FINDINGS FROM THE THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Now that the wholeness of participants’ stories about their experiences has been presented in the form of narratives, this chapter summarises the components of the interpretive process (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). These components begin an answer to my stated questions: “What are the developmental issues of borderline psychopathology?” and “Does inattention play a part in the development of borderline psychopathology?”. In this chapter, I define, describe and table the elements in the processes of unravelling experiences of self as they emerge. I am aware that the stories or gestalts were produced in the socially, historically and politically constructed intersubjective exchanges of the interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

The thematic content analysis of the participants’ narratives made it clear that the growing-up years of these participants were painful; and that the implications of such painful narratives for them were that:

- they felt incoherent as individuals and powerless to correct the situation, and their failure to cohere was in some way their own fault;
- they felt that their levels of consciousness lapsed at times and in those lapses something valuable was lost and available only to others, who were therefore more powerful;
- having lapsed in consciousness and thus lost these valuables, they were
incompetent when compared to peers and caretakers;

- they felt, as a result, alienated from life-giving attachment;
- they felt, as a result, uncontained by nurturing boundaries;
- they felt persecuted on the grounds of being different; and
- they felt worthless to the point of not wanting to survive and, instead, the urge to life had refracted or bent back upon itself to self-destruction, sometimes to the point of death.

The objects in the environment perceived as responsible for these experiences were caretakers, i.e. parents and teachers, and older siblings as well as peers. The sites in which these experiences took place were the home, the school and the psychiatric institution.

7.2 INTERPRETATIONS

2 Note: all definitions have relied on the Oxford Talking Dictionary, 1998.
7.2.1 Incoherence

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Table 7.1 Incoherence

The term ‘incoherence’ is used here to reflect the disorganised, disintegrative and uncontained experiences of the participants. There were attempts at coherence and integration, i.e. efforts by both external sources and internal resources to hold the individual together either in a constructive sense, which promotes development, or in destructive sense, but together nonetheless. These attempts were (a) chemical, using prescription medicine; (b) by grouping the participants in particular ways, such as in
particular classes for children who could not cope; (c) through the explicit imposition of rules and boundaries, or (d) through the expectation that implicit social rules would be followed; and (e) self-generated efforts to keep good and bad experiences polarised. These attempts were many, but frequently failed. If integration, coherence and containment prove impossible, a sense of fragmentation seems to result. The subthemes of “incoherence” reflect the attempts at coherence, their failure, absent coherence, lack of containment and increasing disintegration and incoherence, over time. Incoherence is experienced as collapse, devastation, ‘freaking out’, panic and overreaction.

‘Incoherence’ is contrasted with the underlying cognitive model of ‘containment’, which is defined as the action or fact of containing or holding, or of restraint, especially the action of preventing a hostile force from expanding into other areas.

7.2.1.1 External attempts at coherence

7.2.1.1.1 Physical

A failed attempt at containing incoherence was through physical means. In this study physical means take the form of prevention, chemical containment, placement, and the opposite – running away. Prevention is the action of stopping something from happening or making impossible an anticipated event or intended act, derived in one sense from the privilege claimed by a superior of taking precedence over or forestalling an inferior, to provide against an anticipated danger. This can take the form, as it does here, of a mental anticipation, i.e. a bias or prejudice. This is relevant also to the perceived intentional stance that the child has regarding significant objects.
Running away has negative value loading in conventional society and in the minds of participants, given the manner in which the term is used. It refers to an act of running away or of being out of control; developing at an ever-increasing rate; unrestrained, rampant; immeasurable and overwhelming; escaped, on the loose, and wild.

Participants report that they were prevented from action (such as by being locked in their rooms), chemically contained; placed in remedial groups, remedial schools, places of safety, psychiatric institutions and rehabilitation centres; and that they ran away.

At some stage, resolution of incoherence is reached either positively or negatively. Resolution has a number of meanings relevant to this study. Resolution is the process of reducing or separating an object into constituent parts, as well as conversion into a different form or substance. In relation to the theme of discord, described below, resolution refers to the separation of a force into two or more forces of which it is the resultant. It is also the examination of the truth or falsehood of a proposition by moving from a particular known truth to a more general principle. Usually, the psychological implication is the action or an act of resolving or making up one's mind; the removal of doubt from a person's mind; confidence; and certainty. The most significant meaning in this context is the understanding of resolution as the action or process of causing discord to pass into concord, however pathological the concordant structure may be. This is confluent with Kernberg’s (1984, 1985a, 1985b) proposition that borderline structure is pathological but stable.

7.2.1.1.2 Chemical
Chemical containment refers to the administration of conventional psychiatric medication to the children for symptoms of ADHD. Labelling the child and prescription of Ritalin appear to be used to deal with fragmenting around failure and incompetence. This is experienced by participants as helpful, as getting the child more focused; and as unhelpful (INT 1 P 71; INT 9 P 21).

Chemical containment is used when the child appears to be beyond behavioural control. In one example, the participant recalls kicking the pregnant teacher, whom she experienced as persecutory, in the stomach, knocking the teacher over, feeling guilty, crying hysterically, and having to be sedated (INT 5 P 18).

7.2.1.1.3 Grouping
Grouping was a mode of containing the incoherence of the child that proved to be unsuccessful. Grouping is defined in several ways that are applicable here; namely: two or more people, standing or positioned close together so as to form a collective unity; a knot or cluster, a number of people or things regarded as forming a unity or whole on the grounds of some mutual or common relation or purpose, or classed together because of a degree of similarity. To group means to classify, class, categorise, sort, grade, rank, bracket, band together, and associate. One means of grouping is to label, and another is to assign roles, i.e. the part played or assumed by a person in society or in life, or the characteristic or expected function of a person in a particular setting or environment. Grouping took three forms in the data: placement, no group, and marginalisation.

Placement
Placement, one type of grouping, is experienced by participants as being passed from caretaker to caretaker, unattached and dispossessed. This type of containment can be successful at first but is inevitably disillusioning and can be so dispossessing that running away and suicide attempts are resorted to. Even if these faulty attempts at containment by the child are successful in changing the circumstances of containment, they are not necessarily successful at containment (INT 9 P 33-34).

Improvement at the remedial school is attributed to the greater length of time teachers had available for the children and therefore the amount of attention they received. In addition, teachers communicated with parents at least once a week, which provided a positive sense of time. This seemed to help one of the participants feel contained and hopeful, which in turn led him to some sense of future, which promotes attentional capacities. Improvement is also experienced when a headmaster contains one boy by sending him to a psychiatric institution, where he makes friends and sees the teachers as being very good, and himself as competent.

Improvement seems to be negated by teachers not talking to the child himself; and if the child experiences him/herself as being contained only in a physical file kept by the school. Recollection of being merely in a file is related to one participant’s repeatedly being labelled as a ‘problem child’, a term which he did not understand other than in its association with his incompetence. Improvement is also negated when physical containment is experienced as interfering. Physical containment is also counterproductive when associated with being caught, labelled stupid, and being sent away. Counterproductive means of containment and integration include placement in a class perceived as naughty (to the extent that the teacher burst into tears when she
saw the class arriving) and in a practical class, seen as less stressful (INT 10 P 126; INT 11 P 9).

Incorrect placement seems to have a negative impact on peer relationships. One participant sees her peers as alien and beneath her and the other children as revolting. She has no attachments to peers who are placed in the same group. Instead she experiences them as persecutory. She points out that children have no euphemisms for ADHD. Confusingly, this participant is also placed for one subject with the most proficient students, whilst staying in the special class overall. However, she sees the overall class, i.e. for children with special needs, as holding the most weight in deciding where she belonged.

Grouping by others and then by participants themselves, reflected persecutory attitudes towards the participants, which they believed others held. From these groupings, the participants derived a good deal of their identity. Assignation to groups resulted in the experience of marginalisation and associated dispossession from the main group.

**No group**

If the child feels uncontained by a lack of assignation to a group other than the ‘mass’, this leaves her feeling ‘a nobody’, without an identity and dispossessed. Alternatively, the child feels good if she identifies herself as grouped with individuals who produce something really different and really extra special. Specialness, however, can be spoiled by grouping the ‘special’ child with others she sees as less special. For example, one child is placed in a group with other children to do a project but she
cannot accept this as it may spoil her initial grouping. On a dynamic level, she cannot share the work as this may mean risking less than perfection and the parts of the project would not fit. She seems to overcompensate in the face of her inability to integrate or group these parts. She does all the work her way, without knowledge of implicit social rules, which alienates her from her peers, exacerbating her sense of dispossession.

Marginalisation

The child may also experience him/herself as belonging to the group of marginal people, which in his/her view is the opposite of popular people. One child feels part of the popular group only through achievements, defined by good marks, which she is capable of at that point (primary school). These achievements come about through massive overcompensation on her part and, later, schooling is marked by a sense of failure. Attempts by the child at involvement in groups are marked by inhibition, which seems to result from her self-definition as very marginal and not popular.

Participants tend to attribute marginalisation erroneously; for example, to being overweight. The sense of marginalisation appears to exacerbate both senses of dispossession and inattention. This may be related to later dispossession/eating disorder equations, which some participants report later in development. The grouping process can exacerbate the child’s confusion, depending on how caretakers manage it. One participant recalls being assigned to a group of children, who are all seen as having something wrong with them, but is then told he does not belong there.

Marginalisation appears to become entrenched when the child feels confined to a
group of children who do not listen or ask questions and are, therefore, stupid. The child does not necessarily feel directly affected by teachers labelling a group of other children as stupid, lazy and naughty in association with hyperactivity, at first. However, when she is similarly labelled, she is ashamed to be a part of this group herself. When the grouping is as a direct and clear result of ADHD, and the child is placed in a class for such children, she senses the resentment of the teacher at having to teach this dumb class (INT 11 P 55).

Labelling and grouping seem rarely useful to the participants. One participant is aware that he has been labelled as ‘PD’, which he understands, with accuracy and insight, to be a state of conflicting and variable emotions over which he has no control and where reason does not apply. In contrast, he describes periods of coherence and attention, where his head is on his shoulders and when he is able to relate affectionately.

7.2.1.4 Rules, boundaries, space, and place

Participants seemed unable to make use of rules as a means of containment, which thus further perpetuated their sense of incoherence. A rule is a pattern describing the normal or usual state of things or an accepted or prescribed principle, regulation, system or routine, method or maxim governing individual conduct. It can involve the individual following a prescribed method or process, and is used as a standard of discrimination or estimation or as a criterion, test, or measure. Taken together, a set of rules is a code or body of regulations (an expressed, explicit form) or a dominant custom or habit (an implicit form). It refers to a social decision or decree having the force of law and thus of control, order and discipline, and the state or condition of being settled or regulated. Rules are intended to regulate conduct. Without such
regulation and order, there is disorder, lack of restraint, and lack of containment. This could be brought about, *inter alia*, by the lying and rebellion, or by the reported neglect and persecution by others.

Incoherence is further contrasted with the underlying model of ‘boundaries’. A boundary serves to mark the limits of something; it is the limit itself. Boundaries as a property of containment imply a sense of cohesion that results from a border experienced between the individual and the other. Insufficient or absent boundaries manifest as fusion (merger/enmeshment) and may be evident when the individual takes on the experience of the other unrealistically.

Boundaries may be linked to the concept of space and the position the individual feels she/he occupies in it. The term ‘bounded daydream’ is a construct constituted from the meanings of boundary and daydream; the latter refers to a fancy or reverie (especially of happiness) indulged in while awake, a castle in the air, a transporting of oneself elsewhere imaginatively in a daydream. A bounded daydream comprises the notion of specific fantasies, which seem to occupy the minds of participants during periods of inattention and which could be linked to the category of space in that the individual finds a mental space, split off from reality, in which to exist temporarily and to which she/he is transported imaginatively. Bounded daydreams seem to be a form of vertical splitting (Kohut, 1977, 1984). External chaos is misinterpreted by one child as an internal sense of being wrong and alien. The sense of dispossession, which may be a consequence, can be taken in and interacts with inattentive processes (INT 1 P 99).
The breaking of rules can be, amongst other things, contingent upon discordant vectors, or negative forces with direction and magnitude. These may accumulate, disrupt internal regulatory controls and lead to impulsive action, which in turn produces further discord, and disintegration of relationships (and their internal representations). This is evident in an example where rule breaking is precipitated by a threat by the teacher. The rule breaking seems to be experienced as a survival issue by the child, and appears to lead to negative affect, to the extent of hate. Negative affect disrupts any ability to apply rules and ends in disinhibited action.

The breaking of rules is aggravated by a temporary loss of the ability to process verbally. In one example, the participant produces an example of her own physical aggression, getting into fights and explaining that she needs more than words. On an analytic level, it could be that words and the developmental stages they represent have failed these participants. This is supported in the literature on language failure in borderline pathology (Straker, personal communication). At high school, when autonomy is demanded and rules relaxed, age appropriately, this can lead to the individual coming undone, and disintegrating. This is in contrast to containment and integration by the many routines and regulations that characterise the primary school years. It is possible that coherence is dependent upon learning implicit social rules early, in order to rely on them in the later absence of explicit verbal rules. This learning requires functional attentive systems as well as a good enough quality of attachment (INT 5 P 62).

One participant describes how she begins to relate to peers whom she describes as the ‘wrong crowd’, older children with older siblings who were addicts and alcoholics.
From that point (age 13), she begins taking substances herself. Her mother criticises her choice of friends and her rebelliousness and defines the child as a rebel. At the same time, the mother praises other personality attributes. The child extends her rebellion to going to clubs. The Doors was at that time a hardcore nightclub in a central city area, which officially only allowed entry to those who were over 18 years old.

In not caring by whom she is accepted, i.e. being careless of the rules, the child comes into conflict with her mother. Further rule breaking is engendered by the critical attitude of the mother, which is experienced as intolerable at a particular developmental phase (adolescence). The child’s choice of action, interaction etc., i.e. vector, is discordant. Deficient attention, in the form of misperceptions, misunderstandings, compromised foresight and insight, and possibly self-medication rather than self-motivation seems to perpetuate rule breaking.

In contrast to the carelessness of breaking other people’s rules, participants appear to react with extreme negativity and discord to transgressions against themselves, wanting to kill or die. In sequences that consistently resemble lines from a soap opera, rage appears to flow from frustration through revenge, through the incomplete taking in of rules about expressing rage, to aggressive and sadistic fantasies, ending with the participant’s own wish to die.

Parents seem to be experienced as not following rules themselves. Insufficient knowledge of rules, implicit and explicit, or carelessness with regard to following known rules may persist through to adult training and education, as well as to work
situations. These latter are described by one participant as claustrophobic, which may be a function of being unable to confine himself to that rule-governed context.

Breaking the rules seems to also impact negatively on peer relationships. One participant recalls an incident in Grade 4 (he was approximately 11 or 12) in which frustration is a function of not knowing how to retrieve his ruler. Attention becomes overly intense. In retrospect, he reasons his uncontained response was absurd but at the time, he threatens to kill the other boy if he tells anyone. This is similar to the disinhibition in the incident of the Grade 1 child kicking the teacher (INT 9 P 38).

The same participant describes two further incidents. In response to a request for his seat, he physically attacks a girl without a reason that he can give to himself. The school ignores the incident when he cries, leaving him feeling guilty and uncontained (his images of self go to the extremes of murderer). The girl is sufficiently hurt to spend a week off school (INT 9 P 41).

In the second incident, a bully attacks the participant who responds violently, apparently knocking the bully unconscious. He recalls this response as unplanned, uncontrolled and confusing to himself. Disinhibition and lack of internally generated containment within social rules seem associated with incoherent images of self. As adults, when there is contact with family, which is frequently experienced as abandoning, it tends to be fraught with conflict, which is ascribed to an inability to follow rules, i.e. to being uncontrollable.

Deficient internally generated rules can manifest in disruptive classroom behaviour or
forgotten tasks, an inattentiveness that may impact on the teacher-child relationship negatively, leading to persecutory experiences (INT 10 P 13; INT 11 P 24).

Without rules, the child feels lost and unable to focus on the task at hand, an inattentiveness that may lead to a sense of incompetence. This sense of being lost, and unable to survive in their own contexts, appears related to active attempts by the participants to break away from the rules, and to break them, as well as to feelings of alienation (INT 10 P 92; INT 11 P 65).

Rules appear to be the most tangible form of boundaries. Boundaries are linked to the concept of space and the position the participants feel they occupy in it, in terms of absence, presence, being ahead or behind. Space provides the opportunity to do something, an area sufficient for some purpose. Space is demarcated by these participants in terms of ranking in class, falling behind the class, being ahead in some respects, and they seem to derive a sense of their worth from these situations in space. They do not feel in the same space as the other children because of their inattentiveness and this seems to lead to both a sense of dispossession and of incompetence (INT 1 P 100; INT 11 P 38; INT 11 P 1; INT 11 P 5).

**8.2.1.2 Absent coherence**

A lack of containment was pervasive. Several meanings for ‘lack’ are relevant to this study: it is a deficiency with the implication of fault and blame; an offence or crime; or a shortage or absence (usually of something desirable or necessary). The child may be left feeling uncontained and insecure by the lack of interest in his/her feelings and opinions shown by parents and teachers, the inability of the mother to hear her/him, and the mother’s own chaos and lack of structure. Indications of this deficiency can be
internal or external, and can take the form of panic, which refers to a state of being terrified/agitated, hysterical, or to overreact, be perturbed, and go to pieces. The mother’s chaos seems to be taken in by the child, in terms of emotional upset, sense of discordant time and inability to plan. All of these leave the child uncontained.

The one child has little sense of time, whether internally or externally generated, and procrastinates, which results in having to cram and stay up the entire night, aggravating inattention. This seems to lead to her panicking, which she recalls as going crazy. Attempts by her mother to pacify her are experienced as persecutory in themselves and do not convey a sense of containment. Her mother is experienced as uncontained and without a sense of time herself, and the child feels neglected as a result.

One participant reports that failure with one teacher is initially alleviated by the experience of being contained by a different teacher who then leaves, and is followed by a succession of other teachers and deteriorating marks. The inconsistency of teaching and teachers seems to have led to her feeling uncontained, unattached, and incompetent (INT 11 P 57).

Teachers can be experienced as not providing containment because they are themselves seen as being overwhelmed, and giving up on the child (INT 11 P 63). Containment, on the contrary, can be experienced through the application of rules, routine, and regulation.

A further manifestation of lack of containment is not of falling apart but of being
excessively confined by inappropriate or claustrophobic containment. Claustrophobia is the irrational fear of confined places and is used here literally and to describe that experience in interpersonal relationships where instead of containment there is intrusion or confinement. It is related to a sense of incompetence and the short-sightedness of deficient attention. In one example, when the child provoked a parent following inattentive behaviour, the parent reacted harshly. The child’s consequent upset was contained by threats of abuse and abuse itself. He feels left with sadness and hurt, which he describes as becoming angry through frustration. His image of self as sad seems to be juxtaposed with the hostile image of his stepmother abusing him and angry affect linking the two images, in the context of an attachment relationship. The consequence may be a sense of dispossession, fostered by discord (INT 9 P 67).

7.2.1.3 Internal attempts at coherence

7.2.1.3.1 Polarities of experience

The term ‘incoherence’ is used with the notion of ‘defences’ in mind. This term is used with reference to the psychoanalytic literature (Jacobson, in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Kernberg, 1984; Kohut, 1977) and is the avoidance of unconscious anxiety. In this study, incoherence refers to mechanisms of separating good from bad (splitting) and of preserving the split by keeping the good elevated (idealising) far from the devalued bad. It is the action of warding off, guarding from resistance against attack, protection.

At certain developmental stages the defences peak age appropriately and a degree of employment of these mechanisms throughout life is necessary, as without defences the individual is unprotected. However, by the time the participants have reached
school, repression rather than splitting should predominate. To split has the additional relevant meanings of to break, divide, separate, sever, set apart, disunite, apportion, distribute, separate from, dissociate oneself from, become estranged, and crack. A split can refer to a fissure, breach, division, rift, schism, rupture, division, partition, separation, break-up, alienation, estrangement. By implication, splitting can refer to multiple fissures, perhaps grouped generally into good and bad. Two fragments of splitting are the idealised and devalued aspects of the individual, visible through idealising and devaluing others or the self. To idealise is to represent or perceive (a person or thing) in an ideal form; to regard as perfect or supremely excellent, and as representing a perfect example. However, the representation exists only as an idea, confined to the imagination, unattainable, unreal, and impracticable. In contrast, to devalue is to rob others of worth, usefulness, or importance, disregarding their value and importance, goodness and significance.

The interviews are replete with participants maintaining a separation of good and bad experience in their recounts. Polarities of experience extend to keeping both experiences of perfect self and perfect other far from experiences of self and others as dreadful. From the context, such separation seems defensive, and has the effect of warding off, guarding from the position of resistance against attack, and protection. Such action further appears to have the effect of splitting experience, both of self and of others. In one example, the participant describes her good aspects manifesting at school (angelic, model student, model child) and bad aspects at home (difficult, tyrant). It would appear, in this case, that the manifestation of the symptoms of deficient attention is related to bad aspects of self and to context (INT 1 P 90-91).
One child recalls an experience in Grade 1 of a threatening teacher. Her mother, also a teacher, intervenes and is seen as ‘cracking’. Splitting seems evident in terms of a mother who is perceived as both powerful and fragile, as well as a good mother contrasted with a bad teacher. The participant is unaware of these contradictions. The image of self that she takes in appears to be bad and fragile. This confusion seems precipitated and perpetuated by deficient attention, which may result in the child not listening to or following the explicit rules and missing the implicit ones. Confusion seems extended by deficient attention, which limits the span of awareness to smaller than usual units of affect-toned events. Goodness or badness can be entertained, but not for long enough for goodness to neutralise badness.

Polarising experience tends to become a way of life if entrenched at critical developmental moments. At times, it is employed quite consciously: keeping bad aspects of her life (family and school) away from good (gymnastics) (INT 5 P 31). Polarisation of experience can be consciously experienced as multiple states of self. One participant describes this clearly when he claims that he has multiple personalities, is a man trapped in a woman’s body, and is a vengeful witch. He expresses great hostility towards others, giving the same emphasis to killing and cursing. The opportunity for drama assumes salience in this participant’s replies. Possibly, this is a function of being unable to distinguish relevance from irrelevance, a function of inattention. The assault of stimuli is confirmed to an extent, on an internal level, by the fragmentation he expresses in dissociated identities. Frustration seems to be met by fragmentation, discordant rage and aggression.
In a sequence that illustrates the impact of deficient attention on polarisation and the formation of bad sectors of the self, the same participant describes the following: a disconnection between head and body, which does its own thing, leaving these parts of himself in conflict with each other. The conflict is experienced further as between good and bad, and he equates good with sane. It is implied that connection and control of intellectual faculties are experienced in the good sector of the split self (INT 9 P 63).

People who are experienced as persecutory can foster polarising of experience. Participants recall being blamed and treated very badly by parents and teachers. This is aggravated if siblings or stepsiblings are accorded differential and good treatment. There are other manifestations of polarised experience in the data. Participants seem to doubt their own competency (around awards and selection), which is evident when a good mark is associated with ‘not me’. A nice teacher is associated with doing well and a teacher who made the subject uninteresting is associated with doing poorly. The image of self is split in that there is a part-image of competent, attentive self and a teacher being nice to the self, on the one hand, and on the other, an image of an incompetent, unengaged self. Senses of incompetence, dispossession and inattention seem to prevail in this context of incoherence. Repeated recollections are of images of a good experience juxtaposed in memory with bad, (e.g. good week/overdose/sent home).

7.2.1.3.2 Perfect and dreadful

Two shards that result from the polarisation of experience are the images of self as perfect and as dreadful, and the experience of others as perfect and dreadful. Most frequently, self is experienced as dreadful and others as perfect or ideal. Idealisation is
used by one participant in connection with the male friends of her older brother. It is also used to describe the teachers. One participant recalls a teacher as good and in her recall attributes several powerful positions to this teacher: she is the reason for the participant passing matric; she is a family member (and therefore not alien); she has a senior position; she has her own office; she can teach and she can provide therapy.

Throughout his schooling, another participant recalls feeling very lonely, which he relates to never liking sports. (INT 9 P 16) i.e. he feels bad because of a personal attribute. In contrast, he loved the teachers, all of whom are experienced as fantastic. This love he explains in terms of being more comfortable with adults rather than with other children.

In her description of her boyfriend, a third participant uses adulatory terms, seeing her endpoint, goal and freedom as residing in him. The idealising of the boyfriend seems based on minimal real supporting factors and the relationship, such as it is, and has the tone of young and mischievous children. (INT 5 P 104)

This type of idealising, which appears to lead rapidly on to devaluing (in the temporal sequence of the interviews), is not gender specific (INT 10 P 176; INT 11 P 67).

In contrast to the idealisation described above, participants experienced themselves or others as dreadful, without a middle range in evidence. This dreadfulness is characterised by devaluing or robbing the self or other of worth, usefulness, or importance, disregarding their value, goodness and significance. The balance, in terms of volume, of references in this data is towards this devaluing of both self and others.
As a defence against the pain of her own exclusion (from popular, proficient children), one child devalues the teacher, claiming to know more than the teacher does (in Grade 1). Recollections of teachers seem both devaluing and idealising (INT 11 P 55; INT 11 P 22; INT 11 P 67).

Overall memories of the mother are negative (for all female participants and one male), whereas the father tends to be devalued by male participants. When one parent is devalued it seems that the other parent is idealised. When recalling a sequence of events, there is a tendency for participants to idealise and devalue sequentially when talking of teachers, mothers and fathers.

The experience of others as dreadful is aggravated when the child’s future opportunities are presented as extremes. In one example, this takes the form of presenting unattainable choices as menial jobs on the one hand and a degree on the other. The latter, more valued in his cultural context, was then removed as an option and his time was truncated in that he had no future in which anyone could imagine him. In another example, current opportunities for being loved (as a nine-year old) were presented by a teacher as a self that was lovable only by an external, superhuman force, god. Although the participant experienced this as affirming and comforting, the message was weakened by the simultaneous confirmation of rejection by other people.

Parents seem to be experienced as seeing participants as dreadful. Parents are seen as unwilling or unable to deal with participants, using doctors, therapists and repeated remedial placements instead. The image of the child, which the caretakers are
perceived to have, is derogatory; the child is seen as stupid, incompetent, useless and limited. This image appears to be taken in by the child and leads on to the experience of self as dreadful. One participant is seen by her mother as not only alien but also worthless and devalued to the extent that her mother has threatened to disown her and follow ritualistic mourning procedures (Shiva) (INT 5 P 99).

The image of self as dreadful appears evident when one participant recalls that because he was unable to focus at all, was physically very restless and unable to remain seated, he attended three different remedial schools. Being sent to these schools left him feeling like an idiot and he attributes his lack of friends to his idiot status, comparing himself to an ant and them to giants, so that he is not good enough for them. Here the symptoms of ADHD (inability to sustain attention once engaged, and excessive motor restlessness) appear to contribute to frustration, to being grouped with other children who are marginalised and seen as problems, and to subsequent isolation from peers.

Devaluing experiences seem related to refraction of the survival thrust, which leads it to self-destruction. These experiences may take physical forms or frustration of the participants’ own long-term goals Consequent upon this, further polarisation of experience seems to follow. In one example, the participant has spent six years on a three-year hairdressing course and has not completed it. He begins practical placements by feeling competent, talented and even contemptuous of others, idealising himself. These placements end precipitously. This failure he ascribes to having a nervous breakdown, smashing his car, and having conflict with his lecturers, as well as to the work itself. He attributes his difficulties in the workplace to his junior
status and the expectations of bosses and of himself that he should be as competent as a fully qualified hairdresser.

He fails to meet these expectations, although he begins by imagining that he can meet them, and is seen as incompetent. At first, he attributes this to failure of the college to teach him more than the basics. Then he is able to acknowledge that competence comes with increased learning. However, he is too proud to learn, experiencing himself as better than they are, then as good but needing to learn, without acknowledging these different attitudes. He attributes the sensible thoughts he has to his brain and the unreasonable thoughts to something else, thus relating inattention to polarisation of experience and the shifts between perfect and dreadful experiences of self and other. He experiences internal conflict. He feels caught in a bind where he requires greater expertise but is unable to act on this need.

7.2.1.4 Fragmentation

Incoherence further refers to an experienced state of self as fragmented. Fragmentation is the action of breaking or separating into fragments; the state of being fragmented, or separated into parts that form new individuals or units. The new units do not imply a state of cohesion of the whole. Instead, this state is the opposite of containment. It includes collapse, which means to fail, disintegrate, founder, break down, go to pieces, and to crack up. Fragmentation also includes devastation. This term has many implicit meanings: desolation, ruin, wreckage, ravages, laying waste, destruction, demolition, razing, annihilation, shock, traumatisation, and bewilderment.

Fragmentation also includes: the notion of the fragmentation of the child’s experienced identity, i.e. having the condition of being that specified unique person,
especially as a continuous unchanging property throughout existence; the characteristics determining this; and individuality and personality. Identity crisis, a term used by participants, is a period of emotional disturbance in which a person has difficulty in determining his or her identity and role in relation to society, as part of the maturing process. Identity is the name, specification, self, selfhood, individuality, distinctiveness, singularity, and uniqueness ascribed to the child by both herself and others. In optimal circumstances, a crisis could be a turning-point, a critical/decisive point, crux, or moment of truth. However, the participants speak more of emergency, disaster, catastrophe, calamity, extremity, predicament, plight, mess, trouble, and difficulty. Failure, following deficient attention, can precipitate an experience of fragmenting and some containment is sought fruitlessly, by physical means, with one participant sitting in a particular teacher’s office and locking herself in her room (INT 1 P 70).

Fragmentation can be consequent upon experiencing caretakers as fragile or persecutory. It is related particularly to betrayal by caretaking figures, which leaves participants also feeling dispossessed. One participant describes how, following overwhelming events (abuse, loss, threat), she sought assistance from the school counsellor and a teacher she liked. The sequence ended with the counsellor telling the staff of the school, who included the child’s mother, about the child. The participant experienced this as a fragmenting betrayal. The participant describes herself as being left feeling absolutely useless, incompetent, worthless, and soiled. Subsequent aggression appears directed towards the self in the form of self-mutilation (INT 5 P 65).
Fragmentation may also result from repeated sequences of dispossession. In one example, in response to her mother’s comments, the participant fragments or “freaks out”, to the extent that she feels totally out of control, and that the staff of the psychiatric institution where she is hospitalised are powerless to contain her. She seeks concrete containment by hiding under a pillow and screaming. Not only has her mother threatened to disown her and mourn ritualistically for her, but has also blamed her for her own misfortune in being hospitalised. She is the only one in the family to be thus hospitalised; she is portrayed by her mother as abusive, useless, worthless, consuming and alien. Sterkfontein is a large state psychiatric hospital and being there carries a social stigma, which is less concealable than the stigma of private hospitalisation. This image of the mother as persecutory is followed immediately by another image of the mother collapsing (INT 5 P 101).

7.2.1 Inattention
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPRAORDINATE CATEGORY</th>
<th>INATTENTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BASIC-LEVEL CATEGORY</td>
<td>LEVELS OF ATTENTION AND CONSCIOUS AWARENESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUBCATEGORIES</td>
<td>DISTRACTION</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Daydreaming, absence and presence, missing, unpredictable, impulsive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DISPERSAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zooming, interruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOT GETTING IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misapprehension and misunderstanding</td>
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</table>

**Table 7.2 Inattention**

Incoherence is prominently related in the data to reported levels of attention or awareness and specifically inattention, the second domain of experience. This seems to be an indication that attention is at least one factor in the development of borderline psychopathology. ‘Attention’ is defined here as the action, fact, or state of attending or giving heed; the mental faculty of attending, attentiveness; application of the mind, consideration, and thought. It implies consideration and observant care. It is the action of attending to the comfort or pleasure of others, ceremonious politeness, courtesy, an alert attitude of readiness (Oxford Talking Dictionary, 1998). The data indicated increasing deviations from an underlying idealised cognitive model (Dey, 1999) of attention, focusing, learning and understanding. These were replaced in the participants’ experiences with dispersal (described as zooming, interruption), distraction (described as daydreaming, absence and presence, missing, unpredictable,
impulsive), and ‘not getting it’ (described as misapprehension and misunderstanding).

In effect, participants appeared to experience lapses in conscious awareness, which led to sensations of being dispersed, scattered, out of control of themselves, and missing crucial bits of information. Such information was necessary for learning the implicit rules of social conduct and the explicit rules of subject matter in the classroom. In relation to caretakers and peers, participants came to feel lost and unable to access the agency necessary for constructing themselves as competent and belonging.

7.2.2.1 Distraction

Instead of focus and learning, participants were constantly subject to distraction, which is the action of drawing or forcing apart; forcible disruption, severance; division and separation. Even when not forcible, distraction constitutes an interruption, disturbance, interference and obstruction. Specifically it is the diversion of the mind from a particular object or course, the fact of having one's attention or concentration disturbed by something. It includes being restless, i.e. the condition of being physically or mentally drawn in different directions by conflicting forces or emotions, disorder or confusion of affairs, which result from internal conflict or dissension. In the participants’ experience, distraction is manifest in daydreaming, and not listening.

One participant reported difficulties with concentrating in the classroom because she was daydreaming, specifically, about being in the gym. Being in the classroom represented the area in which she felt incompetent, whereas the gym represented
competence. The daydream contained a movie scene in which a world-class gymnast was seen as daydreaming herself, of doing somersaults. The gymnast was taken as a model for the participant who was able to imagine trying to do the same and planning to try that day. This seems to be a multiple distancing mechanism on the part of the participant, first from the classroom by daydreaming, then by viewing a movie within the daydream and subsequently by seeing the protagonist in the movie as daydreaming. Possibly, in the safety of this distance, the participant is able to participate in the competence and power of an admired and perfect person. In addition to favoured activities, food also forms the content of these daydreams.

Distraction has the property of absence, in common with a property of incoherence. One participant reports that on occasion, her thoughts would fly out the window, and she would, in effect, leave the classroom. She compares this distraction to a short period of being asleep, from which she would awake suddenly on her ‘return’ to the classroom. Absence and presence are not under the child’s control and are, thus, confusing. The child feels unpredictable to self and is unpredictable to others, which disrupts the laying down of the foundations for knowing the boundaries and nature of the self and the space in which it exists. Patches of information are missed, of particular relevance in logical explanations of work content, which demand consistent attention to make sense of the concept being taught. Absence seems equated with inattention, and presence with attention. (INT 5 P 53)

Studying for exams may be particularly difficult, even when using compensatory strategies such as listening repeatedly to tape-recorded work, which has an unpredictable soporific effect. Awareness and attention appear to be related to
experiences of coherence (and inattention to experiences of incoherence) (INT 9 P 56).

This element of unpredictability seems to extend over the course of development and becomes part of the adult perception of self as competent or incompetent and a failure. As a whole experience, having deficient attention appears to lead to a concept of self as unable to hold down a job and to be functional as an adult (INT 5 P 106). One participant was unable to sit still or concentrate and was labelled mad or not normal, which resulted in his assignment to problematic and marginalised groups. Queries about his behaviour have a hostile tone. The standard of what is normal is presented as unreasonably high and the child experiences it as inaccessible (INT 9 P 68). There are repeated experiences of alienation from peers, of not knowing the rules that others know, and of frustration (INT 11 P 34).

Distraction was evident in the interviews themselves (INT 11 P 75). One condition of distraction is fear that has been generated within an attachment relationship by abuse and this has the consequence of fragmentation (INT 11 P 141; INT 11 P 142).

Participants recall being impulsive, displaying a quality of being either impelled by or imparting motion; characterised by onward movement or impetus; driven by force, and determining some action, appropriate or not. The suddenness of such action was often surprising to the participants themselves. Impulsivity seems related to discordant vectors, particularly anger or rage. (INT 9 P 39)

One participant describes three incidents, which illustrate impulsivity and consequent
peer alienation. He recalls his own responses as unplanned, uncontrolled and confusing to himself. Disinhibition and lack of internally generated containment within social rules seem associated with incoherent images of self.

7.2.2.2 Dispersal

The participants report extreme difficulty in focusing, where the focus is defined as that point at which rays or waves of energy meet after reflection or refraction, and as the point from which divergent rays appear to proceed. The ability to focus is related by participants to an analogous refraction of the survival thrust as they interpret the ability to focus as an ability to survive and the lack of focus as a continuation of dispersal of energy and refraction. Focusing is experienced as the ability to produce a well-defined image, which is coherent; inability to focus is experienced as analogous to incoherence.

Unexpectedly, participants report being aware, at times, of their own lack of awareness, at which point they can bring their attention back. This is referred to by one participant as ‘zooming’ (INT 5 P 58).

Zooming seems dependent on other events producing a state of shock in the child, which enables her to motivate herself to the extent of being able to focus, ‘zoom’, attend, and have an awareness that she was not attending. When the shock wears off, the child then recovers her original, dysfunctional equilibrium. Interest in the focus of attention appears to produce the same effect as zooming.

In general, lack of focus rather than focus prevails for these participants. One participant recalls that he was unable to focus at all, was physically very restless and
was unable to remain seated. This led to frustration and discord on his part, to teachers grouping him with other children who were marginalised and seen as problems, as well as to isolation from peers. A further consequence is evident in his polarised categorising of himself as absolutely incompetent and of peers as powerful (INT 9 P 14).

Dispersal appears to impact directly on relationships when the participant has difficulty registering names, which is experienced as effortful and frustrating. This sense of incompetence may lead to interpersonal conflict (other people get cross), as well as internal conflict (he becomes angry with himself). Images of conflict may be related to identity confusion and fragmentation. The conflict is so intense that this participant cannot live with himself, which may lead to polarisation of his sense of different aspects of himself (INT 9 P 24).

This type of bad experience can be entrenched when there is a more competent sibling to provide a comparative marker. In difficult interpersonal situations there can be excessive focus on one aspect, not necessarily the most important one. Focusing seems to take noticeable effort and is related to a sense of not knowing the rules (INT 11 P 2). Wading through distraction seems to result in learning and remembering only with effort (INT 11 P 3I).

### 7.2.2.3 ‘Not getting it’

Participants did not ‘learn’, where learning is to acquire knowledge or skill as a result of study, experience, or instruction, with the added quality of developing an ability to do something. Either implicitly or explicitly, the child becomes acquainted with or informed of something that includes rules of conduct and the consequences of
breaking these. Through learning in optimal circumstances, the child is meant to improve his or her ability to solve problems or perform tasks by making use of information from previous attempts. However, this does not appear to be the case in the data, where learning for these participants appears to be a function of their experienced incoherence (INT 9 P 11).

Learning is also based on modelling, and the model, that an attachment figure presents, assumes primacy. The comments made by this figure about the learning capacity of the child influence both the child’s sense of coherence and tendency to misapprehend (INT 11 P 19). Misapprehension by participants appears to be fostered by the largely negative and frustrating perception the child has of the attachment figure (INT 11 P 35; INT 11 P 80). Misapprehension seems also influenced by fear and repeated experience of failure (INT 11 P 155).

On many occasions, the participants failed to understand rightly (words, a statement, etc.). Instead, they tended to take in a wrong sense or misinterpret the words or actions (of a person). Added nuances surrounding the term ‘misapprehension’ are to misinterpret, misconstrue, misread, get the wrong idea, receive a false impression, be mistaken, and to miscalculate. Significantly, to misunderstand implies that the participants had greater potential than average to misconstrue their worlds. Misunderstanding appears to have resulted from lack of focus and distraction (INT 1 P 72). For the participants, misunderstanding was related to the teacher-child relationship, impacting negatively on it, as well as generating periods of missing the understanding of work, which served to alienate the child from both teachers and peers (INT 1 P 73; INT 1 P 78; INT 11 P 1; INT 11 P 101).
Unacceptable performance and deficient learning of implicit social and explicit rules, which may result from misunderstanding, seem related to an image of self as being misunderstood and incompetent. The self may be subsequently related to in destructive ways and there may be suicidal ideation (INT 5 P 75; INT 9 P 34; INT 10 P 49).

### 8.2.1 Dispossession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPRAORDINATE CATEGORY</th>
<th>BASIC-LEVEL CATEGORY</th>
<th>TYPES OF ATTACHMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DISPOSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJECTION</td>
<td>Parents, teachers, family, peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUPTURED ATTACHMENT</td>
<td>Dependence, traumatic pattern</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRAUMATIC ATTACHMENT</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANISHMENT</td>
<td>Left all alone, abandonment</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Table 7.3 Dispossession**

In contrast to a sense of belonging, I found that the participants’ stories of attachment to significant other people are in terms of its opposite, i.e. being unattached. However, this latter term does not convey the agency of the actors (the significant others in this case) and thus in constructing this category, the term ‘dispossession’ was used. To
dispossess means to strip of possession, dislodge; deprive and to drive out of, particularly a home. This type of deprivation implies a bereavement and loss. I contrasted this with the meanings derived from the literature on attachment to arrive at an understanding of what dispossession constitutes.

The participants experience three types of dispossession, ranging in extremity and reflecting the extent to which they feel they have progressed, or not progressed in resolving issues of dependence and functional independence. The most severe and unresolved forms of dispossession are banishment, described as being left all alone, or abandonment, where there is no opportunity to depend as needed. Being left alone is equivalent to being actively isolated, being put into solitary confinement and being shut out from warmth and love. Banishment is followed in decreasing levels by traumatic attachment and ruptured attachment, talked of in terms of dependence. The least severe form of dispossession is rejection, experienced as emanating from parents, teachers, family, and peers.

The consequences of misunderstanding may persist over time, from school to work. The resident counsellor of the Manor encourages a participant to persevere, which affirms his talent for hairdressing. The encouragement and affirmation seems to lead to his feeling confused as he wants to persevere but knows he collapses in the work situation, which causes him to engineer being fired, or to leave (INT 9 P 9).

Eventually, misunderstanding of the work and of the child can result in placement in a special high school, which is associated with giving up on life and deterioration. For one participant, this undermines his motivation to the point where he no longer wants
to function. This refraction of the survival thrust is attributed by him to incompetence, confusion, frustration and related fragmentation. The confusion engendered by misunderstanding can be physically dangerous to participants and others, as in driving dangerously in an attempt at suicide (INT 9 P 61).

7.2.3.1 Rejection

The overall experience of growing up with ADHD seems to be one of lovelessness, rejection, lack of acceptance, and lack of recognition for and appreciation of the child as well as an emphasis on incompetencies and inadequacies (INT 9 P 83).

Rejection refers to the participants having been found unsatisfactory in some way. Their behaviour or they themselves were experienced as intolerable, objectionable, offensive, obnoxious, and undesirable. Rejection also refers to the state of not having properties appropriate to something. Without those properties, the participants experienced themselves as different, not belonging to the popular, favoured, group.

Participants recall rejection being taken to the extreme of alienation, which carries with it the implication of being wrong, bad, culpable, contemptible and defective. As a result of being seen as having these attributes, participants experience separation, cutting off, and the experience of not belonging. Being wrong extends to being the object of misunderstanding, misinterpreting and misconstruing. Invalidating rejection, alienation and misunderstanding were communicated to participants, who then appeared to take these attitudes in as parts of the self.

Participants feel overwhelmed by the high expectations of parents. They are further overwhelmed by their failures to meet these expectations. Unfavourable comparison
with other children seems to exacerbate this sense of failure as it emphasises the wrongness of the child (INT 5 P 4).

There is particular distress about having been or done wrong since early childhood and either nothing was done or the child felt passed on from one caretaker to another, from one school to another, and from school to psychiatric institution. Consistently, parents are recalled as having an enduring image of the child as irritating and exasperating, problematic, beyond comprehension, incompetent, inadequate and a failure, useless and pitiable (INT 9 P 36).

Teachers may exacerbate parental rejection. For example, the child’s appeal for explanation is met by sending the child on to his parents. They in turn reject the child, ascribing his need for help to something unusual and bad about the child. Participants feel they are too much trouble and are an overwhelming problem to others (INT 9 P 22).

One participant, on asking for help from teachers, was treated in a manner which led to his need for help being ascribed to something unusual and bad about him. This appeared to compound the participant’s confusion about self. The participant is confused by his own actions and wishes he could understand them better. Life in general seems overwhelming for him and he feels inadequate.

The rejection implicit in being sent to a remedial school seems associated with extreme incompetence, which in turn may be related to frustration. Talking of rejection led one participant to a brief description of sadness, and the immediate production of an image of frustration resolved through smashing things aggressively.
Parental reassurance is negated in its clear message that the child costs them something (usually worry, pride, and money).

Participants experience teachers as either extremely insensitive or as fantastic. The experienced insensitivity of teachers to their own impact on children when they are in attachment relationships with these children may be of chaotic quantum.

In response to the attitude of teachers, children feel assigned to problematic and marginalised groups, in a context of humiliation. This feeling may be exacerbated if the assignation is also to a remedial school, and/or if the child attends several different schools. One participant attended three different remedial schools before the end of Grade 4. Being sent to these schools left him feeling frustrated and incompetent. Lack of mediation or inappropriate mediation by parents or teachers may aggravate a sense of rejection. Ordinary development, if left unmediated, can lead to feelings of rejection and, possibly, to an extension of a deficient ability to learn implicit social rules.

Over time, sufficient rejection can be expanded to an experience of self as an alien in the family. For the one participant, she is not only alien but also worthless to the extent that her mother has threatened to disown her and to follow ritualistic mourning procedures. In response, participants describe feeling wrong and guilty in relation to their family. One participant attempted faulty resolution of the relationship with his family through the making of money for them, in an attempt to be accepted.

The teacher can be seen as exclusively favouring other children who, in turn, are
experienced as both popular and rejecting. Their rejecting attitude seems to be taken in as the sequence continues with the child rejecting the teacher, contemptuously. Attentional capacity appears to become fragmented as the focus is on popularity and on which group the child belongs to or does not belong to (INT 1 P 40-41).

The explanations for not belonging, that participants offer seem idiosyncratic and appear to be based on their hostility towards others. This manifests as choosing isolated activities; competition with others; others making friends in a mysterious way; and not being invited to parties. The self seems to be seen as being deserving of exclusion, being very inhibited and self-conscious, and actively belonging to the group of marginalised children (INT 11 P 44).

Explanations for being disorderly may also be idiosyncratic and imply that something is wrong with the individual, and that hatred, rejection and alienation are consequent upon this. This type of attribution is further distorted by a bodily component: for one participant, popular is equated with being organised, thin and attractive. Thin people are seen as sticking together (INT 11 P 39; INT 11 P 114).

If the child already feels marginalised or, following a period of extreme loneliness, wanting her very existence acknowledged, the child may crave attachment (friends, feedback from any of them) and appears vulnerable to any form of it. This can affect later choice of peer relationships. For a girl, not being accepted can lead to ingratiating search for acceptance from older, idealised males. For both boys and girls there is a vulnerability to choosing peers described as the “wrong crowd, older children with older siblings who were addicts and alcoholics”. From that point (age
13), there is a tendency to substance abuse and the taking up of dares, which involves the breaking of rules.

Making friends with the wrong crowd may occur after peer rejection and isolation. Other intervening conditions in choice of friends seem to include the child defining herself as part of the group of children with problems, impending loss of attuned and attached caretakers, events encouraging polarising of experience; and the expectations of parents and teachers, which are experienced as unattainable.

Choice of friends and rebelliousness may become additional points of conflict in mother-child relationships, which are already toned by dispossession. Criticism seems to lead to one participant extending her rebellion to going to hardcore clubs in rough areas.

Rejection seems to perpetuate dependence and poor peer relationships. For example, in middle adolescence, one participant became homesick on a school-related overseas trip. This was attributed to her father's illness and to the absence of family holidays in her experience, unlike all the other children. She feels different from and less than these children in terms of money and family experience (INT 11 P 8).

Even when good work is rewarded, this can have negative consequences, if it is given in the context of poor achievement. In the case of one participant, the child felt good about herself but experienced her peers as dismissing her achievement on the grounds that she was undeserving. She attributed this rejection to their envy. On an analytic level, this type of recalled representation seems composed of good, affirmed and
competent aspects of the self, juxtaposed with bad, rejected and worthless aspects. Both good and bad seem directly derived from the participant’s perception of how others perceive her.

As with other subcategories of dispossession, there does not seem to be a gender difference in experiences. Rejection by peers on the basis of ADHD symptoms appears to lead to feelings of incompetence. In general, peer relationships are experienced as abusive and the participants are left feeling empty, worthless and useless. This can be to an extreme extent, provoking suicidal gestures, such as deliberately driving into a wall. Belonging seems so crucial to the participants that even failed suicide attempts are described in these terms, i.e. not belonging to the category of normal people, who feel alienated and are able to commit suicide successfully.

Following rejection by peers, one child seeks adult company, particularly that of teachers, although this attachment appears to be anxious, marked by craving their company, giving gifts, etc. The child also tries to engage in aggressive behaviour under the guise of protecting his peers from authority figures (prefects) and in this way becomes popular. However, adults begin to see him as wrong in some way. Having missed the social rules governing peer relationships, the child also seeks the company of younger children, thinking this will prevent him from getting into trouble.

Missing social and work-related rules appears common. For one participant, missing appears to begin with inattention, which then may lead to a strong sense of having missed whatever the other children received, thus alienating her from the rest, to the
extent that she feels in a different place from them, behind, in an increasingly negative spiral. This experience appears to entrench incoherence and inattention (INT 11 P 1; INT 11 P 5; INT 11 P 38).

The child seems perpetually alienated from the other children; lost and unconnected to them and the rules they seem to know. She sees them as having a book of rules about how everything works, and herself as not only not having and not knowing this book but also not knowing how to find it (INT 11 P 65).

Cultural difference can precipitate a sense of dispossession. Belonging to a cultural majority in school allows feelings of inclusion and of knowing implicit social rules such as turn taking. From the minority point of view, majority rituals, especially if conducted in a foreign language, lead to alienation and confusion. A sense of alienation because of cultural difference has the following dimensions: religious, ethnic group, rural/urban, mannerism, language and dress code.

One consequence of cultural difference is that the child is not allowed to join her peers for social arrangements because of the clash of cultural rituals, and a further consequence is rejection by the peers, teasing, exclusion, alienation and envy. Expectations, difference, failure and alienation taken together constitute a discordant vector which, repeated over time, seems to lead to increasingly fewer points of belonging over time.

When belonging is experienced in the context of a secure attachment relationship, work appears to improve and more balanced evaluations of other people and the self.
may ensue. However, rejection and subsequent belonging to marginalised groups may impair learning.

There are a few instances of acceptance (a term used here when the participant felt favourably received by others) in terms of gaining their approval and recognition. ‘Acceptance’ implies that the other has belief in, trust in, faith in, and places reliance on the child. Acceptance has the quality of integration, whereas rejection is associated with incoherence. The experience of acceptance has great impact, even if it is infrequent. In an example, one participant recalls that her father’s accepting attitude is taken in as her own accepting attitude towards him. He also expects her to cope, which is an acknowledgement of her potential competence. This is an example of the intentions and perceived intentions of the object being internalised as part of the self, in an attachment relationship. In this case, it is a good experience, which promotes integration of the self (Fonagy 1996, 2000). Acceptance is highlighted when there is a difference between what is expected by her father, who is experienced as more understanding and tolerant of what she can actually manage, and what is expected by her mother, who is never satisfied (INT 5 P 94).

7.2.3.2 Ruptured attachment

Dependence

In the absence of validation, participants appear to remain dependent on others, experiencing their existence hanging upon, or conditional upon, the existence of something and someone else. Existence seems only in relationship, connection, interconnection, and interdependence with or on the other. This implies helplessness, weakness, defencelessness, and vulnerability. Participants tend to relate their age-inappropriate dependence to their insecure attachment. As a consequence, they tended
to learn destructive strategies for dealing with conflict and resorted to polarising experiences or attachment to non-human objects (INT 10 P 162; INT 10 P 165).

Ruptured attachment tends also to have a quality of lack of reliability. The quality of a ruptured attachment is changing, developmental, evolutionary, intermediate, fluid, unsettled, long after it is developmentally appropriate. One participant recalls that he felt so connected to his teacher (Grade 1, age five), that he experienced her as his possession, following her around, possibly to preserve the sense of attachment (INT 10 P 7).

Dependence seems also evident when the child is only motivated if the work is interesting and/or the teacher likeable, otherwise work is actively rejected. Interest (and thus attention) is at least partially a function of attachment to and dependence on the caretaker. Variable child presentation appears to elicit variable caretaker response and, therefore, caretakers can be perceived as unpredictable and unsafe (INT 5 P 50).

If dependence persists age-inappropriately, this can lead to the child attaching equally inappropriately. In one example, a sequence of events leaves the adolescent feeling extremely bad. Her ongoing dependence seems to lead her to unquestioning engagement with a teacher who is thin despite being pregnant. The teacher tells her about her own bulimia in graphic detail. She models the teacher’s eating disorder and extends it to bingeing and the use of laxatives. As adults, participants attribute staying on their own, or coping by themselves to conflict and inability to get along with caretakers rather than to strivings for autonomy.

**7.2.3.3 Traumatic attachment**
The most insecure bonds appear to have been formed in the context of trauma, i.e. traumatic attachment, which constitutes the prevailing experience of growing up with deficient attention. Trauma means an external or internal injury and the state or condition resulting from this. For the participants, this state is characterised by disturbance, disorder, distress, pain, anguish, and suffering. In the data the distressing, damaging, injurious consequences are visible, particularly because trauma, consequent upon both deficient attention and abusive caretaker behaviour, occurred in the context of attachment relationships. In the data, it appears evident that trauma can be sustained by betrayal, which was experienced extremely, i.e. as having been given up treacherously to an enemy, or to punishment. The object of one participant’s attachment was experienced as false to, disloyal to, and as excessively disappointing the expectations of the participant.

The conditions for trauma, or the context in which it occurs are: threat, inappropriate teacher behaviour, betrayal, overwhelming circumstances, pervasiveness, physical abuse by caretaking sibling, hostile and inaccessible mother, and chronicity. The consequences are self-mutilation, confusion, and polarisation of experience, extension of younger attachment relationships, rage, discordant sense of time, disruption, and withdrawal from learning.

Threat by a teacher in the first year of schooling can be recalled as traumatising. This is related to persecution. Even if this threat is not directed at the child specifically, the child experiences it as such. On an analytic level, images of self and other are juxtaposed and held together by negative affect. The object-relations unit (the object representation) is one of traumatic attachment. A violent threat to the body is
experienced as being directed at the very survival self of the child by an authoritative, trusted, apparently reassuring, but also abusive object. This object is perceived as having ‘hostile object intent’ (Fonagy, 1996, 2000) (INT 11 P 25).

Attachment can also become traumatic if the teacher initiates inappropriate physical interaction with the child. The age of the child (7-8) and the nature of the young child-teacher relationship as an attachment type make this situation potentially traumatic around issues of trust, suggestibility and authority (Fonagy, 1996, 2000). The trauma need not be recalled as relating directly to the teacher but is experienced as a consequence instead. This can take the form of being singled out by the teacher for this type of interaction and being teased about being teacher’s pet as a result. In retrospect, the participant may even attribute good intentions to the teacher, who is seen as attempting to pay more attention to and motivate the child. However, the teacher is experienced as also as having an image of the child as incompetent (INT 11 P 148).

When circumstances prove overwhelming and the young adolescent seeks help from the school counsellor, betrayal by the counsellor can constitute traumatic attachment. If traumatic attachment is pervasive, i.e. there are no attachment figures experienced as secure, this can be devastating and is related in the data to self-mutilation.

Physical abuse by a sibling who is in the position of a caretaker is an additional type of traumatic attachment. When traumatic attachment occurs in relation to a caretaking sibling, this can result in defensive splitting and projection of the bad onto that sibling, which manifests as contempt. If there is unmediated confusion of traumatic
and ruptured attachment relationships, the participant can be left feeling absolutely useless, worthless and soiled.

The child’s attachment to the mother is experienced as most traumatic if the mother is experienced as inaccessible and hostile as a result, in turn, of an action by the child; i.e., it is the ‘fault’ of the child. The child experiences the mother as double binding her (she must talk to the mother, who is unavailable) and the counsellor is experienced as betraying the child further (INT 11 P 70).

### 7.2.4 Persecution

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<td></td>
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<td>Forgotten, not knowing why</td>
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<td>You’re not normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEASING</td>
<td>cruel, awful, nasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABUSIVE</td>
<td>threat, no future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.4 Persecution

Along with their sense of having been dispossessed, participants feel persecuted. In contrast to the empathic attunement regarded as a necessity by many authors of
optimal development, stories are replete with persecution. This word captures the active and ongoing hostility that participants feel is directed at them by parents, teachers, siblings and peers. Although there are faint indications of a validating stance, persecution predominates and varies along a continuum of five increasing levels of extremity: unpredictable (variable, invalidating, inaccessible, out of sync, insensitive); neglectful (forgotten, not knowing why); hostile (you’re not normal); teasing (cruel, awful, nasty); and abusive (threat, no future).

7.2.4.1 Unpredictability

Crucial to the development of the child is an attuned response, in tune or in step with the needs of the child. One aspect of being in step is validation; the caretaker is experienced as lending force or validity to, confirming, ratifying, and substantiating. To be in step is to approve, endorse, verify, authenticate, substantiate, confirm, corroborate, justify. Such confirmation is experienced when the other is accessible, or when learning (of mathematical concepts, for example) is seen as attainable, understandable, comprehensible, intelligible, penetrable, fathomable, graspable. Validation and the experience of accessibility are promoted by reassurance, i.e. the restoration of lost confidence, the dispelling of fear or concern and the confirmation of an opinion. In this context, validation refers significantly to the re-establishment for the self of the presence of another.

Most examples given by participants are of inaccessibility, insensitivity, invalidation and lack of attunement. Caretakers tend to be experienced as devoid of the capacity to be naturally perceptive of the feelings of others, or to be tactful, sympathetic, or compassionate. They seem to be seen as non-responsive to external influences; uninfluenced by changes in the participants and under-reactive or over-reactive to
them. Most of the participants’ stories are of gross and chronic insensitivity. Without sensitive attunement, invalidation in turn becomes chronic, where invalidation is inherent to the histories of BPD and to the contexts provoked by the ADHD child.

In most examples, accessibility is diluted by the concurrent expectations of the caretaker, which are experienced as unattainable, or by the work being beyond reach. The sense of incompetence in relation to Mathematics (and the inaccessible cognitive operations and emotional tranquillity it requires) is extreme (INT 5 P 55; INT 9 P 13).

Feeling misunderstood and perceiving competencies as inaccessible may be easily translated into hostile intentions of the significant object by participants. Dilution also occurs when one caretaker is experienced as attuned but another as hostile. A third manner of dilution is when a teacher is recalled as making an inappropriate request at the same time as encouraging and reassuring the child. The child’s initial response is refusal, turning away from a frightening situation where competence was requested and humiliation feared.

Competence can be complicated by inappropriate caretaker behaviour that contradicts caretaker reassurance. In one example, the child seeks assistance from a teacher she likes. The participant describes herself as being left feeling absolutely useless (incompetent), worthless and soiled, when the teachers and school counsellor discuss her amongst themselves. This persecutory incident is further complicated by her mother being a teacher at that school. The mother is experienced as inaccessible and hostile; as a result an action is attributed to the child; i.e., it is the ‘fault’ of the child. The child experiences the mother as double binding her (she must talk to mother, who
is unavailable) and the counsellor is experienced as further betraying the child (INT 5 P 84). These dilutions of accessibility may contribute to the persistence of incoherence, in particular when dilution occurs through negative experiences of the mother. One participant feels misunderstood by his mother, and that ‘understanding’ itself as unavailable.

Learning of implicit social rules may also be perceived as unattainable. Participants feel that the knowledge of how to make friends is beyond them, about which they feel guilt. Peer relationships may be further disrupted by the perception of being in a different place from the rest of the class, because aspects of the work are beyond grasp and unknown. Accessibility to the teacher tends to become disrupted because of getting into trouble for not following the rules. The rules of conduct at school, both implicit and explicit, are experienced as unavailable to the child, as is what the teacher is saying, causing the child to expend a great deal of energy. One teacher is experienced as “talking Greek” and what she says is unfathomable by the child (INT 11 P 2; INT 11 P 3).

Losing time at school is experienced as a huge disadvantage to the child who then feels the work is permanently beyond her grasp and the other children in an inaccessible place, in a deteriorating spiral. In contrast, enjoyable work is experienced as attainable (INT 11 P 5).

Sensitivity refers to the capacity of the caretakers to be naturally perceptive of the feelings of others. It also refers to their ability to be tactful, sympathetic, compassionate; to be responsive to external influences; appreciably influenced by
changes in some other quantity, and to be reactive to and sentient of the feelings of others, receptive, discerning, understanding, and empathic. Most of the participants’ stories are of gross and chronic insensitivity. Without sensitive attunement, invalidation in turn becomes chronic, where invalidation is inherent to the histories of BPD and to the contexts provoked by the ADHD child.

As with the predominant theme of inaccessibility above, most examples are of insensitivity and lack of attunement. Insensitivity to the needs of the child is clear when a teacher makes a threat, which is taken literally and with terror because of the age of the child. The simultaneous sensitivity of the mother has insufficient neutralising capacity. Insensitivity can extend to inadequate mediation of religious and cultural differences, which results in problematic peer relationships.

Teacher insensitivity, even if original intentions are good, can have devastating consequences. One participant recalls an event in which a teacher insensitively draws negative attention to her adopted status, causing her confusion as she had previously thought she was special in a good sense. Here, in contrast, being adopted is associated with being rejected and abandoned because she was unlovable, worthless and bad.

Further, disbelief in the child’s competence, when it does manifest, may undermine the brief exposure to goodness. Neither the teacher nor the mother can believe that the child has received a prize as they both had a firm idea of her as incapable of it. The prize becomes a threat in that insensitive expectations are held up as the yardstick to which she must conform (INT 5 P 42).
In response, there may be a tendency to withdraw from the school and from participation in the class, thus perpetuating inattention. Even when the mother intervenes after a month and things are righted with the teacher, they are not righted with the other children, who continue to alienate the child up until the end of primary school. The gap in time between the incident and the mother’s intervention is puzzling in terms of the reason; was she insensitive to the child’s distress, and were withdrawal and refusal precipitated by a temporal gap, before the mother assisted in resolution? It appears that the latter is the case, given that time is a factor in several other occasions of lack of attunement.

There are a few examples of validation without reserve or complication. Usually, however, validation, like sensitivity and accessibility described above, are recalled by participants in split and diluted terms. An image of being validated (getting a lot of prizes) is again presented alongside an image of being invalidated (not popular, very marginal) (INT 1 P 55). In addition to diluted validation is clear invalidation, to the extent that invalidation seems to summarise the child’s experience of most of her teachers, who affirm her sense of stupidity (INT 11 P 63).

At times, the participants experienced positive responses and at other times negative responses to the same behaviour; i.e., they were subject to an environment that was variable, changeable, fluctuating, and uncertain. Caretakers were seen as apt to change from one opinion or course of action to another: inconstant, fickle, unreliable, and shifting. Responses varied extremely, to the extent of being shocking. To shock implies causing indignation or disgust as well as having the dimension of being extreme; it is something appalling and dreadful. Although used with these latter
meanings, the participants seemed to want to convey something that was offensive, distressing, disturbing, overwhelming, and bewildering. Being shocked extends to being compared unfavourably to others or singled out unpredictably.

Shock and variation can exert influence on the child in that influence refers to the action of flowing in, an action exerted, imperceptibly or by indirect means, by one person or thing on another to cause changes in conduct, development or conditions. Its meanings are, therefore, both positive and negative. The impact is also on a neuropsychological level in that a response refers to an excitation of a nerve impulse caused by any change or event; a physical reaction to a specific stimulus or situation; or the action or fact of reacting to a stimulus. Importantly, when subjected to a change in input signal, the child is also subjected to change in its state.

One child’s father was diagnosed with life-threatening cancer when she was in Grade 6 (age 12-13), and she experienced the diagnosis as dramatically changing her life. Both academic performance and gymnastics changed in a shocking way. Academics improved but gymnastics deteriorated. In this state, which she describes as ‘shocked’, the child was able to motivate herself to the extent of being able to focus, ‘zoom’, attend, and have an awareness that she was not attending. The child then recovered her original equilibrium and reverted to attending to gymnastics. In retrospect the participant describes that she was considering gymnastics as her future life. The threat posed by the father’s diagnosis seems abstract in the sense of pending loss of the more nurturing parent. Academic performance appears to improve in the focusing light of the threat and a wish to avert disappointing the sick father. This meant to this child that she must improve an aspect of herself, which she usually experienced as bad at
the expense of the good aspect (gym). Her strategy to avoid loss was in line with established parental expectations. This did not last as the child changed back to her usual mode of experiencing goodness and badness. The net result of this sequence was variable performance and variable response (INT 5 P 56-58). Variable response tends to be recalled in negative terms (INT 10 P 166).

Occasional good performance and competence are held up as the consistent yardstick against which the child is measured, resulting in feelings of being overwhelmed and incompetent (INT 11 P 8; INT 11 P 14; INT 11 P 6).

7.2.4.2 Neglectful

To neglect is to disregard, leave unnoticed, fail to give proper attention to, fail to take proper or necessary care of. It refers here to the child’s experience of neglect at the hands of caretakers (INT 1 P 98).

Neglect also refers to occasions where mediation is required but not provided. One participant associates the change to a special high school with giving up on life and deterioration. This undermines his motivation to the point where he no longer wants to function. This refraction of the survival thrust is attributed to incompetence, confusion, frustration and related fragmentation. Caretakers neglect to mediate the experience for him (INT 9 P 49). Neglect by one caretaker can lead the participant into conflict (discordant vector) with another (INT 11 P 27). Neglect is also experienced in conjunction with lack of sensitivity and attunement and can lead to extreme disruptions of attention and fragmentation (INT 11 P 142).

7.2.4.3 Hostile
Participants experienced others as hostile. The hostility of the significant other seems to have been taken in, disrupting both a coherent image of self and of that self in relation to the other. Hostility seemed to have begun with behaviour associated with deficient attention, which was thus the *agent provocateur*. Hostility seemed to emanate primarily from parents, but also from teachers, siblings and peers.

Parents can be experienced as hostile, particularly if they threaten aspects of the self that are otherwise experienced as good, and thus encourage polarisation of experience. In the case of one participant, her success in gymnastics is held up as a standard, which she must meet academically, by her parents. Gymnastics, and the good experience it provides the child, is then itself threatened with cancellation if academic performance does not improve. The child attributes their choice of threat to hostile parental intentions. Hostility can be experienced to the extent that the participant feels alien, worthless, and devalued in the family. Extremity of hostility is concretised when a mother threatens to disown the participant and follow ritualistic mourning procedures. The experienced hostility of the mother and brother appear to foster this participant’s paranoia.

Hostility within the family is a recurrent theme, propagating a sense of incoherence, damaging the attachment relationship in which it occurs, and leading to perverse means of containment. In the case of one participant, his upset state was contained by threats of abuse and abuse itself. He feels left with sadness and hurt, which he describes as turning into anger through frustration.
One child seems to experience herself as bad and incompetent because the teacher sees her this way, i.e. because of the hostile object’s theory of the child as bad and incompetent. At this developmental stage (age 7-8), it would be difficult for the child to separate not being able to do something from being intrinsically bad, and the attachment nature of the teacher-child relationship would be important. Another child is unable to sit still or concentrate and is labelled mad or not normal, which assigns him to problematic and marginalised groups. Queries about his behaviour have a hostile tone. (INT 9 P 68)

Peer relationships may also be damaged by perceived hostility of the other children. This appears to be generalised, although specific reasons are usually given. In one case, the child feels that the other children are hostile to her because of her adopted status, which, in turn, is attributed to the hostility of their parents, who are described as gossiping about her in negative ways.

Rage may manifest as extreme hostility, directed at both the self and others, serving to split intrapsychically and interpersonally. It does appear that male participants experience a greater intensity of hostility and related aggression. One participant feels confused and frustrated, claiming that he has multiple personalities, is a man trapped in a woman’s body and is a vengeful witch. He expresses great hostility towards others, giving the same emphasis to killing and cursing.

7.2.4.4 Teasing

A primary form of persecution was teasing. Teasing refers to the child feeling it is the target of torment. It means to provoke, bait, worry, irritate, annoy, mock, ridicule and poke fun at as well as aggravate. It is to torment persistently. The meaning usually
attributed to working with cloth is also considered relevant here in the description of what happens for these participants in the developing integrity of personality. To tease cloth is to pull apart or pick into separate fibres, or to open or separate out by pulling apart, in other words to unravel (the meaning or sense) that the child has made of itself. In the data, the participants were teased on the basis of difference, such as deficient attention and grouping in special classes. (INT 11 P 51)

Teasing related to difference also occurs if the teacher singles out the child particularly inappropriately and the child is teased about being teacher’s pet as a result. If a child is seen as different by peers (and these participants were all different), this attracts their negative attention, much like turkeys peck wounded members of the flock to death. The consequence is that the child withdraws from that situation; i.e., turns away from a learning context towards further inattention and incompetence (INT 10 P 89; INT 11 P 44). Teasing by peers can be exacerbated if the teacher is seen to join in, increasing the trauma (INT 11 P 25). Attempts at asserting the self are experienced as fruitless and serve to alienate the child further (INT 11 P 43; INT 11 P 46).

7.2.4.5 Abusive treatment

Participants experienced chronic abuse. In relation to the handling of children, and to reflect participants’ experience, abuse has been taken to mean: mistreat, injure, hurt, harm, beat, damage, wrong, oppress and torture. It can include torrents of abuse, swearing, cursing, scolding, and rebuking. From the data, abusive stance is experienced in terms of hurling abuse, inappropriate [teacher] behaviour, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and violence, in various degrees of severity.
Hurling abuse is apparent in the high level of conflict in the family, which, in the case of one participant, intrudes into relationships the child has with peers and embarrasses her. One participant experiences her mother as harshly instructing her to help and to be quiet; and her father as screaming with temper, when she manages to invite friends over. (Her siblings do not have a similar experience, following the data.)

A teacher perceived as threatening may be particularly abusive. One child recalls an experience in Grade 1 of the teacher threatening to cut off the hands of the children if they did not hold the pencil correctly, and she refuses to go to school, pulling her hands into her jersey as a result. The hand-cutting threat leads to withdrawal of whole body from situation; i.e., refusal to go to school and a turning away from learning. Even if such a threat is not directed at the child specifically, the child experiences it as such.

The clear abusive nature of the teacher’s behaviour is evident in the participant repeating this event three times, each with further elaboration. This includes the knife detailed as a bread knife, and the threat being directed at the participant, when it was previously directed at the children in general, and the intention of the teacher, which is perceived as confusing. Elaboration also includes the participant’s response, which she recalls as having to survive and thus defensively kicking the pregnant teacher in the stomach, knocking the teacher over, feeling guilty, crying hysterically, and having to be sedated. (INT 5 P 1; INT 5 P 18)

Abuse can have the property of betrayal, which is related in the data to fragmentation and self-mutilation. Other properties of abuse are rape; physical and sexual abuse by
an older sibling in a caretaking capacity; and differential treatment of siblings by parents. Abuse can take the form of punishment for misbehaviour consequent upon deficient attention, which leaves feelings of alienation and emptiness in the child. (INT 10 P 29)

Temporal gaps between abuse and attuned response, if these are forthcoming, seem to be too long, and a sense of mistiming prevails in abusive contexts. In reaction, participants are left feeling incompetent. Also in reaction, the abusiveness of the caretaker may be taken in and expressed as aggression. (INT 5 P 75)

Neuropsychologically, the narrative portrays a failure of executive functions: the participant cannot select the appropriate response from an array; she cannot inhibit the expression of aggression. This is consistent with limbic system activity unconstrained by the frontal, executive system. Words, which require inhibition and imply deliberation, are discarded in the face of impulsivity.

For more than one participant, the image of older brother is one of an abusive child who molests sexually and physically, exhorting, in one case, the participant to keep it secret, which she does until she realises that something is wrong. At that point, he denies the abuse. This image seems to be related to a current description of these brothers being withholding. Parents are experienced as partially containing and protective in that they stop sexual abuse when they are made aware of it, but not physical abuse even when there is physical evidence on the body. The stated perception that others have of the participant can also be abusive (INT 11 P 18).
One participant was sent to a succession of remedial and special schools, which reinforced the image his caretakers had of him as stupid, incompetent, useless, and limited.

Feedback from teachers can constitute abuse, in and of itself, whether this refers directly to deficient attention or to the indirect consequences of being grouped with problem children (INT 11 P 55; INT 11 P 123).

### 7.2.5 Incompetence

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<td>Failure, inadequacy</td>
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</table>

Table 7.5 Incompetence

Competence is experienced power, ability or capacity, to do something. Undercut by feeling persecuted, dispossessed and missing rules they see others as having, participants have little sense of proficiency, adeptness, expertise, skill, or adequacy as a valid human being. Most frequently, that is, they experience incompetence rather than competence. This sense of incompetence increases as they move from an experienced gap between their own sense of adequacy and the expectations of others
through variable pressure and personal value derived from marks; to attempts to swim or redress this gap. The most extreme experience is drowning in total failure, in the participants’ own eyes.

7.2.5.1 Expectations

Expectations refer to a preconceived idea of what will happen, what someone or something will turn out to be, a mental attitude of expecting something to happen. It is based on a supposition with regard to the present or the past. In relation to expectations, participants’ recall is frequently entirely negative, and is often of being a failure and a disappointment to both parents and teachers, whose expectations were in turn unrealistic. These expectations held even if the level expected by parents and teachers was never demonstrated but the participants were nevertheless perceived as possessing the ability to rise to this level (INT 5 P 23).

Variable pressure

In the data, participants experienced pressure to meet these expectations, where pressure was the exertion of continuous force on participants who felt pressed into a particular form or image. Pressure has the connotation here of trouble, stress and strain (INT 11 P 96).

Pressure can be increased to the extent that the child doubts herself, expecting failure. Expectations are thus related to fear. This is exacerbated by the parents drawing the failure to the child’s attention by comparing her unfavourably with siblings or peers and conveying that there is something wrong with her (INT 5 P 4).
One participant attributes his difficulties in the workplace to his junior status and the expectations on the part of bosses and himself to be as competent as a fully qualified hairdresser. He fails to meet these expectations and is seen as incompetent. At first, he attributes this to the failure of the college to teach him more than the basics.

Even when there is affirmation of achievement, it appears to be mixed with doubt about the child’s competence. Pressure derived from expectations is both variable and confusing. In one example, neither the teacher nor the mother can believe that the child has received a prize as they both had a firm idea of her as incapable of it. The prize then becomes a threat in that insensitive expectations are held up as the yardstick to which she must conform. This can be related to an incoherent sense of self, as the affirmed part of self is doubted and the incompetent aspects of self simultaneously emphasised. This seems evident in perceptions of the encouragement to maintain a high standard of work as a threat – the weak, affirmed, self feels overwhelmed by expectations (INT 11 P 156).

Variability appears to pose as much of a problem to experienced competence as does consistent incompetence. Teachers are confused by the variable performance of the child and attribute poor performance to her lack of interest, whilst maintaining an expectation of consistency. They ask her for reasons and the discussion leads to no one being the wiser. Temporary improvement in academic performance may result in renewed expectations that the child can produce good results consistently, as well as exhortations to do so. Attempts to encourage are perceived as threatening (INT 11 P 7).
Variability persists in terms of expectations by parents – mother can expect one thing and father another. One participant describes her mother as predictably hostile and perpetually dissatisfied. However, her father is experienced as more understanding and tolerant of what she can actually manage, and expectations from him differ.

Marks
Expectations were frequently related to the measurement provided by school marks. Marks can come to form part of the self, and good marks can be associated with ‘not me’ (INT 1 P 83).

Incompetence in Mathematics, which can demand more attention than other subjects, seems to be an important aspect of self-esteem and coherence. One participant recalls that Mathematics was the subject most difficult for her. Even extra lessons did not help her in getting it right. The sense of incompetence in relation to Mathematics (and the inaccessible cognitive operations and emotional tranquillity it requires) is extreme.

Marks may also impact on peer relationships. Humiliation about previous marks causes the child to refuse to share marks with her peers. This continues even when her marks improve. Marks come to be a crucial dimension in relating to peers, leading to sharing/not sharing in the creation of friendship. Marks may also drive the relationship with teachers and parents in that the marks can be perceived as threatening whether she does well or poorly, or they are held as the signifier of the child’s worth (INT 5 P 60).

Interesting work may be linked to good marks, which tend to be experienced in contexts where there is more rather than less routine. Changes in school are also
linked to marks, and, for example, three changes within a period of a few months were used to account for a participant not wanting to continue with subjects in which poor marks had been achieved. Marks further seem to propagate polarisation of experience, in that schools are found very bad or very good, the self as bad or good, based on the marks achieved (INT 5 P 79).

Expectations by others may serve to entrench the mark associated with a child and thus the image others have of her. (INT 5 P 81)

Defining the self in terms of marks received may lead to confusion, related to variable performance and variable caretaker response, highlights incoherence and increases pressure (INT 11 P 6).

7.2.5.2 Attempts to swim

Motivation is the incentive for action towards a goal, especially that which results from psychological or social factors; i.e., the factors that give purpose or direction to behaviour. It refers, ideally, to the child’s enthusiasm, drive and ambition and attempts to swim with the processes of life. On the rare occasions when motivation occurs, it seems to be promoted by interest, which elevates the person or thing in importance and curiosity to the participant, giving them a sense of participation. Interesting work appeared to have the quality or power of arousing such a feeling. In the data, tasks that were seen as interesting had the quality of being challenging. Mostly, tasks, whether they were interesting or not, produced boredom and fatigue or annoyance (INT 10 P 18; INT 11 P 123).
Once motivated, the child ideally should demonstrate perseverance, persistence, tenacity, and determination, patience, application, and diligence (INT 5 P 58).

However, refusal to participate and turning away from the learning situation was more in evidence, particularly as an inordinate amount of effort was required to maintain motivation that came more easily to peers (INT 11 P 153).

Motivation seems to decrease with frustration (discord), given also that frustration is poorly tolerated in the presence of deficient attention (inattention) (INT 9 P 9).

Motivation also decreases if the child is placed in an environment experienced as terrible, to the point where survival is questionable (INT 9 P 49).

### 7.2.5.3 Drowning

This term is used to convey the participants’ experience of collapsing in the face of expectations that serve to make them feel inaudible, ineffective, or unidentifiable, swamped and nullified, flooded, submerged inundated, and engulfed (INT 9 P 46). Drowning is marked by a sense of failure.

**Failure**

To fail is to be found wanting in some respect, to be seen as deficient and inadequate, to become weak or impaired, or to prove unreliable as a resource or source. It also means proving defective when tested and giving way under pressure. In the data, failure is related to its opposite, success and improvement, but more frequently to being overwhelmed and to deteriorating experience. Recall appears to be of occasional success and related brief balanced images of self. These disappear and are
replaced by entirely negative recall of being a failure and a disappointment to both parents and teachers (INT 9 P 13).

Most frequently, good images seem spoiled by recall of failure, and bad images of self. This spoiling can be aggravated by threats from caretakers to take away areas in which the child feels competent.

The particular cultural context of participants serves to mediate expectations and failure. One participant emanates from a middle-class Jewish family where tertiary education is emphasised. His repeated failures are not only below the societal norm but also well below his cultural norms. His sense of incompetence would therefore be exacerbated. In the case of another participant, his first clear memories of school are of staying there years longer than peers and of being labelled by others as disabled. This memory is followed by those of failing three further grades in the course of schooling, leaving at the end of Grade 10. This would be less than the average in his cultural context. Failure marks his school experience. This is at first labelled learning disability (LD), although he does receive a diagnosis at some point of ADHD (INT 9 P 17).

A sense of incompetence seems merged with the experience of being disgusting, which fuels the development of a bad sector of the self. One participant still experiences himself as incompetent in reading and compares himself to an eight-to-nine-year-old child. He feels equally incompetent, even disgusting, at spelling and Mathematics, again comparing himself to a young child.
This particular participant was sent to a succession of remedial and special schools. His perception, which is a common theme for other participants, is of caretakers who see him as stupid, incompetent, useless and limited.

The child is able at times to experience a competent aspect of self, often with surprise, but keeps this polarised from other areas in which incompetence is experienced, such as peer review. One participant attributes her success at gymnastics not only to her hard work but also to the nature of gymnastics as being individual rather than a team effort. Preserving the sense of self as competent in isolation transpires to be the participant’s mechanism to prevent failure in team situations and, thus, disappointing herself (INT 5 P 46-47). Disappointed expectations and failure can lead to self-destruction in the form of suicide attempts (refraction), and can persist through school to employment situations (INT 5 P 106; INT 9 P 74). Participants frequently relate their sense of failure to being overwhelmed, insufficient, useless and lost (INT 1 P 73; INT 11 P 17). In contrast to the focusing capacity that fear seems to have, fear can also lead to a sense of failure, when a teacher’s threat leads to the child being unable to write until the teacher goes on maternity leave. Competence is achieved in the absence of this teacher.

When something is seen as beyond the capabilities of the child, by the child, this failure can lead to being overwhelmed, giving up, ‘freaking out’ and drowning. Time in relation to this part of the self is experienced as all encompassing in that incompetence stretches backwards (always have been) and forwards (always will be), a failure of sense of time. Drowning further serves to foster alienation from peers.
(INT 9 P 15). A sense of failure can be a precursor to self-destructive behaviour, moving through frustration (INT 9 P 31).

Betrayal of trust by a caretaker can leave the participant feeling absolutely useless (incompetent), worthless and soiled. Caretaker–child relationships can become so complicated by deficient attention and consequent incompetence and failure that suicide seems logical to some participants. One participant relates these directly in that she attributes a death wish directed at her by her mother, based on her worthless, useless, undeserving and soiled status. Another participant is drowned in pity (INT 9 50; INT 10 P 82; INT 11 P 15; INT 11 P 18; INT 11 P 63).

### 7.2.6 Refraction

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<tr>
<th>SUPRAORDINATE CATEGORY</th>
<th>REFRACION</th>
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</thead>
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<td>fading, vanishing, shame</td>
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<td>DYING</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEMOLITION</td>
<td>Self-destruction, suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.6 Refraction

Refraction, which is an ongoing consequence of other unravelling experiences, is the action of breaking open or breaking up, throwing back, reflecting, returning and
actively impairing its original source. In this study, it refers to the human imperative to survive. It is illustrated by the phenomenon of light or waves being deflected in passing obliquely through the interface between one medium and another, as well as a change in direction because of travelling at different speeds at different points.

I have chosen this word ‘refraction’ in order to contrast the tendencies in the stories with the normative desires or thrusts to survive. The pull of biological organisms in their ecosystems and psychological beings in their social contexts is usually to survival. Survival is the action or fact of continuing to live after some event, a continuance or observance of a custom after the disappearance of the circumstances in which it originated, or coping with harsh conditions. Stories reflect instead that this pull was frequently neutralised (giving up), and bent or refracted backwards in acts of self-mutilation or destruction when insurmountable obstacles were confronted (expressed as dying in different ways – fading, vanishing and shame). The urge to survive is given expression in significant (attachment) relationships, however constructive or destructive these may be. In the normal course of events, survival directs the child to attach to caretakers and to follow social rules in the service of doing so. In the case of these participants, they wished to demolish themselves, and expressed this wish as self-destruction and suicide.

7.2.6.1 Crumbling

‘Crumbling’ reflects the participants’ continuous sense that they were not coping; i.e., not managing, succeeding, surviving, nor carrying on with issues of the life process, but rather struggling unsuccessfully. Participants report a few instances of coping,
usually associated with an externally competent appearance and a sense of internal fragmentation. Daydreaming is marked by themes of mastering the situation and thus coping within the fantasy (INT 1 P 82).

Crumbling can be seen comparatively and usually with negative consequences for the child. One participant compares herself to her sister in terms of coping in the family chaos – the sister copes, she does not. She attributes this to her insignificance to her parents and to something being wrong with her (INT 1 P 99).

Another participant, having stayed back a year, compares himself unfavourably with the younger children in his class, feels incompetent, and slits his wrist so badly his arm has to be placed in a plaster cast. Despite the helpful attitude of the headmaster, (who moves him to a different class to help him ‘cope’) the bad experience deteriorates to a point where the fragmenting participant makes further suicide attempts (INT 10 P 82).

The need to cope and to survive may lead to faulty attempts to do so. Abusive relationships, aggravated by inattention and the experienced persecutory stance of others, may have the effect of sending participants away from home, in order to ‘cope’ on their own, prematurely and without the necessary competencies. Factors that mitigate against crumbling seem to be found in situations where psychopathology is normative (e.g. a small school run within a psychiatric institution, teachers are experienced as attuned and attached, and distraction minimal).

7.2.6.2 Giving up
Over the course of development, and having had sufficient experiences of crumbling, participants seem to reach a point where they give up on normative ways of expressing the urge to survive. Instead, from frustration, anger and boredom (even by the bluntness of the instrument chosen for the purpose) without normative survival parameters but with the energy still apparently seeking expression, self-mutilation, wishing for death or aggression directed at the obstructive, persecutory, dispossessing other can result (INT 5 P 66; INT 5 P 107).

One participant narrates the experience of hatred towards the mother, so extreme that she wishes to kill her. She expresses plans she has formed to do this. She recalls her relationship with her mother as always bad in the past and expects it to be equally so in the future. In view of this bleakness, she thinks one of them must die and goes on to say it must be her. At this point rage seems to serve to both fragment and bind and becomes more evident as crumbling and fragmentation increase. The only evidence of the ability to plan and imagine a future seems to be a foreshortened one, fuelled by rage and aggression (INT 5 P 102).

Overt acting out of self-destruction could be construed as the survival thrust encountering insurmountable obstacles and bending backwards. A major precipitating event for crumbling, giving up and refraction seems to be being sent to remedial or special schools, to changing school systems, or to moving from primary to high school when progress is determined by age rather than merit. Giving up is further associated with extreme incompetence, which in turn is related to confusion, frustration and fragmentation, which can be experienced as identity diffusion. One participant recalls his inability to concentrate together with feeling stupid,
dysfunctional, useless and not worthy of surviving. Inattention seems further associated with de-motivation, giving up on life and deterioration (INT 9 P 48).

Giving up, like crumbling, can be acted out through hurting the bodily self (INT 9 P 31).

Absence of mediation by parents exacerbates this process (INT 9 P 49).

7.2.6.3 Dying

Participants repeatedly refer to dying, which in this context refers to their experience of fading, vanishing, failing, suffering a psychological death and losing their vital force. It implies experiencing suffering as well as being consumed with longing. Interestingly, it can mean to be overcome with embarrassment, boredom, as well as to pass out of memory or knowledge.

One participant recalls that being singled out to tickle the teacher’s back was humiliating. This experience was resolved to an extent through a sense of belonging to a group of children singled out and marginalised in this way. The child’s normal need to survive, i.e. her thrust to survival appears to pull her to attach to the teacher and belong with other children. However, she does this in the context of humiliation and being marginalised as problematic; i.e., the thrust to survive takes a distorted route and is refracted (INT 5 P 36).

An additional relevant meaning of dying is to die into something else; change into something at death or termination; or merge into, cease to be of use or interest to someone. These meanings are reflected in the participants’ experiences, which
indicate self-destruction in response to repeated failure, persecution, discord, fragmentation and dispossession and after sequences of crumbling and giving up.

Ceasing to be of interest because of insufficient opportunities to experience goodness of self seems to be talked of in terms of dying. Gymnastics, where she felt integrated, competent and acceptable was no longer an option for one participant who experienced this as dying down. Recall of this produces another traumatic recall of entering puberty, which is a further cause given for dying of good experience. Puberty, in turn, is related to being raped and the fear of being pregnant. These attributions seem to reflect some failure of working memory in that experience is connected to incorrect memories, (good-thin; bad-fat). The participant’s good self is expressed as dying, and it may be that the profound anxiety thus aroused is deflected to concern about body image in dimensions of heavy, thin and damaged. Imagery of dying intrudes upon coping, which depends on attentiveness. Dying seems to form the content of some daydreaming (INT 5 P 68).

Dying seems to become an option when the environment is experienced as excessively frustrating and when loss is impending. Threats of abandonment both by loss of brother to marriage and loss of father to death, leave one participant to understand that she will be left with her mother, who is experienced as the ultimate persecutory object. In effect, the participant appears to experience an absence of space and time in which to exist. In this refraction of survival, the participant concludes that her only option is dying herself. She attempts suicide.
In a different example, another participant presented a poem in the interview, which he read, and a picture, which he described. The poem is a dramatic plea to be rescued from his awful plight, of feeling alien, unloved, unwanted, unacknowledged and tired of the conflict. The picture depicts him on one side of a wall and other unrecognisable objects on the other side. He describes himself as a member of the living dead, and the wall as obstructing his path to success. The same participant narrates aggressive, sadistic homosexual fantasies, which end in a dying of the self. He experiences a great deal of anger, which he categorises as physical, sexual and emotional. He then describes giving up and waiting to die.

Graphic descriptions of morbid events are a recurring theme and it may be that these are attempts by participants to draw attention to the obstruction of the survival thrust. Others may see these attempts as attention seeking or manipulation. This elicits experience of others as persecutory and dispossessing.

The workings of the survival thrust appear to be evident in relation to significant attachment figures. One participant has an image of his mother as irritated with him and of himself as incompetent, inadequate and a failure. His improvement goes unrecognised by her and leads to him rejecting her. She models for him progression from dying to survival in terms of her own mental illness. She is taken as a model because the participant sees that he is exactly like her, but he cannot follow her survival because of the dispossessing nature of their relationship.

7.2.6.4 Demolition
The notion of self is complex. Very briefly, self refers to a person's individuality or essence at a particular time or in a particular aspect or relation; a true or intrinsic identity; or to a person as the object of introspection or reflexive action. “Self” is further understood here in terms of the thoughts of Kernberg (1984), Ryle (1997) and the self psychologists. Destroying this self may be apparent in the actions of demolition and devastation, which characterise the participants’ attitude in relating to themselves and others.

The idea of self-destructive behaviour can be internalised by modelling. In one example, the child models a teacher in the development of impulsive self-destructive eating-disordered behaviour (INT 5 P 71).

Self-destructive behaviour can take a more subtle form. One participant spent six years on a three-year hairdressing course and did not complete it. This failure he ascribes to having a nervous breakdown, to smashing his car, to conflict with his lecturers as well as to the work itself. He feels competent, talented and even contemptuous of others, but sets himself up for further conflict by performing incompetently and leaving or abandoning the situation, damaging his long-term goals, whilst asserting his desire to live his own life.

Experiences marked by polarisation of experience, incoherence, dispossession and persecution seem to end with some attempts at self-destruction, ranging in severity from damaging long-term goals to serious suicide efforts (INT 9 P 58; INT 5 P 74; INT 5 P 78). If bad experience predominates and is enduring, splitting of experience may take the form of who is to be destroyed as opposed to who is not. Usually the self
is to be demolished, given its devalued status as worthless, useless, undeserving and soiled (INT 5 P 102; INT 5 P 103).

Graphic descriptions of morbid events, failed attempts at suicide and frustration with these failures seem to be recurring themes, even when others are attuned to the needs of the child and intervene. The narratives are marked by the startling frequency of these attempts and their precise recall, where clarity of certain other events tends to be lost. One participant is disappointed at the failure of his self-destructive behaviour and ascribes it to his not belonging to the category of normal people. He then wishes to be a doctor, a role that he seems to idealise. Another participant feels he cannot cope and attempts suicide by slitting his wrists and jumping off a three-storey building (INT 10 P 81).

Narrations of self-destruction take on a quality that this researcher experienced as melodramatic and reminiscent of scenes the participants might have been exposed to in the cinematographic media. This impression is derived from the list of ‘methods’, which in the ordinary course of events would have succeeded. These methods include tying oneself to a railway track, poisoning with mushrooms, abusing cough medicine and shooting oneself, all related with equal intensity, all by one participant. Attempts all seem to follow some form of experienced persecution (INT 9 P 80; INT 10 P 96; INT 10 P 99-100; INT 10 P 140).

The urge to demolish the self may be aggravated by the perception that the participant is not being taken seriously by others. In response to this perception, one participant tries to jump off a bridge over the highway and then shoots himself before he
experiences that others believe his intent. He chooses to shoot himself through the
internal organs, which causes definite internal devastation but uncertain death. Self-
destruction is transmuted into a survival thrust by physical pain, which the participant
was unable to think through before hurting himself and then finds he cannot bear (INT
10 P 142; INT 10 P 143).

Not only is the dismissive attitude of others apparently engendering of self-
destruction, failed attempts are themselves experienced as enraging. Failed poisoning
enrages the one participant, who also feels uncared for by the nurses at the psychiatric
institution where he is, so, in a calculated manner, he hangs himself. This also fails.
Similarly, if a dismissive attitude is related to a failed attempt, this seems to serve as
further grounds for suicide (INT 10 P 153; INT 10 P 154).

The survival thrust and its fluctuations in these individuals are further visible in terms
of attachment to transitional objects and how they reinstate lost desires to live. If the
object is unavailable, the self-destructive urge prevails (INT 10 P 151).

### 7.2.7 Discord

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Table 7.7 Discord

Stories are bursting with discord, conflicts between participants and others as well as the eventual internal representations of these conflicts. The notions of force and vectors have been taken from the field of physics and applied here in the following manner:

- A force, which is applied energy, refers to the interactions both between and within individuals. A force is usually observable through stories, which include images in terms of magnitude and intensity, such as extreme fear.
- The resultant force is the sum of all the forces and their direction, i.e. of vectors. The direction could take the form of being constructive (towards survival) or destructive (refracted survival thrust, bent through repeated traumatic experience).
- A concordant vector (which comprises several positively toned, constructive vectors) would tend towards health, survival or the norm.
- A discordant vector, on the other hand, (which comprises repeated negatively toned, destructive sub-vectors) would tend towards pathology, disintegration and away from the functional norm.
These vectors or forces seem predominantly discordant in the narratives. They are differing; conflicting, opposing, hostile and clashing. As in discordant music, the flux of forces is lacking in harmony. Forces at play appear to be harsh, strident, dissonant, and jarring. Vectors that produce discord are talked of as anger, fear, frustration, humiliation as well as conflict. These vectors appear to be shaping forces in these stories of self. They manifested as stances of fight (conflict, frustration, anger, aggression), flight (dread, threat) or freezing (shame, humiliation, hurt, sadness).

7.2.7.1 Fight

Conflict
A conflict (or discord) results from vectors produced in a fight, a struggle between opposing forces fighting, strife, the clashing or variance of opposed principles, beliefs, (the emotional distress caused by) the opposition of incompatible wishes etc. in a person. One participant describes how she begins to relate to peers whom she describes as the wrong crowd. In not caring who she is accepted by, she comes into conflict with her mother who affirms her but qualifies the affirmation in a way that is intolerable for her developmental phase (adolescence), emphasising and possibly perpetuating rebellion. The child’s action, interaction, etc. (i.e. vector) is discordant. Many forces or vectors comprise this discordant vector, including the forces of deficient attention – misperceptions, misunderstandings, compromised foresight and insight, and possibly self-medication rather than self-motivation (INT 5 P 62).

Frustration
Discord is also apparent in frustration, i.e. the child’s experience of being ineffectual, fruitless, unavailing, pointless, deprived of hope and purpose; disappointed, obstructed, and discouraged (INT 9 P 24).
Sufficient discordant vectors may have the resultant force of fragmentation (INT 5 P 100).

In one sequence, discordant vectors seem to fragment the participant when containment is not forthcoming. Negative vectors are the mother’s active blame and brother’s coldness/messenger status; the internal lack of holding capacity, the alienation from family, the internal images of self as worthless, guilty and shameful as well as the mother’s perceived fragility.

Discordant vectors are in evidence intrapsychically as well as acting out events. One participant describes a disconnection between his head and a body that does its own thing, leaving these parts of himself in conflict with each other. The conflict is experienced further as between good and bad and he equates good with sane. It is implied that connection and control of intellectual faculties are experienced in the good sector of the polarised self (INT 9 P 63).

**7.2.7.2 Flight**

**Fear**

Like conflict, fear constitutes a discordant vector. Fear refers to the painful emotion caused by a sense of impending danger, a state of alarm or dread, anxiety, terror, panic, trepidation and apprehensiveness, worry or unease. In this study, fear may be related to (and a precursor of) panic and fragmenting (INT 10 P 34).

**Dread**
In another example, the event of the Grade 1 teacher threatening to cut off the children’s hands is repeated and elaborated to include a fear of writing, and then to a fear of damage and pain. Fear generated by the teacher’s threat leads to the child being unable to write until the teacher goes on maternity leave. Competence appears to be achieved in the absence of this teacher. The event in its repetitions constitutes the dimensions of this discordant vector (INT 5 P 2; INT 5 P 15 & 17; INT 5 P 18).

In a different sequence of fragmentation directed by a series of discordant vectors, one participant is left uncontained and becomes angry and bored, and frustrated by the bluntness of the instrument she uses for self-mutilation. In this sequence, there are strong negative vectors of (a) frustration, (b) anger and (c) boredom. Other vectors in this equation are weak positive vectors of holding goodness in mind, the force of internalised rules and the need to integrate experience. However,

- (d) the apparent ability to hold goodness in mind is limited. This may lead to insufficient experience of goodness. Inability to hold in mind is characteristic of deficient attention. Experience of badness may lead to dysregulation of arousal, motivation and affect;
- (e) explicit rules in her culture about damaging the body are insufficiently internalised;
- (f) integration may be centred around a refracted survival thrust.

The resultant force of these vectors is discord, manifest in the disinhibited, impulsive-destructive action of self-mutilation. Events driven by vectors are spoken of in the strongest terms, probably because they represent the unmoderated functioning of base affect in the limbic system (INT 11 P 22).
7.2.7.3 Freezing

Negative, discordant vectors that have a paralysing impact seem to occur when the child experiences humiliation, i.e. loss of pride, shame, disgrace, loss of face, dishonour, indignity, embarrassment, debasement, degradation, and being crushed. Participants frequently relate humiliation to teasing. Humiliation about previous marks causes one participant to refuse to share marks with her peers (INT 5 P 60; INT 11 P 16; INT 11 P 138; INT 11 P 141; INT 11 P 142).

Vectors are limited by both the space in which they take place and their duration, i.e. by dimensions of space and time. Participants’ experiences of themselves in space are wrong, insufficient, excessive or unpredictably permeable, as reported in their stories of incoherence.

Time is a finite extent of continued existence, e.g. the interval between two events, or the period during which an action or state continues; the rhythm of a piece of music; the rate at which a piece is performed, the tempo. For these participants, time appear to be experienced as discordant (INT 11 P 69).

7.3 Comments

As is evident from the above analysis, the data is rich in terms of exploring unravelling experiences of self, in all the domains of experience described by Stern (1985). Instead of emergence of a positive nature in the sense that Stern (1985) would have it, there is bias towards emergence of a negative sense of self. Instead of a sense of core self (Stern, 1985), there is incoherence. Instead of intersubjectivity (Stern, 1985), there is great social deficit, and the fragile sense of a verbal self (Stern, 1985)
entrenches these disruptions.

It remains problematic to talk of both parts and wholes, noting always that these parts require consideration only in their whole-life contexts and, therefore, I respectfully redirect the reader to the unbroken narratives. After presenting the parts, I move simultaneously to consideration of the stories as wholes to inform a suggested explanation of the development of borderline psychopathology (Chapter Eight).

These themes are the fuzzy-edged categories of experience that I identified in the data. Early linking between them was effected through the admittedly quantitative frequency and intensity of relationships. This initial ordering reflects the salience of experiences to participants. At this level, the most striking overarching theme that caught me was trauma, in every context of living and flourishing. Trauma came to organise the other themes, as the lens through which to view unravelling experiences of participants' selves. From this central experience radiated other themes: (1) a sense of disintegration, usually beginning in early childhood and deteriorating in non-linear fashion until the predominance of the experience of incoherence is inescapable; (2) a withdrawal from, and inattentiveness to, the considerate care of others, reflected in inattention, which included missing overt and covert rules; (3) a sense of being alone and lonely, rejected and banished, manifested in the experience of dispossession; (4) victimisation rather than attunement on all levels, and repeated experiences of persecution; (5) an experience of self as useless, being in a state of dysfunctional incompetence; (6) an experience of self as worthy of mutilation and destruction in subtle and dramatic ways, rooted in a bending back, distortion and refraction of the imperative to survive; and (7) the forces at play, which clash, conflict and contradict, resulting in a good deal of experience being permeated with discord. These seven
categories of experience, set in trauma, reflect the developmental issues of borderline psychopathology. It is re-emphasised that these categories are structured in terms of radial extensions from the basic-level categories of experience to supraordinate and subcategories. (See Chapter Five.)

As none of these seven themes is a discrete entity, the categories overlap with each other, progressing as a string that continuously loops back upon itself. This movement can be visualised as the form of a butterfly\(^3\), with incoherence at its centre. It is important to note that not only does each theme trace its own path, but also that repetitions are never exactly in the same place and that they, therefore, involve increasing anatomical and psychological areas of functionality. Further, as time progresses, which it does in linear fashion over the course of non-linear life, the pathways of the other six themes take participants through the centrality of a self attempting to cohere, increasingly polarising its aspects.

These themes and their neat tables do not begin to reflect the chaos of many types, which permeates the stories in this study, and which takes the journeys in these narratives through repeating cycles of trauma and incoherence. The diagrammatic representation of these cycles is more illustrative of the processes of unravelling experiences of self. (See Figure 7.1 below.)
7.4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Recasting stories in terms of narratives and analysing the emerging themes came to highlight that the sufferers of borderline psychopathology believed themselves to be from the beginning in a constant state of emergency, maintained by knowing that the ‘book of rules’ by which life is to be lived was unavailable to them. Both of these
beliefs fuelled their conviction that they were, interminably, castaways, adrift alone on hostile, unpredictable and even menacing fathoms of self-states and relationships.

The manner in which the self comes to be unravelled such that borderline status is assigned has been specified in this chapter and is discussed in the next.