaser has continued to stress this link and states clearly that 'data collection is controlled by the emerging theory' throughout the constant comparative analysis (1978, 1992). Strauss and Corbin broke theoretical sampling down into three stages, open, relational and

variational, and discriminate, however this has been seen as making the process over complicated and prescriptive by Glaser. Overall, within qualitative research, Coyne (1997) suggests that all sampling is purposeful, as it is dictated by the requirements of the study. However, theoretical sampling is a particular part of GTM, linking with the process of constant comparison and theoretical saturation.

This leads me to describe my own sampling procedure. Initially I engaged in purposeful sampling in order to contact individuals that would be 'good informants'. Morse (1991) suggests that these are individuals that are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of study (in this case adult only children), are able to reflect and be articulate, with the willingness and time to be interviewed. For this purpose I created a flyer (see appendix one), which outlines the research, confidentiality and contact details. I had also decided at this stage that as previous studies had focused on female only respondents (Sorensen, 2008), I would include both females and males to allow a greater range of experience. There were several options open to me in regard to accessing this particular group. I was aware of a UK website set up for adult only children. They also organised yearly conferences and I had attended the first of these in 2006. However I did have some reservations in contacting this group as a first choice, as these were only children that had already given an amount of thought to their experiences. Also the website provides networking opportunities for only children, which would suggest that they held a particular view, that the experience was quite an isolative one. Therefore, my intention was to talk to only children that had perhaps considered the experience less or only on an individual level. I was already aware of several only children who had expressed an interest in participating; these were through work colleagues and neighbours of my parents. So this was the sample that I chose to start with, proving to be the most convenient to access. I was aware that some of these participants might feel obliged to take part in the research, so they were approached early on and then given time to think before giving me a response.

The key influencing factors of my sampling were that they would cover a range of possible experiences for the only child, and so be able to add depth to category development. Therefore I would need to identify participants across the age range, as this would allow for further exploration of any perceived effects of wider societal changes. I had also decided to include fellow trainees on the course as they were easily accessible and had shown an interest in participating in the study

since its inception. Below in Table 3.3.1 is a breakdown of the participants' demographics in regard to gender and age.

Table 3.3.1: Participant Demographics

	Gender	**Age**
Int. 1	Male	31
Int. 2	Male	50
Int. 3	Female	35
Int. 4	Female	64
Int. 5	Male	42
Int. 6	Male	26
Int. 7	Male	36
Int.8	Male	60

After completing the first two interviews I transcribed them and began the coding process. After this point my sampling was directed to a greater extent by the need to expand developing categories and therefore I would now be engaging in theoretical sampling. I began with an initial interview schedule (see appendix three) that had broad areas that I wished to cover. This then evolved through the analytic process, with questions being added in order to develop and define my emerging categories; the semi-structured process also allowed participants to direct the interview focus into areas that I may have not considered previously.

There was no set number of participants, as the sample size would be directed by the developing theory and the saturation of categories. However it was initially suggested to me that around eight to 10 participants would be a minimum amount. The sample size on completion of the study was nine participants, seven male and two female, with ages ranging from twenty six to sixty-four years old. I was also working to a fixed deadline, so this played a part in how many interviews were conducted; in fact several other children had shown an interest in taking part but I was unable to interview them.

3.4. The Interview.

The necessary data for the research was gathered with the use of in-depth semi structured interviews of approximately one hour in length (see appendix two for preliminary interview schedule), ranging from fifty minutes to ninety minutes. The differences in time can be attributed to the time made available by my participants. After conducting some initial reading around the area of only children and also reflecting on my own experiences, I was able to identify 'sensitizing concepts' that provided ideas necessary to develop initial interview questions. Blumer (1954) stated that 'sensitizing concepts' merely suggest to the user "directions along which to look" (p.7); and should therefore only be used as "departure points" for the research process (Charmaz, 2003 p.259).

The interview has been described as a 'directed conversation', where questions are asked to elicit extended responses and is above all an opportunity to explore and not interrogate (Charmaz, 2006, Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). A schedule of open ended questions was created in order to elicit participant's interpretation of their experience (Charmaz, 2006). This was used as a guideline and therefore not followed in a strict linear fashion with each participant. Morrow (2005) suggests that too large a number of questions will limit the depth of responses given by participants. By using a flexible schedule "unanticipated statements and stories can emerge" (Charmaz, 2006, p.26), thus limiting the effects of prior assumptions or biases that I, as the researcher, may hold which may have surfaced in a closed questioning format. Additionally, they would also evolve in keeping with grounded theory methodology, to include more focused questions in response to the ongoing analysis of data and emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006).

There is a strong emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge and the acknowledgement that interviews are not 'neutral, context free tools' (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006). The interactive nature of the interviews was demonstrated by my willingness to share personal experiences and answer any questions put to me as openly as possible. Being able to develop a good rapport with participants is central to gaining rich data and consequently a deeper level of meaning (Ponterotto, 2005). The feedback I received after the interviews was positive, with participants expressing the view that they were provided with the space to talk about their experiences, often for the first time in their life.

The interviews were audio taped with the prior written consent of the participant (see appendix four) and transcribed verbatim as soon after the interview as possible. This process was conducted entirely by myself, allowing an increased level of familiarity and immersion in the data at this earliest stage of the analytic process. Rennie (2000) supports the view that more can be gained when a single researcher collects and analyses data. That a sense of the text develops before transcription begins and that through the subsequent act of transcribing the researcher gains meaning of the text as a whole.

3.5. Memo Writing.

As has been previously stated, memo writing is an essential process within GTM and is a constant across the different interpretations. On a basic level they allow the researcher to, 'capture their thoughts' and keep a permanent record (Charmaz 2006), but they also involve noting patterns in the data and detailing processes. In addition to this it has been stressed that researchers include examples of the raw data, in order to keep the 'participants voice and meaning present' (Mills et al. 2006, p.7). By providing this data, the researcher remains grounded and this allows the reader to participate in the 'unfolding analytical arguments' (Lempert, 2007, p256; Rennie et al. 1988). It is also the methodological link (Lempert, 2007) necessary to begin moving from 'working with data to conceptualising' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and is therefore key to developing theory. Memos are the place where the researcher's voice is most present and as such are representative of the internal dialogue (Lempert, 2007); this allows the preservation of early ideas that may be premature (Rennie, 1988). Charmaz (2006) stresses the importance of writing any thoughts down on paper; she goes on to say that grammatical correctness is not needed in the initial stages. Consequently memos will come in many different forms, including both narrative and visual representations. An example of this is clustering, which allows you to gain greater understanding of your material in a non-linear and flexible format (Charmaz, 2006). Through this creative process, individual codes as well as relationships between codes and categories can be explored in a dynamic, visual format; the use of this within this study is further explained in 4.2 Memos and Diagrams. However, as the analysis

moves forward, memos are refined and play a key role in the final write up (Rennie, 1988).

3.6. Use of Literature – 'an open mind does not imply an empty head' (Charmaz, 2007, p.20)

As with much of GTM, the use of literature is another area of contention. In the original work of Glaser and Strauss, the researcher was urged to avoid conducting a literature review prior to data collection, as this would be going against the inductive nature of the method and its focus on emergence. Glaser (1992) continues to state that literature can 'contaminate, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher's effort to generate categories' (p.31). However, the researcher does not exist in a social vacuum; we are not an empty vessel. Some approaches (i.e. phenomenology) would ask the researcher to 'bracket' all prior assumptions, but this is based on the assumption that the researcher has a full awareness of them, which is questionable. Consequently, all our knowledge and prior experiences impact on how we conduct data collection and analysis (Cutcliffe, 2000).

There is also a distinction made between novice and experienced researchers in terms of the amount of knowledge and familiarity they already possess in the research area. It has been suggested that experienced researchers may already be aware of gaps in knowledge and have a developed degree of theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2007; Cutcliffe, 2000). Consequently Strauss (1987) opinion was that some flexibility could be afforded to the experienced researcher who had more developed skills in conducting research, but none to the inexperienced. Strauss and Corbin (1998) warn against 'steeping' oneself in the literature, but go on to suggest that existing literature can act as a 'stepping off point' (p.51) at the start of a project and that a familiarity with relevant literature can 'enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances' (p.49). With regard to this doctoral research a literature review was a required element of the research proposal; similar requirements would exist in funded research. Therefore it was necessary to review available literature prior to data collection and analysis.

A concept that I have found useful, as a grounded theory novice, is that proposed by Urqhart (2007), that the literature review be seen as, 'an orientating process'. The researcher does not seek to take a position and holds in mind that it

will be the developed categories and theory that will determine the relevance of the literature. This need to orientate oneself is also supported by Lempert (2007), who states she uses literature to identify the 'parameters of the conversation' (p.254). She goes further to say that she includes ideas from existing literature within the memoing process in order to sensitise herself to patterns that may occur. Ultimately, Fassinger (2005) highlights the 'delicate balance' (p.158) that is struck between enough knowledge to focus data collection and avoiding immersion in existing literature, that could result in a study, 'circumscribed by preordained constructs' (p.158). Once the initial data analysis is complete, the researcher then begins to locate their work within the relevant literatures (Stern, 2007).

3.7. Quality Control.

As has already been suggested, along with the greater adoption of qualitative methods, there also comes a need for discussion around what makes a good piece of research. As Smith (2003) states, qualitative researchers recognise the importance of validity and reliability (criteria used to assess quantitative research), but qualitative methods require their own set of criteria in order to judge its 'trustworthiness'. He goes on to cite the work of Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999), and Yardley (2000) as being useful as they set down broad guidelines, irrespective of the theoretical orientation of the qualitative study.

Elliot, Fisher and Rennie (1999) developed a set of seven 'evolving' guidelines for the publication of qualitative research. Their intention was not to write a rigid set of rules, but broad guidelines that they felt would lead to greater recognition and acceptability, as well as encouraging greater self-reflectiveness within qualitative researchers. They hoped that this would lead to the further development of guidelines that would have a paradigm specific and acknowledged the concerns of some, that 'explicit codification' could lead to a 'dangerous methodolatry' (1999). This was a point picked up by Reicher (2000), who called for work to be 'judged as excellent in its own terms'.

Yardley (2000) again remained broad in her suggestions of three basic principles, 'sensitivity to context', 'commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence' and 'impact and importance'. In addition to these, Morrow (2005) suggests universal qualities such as, 'sufficiency of and immersion in data, attention

to subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data and issues related to interpretation and presentation'. Morrow, also acknowledges the relevance of paradigm specific standards for trustworthiness, highlighting the importance of the researcher making clear to the reader, their ontological and epistemological position.

In relation to GTM and its emergence from postpositivist assumptions about the nature of knowledge, Cresswell (1998) stated that careful implementation of the approach was enough to ensure rigor, due to the integral role of continual verification. Strauss and Corbin (1998) developed more technical features of data analysis in order to focus on theory building and thus enhance the rigor of the approach. To define more specific methods, Chiovitti and Piran (2003) use Beck's (1993) general criteria of credibility, auditability and fittingness, defining eight methods of research practice.

Credibility

1) Let participants guide the inquiry process.
2) Check the theoretical construction generated against participants' meanings of the phenomenon.
3) Use participants' actual words.
4) Articulate the researchers' personal views and insights about the phenomenon.

Auditability

5) Specify the criteria built into the researcher's thinking.
6) Specify how and why participants in the study were selected.

Fittingness

7) Delineate the scope of the research in terms of the sample, setting and the level of theory generated.
8) Describe how the literature relates to each category that emerges in the theory.

(Chiovitti and Piran, 2003, p.430)

Trustworthiness can therefore be judged by observing the closeness of fit between initial descriptions, categories and the developed model/theory. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to use quotes from participants and be transparent in descriptions of the analytic process.

If assuming a constructivist stance to GTM, as this study does, Hall and Callery (2001) stress the need to include reflexivity and relationality in order to enhance rigor, as they acknowledge the social construction of knowledge. These qualities are echoed by Morrow (2005), who suggests a focus on a) the extent to which participant meanings are deeply understood and b) the extent that there is a mutual construction of meaning and the explication of this. Above all Charmaz (2006) states that the resonance and usefulness of a Grounded Theory, is increased by a strong combination of credibility and originality. It is the consideration of how useful the theory is in people's everyday lives, its ability to spark further research and its contribution to our wider knowledge base that aims to close the gap between academic research and clinical practice.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis.

Overview.

Within this chapter I intend to outline my analysis process and will then present it in stages. As GTM does not follow a strict linear format, as previously stated, dividing the process into stages is only for descriptive purposes. Rather it involves different stages, operating in tandem, through the constant comparative method. It is therefore fluid and allows for constant interplay between data analysis, collection and the developing model.

4.1. Stage 1 – Initial Coding.

As has been previously described in Chapter 3, each taped interview was transcribed by myself as soon after the interview as possible. This involved an initial process of handwritten transcription before moving on to type this up on the computer. Through this process I was able to gain a high level of familiarity with the data before I even began the coding process. Once I had a printed copy of the transcript I would then start initial coding, the purpose being to start defining what the data was about (Charmaz 2006). The aim for the researcher during coding, is to remain open to different theoretical directions, keeping codes simple and short in order to convey the participants' understanding of their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). This was achieved by working through the transcripts line by line. This approach to coding allows the researcher to look at the data in new ways and also keep some distance from both their own and the interviewee's assumptions (Charmaz, 2003). The researcher is also not passive in this process and is actively choosing what is significant in the data in order to, "describe what we think is happening" (Charmaz, 2006, p.47).

As I worked my way systematically through the text, I noted down my codes in the margin of the transcript. Charmaz (2003) suggests the use of questions such as 'What's going on?' and 'What are people doing?' in order to help make analytic sense of the data and begin to identify the processes participants are engaged in. An example of this can be seen in figure 4.1.1, here Int.1 is talking about what it is like to live with his girlfriend. It is evident from the coding that

space and the desire to hold on to space began to emerge as useful concepts, these would be future leads to pursue. Another interesting element is the expectation that this participant has of others, that they are expected to be aware of the need for space. The different types of codes that are used at this stage are also evident. Some are descriptive; others are 'in vivo' codes. The latter are codes that are taken from the interviewee's individual discourse, such as, "a possessional thing"; these are useful as they preserve participants' meanings of their actions (Charmaz, 2006).

Fig.4.1.1. Extract from Interview 1.

Co-habiting different
Sharing of space "a big thing"
"a possessional thing"
wanting definition of space
Separating possessions

"claustrophobic"
Feelings change, phases
Needing own space
Trapping
Feeling irritated
Expectations of others

Living with someone else is completely different (laugh) the whole sharing space is a big thing, I can't, it's the hardest things for me. I can't, its not so much a poss…well it is a possessional thing as well about whose possessions go were and are they mixed with my stuff and things like that.

Do you have your books, your CD's…?

Yeah and I don't like them being mixed together (yeah). I find that very hard and sometimes just being in the same room with someone erm is just hard knowing their presence is there, its, it feels, like claustrophobic and erm I can go through phases where I'm okay and then suddenly I feel a bit like, oh I need to be on my own and there's just no where to go and I get really irritated knowing that there's someone else sitting there (laugh) and its like how can they not know I need to be on my own.

In order to prevent applying pre-existing categories, it is important to try and remain close to the data. Line by line coding is one part of this, but Charmaz (2006) also suggests the use of words that reflect action, in order to prevent possible conceptual leaps. Additionally, the use of gerunds is suggested by Glaser (1978), as a means to detect processes i.e. "needing" and "separating". The aim is to move fairly quickly through the data at this initial coding stage and to consider these codes as flexible some may develop into categories others will not find there way into the final theory. This is based on the idea that they have to earn their place in the theory.

While engaged in coding, I have also found it useful to keep a notebook at hand, in order to record any thoughts that might arise, thus not losing them but keeping a degree of separation from the data. They often just entail noting one word but might include questions that come to mind or the identification of possible links between codes, which would be considered further at a later stage. An example of something that I noted in relation to this extract, was the "needing" space, rather then saying "liking" space, this seemed quite significant. I noted it at this time in order to reflect on it in a memo. Out of this initial coding I was able to develop low level categories, which are classed as low level due their more descriptive treatment of the data (Willig, 2001). The eleven categories that I developed from Int.1 are presented in Fig. 4.1.2. It is also possible to see from this that categories in GTM are not mutually exclusive i.e. "cutting people off" appears in both Connection/Disconnection and Fear of Exposure. Therefore the data is not forced to fit a narrowly defined category. This is called open categorizing and is a means for the researcher to "preserve subtle nuances", in order to go on and development rich theory (Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro, 1988, p.143). During the process, categories will evolve and often collapse into each other as they become more abstract. This process was conducted for the first five interviews, after that point I engaged in theoretical sampling.

Fig. 4.1.2. Low Level Categories from Interview One.

Purpose of Siblings	Managing Emotions	Control	Own Space
-Reference point. -Observing siblings reactions. -To share experiences. -To bounce off.	-Risky to open up. -Putting self on the chopping board. -Can talk emotions. -Hard to measure level of what's going on. -Numbed affect. -Disconnection with emotions. -Hidden rage. -can misread people Avoiding conflict	Too much self control at early age. -Used to having control of things. -Difficult to share. -Greater certainty when on your own. -A possession thing. -Hidden rage -deal with own problems. -insular -quietness, invisibility good. -self contained -cut people off	-Sharing space difficult. -Phases of need to be alone. -Enjoying own company. - easily be on own. - Spiritual element -used to spending time alone. -"do my own thing" - Needing space
Connection/ Disconnection	**Self reliance**	**Fear of Exposure**	**Interacting with others.**
-Uncertain connectivity to others. -Easy to feel disconnected. -Never took part in groups. -If overwhelmed closes off. -insular -uses sense of humour -decompartmentalising -not needing others -empathic -observer -cutting people off	-Enjoying own company. -Do my own thing. -Making own sense of the world. -Omnipotence. -Thinking for self. -Dealing with own problems -encouraged to make own decisions as child -intuitive -not infallible -self contained -distorted thinking	-Risky to open up. -Putting self on the chopping board. - not getting what you need from others. -cutting people off. -cover up sensitivity.	-Being an observer. -Risky to open up. -Lack of attachments. -Needing attachment to trust. -Can be sociable. -Separating self and others. -hard -forcing self -'claustrophobic' -flooded in crowds -avoiding conflict
Loneliness	**Relationship with parents**	**Fantasy sibling**	
-dependent on age. - only parents to talk to - few friends - would have talked to siblings.	-too much freedom -grow up to quickly -too much control -encouraged to be own person.		

The categories that were developed from the first interview, were then used as 'sensitizing concepts' when I moved on to my analysis of Interview Two. They were kept in my mind and used to make comparisons, to identify similarities and differences between the accounts. Though at this stage, it was important to remain open to identifying new concepts and categories. In Fig.4.1.3 I include two extracts from my coding to demonstrate similarities in the concepts and also the differences.

Fig. 4.1.3- Extract from Interview 2.

if you get married or if you are in any form of a relationship how does that fit in when you still want that time on your own as well?

My own time now, well again its not a problem because its not a problem for me as I work shifts (yeah) I suppose that makes it much easier with L working erm I gotta, I suppose my way of looking at it is in probably five years time I am gonna be retired and L will be retired then will I get some time on my own? I don't know(laugh) I need a bit of time every now and again L knows that, coz I get a bit grumpy if I don't get my own space and time.

Own time not a problem
Shift working provides time alone
Change occurring during retirement

Need for time alone.
Others understanding need Consequences of not meeting need

Second Extract from Interview 2.

Yeah, I always felt I did, I was fortunate enough to have. I always had friends at school, never in short supply at school before we moved to Bridge Street I got a mate that lived next door, a cousin who lived across the road abut then I was only there for a few years, not that age group that your playing but yeah when we moved to Bridge Street, new development, loads of kids, played football, so mates, always plent, plenty of mates.

Friends close by

Family close proximity

Children playing outside together

In the first extract you can see similarities with Int.1 with a degree of importance being placed on space and the need for time alone. This occurs along with having expectations of others, that they have an awareness of this need. Additionally for this participant there are negative consequences to their mood when not having enough space, grumpiness. Space in a relationship therefore appeared to have similar meanings for these two participants and served to strengthen this as a category. In the second extract I identified something new that had not been present in Interview 1 and categorised this as Societal Changes (the memo for this can be seen in Fig. 4.1.4).

Fig.4.1.4.-Memo Extract

Memo-Societal Changes (interview 2) July 2007

Interviewee 2 was significantly older then 1 and an interesting element that came up was a noting of differences in society. Family living close together, which was more of the norm in the 50's and 60's, thus even if you did not have any siblings, it was likely that extended family would be close i.e. Cousins. Also children spent much greater time playing outside then, now computer games, consoles didn't exist. Did children have a greater degree of freedom to explore their neighbourhoods, therefore having greater interaction with their peer group? This could mean that being an only child was less of an isolated experience, with cousins and peers filling this role. This would be interesting to explore with other older participants. This I would presume would have implications for the growing number of only children in our Society.

This is interesting, as it places the individual participants experience in the wider societal context and suggests that wider social processes impacted on their understanding of growing up as an only child. This category would need further exploration by the process of theoretical sampling, therefore I would need to identify only child participants that fell into a similar age bracket in order to compare their meanings around societal differences.

Within Interview Two I went on to identify nine categories, as presented in Fig. 4.1.5. There were similarities with Interview One in five out of the nine categories. I have used slightly different category labels, 'relating to others' rather then 'interacting with others', as this was still in development and neither seemed to quite capture the concept at this time. I also included, 'self sufficiency' with 'self

reliance', as again at this stage I was not sure whether they were distinct concepts. This is part of the evolving nature of categories and this was still an early stage in their development.

Fig. 4.1.5. - Low level categories Interview Two.

Relating to others	**Space**	**Self reliance/ Self Sufficiency**	**Decision Making**	**Identity**
-Lots of friends as child -Avoiding conflict. -Observer -Peace keeper -Limit to sharing. -Preference not to share with others. -Central focal point, collaborative working style. - Few close friends	-Like own company. -Work situation provides space. -Need for time and space, change in mood if not. -Own interests. -Prize time alone -Resent people breaking into space	-Like own company -Can occupy self. -'own little world' -Frustration if things don't go own way. -Own memories of parents enough. -Preference not to share with others	-cautious. - multiple decisions difficult. -one thing at a time - weighing up options. - getting right in own mind.	-Laid back -Adaptable -Middle of the road -Tolerant -What happens, happens.
Societal Changes	**Loss of Father**	**Fantasy sibling**	**Managing Emotions**	
-Closer community. -Families in closer proximity. -Playing out in street. Greater freedom.	- loss of guidance. - has own memories.	Idealised image, but aware of reality of sibling relationships.	Tolerant Avoiding conflict Long fuse. Dealing with own problems.	

This process of coding was continued for the next two interviews that I conducted and the identification of similar concepts is shown in Fig.4.1.6 and Fig.4.1.7.

Fig.4.1.6. Low Level categories Interview Three.

Relating to others	**Challenging stereotypes**	**Reference point**	**Parental Expectations**
- "good mixer as I got older" - reluctance to go to school. - kindergarten "screamed the place down - playground "so rough", "petrified" - other children "bunch of mad things" - UNFAMILIAR. - preference for 1 to 1. -familiar mixing with adults, family parties etc	-"luckier then most" - "fortunate" - privileged - greater opportunities, greater resources. -experienced not getting what I wanted.	No one to empathise No ally	"wondrous child" pressure no one to share care of parents. -in the spotlight
Loss of Parents	**Non Only Families (perceived differences)**	**Space**	**Societal Changes**
No one to empathise - solitude, literal solitude. - "you feel really bereft and a loss and you feel like you feel quite vulnerable" -desire for a sibling. -Having own family comforting.	"grass is greener" "rose tinted glasses" -envy the busyness - no guarantee of good sibling relationship.	-space is important. - own things, own bedroom "own bit of seclusion up there" -"like own things to stay put" -"no sense of solitude"	-Closer community. -Families in closer proximity. -Playing out in street. Greater freedom.
Aloneness	**Connection**		
Loss of parents, desire for sibling then. FAMILIAR	-would like connection with sibling. -cousin an OC and "ally", can empathise.		

Fig. 4.1.7. Low level categories Interview 4

Interacting with others	**Fear of Exposure**	**Alone ness**	**Control**
-Socialising difficult. - " a late starter" - siblings are instant playmates. -Effortful - can feel "suffocated" in relationships Awkwardness in groups and social sits. - Unfamiliar "not used to having to take other people into consideration" -curiosity and fascination -playgroup "terrified", unfamiliar	- therapy exposing. - difficult to trust and share. - "keep people at arms length" - "private world"	-Not problematic. -Ability to occupy self. -Allows creativity. -"I enjoy and relish time on my own" -Seeking out time alone. -Can be alone (disconnect) in busy environments. - "switch off and go into self" -loss of both parents "feel like an orphan" - total responsibility good and bad. "you just do it"	-Not being constrained. -Freedom important. -Work setting allows independence. -Not used to being rushed by others -choose to seek company
Familiarity/ comfortableness	**Questioning Stereotypes.**	**Missing Out**	**Seeking a reference point.**
-With being alone. -Not a loner "can cope with being on your own" -OC friends. -OC boyfriend -working on own but with people	-spoilt but not financially. - parent concern "the only child thing", socialising	- negotiating and relating. - socialising as a child. - Siblings 'instant playmates'. - Had to develop listening skills. -Develop talking about emotions.	OC friends "like a mirror". Commonalities and parallel experiences.
Siblings	**Being in the spotlight**	**Parental relationship**	**Loss of Parents.**
-Conditional on it being a good relationship. -Friends as siblings, can choose.	- protectiveness. - undivided attention. - "under a microscope" -no escape	- protectiveness. - undivided attention - 'treated less babyish and more like an adult" - "under a microscope all the time" - no escape or dilution -equal footing - given choices to make	-feeling like an orphan. -sense of duty to care for parents.

In both interviews, I had asked questions relating to ageing parents and the loss of parents, whether this was something that they had given thought to or experienced. This had been mentioned in the literature as something that had quite an effect on the only child. Out of the participants stories, codes relating to, 'duty' and 'feeling like an orphan', 'literal solitude' were categorised under 'loss of parents. However,

this would be a category that I would not greatly expand at this time, due to the focus becoming, understanding the way the only child constructs how they relate to themselves and others.

4.2. Memos and Diagrams.

As discussed in 3.5. memos are an important part of the research process and are written from the onset of coding to give clarification and direction. GTM encourages a level of creativity when looking at the data. Memos are, "partial, preliminary and eminently correctable" (Charmaz, 2006, p.103). Therefore they should not be standardised and should allow the researcher to break down their categories and make comparisons to old and new data. As I previously noted, I began to write memos immediately after beginning the initial line-by-line coding. One early memo was written in relation to the, "need for space" and can be seen in Fig. 4.2.1.

Fig.4.2.1. Memo Extract – Needing space.

Memo – Needing Space, July 2007.

What is being said here? Space is important, when you begin to live with somebody else there has to be a sharing of space. On a practical level this is mentioned in relation to possessions, i.e. CD's.

This resonates with me, something that I had not considered before, I too have my CD's and books clearly separated from my partners and have even reorganised them when we have moved house and things have become intermingled. I don't like them to be mixed up, not used to it.

Is this linked with never experiencing this as a child, you will have had your own room with all the space you will need. A 'need' is something that has to be met, if not there is a degree of dissatisfaction. If 'like' was used this would be the same communication, it would be more of a preference.

But more is being said here, feeling 'claustrophobic", this would be an unpleasant feeling, creating a strong desire to escape the situation to find that much needed space, in order to not feel trapped. However this means that the other person is seen as the cause of this in some way, so there is a desire to remove yourself from them. But something else is being communicated as well, that there is an expectation that the other person will have an awareness of all this. They should know that they have this effect, that it is irritating.

Something to continue to be aware of in future interviews, is it just particular to this interviewee or something that exists for other only children.

This memo shows how I attempt to interrogate the data, I am exploring the 'need' for space, what meaning it has for the participant, what it is suggestive of. Memo writing is also an additional part of the reflexive process, in that I often include my personal views, as both researcher and only child. To make these transparent to the reader I use italics (as in this case) or a different colour if I am handwriting, which allows a degree of separation, but acknowledges that I am part of what I study. Along with memos I have found clustering a useful writing tool. I have discovered that the visual element is particularly useful for me and there are times when I have found it difficult to find the words in narrative form, but a drawing has been easier. This I have used from the earliest stages of coding, two handwritten clusters for Int.1 and Int.2 can be found in appendix four. These begin to show the linking of codes and the subsequent identification of processes. Initially these were conducted for each interview and all handwritten, but I then began to use the computer to draw clusters that compared codes and the developing low level categories across interviews (see appendix five). This links to an interesting point about, combining the use of the computer and handwriting memos. I have often found it easier to handwrite diagrams and memos, as this allows for greater freedom for annotation of the text. However, at other times, perhaps particularly because I have the ability to touch type, I have found free typing a way to access my thoughts. Consequently I have found it not only useful, but necessary to draw on a variety of approaches, along with the more recognised form of memo writing, in order to refine codes and categories.

An example of a later memo on the Time Alone category, which was developing as a core category at this stage, is shown in Fig. 4.2.2. Here I am moving away from mere description to conceptualising, by making various types of comparisons. For example, comparing the differing purposes of time alone, comparing different interviewees use of time alone, particularly in the case of self-reflection. I have also compared categories with other categories such as, Time Alone and Encountering Others, which were at this stage starting to stand out as core categories. The relationship between these two categories is presented as a balancing act and they cover much of what interviewees appear to be describing.

By making these comparisons I was able to start to develop a view of the process that was occurring. Again, I use italics to mark questions to myself, which aim to explicate the category further. At the bottom I include my thoughts about the impact on the therapeutic process and also note my experiences of therapy.

Fig. 4.2.2. - Memo Extract.

Time Alone – March 08.

Appears to be some sort of familiarity with being alone, its something of a fall back position. A greater feeling of being comfortable, either alone or with fewer people. A balance that is naturally found between spending time with others and time spent alone. This is identified to be a process that occurs on a day to day basis Int.5 talks of a 'silent scream' that builds up slowly and needs to be acknowledged. Therefore Time Alone and space is used as coping mechanism or a strategy. This relates to seeing Encountering Others as involving some sort of effort

self-reflection – this appears to occur a lot, all participants seeing themselves as quite thoughtful individuals, thinking a lot. This can come across as being quite cautious in decision making, thinking through the options – generally as previously noted in some degree of isolation. *[what is this about? Is it because of growing up in an adult world. Expectations? High achievers? Not wanting to fail, let people down, parents have 'all eggs in one basket'. You are in the spotlight as an only child, is there less room for mistakes, or is it that your only models are adults who think through things differently to a child?]*

In Int 1. time alone, self reflection seen to have some sort of spiritual element, an 'inward looking' process. Time alone allows calmness, quietness all necessary to be able to self reflect.

For Int.5 too high a degree of self-reflection leading to 'self criticism'. Questioning everything, no one to bounce thoughts off, question reliability similarly shared in Int 1, where this was described as distortion. No siblings = no reference point.
No one has shared your experiences, been part of your world at an equal level.

'loneliness' int.1, linked to not having someone to talk to about difficult events/parental arguments. Alone with it, no witness. No one to ask, what do you make of that? This then becomes an internal process, and can become an endless loop of thinking.

In therapy internal processes encouraged to become external. Can this seem like a threatening process? Unfamiliar, perhaps leading to holding back. On a personal level this is in the form of needing to process events/experiences myself first, very difficult and feels unsafe to do this in the moment, perhaps when more raw. Has therefore already gone

through a degree of filtration. Links to the ideas of Risk in sharing emotions with others in general.

These more developed memos are used for sorting and help to give a logic to the emerging theory.

4.3. Stage 2 – Focused Coding.

It is important to keep in mind that Initial Coding and Focused Coding are not two distinct stages that a researcher passes through. The purpose of Focused Coding is begin to, "synthesise and explain larger amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2003, p.97), by using the most frequently occurring or most significant codes. This is demonstrated in Fig 4.1.1, (p.59) were the stronger codes are underlined and these were then used as conceptual categories; they capture more succinctly what is happening in this paragraph. In order to make codes more focused and raise them up to conceptual categories, it is necessary to make comparisons across the interviews, going back and forth, checking codes and emerging conceptual categories against each other. I worked across the first two interviews comparing the developing categories and the similarities and differences can been seen within the two tables. Even though I had emerging categories, it was important not to begin to force data to fit into them. At this stage I was beginning to develop a greater number of conceptual categories, they are considered to be higher level categories by Willig (2001) as they move towards interpretation, rather then simply labelling, as was evident in the lower level categories. The comparisons made during this stage are also necessary for identifying gaps in the categories, and particularly in how the categories begin to fit together. This is important, as it is how the theory is developed.

It would be pertinent to say at this point, that I chose not to follow the axial coding stage, as set out by Strauss and Corbin, as I found it too prescriptive and instead adopted the more fluid and flexible coding suggested by Charmaz (2006). This involves relying on the constant comparative method, by comparing codes to categories, categories to codes, within and between interviews. This is more in keeping with the descriptions given by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

4.4. Stage 3 - Theoretical Sampling

This has already been described in Chapter 3, particularly how it differs from other forms of sampling and also how it is one of the core components of GTM. Once I had analysed the first four interviews, it was necessary to sample more participants in order to further develop conceptual categories (presented in earlier tables). The purpose is not to see how they generalise to the wider population, but to gather more data to refine the categories. This has already been noted as being important with regard to the category of Societal Changes, which led to me identifying other participants that were in a similar age bracket to Interviewee Two. I also used the categories to develop new interview questions or areas that where important to cover, in order to develop them more and thus further refine the categories. These involved asking about the "need for space" and levels of emotional sharing with others. As it has been previously stated, this is not a linear process and a great deal of time has been spent moving between different parts of the analysis, in order to keep refining codes and categories. Once I had developed a set of higher level categories, I went back to the data in order to see if there was a fit. The result of this process has been that I have identified two core categories.

4.5. Development of Core Categories and Sub-categories.

As previously described, it was through the theoretical sampling that the categories were developed. I have used colours to show the different codes for each category throughout the first four interviews. The table in Fig.4.5.1 shows how I merged categories to identify the two core categories. The first core category in blue, did not have a decisive label at this time. Throughout the stages of coding I had used different labels. It would be, Encountering Others that I would ultimately choose, as this went beyond the descriptive qualities of the previously used labels. By using the word, 'Encountering', I was attempting to capture a wider conceptual element of the category. To encounter is to meet unplanned, unexpectedly, briefly in a confrontation or to come up against someone or something (Oxford English Dictionary). Relating and interacting on the other hand, suggested more of a reciprocal relationship and did not capture the uncertainties, the effort and the tension that was evident in how the participants constructed the process of meeting

others. Similarly, when looking at the second core category, Aloneness, this began as a descriptive low level category of, Time Alone. Alone is defined as, 'being apart from others; solitude' or 'being without anyone or anything else' (Oxford English Dictionary). I think both of these again capture more of the different meaning of being alone for an only child evident in the participants' stories; the sense that this is with them, whether they are physically alone or not. The subcategories are the concepts that come together in explaining the experience at a process level and therefore cover both positive and negative aspects. This is again where the use of line-by-line coding is particularly useful in identifying the contrasts within interviews. If they were not coded at this level, the overall analysis of narrative might not have recognised the complexity in the experiences.

Fig. 4.5.1. – Developing Core Categories

Core Categories	**Relating to others OR Interacting with Others**	**Encountering Others**	**Aloneness**
Subcategories	Connection/Disconnection Missing Out Seeking a reference point/ normalising Siblings		Need for Space
	Control Managing Emotions		Becoming self reliant Decision Making
	Effortful		Self sufficiency
	Fear of Exposure		Familiarity/comfortableness
			Identity Being in the spotlight

The final part of the model was the grouping together of other factors that appear to have an impact on the overall process and these are presented in Fig.4.5.2. 'Societal Changes', as reflected on previously with the memo Fig. 4.1.4. (p.63) was identified to be one outside factor that impacted on the core category, 'Encountering Others'. The role of Stereotypes was already identified from the start of the research as being important and the analysis supported this. In all of the narratives, participants commented on the process of stereotyping and they particularly identified the

impact they perceived this to have on the parent of the only child and parenting decisions.

Fig. 4.5.2.

Impacting Factors
Societal Changes
Role of stereotypes
Parents Parental relationship

An example of this is the meaning they gave to being sent to playgroup, that this was in order to learn how to socialise, due to the lack of siblings in the home environment. (Int.3 and 4). This leads to the third factor in the group, the role of parents and the relationship that they have with their children and how this impacts on the two core categories.

The categories that I have presented in orange are all related to experiencing the loss of parents and suggest that this can be felt as an isolating experience for only children. However I considered this to be separate from the process that the two core categories were conceptualising and so chose to leave it out of this model, but it will be referred to in Chapter Six.

4.6. Saturation

Although this is an important part of the method, it should also be considered something of an ideal (Willig, 2001). Dey (1999) suggests replacing it with the term, 'theoretical sufficiency', as saturation has "connotations of completion" (p.117) and this I feel is a better description of what I have achieved. It has been necessary for me to work within a strict time frame due to the nature of my course and it is this that realistically dictated the end point, not reaching saturation. Within these constraints I have worked to refine the categories through further data collection. I am able to say that nothing new was being added to category development during the last two interviews, leading to judge that sufficient data had been collected.

Chapter 5 – Theoretical Model and Category Formation.

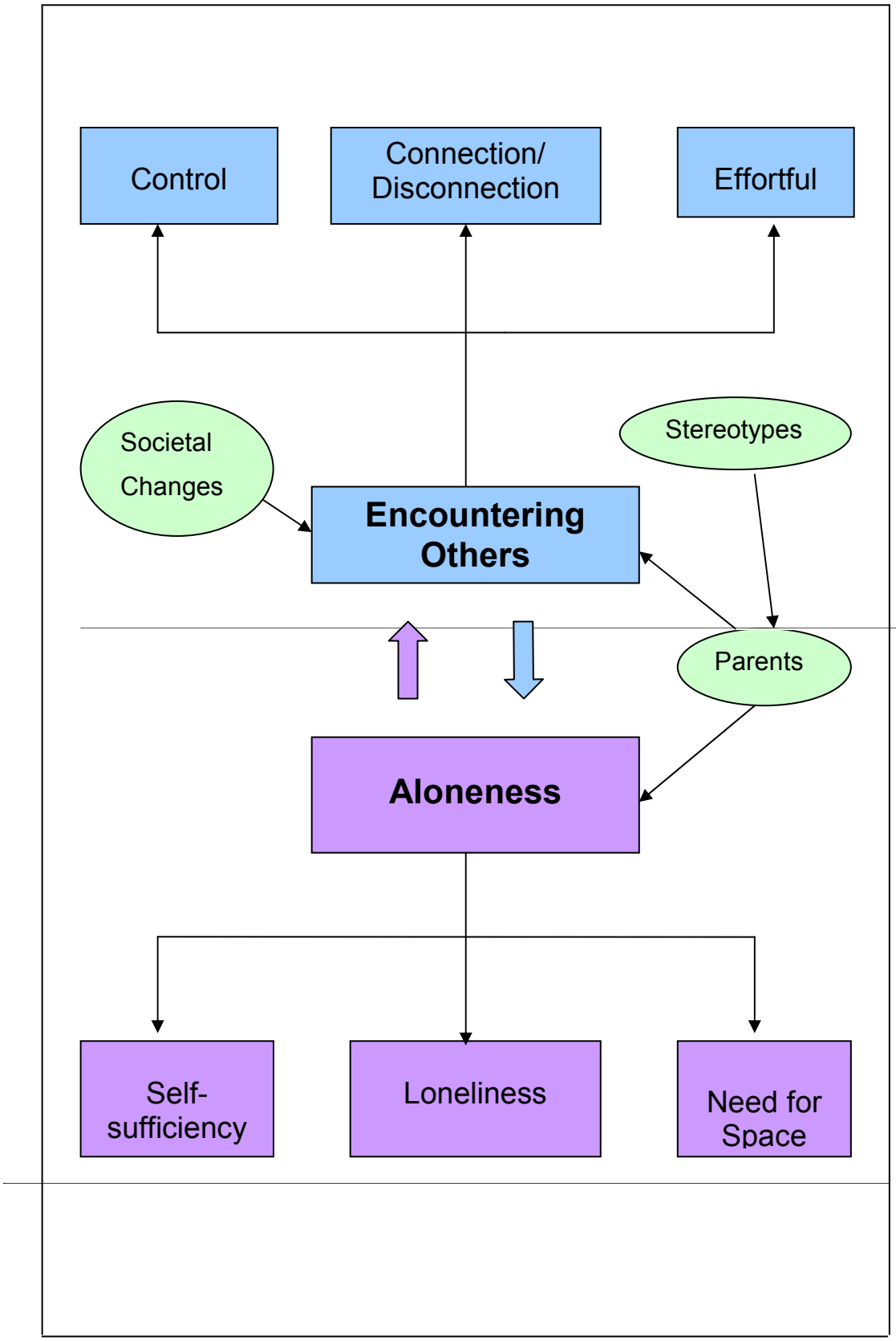
Overview.

In this chapter I will present a model (Fig. 5.1.1.) which aims to increase our understanding of the relational processes only children engage in between themselves and others. The model is based around two core categories, Aloneness and Encountering Others. These are closely related to each other, as are the other major categories and this relationship will be considered in a separate section (5.4). The model also includes details of three factors that were referred to in the narratives, in respect of their perceived impact on experience, Stereotypes, Parents and Societal Changes. It is important to say at this point that there is not one single reality for the only children and so this model is simply an attempt to present a more cohesive picture of how the only child constructs their experiences in relating to the world around them.

5.1. The Model.

The model depicts how the only child constructs their relationships with the world around them. Being alone is presented as being familiar and something that is needed in order to think clearly and reflect on the world. On the other hand, being with others is experienced as something that requires greater effort and is a more complicated process. There is an apparent need for the only child to create a sense of balance between these two experiences in order to feel settled. The dominant negative stereotypes appear easily accessible to only children, but they were more commonly offered as a justification for certain parental decisions. Although only children were clearly aware of the stereotypes, they did not appear to be particularly affected by them in a direct manner, within the narratives they were often referred to in the way of discounting them. The remaining factor that is perceived to impact on the process and particularly on how the only child encounters others are the wider changes in society and family proximity that have occurred since the 1950's and 1960's. Each of these elements will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

Fig. 5.1.1 Model of Only Child Relatedness.



5.2. Category Development – Aloneness

Aloneness is one of the two core categories as can be seen in Fig. 5.1.1. It has been a strong concept from the early stages of analysis as demonstrated in Chapter Four. The label should be seen as neutral, as the category is made up of both positive and negative elements. This attempts to capture the variation in experiences both within and between participants' individual accounts.

Being alone is constructed as a familiar position for the only child, spending a large proportion of their time alone or within the company of adults, as there is no direct experience of knowing what it is like to have a sibling. This position of Aloneness would appear to remain a familiar one throughout life, as the following extract shows:-

"I'm used to spending time on my own, so it's familiar and comfortable." (Int.4:4:12-13)

An apparent result of this familiarity with being alone, is that they consider themselves to become Self Sufficient. This self sufficiency is suggested by the focus placed on making their own decisions, possessing a high degree of personal control of their environment and not having had to necessarily consider other people.

"not used to having to take other people into consideration" (Int.4:8:20-21)

This suggests that they experience a degree of separateness from others and being able to consider other people, is something that they are required to develop over time. This would be a particularly important skill to develop in relation to developing successful interpersonal relationships.

Along with the familiarity, aloneness also serves an active purpose for the only child. A 'need for space' is often referred to and appears to serve a particular purpose, in that it creates a refuge from the less familiar outside world, a place in which one is able to think and reflect.

However, although Aloneness can offer positive opportunities for the only child they can also experience Loneliness. Although evident in this research, it was not as strong a category as one might have expected when considering previous

research findings (Sorensen, 2008). As I will demonstrate, the degree to which the only child experienced Loneliness appears to be related more to the quality of the relationship they have with their parents.

I will now move on to describe the three major categories in detail, using examples from the interview accounts.

5.2.1. Major category – Need for Space

This first major category is one that ran throughout the account and provides information on what is occurring on a process level for the only child when they are alone. The internal process that occurs is that the only child is attempting to strike a balance between spending time alone and spending time with others. This balance can be seen to exist on both a physical and psychological level. By this I mean that the only child expresses a clear need for space, they are not simply expressing a preference for having space – perhaps something that all of us feel from time to time. The importance of acknowledging this need is demonstrated by the following extract:-

> *"...it starts out like a sort of quiet scream* (…) *it gets louder and louder in my head until I get it* (…) *and then I can say I just have to have some time on it, and I need to do it most days* (…) *most days I need some time."*(Int.5:14:22-24)

This is a powerful description of the process that occurs on a daily basis for this interviewee. The need builds to a point where it can no longer be ignored, or that if it is ignored, it would be in some way detrimental to his well being. This would therefore appear to be used as a justification for needing to remove oneself from the company of others. Another concept that supports this is the term "prize" (Int.2:2:17) used in relation to having time alone, which would suggest that a high value is placed on being given 'space' and this is therefore considered a 'need'. Another dimension to 'space' and 'time alone' is added by the following extract:-

> *"...when I've had enough of socialising and interacting I can sit quietly and actually go completely into myself and have time on my own although I'm with other people..."* (Int.4:4:20-22)

Here the ability to find time alone among a group is highlighted; the individual does not need to remove them self from a social setting to find the necessary 'space'. Also within this extract, 'needing space' is constructed as a form of antidote to socialising and being around others. Consequently we can see that having your own space is presented as both a purposeful activity as well as an internal drive as suggested in the earlier extract. So if time alone is indeed a purposeful activity, what is the purpose of it? An additional concept that came out of Interview One, although not present in other interviews to the same degree, adds to our understanding.

> *"I don't know everything used to make sense and I could just be sort of by myself but not alone, it's hard to explain erm, and it did, it felt, it did feel should I say spiritual…"*(Int.1:16:20-22)

Time spent alone appears to provide an opportunity for making sense of the world and so doing allows greater clarity of thinking. This extract also links with the previous, in that being physically alone does not necessarily mean one is lonely and that time alone can also be found when in a crowd. Within this narrative, time spent alone is constructed as something 'spiritual', beyond everyday experience, which leads to the participant describing an experience in which they feel a greater sense of connection to both self and the world.

5.2.2. Major category – Self Sufficiency.

It is acknowledged that only children spend a greater proportion of time on their own than those with siblings and therefore it becomes something of a necessity to be able to occupy themselves. This was constructed within the accounts as a strength of the only child, something that was developed naturally in childhood but considered beneficial in adulthood. There is also strong reliance on the use of internal resources, in order to reflect on an issue at an individual level. This is demonstrated by the following two extracts.

> *"I think I can solve my own problems. I don't need anyone" (Int.1:6:9-10)*

"I sort things out myself first"(Int. 6.)

The emphasis is placed firmly on the shoulders of the individual but this does not mean that only children perceive themselves as unable to ask for support or guidance from others. The second of these extracts suggests that using their own resources is the first step only and if this does not resolve the situation then others will be approached. Where does this strong sense of self sufficiency come from, how does it develop? Within the next two extracts we can see that this development is perceived as something of a necessity for the only child and it begins in childhood. The focus within these extracts, is that within the only child experience there is the absence of siblings who are perceived to have a guiding, a supportive role within the family structure.

"when you are an only child you've got nothing, you've got only the resources around you." (Int.6:5:4)

"...I haven't had someone to tell me or do or make mistakes for me then it's always been left to me to learn, so that, I think, has benefited me..." (Int.6:1:30-31)

The tone that comes through here is that it can be a liberating experience; there are no one's larger footsteps to follow. This participant does not attach any feelings of anxiety to the freedom they experience but this may not be true for all.

Being self sufficient and relying on your own resources also means that you hold on to a degree of control of the world around you and this appears to provide greater certainty. As the following extract shows, being alone and self-sufficient would mean that there are fewer variables to consider and that this simplification of situations is preferred.

"Its easier when you're on your own I suppose because you just , I can think of myself and that's, its easy and its fine and I know where I stand." (Int.1:9:19-21)

Consequently 'need for space' and 'self sufficiency' are closely inter-related within the experience of growing up an only child and are positively constructed. Though self-sufficiency is presented as a natural outcome of growing up without siblings, it is constructed as beneficial, as it allows greater freedom but also greater certainty.

5.2.3. Major Category – Loneliness.

This is something of an interesting category, as it was constructed in different ways throughout the accounts and although it was present, it was not all pervading. Firstly, the degree to which the only child perceived themselves as lonely was more often than not related to the quality of the relationship with their parents. Subsequently, if this is good, then the family can feel like a team of three, if it is not, then the feeling is more like two against one, as demonstrated in this extract:-

> *"my parents were a unit of two and I was the extra (...) so it wasn't like, there was no ally (...) very much two against one was how it felt."* (Int.5:1:9-13)

The difficult relationship with parents had left this participant feeling very much alone in life, they present themselves as separate, an extra within the parental relationship. This feeling, although linked strongly with childhood, continued through into adulthood, even though they were now married and had children.

> *"I do feel very on my own. I have kids so in that direction I've got people but but about me there isn't anyone I feel, I am quite alone."* (Int.5:12:31-32)

It is here also that greater clarity is given to the meaning of a sibling and the role an only child believes they fulfil in a family; a sibling is constructed as an ally within the family system.

> "*I had one ally of a friend, strange enough a big friend of mine was my cousin."* (Int.3:4:29)

They are also considered to be someone that is automatically there to talk and relate to, which would mean less feelings of loneliness. Although this is first mentioned in relation to the childhood experience with the home, a greater degree of importance is placed on it within adulthood. In adulthood, a sibling is given the role of acting as a reference point, able to provide alternative viewpoints of past events and someone that memories can be shared with.

"I suppose it was not feeling like I had someone to talk to […]I could only imagine it would have been different if I had had a brother or sister." (Int.1:1:6)

Only children often have no one to check things out with, or to compare memories of a particular event with. This lack of a reference point appears to highlight the sense of being alone; experiencing things that no one else can empathise with.

"I think that's one of the things that Jill's got with her sister, is that they do have the shared memories and they may not be the same (…) but there's a sense of this is who I am, this is who I am in relation to other people which I don't feel I've got (…) you've got a context. (Int 5:10:2-5)

"we could have bounced off the two of us or at least we'd, know we existed in the same place, space for a better word." (Int.1:13:6-7)

Linking to the lack of context and no one to share memories with, is the loneliness that is experienced at the time when parents die; resulting in an increased sense of vulnerability. Int. 3 described this as *"literal solitude",* as there was no sibling to turn to in order to share the meaning of the experience and for Int.4 they now *"feel like an orphan"*. For others though, not having a sibling to share memories with was not found to increase feelings of loneliness. They identified others that fulfil this role and by so doing they created their own wider family structure:-

"I feel like I've got no family at all now but then I've brought in my close friends which I value as family members really." (Int.4:13:5-6)

or that it was simply okay to be the sole keeper of childhood memories as shown in this extract:-

" I don't feel that's a problem because I, I can share memories with Clare [wife], I can share memories with the kids(…)I mean I don't think there's a day goes by that I don't have a memory of him (…) and they're crystal clear memories (…). If you mean having a brother or sister to share it with (…) don't think it would have made it better, worse or any different. (Int.2:10:4)

Here, the point is also made that being an only child means that you never know what the alternative experience of having siblings is like, therefore there appears to

be an acceptance that there is no one else to share memories or experiences with. In conclusion, loneliness has different meanings, but appeared to be a greater feature of adulthood rather then childhood, due to the inevitable loss of parents.

5.3. Category Development – Encountering Others.

Again, as with the Aloneness category, 'Encountering Others' encompasses different elements on both a physical and emotional level. To start with, only children often appear to construct themselves as 'observers' or 'outsiders looking in'. None of my interviewees described themselves as natural leaders, they considered themselves able to take on the position if it was essential but still talked heavily about a team focus, inclusion and taking on board the views of others.

> *"I see myself as a central point in a team, who has to make decisions but equally uses those people, we feed off each other."* (Int.2:5:12-14)

Previously I have discussed how being alone is a familiar position for the only child to be in; it provides greater certainty and comfortableness. In contrast, being with others is very much constructed as unfamiliar territory where much less is known about how to behave and respond. This is demonstrated with this extract:-

> *"...it was probably not till I was four or five years of age that I would be encountering other children (...) so I think it was probably quite an odd experience."* (Int.5:1:18-19)

Due to its strangeness and not being a familiar part of their experience in childhood, there is the sense that it feels effortful. This does not seem to necessarily result in an avoidance of being with others but that new skills need to be developed over time. In regards to connecting with others, a degree of caution is present and there they can appear to take on something of a chameleon nature, in that they adapt to their surroundings. However, this has been presented as both a strength and weakness, as it can lead to some role confusion. Another purpose of connecting to others seems to be with the intention of counteracting the effects of not having sibling; as previously mentioned, the perceived role of siblings within a family and particularly in adulthood, is that they are able to act as a reference point. Therefore

it is necessary for the only child to seek out alternative points of reference and individuals they can share memories with. However there does seem to be a sense of ongoing tension relating to striking a balance between time spent alone and time spent in the company of others. I will now move on to explore each major category individually.

5.3.1. Major Category - Effortful

Within this category, 'encountering others' is constructed as a challenge, which therefore requires a degree of effort from the only child. This is generally not the only child at their most comfortable and a preference of mixing on a 1 to 1 level or in smaller groups was most commonly demonstrated.

> *"(...) there's too many, too many, I don't know, thinking about its, erm I tend to go quieter, I think "* (Int.1:3:32-33)

Its effortful nature appears to be evident throughout the life span. Firstly in childhood, where the only child begins their first interactions with their peer group. This is presented as an overwhelming experience, as in the following extracts. In these they present memories of early social interactions in the school playground,

> *"I found the playground so rough (...) I was petrified at all this running around" (*Int.3:2:25-27)

the playgroup,

> *"it was loud, it was noisy lots of other kids I couldn't just play with what I wanted, I had to wait in turn and people were kind of pushing and shoving and it, I was terrified."* (Int.4:10:16-18)

and Saturday morning cinema.

> *"I went bananas because they were like a bunch of mad things"* (Int.3:2:33-34)

They capture the view of an outsider observing an unknown world, a world they are expected to be part of but do not know the rules of engagement. Additionally they

pick up on the boisterous behaviour of other children. It is this 'rough and tumble' that appears to be most shocking and unfamiliar, which is presented as a fear inducing experience. How does this translate to adulthood? There appears to be a realisation that they do not perhaps naturally possess the skills needed to enter this unfamiliar world. Subsequently they engage in a process of learning these new skills, which equips them to deal with these interactions in a less anxiety provoking way.

> *"I was a good mixer as I got older"* (Int.3:2:15)
> *"I've come in as, as kind of a late starter."* (Int.4:10:27)

They also show that there is a perceived change over time and what may have existed as a disadvantage in childhood, does not necessarily remain so in adulthood. It does appear though, that the ability to express ones needs when relating to others, remains a challenge for the only child and continues to require effort to achieve.

> *"I suppose when I first started work particularly erm I was very quiet for a long time. Yeah it took me a long time to be able to express myself (...) feel part of what was going on".* (Int.1:2:23-25)

> *"to be assertive and have a need and express it and defend it is very difficult .So if there is a competition for resources I tend not to enter into it erm so yeah work situations have been difficult".* (Int.5:6:23-25)

The second extract above also suggests that the effort required is at times too great and an active decision is made to withdraw from challenging situations. In addition to this, it is also evident that only children have something of an expectation of others to know what they are thinking or feeling, leading them to make the assumption that other people understand their needs.

> *"it's like, how can they not know I need to be on my own"* (Int.1:8:26)

What has hopefully been presented here is the view that Encountering Others is perceived as a challenge by the only child. There is a process of change where it is experienced in childhood as fear inducing, but in adulthood, as an area to develop or avoid.

5.3.2. Major Category - Control.

This was previously referred to in the category of Self Sufficiency. There it was suggested that being self-reliant provided a higher degree of certainty and control. Its development as a major category in relation to Encountering Others is related to the increased uncertainty that is the result of Encountering Others which leads to less personal control. The process of engaging with others means opening up to other influences and viewpoints and engaging in a two-way interaction. An example of this would be demonstrated in the following extract with regard to making plans with others:-

> *"it's quite nice to kind of take my time to be steady and to pause and take things in but then that irritates other people (...)because they want to have this, do that (...) I like to wander around, quite used to wandering around on my own and not having to be anywhere at a particular time" (Int.4:5:17-21)*

When the decision is made to include other people in your arrangements you are no longer in complete control. It is then necessary to accommodate the needs of others. This again seems to be something that requires greater effort on the part of the only child. If you are in a close romantic relationship, then this becomes a somewhat unavoidable situation. Consequently, if you are cohabiting, there is less individual control over both time and space.

> *"And it was my space and people could come into it when I wanted them to come in to it"* (Int.1:9:13-14)

> *"If I've got my free time then I'll try and guard that."* (Int.5:14:31)

Moving on from this, the decision to have children appears to also present its difficulties, in relation to having other additional needs to meet and being able to make the necessary compromises. In this first extract, the participant talks about sitting around the dinner table with her husband and three children, she reflects on the noise that occurs. In the second, the narrative links the addition of children to a reduction in the time that can be spent alone and that this can result in feeling constrained.

"I can't have my meal, and eat it and enjoy it and everybody yapping all at the same time" (Int.3:6:1-2)

"I need a lot of space (...) so the idea of having children around as well suddenly felt like I was trapped."(Int.5:4:30-32)

Additionally there is a level of irritation when allowing other people to carry out tasks and it is not done to the same standard or time frame. In order to do this it is necessary to hand over control and responsibility to someone else. This would link with the strong sense of self sufficiency the only child appears to demonstrate.

"If people take longer than it would take me to do whatever they're doing, that does annoy me" (Int.6:10:5-6)

In order to allow other people to help you, it is necessary to have some degree of faith or trust in their abilities, this is something that this participant (Int.6) found extremely hard to accept. The only child appears then, to place them self in a position where they hold the greatest degree of responsibility for what occurs around them and that relinquishing this position in any way causes a degree of internal tension.

Control is not only about space and making your own choices, it is also related to sharing with others on an emotional level. Within the narratives it is this, that is perceived as holding a particular risk, as shown by these extracts:-

" I would always imagine what if I said to this person blah, blah and they didn't say anything back or, then I'm left out in the open with it" (Int.1:11:15)

"I wouldn't want to be in that situation where I'd sss, you know put myself on the chopping board" (Int.1:11:22-23)

Here we are able to see the concerns related to opening up to another, the process of exposing oneself results in a strong sense of vulnerability. In order to counteract these unpleasant feelings and keep a degree of control of a situation, there appears to be a conscious decision made to be extremely cautious.

"No I don't talk to anyone about anything." (Int.6:14:29)

This degree of caution around others is also suggested in the narratives in the way that the only child connects and disconnects to those around them, which is explored further in the next category.

5.3.3. Major Category – Connection/Disconnection

This category may appear quite paradoxical - How can the only child appear to feel both connected and disconnected when encountering others? I think this fits with their overall experience of relating in the world. As it has already been suggested, the only child often perceives them self as an outsider, looking in and therefore separate from others. Indeed this would be a role we are able to see them assuming from birth; a child looking up to two adults. In the narratives they expressed a curiosity in other people, a *"fascination"* (Int. 4) to understand how other people experience the world, which suggests they see themselves as different, from an early age.

"For years I was kind of, only knew what it was like for me." (Int.4:10:4)

Another purpose to making connections appears to be to find a form of reference, a point that they can relate their experiences to and something that they feel is lacking due to not having a sibling. There was a sense of this in the first interviews and it was developed further across subsequent analysis and sampling.

"If I had had another sibling, yeah I would have had the opportunity to have probably said you know, what was that about (…) if they were upset I'd be able to register it was something serious…" (Int.1:5:28-31)

Here a sibling is placed in the role of providing important information on the appropriate reaction to a given event, particularly in relation to parents' behaviour. Another example is given below and this would suggest that for the only child the usefulness of having a sibling is that they provide a point of reference.

> *"...I think to have someone else to sort of provide an alternative view of it would be a real benefit (...) to say actually it wasn't like that and you're misreading this and have you thought about this view..."* (Int. 5:15:8-10)

As well as looking for someone to provide a reference point, only children appear to need someone that can empathise with their experiences to a greater extent. In relation to this, one participant stressed the importance of the relationships she had developed with other only children; that they provided an opportunity to look into "a mirror". A similar feeling is expressed in the following extract as she talks about her adult relationship with her cousin:-

> *"I suppose we got that sort of erm empathy, that we are both only children."* (Int.3:4:33-34)

So the only child does seek to make connections with others, they also put a degree of effort in to maintaining these connections. This is evidenced by the terminology used, such as being, "the go-between" and "keeping the peace". In order to make and keep these connections, only children see a strength in being able to adapt to different people and situations; having a 'malleable identity" (Int.5) is part of this. Also actively using different types of humour as a way to create a connection, as in the following extract:-

> *"If I know what kind of makes people laugh I can, I adapt (right), I use that I suppose as a way of being connected to that person..."* (Int.1:3:27-30)

This would suggest that adaptability is a strength of the only child when it comes to making connections. However within the accounts a different tone is evident and being different things to different people is also constructed as a defensive reaction; a way to avoid conflict with others. One only child uses words more associated with warfare to describe this process, that adaptability is something that can be consciously "deployed" (Int.5) in order to not stand out, to blend in with others. However this is perceived as leading to some degree of confusion over true identity, which may be exacerbated by not having a sibling as a reference point.

> *"I adapt myself to how they are which probably means I'm not being myself"* (Int.1:4:2-3)

"…at three o'clock in the morning you know, you don't actually know who you are which is quite difficult." (Int.5:14:7-8)

Additionally, disconnection would also relate to the strong feelings of self sufficiency and the emphasis on the need to seek out their own space as previously demonstrated in the core category Aloneness. The linking relationship between the core categories will be further explored in the next section.

5.4. Relationship between the Core Categories.

I would hope that the relationship between the two core categories Aloneness and Encountering Others has already been demonstrated above. Neither can exist in isolation and finding a natural equilibrium between the two, appears to be a continuing process that the only child engages in, in order to feel settled within them self. There is a strong desire to connect with others with the purpose of finding a reference point but this reaches a limit and then can lead to feeling overwhelmed of threatened. This results in a need for space; which is felt as familiar for the only child and has the purpose of allowing time to reflect on the apparent uncertainty of the world around them. When alone, there is the strong sense that they do not have to make as much effort as when encountering others and there is also less risk involved, in that they do not have to fear exposing themselves.

Accepting being alone and developing as a self-sufficient individual, is a strategy that appears to create a greater sense of control of the environment. When relating to others and in particular close personal relationships, it is recognised that there is a requirement to relinquish a certain degree of control, but within the narratives this appears to be at times difficult and frustrating. There is a sense that others are sometimes intruding into what is considered their space, although this is not always verbalised to those around them.

Perceived positive and negative elements of the experience can be seen throughout the categories. Being able to adapt in order to make friends is a positive but there is a sense that this flexibility can go too far and result in confusion of identity; uncertainty of what really matters to you as an individual. Likewise with self sufficiency, a degree of independence and taking responsibility for your own

actions is constructed as a positive, but if it is less of a choice and is more a way to avoid opening up to others and asking for support, then this could be quite limiting.

The next section will consider three factors that impact on the relationship between the core categories.

5.5. Impacting Factors.

5.5.1. Stereotypes.

As was presented in the literature review, there are accepted descriptions of what only children are like within wider society and across cultures. In general these appear to be stronger and more negative than those attributed to other birth order positions. Evidence of these stereotypes was present throughout the interviews. They were strongest in relation to considering how parents engaged in decision-making and appeared to be used as a justification of certain parenting choices, for example, the need to socialise children in a playgroup. This would then serve to combat the negative stereotype that only children were lonely or socially inept. Further examples from the narratives are shown below, of how the only child is aware of possibly being perceived as spoilt, these are counteracted by referring to parental behaviour as not fitting this stereotype.

> *"…'I wish I was like you because you get everything you want' but I never did, I certainly didn't at all. My mother would have paid attention to that."* (Int.3:1:31-32)

> *"I had a lot of choice and freedom and in <u>that</u> way I think I was spoilt rather than you know material. I think they were worried about the only child thing you know that only children are always spoilt, so if anything they went the opposite way.* (Int.4:7:10-12)

Within the second extract, the spoilt stereotype is dealt with by a partial agreement with regard to receiving more time with parents, rather then financial or materialistic rewards.

> *"the typical thing about, people think about only children 'oh you must have been spoilt'"* (Int.4:2:10-11)

There was also another way that stereotypical thinking impacted on the only child but this time in an indirect way, as shown in the following extract:-

> "*I felt like I was like having a new car every year (...) I was one of those middle class appendages that you needed to have. You needed to have a child at least one to, so people wouldn't think 'oh what a funny couple'"* (Int.5:7:25-28)

In this account the participant had felt unwanted and he described feeling under pressure to meet parents' high expectations and commented feeling like a 'performing seal'. The way he makes sense of this experience, is in reference to how his parents had been influenced by society's judgements on what family size one should have. In conclusion then, negative stereotypes are strongly perceived by only children themselves as impacting on their experience directly and indirectly.

5.5.2. Parents

Parents, perhaps not unsurprisingly, have a large impact on the development of the only child. The relationship can be experienced as overbearing, supportive or neglectful. A mixture of these can even be experienced at the same time, as is demonstrated by these extracts, which are all from one interview.

> *"treated less babyish and more like an adult"* (Int. 4:2:19)
> *"wrapped in cotton wool"* (Int. 4:*10:12)*
> *"under a microscope"* (Int. 4:*3:6)*

The only child can experience being treated more like an adult and therefore there is an expectation that they will behave in a mature manner. However as this extract suggests, there are no distractions to the focus on the only child in the family and they remain *"in the spotlight"* (Int. 4). This can result in high parental expectations, as there is no-one else to share the responsibility, relating to the saying "*having all your eggs in one basket"* (Int. 3). . However this does not necessarily result in a negative impact on the child, as only one participant talked about their parent's expectation that they fit a required *"mould"* (Int.5). Within all the narratives, the parental relationship was constructed as supportive and

encouraging, rather than overpowering. In this extract the participant referred to culturally related expectations:-

> *"Expectations (...) I never really thought about it (...) I can probably say it's an Asian mentality that err is placed on their kids to do well academically but I never had that (...) Just let me do whatever"* (Int.6:6:5-10)

Interestingly, expectations were not perceived as being related to his birth order position, but instead were placed within a cultural context. However here and within the other narratives, greater emphasis appeared to be placed on personal responsibility.

Another observation related to their perceived specialness within the family, the term, "wondrous" child was used by one participant. Here a reason was provided as to why they were an only child which was most commonly not presented as a conscious decision by parents, but rather due to outside factors, fertility difficulties, older parents.

5.5.3. Societal Changes.

Within the model another factor that impacted on the core category of Encountering Others, was generational difference and the subsequent changes in society. In the narratives of older participants, they reflected on parts of their childhood experiences as being particular to their generation and that this was quite different to society now. They described having greater freedom to play out in the street with friends away from adults and therefore were given the opportunity to socialise in an unstructured way.

> *"It was easier in those days because you always played out (...) you could go out to the park (...) there wasn't this you know sort of consciousness of never letting children out and that so we were left more to our own devices."* (In.3:1:24-29)

> *"I got a mate that lived next door, a cousin who lived across the road (...) then when we moved to Lark Hill, new estate, loads of kids, played football."*(Int.2:13:10-13)

The second extract also highlights additional changes over time, where participants described living closer to extended family, even down the same street. This was seen to provide greater opportunities to interact with cousins who were a similar age.

> *"Down the road I lived there was my grandmother, my auntie, a couple of other, we'd got family down the same street same neighbourhood.* (Int.8).

Therefore even though they may have been the only child in the home, they stress that there were many more opportunities to interact with others, particularly the extended family. This could also be perceived as another means to dismiss the all-pervasive negative stereotypes. However it may also serve the purpose of counteracting the lack of siblings by creating greater opportunities for sharing memories with the wider family and appear to provide a greater sense of belonging.

> *"it's a time when the family gets together and we usually(...) and remind ourselves of all the sort of good things about the family really". (Int.8)*

For one particular participant, these opportunities to be part of a close-knit family were believed to make the loss of parents more bearable, resulting in them feeling less isolated.

To conclude then, along with the core categories and attempting to maintain a balance between Aloneness and Encountering Others, the model includes these three factors as having an additional impact on how the only child experiences the world. They are referred to in varying ways within the narratives and appear to be used to justify parental decisions, counteract negative stereotypes and point to wider changes within family structures that may have further implications for single child families in the future. These different factors will be discussed in Chapter Six and related to the existing literature on only children and family structures.

Chapter Six – Critical Discussion.

Overview.

In the previous chapter I presented a model that demonstrates how the only child participants constructed their experience as a constant balancing process between Encountering Others and Aloneness. Within this chapter, I will look at the model in relation to the existing research around solitude and socialisation. I will also consider how the model could be related to the therapeutic relationship. In the latter part of the chapter I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this research and cast a gaze forward, to look at how it may influence future research directions.

6.1. Solitude

Aloneness has been developed as a strong feature of the only child experience. Although we can perhaps consider 'time spent alone' as being a naturally occurring state for the only child during childhood (absence of siblings), within the narratives there was a strong sense of spending time alone being a 'need' throughout their life. It was constructed within the accounts as an activity the only child purposely engaged in, in order to create a space for reflection and very much emphasised as a positive part of their experience. Storr (1988) talks about the capacity to be alone becoming a link to self discovery and self realization, allowing time to think which can be regarded as the preliminary step to action.

In order to understand the position of the only child it is important to clarify the distinction between loneliness and solitude. Loneliness is commonly described as a negative state in which the individual experience is marked by a sense of isolation and the feeling that something is missing. Whereas solitude is constructed as a positive state where one is able to engage with oneself and reflect. Buchholz (1997) stresses that 'alone' did not always mean an absence of others and that in medieval times it signified a completeness of ones singular being – all one. However, she goes on to state that many current meanings of 'alone' imply a lack of something.

When reviewing the existing literature, the positive effect of time spent alone is substantiated by the findings of Long and Averill (2003) who stress the benefits of solitude and describe it, as a "vital social phenomenon" (p.21). Solitary

experiences are presented as having provided us with spiritual, religious, creative and artistic gains throughout history (Long and Averill, 2003). They go on to identify the paradox that exists between the human biological needs of attachment and sociality and the search to spend time in solitude. Within the narratives of the only children in this study, this paradox is perhaps demonstrated in a purer form than other individuals' accounts – their experience is constructed as a delicate balancing act between aloneness and encountering others, in order to experience contentment. Sorensen writes of how the only child uses time alone to, "re-experience themselves and recharge before going back into the world of people" (2008, p.172). Solitude appears to offer a greater sense of freedom to all, not just the only child. This freedom can be divided into two types; positive (i.e. freedom to engage in desired pursuits, not because of the absence of constraints) and negative (i.e. freedom from constraints). Koch (1994) describes how we are obliged to co-ordinate our experiences with others when we are in their presence, but solitude allows us to experience ourselves and reduces the feeling of self-consciousness. However, what comes to define the only child experience is the degree of comfort with solitude and the freedom that it allows; there is no perception of this process as effortful. It has been noted that people often report a more negative mood when alone (Larson, 1990), consequently it appears to take more than simply experiencing freedom from constraints, to be able to use time alone constructively. It is necessary to possess the resources or capacity to experience solitude as a positive (Long & Averill, 2003). Within the only child literature Richardson (2006) states spending a large amount of time alone, results in the only child developing a strong creative ability and imagination. It is possible then that the familiarity the only child has with the state and this developed sense of creativity, leads them to place a greater value on the experience of being alone.

Winnicott (1958) argued that the person, who has developed a capacity to be alone, is never truly alone, as they have internalised the supportive parent or care giver. Consequently the feelings of loneliness, anxiety and boredom can be avoided by relying on the introjected presence of a real person (Modell, 1993). It is possible to link this with the reported experience of loneliness within the accounts. Loneliness within the accounts was commonly constructed as being the result of a poor relationship with parents and the heightened effect of not having a sibling to moderate the effects of this (which will be explored in a later section). If we

consider this in psychoanalytic terms an only child in this situation has perhaps been unable to develop that capacity to be alone and the result is the feeling of uncomfortableness. Although within the only child narratives of this study the predominant theme was positive (solitude) rather then negative (loneliness).

6.2. Socialisation.

The role of siblings in socialisation was previously considered in the initial literature review. Siblings are believed to provide a somewhat safer place to learn and test out our relationship skills; it is where we learn how to resolve conflict and accommodate the views of others, because we are unable to walk away from the situation (Richardson, 2006). However, for many only children they are required to learn these skills outside of the family, in a somewhat riskier environment. The current research findings suggest that being able to manage conflict in adulthood can prove particularly difficult for the only child; there is a theme of taking on the role of 'peace keeper' in order to avoid possible confrontation. This would support the findings of others that the absence of the emotional "rough and tumble" (Pitkeathley & Emerson, 1994, p.60) that siblings provide, leaves the only child lacking in skills to manage conflict with peers (Sorensen, 2008; Kitzmann, Cohen & Lockwood, 2002). As Mancillas (2006) states only children spend more time interacting with parents rather then practicing negotiation skills with children of a same or similar age. So although research has demonstrated that only children are no less sociable than those with peers (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Polit & Falbo, 1987) the specific skill of conflict management has not been investigated. However, Falbo (1992) suggests that although siblings do play an important role, parents can, on the whole, compensate for the lack of them. Only having one child affords them a greater amount of time to interact on a one to one basis with the child and they can also act as 'broker' in arranging other social interactions. Spending a greater amount of time interacting with parents, also increases language ability and offers opportunities to learn about pro and anti social behaviour (Laybourn, 1994). There is an assumption made that by spending more time in the company of adults, the only child experiences less fun; there was no evidence for this in the research (Laybourn, 1994).

Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) conducted a study into the differential socialisation of only and first-born children. They used retrospective reports using the Child Rearing Practice Report (Block, 1965) from male and female only and first-born adults. They found that only children received less encouragement for independence, greater over-investment by parents and greater expressions of affect from both parents when compared to first-borns. This finding could be used to support the negative stereotypes of the only child being spoilt and socially inept. I would however question this in light of my own findings, particularly in relation to independence. I would suggest that there is perhaps less of a need to explicitly encourage independence in a one-child family and that instead it occurs implicitly. Throughout the accounts, self-reliance and self-sufficiency were strong themes, but in the majority of accounts, these were not things that were taught. In many ways the only child has a much greater level of independence from birth, they have no older sibling to be compared to and they spend a considerable amount of time alone during childhood. In relation to over investment and greater expressions of affect, studies have shown that only children do experience a special relationship with their parents (Falbo and Polit, 1986). This may be related to the individual reasons for being an only child. In many cases it is not a conscious choice by parents to have one child and is due to fertility problems, which could in turn lead to feelings of 'specialness' or 'preciousness'. This was a theme touched on by several participants when justifying their only child status. In addition to this, there also appears to be quite a logical explanation for over investment and that is that within the one child family resources do not have to be divided, resulting in a greater opportunity for one to one attention. Sorensen (2008) has identified parental enmeshment as leading to difficulties in separation and individuation for the only child. Enmeshment, Sorensen states, occurs when "children experience themselves as an extension of a parent" (2006, p.39) and that being the centre of attention, leads to feelings of suffocation and lack of emotional space. Within this study there was a narrative of 'being in the spotlight' and 'under the microscope', however this did not appear to dominate within the experience. Indeed the majority of participants made greater reference to a narrative of freedom and independence as an only child, being able to find their own way in life with a sense of ongoing support from parents. Roberts and Blanton (2001) found that their only child respondents felt pressure to succeed and meet the expectations of parents, however this was not a

theme within this study. Overall there appears to be varying views on how well the only child relates to those around them and how significant not having siblings is. However, it would appear that the important factor is the quality of the parent/child relationship, which can compensate for the lack of siblings, enabling the development of a well adjusted individual.

6.3. Self Reliance and Self Sufficiency.

Within this current model there is the construction of the only children relying heavily on their own internal resources and holding a strong sense of personal responsibility. The largest indicator of good self-esteem is the parent/child relationship. High levels of parental support, encouragement and acceptance, foster within the child higher levels of self esteem (Gecas and Seff, 1990; Cornell and Grossberg, 1987). These parental behaviours are also found to be associated with the development of other positive socialization outcomes in children (such as moral development, pro-social behaviour and academic achievement). Although this would point to the conclusion that an only child is in a position to receive more reinforcement, praise and attention from parents therefore leading to higher self esteem, research has shown no significant birth order effect (Guastello & Guastello, 2002). The only child however, can also find them self in a vulnerable position if their family structure is not a stable one. In relation to this vulnerability, Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) found that adolescent female only children reported less life satisfaction and lower self esteem then peers with siblings when their fathers were unemployed. This would appear to be due to the role of siblings who act as a buffer within the system; research has shown that within high conflict homes, siblings are able to provide the same protective functions as a positive parent/child relationship (Caya and Liem, 1998).

There is also literature that supports the construction of the self-reliant only child. It suggests that only and first-born children make more internal attributions to others than later borns (Philips and Philips, 1994). This emphasis on the influence of personal responsibility over situational factors, was further supported in later research, which found increased internal attributions were made by only and first-born children in relation to their own good performance (Philips and Philips, 2000). Taking these two studies together only children appear to possess a greater

degree of personal responsibility and consider other individuals to be personally responsible for their own successes or failures, rather than them being influenced by situational factors. According to Philips and Philips (2000) this may then lead to only children being less able to recognise the need for outside help or less willing to ask for it and this could then result in them experiencing higher stress levels.

However, an important factor to consider here is how the psychology of men and masculinity may impact on the narratives of interviewees. Research by Pleck (1981, 1995) puts forward the view that masculine gender roles are socially constructed, are formed from stereotypes and norms and are multiple and contradictory in nature, but can ultimately create problems for individual men and those around them. The end sample within this study consisted of a greater number of males, which may account for the predominance of the construction of the only child as self reliant and self-sufficient. Levant et al. (1992) identified seven dimensions of traditional masculinity ideology which include self reliance, along with the injunction to restrict ones emotional life, avoiding all things feminine; emphasis on toughness and aggression; emphasis on achieving status above all else; non relational, objectifying attitudes towards sexuality and the fear and hatred of homosexuals.

Pollack (1995) coined the phrase, 'defensive autonomy' to describe the male tendency to feel safer alone then being close to someone, the withdrawal from emotional connections to others. This fear of being engulfed by another and the suppression of deeply felt emotions and needs can lead to the pattern of male distancing in marriage (Pollack, 1995). The process is theorised as an outcome of the required early separation from the mother, in contrast to female children who are not similarly encouraged to sever their attachment. Through this separation boys are given the 'prize of a sense of themselves as separate individuals" (Levant, 1996 p.263). However this strong sense of self reliance can prevent males from admitting a need for help. In relation to seeking help from health professionals, such as psychotherapists and counsellors, there is a large body of evidence that men are less likely to seek support then women (Addis and Mahalik, 2003) and when they do, ask fewer questions (Courtenay, 2000).

If we consider these findings alongside the aforementioned research by Philips and Philips (1994, 2000) it is possible to hypothesise that male only children could find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position, with gender role

socialisation adding to birth order effects in relation to seeking outside support and help.

6.4. Normalising and Witnessing.

In this current study when considering what the perceived role of siblings was within the family, two meanings were given, normalising and witnessing. With regard to normalising, this was used in the context of emotions and experiences, where the lack of a sibling meant that there was no one to compare experiences/memories with. They were required to make their own sense of the world around them as a child, which appeared to lead to a feeling of uncertainty around the validity of what they may have seen or felt. This appeared to take on a greater importance in adulthood and particularly if there had been some degree of conflict within the childhood home, which would link with previous research included in 6.3, relating to the buffering role of siblings. In relation to witnessing, this again took on greater significance in adulthood, particularly when the only child had experienced the loss of parents. This was felt as a simultaneous loss of context in which to place oneself, no longer having anyone to act as witness to their earlier life and experiences due to the absence of siblings. The only child then becomes the sole keeper of memories from one singular viewpoint, no one to compare and contrast with (Laybourn, 1994). These feelings would link to the findings of Sorensen (2008), who highlights the need for the only child to have their life witnessed and that a lack of this, can affect their sense of, being-in-the-world. She takes this further within a therapy context and highlights the role of the therapist as being able to provide the role of a witness and validate their experiences (2008).

6.5. A Homogeneous Group?

We cannot look at only children as one homogenous group. Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) suggest that there are in fact three different types of only child, which remain consistent across the lifespan and it is perhaps the existence of these different types, which account for the varying constructions of the only child. In their longitudinal research, which looked at male and female only children, they

labelled Type 1 as 'normal and well adjusted'; Type 2 as 'impulsive and acting out' and finally Type 3 as 'first-bornish'. In the female only group these types were found to be quite well defined and robust, but for the male only group, there was not such clear definition. This would therefore suggest that there are gender differences, which may be a reason for the inconsistencies in previous research outcomes (Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). The model itself presents one view of the processes the only child engages in when relating to themselves and those around them and as such, individual differences will exist to the extent that an only child will relate to its different parts. Although similar themes to other studies have arisen, there does not seem to have been a strong sense of the only child experience as a negative, which has been evident in the work of other researchers. If we consider loneliness this has been particularly strong in the work of Sorensen (2008) and Pitkeighley and Emerson (1994), but as demonstrated, was not a significant theme here. This suggests that there are other factors, such as the wider family structure that impact on how the only child perceives their experience.

6.6. Wider Societal Changes.

When analysing the research data a narrative relating to the role of wider societal changes was evident and this was presented as having a significant impact on the only child experience. The older participants, those now in their 50's and 60's, described growing up and living in close proximity to extended family; the same street or same neighbourhood. Due to this closeness they had the opportunity to spend time with cousins playing out in the street and generally being 'in and out' of relatives' houses. This appears to have been used by participants as evidence for them being able to socialise with those their own age and consequently serving to negate some of the significance placed on the role of siblings. This view is supported by literature presented earlier, that the negative effects of not having a sibling can in fact be compensated for by other people (Falbo, 1992). For these only children, proximity to extended family, along with greater levels of freedom, afforded them the opportunity to engage in 'rough and tumble' play as well as develop the skills of negotiation and conflict management. The inclusion of this would also suggest that the participants had an awareness of the only child

stereotype relating to social difficulties and therefore felt the need to provide evidence that this was not a problem for them.

This was also constructed as something that was particular to that period of history and that in today's society family structures are quite different. A survey published by the Royal Mail in 1999, revealed that people now live further away from relatives. In addition to this a culture of fear has developed; the world is not seen as a safe environment and there is a greater reluctance to let children 'play out' alone (Furedi, 2001). According to Furedi (2001), the distance that children are allowed to stray from home has been reduced to one-ninth of what it was in 1970. When considering these changes alongside the increase in the number of one-child families, the question arises – Is there a greater chance of the modern only children feeling more isolated and socially inept? This is not something that this research can answer but is perhaps something to consider for the future.

6.7. Relating the Model to the Therapeutic Relationship

The Only Child as Client :Trainee Reflections.

Three of my participants were counselling psychology trainees and although they were not chosen because of this, were able to offer an additional perspective on their experience of therapy. Within these accounts the therapist was placed in the role of an 'outsider' and subsequently approached with a level of caution and distrust. The therapeutic process itself was perceived as unfamiliar territory, in which a degree of caution was necessary as there was an expectation to share things, that perhaps only parents were aware of, with someone that was considered to be an outsider. Reflecting on my own experience as only child and client, I recall similar feelings of uncertainty and it took a considerable amount of time and patient probing, to access the greater depths of my being. When my therapy was ending, my therapist did reflect on, how she felt I only allowed her selective access to my private world. This I agreed with, however that observation in itself was useful in allowing me greater awareness of how controlled I could be and has ultimately led to me sharing more of myself to other people in my life.

Therapist Assumptions.

The findings of this study and other recent research do not suggest that only children are more likely to develop into dysfunctional adults, in fact the majority of literature suggests that only children are happy, well adjusted individuals (Newman, 2001). Cross cultural research also supports the view that there are in fact more similarities than differences between only children and their peers with siblings (Poston & Falbo, 1990; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). However, the strong negative stereotype continues to exist across ages, cultures and among only children themselves (Mancillas, 2006). This stereotype is maintained, as are other stereotypes, by people's tendency to only seek out examples that confirm existing beliefs (as discussed in Chapter One). If these stereotypes are so prevalent within our Society, how do they effect a clinician's initial judgement? Previous research has already demonstrated the existence of anchoring effects, where information obtained earlier in a clinicians contact with a client is given more weight then information appearing later (Garb, 1994). A study by Stewart (2004) focused on assumptions made by therapists in relation to the birth order of their clients. He utilised a vignette about 'Paul' who was experiencing a career counselling dilemma, where the only detail that was changed was his birth order position. His findings suggest that once the clinician had developed a perception of 'Paul' as a first, middle, youngest or only child, their impressions and prognosis differed according to the birth order. In relation to the only child, clinicians gave 'Paul' a poorer prognosis than when he was perceived as a first or middle born. He was also viewed as most likely to experience personal problems beyond his career-related concerns. As previously stated, there is little empirical evidence to support these assumptions. Stewart (2004) suggests that clinicians should review initial impressions and diagnoses after completing several sessions. Additionally, Mancillas (2006) stresses that due to the strength of the negative stereotypes, it is important that professionals be aware of any biases they themselves might hold and take active steps to gain a full understanding of the only child experience, both advantages and challenges. It would therefore be useful for the therapist to consider how to address the issue of birth order and be able to open up a dialogue with their client. Sorensen (2008) found that therapists, who were only children, appeared to recognise the difference inherent in the experience, more so than therapists with

siblings. This would highlight the need to conduct further research in order to widen the knowledge base of therapists and lessen the power of the negative stereotypes.

Developing a Therapeutic Alliance

Developing a good working alliance enables a therapist and client to work together even when the client experiences strong desires not to do so (Clarkson, 2003). According to the research literature, the therapeutic alliance is significant in most if not all psychotherapeutic approaches (Gelso & Carter, 1985) and therefore is a key factor in affecting change in therapy (Smith, Glass & Miller, 1980). How then might the way an only child experiences themselves and others impact on this alliance? Safran & Muran (2000) conceptualise the alliance, as a process of negotiation between the client and therapist in order to agree on the tasks and goals of therapy but if we consider this in the context of an only child who holds expectations of others to know what they are thinking or feeling (as shown in this study and the work of Pitkeathley & Emerson, 1994) this may prove difficult. In addition to this, an only child who strongly identifies with the self sufficient/self reliant narrative, may also be less likely to express their needs to others or to seek help (Phillips & Phillips, 2000). There is also the sense that the only child is unfamiliar with sharing their internal world and that therapy is perceived as a fearful situation (Richardson, 2006). This is highlighted by this quote by an only child participant that had undertaken personal therapy.

> *"A fear of letting somebody into my world, although I'm curious about other people I didn't want people to know too much about me."* (Int.4:12:3-4)

This would also suggest that there is a process of self-censoring going on in order to protect their self image. Richardson (2006) reflects on a supervisee's comments, that her only child client, talked in a "veiled kind of way" (2006, p.38). It is therefore necessary for the therapist to develop a deftness of touch and listen to what is not being said, in order to gain entrance to the private world of the only child. This is perhaps not very different from working with any client but it is important to consider the impact of therapists' assumptions about only children as

discussed earlier. There is however a need for specific research into the only child's actual experiences of therapy, in order to judge whether these observations hold true.

Within the narratives, a degree of unfamiliarity with conflict was expressed and a sense that this was something to be avoided by taking on a 'peacekeeper' role. An additional coping mechanism appeared to be to use time alone to manage the tension of encountering others. Similar behaviours could therefore be expected in the therapeutic relationship, as it replicates other relationships in the clients' life. Richardson (2006) shares her observation that an only child client is likely to wish to protect their therapist from any strong feelings that they may experience. Pitkeathley and Emerson (1994) found that the only children they spoke to, felt they were bad at resolving emotional situations and tended to retreat from them. If a similar sense of threat was perceived in the therapeutic relationship, they may then be more likely to cause a withdrawal rupture in the alliance. This has been described as a client's disconnection or withdrawal from the tension they feel towards the therapist (Safran & Muran, 2000). However, studies have shown the benefit to the client that working through such ruptures can have on the outcome of therapy (Ruiz-Cordell & Safran, 2007). For the only children in this study, anger was experienced as problematic and therefore something that was kept under control, commonly linked with having a "long fuse" (Int.2) or for another a "hidden rage" (Int.1). The observation of Safran, that a person's sense of agency can be developed when they are able to express their disappointment to a therapist and the therapist subsequently survives, would appear particularly pertinent for the only child. Another apparent resource of the only child that can be utilised in the therapy room, is their creativity and imagination which has been developed through time spent alone, Richardson (2006) suggests that this is a useful way to connect to an only child.

6.8. Wider Issues.

Within my analysis, I identified other areas that were significant to the only child experience, such as caring for ageing parents and the loss of a parent/parents. Along with other researchers, I have identified these events as having particular meanings for the only child and a major concern (Roberts & White-Blanton, 2001;

Pitkeighley & Emerson, 1994). The only child has no other siblings to share the burden of caring for ageing parents, which places them under greater pressure. In Sorensen's (2008) work, she shares the observations of a nurse who talks about watching "frazzled" (p.197) only children keeping round the clock vigils at their parents' hospital beds, often to the detriment of their own children and partners. In my accounts, there is the theme relating to a sense of duty that only children felt to their parents at this time, but there was also the sense that it was easier, as they could just get on with what needed to be done and did not have to enter into discussions with siblings. This would support other research findings suggesting that parental sickness can lead to strong feelings of resentment between siblings and a tendency for one to take on responsibility, rather then this being shared equally (Laybourn, 1994).

At the time of death of parents, participants talked about feeling like '*an orphan'* (Int.4) and that there is no one to share those feelings with, i.e. a sibling. Within bereavement work, knowledge of these experiences would be particularly useful, as they are not perhaps something that a therapist with or without siblings may have considered before. There is also the loss of shared memories when parents die. Depending on the wider family structure, for the only child, there may be no one else to bear witness to their childhood and no one to check memories out with (Richardson, 2006). In one of the accounts, significance was given to the participant having their own family to offer them support at this time, which appeared to balance out the feeling of being left alone. Worden (2002), states that perceived emotional and social support is a significant mediating factor in the grieving process. Therefore, it would be particularly important to consider what social support the adult only child has when they have no partner or family of their own, as they may have different needs of support then other individuals. These are not issues that I have specifically focused on within this research but are areas that would benefit from further study.

Another area that requires further exploration than was possible in this research, is the effect of the negative stereotypes on the parents of only children. It was noted in Chapter One, that parents often experienced criticism from others for only having one child (Hawke & Knox, 1978) and that they were considered by others to be more self-centred (Polit, 1978). In these current narratives, the negative stereotype was most commonly referred to in relation to their perceived effect on

their parents' behaviour. Participants commented on the concern of parents to, not appear to be spoiling their child, which could result in parents doing the opposite. Sorensen (2008) has suggested that the negative stereotype and its conscious and unconscious effects on parent behaviour can result in the only child developing a sense of shame, relating to feeling privileged and spoilt. This is an important factor to consider, but did not come across in the accounts.

6.9. Limitations of the research.

The key limitation of the research would be the short period of time given to conduct it. This was influenced by the fact that I was a Grounded Theory novice and as such it was necessary for me to read a great deal about Glaser and Strauss' original theory and then move on to its different incarnations, to fully understand the process. The use of regular support from colleagues and my research supervisor has been invaluable in allowing me to gain the familiarity with the approach, necessary to successfully complete the research. With a greater amount of time, perhaps the model and its categories could have undergone further development. A way that this could have been achieved would have been to consider the only child from different angles, such as the parents view, partners view, therapists view and the clients view. As previously stated in Chapter Four, it is perhaps questionable whether full theoretical saturation has been reached. However, every effort was made to use theoretical sampling to explicate categories as much as possible within the time frame.

On reflection, I also question whether my sample perhaps offered too broad a range of experiences regarding age, gender and cultural background. The literature on sampling presents contrasting views on this. Some argue for the use of a wide and diverse sample, allowing for a full range of social processes and maximum variation (Hutchinson, 1993), but others call for a narrower sample that uncovers the "situated, contextual, core" of social processes (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1478). This study involved both males and females but did not consider fully the influence of gender differences. There is some evidence that there may be varying male and female experiences. Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) identified three distinct types of only child but found that these were not as well defined for males, which suggests that there may be further interactions between birth order status and gender

that have not been fully explored yet. Consequently, the model may have added more to our understanding if the focus had been purely on the male experience; this would have also complemented the previous work conducted by Sorensen into the female only child experience. As previously suggested, certain interpretations relating to self-sufficiency may have been related more to the meanings around masculinity, rather then those attributed to an only child upbringing. A similar argument can be presented for age and that although the aim was to allow for breadth of experience, a greater depth of meaning may have been achieved by narrowing the age range of those involved.

Another limitation to the research could be that I had links, through mutual acquaintances or family, to all the participants involved. Personally, I do not feel this has biased the research in any way and I have attempted to be as transparent as possible throughout the analytical process. Participants were offered anonymity, confidentiality and time to independently consider whether they wanted to take part before signing consent forms, in order to combat any feelings of it being an obligation. Additionally, in terms of the content of the interviews, there appears to be no evidence of participants being reluctant to discuss personal experiences and they have been open throughout.

6.10. Implications for Counselling Psychology.

The usefulness of the model that has been developed is twofold. Firstly, it is useful for the Counselling Psychology community in general, as it provides new insights into the only child experience and contributes to our professional knowledge base; thus increasing our ability to help this client group in relation to the variety of life's difficulties that may bring individuals to therapy. Secondly, it is useful and hopefully equally accessible for only children themselves to reflect on with regard to their own individual narratives. Clearly the aim was not to identify one singular truth but to draw together the individual understandings into one coherent model. In addition, by using Grounded Theory Methodology, the aim was to avoid the model becoming removed from everyday experiences, which in turn makes it even more relevant to clinical practice. In reference to the methodology itself Fassinger (2005) stresses its usefulness and although widely used in other disciplines, it appears to have been quite under-utilised within psychological

research. This has been one of only four research projects on this particular training course that have used this approach, with the majority adopting an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Obviously the decision on what methodology to use is driven by the area that one wishes to study, but perhaps there are more areas that could be developed within the discipline of counselling psychology. Charmaz and Henwood (2008) have recently echoed Henwood and Pidgeon (1992, 1995) in highlighting the promise of new theorising in psychology provided by Grounded Theory Methodology.

6.11. Future Research Directions.

The model attempts to make sense of how the only child relates to the world around them and how they construct that experience. To move further with this research it would perhaps be useful to explore the only child specifically as client within the therapeutic context. This would aim to answer some of the questions that have been posed in earlier sections of this chapter relating to the alliance. Other possible research areas could be, focusing on the inevitable loss of parents and the grief process for the only child, where there is some evidence that the lack of a witness to their childhood may be particularly significant. This could then be compared and contrasted with other understandings of the natural grief process. What factors are perhaps particular to their experience? For example, what it is like for a client who is under immense stress caring for ageing parents when there is no one to share the responsibility with? Perhaps a client who has lost both their parents and there is unresolved grief causing depressive symptoms; what is it like for that individual to have no one to share childhood memories with? These are factors that a therapist who has siblings may not have even considered and so may miss there importance to their clients. Additionally, as a profession, we accept the importance of recognising the diversity of experience of our clients' ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexuality and I feel it is equally important to look at a factor that cuts across all this diversity.

Overall this will serve to increase understanding within both the counselling psychology profession and wider society about the advantages, disadvantages and challenges of growing up without siblings.

6.12. Reflections on the Process as Researcher and Only Child.

The research process itself has been a combination of pleasure and pain, with perhaps the most intense feeling of pleasure being postponed until graduation! Previously for my undergraduate dissertation, I had used a discourse analytic approach to explore the ideologies of mental health care workers, at the time I considered it to be the largest mountain I had ever climbed. Reflecting on this now, I consider that as a climb up Snowdon rather then this expedition to the summit of Everest. The sheer immensity of completing the doctorate, has at times, held me in a state of paralysis; however it has been a combination of the support of tutors and colleagues, as well as my undoubting belief in the usefulness of the research, that has spurred me on.

It has also been an extremely interesting piece of research to conduct. I continue to be surprised at the willingness of participants to share their personal experiences and the overall enthusiasm they have shown for the study. Personally I have developed a new degree of insight into who I am and how I relate to the world around me. There were many things that came out of the interviews that I had previously considered were particular to me, rather than being related to my position as an only child. A key one being the degree of importance placed on having space from others. I have also been able to use my increased awareness within my clinical practice by considering the impact of not having siblings for my clients. However, above all, I am left feeling extremely fortunate to have had a positive parent/child relationship, one which has encouraged personal growth and independence; as well as supporting me to undertake the long academic journey to becoming a chartered counselling psychologist.

6.13. Conclusion.

The aim of the study was not to identify one truthful account of what it is like to be an only child, but to create a model that conceptualised how the only child perceived their experience and how they related to the world around them. This has resulted in identifying the balancing act the only child engages in, between time spent alone and time spent in the company of others. What is also evident is that there are many outside factors that impact on how an only child perceives their

experience, but that there is a strong awareness of the negative stereotype that exists in society regarding their situation. This was most often referred to in the context of its effects on parents' behaviour, where parents where seen to be making decisions in response to external pressures.

It would be important to state, that like Sorensen (2008), I do not argue that these findings and model relate exclusively to the only child experience. However there does appear to be a number of factors that combine to create a particular way of relating to the world that differs from peers growing up with siblings.

Overall, I feel that there is further research to be conducted but that this study has added to the knowledge base of counselling psychology, as its findings are grounded in the participants' narratives. By recognising the strength and pervasiveness of the negative only child stereotype there emerges a need for clinicians to develop a greater level of awareness of their own beliefs and assumptions. In addition it would be equally beneficial to consider the possible impact of not growing up with siblings when building an understanding of our clients world, as we would hopefully already do in relation to ethnicity, culture and religion.

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Appendices.

Appendix One: Flyer.

Exploring the experiences of adult only children : A grounded theory approach.

My name is Rebecca Pratt, I am a counselling psychologist in training at City University, London and looking for participants to become part of my doctoral research. The aim of the research is to increase understanding within the professional counselling community and wider society of the experience of growing up without siblings and how this affects the individual in adulthood.

It will involve a one hour semi- structured interview exploring different aspects of your adult life, and how you reflect back on your childhood experiences growing up without siblings. This will involve being audio taped. Please rest assured that the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence. The interview will be anonymous and the tape recording will be erased as soon as I have transcribed the data.

I would be extremely grateful for your support.

Rebecca Pratt
Email: [redacted]
Tel:

Appendix Two : Preliminary Interview Schedule.

- How would you describe your childhood?

- When do you think you first became aware of being an only child?

- What do you feel are the positives about being an only child?

- Have there been periods in your life when you have been more aware of not having siblings? If so can you tell me about them?

- Some only children have talked about a sense of loss in not having siblings and have felt it quite a negative experience, is this something that you would identify with?

- How do you think growing up without siblings has affected the way you are in your close personal relationships?

- How do you think your feelings have changed about being an only child as you have become older?

- There may not be one overall experience of being an only child but how would you describe it has been for you?

- Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

- How has it felt being interviewed about your experience as an only child?

- Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

Appendix Three: Consent Form.

All information will be kept confidential; participant's real names will not be used in the research. Tapes will be erased as soon as they are no longer needed for the research project.

Please circle.

1) I agree to participate in the research study by participating in a research interview? Yes No

2) I agree to the taping of this interview? Yes No

Even if you have answered yes to the above the questions, you may still withdraw your consent at any time.

Please sign and date below. Thank you.

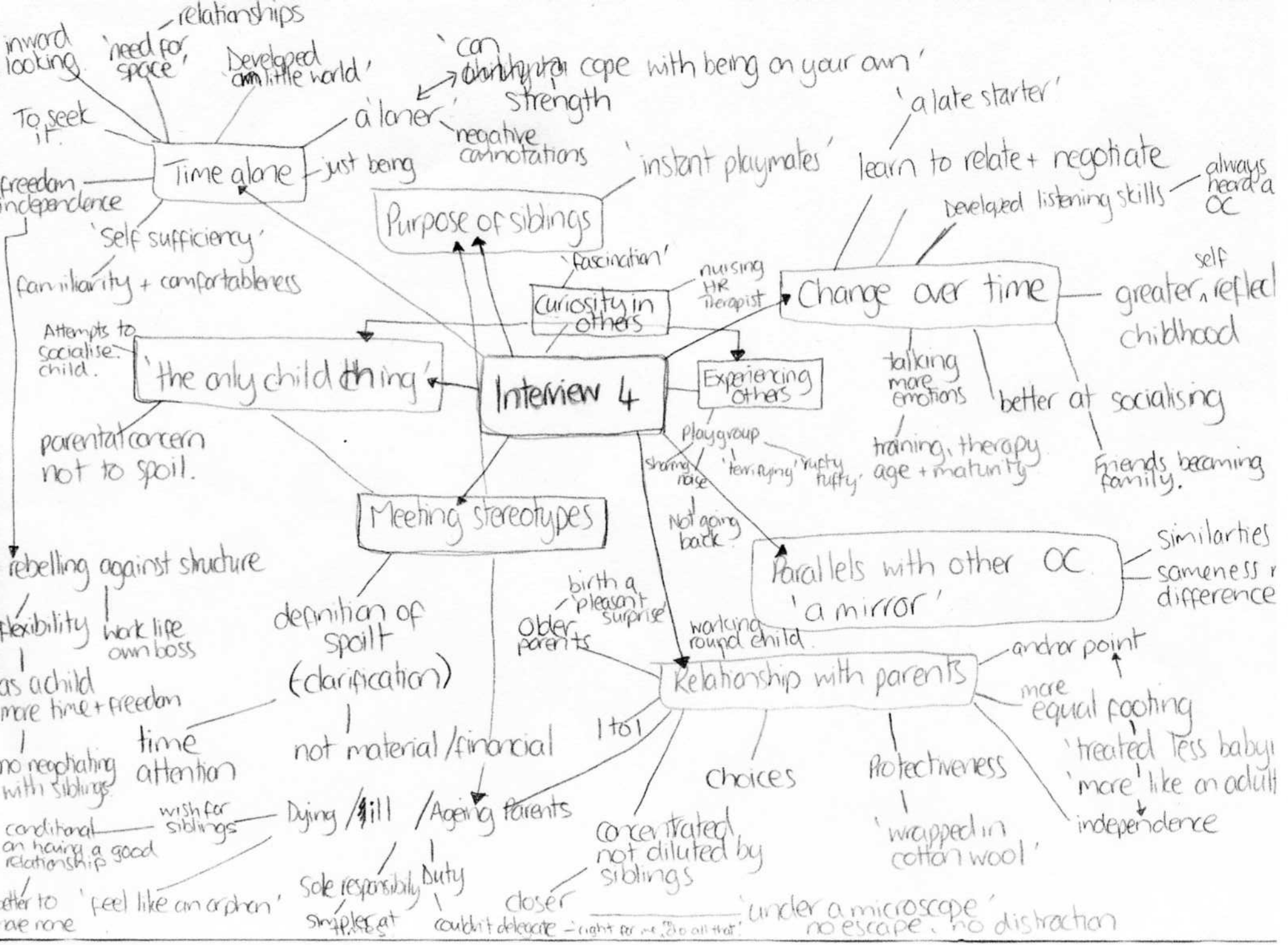
Signature: …….

Date: …….

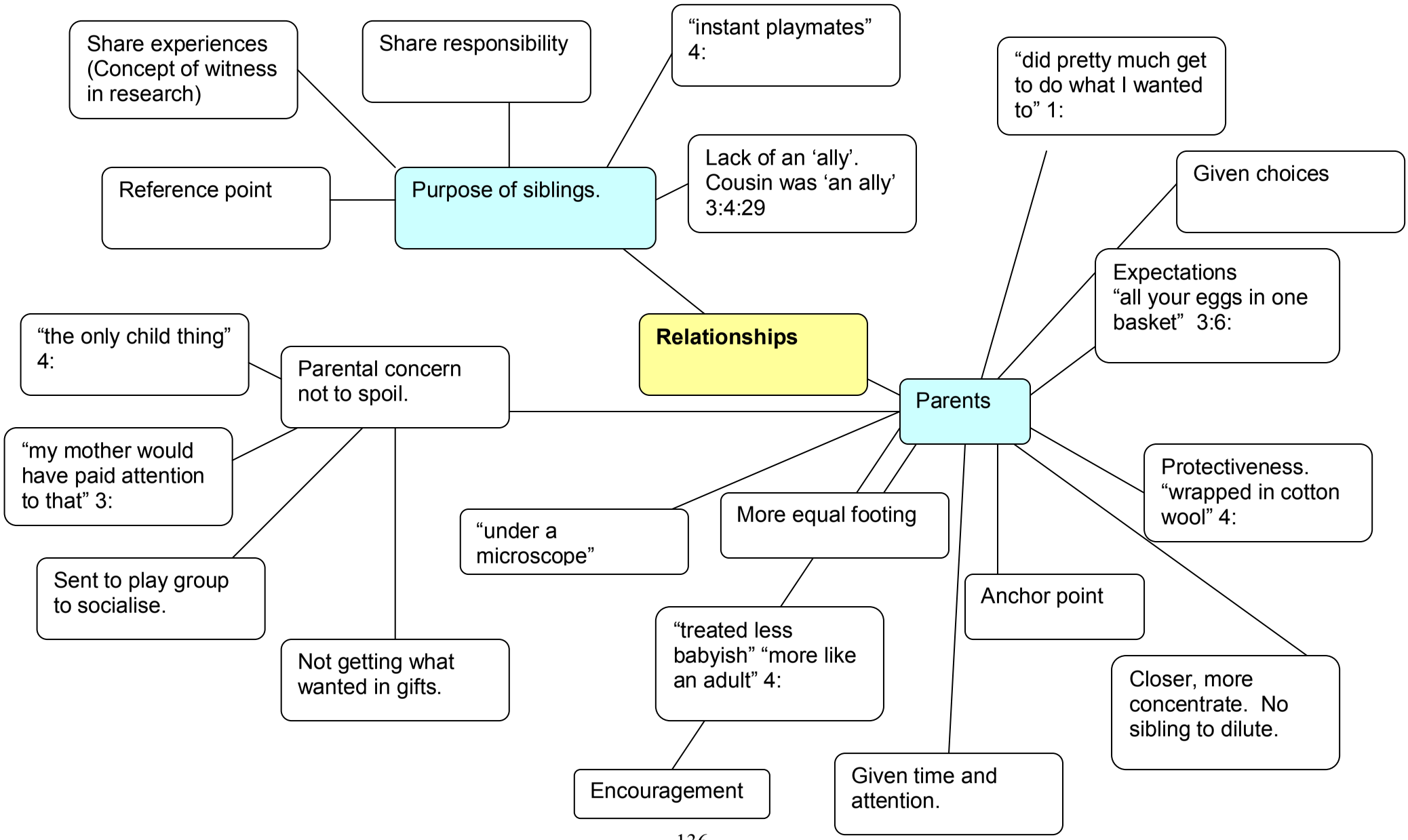
Appendix Four: Initial handwritten cluster diagrams for Interviews Two and Three.

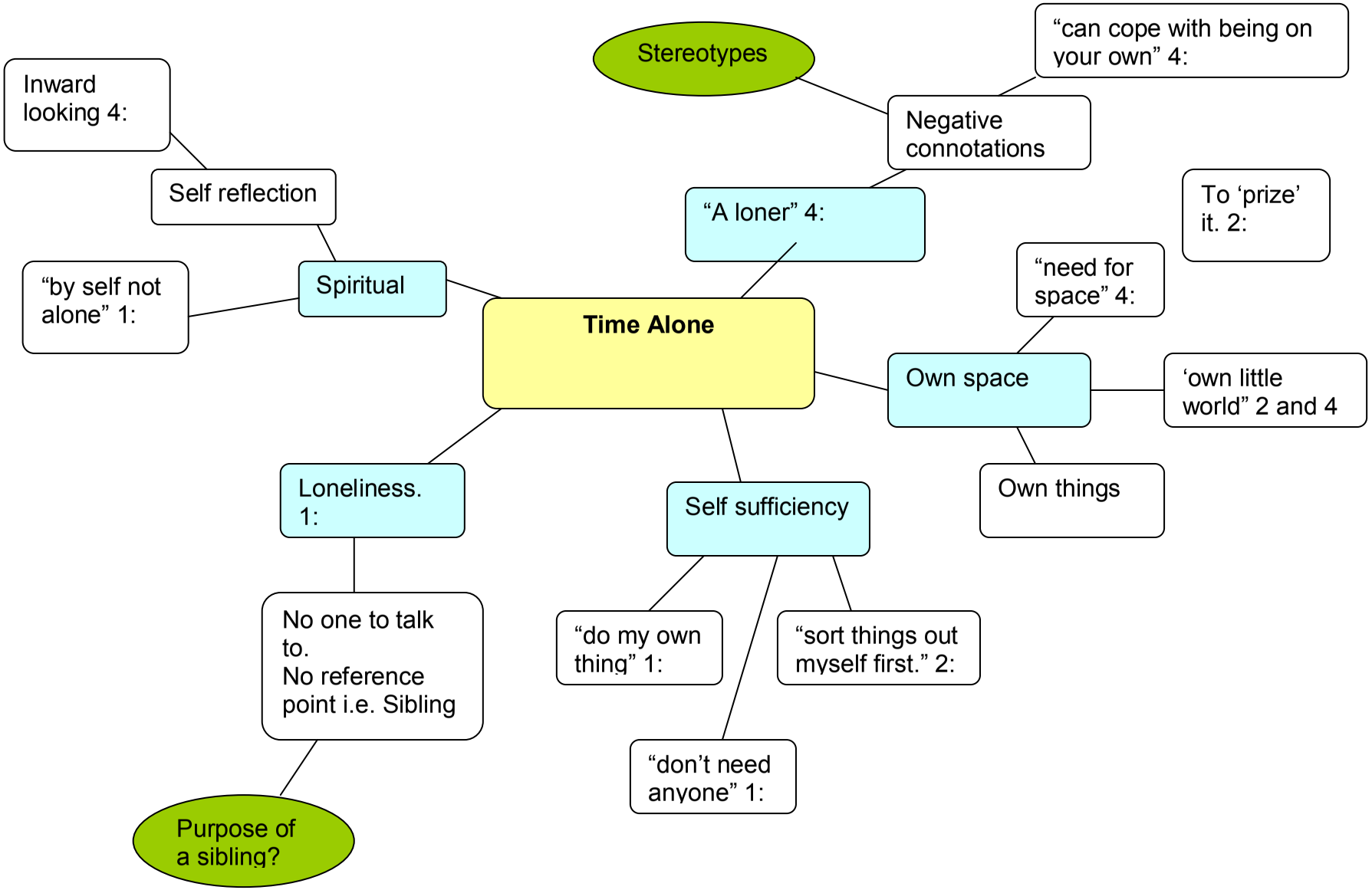
Interview 3

- Motherhood
  - at home with children
  - less financial pressure
  - home maker
  - known alot of large families
  - grand daughter as well not to be OC
  - more then one
  - conscious effort
  - no experience of siblings
- Parental concerns
  - 'my mother would have paid attention to that'
  - play group
  - 'screamed the place down'
  - didn't always get what wanted
  - lent money to payback
  - not getting presents wanted
  - not spoilt
  - 'luckier then most'
  - 'fortunate'
  - holiday
  - more resources
  - able to afford horse riding
- Stereotypes
  - cousin
  - 'an ally' P4 - L29
  - empathy as he was an only child
  - 'lots', 'plenty'
- Friends
  - safer times
  - played out
  - generational
  - knew neighbo
  - left school 16 worked
  - friends house liked the busyness
  - envied by others
  - assumptions
- Own space
  - thinks things through
  - own things
  - to stay put
  - friend lost umbrella
  - hates to loose things
  - went overbo with her
  - own bedroom
  - French 'Enfant unique' P.7
  - felt special hearing that in French class
- Change over time
  - teenager change
  - 'good mixer as I got older' P.2-L15
  - would like a sibling now
  - missing connection
  - responsibility
  - 'pressure' caring for parents
  - guilt
  - female/mother thing
  - siblings don't necessarily mean support
- Parents
  - loss of mother hard
  - no long period of define religious belief
  - expectations
  - 'all your eggs in one basket' P.6
  - 'literal solitude' P11
  - family support
  - to share feeling
- School
  - playground scary place
  - 'petrified of all this running around' P2 L27
- rough + tumble
  - cinema
  - 'und of mad' things P2 - L34
- preference 1:1


Interview 4
Time alone
inward looking
'need for space'
relationships
Developed an little world'
To seek it.
freedom independence
'self sufficiency'
familiarity + comfortableness
a loner
negative connotations
'can cope with being on your own'
strength
just being
Purpose of siblings
'instant playmates'
'fascination'
Curiosity in others
nursing HR therapist
'the only child thing'
Attempts to socialise child.
parental concern not to spoil.
Experiencing others
Playgroup
'terrifying'
'rufty tufty'
sharing
Not going back
Meeting stereotypes
rebelling against structure
flexibility
as a child more time + freedom
no negotiating with siblings
work life
own boss
definition of spoilt (clarification)
not material/financial
time
attention
conditional on having a good relationship
wish for siblings
better to have none
Dying/ill/Ageing parents
'feel like an orphan'
Sole responsibility
simpler set
Duty
couldn't delegate
birth a 'pleasant surprise'
older parents
working round child.
Relationship with parents
1 to 1
concentrated not diluted by siblings
closer
'under a microscope' no escape, no distraction
choices
Protectiveness
'wrapped in cotton wool'
anchor point
more equal footing
'treated less baby'
'more like an adult'
independence
Parallels with other OC 'a mirror'
similarities
sameness
difference
Change over time
'a late starter'
learn to relate + negotiate
Developed listening skills
always heard a OC
self
greater reflect
childhood
talking more emotions
training, therapy
age + maturity
better at socialising
Friends becoming family.

Appendix Five : Low Level Cluster Diagram.


Share experiences (Concept of witness in research)
Share responsibility
“instant playmates” 4:
“did pretty much get to do what I wanted to” 1:
Reference point
Purpose of siblings.
Lack of an ‘ally’. Cousin was ‘an ally’ 3:4:29
Given choices
Expectations “all your eggs in one basket” 3:6:
“the only child thing” 4:
Relationships
Parental concern not to spoil.
Parents
“my mother would have paid attention to that” 3:
Protectiveness. “wrapped in cotton wool” 4:
“under a microscope”
More equal footing
Sent to play group to socialise.
Anchor point
“treated less babyish” “more like an adult” 4:
Not getting what wanted in gifts.
Closer, more concentrate. No sibling to dilute.
Encouragement
Given time and attention.


Time Alone
Spiritual
Inward looking 4:
Self reflection
"by self not alone" 1:
Stereotypes
Negative connotations
"can cope with being on your own" 4:
"A loner" 4:
To 'prize' it. 2:
Own space
"need for space" 4:
'own little world" 2 and 4
Own things
Loneliness. 1:
No one to talk to.
No reference point i.e. Sibling
Purpose of a sibling?
Self sufficiency
"do my own thing" 1:
"sort things out myself first." 2:
"don't need anyone" 1:

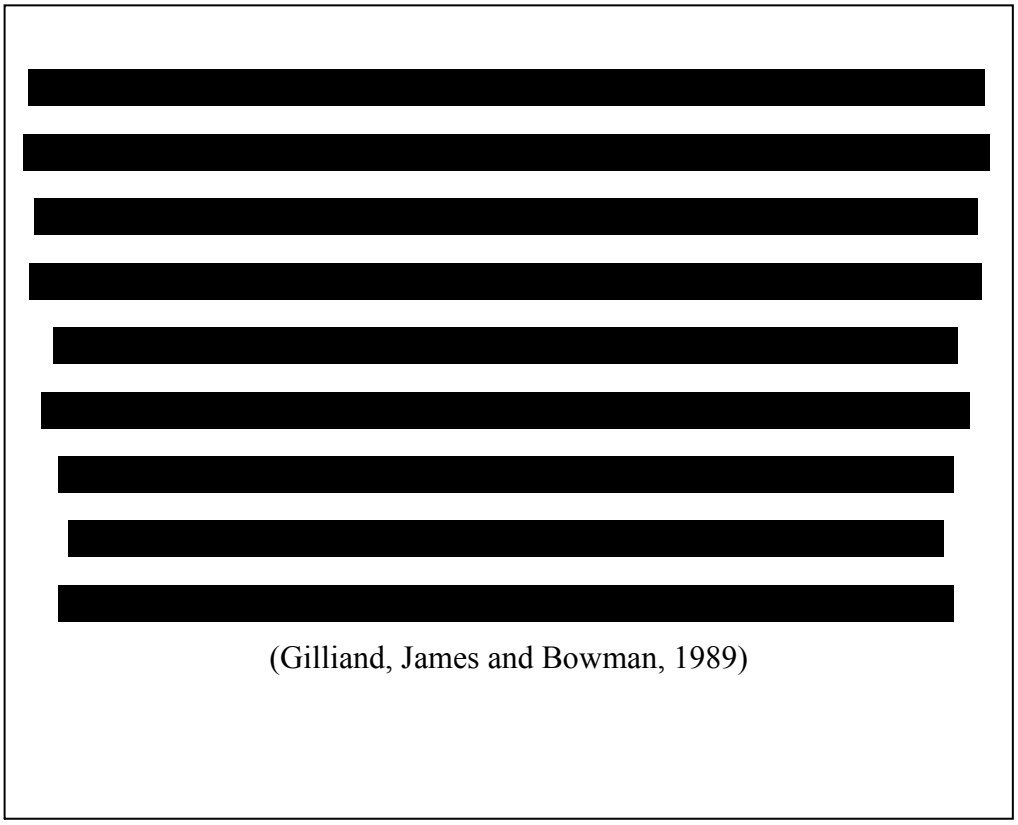
Section C – Professional Practice.

"In my early professionals years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?"

The Professional Practice Component of this thesis has been removed for confidentiality purposes.

It can be consulted by Psychology researchers on application at the Library of City, University of London.

Section D – Critical Literature Review.



(Gilliand, James and Bowman, 1989)

“Magic, mystery and authority?” : Therapist use self-disclosure.

Introduction.

1. Theoretical Stance on Self-Disclosure.

1.1 Psychoanalytic.

1.2 Humanistic.

1.3 Existential.

1.4 Cognitive-Behavioural.

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1.6 Summary.

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Introduction.

Within this literature review I intend to explore the use/non use/ misuse of therapist self-disclosure within the therapeutic relationship and look at different ways that this has been both presented and studied by researchers and therapists. Much has been written throughout the history of psychiatry and psychology about how much a therapist should disclose about himself or herself to a client. Indeed many different ideas surrounding self-disclosure exist between therapeutic approaches and also within these different approaches. However there is no argument that the key part of therapy is the relationship; that is, an individual is having some form of psychic/emotional difficulty that they want to find some relief from. It is something that has become unmanageable for them to face on an individual level; therefore they seek out the support of another. A relationship is formed between these two individuals and it is through this relationship that change can occur. The therapist view on how this change may occur and what position they hold in the relationship, will very much depend on what school of thought they ally themselves with and the amount a therapist is willing to share of themselves.

1. Theoretical stance on Self Disclosure.

1.1. Psychoanalytic

A necessary place to start in the discussion of the usefulness of self-disclosure in the therapeutic relationship is to consider what stance different approaches take. The obvious place to start is the beginning with Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis from which the key elements have been developed into the psychodynamic approach. In 1912 Freud wrote that,

"The doctor should be opaque to his patients and like a mirror, should show them nothing but what is shown to him."

The concept being that it was necessary for the therapist to remain neutral so that the client was able to project on to them through the process of transference. This process could then be analysed and would shed light on how the client related to

others in the past or indeed present. However Freud's stance on the need for neutrality of the analyst, as described in his academic papers on technique, is not supported by the reports of how he actually worked in the consulting room. Roazen (1992) has interviewed many of Freud's analysands and a much more personable portrait of the man is painted by them. The idea of the analyst as a blank screen is not born out by Freud's analysis of Max Eitingon, where he conducted sessions while taking evening walks in the park, and perhaps above all else the analysis of his own daughter (Gay 1988 as cited in Stricker and Fisher, 1990; Roazen, 1992) The pre-existence of the farther/daughter relationship would undoubtedly blur any boundaries and therapist disclosure would be inevitable.

Farber (2003) argues that a 'blank screen' is never truly possible, as clients will always have access to information from the therapist's dress and office environment. Therefore the therapist is always disclosing something about themselves, whether this is conscious or not. Freud's early theory had set the stage on the use of non-disclosure for future therapists from the psychodynamic tradition. Many of which continue to espouse the idea that self-disclosure can damage the therapeutic process by interfering in the transference (Knox, Hess, Peterson and Hill, 1997). Indeed Barrett and Berman (2001) argued that through self-disclosure the therapist's weaknesses could be exposed and could lead to the clients trust in them to be undermined. However, there are some therapists such as Ferenczi, who maintained the importance of having a relationship that 'feels real' and also Winnicott, who believed that a client has to make some from of attachment to the therapist in order to be able to take risks to change (Psychopathology Committee of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 2001).

1.2. Humanistic.

An alternative approach to psychodynamic thinking is the humanistic tradition and in particular Carl Rogers' Person Centred Counselling. Rogers places great emphasis on the therapeutic relationship and that by being genuine within this, expressing empathy and positive self regard, change can occur. Being genuine as a therapist involves a willingness to express to the client the 'various feelings and attitudes" that exist within us (Rogers, 1961 p.33). This would be an example of a therapist's self-disclosure, however, it also highlights differences that exist in regard

to the actual definition of self-disclosure. Mearns and Thorne (2004), stress that this type of genuineness and congruence should not be mistaken for self – disclosure. They suggest that a therapist sharing thoughts and feelings that have arisen in the 'here and now' with a client, is different from the therapist sharing any thoughts and feelings that can arise in a session or sharing personal information (2004). This point is explicated further in Mearns and Cooper (2005), in reference to working at relational depth with a client, where therapist 'transparency' has two facets. Firstly, being 'natural' in the relationship, for instance not pretending to understand something that you do not and the other 'immediacy', sharing felt-responses from the 'here and now' relationship (2005). Watkins (1990) would describe these types of disclosures as self-involving, that they are an expression of current feelings. However, he states that although they are often contrasted with self-disclosure (as Mearns and Thorne do here) they are a form of self-disclosure (1990).

However, it is also stressed that it is essential to keep the focus on the client, the therapist needs to have an awareness of what is relevant for the client and not let their own needs or "willingness to be known" take precedence (Mearns and Thorne, 2004). They observe that clients can experience personal revelations from a therapist as an intrusion into their therapy time (2004). This concern regarding sharing personal information has similarities with the concern relating to possible 'role reversal' in the psychodynamic relationship.

1.3. Existential.

Irvin Yalom coming from an existential approach has also highlighted the usefulness of both these kinds of disclosure. In The Gift of Therapy (2002) he goes as far to say:

"There is every reason to reveal oneself to the patient and no good reason for concealment." (p. 33)

Yalom's aim was to work in the 'here and now' with a client and this would heavily rely on the use of self-involving disclosures as previously illustrated in reference to the person centred approach. For Yalom this helped to create a 'genuine'

relationship with his clients, that he did not see as possible to create by remaining 'opaque', as Freud suggested. In addition to this perhaps more accepted way of disclosing, Yalom also often shared personal information with clients, seeing this as an opportunity to model behaviour. He feels that by not answering direct questions such as 'are you married or do you have children?' an impasse is reached. In particular he notes a situation in group therapy where he chose to speak candidly about the recent death of his mother, and how after answering a myriad of questions, he and the group had been released to go on and work productively in the session (Yalom, 2002). Spinelli (1994), shares a similar view expressed by Mearns and Thorne, that a therapist should always hold in mind that disclosures should only be made in order to assist the therapeutic aims. Another form of self-disclosure is highlighted by Cohn (1997)), who comments on the physical therapeutic space. He suggests that therapy should not be conducted in an impersonal environment, as how can a client be expected to "talk personally" in such a space (1997, p.37). Although again caution is stressed and it should not be "cluttered" (p.37) with the concerns and involvements of the therapist.

1.4. Cognitive-behavioural.

Similarly within CBT self-disclosure is seen as beneficial in strengthening the therapeutic bond and therefore fostering client change (Knox and Hill, 2003). In a discussion of self-disclosure in relation to contemporary practice, Goldfried, Burckell and Eubanks-Carter (2003) present it as a way to model effective coping strategies and normalises the clients struggles. Additionally that it is an opportunity to provide feedback on the interpersonal impact a client has on the therapist and therefore the potential reactions from others in their lives, both positive and negative.

1.5. Feminist.

In more recent years Feminist therapy has added to the discussion with a slightly different focus to those previously stated that of the necessity of self-disclosure as a means to address a power imbalance that they see to exist between therapist and client. The belief is that greater equality can be achieved leading to a

subsequent sharing of power (Mahalik, Van Ormer and Simi as cited in Tantillo, 2004). Another aspect in regard to power is a sense that a client when choosing a therapist should be able to make an informed decision. However, this can only be possible when the therapist discloses details about her lifestyle, beliefs, theoretical, religious and sexual orientation (Hawkins and Bullock as cited in Peterson, 2002).

1.6. Summary.

As has hopefully been demonstrated, there is some variation in views at a theoretical level on self-disclosure and thinking has shifted since the inception of psychoanalysis. There is now greater acceptance of its use, particularly in relation to strengthening the therapeutic alliance. Though it is also evident across the approaches that a degree of caution is required when a therapist discloses, in that the emphasis needs to be on what is useful for the client. However, it must be remembered that these are the theoretical positions, and as therapy/counselling involves a relationship between two individuals, much more can occur than the theory allows for.

2. Defining Self-disclosure.

The published literature relating to therapist self-disclosure covers a wide range of subjects and the studies approach the area from several different directions. A key limitation to being able to make comparisons across the published research is the varying definitions as to what constitutes a therapist self-disclosure (Hanson 2005; Hill and Knox 2002; Watkins 1990). However it appears that since the 1990's researchers have been able to agree on a definition that reflects the different concepts presented in earlier research. This involves the distinction already made between what a therapist reveals about themselves as individuals and what they reveal about their experiences in the relationship with the client. These two different focuses could be investigated separately, though the trend in more recent research appears to be inclusion of both under the umbrella of self-disclosure. Indeed studies discussed in this paper will combine the two aspects of 'self involving' (in session feelings) and 'self disclosing' (personal information) and reflect the definitions evident in the most up to date studies.

3. Research Designs.

In the main, the research has had two different focuses, the first being the view of the therapist and the second the view of the client. Watkins (1990) conducted a systematic review of research pertaining to the effects of therapist self-disclosure; this included thirty-five studies, which were published between 1970 and 1988. Out of this review came several recommendations for future research. A key one being, a need to change the basic format of studies in the area. In his thirty-five studies he noted that all of them utilised analogue designs, that is to say they had relied on using student non-client participants in a simulated single session. These studies in the main used either audio or videotapes of a simulated session and participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the disclosure or of the therapist. Although this can be a useful place to start, as Watkins and later researchers (Hill and Knox 2002) suggest, more knowledge would be gained from naturalistic research using real clients in actual therapy sessions. It is only recently that this move has been made as noted by Hill and Knox (2002) who also conducted a review, and found similarly that more studies than not had continued to use analogue designs.

Hill and Knox (2002) designed a new methodology called Consensual Qualitative Research (C.Q.R) (Hill, Knox and Williams, 1997), holding the belief that qualitative approaches would enable the researcher to probe inner experiences to a greater degree. A recent study by Burkard, Knox, Groen, Perez and Hess (2006) takes on board another of Watkins recommendations that studies needed to be more culturally diverse, only one out of the thirty-five studies had ventured away from the white middle class American participants. They used C.Q.R. to focus on the effects of self-disclosure in cross-cultural counselling (2006). Therapist's acknowledgement of the role of racism/oppression in their client's lives and reflecting their own attitudes to racism/oppression were found to enhance the relationship, resulting in an affirmation of their clients' feelings and experience. The study involved interviews with eleven European American therapists discussing the training they had received in the use of therapist disclosure, especially in regard to racially different clients. They then went on to talk about specific occasions of self-disclosure, their reason for it, the actual event and the perceived effect on the client and therapeutic relationship. Types of self-disclosure

they reported making were in relation to sharing own perceptions of discrimination, awareness of racial barriers, own cultural values and personal struggle with racist feelings. The results of the study highlighted a new aspect not apparently noted before and that was the lack of training related to therapist self-disclosure. This was in regard to counselling overall, but within cross-cultural counselling in particular (Burkard et al., 2006). This is a similar effect of self-disclosure noted by Yalom (1970) of reassuring the client that they are not alone, recognising the universality of human experience and also the focus on normalising client experience within CBT (Goldfried, Burckell & Eubanks-Carter, 2003).

An additional point that came out of the research and one that is identified as warranting further study is the consideration of the negative effects of disclosure. Burkard et al (2006) make the point that although the interview schedule allowed for the discussion of both positive and negative effects of disclosure, therapists only talked about the positive. Also in this case all the participating therapists described the relationships that they had with clients to be predominantly good prior to their decision to disclose, therefore this begs the question of how the quality of the existing therapeutic relationship affects the use of disclosure and more importantly how it may have an effect on how the client receives the disclosure.

4. Therapeutic Effectiveness.

Is therapy more effective when therapists disclose? This question was the focus of Barrett and Berman's 2001 study. In this they randomly assigned clients to a number of the therapists in-training at the University of Memphis. Each therapist saw two clients one of whom they would increase their level of self-disclosure to in response to a similar disclosure by the client. With the second client they would restrict the level, always keeping the focus on the client, directing questions back to them. Prior to the study the therapists received training around the topic of self-disclosure, within this they worked through vignettes to ensure they were clear on appropriate responses for the two therapy conditions.

Before their first session clients were required to rate their expectations for therapist disclosure and expectations for improvement. In addition to this they were also required to rate their symptoms of distress and also the level of therapist self-disclosure before their first session and after subsequent sessions. Another part of

the design was the use of independent observers who after listening to audiotapes of the session rated the level of therapist self-disclosure; this whole process was conducted over the clients initial four sessions.

The chief finding of the study was that clients reported a greater reduction of symptom distress in the increased level of disclosure condition; they also reported liking their therapist more in this condition. However, a key point in this study was that even when there was an increased level of self-disclosure, these interactions still remained infrequent and were quite brief in nature. This low frequency occurrence of therapist self-disclose has also been noted by Geller (2003). There are other possible explanations for the findings, perhaps the more positive view of the disclosing therapist was due to a more natural use of disclosure within the session. Similarly in the non-disclosure condition therapists may have been forced to act in an unnatural way, being quite different from their usual therapeutic style and therefore perceived negatively by the client. However this study appears quite thorough in its exploration; it answers previous limitations in research (Watkins, 1990) by moving away from an analogue design and using real therapeutic encounters. It could have been enhanced with the inclusion of a qualitative element rather than the sole reliance on rating scales, which only allow for a minimum amount of pre-conceived responses. Furthermore the study only involved counsellors 'in training' and so by only using this group we are limited in how much we can extrapolate from the results in relation to how established counsellors approach self-disclosure.

The question of ethics in counselling research should also be considered in relation to this study. Clients were debriefed regarding the true purpose of the study after the fourth session, but the negative effects of manipulating the therapeutic relationship of the previous sessions do not appear to have been considered. McLeod (1998) stresses the tension that exists in counselling research regarding what is beneficial to the individual client in the short term, and what may prove useful for clients in the future.

5. Therapists Aim of Self-disclosure.

The main aim of therapists when they chose to disclose, according to a 1994 study by Edwards and Murdock, was to increase similarity between themselves and

their client. In addition, the purpose of disclosing was described as an attempt to model helpful behaviours. In the early stages of therapy, this was suggested to increase rapport and that clients, perhaps new to the therapeutic process would also learn more about the process itself (Kaslow, Cooper and Linsenberg, 1979 as cited in Knox, Hess, Peterson and Hill, 1997; Simone, D.H. McCarthy, P & Skay, C.L. 1998). This study also demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the level of disclosure between male and female therapists, subsequently it appears to be the therapeutic orientation of the therapist that has the greater influence on the amount of disclosure occurring. The findings of this study stemmed from questionnaires sent out to four hundred American Psychological Association registered psychologists, of which one hundred and eighty four were returned. Respondents consistently rejected some suggested reasons for disclosure, such as increasing expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness. The dominant content of disclosures was related to professional training and qualifications, which could be considered a normal part of the process. Peterson (2002) notes two possible explanations for this; the first that therapists were enabling clients to make informed choices before entering therapy and the second that perhaps they were in fact wishing to stress their levels of expertise. The point here is that the client may also perceive this type of disclosure as having two different intentions. Although this study demonstrates some of the intentions therapist's have when they disclose, it is necessary to consider the literature that relates to the clients perceptions of therapist disclosure.

6. Client Perception of Self-disclosure.

Audet and Everell (2003) conducted such a study that followed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with nine clients who although not in therapy now they had been previously. Each had experienced on average thirteen and a half sessions, ranging from five to seventeen sessions, spanning a time period from two to six months. Overall this is an interesting study as it really attempts to find out what the client thinks of disclosure; as the researchers state they believe that no matter what the therapist intends to achieve with their disclosure, it is how the client experiences the disclosure that truly determines its effectiveness. The information gained from an analysis of the participants' accounts includes both the

beneficial and the hindering effects of disclosure. Firstly, the positive, which indeed supports the existing idea of the process of disclosure as a means to model useful behaviour and also how it can assist in the building of rapport. One participant spoke about feeling anxious and vulnerable, seeing the counsellor as an authoritarian figure, but this view had changed when the counsellor had made a brief disclosure about his leisure activities. The client described feeling 'more equal' after the counsellor had shared this personal information in the first session. This particular participant had experienced a further two disclosures by his counsellor however, this time they related directly to his presenting issue of anxiety. On these occasions the counsellor had used a description of anxiety provoking events in their own life to illustrate different coping strategies. A second participant echoed the first in feeling that disclosures made had created a sense of greater equality in the relationship and stressed the collaborative nature of the process, which in turn had encouraged her to open up and relate on a deeper level. These two experiences clearly support the previous aims as suggested by Edwards and Murdock (1994).

In addition, this study also allowed an exploration of the hindering effects that a therapists inappropriate disclosure could have on the overall relationship. The first issue, presented by a participant who recalled the prolonged anecdotes of his therapist, some being fifteen minutes in length and laden with superfluous detail. Although he saw the first disclosures as initially helping to normalise his anxiety, they became quite damaging to the relationship, leaving him feeling that all the focus was on the therapist. This echoes concerns expressed by Goldstein (1994 as cited in Peterson, 2002) that self-disclosure can be intrusive and manipulative and that it is not always easy to assess whether the desire to disclose comes from the client or the therapist. For another participant (Audett & Everill, 2003) the resulting negative experience was due to one disclosure that caused her to perceive the counsellor as being quite unsuccessful in her personal life, which then caused her to have doubts over her professionalism and ability as a counsellor. The general sense of disclosure that comes from these clients' accounts is that a therapist's disclosure can have numerous effects and consideration needs to be given to the individual relationship with the client. This study highlights the usefulness of qualitative methodology, in that it allows for a greater breadth of information to be uncovered, as researchers do not begin with a preconceived theory.

After the development of CQR, Knox and Hill (1997) went on to use this method to conduct a study into the effects of helpful therapist self-disclosure in long-term therapy. This was an attempt to move the research focus away from single session observation. They intended to examine the antecedents, events and consequences of disclosure with thirteen clients who had all been in therapy for a minimum of five months and a maximum of 192 months. Information was gathered through two semi structured interviews, allowing the researcher to review the content of the first interview and then having the opportunity to clarify and follow up on certain points in the second. The results of the study indicated that clients experienced the disclosures as positive, in that they sometimes gave them a different perspective to a situation, the therapist was seen as more 'real' and 'human' and they felt reassured. Knox et al. (1997) noted that all the disclosures were 'self disclosing' rather then 'self involving', though the latter are perhaps harder to recall as they are process related, consisting of historical personal information being shared. The study appears to be comprehensive and the methodology of CQR is very rigorous, requiring researchers to immerse themselves in the data and work as a team, as it is a consensual approach. There is also a high degree of transparency; as the researchers, prior to reading the transcripts, are required to note how they think the clients will respond to the interview schedule in order to increase awareness of pre-conceptions.

7. Effects of non-disclosure.

A new dimension to the research is given by Hanson (2005), who includes in her study some exploration into what effects therapists choosing not to disclose had on their clients. Again, Hanson makes use of semi-structured interviews with eighteen participants who were currently in therapy, to gain knowledge about their experience of therapist disclosure and non-disclosure and the subsequent effect it has on them. The study utilises both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data gathered, with participants showing that they were 2 1/2 times more likely to find disclosures helpful and twice as likely to experience non disclosures as unhelpful. An example of a helpful disclosure offered by a participant, was that in response to her saying that she felt angry after her partner had left her, the therapist expressed feeling similar angry emotions. Qualitative data was gathered using the process of

constant comparison (as used in Grounded Theory) to identify themes and categorise them. This supported other findings previously discussed, that the greatest effect of disclosure is on the therapeutic alliance, increasing levels of trust and causing a 'decrease in alienation'. Perhaps not surprisingly the opposite was also true, the greatest effect of non-disclosure being a loss of trust and damage to the alliance. An example is given of a client that wanted to know a little more about her therapist in order to make a connection; the therapist refused this. The client was left feeling embarrassed, but never felt comfortable expressing this to her therapist and eventually left therapy. This is suggestive of the importance of building a strong relationship with clients, supporting anecdotal evidence from clients who have expressed negative experiences of psychodynamic therapy relating to the perceived 'coldness' of their therapists.

Another important element came out of Hanson's work and that is the effect of how skilful the therapist is. When the client had had a positive experience of both disclosure and non-disclosure, there was a strong focus on the skill of the therapist. Hanson draws particular attention to how therapists had been able to frame a decision not to answer a client question with a degree of compassion. The key result of being able to do this, was that although the client may have experienced negative feelings initially at the refusal, these soon passed, as they were able to understand why that choice had been made. There is evidence that non-disclosure can be experienced as therapist rigidity, and is a subsequent cause of negative feelings (Hanson, 2005). For the therapist the skill is being able to work through negative feelings and ruptures to the therapeutic relationship (Safran & Muran, 2000). In relation to skilful disclosure, the findings support those of other studies, that it needed to be in the right context, that it should be brief and appropriately timed (Audet and Everell 2003; Knox et al. 1997; Bridges 2001). Possible future research could investigate further the relevance of skilfulness in relation to self-disclosure. How do trainees compare to well established therapists and that due to the significant effects disclosure has on the alliance, how much can an unskilled disclosure harm that alliance?

8. Conclusion.

As has hopefully been demonstrated there has long been an interest in therapist self-disclosure in the therapeutic literature, with different approaches taking varying positions regarding its purpose and usefulness. However there does appear to be a general consensus, supported by research evidence that the judicious use of self-disclosure is of benefit to the client and the overall therapeutic alliance.

It has been noted in previous literature reviews that it can be difficult to make comparisons between studies (Hill and Knox, 2002; Watkins, 1990). This is due to the lack of agreement regarding a definition of what self-disclosure actually entails, though a consensus appears to have been met in the current literature and indeed this paper has chosen to follow the current trend in including 'self involving' and 'self disclosing' as set down by Hill and Knox (1997). Another concern previously expressed, is the predominance of analogue designs in the published literature and how this design has been quite limiting in relation to extending our understanding of the real therapeutic relationship. However, since the early 1990's, researchers have begun to recognise the benefits of using qualitative methods in order to explore the experiences of real clients in relation to therapist self-disclosure. The use of semi-structured interviews has enabled researchers to have much greater access to the experience of the client. This has resulted in a gaining of evidence that self-disclosure is useful within the therapeutic relationship; the main effect it appears to have is in strengthening the alliance between therapist and client. Therefore the way forward should be continued research into all elements of the therapeutic process and that ultimately 'magic, mystery and authority' does not best serve our clients needs.

It is also important to bear in mind the ethical issues of conducting counselling research and that it can become a distraction from the focus of therapy, for either client or counsellor. McLeod (1998) suggests that even simply asking a client whether they would participate in a study could damage the therapeutic frame, as the client may feel obligated to take part.

9. Directions for Future Research.

An interesting direction for future research would be a study that sought to pull together the different elements from the published research, those of the therapist's perspective, actual in session events and the client's perspective in one study. The aim for this would be to be able to directly compare the therapists' intentions with the experience of the client. Another suggestion for research would be to follow clients over a longer period of time as most previous research has been based around a small number of sessions. It would be necessary as with all research to consider the ethical issues of this, but this may allow for greater continuity and therefore become an accepted part of the therapeutic process. Although longitudinal studies can prove more difficult to conduct they would also give more evidence as to the pattern of self-disclosure over time. If as research suggests self-disclosure is especially useful in the initial stages (Audet and Everell, 2003; Hill and Knox 2002) what happens further along in the relationship? Does the type of disclosure change? There is the suggestion in the findings of Audet and Everell that disclosures may need to become more specific, with the therapist giving even greater consideration to the intention and timing of the disclosure in order to keep the focus on the client.

10. Positioning Counselling Psychology and Self Disclosure.

At this point it becomes necessary to highlight the position of counselling psychology in relation to the current discussion of self-disclosure. Within the tradition there is an emphasis placed on the importance of the helping relationship and a valuing of the subjective experience. It has developed through a questioning of the medical model of professional/client relationships and a concerted move towards values associated with humanistic thinking (Woolfe 1990). With this more holistic approach comes different thinking in relation to research and psychology's strong focus on the scientist/practitioner approach. This has resulted in an interesting suggestion that a practitioner/scientist approach would perhaps be a more apt description (Strawbridge and Woolfe 2003). This reflects the focus being on the practice, being with the client, which is then supported by the science, the theories and studies. Both Seligman (1995) and Spinelli (2001) have commented on

the need for a different form of research methodology to look at 'therapy' and more 'complex life situations', both feeling that randomised controlled trials and interventions that are more easily quantifiable (such as cognitive behavioural techniques) represent a medical model of science. Therefore counselling psychology has sought to utilise not only quantitative research methods but also qualitative approaches, which are felt to be the more appropriate tool for exploring the human relationship, which is at the core of the therapeutic encounter.

A strong link exists between counselling psychology and self-disclosure research, supported by the large body of studies that appear in key counselling psychology journals. This suggests that counselling psychologists feel that they are well placed to explore the finer points of what happens in the therapy room in a rigorous way. As a topic it is relevant to all therapeutic schools, from psychodynamic to cognitive behavioural; what a therapist/counsellor chooses or happens to reveal about himself or herself to a client crosses all schools of thought. However it should be noted that much of the literature is of North American origin, indeed all the articles included here were U.S. or Canadian based. The few articles relating to self-disclosure to be found in British publications, such as the BACP journal Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, are still of non-British origin. Reasons for this may be due to counselling psychology as a discipline, having had a 'head start' in the U.S. and therefore have a stronger voice in psychological discussions and providing increased opportunities to receive funding for research. The stage would appear to be set for European counselling psychologists to consolidate their position and part of this process is to extend the knowledge base, through research supporting the clinical work that they do. In the light of this, new questions arise in relation to self-disclosure, are there different expectations from British clients, how do their experiences compare to US clients? The focus of research appears to have been moving towards considering cultural differences following on from the Burkard et al. (2006) study. As Britain is a multi-cultural society there are vast opportunities to explore how different cultures experience the therapeutic relationship. Indeed how much 'magic, mystery and authority' do clients from other cultures wish to experience?

The recent move in British counselling psychology training to require a doctorate means that there are greater opportunities to conduct research. Therapy and counselling is a growth area with an ever-increasing demand, as proven by the

expansion of the governments 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' initiative. This will increase the profile of C.B.T, but will also mean that therapists choosing alternative ways of working with clients will be required to prove the efficacy of their work to a greater extent. The self-disclosure research included here demonstrates how the finer points of the therapeutic relationship can be studied. It also demonstrates that counselling psychologists are well placed to continue research in this area, however greater consideration needs to be given to the ethical issues that arise in counselling research.

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