Being Unemployed: An Existential Understanding

A Qualitative Inquiry

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A word of thanks also to Dr. Gráinne Donohue who steered me safely through these perilous research waters.
Examination of the literature associated with unemployment revealed a dearth of information associated with an explication of the experiences of being unemployed from the perspective of the unemployed person. This study undertook to look out from the lens of the unemployed person from the subjectivity of their own experiences, utilising an existential phenomenological approach. Underpinned by existential philosophy and theory, the work utilised an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to carry out the research. In undertaking the work, a homogenous cohort, in keeping with best practice research methodology, was identified and respondents were recruited and subsequently interviewed. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed with resultant data. From this data three super-ordinate themes emerged: Relationship to Self and Others; Limitations and Possibilities; The Humanity of it All. In discussing the results, a number of implications in the arena of psychotherapy were extrapolated at several different levels including the macro, the therapeutic space, and in relation to an integrative approach. The richness and insight gained from the research and the demonstrated results have added to the body of literature relating to psychotherapy.
Chapter 1: Introduction:

1.1 Background and Context

This study is a qualitative inquiry into the central aim of the research that utilises a phenomenological approach with an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Larkin, Watts & Clifton 2006). An understanding of some of the meanings and understandings of unemployment through previous studies provide an underpinning of this research as do the origins and philosophical foundations of the phenomenological concepts employed therein. An interest in gaining some understanding of the phenomenon of being unemployed from the perspective of the long-term unemployed person emerged from previous academic research and from literature which focussed primarily on measuring mental health or psychological distress. There was little evidence of looking out through the lens of the person who is unemployed and a great deal of looking at him/her as object in a collective grouping of unemployed people examined through the subjectivity of the research. Quite often this involved longitudinal studies requiring questionnaire’s, based on various psychological scales completed by respondents over a number of years (Winefield & Tiggemann, 1990) or those drawing from demographic sources of information (Caplan, 2000).

Unemployment has been commonly defined using a number of key metrics that include: people above a specific age, a set reference period during which the person was without paid work, or were seeking work, and were taking active or specific steps to seek paid employment or self-employment (Griep, Rothmann, Vleugels & De Witte, 2012:307; Hussmans, Mehson & Verma, 1990:97). This is a useful basis for understanding unemployment from a statistical or structural policy creation perspective but does little to assist in comprehending the impact that unemployment may have on the general health, and
in particular the mental well-being, of those affected. However, meta-analysis of studies on the effects of unemployment on people from the Great Depression of the 1930’s, through the 1980’s and the 1990’s have demonstrated the deleterious effects it has on people (Creed, Machin & Hicks, 1999). Effects include psychological distress, depression, helplessness, poor self-esteem, and poor levels of coping (Creed et al, 1999) relationship difficulties, anxiety and health problems (Gallo et al, 2006).

While much of the research relates to job loss and people moving from the world of work to unemployment and the correlative effects on individual mental well-being and mental health little is reflected in the subjective experience of being unemployed. This work focuses on males with previous work experience who are long-term unemployed which is defined as “…people who have been unemployed for twelve months or more…” (OECD, 2014). In understanding unemployment in this context this research draws upon, among other things, the existential phenomenological conceptualisation of Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with’ (Tratter, 2012:257). An existential understanding seems most apposite for this body of work as it strives to subordinate knowing about the person to the fact of the person’s actual existence (May, 1983:93) underpinning the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which strives to model the person as a “sense-making creature” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009:33).

1.2 Research Aim & Objectives:

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the experience of a cohort of unemployed persons’ experiencing the phenomenon of being unemployed from an existential phenomenological and therapeutic perspective.
In that context a number of objectives will be achieved through gaining insights into:

1) The sense that unemployed persons’ have of themselves in being unemployed.

2) Understanding the relationships that unemployed persons’ have with themselves and with others.

3) To establish from the participants’ their sense of meaning, if any, attached to or derived from being unemployed or not employed.

4) To gain an understanding of the unemployed person’s context in the world through their ideals/dreams/vistas of their past, present, and future.

Ultimately the significance of this research is primarily in filling a gap that exists in research relating to unemployed persons, as understood from their own perspective and how that research may be used. It opens the door to further research and inquiry into the important meanings, essences, comprehensions, and apprehensions of the unemployed person. This may in the future assist in informing approaches within the therapeutic space.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:
This literature review provides an overview of some of the research available that has, thus far, been primarily focussed on establishing, or explicating the negative health outcomes, both physical and mental, for unemployed people. It also examines literature relating to the underpinnings of the existential phenomenological approach, the therapeutic approach, and how these may be understood from a research perspective. Quite often the opportunity to research aspects of the person is lost as a result of looking at the collective of the people. Perhaps, there is a ‘taken for granted’ (McLeod, 2001:2) approach to human experience in a world in which we all understand, or have an understanding, of our experiences.

2.2 Unemployment in Context:
Employment, for the individual, is often characterised in the context of the economic benefits, the social resources or the capacity to earn a living and social status (Scharzer, Hahn & Fuchs 1994:75). Described as a universal problem in the western world the impact of unemployment is felt within economic, social, and psychological boundaries (Waters & Moore, 2002). At a macro level, interventions and institutional policy implementation in neighbouring jurisdictions, possibly reflective of social mores, which may have implications in the therapeutic space, are being questioned. Implications of these policies suggest that being unemployed is a psychological condition that can be changed through coercive interventions to enforce attitudinal changes (Rhodes, 2015). Psycho-social policies such as these aim to change the psychological attitudes of the unemployed implying a need to cure or heal them of their unemployment ailment (Friedli & Stearn, 2015).
Unemployment has been shown consistently by studies from the Great Depression of the 1930, through the 1980’s and the 1990’s to have deleterious effects on people. Effects include psychological distress, depression, helplessness, poor self-esteem, and poor levels of coping (Creed et al, 1999), boredom, financial hardship, and poor mental health (Roynayne, 1991), feelings of despondency, hopelessness, and discouragement (Schwarzer et al 1994:76). Differential effects of unemployment on people have been shown in relation to educational attainment and position in the work force using a General Health Questionnaire. Unemployment was found to have a causal effect for high levels of psychological distress for 1 in every 12, or just over 8%, of those in higher professional and managerial classes, and for 1 in 4, or 25%, in the unskilled manual class (Whelan, Hannan & Creighton, 1991). However, there are other studies which have found less clear cut negative effects on mental health related to unemployed. Although they have concomitant findings of improvements to mental health in moving from unemployment to employment (Murphy & Athanasou, 1999).

For others the negative effects on mental and physical health experienced by unemployed people is related to a personal disposition regarding self-efficacy. Influential factors on levels of self-efficacy include age and duration of unemployment, with unemployment in itself indication of a causal effect on low self-efficacy (Zenger, Berth & Stöbel-Richter, 2013). The complexity of the relationship between cause and effect may be apparent. Mental health can be negatively affected by unemployment but it is worth noting that people living with mental health issues are more likely to be unemployed. One study found that between 80-90% of people living with severe mental health issues were unemployed (Marwaha, Gilbert & Flanagan, 2014).
Cullen and Hodgetts’ (2001) study examined, from a social representations theory perspective, the meaning that unemployed people gave to their own situation. The results demonstrated that people attached meanings framed from a perspective of unemployment being a transgression. Individualised, societal, and fatalistic underpinnings become embedded as the unemployed try to bring order to their lives within the strictures of societal mores. In many instances unemployment was made sense of through framing it in the same way as an illness which restricted activity and involvement in the wider social activities of life, including work. Such pathologising, reflects official responses and individualising of responsibility, with victim blaming being attached to the unemployed. Although social representations theory is not psychotherapeutic it is located in a framework elucidating the individual as not alone in one’s understanding of, and in, the creation of reality. A study from a psychosocial perspective carried out one hour face to face interviews with young unemployed men in a Welsh mining town that had lost the industry. The detailed interviews revealed that the young men had coping mechanisms which were shaped by disillusionment as well as, importantly, a sense of traumatic loss for an industry they never worked in, as loss was transmitted inter-generationally (Jimenez, 2014).

2.3 Existential Underpinnings:

Unemployment and the meanings and sense that an individual may experience can be understood from an existential psychotherapeutic perspective. In taking an existential perspective the relevance of the philosophical underpinnings is evident. The literature would suggest that this follows a critical understanding of systems that de-humanise people into statistics, impersonal facts, or laws in a reductive attempt at interpreting the varied intricacies, complexities, relationalities, of human existence. (Cooper, 2015:12). Laing
expressed the view that applying terms that are not human to human beings is “to do violence” to them and the essence of who they are (Cited in Cooper, 2015:12).

In taking a more reflective approach, the essence may be represented by the four dimensions of human existence; The Umwelt, The Mitwelt, The Eigenwelt, and The Überwelt (Van Deurzen, 2006). The Umwelt or physical dimension relates to our environment, material surroundings, physical health, our mortality and temporal nature (Adams, 2013:26). The Mitwelt, or social dimension, concerns relating to others in the world, to our own and other cultures and the presence of other people (Adams, 2013:27). The Eigenwelt, or psychological dimension, is about the relationship we have with ourselves, our imagination, with the past and future events and potentialities (Adams, 2013:28). The Überwelt, or spiritual dimension, concerns the created value systems, meanings, concepts of right and wrong that underpins the belief system by which an ideal world in which we could possibly live, would exist (Adams, 2013:28).

Further to that the core concepts, or ‘ultimate concerns’ (Zafrides, Markman, Proulx & Lindberg, 2013:467), of existential theory; freedom, death, isolation, and meaning (Yalom, 1980) may have some resonance with the potential findings of any study taken from a phenomenological existential perspective into unemployment. Central to this is the ‘gift of human consciousness’ (Zafrides et al, 2013:467) or in Husserl’s terms, it is what is experienced in the consciousness through the processes of relationships called intentionality within the consciousness and the object of our awareness (Smith et al, 2009:13). Freedom is not simply about having unlimited choices but about choices within the boundaries of human existence and the individual response or responses to events and stimuli. Our inevitable physical demise and the human awareness of our terminal existence create a sense of awareness of non-being, evoking anxiety coupled with a fear of being left alone in
the world, in isolation, forgotten (van Deurzen, 2006) as does the freedom to “…fulfil some new potentiality” (May, 1983:112). As individuals’ humans strive to create their own meaning which inevitably becomes more acute and heightened with impending death, or of the threat to the existence of the self (Van Deurzen, 2006) as awareness of our terminal demise and sentient continuance become psychologically merged (Yalom, 1980:30). In the context of human existence the individual’s whom the therapist encounters may present with various existential conflicts. Such challenges and struggles may be associated with the conflicts of meaning, isolation, freedom and mortality (Zafrides et al, 2013:470).

From an existential point of view it is about how we as humans relate to ourselves, to our environment, to our historiography, and to our sense of our humanness beyond the biological. Heidegger refers to humans in this sense as ‘Dasein’ (Heidegger, 1962:41) which literally means ‘being-there’(Olsen 1962:135) in which its essence lies in its existence or which others interpret as meaning ‘the there of Being’ (Cohn, 1997). The relational context in which humans find themselves are reflected in Heidegger’s use of the concepts of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-in-the-world-with-others’ (Cohn, 1997) through which in a state of mindfulness of being, there is an amazement, not at the way things are but ‘that’ they are (Yalom, 1980:31) with the ratiocinate connexion of ‘self’ and ‘world’ (May, 1980:122). As humans we have an inevitable involvement with others, and the world is not something we enter but is something we are always a part of. Neither can we choose a world without people. Our response to the world which constitutes meaningful relationships; events, past and present, and influences with deterministic possibilities suggest that with an individual’s awareness the potential to shape, and reshape, our world exists (May, 1980:123). For Heidegger understood the lack of ability to choose where or to whom we are born, or if leading on to an inherent sense of enquiry into these ‘givens’ of life as ‘the ontological’. It is how each individual responds to these givens and the
exploration of those responses he called ‘ontic enquiry’ (Cohn, 1997) or ontological mode in which one has the capacity to effect self-change (Yalom, 1980:31). Through engagement, interaction with the world, through responding to the world as an individual among others or in understanding that it is through existence that human beings come to terms with existence (Heidegger, 1978:17). Yet within that existence there can be a sense of man’s disposition to place function in primacy to existence as the person’s sense of being is linked to the label of their economic role in society which is tied to the conformist and collectivist trends of modern societies (May, 1983:95).

The relational aspect of being-in-the-world; the personal and social aspects of communal life; the individual comprised of the social just as the social is comprised of the individual, are all parts of the inter-subjectivity that makes up the constituent elements of the human world of self and other. The context of inter-subjectivity also known as ‘being-with’ or ‘with-world’ (Owen, 1994) and the idea of the ‘person-in-context’ is what lies at the centre of Heidegger’s phenomenological understanding of existentialism (Larkin et al, 2006). In this, it is about acknowledging the essence, meaning the characteristics which give everyday existence substance (May, 1980:51) Yet, it is about an understanding, through leaving aside existing theories and beliefs in an attempt to interpret that essence (McLeod, 2003 p37). Heidegger’s concept of ‘everydayness’ (McLeod, 2003:59) was framed as an ontological analysis of the essence of the constitution of Dasein, the “being who is there”(May, 1980:25), rather like a ‘…philosophical anthropology…’ (Heidegger, 1978:20). Through this, an understanding of the ‘Being of this being..’ (Heidegger, 1978:20) Heidegger attempted to understand the essence of ‘…being in..’ itself to understand what it means to be human (McLeod, 2003:59). Rather like Viktor Frankl’s understanding of therapy, as the client and therapist being co-explorers in discovering
meaning and meaning potential (Lantz, 2000) the phenomenological approach is about discovering what 'is'.

Within the meaning of life that emerges, the needs required to be satisfied in making sense of it are explored. In this can be suggested four basic meanings; purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991:29). Purpose could probably be better described as purposiveness (Baumeister, 1991:32) and is about relating current activities with something in the future which may or may not be ultimately achieved. Value is essentially about the person viewing current actions or past acts as not being bad or disagreeable, to give a pure motivation to actions. This is so even if in other circumstances the person may see them as objectionable or even immoral. Efficacy describes the persons requirement to hold a belief of some level of control over their activities and life. It may mean to believe one has control over one’s life, when one doesn’t; one is in fact deluding oneself (Baumeister, 1991:41). Self-worth relates to the person as tied in with a quest for superiority in relation to others. It may or may not have a moral component, or financial, or social class or some other social construct. It does seem related to a need for a hierarchy in which the human person will always seek a way of interpreting their existence in a fashion that does not place them at the bottom. (Baumeister, 1991). Not to have these needs satisfied may lead to distress for the individual. Usually if one meaning is lost the response is to elaborate the other meanings rather than find new ones. Only if the other meanings are inadequate will new meanings be sought (Baumeister, 1991:47). As May (1983) posits, in the modern world in which conformism and identification with others is prevalent it is mans’ fear of ostracism, of not being accepted, which is symptomatic of how individual meaning can become meaningless as it is borrowed from someone else (p21).
2.4 The Psychotherapeutic Perspective:

In taking the existential approach to understanding the meanings unemployed persons give to their ‘being’ the relevance to psychotherapy must be established. Irrespective of the theoretical approach, it is the ‘therapeutic relationship’ (Mearns & Thorne, 2013:161-62, Walsh & McElwain, 2002:258, Jacobs, 2010:17) or ‘therapeutic alliance’ (McLeod, 2013:407, Yalom & Bugental, 1997:122) between the client and the therapist that is central to effective therapy (Evans & Gilbert, 2005:39). Whether called alliance or relationship key factors include the personality of the therapist, their individual style, the attitudinal attributes of the client (Evans & Gilbert, 2005:39), the therapist’s empathic disposition, a partnership approach which is collaborative and in which the client feels an active and respected participant (Hovarth, 2000:171). Through this, a framework which is supportive and allows the client to feel heard and accepted, the work which is required to happen, will occur (Yalom & Bugental, 1997:123).

From Frankl’s existential approach called “…logotherapy, or the therapy of meaning…” (van Duerzen, 2012:11) to the humanistic existential psychotherapy of Yalom, Bugental and Schneider, with the philosophical underpinnings of Laing and van Deurzen the uniqueness of existential therapy is apparent (van Deurzen, 2012). Yet in this uniqueness, one of the key ingredients of existential therapy is freedom; in approach, application and understanding which allows for “cross-fertilization” (van Deurzen, 2012:12) or, as has been suggested it is about allowing in whatever technique emerges in the therapeutic encounter (Dreyfus, 1962:131). There is a suggestion, in this, of an integration in practice of what the client brings to the therapeutic encounter with the training and skills of the therapist (Culley & Bond, 2011:14). In essence it is about a process in which there is a ‘rapprochement’ and mutuality in the therapeutic space, at both a clinical and conceptual level (Fernández-Álvarez, Consoli & Gómez, 2016:820) through which a narrow outlook
that restricts the therapist from utilising approaches from outside their preferred theory is avoided (Sotskova & Dossett, 2017:132).

The approach of existential psychotherapy and counselling is not based on a need to cure but to reflect upon and understand life. The client may have challenges, difficulties, or obstacles but the aim is to assist the client in focussing on life, not personality (van Deurzen, 2012:30). A main concern from an existential perspective is working with the individual in the rediscovery of the living person within all of this, as the experience of the person is examined, but more than that it is the study of the person who is doing the experiencing (May, 1983:53). Within a relational context, the client may be facilitated in understanding their awareness of themselves as being in the world, or of standing in a world which threatens him as the subject. From a therapeutic perspective it presents the possibility of insight (May, 1983:31). With that insight the choices available may become apparent (May, 1983) and the possibilities for radical change, as the dynamic and temporal nature of a person’s future (meaning) and their past (as ground) make significant contributions to a present choice (Walsh & McElwein, 2002:256).

In the therapeutic space manifestations of existential anxiety may become apparent for individuals in times of transition through changes that can be either positive or negative (Zafrides et al, 2013:470) such as in the person becoming, or being, unemployed. Across the temporal span of life, individuals may experience ‘existential crises’ (Andrews, 2016:104) through their struggle to figure out who they are. In many ways an existential crisis is part of being alive as it signifies the person working through an important part of their life. It is a component of being in modern societies that offer individuals more choices in the paths they may possibly follow (Andrews, 2016). It can be closely related to the internal conflict within the individual who has an awareness or ‘primordial knowledge’
that they are not realising their potential in life (May, 1983:79). In this there is sense in relating to the world around that the individual realises they are failing to find their potential, to self-realise, or most commonly failing to live fully through achieving self-actualisation (Yalom, 1980:279; May, 1983:79-80).

Similar to other approaches, existential psychotherapist’s regard the quality of the therapeutic relationship as being paramount (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:258) in which, from a phenomenological perspective, it is how the client experiences the world at the moment of contact with the therapist (Dreyfus, 1962:128). Critical also in the existential approach is subordinating technical concerns to an empathic holding of the client’s experience using varying interventions and practices within the authenticity of the therapeutic relationship through the medium of engaging with an ‘existential attitude’ (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:258/280). This resonates in similarity to the Gestalt practice of recommending the therapist to be present in the space by ‘bracketing’ off one’s own concerns and urges, to be fully there for the client (Joyce & Sills, 2014:46) or of a co-created space between two equal adults in psychodynamic therapy (Jacobs, 2010:137). Integrating an existential approach to other theoretical schools may be a moot exercise given that it has been conceptualised as being influential, partially or wholly, in many therapies including: Gestalt; Person-Centred; Psychodrama; the Soteria approach (Craig, Vos, Cooper & Correia, 2016:285).

Ultimately it is central to an existentialist approach to make assumptions about human freedom within which is the belief that the person can, and has, the capacity to change (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:256). Through this one of the fundamental intentions of therapy is to facilitate the personal agency of the client into coming in contact with their real or authentic self (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:257). An authentic self (Cooper, 2003:24) is one
that is not self-deceptive in hiding from the pain of existential guilt or anxiety acting in bad faith (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:257) but is one that relates to facing down and acknowledging the difficulties of these positions (Cooper, 2003:24) and having the courage to take risks (van Deurzen & Baker, 2005:175).

Within the relational therapeutic framework, not grounded in technical practice, an awareness of transference and countertransference could be held by the therapist. Transference relates to the displacement of feelings, ideas, emotions by the client onto the therapist which have origins in former objects or people in the client’s life (Rycroft, 1995:185). Countertransference relates to the therapist transferring onto the client; yet, as a potentially distorting element of the work it can be used, by the therapist, as a way of understanding (Rycroft, 1995:28/29) what is happening in the therapeutic space. In some instances this looks very like a technique of the therapist withdrawing the authentic self to present a blank screen in order for the client to more readily transfer onto the therapist (Yalom, 1980:412). However, the import and effectiveness lies in not having a single focus on the transference as this would impede therapy (Yalom, 1980:413) however if the therapist can facilitate the emergence of strong feelings, it can facilitate insight and learning for the client (Cooper, 2015:48). From an existential perspective transference is about what is coming in to therapy in relation to the client ‘being-in-the-world’ and their ‘openness’ or ‘closedness’ concerning others (Cooper, 2003:40). Care must be taken by the therapist to ensure what is being responded to is for the client and not for an unmet need being carried by the therapist (Cooper, 2015:36) in their countertransference. Through ‘bracketing’ of personal ‘prejudices and biases’ (Cooper, 2015:70) the therapist can focus on the experiences of the client. There is a practical association of approaches such as psychodynamics which places the influence of past experiences as an important factor.
(Jacobs, 2010:64) or Gestalt which seeks to work in the here and now with the co-created manifestation of transference and countertransference (Joyce & Sills, 2014 133/135).

2.5 Research Approaches:

To capture the subjective essence of the unemployed person’s experience of being unemployed an appropriate research approach is required. Research utilising a Quantitative methodology could be considered as it is often viewed as impartial or independent of the researcher and something which can be measured objectively (Creswell, 1994:4) producing data in the form of numbers (Punch, 1998:4). Generating data through this approach results in a focus on the product, not in the decisions or meanings attached by the object of the study in the process being examined (May, 1997:172) in contrast to qualitative research methods which focus on understanding the agency of subjects. Quantitative research methods are useful in measuring the relationship of one set of variables against another, or in the effects of causal or independent variables on outcomes (Ragin, 1994:145) a rather detached and, perhaps, clinical mechanism that would not fit the needs of this work.

However, utilising a quantitative approach would not be without its challenges as often the grasp we have of an event or experience is such that no explanation is required. It is understood through common sense, which is described as one of the paradoxes of qualitative research (McLeod, 2003:2). This taken for granted, common sense understanding, is something that is a challenge for the researcher in qualitative research and in particular when utilising an existential phenomenological approach (McLeod, 2003). In using an interpretative phenomenological analysis adopting Husserl’s concept of ‘bracketing’ to set aside our assumptions (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011:44) and taken for granted preconceptions to fully concentrate on the meanings of perceptions relating to the
world (*Smith, Flower’s & Larkin, 2009:13*) can facilitate avoiding interference from predispositions. However, caution should be weighed in taking this approach when one considers Heidegger’s understanding of bracketing as a complex dynamic that can only be partially achieved (*Smith et al, 2009:25*) as the role of the unconscious is not always obvious and the influence of preceding thought and the researchers perspective ever present (*McKenzie, 1997:19*).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Rationale for Methodological Approach:
The methodology utilised in this study is aimed at gaining an insight into how the research respondents, as unemployed persons, interpret, understand and find meaning in their current existence. In pursuit of this the most appropriate approach to utilise would appear to be a qualitative one. For within the qualitative approach the voice of the participant in the research is heard through a structured process. It is about elucidating the meanings, understandings and essences of their experiences as captured in common sense expressions, reflecting their grasp of the world (McLeod, 2003, 2:4). Primarily this is so, because this method of research is aimed at gaining an understanding of how the social world is constructed. Dooley (2001) categorises qualitative research as research which is carried out by analysing field observations without the use of statistics. Qualitative research has been known to be called participant observation or field research which takes place in the context of direct observation and unstructured or semi-structured interviews. For Creswell (1998) qualitative research is a complex process, described as an intricate weave with different colours, textures and fabrics made up of minute threads. It is a process, usually carried out in the natural or familiar setting of the participant, through which the expressive understandings and the meanings of the participants emerge.

Various qualitative methodologies such as: grounded theory, phenomenology, discursive, ethnographic, or hermeneutic each take a different perspective in facilitating an understanding of how that world is constructed (McLeod, 2003). The approach of this study is to utilise a phenomenological approach, largely envisaged by Husserl, in which rigorous examination of the subject is carried out through leaving previous assumptions or prejudices aside (bracketing) and looking with fresh eyes and using our intuition to reveal
the fundamentals. To apprehend the essence and meaning of events and things to the subjects of the study (*Dooley, 2001:251; Van Deurzen, 2006*) we must describe and understand rather than explain and analyse (*Van Deurzen, 2006*).

### 3:2 Methodological Approach:

To grasp this essence of the participants’ in context this study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (*Larkin et al, 2006*). This approach offers a flexibility that presents the opportunities for deep and enriching exploration of the phenomenological centre of the subject matter. Rather than a purely analytical step by step approach IPA allows the meanings held, and understood, by the participants’ to emerge across an interpretive range (*Larkin et al, 2006*) through an exploration of how they make sense of their social and personal world (*Smith & Osborn, 2008:53*). IPA, through utilising an in-depth qualitative analysis is particularly useful in the instance of this study as it is not aimed at determining the validity of a researcher’s hypothesis but of apprehending the perceptions of participants to their situation, in all of its complexity and novelty (*Smith & Osborn, 2008:55*). It has been defined as providing an analysis that is a double hermeneutic in which the participant is trying to comprehend their own world while at the same time the researcher is trying to comprehend how the participant is comprehending their world (*Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2012:131; Smith & Eatough, 2007:35*).

IPA has been described as an idiographic rather than nomothetic approach in that it facilitates the making of specific statements about individual case studies in contrast to the nomothetic approach which can result in broad generalisations (*Smith & Osborn, 2008:56*). In this approach, it is possible to get a broad understanding of general themes as well as that
of the individual participant, as a good IPA study will allow itself to be ‘parsed’ in these two ways (Smith & Eatough, 2007:37).

3.3 Participants:

To facilitate the research aim of this work the respondents participating in the study were drawn from a relatively homogenous cohort. All are males who are long term unemployed, and have had paid work experience. “Long term unemployment is usually described as referring to people who have been unemployed for 12 months or more.”, that are available for work and are taking actions to find gainful employment (OECD, 2014). While that definition is not found in Irish official literature, twelve months is the usual start point for eligibility to programmes aimed at addressing the long-term unemployment situation (Welfare.ie 2016). It seems reasonable to utilise this as the reference point for this work.

Recruitment of participants was undertaken through contact with Local Employment Services (LES) in number of locations in Dublin, who were in position to identify individuals willing to volunteer for, and to take part in the research. Although sufficient volunteers were initially identified by the LES’s and contacted by the researcher, there was no initial success in recruitment. In all seven potential respondents were contacted and meetings set up, which were either cancelled by the respondent or the respondent failed to turn up. Each time alternative arrangements were agreed with, unfortunately, the same outcome, so alternate recruitment arrangements were put in place. Following this a community based male support network was contacted and volunteers came forward to participate in the research through a snowball recruitment process. As can be seen from Table 1 the outcome of the recruitment process was successful in recruitment of an
homogenous cohort reflective of an appropriate research basis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009:49)

Table 1
Participant Demographic Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Time unemployed</th>
<th>Primary occupation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Chef</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Printer</td>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Warehouse Supervisor</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the context of this research this purposive sampling (Dooley, 2001:129) method was appropriate as it facilitated identifying respondents. As a focussed form of opportunity sampling it had the effect of bringing to the research participants who were ‘information rich’ (Sullivan & Riley, 2012:42).

3:4 Sample:

The sample size used in IPA can vary, as published research using between one and forty two participants has been noted, however in general it is at the lower end of this scale that most research occurs (Smith & Eatough, 2007:40). While there is no right number for participants taking part in IPA research (Smith & Osborne, 2008:56) it has been suggested that for research such as this, three would be an appropriate number (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith & Osborne, 2008). In this research the sample size is three respondents. This, in part, fulfils an objective that qualitative research is not intended to be statistically representative but is aimed at presenting an understanding of the respondents’ subjective experiences (Sullivan & Riley, 2012:41) as at a basic level it is about the depth of insight rather than the breadth (Smith & Osborne, 2007).
3:5 Data Collection:

Data was gathered through the use of one to one, face to face semi-structured interviews with the respondents. This form of interviewing is particularly useful in qualitative research (Hugh-Jones & Gibson, 2008:104) and is used in most IPA studies (Smith & Eatough, 2007: 41) allowing the respondent more freedom to respond than in a structured interview (Hayes, 2000:121/122). The semi-structured interviews followed a schedule of questions (Appendix C) which was used in a flexible fashion by the researcher, as in each case the respondents covered broad swathes of material and cross-referenced many of the questions without the researcher eliciting those responses. In order to facilitate ease of information gathering interviews were recorded and contemporaneous observational notes about each individual session were taken. Data was recorded using audio recording equipment and is stored securely in a digital format accessible only to the researcher. All information recorded at the interviews was transcribed verbatim (Kirkham, Smith & Havsteen-Franklin, 2015) to documents in order to form a basis for the data analysis. Three respondents took part in the individual interviews with the researcher and duration ranged between forty-five and forty-eight minutes long and were in a location that was agreed as acceptable to both participant and researcher. In this instance the interviews took place in rooms used by the participants’ in the facilities of their support networks with which they were familiar and comfortable (Smith & Eatough, 2007: 44).

3:6 Data Analysis:

As set out above the data was analysed utilising an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) which focused on retaining the participants lived experience as central to the whole process (Kirkham et al, 2015). A preliminary part of the data analysis involved transcribing the recorded interviews from spoken text into documentary written form
(Gibson & Hugh-Jones 2012:142) which can be tracked using page and line numbers, that also facilitated ease of reading and exploration (Hayes, 2000:184). The analytic process involved initial reading and several rereading’s of the text (Storey, 2007:53) to delineate some of the emerging experiential themes as each respondents’ interview was rigorously analysed. Interviews were analysed separately with initial thoughts and contemporaneous notes of the researcher taken on the margins of the transcripts highlighting anything interesting and significant (Smith & Eatough, 2007:45). Sub-themes were identified in the context of commonality establishing preliminary connections between the variegated answers of the respondents (Storey, 2007:57). Each of these sub-themes were clustered under emergent thematic headings which were individually colour coded in the text (Appendix D). Emergent themes were clustered together as they demonstrated a sense of a pattern, or a like with like complexion (Smith et al, 2009:96). Emergent themes were then further clustered to develop super-ordinate themes (Storey, 2007) which were delineated in summary through the colour coded themes (Appendix D) with accompanying illustrative quotations from the transcription (Storey, 2007:59). Super-ordinate themes (Storey, 2007:52) were identified, facilitating an understanding of the overall depth and breadth of the participant experiences (Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2012:145). In all five clusters were created, of which three were created as super-ordinate themes and given titles reflective of their sense. The two remaining clusters were not used primarily because they lacked the same sense of cohesion and of pattern across the three interviews and therefore the possibility of a lack of richness that would come from a more homogenous understanding. Ultimately the research analysis addresses the research aim and objectives, yet the nature of IPA allows for the emergent themes to shift the emphasis of the research (Gibson & Hugh-Jones 2012:141), however, care must be taken, to ensure the analytic narrative is not taken out of context (Storey, 2007:60).
3.7 Ethical Considerations:

Literature relating to ethical issues generally finds that considerations can be reduced to a number of central elements focusing on; harm, consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality of data (Punch, 1998). In keeping with best practice, respondents were given sufficient information by the researcher in order for them to give their ‘informed consent’ (Peterson, 2000. Elmes, Kantowitz & Roedigger, 1995) in deciding whether or not to participate in the study (Appendix C). Informed consent is viewed as the respondents having enough information about their role in the research, who is doing the research, and what will be done with the information gathered (Sullivan & Riley, 2008:52). This information was shared verbally and through written form (Dooley, 2001:30) in an understandable manner free from jargon and abstract concepts (Sullivan & Riley, 2008:53) in which potential risks attached to the research were outlined.

The researcher, fulfilled the ethical responsibility of ensuring that a higher level of confidentiality than could be achieved was not promised and that information originating in the research would not be used for other purposes (Peterson 2000). For this study respondents were given an information sheet (Appendix C) setting out the topic of research, the purpose of the research, and their rights within the research. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage, including withdrawal of their information from the research up to the date of the thesis going to print. This would be viewed as an appropriate point where logically it would be too late to withdraw, in keeping with the limitations of the withdrawal right (Sullivan & Riley, 2008:62). Each respondent was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) which confirmed they understood that recordings would be used and kept securely stored, as well as their right to withdraw and the matter of confidentiality. In doing so the participants acknowledged that they are giving their informed consent (Hayes, 2010:128) regarding all aspects of their involvement in the
research. The consent form was also be signed by the researcher with copies retained by the respondents, and by the researcher.

Using covert or deceptive practices is not in keeping with ethical standards (May-Kut & Morehouse 1994) which should be concerned not only with the interests of the project but with the interests of the participants in the research (May, 1997). The identities of the respondents are not revealed in this study through a process of replacing actual names with pseudonyms (Sullivan & Riley, 2008:58; Hayes, 2012:129). Identifying data was edited for anonymity because of the possibility that the results will be accessible to persons other than the researcher (Smith et al 2009:53) at some time in the future. At all times the respondents interests are paramount which was reflected in putting in place measures aimed at mitigating or supporting respondents in the event of harm, or distress, being caused through the interview process (Sullivan & Riley, 2008:59-61). In the case of interviews carried out for this research, respondents did not leave the premises alone and were also provided with a contact sheet with details of local and national support groups and organisations (Appendix C).
Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction:

Through analysis of the data obtained in the three interviews there emerged a total of eighteen different initial themes. Through further analysis a number of emergent themes were identified, which in turn were clustered together as they demonstrated a sense of a pattern, or a like with like complexion. Of the five clusters created, two were not used due to a limited sense of cohesion and of pattern within the interviews. The remaining three, which carried a greater depth of an homogenous understanding were set out as super-ordinate themes and given titles reflecting their content. The three super-ordinate themes which emerged and are discussed below are; Identity and Relationship with Self and Others; Limitations and Possibilities of Self; The Humanity of it All.

4.2 Identity and Relationship with Self and Others:

What became apparent during the analysis of the interviews was the context in which the respondents placed their relationships to others in the world. In the context of their understanding of their relationship to themselves as individual sentient beings findings revealed a sense of being with oneself. To contextualise, the respondents showed an experience of self that was complex and intricate that traversed their life, both within and without of employment. Within the complexities of the awareness of who they are now, as represented in interview, and of their past histories giving a glimpse of a certain sureness in their outlook, yet beneath there is a degree of uncertainty within how they relate and have related to others, and to themselves.

In each of the three interviews it was the relationships to people within their primary employments which were recounted and framed in a positive way. In responding to a
question regarding their job giving them a sense of being part of something Kevin spoke of
“… a certain belonging to the place… the people I worked with… some of them have
become lifelong friends…” while John spoke of the family orientation of the business as
“…me(sic) sister worked there, me brother-in-law… me brother…brother-in-law’s brother
worked there…”. While Mark in the context of explaining the serious challenges he faced
within his work environment made the point of that the “…camaraderie in the business was
pretty enjoyable…”.

The environment of the workplace was a focal point for the respondents in which their
sense of belonging was attributed to being with other people in the workplace. Yet there
was a price that this sense of belonging exacted from each of the respondents. For some it
was at a personal level in trying to fit into the expectations of others;

**Mark**
“…ehh, I just came to the conclusion, you know…. that I was constantly
chasing ehh, inadequacy, inadequacies within meself (sic), you know
by…emm, trying to please people; parents; you know my employers… and
you know…that…you know lookin’(sic) for…ehh, affirmation from
people…”

or expressing feelings of not being rewarded;

**John**
“…like any other job the camaraderie and, do you know, there was great,
like but you’d be pumping out loads of work…should have been getting
more and you know you should have been getting paid more but no matter
what you do they won’t pay you.. yeah…so…”

or in another instance of expressing a metaphorical image of being valued;

**Kevin**
“Yeah, and as I said a sense of belonging as well…because it was kind of
like, consider it a kind of machine with a load of cogs… even the smallest
one had to kind of operate correctly because without that small cog the
bigger cogs…wouldn’t work (said with a chuckle)…”
In the instances above there is a sense of the respondent struggling with the relational world but, as became apparent through further analysis it was primarily of the relationship to the self. There were indications of a need to be liked, to be wanted, to be valued, yet it was in the context of the response of the other not in the context of coming from within. So while employment provided a real sense of being part of something there was a thread throughout of the individual placing his authentic self as a second place to the vagaries of others. This lead to certain signs of unconscious psychical conflict.

**Kevin**
“…No, no…I was never considered a robot … you know even though the company had a very… biig(sic) hierarchy… my own personal kind of ethic was to treat them all equally. Because, kind of they had the same kind of hopes and dreams and pressures as meself (sic), so, kind of you had to kind of put yourself in their shoes, sometimes and vice versa too, you know…”

**John**
“Yes, you know, cos’(sic) you get to know people and you like them, and you like some people and you don’t like others you know…know…wants vice versa, some people like you and they don’t so, like. But I always considered meself a likeable chap and I got on with everybody…”

**Mark**
“Emm, I wasn’t happy with the lifestyle it was kind of giving me you know, with long hours and the stress..emm..personality wise….it’s just the natural kind of thing that happens when put to… pushed to extremes, it can bring out the best or worst in you. I just didn’t like who I was becoming really, you know… so I just emm…I dunno (sic)…I dunno.”

The personal journey of each respondent who found refuge in excessive and damaging alcohol misuse demonstrated, in many ways, the painful paths taken to a more secure relationship with the self. While only one attributed direct causation of his alcohol misuse to the nature and demands of his primary employment each, without exception, found the space, and the developing relationship to self, through unemployment to address their addiction.
Being off the drink for between one and one half and three years provides a connection, for each of them, with a growth in their inner relationship. And while each found a sense of identity from the external relationships socially and in the workplace there is a demonstrable awareness of the sense of identity that comes from within in each of the respondents.

Each has come in contact with a part of themselves that has given them a sense of belonging, not only to a wider group, but also to oneself. Each has been involved in a nationwide men’s support organisation and have become more active in the community or working with their creative passions learning new skills. The outcome of this for each of the respondents is to come in to contact with attributes and personal factors that have great meaning to them. Each have also come in contact with the authenticity of their current existence and the sense of making good use of their time.

**Mark**
“…the things I create, you know, from the pens to, you know, coffee tables. The simple pleasures in life, watching the, the, vegetables grow in the allotment….I just stopped all that messin’ *(sic)*, you know, and just kind of, you know started livin’ *(sic)* for me, you know… livin’ for me own peace and contentment, that I’ve nothin’ *(sic)* to prove, you know, that I’m here on this earth and, you know I’m given a certain amount of time and it’s up to me what I do with it, you know… instead of living it for other people…”

**Kevin**
“Ehh, looking back…I was saying to myself, what was I thinking and doing? You know, most rational people will get one, as alcoholics like to call it the moment of clarity…it took me eight moments of clarity to finally get the message…Yeah, you know, if you believe in yourself and you believe you’ve kind of, helped yourself, you can definitely help other’s in some small way. And, kind of, with the more education you have you’ll be even more qualified to help them..”

**John**
“Yeah, well no, well it’s being part of here and you know, like, when I was drinkin’ *(sic)*…like I couldn’t… I wouldn’t be sittin’ *(sic)* down here now talkin’ *(sic)* to you you…. You know even to just…I got me tools, I got me,
I’ve(sic) after getting’ me tools, like, and I don’t know what it is, it’s just, seems like a natural, a natural thing to do, to me now. You know what I mean, it’s come, it’s came natural to me, like…”

In each, the relationship to oneself and the awareness of self in relation to others has taken on a new dynamic. The relational world in which they live is one of being secure enough in themselves while having a greater certainty in the self in the context of others.

4.3 Limitations and Possibilities of Self:

In analysing the data contained in the three interviews it became apparent that there was a level of awareness of the respondents of their own physical, emotional, and psychological limitations. It was also apparent that there was also a real sense of their own potential and possibilities not only for the future but from past life also.

As mentioned previously each of the three respondents has made choices in their relationship to the self, resultant from their history of alcohol misuse. Each had reached a point where they no longer felt in control of their own existence as alcohol was dictating their daily lives. They had seen the extent to which the damage inflicted on their being and body was having a deleterious effect on their very existence and delimited their interaction with the world around them, and more importantly with themselves. While choices, at one level, were taken to begin drinking the use of it as a coping strategy became destructive.

Mark
“…you’d be just having a few drinks, you know, just to help you wind down; before you knew it, it was just taking over your life, you know, like I mean… it’s just yeah. It takes time for the body to recover from spells of drinkin’(sic)”

John
“…I was heavy on it and I ended up in hospital and me pancreas there, about a year and a half ago…And, ehh, yeah, I went on the rip…so I haven’t touched a drop since then, cos’ I got on, well I got a bit of a fright the second time I went in. And, ehh, you know seein’(sic) the state of the
people in the hospital, you know and it’s; I just said the hospital’s not for me anymore…”

**Kevin**

“Ehh, you kind of have, I kind of asked myself ehh, when you’re kind of waking up in A&E and you have no idea how you got there you should be asking yourself, this is not normal behaviour… Ehh, if I, kind of, kept on the way I was going, it wouldn’t have had, kind of, a good outcome…”

All have lived with the loss of control and the challenge to physical and psychological well-being experienced through adopting an inappropriate coping mechanism of excessive alcohol consumption. Nevertheless in the face of the vicissitudes of life each has also experienced gaining control and developing a greater sense of their own physical and psychological potential and the possibilities in life even in the face of on-going challenges.

Self-efficacy and awareness of a sense of their authentic self was demonstrated by each of the respondents in seeking new ways of being and of contacting with the world. In part, the self-efficacy and sense of themselves was evident in agreeing to participate in the interviews with a stranger and for no personal gain other than what came from within. For Kevin it was “…doing kind of critical reflecting on where I was, where I was at and where I wanted to go…” while Mark spoke of taking time to reflect and “…just thought it would be a good idea to get out of the business…for me own physical and mental health..”. For John the awareness was less reflective yet still apparent “…as soon as I got out of hospital I said, ahh you know; I’ll do something different, so..”.

There was a sense that each of the respondents, while being more comfortable with themselves in the world, were uncertain of how they would be received. Others, perhaps could delimit them so it became important to ensure the new ‘me’ was seen and heard which was manifest in a number of ways. Respondents sought validation of their words with the researcher throughout the interviews with verbal devices repeated consistently throughout. One used the phrase “ you know, like” another “you know” while the third
used “you know what I mean”; it was noted by the researcher that purposeful eye contact was usually made contemporaneously with these verbal devices. In other instances respondents rushed to ensure they would be heard by cutting across the interviewer’s question, to begin talking.

For some it was the need to be able to demonstrate their new capacity and skills to the interviewer. Kevin provided evidence that he had learned new things on his part-time course quoting people like ‘Abraham Maslow’, ‘John Merrick’ and ‘John Donne’ and referencing classes in which he learned of ‘social capital’ and ‘humanistic approaches’. While John was keen to explain old skills such as his prowess in the field of motorbike mechanics as he recounted taking off cylinder heads and diagnosing problems. In this he came to life as he spoke of rekindling his passion for this sort of activity.

In the analysis it emerged that the respondents had a sense of hope for the future as they could picture themselves involved in satisfying activities. In some instances it was related to work, while for all it connected in with something personal at an individual level. When responding to the following:

**Interviewer:**

“As a person…where do you see yourself in five or ten year’s time?”

**John**

“Hopefully with a big hammer in me hand putting in a big wardrobe or something… from some rich person…I, I think, you know, no I just be, like, I’d like to be, I think I’d like to be self-sufficient, is that what they call it? And make stuff for somebody and get well paid for it and not have a boss over me head…”

**Mark**

I’d like, you know financial security kind of resolved… hopefully doing something that’s fulfilling, you know I’m still exploring different avenues…..I dunno, I suppose self-control has been an important thing; just a lot more confident, you know…just at peace with meself, you know…”

**Kevin**
Ehh, I hope to be helping people with, kind of, in some small way, in things maybe, I’ve learned or mistakes I’ve made and say right; ehh, this is kind of, maybe a road you could go down….It’s kind of theory and practice and, kind of, having the knowledge and probably the experiences of both and ehh, hopefully, kind of passing them on…”

In exploring the awareness of the respondents own sense of their limitations, their hopes and aspirations, and their making of choices and taking of decisions there was throughout a sense of an awareness that they did not have full control. However, what did emerge was the sense of contentment and satisfaction of the changes they have made in their lives to date and in the place the find themselves now. When asked about what would they change in their lives now, if anything, it became apparent that there was a sense of journey having been taken, that was as yet incomplete and that it is the past changes that have made the differences with some measure of regret also contained.

**John**
“…uhh, at the minute I wouldn’t change anything, no not at the minute. Quite happy where I am, just quite happy where I am. I’ve come a long way now to get as far as I am like, so, now I mean that in a, mental state and physical state as well like, you know like, I mean mentally I’m after coming a long way, a long way…”

**Mark**
“ Ohh, God that’s a tough one… Ahh, I’ll get back to you in ten years time… you know, like it’s still twenty years before retirement age… like if I was starting off … yeah, I’d do things a lot differently.

**Kevin**
“Hmmm, ehh, I kind of look back and say there’s certain things I should have, maybe, stuck with, but at the time I needed to, kind of, have a change…”

4.4 The Humanity of it All:
Data across the three interviews revealed a sense of futility, or doubt, expressed by the respondents in many parts of their existence, representing a world weariness of sorts. In this there was a sense of the frustrations of past life, characterised by aimlessness and an
inability to change significant components of one’s life. This was framed in the respondents awareness of a certain helplessness, hopelessness, or powerlessness in the context of professional, personal, and in contact with authority figures and organisations in conjunction with their own incapacity to change them. Contrasting with the sense of hope and the positive relationships with self as expressed previously it nonetheless demonstrated the wholeness of their relating to the world

Without reprising the part that alcohol played in the respondents lives it is worth noting the sense of hope that emerged from their interaction with that seemingly hopeless situation. However, in a professional context for each of the respondents there were moments in which the sense of enervation was apparent in the interviews, some of which were associated with alcohol but also contingent to other factors. For Mark, despite the work as a Chef meaning a lot to him, the relentless and disempowering nature of it left him feeling “… it was like banging your head against a brick wall… the rewards weren’t coming unless you were really prepared to really make sacrifices you know…”. For John the connection between the distant and the recent past was real in the present for him, as he recounted short-term job last year “…for that week, it was all the same all over again. Nothin’ (sic) changed even though I was only covering the guy for a week …”. In Kevin’s case it was finding a place of work to settle in as “…I kind of went from kind of, ehh, establishment to establishment and kinda (sic), kind of settled in nineteen-ninety in the (place name) and I had various roles there…”.

The contemporary sense of weariness, representing an embedded feeling from the past, is perhaps reflected in the respondents replies and somatic transference which for Kevin was a sense of sadness as he sat back into his chair and then a sense of energy as he recounted finding a place to settle. For John there was a sense of energy located in an anger, as he sat
forward to confront his challenge, that he should have known better than going back even for one week. In Mark’s case his voice dropped as he sat back into the chair and he reflected how he “…had to, you know, accept defeat…” when he was working as a chef.

Perhaps where the sense of doubt is most represented by the respondents is in their current interactions with the world around them. The sense of the challenge to their own identity was apparent in questions relating to their feelings in response to how they may be seen by others as unemployed person’s.

**Kevin**
“…most, kind of, people are, think right, this guy, he’s, since he’s a certain age, he's got lazy and can’t be bothered to get out…You’re definitely, kind of labelled if you are…signing on.

**John**
“Emm, yeah I wouldn’t be, no I’m not biased against somebody who hasn’t got a job, like I mean, you know, if they’re out lookin’ for a job and they can’t get one, like, like that’s, that’s not their fault…”

**Mark**
“ Ah yeah, it’s, you will get people who look down on you but you’re gonna (sic) get that everywhere, you know. You know I, you know there’s just people out there you know who’d step all over you just to get ahead in the world…. Who’s to say anyone else given the same set of circumstances as me would react any differently, or any better or any, any worse, you know, so…”

Responses across the three interviews revealed instances which elicited the sense of bewilderment at the unchanging world around them. For Mark and Kevin there was a sense of an inherited inequality and unchanging essence in Irish society and institutional life that was transferred inter-generationally from our colonial past. There was a sense of being judged in one’s inadequacies; for John by being asked for qualification papers when looking for a mechanic job; or for Mark in his forlorn hope that his father, and people of his generation, would understand that he is going through a period of transition.
In each of the interviews interaction with the wider world in the shape of the Department of Social Welfare and in reaction to media commentary brought strong feelings to the surface for the respondents. For John, there was contact with his awareness of his age and the challenges which he faces in new beginnings. For both Mark and Kevin, it became apparent that there was a sense of being isolated through a process of dehumanising and making their individuality invisible.

**Kevin**

“Ehh, it’s always been an intimidating place. You know, when you go in, even now when you go into the office...there’s two inches of glass between you and the receptionist...You go into this big room with a ticket, so you’re a number, not a name, you know...They don’t, kind of know your own kind of, emotions and feelings and kind of, kind of how degrading it is…”

**Mark**

“Well, I dunno, number one your just another statistic. Number two...the media is impartial, I think at times...they should use objective vocabulary, you know, in their reports, but they don’t.... you’re not one of the contributing members of society so you, you have less of an influence, less of, less of importance in society, you know; that’s the impression I get sometimes, that comes from the media you know…”

**John**

“...I paid taxes for over twenty odd years in this country, and, they’re, they come along and ask you to do a cour (sic), some course.... I’m fifty this year, whose gonna take on a fifty year old doin’ twenty year old’s work... The Intreo, crowd. Well I went down a couple of times to them and yeah, they’re informative enough...can’t see many people getting’ a job out of it, you know, to be honest…”

In Kevin’s responses referring to Intreo, were revelations of feelings of being seen as “...lower than they are...” which merged with a commentary on wider society and the reaction in conversation upon hearing one is unemployed “...the conversation kind of changes...”. In John’s case his feelings in relation to Intreo merged with his anger towards the attitude of young people and the fact they were not being targeted in the same way as he was. It is apparent that some of this feeling emerged from his awareness of his own aging and unconscious connecting between his own lack of youth and their youth, wasted as it is. He is not alone in this as Kevin, using a movie narrative to reflect his experiences, tells of a
man of certain age who, naturally, does not have strong IT skills, is shown humanity by a welfare staff member, for which she is reprimanded. While Mark, yearning to be younger again, connects his older self with his past younger self as he reflected on how he “…took a lot of personal abuse… and how the youth today would not …tolerate it…”

The futility that at times seemed like a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the face the situations in which they found themselves, and their powerlessness to change institutions were challenges to their own identity. The alienation and isolation from the power of society was seen, almost as just the way of the world coupled with a sense of having one’s own life to lead; as John said “…I’m in a happy place anyway. I know I’m still unemployed but, like, at least I’m getting out and doing something about it…” In many ways it represented how they responded to the givens of the world in which they exist.

4.5 Transference and Countertransference:

Through the context of the interviews it is worth factoring the researcher’s sense of the interview experience in the area of transference and countertransference. While not a therapeutic space there was a reality that it was more than just an interview as there was a requirement for a certain depth to be reached in order for the interviews to succeed.

In the transference it was felt by the researcher that with the respondents, particularly Mark and John (interview conducted on the same evening) there was a sense of feeling they had to make me comfortable and like Kevin in the need to have their story heard. There was a felt sense in the space experienced by the researcher of the respondents wanting to be seen to do the right thing by someone who may be important, particularly in Mark’s interview.
It’s possible that in some way there was a transference onto the researcher, based on the respondents previous interactions with officialdom, of influential figures from the respondents past. In Mark’s case his father seemed to be a pivotal figure. Characteristics of this included the need to prove how skilled, or knowledgeable they are, or indeed in their seeking of validation from someone who may be representative of a previous entity or experience.

The researcher’s countertransference was largely due to being extremely tired and uncertain in this strange place in which there was a strong feeling of keeping the respondents secure and safe in the interruption laden space, in the case of John and Mark. There was also, for the researcher, a driving need to get the interview done as there had been a number of previous delays due to other potential respondents dropping out. In all the interviews the researcher brought into the room this anxiety to have good interviews so the interruptions to Mark and John’s interviews, and of trying to keep Kevin in the framework of the interview provoked a certain anxiety. Perhaps in the researcher it was the environment, the respondent’s demeanour, and the pressures to complete the interviews which connected with some atavistic feelings that were carried into the interview. Connections with these feelings from the past may have been associated with the researcher’s own experiences of previously being unemployed, intertwined with a wish to ensure the voice of the unemployed, in this instance at least, would be heard.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1: Introduction:
This work set out to examine from an existential therapeutic perspective how unemployed person’s experience the phenomenon of being unemployed. The rationale behind this was that contemporary literature was primarily located in the realm of studies which looked at the unemployed as an object, whereas this study aimed to examine the phenomenon from the subjectivity of the person doing the experiencing. In doing so it was intended to establish the meanings, feelings, and emotions that the research target group, long-term unemployed males with previous work history, experienced in their experiences with the world around them. Hence ‘being’ unemployed seemed apposite. The literature suggests that in order to understand the relevant psychotherapeutic connexions, a position of viewing through an existential phenomenological lens would be appropriate to adopt. Further to that, to attempt to gain the level of understanding required, the literature also pointed to the use of a qualitative research approach and in particular the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This being so to gain a richness of insight to a small sample size and a concomitant opportunity for deep learning.

Analysis of the transcriptions of the three interviews carried out with the respondents in the research revealed a varied and rich tapestry of data. However, as in all IAP studies it is worth recalling that it is the researcher trying to interpret the respondent’s interpretation of what he is trying to interpret in what is called a double hermeneutic (Gibson & Hugh-Jones, 2012:131; Smith & Eatough, 2007:35). The super-ordinate themes that emerged were; A: Identity and Relationship to self and others; B: Limitations and Possibilities; C: The Humanity of it all. These superordinate themes will be discussed below as will the implications for psychotherapy in a number of different contexts.
5.2 Identity and Relationship with Self and Others:

In analysing the data it became apparent that all three respondents found succour, joy, pain, disappointment and betrayal to name a few feelings that were present in their relationship with others and with themselves. As set out in the literature review the relationships we, as human beings, have with ourselves, the world around us and of the sense of being human beyond the mere biological, which Heidegger refers to as ‘Daesin’ (Heidegger, 1978:24) is inextricably linked to the context of ‘being’ in the world (Cohn, 1997). Within this framework each found a sense of identity, that in some cases moved from meaningful to meaningless and in all cases found a sense of certainty in finding greater appreciation of meanings coming from within.

Through the interviews it was apparent that the inter-subjectivity of the relationships that each of the respondents had in their environment fitted closely with Heidegger’s concept of the person in context (Larkin et al, 2006). For each it is the social and relational presence of others in the world which is key to their sense of identity and their place in the world. The ontological mode (Yalom, 1980) in which the respondents engaged with the situations in which they found themselves led to challenging interactions with their environments. In such circumstances components of ‘later existential crisis’ (Andrews, 2016:106) can be found. In Kevin’s case he wants to help others, facilitated through his own education and learning; Mark and John want to be in contact with their creative selves and to be held in that way. The struggle towards their own self-realisation or self-actualisation (Yalom, 1980:279; May, 1983:79) can be seen in this perhaps, and if the interviews were therapeutic encounters the opportunity to facilitate this growth would be present. Possibly these come from a place of struggle within themselves in the context of mortality, achievement, and legacy (Andrews, 2016) not only in their primary employment but also in the world of unemployment. There is an awareness, in this instance which can be located in
the Mitwelt and Eigenwelt (van Deurzen, 2006) as each connects their past, with present and to their future through the relationship to self. As Mark said “…I was drinking for about fifteen to thirty years…I feel a lot more content in meself (sic)… that gives me another twenty years of employment…workin’ (sic) years left in me …I’ve still a lot to offer…”

In each case throughout the interviews in discussing their relationships the context changed and moved and through this a search for meaning was reflective of Baumeister’s basic meanings of purpose and self-worth (Baumeister, 1991:29). The sense of purpose or more appropriately purposiveness (Baumeister, 1991:32) as each relates their future possibilities to the current activities in which they find a sense of self. The future that John see’s in working with his hands at carpentry as his innate capacity to have this skill, and his contact with it are revealed through his joyful exclamation “…some people say you’ve got a natural gift for it… you just fell into it…”.

Self-worth connects in with the respondent’s need to have a value or a basis on which others can regard them positively (Baumeister 1991:44). Kevin’s wish to be seen as more than ‘…a robot’ and in how he always put himself in other people’s shoes. For him it seemed his sense of identity and self-fulfilment (Yalom, 1980:281) were bound to others “…the unit I was in, ehh, all the other units relied on us to get them their products to sell to their customers…round and round we went…gave me a sense of belonging”.

It was also became clear that a connection in the relationship to the self was in keeping with the concept of finding meaning when there is a threat to one’s very existence and with awareness of our potential death (van Deurzen 2006). Connected intrinsically with this is the respondents relationship to the destructiveness of alcohol and how they found new
meanings in life. Their tie to Heidegger’s concepts of Umwelt and Überwelt (Adams, 2013:26) in how John, when he was drinking, would not have been able to sit in relationship with the researcher or how, for Kevin, moments of oblivion and revelation allowed for his relationship with himself through the clarity of sobriety to manifest “…would drink so much and probably pass out, eventually it was hopefully…obviously I did wake up… finally seen light at the end of the tunnel…”.

Within the research context of this work the relational aspect of being-with-the-world and being-in-the world (Owen, 1994: 264) were constituted in the meaningful relationships (May, 1980:123) that the respondents found themselves. The connection between the research results, coming from the perspective of the respondent, directly correlate with literature that reflects positively on the immanent qualities of the therapeutic relationship (Mearns & Thorne, 2013; Walsh & McElwain, 2002; McLeod, 2013; Yalom & Bugental, 1997). Ultimately it was finding a relationship with their authentic self as they found the courage to challenge and confront their existential anxiety and guilt (Cooper, 2013:24) and move forward in their lives.

5.3 Limitations and Possibilities of Self:

The data revealed a sense of awareness among respondents relating to the choices they have made, the sense of freedom they have, and the boundaries affecting their physical and psychological capacities, and their potential for self-efficacy. As mentioned previously a major component of this has been the relationship each of them has had with alcohol. Through the literature review there were discussions regarding the four dimensions representative of human existence (van Deurzen, 2006), the four ultimate concerns (Zafrides et al, 2013, Yalom, 1980:8) and the four basic meanings (Baumeister, 1991).
Yalom set out the four ultimate concerns: Death; Freedom; Existential Isolation; Meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980:8/9) in which there is a correlation with the respondents experiences. The effect of alcohol on the physical and psychological health of the respondents is reflected in the realisation of the dangers it posed “…you’re using alcohol in sauces and deserts and there was moments of weakness, you know…it was pretty often…”(Mark), or after been warned off the drink, and without support, the potential consequences “…without her now I’d be, be either back in hospital or be still drinkin’(sic) or be dead…” (John), or “…it wouldn’t have had… a good outcome…” (Kevin). In the case of each respondent the awareness of the fragility of human existence and the potential for death, led to new choices being made. In this it would seem to be the idea of death which would have extinguished the physical existence led, paradoxically, to the respondent being saved (Yalom, 1980:30).

Although meta-analysis describes how unemployment has negative effects on self-efficacy (Zenger et al, 2013) it is apparent that coming in contact with the authentic self (Cooper, 2003:24) possibly demonstrates how the freedom of choice facilitates a capacity to change (Walsh & McElwain, 2002). While the challenges faced in the recruitment process may point to a negative correlation between unemployment and the capacity for self-efficacy it would seem that the three respondents in this case do not fall into that general characterisation. In each case they demonstrated a capacity to be self-reflective in how they made conscious decisions to make major changes in their lives, reflecting the contention that self-efficacy is having the belief that one is in some measure of control over one’s activities and life (Baumeister, 1991:29). Correlating with Husserl’s intentionality (Smith et al, 2009:13) this freedom also evoked certain components of anxiety (van Deurzen, 2006) as the respondents still sought validation and assurance from the researcher. As set out in
the results this was characterised, to a certain extent, by the constant use of verbal devices such as ‘you know what I mean’ or ‘you know, like’ reflecting, perhaps, the delusion that one is actually in control of one’s activities and life (Baumeister, 1991). Regularly, during the interviews when these devices were at play the researcher noted that they often coincided with the respondent making deliberate eye contact or a seeking of some note of endorsement.

In comprehending the limitations the respondents placed upon themselves, it can be seen that they had a need to be seen and heard. Through interpreting the data it became visible that the respondents sought to find some sense of meaning to their activities. Baumeister’s (1991) four basic meanings; purposive(ness), value, efficacy, and self-worth have some correlation in this instance. Self-worth in particular has a particular resonance as in seeking validation for their activities, to establish a value for them, they acknowledge the need for hierarchy in life, where one is not at the bottom (Baumeister, 1991). Yet in this instance, the validation sought was through demonstrating to the researcher; in one case technical prowess (John) and in another educational achievement (Kevin). Perhaps, the one being placed below them is the earlier version of the self or people similar to their earlier selves as they wish to be seen as different than “…those who remain behind…” (Baumeister, 1991:46). Yet in this anxiety, by seeking to do this one is demonstrating the fear of being ostracised or not being accepted; validation of one’s own meaning is sought through the other therefore reducing one’s own individual meaning (May, 1983:93, Yalom, 1980:378).

Within the four basic meanings one could also see the sense of purposiveness (Baumeister, 1991) in which the respondents looked to the future as they saw the possibilities for radical change in themselves (Walsh & McElwain, 2002:256). The sense of hope of each as they saw new possibilities “…[to] be able to create something and hopefully somebody wants to
buy it…I start makin’ (sic) a business out of it…” (John) or “…hopefully doing something fulfilling…still exploring different avenues… but haven’t committed to anything yet…” (Mark) or “…as I said I’ve made some lifelong friends on the course…one of them I hope…will be my wife in time…” (Kevin), was illuminating. However the anxiety associated with these hopes and dreams was tangible by each of them using variants on the words hope to express levels of uncertainty. Nonetheless, the sense of purposiveness of relating their current circumstances with future activities that may or may not be achieved correlate to the four meanings (Baumesiter, 1991:32).

5.4 The Humanity of it All:

Through the research, it became apparent that there was a sense of hope, of plans and dreams for the future which, as set out above, reflected the significant personal growth each had experienced. However, underlying these was a real sense of a hopelessness, of frustration, of isolation amongst other feelings that capture the essence of humanity. In this there is real connection between the individual’s sense of the ontological mode, in that they ‘are’ (Yalom, 1980:31) and the structural givens in which one makes choices (Spinelli, 1997).

In their awareness of their own journey and the sense of self that has developed there is an existential anxiety (Zafrides et al, 2013) that was present in the respondents as they looked to the future, with one eye looking at the age clock, as a sense of “growing up” was being replaced by one of “growing old” (Yalom, 1980:172). Correlating closely to this sense of anxiety for the respondents was their recently achieved capacity to choose, and with having the freedom to aim at reaching their own potential (May, 1983). The temporal nature of this, located in the Eigenwelt dimension (van Deurzen, 2006) is reflected in the anxiety of
the future, as felt in the present, but located in the past through their experiences or being in the world in their relationships with themselves (May, 1983:123).

Despite the ontological mode (Yalom, 1980:31) evident in the choices made, it is the freedom to make choices for the future that provokes the anxiety. In this there is an underlying awareness of the threat to ones very existence (van Deurzen, 2006). Each of the respondents answered in ways that reflected a deep awareness of lost youth and of the limited time in the future to achieve. Correlations with the Eigenwelt, or the psychological dimension, in the context of past and future events and potentialities (Adams, 2013:28) were reflected in Mark ruefully talking about how the youth of today wouldn’t take the abuse he did, or in John’s anger at the wastrel youth who possess the vitality he does not. Yet within this, there is a resonance of the understanding that it is through existence that human beings come to terms with existence (Heidegger, 1978:17) which possibly provoke a death awareness within the individual (Yalom, 1980:172).

In each case the respondents had come from places where a real sense of futility prevailed. Expressions of powerlessness and being overwhelmed reflected an isolation as ‘weak ego boundaries’ (Yalom, 1980:378) subsumed the individual to the group in denial of the reality of their own existence (May, 1983:94). Mark, as he spoke of feeling like he was banging his head against the wall when working as a chef, or in John as, even after six years away from the print game, he should have known that things wouldn’t have changed. Reflecting a world in which they eliminated their sense of isolation through ‘fusion’ (Yalom, 1983:380) there is a sense of not being in that world anymore, although there are powerful feelings still associated with the old world.
Correlations with the nature of functionality that superimpose themselves upon members of society as expectations of conformity and the sense of being as lacking (May, 1983:95) are reflected in the interactions between the respondents and institutions of the State and the media. While Kevin expressed some frustration at challenges relating to the Department of Education it was in interactions with the Department of Social Welfare that elicited strongest feelings. This can be viewed as being coterminous with the implications of self-worth in the context of previously discussed hierarchies and with the dimension of Mitwelt, particularly in the framework of relationship in which one does not regard the other as equal, therefore does not regard the other as a person (May, 1983:128). This is apparent when hearing Kevin speak of “But obviously, they’ve never been in the position, you’ve been in…Irish people are kind of very honourable people, that don’t like to, ask for help, but sometimes you have to…” or in Mark’s frustration of media commentary “…you know, just take it on the chin… like I said, I’ve no intention of being unemployed for the rest of me life…”. There is a connection to the core concept of isolation from, in this instance, the world as represented by the organs of the State or of a higher power which could be categorised as existential isolation or separation from the world (Yalom, 1980:355). Also the very real sense of the respondents feelings about being statistics, or less than others reflects an official interpretation of unemployment that is reductive in form and fails to understand the complexities and intricacies of human existence (Cooper, 2015:12).

The sense of depth of painful feelings evoked by these interactions and the reality of the individual’s own responses to the world and the sense of self and the hope and dreams with which they relate to being-in-the-world (Spinelli, 1997:15) provide a sharp relief to the coldness of the official response. For each of the respondents it is their own capacity in which they trust, despite the negative and draining intrusions of external powers as they seem determined to progress with their lives. Yet within that there is a great sense of the
humanity of the respondents in that “…after all that he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore…” (Frankl, 2004:100)

5.5 Implications for Psychotherapy:

Discussing the above aspects of the research results in the context of the literature review there are discernible implications for psychotherapy. These implications are primarily focussed on three areas directly relevant to current understandings, as reflected in the literature review. Initially there are implications for psychotherapy, it’s place in the official world in terms of policy and the part played in it. Secondly, there are implications in the therapeutic space in the context of the relationships and in terms of transference and countertransference. Finally, there are potential opportunities in the integrative world of psychotherapy to utilise existential psychotherapy as the lynch-pin of a structured integrated therapeutic approach.

5.5.1 The Macro Level:

When examining the literature about the experience of the person experiencing (May, 1983) unemployment there was a significant focus on the examination of quantitative data or meta-analysis of various studies over the years, with significant deleterious effects cited (Creed et al, 1999; Roynayne, 1991; Schwarzer et al, 1994). Yet, in the field of psychotherapy which draws from this well of information the person experiencing the experience was barely heard. In practical terms there may be some implications. The psycho-social policies becoming more prevalent in the UK which aim psychological interventions to alter behaviour and attitudes amongst the unemployed (Rhodes, 2015; Friedli & Stearn, 2015) point to an absence of research findings from studies such as this, in the development of policies. The dehumanising experiences of the respondents, found in
this research, in the reductive (Cooper, 2015) practices of state institutions provides the opportunity for psychotherapists to be more influential in policy implementation, which is one of the challenges to policy being raised in the UK (Rhodes, 2015; Friedli & Stearn, 2015). Perhaps if psychotherapists and the results of qualitative interpretative data were available it would be more difficult to implement such policies which, in many instances, rely on psychotherapist’s to deliver.

Also when looking at a macro-level it is instructive, as a psychotherapist, to have an awareness of the societal mores of the world around us. If official policies reflect contemporary societal attitudes which pathologise and victim blame the unemployed (Jimenez, 2014) then care in facilitating the self-actualisation (Yalom, 1980:279; May, 1983:79) of the individual would be advisable. Perhaps, this is most evident in the respondents interactions with government institutions in which they feel they are being de-humanised and regarded as statistics and numbers rather than as person’s. The respondents self-awareness and positive relationship to themselves are being challenged by the official image of what is required of them. As a cautionary note therapeutic approaches need to continue to hold on to the strength in the therapeutic relationship/alliance (Yalom, 1980; Means & Thorne, 2013; Walsh & Mc Elwain, 2002) to ensure the clients feel a respected and active participant (Hovart, 2000) in process that is not aimed at making them fit in to meet others expectations. Connection with the world and an understanding of social values and mores are central to facilitating this.

5.5.2 In the Therapeutic Space:

The literature, although limited and in general framed at a macro level, pointed to a correlation between unemployment and mental health challenges and illness. While all three respondents in this research exhibited correlations to the four dimensions of existence
van Deurzen, 2006), the ultimate concerns (Yalom, 1980: Zafrides et al 2013) and were characterised with existential anxiety amongst other idiosyncrasies, there is little to suggest that challenges they face and difficulties they have, and had, are resultant from unemployment, but in ‘being’ unemployed this is their experience.

The literature review demonstrated the importance of the therapeutic relationship or therapeutic alliance (Mearns & Thorne, 2013; Walsh & McElwain, 2002; McLeod, 2013; Yalom & Bugental, 1997) which correlated with the results of the data analysis revealing the centrality, for the respondents, of relationships. However, while the simplicity of this perspective is more than valid, it is the relational world of the respondent from which the results were interpreted. That in itself is the richness of the understandings that this research brings to the psychotherapeutic arena. Not intrinsically ground-breaking in clinical practice terms, however, it does add some small weight to the literature and understandings about the importance of the relational context in the therapeutic space (Evans & Gilbert, 2005; Hovarth, 2000).

While the research was not carried out in a therapeutic setting it is interesting that key elements in a therapeutic relationship such as an empathic disposition, the client feeling like an active and respected participant (Hovarth, 2000) the personality of the therapist (Evans & Gilbert, 2005) or of the client feeling heard and accepted (Yalom & Bugental, 1997) find negative correlation in the respondents experiences. In hearing the respondents, it is apparent that in their interactions with official Ireland and media representations that they did not feel respected, or heard, or active participants and certainly not met with any degree of empathy. The frustrations and, as reflected upon previously, the existential crises (Andrews, 2016) experienced through failure to self-actualise (Yalom, 1980:379) have relevance to the results of this research and in the context of the implications for work in the therapeutic space.
It is important not to bring preconceptions or assumptions about the cause or effect of unemployment on the individual when working with them. This has pertinence to the therapeutic approach of engaging with the client with an existential attitude (Walsh & McElwain, 2002) or the presence in Gestalt where the therapists brackets their own issues (Joyce and Sills, 2014) or of the Psychodynamic approach of a meeting of two equal adults in a co-created relationship (Jacobs, 2010). As witnessed in the results chapter there were correlations, in the non-therapeutic environment of the interview space, in the words and somatic interplay with transference and countertransference. Certainly in the context of the client it is entirely relevant to be aware of the transference but to hold it lightly rather than fixate upon it, as it would obstruct therapy (Yalom, 1980). While discussions regarding countertransference were as scarce as hens teeth in the existential world and are framed in the context of the therapist not meeting their own needs but that of the clients (Cooper, 2003) or of bracketing assumptions and prejudices (Cooper, 2015:70), it is still instructive to be aware of what may be brought to the space by the therapist.

In relating to countertransference in the context of the interview and the needs of the researcher, there are some indications of its presence. For instance, in asking the question about control to John, the researcher’s need to bring focus and get good data from the interview resulted in him prefacing the question with “…I suppose because this is about being unemployed, I’ll frame it always as being unemployed, do you think…” It is instructive to have that awareness, as mentioned previously, about what one may be carrying into the therapeutic space, such as in the context of social mores and values that may be at odds with those of the client. In this there is a validity in taking understandings from other theoretical schools of practice relating to countertransference (Rycroft, 1995;
Jacobs, 2010; Joyce & Sills, 2014) and bringing them to the therapeutic space in what van Deurzen (2006) referred to as cross fertilisation.

5.5.3 An Integrative Approach:
Within the therapeutic space the correlation of aspects of the respondent’s experiences provided support to many of the theoretical underpinnings and therapeutic understandings set out in the literature review. As mentioned above, key to this is the position of relationship in the respondents world and of their experiences of being in the world.
Taking account of the findings as outlined above it would seem that utilising an existential therapeutic approach when working with individuals like the three respondents would be of significant benefit. From this approach the therapist is not setting out to cure, but the aim is to focus on life (van Deurzen, 2012). The focus of therapy in working in the relational space is to facilitate the client’s insight through which choices can be worked with in a process of change (May, 1983) if that is what is required. In this space, having an awareness of the ontological (Yalom, 1980) and how humans respond to the givens of their environment (Cohn, 1997) is important. However, it is the phenomenological underpinnings of existential therapy that point to its capacity to work with the client in how they are in the moment of contact with the therapist (Dreyfus, 1962). That being said, there are other possibilities.

As discussed in the literature review the centrality of the relationship (Mearns & Thorne, 2013; Walsh & McElwain, 2002; McLeod, 2013; Yalom & Bugental, 1997) in the therapeutic space is paramount across many theoretical and practical approaches. The outcomes of this research, based upon an existential understanding of being unemployed, found commonality in the literature examined, suggesting the viability of existential therapy providing solid foundations from which to practice with an integrative humanistic
therapeutic approach (Sotskova & Dossett, 2017). Van Deurzen (2012) refers to an openness to cross fertilisation of practice from different schools given the apparent common underpinnings of a number of therapeutic approaches with that of the existential. While Cooper (2015:4) promotes the concept of a pluralistic approach as being different from an integrative one, it would seem to be more of an issue of semantics rather than one of significance. Integrating the conceptual with the clinical (Culley & Bond, 2011) provides the opportunity for the psychotherapist to find a grounding in an holistic, dynamic approach that has the strength to deal with the complexities of modern living (Fernández-Álvarez et al, 2016) with a view to enhancing the therapeutic approach (Sotskova & Dossett, 2017). Studies demonstrating the equality of effectiveness of different therapeutic approaches speak also to the creativity of the client in essentially taking what is required for their needs from any particular approach. Having a structure or framework from which a client can chose or which can emerge in therapy is a practical resource (Evans & Gilbert, 2005:44). Indications from this work, in the view of the author, are that an existential approach could provide a meaningful framework upon which to develop an integrative psychotherapy.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion:
This work set out to understand the experience of a cohort of unemployed persons in their experiencing of being unemployed, and the implications for psychotherapy. To do so required taking an explicative journey through contemporary understandings of unemployment along with potential mechanisms to relate to them within the framework of existential phenomenological psychotherapy. This involved examining philosophical underpinnings, existential and other therapeutic approaches, and of exploring and identifying suitable research methodology. In this manner, the academic journey which incorporated examination of the abstruse to the readily comprehensible, a narrative was created to elucidate the research aim in terms of the results and outcome outlined in the discussion chapter. Despite the breadth of the material utilised, it is possibly a fraction of the potential material available.

Ultimately this research demonstrated that there are correlations between research results and existing literature, and in revealing shortcomings in that literature. In the context of mental health and unemployment the perspective of the person was rarely taken; a short coming which is in sharp contrast to this work.

The centrality of relationship as demonstrated in the research is more than relevant as it comes not from psychotherapists’ perspectives on meeting clients, but from those outside of the profession. From this the implications for psychotherapy, while not earth shattering, do provide significant food for thought. They are voices that add weight to existing information and data regarding the importance of the therapeutic relationship.

At a macro level the research revealed potential implications for the psychotherapeutic world to become more active in policy and in research drawn from the non-professional lay
perspective. Although Existential Therapy was shown to be an ideal approach when working with a cohort similar to the research respondents, there is a very real opportunity for the development of an integrative humanistic therapeutic approach built upon an existential framework.

In conclusion, the initial aim of the research, to understand the experience of being unemployed, revealed the varied and intimate challenges facing the respondents. The richness and depth of the insight they provided was illuminating and provided qualitative data that was shown to have concrete implications in the field of psychotherapy. Some limitations and opportunities for further research were explored as this work opens the door to further activity.

6.1.1 Areas for Further Research:

Establishing comparative studies across differing age and gender cohorts may demonstrate broader applications for any results. For instance, the initial recruitment process which mainly involved younger men who had not previously worked in paid employment presented real challenges to the researcher. Gaining an insight into their experience of being unemployed may reveal aspects to components such as self-efficacy, isolation, or detachment that may have been indicative of their incapacity to engage. The meanings and understandings attributable to men in their forties may, or may not, translate easily to those of differing gender across varying generations.

Perhaps larger scale studies using similar methodology would be of benefit to psychotherapy, and society as a whole, with the aim of understanding the variegated and richness of the experiences of those experiencing being unemployed that could feed into national policy development and therapeutic practices. Value would also be gained through utilising the same research methodology for persons who are in employment to establish if
the results demonstrate any correlation. In doing so, perhaps the connection, if any, between unemployment and the challenges revealed by the respondents in this study may be uncovered.

6.1.2 Limitations of Study:
Primarily the limitations of this study centre on how applicable, on a broader scale, are the results of this research. Such a small sample size may not be large enough to be representative of the respondent cohort and of unemployed persons in general.

Equally challenging is the double hermeneutic approach, although it does result in deep and rich insights. Perhaps on another day, or with a different researcher, different results of the research would be interpreted.

Indeed, the results of the data may not have any direct correlation to being unemployed, only that the insight is offered by men who happen to be unemployed.
References:


Appendices
Appendix A

Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about what you worked at before?

2. Did the job mean a lot to you? ...In what way?

3. Growing up; did you have a dream job?
   
a. Can you tell me a little about it?
   
b. What do you feel now when you talk about it?

4. Can you tell me about what gives you a sense of purpose in life?

5. Did (or Do you feel) having a job (would) gives you a sense of purpose?
   ...Can you tell me about that?

6. Did (or Do you feel) having a job (would) gives sense of being a part of
   something? ...To what or who? ...? ...Can you tell me about that?

7. Does being on the dole with other unemployed people give you a sense of
   being part of a group?

8. How do you think people see you as a person on the dole?

9. In what way does this affect how you feel you are treated by some people?

10. Are you the same as other people on the dole? ...In what way?

11. Could you tell me if you feel a part of, or apart from, the world around you
    now? ... Maybe tell me a bit more about it to help me understand.

12. Do you feel you have more, or less control over your life now than if you were
    working? ...Could you tell me more about that?

13. What sort of things, if any, are outside of your control now?

14. In what way/s have you more, or less, freedom in your life being unemployed?

15. Have your views on how much freedom you have changed from when you were
    working? ... Why do you feel that is? ...or In what ways?
16. When you signed on for the first time, what was that like; can you describe it to me?
17. What does it feel like now at this moment, here in the room, when you think about signing on?
18. Would you be able to tell me about how you see yourself in five or ten year’s time?
19. Does being unemployed affect how you can make choices in your life; maybe you could tell me about them?
20. Do you see yourself as having choices in life?...... In what ways? ......or who is making those choices for you?
21. Would it be different if you were working?...... In what way?
22. If you could change anything in your life now, what would it, or they, be?
23. Do you ever hear talking or commentary in the media about unemployment and the unemployed? (If yes) What sort of feelings does it bring up for you when you hear or see this talk?
24. Have you ever decided that you weren’t going to pay attention to it?.... Why was that?
25. I’ve asked a lot of questions which may not have covered things that you know are important. So, if I was to give you a minute or so would you be able to tell me about things I didn’t ask about but that are important for you about being unemployed/out of work?
## Appendix B

**Respondent Demographic Sheet**

### Demographic Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Yes, No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Single, Married, Co-habiting, Divorced, Separated, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Private, Rented, Council, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>University, Doctorate, Masters, Undergrad, Secondary, Junior, Leaving, Primary, Other, Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C

### Respondent Support Contact Sheet

#### Emergency Contact Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballymun Primary Care Team, Civic Offices, Ballymun Road, Dublin 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>01-8467000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camhs Team</td>
<td>01-8467219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Camhs.ballymun@hse.ie">Camhs.ballymun@hse.ie</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### GP's

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic Offices, Ballymun Road, Dublin 9</td>
<td>Dr. David Gibney</td>
<td>01-8467094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Brid Hollywood</td>
<td>01-8467094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Deirdre Horneck</td>
<td>01-8467033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Deirdre Hegarty</td>
<td>01-8467033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Helplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samaritans</td>
<td>Support Line 24hr</td>
<td>116123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware, 72 Leeson Street, Dublin 1</td>
<td>Support Line</td>
<td>1800 80 48 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>01-6617211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pieta House Dublin North, Unit 22 Santry Way, Dublin 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>01-8831000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONSENT FORM

Protocol Title:

| Being Unemployed: An Existential Understanding. A Qualitative Inquiry |

Please tick the appropriate answer.

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Leaflet attached, and have had ample opportunity to ask questions which have been satisfactorily answered. □ Yes □ No

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without giving reason. □ Yes □ No

I understand that the information I give will remain confidential and my identity not revealed in the above thesis or through any future study of this research. □ Yes □ No

I am aware of the potential risks of this research study. □ Yes □ No

I am aware that audio recordings will be made of the interview which will be stored securely. □ Yes □ No

I have been given a copy of the Information Leaflet and this Consent form for my records. □ Yes □ No

Participant: ___________________              _______________________        __/___/__

Signature          Name in Block Capitals          Date

To be completed by the Principal Researcher.

I the undersigned, have fully explained to the above interviewee the nature and purpose of this research in a manner reasonably likely to be understood. We have discussed the risks involved, and I have invited him to ask questions on any aspect of the research that may be of concern.

Researcher: ___________________          _____________________                  __/__/__

Signature          Name in Block Capitals                   Date
INFORMATION FORM

My name is Robbie Callanan and I am currently undertaking an MA in Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School. As part of the programme I am carrying out research to complete a thesis called Being Unemployed: An Existential Understanding. This research involves interviewing people that are currently unemployed. I am inviting you to take part in this research.

What is Involved?

If you agree, the next step will be for me to carry out an audio recorded interview with you at a location you are comfortable in, and satisfied with. The interview will take no longer than an hour to complete. During the interview, I will ask you a number of questions relating to the thesis.

Confidentiality

All information from the interview will be kept confidential. Interview recordings will be stored on a separate computer drive that will be kept in a secure and locked location. They will not be stored in on-line platforms. Transcripts from these recordings will be coded to facilitate your anonymity and will be kept in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. A sample of the answers may be appended to the thesis. Your name will not be used in the thesis and on any occasion that names are required pseudonyms will be used to prevent participants’ identification. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point of the study if you so decide.

DECLARATION

I have read this consent form and have had time to consider whether to take part in this research. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time of my choosing. I understand that, as part of this research project, recordings and notes of my participation will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified from any use of these records or in any work which may come from these records. I am voluntarily agreeing that any notes may be studied by the researcher for use in this research project and may be used in psychotherapeutic publications. I agree to take part in this research.

Name of Participant (in block letters) ____________________________________________

Signature ____________________________________________ Date __/__/____

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Gráinne Donolane, Research Co-ordinator, Dept. of Psychotherapy, School of Arts, Dublin Business School gráinne.donolane@dbs.ie
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I31</td>
<td>So, in terms of say, like... you know what do you think people think of you as a person, on the dole?</td>
<td>R31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to be heard.</td>
<td>Umph... oh on the dole?... Well I'm not really on the dole now you see... like, you know what I mean... Like I know I'm doin' me course and all now... like you know....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't want to be negatively labeled.</td>
<td>Being categorised in the right way is something important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't want to be judged.</td>
<td>Sense of awareness of self- not too pushed what other people think.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing my best should be good enough.</td>
<td>I don't deserve to be judged as I'm trying.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking control of own life.</td>
<td>Awareness of own achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of validation coming from within.</td>
<td>Sense of connection to self-validation not through job or through others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of a future.</td>
<td>Can see a future with new skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement of others plays a big part.</td>
<td>Relying on the judgement of others to progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some hope for the future.</td>
<td>Sense of hope for the future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I32</td>
<td>Or being unemployed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't want to be employed.</td>
<td>Well, being unemployed... Sure I couldn't... sure well I don't.... really care what people, other people think, you know... to be honest with you... You know, can think of me what they want like... I, I'm tryin' after six years being unemployed and ye... Being a heavy drinker, like I not doin' that not anymore, you know.... And that's a major step for me was givin' up the drink last year, year... and now... I'm workin', I'm, I'm actually workin'... for nothin', for well I'm not, I'm getting' trained... for nothin'. Hoefully get into a good job at the end of this woodwork course... cos' I've to try and find work experience now and if I get into somewhere... good and I show them I'm capable, well hopefully I'll get a job out of it....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I33</td>
<td>And so, does it... do you, do you think... how people might like... see you... how do you feel like... do people, how people might see you... how do you feel about how they might think about you or it doesn't matter... by the sound of things... And so do you feel that people treat you different because you're unemployed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety from judgement with some People- can hide from myself.</td>
<td>Emm.... No sure half of (location name) is unemployed (laughter)... I don't think so... no... I'm not... anybody that knows me or knows me attitude, like I mean I'm not one ff, for, for sittin' around doin' nothin'... you know, like, like if there was job there tomorrow... That I thought woodwork... ehh, yeah... Would suite me yeah, no problem.... I'm not talking about a big factory where you go in and you're cutting all sheets of mdf or anything like that.... You know all the mod... all the electronic stuff, like... I wouldn't be in to that now, you know.... Like, I'd be more hands on... makin' furniture or stuff, like that or cabinet maker or cabinet shop or somethin' like that.... That's what I'd be interested in doing</td>
<td>R33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't judge me.</td>
<td>Doesn't feel judged by own community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning new things to change myself.</td>
<td>Doesn't like to sit still and be idle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to run from the past.</td>
<td>New skills will be the basis of future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change and new choices are available.</td>
<td>Doesn't want to go back to type of work as before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with self through creativity.</td>
<td>Looking to the future for new ways of doing things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sees positive in creativity and making new things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding sitting still with self.</td>
<td>really gettin' housebound and... (inhale)... gets to them, like about not havin' a job, like you know... whereas it wouldn't really affect me in that way, you know... cos' I'm always doin' something... with me hands, or doin' something... so I'm always, you know... on the go, you know... or you want to put another word for it... So, I do understand the way people would be... get down and all about unemployment and people targetting unemployment, unemployment... people are unemployed shouldn't do it anyway, no... ye no.... that's wrong I think, in a sense... and you know.... just because they have a job or.... Whatever, you know.... So, that's basically my feelin's on it all, like, you know so........ We'll have to leave it at that, I'm afraid......</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others get depressed not me</td>
<td>Busy all the time- running from self??</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of the world can affect me negatively.</td>
<td>Can understand how others can get depressed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpless to change what powerful others think.</td>
<td>Higher power can have negative effects on unemployed people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration at negative judgements of others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Relationship to self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Awareness of temporal qualities of living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Sadness, grief, loss, disappointment, love, passion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Fear of living, dying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Need to be seen and heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Choice, freedom, control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Powerlessness, helplessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 50</td>
<td>Physical and psychological limitations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Wheel

Through winter-time we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when abounding hedges ring
Declare that winter’s best of all;
And after that there’s nothing good
Because the spring-time has not come –
Nor know that what disturbs our blood
Is but its longing for the tomb.

(W.B. Yeats)