

Lived Experience of a Permanent Rupture Between Mother and Daughter

Helen Germaine, Scarborough Psychotherapy Training Institute, UK Email:

helengermaine@hotmail.com

Abstract

This research explores the lived experience of the rupture in the relationship between Jenny (a pseudonym) - an 18 year old, pregnant, unmarried, young woman in Britain in 1968 - and her mother. In a relational-centred research interview, Jenny shares her experience preceding the rupture, the narrative point of the rupture itself and the occurring experience of her relationship after the rupture. Phenomenological analysis reveals Jenny's experience is one of shame and guilt in relation to her mother. She feels exposed, humiliated and '*at fault.*' Jenny misses a shared sense of pride with her mother and instead experiences rejection not only of herself, but also through the new life she has created. She develops a number of ways to protect herself from her own painful internal experience. Notably she protects her mother from criticism by taking responsibility for her mother's feelings and behaviours. Yet there is a sense of a desperate internal confusion of experience as Jenny continually returns the question of the '*why*' of her mother's behaviour. The pain of rejection and isolation is felt deeply by Jenny within the relationship rupture with her mother. She feels her own deep sadness and loss as interwoven into her mother's.

Introduction

In 1950's and 60's Britain there was a considerable stigma attached to having a baby 'out of wedlock'. There was a lack of information for women regarding their rights. Women were coerced into giving up their children for adoption or into having pregnancies terminated, so as not to bring shame on the family.

A requirement of my training, as a trainee Integrative Psychotherapist, is to engage in research practice - the initial impetus for this paper. The research topic of this paper was chosen in part because it touches my own experience and weaves itself into my own story. I have also recently become a mother 'out of wedlock'; I have a two year old daughter. When I told my mother the news that I was pregnant, Jenny was sitting right next to me. When my mother stood up, approached me and embraced me with exuberance and joy, I noticed Jenny's tears. Later she shared a momentary glimpse of how different her experience had been with her own mother. This initial insight sparked my curiosity and my interest in this research topic germinated.

The aim of this paper is to provide: A phenomenological exploration of one woman's experience of the permanent rupture in her relationship with her mother.

Methodology

A phenomenologically-orientated, relational-centred approach was adopted (Finlay and Evans, 2009). In addition to the explicit aim to explore my participant's lived experience, my chosen methodology values the relationship dynamics between researcher and participant. The data collected from the research encounter is viewed as emerging out of the intersubjective space between researcher and participant (Finlay and Evans, 2009).

Data collection and analysis

An unstructured audio-recorded interview lasting over one hour was initially undertaken to gather the data. The interview took place informally seated on the floor in the participant's living room. An attempt was made to allow as much space as possible for the participant to articulate and share her experience. I started the interview by asking Jenny what her relationship was like with her mother before she became pregnant, which I hoped would help lead her into her narrative. Thereafter, I tried to respond empathetically to my participant, asking open questions where possible and attempting to share the impact her story was having on me.

A simplified variant of the phenomenological analysis method developed by Wertz (1983) was adopted for the analysis of the data collected. Initially the interview was transcribed by myself and the recording listened to several times in an effort to get 'inside' the participant's experience. During the analysis I aimed to empathise with the participant's subjective experience whilst also being aware of my own embodied responses to the data. Through immersing myself in my participant's lived experience in this way, I aimed to not only deepen my understanding of her experience but also to bring meanings into focus and unearth meanings, which may be hidden. As I became more familiar with the data, I was able to extract and examine themes. The participant's own words have been used in the findings to assist in illuminating the participant's personal experience and to illustrate her narrative. In light of the relational approach to this research, it is recognised that self reflection and reflexivity are important part of the research process (Finlay and Evans, 2009). My aim therefore has been to hold and express an awareness of the co-creation of the research and how the relationship itself may have impacted my findings.

Ethics

The research participant in this paper is a 60 year old white British woman. She is known to me and as such there have been particular ethical considerations to take into account. Particular care has been taken to protect her anonymity; all names and place names have been altered, both within this article and within the initial transcript. Specific attention has been given to data storage and the original audio recording erased on completion of this research.

Informed consent was obtained from the participant at the initial stages of the research process and issues and assurances surrounding confidentiality were clearly defined and discussed between us. My aim has been to involve and to share with her at key stages throughout the process. Because of our existing relationship and the level of trust between myself and Jenny, I felt it necessary to gain some additional consent. Therefore, the main themes which I identified within the data have been shared and further consent has been gained in relation to submitting this paper for publication. The point of sharing, however, was for moral reasons rather than as an exercise in participant validation (Finlay and Evans, 2009).

The initial aim of the agreement was for us to explore the participant's experience of being in a relationship with an individual with mental health difficulties. However, when we sat down together to begin the interview, the participant expressed her concern at being able to give me what I needed for the purposes of the research. We floundered for a moment. It became apparent that the participant felt that she was embedded her experience with the individual and was finding her experience difficult to grasp hold of. Interestingly, I had held back on suggesting the title of this paper to her as I felt unsure as to whether she would be willing to explore the subject matter. This initial falter between us gave me an opportunity to propose the topic which is presented here. The subject was readily agreed to by the participant. A discussion of the co-creation of this occurrence and possible meanings can be found in the section entitled *Reflexive Considerations* within this article.

Findings

I have chosen to focus selectively on what seems to be three particularly strong themes to emerge out of Jenny's experience. Within the first section I explore the experiencing of 'Shame and Pride.' I follow in the next section with the theme of 'Why?', which seems inextricably linked to Jenny's attempts to understand herself and events from her mother's perspective. In the third theme I explore Jenny's felt experiences of 'Isolation and Belonging.'

Shame and Pride

Jenny feels both shocked and frightened on discovering herself to be pregnant. The following extract from the transcript is a starting point of Jenny's narrative experience of the rupture in the relationship between herself and her mother. It is from this point that Jenny's experience unfolds. I feel Jenny's anxiety in the re-telling of this part of her story, the pace of her voice quickens, her experience slips in and out of being vivid and intricate to chunks being lost:

Oh definitely. I was really worried about telling them that I was having a baby. You know and Jack [her boyfriend] just came round one night, you know cos obviously he didn't leave me to tell them on our own and er [sic].. I can remember it clearly, I think my dad was there, I can't remember to be fair but my mum was there definitely. And she was one evening you know and you build up to it you know, you're sat there and you know everything's on your mind and you're talking about other things and erm you know. She was ironing and she finished doing that and you know, we said... And er the reaction that she gave wasn't one that erm I expected at all I don't think. Well it's quite a long time ago so I can't really remember but she she just leapt up and hit me, I didn't expect that.

There is an impression of Jenny being trapped, caught in between the experiences of belonging and isolation. The words "he didn't leave me to tell them on our own" substituting the word 'my' for 'our' further illuminates a felt sense of isolation. The phrases "you're on your own now" and "you've made your bed, now lie in it" come to my mind. Jenny's felt sense of isolation is more fully explored later in this paper. The two words "we said" in this part of her re-telling of her narrative are spoken like a full stop; they hold a sense of the shame of Jenny's experience. I would come to understand that in this moment, after the "we said" and the initial physical attack on Jenny, all her known ways of relating to her mother ceased to exist. She says of this moment "your whole world's collapsing isn't it, when that happens." Jenny tells me how she feels about being pregnant in relation to her mother and those people around her:

She made me feel ashamed... It was guilt Helen I think, you know because you'd done something that you shouldn't have done. That, that, was, was in the way and everybody

could see that you'd done it you know [laughs]... and even though I had a wedding ring on by that time. I can remember travelling on the bus and [positions ring hand on knee] you know, wanting to show it... It was it was probably just how I was made to feel, what was going on in there [points to self] and what was happening outside as well you know, from the family and how I was made, certainly made to feel, certainly made to feel like that you know.

Jenny grapples with feelings of shame, attempting to decipher the origin. The shame seems to generate from both inside and outside of herself. Jenny carries her shame in her pregnant body, it being both the source and the vessel of her shame. A shame which is embodied and made visible. There is a sense of feeling exposed: "and everybody could see that you'd done it." There is also a feeling of being trapped by shame, it seeming to invade her from the environment, serving to make her feel vulnerable, self-conscious and marginalised. Jenny defends herself from her environment with her wedding ring, by deliberately showing it she attempts to legitimize her own felt pride in being pregnant.

It is important for Jenny to position her narrative historically and culturally from the outset and she continually reframes her experience in that way:

Well she was quite ashamed at the doctors I think, when we went to the doctors. The doctors at that time were... well this one was well.. certainly wasn't all that understanding either. It was just a general attitude at that time that was probably changing. I mean it would be 1968 you know 69 and erm people say like you know the swinging 60's don't they [smiles] and they think it was all change then but it may have been that in more, you know, in the bigger cities and things but it certainly hadn't spread to the outskirts.

Jenny grounds the events of her narrative in a particular time and place, which helps her to make some sense of her experience. It is important for Jenny to keep herself safe from her own painful unmet needs. External references offer an explanation for her internal experiences and provide a justification for her mother's actions. She expresses some of the joy and the sadness of having given birth to her baby daughter; the pride and the longing to share this new life; this new part of herself:

Well I was sad, yer yer very sad yer, cos you sit there and you want, you know you want people to have a look you've had a baby. It's lovely laughs] you know and for somebody not to come and take part in that pleasure you know for it to be your neighbour that comes to the hospital to see you, you know good for her really if I think about it, you know good for her.

Jenny misses the experience of her own pride being reflected in her mother's face; the shared experience of pride. Instead she feels her mother's rejection, not only of herself but also through the new life she has produced - a new part of her. Jenny substitutes the words "my mother" for "somebody" which again can be interpreted as a method of protection, a way of keeping herself safe. By making her mother a *somebody*, Jenny is able to guard against the pain of the rejection of her *mother*.

I did not set out as such to focus on the analysis of the language in the data, however, I found that deeper into the analysis process I was able to gain further insights by specifically looking at some of the words Jenny uses— and their underlying meanings. Here she expresses her ability to talk about the relationship rupture:

I suppose I'm talking now and I have been able to talk about it to you know to the children since, when they've, when they've asked, if they've asked. But at one time I was never spoken about [sic], I would never speak about it.

Jenny uses the word 'I' in place of 'it' and I think there is some significance in that. In doing so a parallel is drawn between what had never been spoken about in the past "I was never spoken about" and what is not spoken about in the present. She experiences her mother's shame in relation to her and carries the

shame with her into the present. With her shame she carries guilt at somehow being ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’.

In the experiencing of *guilt* Jenny holds on to her feelings of responsibility for the relationship rupture. Jenny’s experiencing of guilt can be seen as an attitude towards herself in assuming responsibility for a break in confluence and an attempt to repair an unbearable fracture in their relationship. What is prevented or avoided by the assumption of guilt however, is any actual contact between them (Perls et al, 1951).

‘Why?’ - A safer place to be

It is very important for Jenny to make some personal sense of the rupture between herself and her mother; some private sense which grants her some control over her experience. Jenny is consumed with the ‘why?’ of her mother’s behaviour, continually searching for some logical or rational to explanation for her mother’s rejection which might ease her internal experience:

We got married in a registry office, was the day of the wedding you know we went to hairdressers and things like that but even that wasn’t a really pleasurable experience because me mum just spent the whole time in tears in the hairdressers. [laughs] While she was er you know, having her hair done and then, you know and we were going, but I did try and see it from her point of view because you know, you probably do have hopes and expectations for your children and I used to think you know, I’m the only one and she maybe wanted you know, the big white wedding.

The pain and loss of Jenny’s abandonment comes in and out of focus as the question of ‘why?’ is turned over and over. Jenny attempts to rationalize and justify her mother’s behaviour, reaching for explanations such as the possibility of her being “menopausal” and her hopes for “the big white wedding” being thwarted. The rationalizations collide with her feelings of being utterly alone and frightened, which in turn catapult her back to the relative solace of the ‘why?’ of her mother’s reactions: *Why did she abandon me when I needed her most? She knows for certain that she could not behave in the same way towards her own children:*

Yer definitely and through, I think through your life you were [trying to understand] and then you as you have children of your own, you just realize there’s more to being a mum than being a mum when things go right and you know, you step up to the mark when things go wrong for your children don’t you. And you would support them come hell or high water really, whatever they did.

The knowledge of her strong convictions and attachment towards her own children makes her mother’s actions even more frighteningly painful and utterly bewildering. She thus continually checks out her own beliefs and experience with her own children against her experience with her mother. Jenny’s rationalizing brings her to the conclusion that *she herself* must be wrong. Jenny talks about her mother:

You know she’d come up through the war and knew me dad in the war so there’s... she had a lot more experience of life obviously than I did. You know I was the only one, and thinking back on it, I would have thought she would have been a bit more understanding, as I’ve grown and had my children. I couldn’t have tret them like, like she tret me. But you know when I was 19, I was at fault, [laughs] that’s how I felt, [upset] I felt really guilty. Really guilty. Really guilty.

During the analysis I looked at what I saw as the rhythm of the three themes, I found that Jenny continually comes back to working out what might be happening for her mother. Often punctuating beginnings and endings of chunks of narrative with the ‘why’ of her mother. There feels to be a relative sense of safety for Jenny in the not knowing what drives her mother’s feelings. I have an image in my mind of

Jenny crossing a river as she tries to make sense of her experience: She moves from the safety of the 'why' at one side of the river bank to the other. Stepping out and balancing on stepping stones of *shame* and then *guilt* then jumping further onto *isolation* and teetering on *rejection* before hurling herself ahead onto the safety of the next river bank of 'why'.

Erm but then I had Laura and erm she didn't even come to see me. [crying pause] One of the neighbours came to see me... in the hospital and she said you know I can't understand how your mum's being and I couldn't really. I tried you know all the things I could think of to erm to understand and try and understand her. Trying to understand why she was treating you know, why she was treating me like that. I mean I could understand that she was shocked and upset but you know, you think that people are going to come to terms with it... I never, I mean I often think if I'd have just argued with her and said you know, pull yourself together what do you think... Erm and I just you know, I just wonder if I'd have reacted differently instead of just being I don't know...

The 'why' is an important place of safety for Jenny because no definite conclusions can be drawn. There, she is removed from the pain of her unmet needs, from the pain of abandonment and isolation, it is perhaps also a place to fantasize. In the past the 'why' place may have been somewhere to hold some hope that the rupture was repairable. In the present the 'why' enables Jenny to fold in and out of protecting her mother, there is an unwillingness to interpret her mother's actions. For Jenny her mother's imagined reality acts to distract her from her own felt experience. Ultimately, it seems that Jenny feels responsible for her mother's feelings and actions towards her, adding to her already heavy burden of shame and guilt.

Isolation and Belonging

The themes of isolation and rejection and seem to jostle with their counterparts belonging and acceptance within Jenny's experience. In this section I hope to draw out some of the complexity and ambiguity of Jenny's attempts to make meaning out of her experience. In struggling to express her mother's reaction at the point of rupture, Jenny says:

Yer yer no, yer yer no no [crying] but anyway you know that's what happened and erm she more or less said that I had to get out of the house or she would go. [crying] Sorry... Or she would leave you know. and erm me dad. No, no, not that she would go sorry. She said that I had to leave. And me dad obviously was there because he said no if she goes, I go, you see.

In the initial statement before it is restructured, Jenny says her mother "would go...would leave". That is exactly Jenny's experience, her mother rejected her, leaving her isolated; she withdrew herself, she left.

I mean Jack [her boyfriend] said you know, you can come to our house and stuff like that but I mean, I wouldn't have wanted to do that and er you know, you want to be at home don't you.

There is the sense of Jenny being trapped somewhere between isolation and belonging not fully accepting either.

Yer so I was trying all the time, I was trying really to justify I think how she was and how she was reacting. Erm I used to... I used to catch a couple of buses when I was pregnant to go and see me mum and dad and erm she would never speak me when I got

there. She just used to put her head behind the newspaper [crying] and that was it. Just chatted to me dad while she just sat there and you know, pretended to read the paper. And one night I'd got back and erm, I'd gone for the bus and I'd just missed the bus so that meant I'd miss the bus from the town as well. And when I got back I got back on the door and me dad had gone to bed, just gone to bed, and me mum said oh there's your daughter. There's your daughter not hers you know. Erm erm, ooh sorry Helen I can talk about this sometimes and and it dun't it dun't really affect me and you know, it just depends you know how your feeling.

The pain of being disowned by her mother in such an implicit manner touches me deeply. As I engage with this part of Jenny's experience over and over by listening to the recording I feel a resonance through my own empathic somatic experiencing. I feel a kind of pressured haziness in the front of my head as Jenny talks of her mother's failure to acknowledge her and a twist and squeeze in my stomach together with nausea as I enter into Jenny's experience of rejection and disownment by her mother. Jenny's mother's anger, which has gone unsaid, becomes missed contact with her daughter and feels deliberate and brutal. I have an image of Jenny's mother's anger as a red ball which she throws to Jenny: Throwing it hard and fast towards her feet causing Jenny to jump, whilst also being impossible to catch hold of. As Jenny's mother retreats the ball is left for Jenny to pick up, hold, examine and carry. I sense Jenny's confusion, isolation and fear in bringing herself to her mother over and over only to be missed, dismissed, ignored and rejected. I have an impression of Jenny holding conflicting senses of herself; simultaneously conspicuous and invisible in the face of her mother. I have a sense of Jenny feeling *wrong*; feeling *being wrong* in her world.

As I reflect on my own experiences of expressing and holding onto anger, I wonder about Jenny's experiencing of it. I consider whether expressing anger might feel like an incredibly dangerous option for Jenny. She says:

I never, I mean I often think, if I'd have just argued with her and said you know pull yourself together, what do you think. But I'm not, I don't like any form of aggression really I don't Like that, you know I don't like to argue. Erm and I just you know, I just wonder if I'd have reacted differently instead of just being I don't know, I can't think of the word.

Jenny's words, again, are a striking illustration of her requirement to take responsibility for the relationship. There feels to be no solidity or firmness of ground on which for Jenny to stand to express her anger, there feels to be a constant tug towards the *Other*. I wonder also, whether an expression of anger from Jenny might have the potential to be used by her mother to legitimize her abandonment; to provide something for her mother to hang her feelings of rejection on. I have a sense of Jenny feeling frozen, waiting, holding on, holding in, scared. Perhaps not challenging her mother, again, becomes the safer option and offers a greater imagined potential for reunion. As I begin to gain a greater depth of understanding of Jenny's experience I have a greater sense of Jenny's requirement to disengage with any feelings of anger towards her mother. As I allow myself to be immersed in Jenny's experience, I notice I begin to feel very flat and I start to feel myself shutting down, exhausted as though I don't belong to myself. I imagine myself to be two-dimensional; flimsy like grey cardboard.

Not only does Jenny experience abandonment and rejection by her mother, she also experiences herself as coming *between* her parents. It is possible that she experiences feelings of *guilt* relating to her father's support for her. Accepting her father's support may well necessitate Jenny in experiencing herself as rejecting of her mother, something which indeed may be her mother's intention - in or out of awareness. Jenny's being-ness is directly used as a tool in a two-pronged attack in her mother's passive aggression, aimed at both Jenny and her father.

Later in the interview Jenny expresses feelings of both gratitude and responsibility relating to her father and her parent's subsequent break-up. An underlying theme of responsibility becomes visible once again; she experiences herself as being responsible not only for her mother's behaviour towards her, but also for maintaining her parent's relationship:

I've definitely thanked him you know for the support, you know it's not gone unsaid, you know it's been said. But it must have been quite difficult you know and I mean their relationship split up in the end and so you blame yourself for that as well you know, I did you know I blamed myself that that happened.

In the next part of Jenny's narrative experience she shifts from the 'why?' to expressing some sadness for her mother's own lost experience, to feeling *rejection* and *isolation*, to expressing her ambivalence about the support she did receive. In feeling supported by her grandparents and godparents she also grasps what was missing for her. She says of her mother:

She loved children you know, when we were growing up we used to live down a terrace and there was lots of children, they were always you know, around and things like that. And I just think you know, she missed out on so much you know. And I used to see people you know, friends sort of shopping with their mums and things and I'd be on my own [crying]... Everybody else from my family was really supportive you know, grandma granddad erm godparents and you know, people that were close but you know... Then I tried to think well they're not first hand are they, they're not like your mum are they, it doesn't really effect other people as much as maybe your immediate family.

Jenny's own felt experience is entwined with a need to take responsibility for her mother's. When Jenny says "then I tried to think well they're not first-hand are they, they're not like your mum are they, it doesn't really affect other people as much as maybe your immediate family", the sentence feels ambiguous. Again the themes of *isolation* and *belonging* are revealed. Jenny seems to reason her mother's rejection as being a measure of her close connection to her. A love inverted perhaps. For Jenny it seems, she could only be genuinely rejected by her mother because it is only to her that she truly belongs. Therefore it is the significance of the relationship that directly catapults Jenny into feelings of isolation and rejection and crucially fuels her feelings of responsibility for the rupture.

Later Jenny talks about the loss of something precious "it's something missing isn't it, there's something you know, there's something missing that was quite precious really [crying]". Her mother's love and support cannot be replicated or replaced. Jenny feels her own loss - a part of herself that is missing.

Reflexive Considerations

My own experience of pregnancy whilst being in an 'unmarried relationship' has been very different from that of Jenny's. I experienced no stigma around my unmarried status and felt no requirement or pressure to legitimise my pregnancy through marriage. Forty years on from Jenny's experience and there has been a societal shift in Britain; tolerance of changing attitudes towards what constitutes relationship and family is more widely held. Of course this generalised collective observation does not account for individual experience; it merely recognises a historical and cultural backdrop. My own mother was accepting, supportive and celebratory of my pregnancy and the subsequent birth of my baby daughter.

Still, both Jenny and my experiences at times converge and weave themselves together. At the time I told my mother the news of my pregnancy, I wondered about Jenny being present and her close physical proximity to me. After sharing in her phenomenological experience over the course of this research, I now recognize the likelihood of Jenny's own painful experience being evoked at the time of my disclosure. What also becomes apparent is the possibility that I unknowingly played *her* role in a re-enactment of the scene of 'point of rupture' from her own story. On the surface the two scenes are incredibly similar. It is conceivable that at the time, my feeling of Jenny's very close proximity accounts for Jenny stepping into the role of my protector: Poised to protect me in the present and her 18 year old self of the past. Poised to protect? Or poised for once again for my/her "whole world to collapse". When I gave my mother the news of my pregnancy, my mother leapt up and approached me, not with an attack but with

a loving embrace. It is also possible that in this way Jenny was able to re-experience aspects of her own scene with a different outcome. On reflection I am caught by the profundity of us both having shared the experiencing of each other's *same* moment.

The co-creation of the re-negotiation of the research topic during the initial undertaking of my interview with Jenny, had some intriguing parallels with what I would go on to understand about Jenny's experiencing of the relationship rupture with her mother. Jenny's need to make sense of her internal experiences, led to feelings of responsibility for her mother. The original subject matter relating to her being in a relationship with an individual suffering with mental health difficulties, would have undoubtedly directed Jenny towards experiencing some ambivalent feelings. Unable to grasp her experience of the subject, she expressed not only her requirement to reflect on her experience but also feelings of responsibility for providing for me. Unwittingly - and with my own agenda - this falter in proceedings presented me with the opportunity to bring forward my preferred topic, thus providing us both with a more desirable outcome. It seems that we were both caught up in parallel processes of protection and responsibility. Jenny's requirement to take responsibility for my needs whilst protecting herself, or possibly both/all of us (including the third party) from her ambivalent feelings, parallels her process to protect and take responsibility for her mother's feelings. Meanwhile I was also concerned with protecting Jenny by holding back the potentially distressing subject matter of her relationship rupture with her mother. This reflects my own process of taking responsibility for other's feelings. Interestingly and paradoxically, it was the same subject matter that I initially endeavoured to protect her from that was finally used to (on some level) protect Jenny from her difficult feelings in the moment.

During the interview I felt my own anger and frustration towards Jenny's mother and I felt my impatience in relation to Jenny's reasonable stance towards her. I felt a pull to ask Jenny about her anger, to somehow bring it into her awareness. Around the same time as the interview taking place, I was working on some of my own unexpressed anger in my own therapy and training. It is conceivable therefore, that my own emerging awareness at the time was seeping through into the relational process. Perhaps I had a need - an excitement - which was just on the peripheries of my awareness, to share this new consciousness with my participant. This coupled with my inexperience in doing this type of analysis, I believe, added to the process and led me to challenge some of Jenny's resistances at the time of the interview:

Helen: It sounds like you have some anger, that you can say; 'no mum you were actually wrong.'

Here I am verbalizing the anger I feel beneath Jenny's words but it is also my own anger and frustration at Jenny's mother and also directed towards Jenny. In some way perhaps I need to hear Jenny's anger; it feels too unbearable for me to hold alone. Jenny's reaction is to retreat into her sadness and pain; she begins to talk about developing a thicker skin, which protects her from being hurt again.

At another point during the interview I begin to verbalize my own anger, which also feels to be on Jenny's behalf. Her need to protect her mother by taking responsibility for her feelings resonates deeply with my own strong requirement for my own similar process. My frustration therefore, and what I find intolerable, is held in finding my own process in Jenny and it being so vividly mirrored back to me:

Helen: And I hear that you were doing a lot of that [trying to understand your mother] but I don't hear that she was doing any understanding.

My intervention causes Jenny, unsurprisingly given her well established pattern, to revert back to protecting her mother from this outside attack. Her response being: "Well I don't know we can speak for other people can we". Which puts her mother out of reach not only from outside attack, but also from Jenny's own relational experiencing of her. Jenny continues:

I think when you're younger your mum and dad are just your mum and dad you don't always look at them as people and personalities.

With this statement from Jenny I seem to be instantly released from this mesh of processes that I feel tangled in. I am thrown back in to Jenny's experience of being an 18 year old girl, who desperately

needs the support of her mother. I sense her holding the unbearability of being abandoned by her when she needed her most. I see clearly Jenny's need to keep her mother safe. I have a new sense of Jenny's need to protect that part of herself that is desperate to belong and be accepted by her mother.

Conclusion

Whilst this paper may well have resonances for individuals and also perhaps in a broader context of relationship rupture, my intention here has been to examine and express one woman's lived experience of a ruptured relationship with her mother.

Aspects of Jenny's lived experience appear interwoven, but there are of course many alternative avenues of exploration and expansion. The themes I have chosen to examine are a reflection of the subjective and intersubjective nature of this research.

I believe that assuming a phenomenological and relational stance to this research process has helped me to solidify my belief and understanding that *relationship* is central to our understanding of ourselves and others. I feel that this research process has fed both *into* and *out of* my training as an Integrative Psychotherapist, which mirrors the same value placed of the *relationship* between therapist and client.

The experience of the research encounter itself has impacted me deeply and I have found myself greatly enriched by the process. Much of Jenny's requirement to take responsibility in relationship resonates with me. I have found myself in touch with my own excruciating urge to make myself 'right' for the *Other*. I have sensed my own panic and loss of *self* in the face of angry silence. The intersubjective experiencing of Jenny's narrative experience has led me to encounter my own feelings of gaining momentary and relative peace with myself only when my perception confirms that the *Other* is at peace with me. I also appreciate and find a greater level of empathy and patience for myself in relation to my capacity for desensitisation from my own feelings of anger.

Engagement in interpretative analysis has been challenging. I have found however, that the opportunity for distance and reflection has enabled me to deepen my experience of embodied empathy, facilitating the unearthing of multi-layered meanings and understandings (Finlay and Evans, 2009). My aim has been to be both reflective and empathic. I have realised that this pattern of involvement and retreat mirrors a familiar relational process - potentially healthy and contactful. However, it also throws up echoes of my own history whereby I could find my own intersubjective sharing of experience lost or essentially stolen (Stern, 1985). This insight has highlighted for me the significance of the requirement for mutuality and humility throughout the research process. More explicitly: a recognition of the mutual impact of the research encounter and an acknowledgement on the part of the researcher that interpretations are always tentative and emergent (Finlay and Evans, 2009).

My understanding of Jenny's experience of rupture in relation to her mother has enabled me to embrace a broader and richer understanding of her in my own continuing relationship with her. I have a respect, a deep appreciation and an admiration for her, having transformed the potential continuing cycle of intergenerational relationship patterns within her relationships with her own children and grandchildren.

To summarize: Jenny's experience is one of shame and guilt in relation to her mother. She feels exposed and humiliated; she experiences a feeling of being '*in the wrong*' that she '*is at fault*.' Jenny experiences the shame of her pregnancy to be both internal and external. She feels her shame to be visible almost tangible. Jenny misses a shared sense of pride with her mother and instead experiences rejection not only of herself, but also through the new life she has created.

Jenny develops a number of ways to protect herself from her own painful internal experience. Notably she protects her mother from criticism by taking responsibility for her mother's feelings and behaviours. She experiences feeling not only responsible for the relationship rupture itself but also for her mother's behaviour towards her, as well as for the subsequent rupture in her parents relationship. Jenny

establishes a pattern of rationalizations and justifications about her mother's experience which again serves as a successful strategy in distancing herself from her own felt experience. There is a sense of a desperate internal confusion of experience as Jenny continually returns the question of the 'why' of her mother's behaviour.

The pain of rejection and isolation is felt deeply by Jenny within the relationship rupture with her mother. She feels her own deep sadness and loss as interwoven into her mother's: '*she missed out on so much.*' Their loss has the potential to momentarily fuse; they share the same loss. Jenny carries the loss with her, her children feel the loss of their mother's mother.

In the present Jenny now stands where her mother once stood, her own children have had children - she is now a grandmother. Our stories overlap and I stand where she once was, an unmarried mother with a baby daughter. As Jenny expresses it: '*there is something missing that was quite precious really.*'

References

Finlay, L. and Evans, K (2009) *Relational-centred Research for Psychotherapists: Exploring Meanings and experience*. Chichester, Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

Perls, F., Hefferline, R. F. and Goodman, P. (1951) *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. London: Souvenir Press.

Stern, D. N. (1985) *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. New York: Basic Books.