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Surfacing the Sibling in Self Psychology: Exploring the Potential Developmental Functions of Siblings

A PhD thesis (including publications)

by Claire Hart

Supervised by Prof. Tanya Graham

2021

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

_____

Claire Hart

Date: _____ of _____2021

Abstract

The significance of siblings has largely been unexplored in psychoanalytic theory and practice. While sibling studies are becoming established, the parent-child relationship remains central in psychoanalysis. As such, there are gaps in understanding the ways in which sibling relationships may be developmentally significant. This thesis proposes a self psychology model for conceptualising the development of self that includes both the vertical and lateral functions that are first experienced in the family milieu and then continue into adulthood. The focus of this study was on sibling relationships in clinical and non-clinical settings, using methodologies that acknowledged the importance of subjective experiences. Data was obtained through the use of a clinical case study and 18 psychoanalytic research interviews with South African adults who grew up with high-access siblings and parents. Based on the subjective experiences of the participants in this study, this thesis shows how the selfobject needs of idealising, twinship, and mirroring were provided by siblings and provided by parents in distinctive and adjunctive ways in early childhood. For this study's participants, early sibling dynamics continued to operate and recapitulated unresolved vertical and lateral functions in later development. The discussion considers how subjective experiences of these vertical and lateral functions shaped the participants' experiences of themselves and others through the process of transmuting internalisation. This study extends the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry by including siblings constellations in the clinical and non-clinical contexts, as well by examining sibling tensions and dynamics that emerged in adulthood. Continued exploration of vertical and lateral functions in research, clinical, and social contexts is necessary to generate more comprehensive and nuanced understandings of the contribution of siblings to development.

Key words: lateral function, psychoanalysis, selfobject needs, self psychology, sibling developmental functions, vertical function.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I was too young that time to value her,
But now I know her. If she be a traitor,
Why, so am I. We still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together,
And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
Still we went coupled and inseparable.

- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Introductory Remarks

Siblings are everywhere I look. I find them in the stories of my childhood, in the books I read, and in the anecdotes that I overhear as I drop my own children off at school. How disappointing that psychoanalytic literature has not offered me the same rich and nuanced sibling stories that I stumble upon everywhere else.

In my own family, I stumbled into siblinghood as the second-born child. On the day I was born, I became a sister to a big brother. Six years later, another child arrived, and we became a family consisting of two parents, one older brother, one middle sister, and one younger brother. My brothers and I spent much of our shared childhoods "like Juno's swans", sometimes by choice and sometimes by force. The above quote could be about my siblings, but it is originally about the childhood relationship of cousins Rosalind and Celia from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. Although these characters are not blood sisters, the quote encapsulates the unique bond that lateral figures can share in childhood and carry into adulthood. I do not know who I would

be without my brothers and I cannot imagine a future in which they are not a part of my life. I have discovered myself through the mirrors they have provided me. Sharing a life with my brothers has allowed me to explore my femininity and masculinity, my emotions and my thinking, as well as my potentials and limitations, in complex ways. I have since realised that these mirrors have their own smudges that sometimes distorted what I saw reflected back. Still, we have learnt to tolerate and negotiate the complexities of sameness and difference that constantly emerge between us. I know that we belong to each other and I feel secure in my connection to my brothers as we continue to mirror each other as best we can as we journey through our lives.

Sibling relationships can be defined and understood in different ways, such as through shared parentage, through shared experiences, or through continuous exchange and interactions (Alber et al., 2013). The significance of siblings has been observed in clinical case studies and psychoanalytical observational studies from as early as the first six months of life (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Rustin, 2007). While sibling studies have started to establish their place in psychoanalysis, the importance of parental figures is still the foundation on which psychoanalysis rests. Studies have also given insufficient attention to the continued embeddedness of sibling ties within families over the life course (Walker et al., 2005) as sibling dynamics continue into adulthood and also seem to impact on other relationships in significant ways (Hart, 2019; Milevsky, 2020).

While my interest in siblings has roots in my childhood experiences with my brothers, it is the adult experiences of others' sibling relationships that has maintained my attention. As a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapist who predominately works with adults, I often find that siblings dominate the personal patterns of the intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences of

many of my patients. The impetus for this thesis arose from my experiences of the relative absence of developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalytic theory. I wondered: “Why is there this disjuncture between my own personal and clinical experiences of the value and importance of siblings and the relative absence of siblings in the psychoanalytic literature?” I found myself often getting stuck in my work with patients when it came to their siblings. While there is a psychoanalytic body of work that I would draw upon to clarify some of my clinical questions and observations regarding siblings, the lack of cohesion in theoretical conceptualisations has complicated the application of these theories to my clinical practice.

Jarvis (2009) reflects that “all human learning begins with disjuncture – either with an overt question or a sense of unknowing” (p. 21). My sense of disjuncture and my questioning of the place of siblings in psychoanalysis has offered me a potential source of learning. In response to an experience of disjuncture or a sense of not-knowing, one may follow different paths, including the rejection of the experience, thinking about the experience, emotionally responding to the experience, or doing something about the experience. For me, resolving this disjuncture meant finding meaning in the subjective experiences of sibling relationships, everywhere I looked. My sibling stories and the many sibling stories that were shared with me in my psychotherapy consulting room while conducting this research has sustained the original impetus for this thesis and has inspired new ways of thinking about and working with sibling and other lateral relationships.

Psychoanalytic researcher, Juliet Mitchell (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) was also disturbed by the disjuncture where siblings and lateral relationships are often explored in creative literature, yet remain relatively absent in social, psychological, and political understandings. To widen thinking beyond an exclusive focus on parents, Mitchell (2000)

proposed a theoretical model whereby the lateral axis refers to the side-by-side interrelationship between siblings and the vertical axis refers to the top-to-bottom relationship between a parent and child. Mitchell's introduction of the vertical and lateral axes offered a new model of thinking about the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis; however, this conceptualisation of the vertical and lateral axes has been criticised as being rigid at times (Vivona, 2007, 2010). The binary separation of the vertical and lateral axes is problematic as many argue that sibling relationships cannot be understood as separate from parental relationships (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The lack of exploration of how vertical and lateral figures can work together to fulfil developmental functions, both in childhood and beyond, is problematic as the rigid vertical-lateral binary can remain entrenched in existing psychoanalytical thought. This doctoral thesis considers developmental functions to be subjectively experienced in a specific psychological environment that is both vertically and laterally structured. I set out to explore both vertical and lateral developmental functions based on the assumption that each can complement and supplement the development of a cohesive self.

Actual, symbolic and substitute siblings exist in our relational world throughout our lives. According to Freud (1914):

> The nature and quality of the human child's relations to people of his own and the opposite sex have already been laid down in the first six years of his life. He may afterwards develop and transform them in certain directions but he can no longer get rid of them. The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters. All those whom he gets to know later become substitute figures for these first objects of his feelings. (p. 243)

While the first lateral experience tends to occur between siblings in the family milieu for many, Mitchell (2013a) argues that siblings and their lateral substitutes, such as cousins, spouses, peers,

friends and foes, are a biological and cultural necessity in all human societies. Hence, psychoanalytic understandings of siblings must also be concerned with symbolic brothers and sisters who exist in our minds, whether they are present or absent in fact (Mitchell, 2013a).

Informed by this desire to deepen understandings of vertical and lateral figures, this thesis does not solely focus on real parents and siblings and their vertical and lateral substitutes. The term *function* can be understood as a metaphorical place-holder for what can be performed by an actual person or even by multiple persons. This study uses the term *function* to refer to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs by any significant figure. The *lateral function* refers to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a lateral figure who is willing and able to fulfil particular needs for another, such as a sibling, step-sibling, half-sibling, cousin, peer, friend, or foe. The *vertical function* refers to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a vertical figure who is willing and able to fulfil particular needs for another, such as a parent, step-parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, teacher, or other authority figure. Previously, the term function has been used to distinguish between variations in maternal and paternal positions and roles and what these each offer developmentally (Davies & Eagle, 2013; Maiello, 2007); however, these conceptualisations have been primarily vertical and have not included the possibility of lateral functions. This study specifically focuses on the developmental functions that can be fulfilled in a consistent environment where available and responsive significant others offer the functions of *idealising* (the need to be a part of an admired, protective other), *twinship* (the need to be connected to an essentially alike other), and *mirroring* (the need to be accepted and affirmed by another) (Kohut, 1971). The focus on vertical and lateral functions in this thesis, as opposed to focusing only on specific vertical or lateral figures in the

family milieu, opens up possibilities for application to different types of family structures, including blended families and families with only children.

This thesis reveals specific gaps regarding the developmental functions that can be provided by siblings from within psychoanalysis and proposes a new way of conceptualising the development of self to include both vertical and lateral functions. While this study focuses on these specific developmental functions, these are not exhaustive as there are various other ways of conceptualising developmental needs that require fulfilment, depending on one's theoretical grounding. Outside of psychoanalysis, developmental and clinical research studies on sibling functions are extensive and have shown that siblings help with the development of and practicing of social skills, tolerating frustration, negotiating conflict, regulating emotions, building self-esteem, providing security in distressing situations, and developing intimacy (Dunn, 1985; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & McGuire, 1992; Milevsky, 2020). Thus, other sibling studies conducted through different theoretical lenses are also important to generate insight and understanding into the many potential developmental functions of siblings.

Rationale

Across the social sciences, new concepts for exploring the connections between people that extend further than a narrow focus on the nuclear family and kinship structures are emerging. Siblings are understood "as part of a web of relationships across time and space, relationships which are integral to the formation of self, identity, and to personhood" (Davies, 2014, p. 14). Certain sociological changes have meant that sibling relationships have acquired greater centrality, specifically in early developmental understandings (Rustin, 2007). The increase of maternal employment has meant that mothers are not always the primary focus in the child's

development. Instead, many children experience and depend on group care with maternal and paternal substitutes, including nannies, childcare workers, and babysitters. Many children also spend more time with actual siblings, substitute siblings, and other lateral figures who are likely to become important and consistent developmental figures (Bank & Kahn, 1982). Rustin (2007) argues that the identity of a child may be more localised to membership of the sibling and peer group from an early age. Even for only children, other lateral relationships seem to be significant developmentally, for example with peers, cousins, or friends. This thesis will show that siblings and other lateral figures hold structural importance in development, in addition to parental and other authority figures. Siblings and lateral figures are necessary for the development of psychic structures which allow more nuances and possibilities for relational dynamics and complexities to develop.

As one of the longest lasting relationships of our lives (Cicirelli, 1995), siblings can provide significant developmental functions over the course of our lives. While psychoanalytic inquiries into early childhood sibling experiences have emerged (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Rustin, 2007; Sherwin-White, 2007; Vivona, 2007, 2010), understandings of the psychodynamics of adult sibling relationships are lacking. As a social and emotional relationship that is distinctive in its prevalence, importance, and longevity, I am not alone in my curiosity about the dynamics of sibling relationships in adulthood (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles 2003; Lesser, 1978; Milevsky, 2020; Wittenberg, 2009). Sibling relationships are constantly shifting and intersecting in the family and in the social milieu, in the past and in the present, and in transference-countertransference dynamics. To fully conceptualise how we relate to ourselves and others over our lifespan requires an exploration of how siblings could shape and alter the course of our

development. There is clinical, contextual, and theoretical importance in exploring the complexities of these many different sibling constellations.

The tendency to understand phenomena from within the clinical setting using the case study method forms the foundation of most psychoanalytic research (Emde & Fonagy, 1997; Holmes, 2013). Generally, this method is employed to understand intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings associated with a particular phenomenon in the psychoanalytic treatment setting (Cartwright, 2004), and is also frequently used to understand siblings from the psychoanalytic perspective. The linking of these case studies to theory has not been sufficient to provide a cohesive theoretical understanding to guide clinical practice. The examination of a few available clinical psychoanalytic cases has shown that siblings were problematic for healthy intrapsychic and interpersonal development (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Sherwin-White, 2007).

As psychotherapists, including myself, mostly work with pathological sibling dynamics and developmental problems related to sibling relationships in clinical practice, psychoanalytic interpretations of siblings tend to focus on intra- and inter-sibling abuse in violence, wars and pathology (Mitchell, 2003). This body of work has yielded valuable insights into the nature of sibling dynamics and how they contribute to clinical conditions and their treatment. Nevertheless, prevailing understandings about sibling dynamics that are informed by these clinical case studies tend to emphasise “hostility, destructive competition and the idea of there never being enough love to go around” (Rustin, 2007, p. 22). Psychoanalysis must turn its gaze outside of the clinical psychoanalytic setting where vertical relationships continue to dominate and exclude a consideration of the significance of lateral relationships and their contribution to individual development. There is value in exploring intrapsychic processes and unconscious

meanings associated with siblings using both clinical and non-clinical samples so that psychoanalytic interpretations can encapsulate the potential developmental functions of siblings.

Families in the South African context have distinctive features that may impact on sibling and other lateral relationships. The extended family is particularly important in many South African families (Amos, 2013). In many of these families, there are not the same rigid distinctions that exist in the western understanding of a nuclear family which comprises exclusively of parents and children. Rather, the extended family, which also includes grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, often share a household. As a result, siblings are not narrowly defined or limited to shared parentage in the South African context. Instead, siblingship often extends to first and more distant cousins who grow up together, while parenting is shared between grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles, at different times (Merten, 2016). Siblings can be expected to fulfil the responsibilities of parenting to brothers, sisters, or cousins due to the loss or extended absence of parental care (Meintjes et al., 2010), which means that siblings can provide both vertical and lateral functions depending on the circumstances of the extended family. Nevertheless, there are strict vertical and lateral structures that divide extended families into elders and children which shape the development of social life in this context (Amos, 2013). These diverse family structures should help inform our understandings of the variations between vertical and lateral functions in different contexts.

Rooted in a western conceptualisation of the family, psychoanalysis tends to focus on the oedipal complex as the basis of nuclear family dynamics (Kradin, 2009). By predominately emphasising the oedipal triad of mother, father and child, siblings are either excluded in psychoanalytic conceptualisations or assumed to only serve as parentified children or displacements of the parental relationship (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). There is a need for

psychoanalysis to accommodate the richness and complexity of different types of family compositions broader than the nuclear family. While diverse family structures exist in the South African context, this study will examine sibling dynamics from within a more traditional family structure in order to make a significant contribution to expanding the application of psychoanalytic theory and practice both globally and in the South African context.

In addition to considering diverse variations of sibling dynamics based on subjective experiences in the South African context, this study attempts to "broaden the psychoanalytic lens" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 211) in several important ways in order to significantly contribute to psychoanalytic knowledge of siblings. Firstly, this study extends its methodological preoccupation of psychoanalytic work to outside of the clinical setting. Secondly, this study extends the theoretical focus beyond the parental dyad. Thirdly, this study extends the focus from early development to include the developmental significance of siblings in adulthood. In doing so, the study contributes to building a more inclusive understanding of sibling developmental functions. Furthermore, this wider lens generates more complex understandings of the potential ways which dysfunction may emerge or be prevented in relation to the influence of siblings of development.

Theoretical Framework

Limited conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in the overall body of literature predominate. Different aspects of sibling dynamics have been understood from various theoretical perspectives. Cicirelli (1995) has noted that "no theory exists that can account for changes in sibling relationships across the life span, sibling closeness, sibling caregiving and helping, sibling violence, and abuse" (p. 222). While one theoretical perspective cannot fully

encapsulate all aspects of individual development (Whiteman et al., 2011), grounding in a singular theoretical perspective can provide the coherence and depth of understanding necessary to encapsulate specific developmental functions of diverse sibling experiences.

There has been a call for researchers to create bridges between subjective experiences and ways of understanding psychoanalytic concepts (Legorreta et al., 2013), especially when it comes to understanding the subject of the sibling. The theoretical grounding of this thesis is rooted in psychoanalysis as the concern is the intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences and developmental significance of siblings. However, psychoanalysis has not historically focused on siblings, even though clinical case studies and other literature has suggested their developmental importance. There are still substantial gaps in psychoanalysis with regards to siblings, contributing to incongruence and contradictions in psychoanalytic sibling research. This thesis aims to contribute to psychoanalysis by demonstrating how psychoanalysis needs to make space for siblings by exploring the structural importance of lateral relationships for the development of the self.

While psychoanalysis is the broad overarching theoretical framework, no single theory can account for all types and stages of sibling experiences. Nevertheless, this thesis is grounded within a self psychology framework, which provides unique theoretical concepts that I found to be useful when exploring sibling dynamics, especially related to developmental functions. The psychoanalytic theory of self psychology was proposed by Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) and has been expanded by contemporary self psychologists. While self psychology has not been extensively applied to siblings, Kohut (1982) and others (Bank & Kahn, 1992; Kivowitz, 1995; Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009) have argued for the structural importance of sibling relationships in self development.

There are some historical and conceptual differences and tensions between psychoanalysis and self psychology. As such, the theory of self psychology requires greater exploration in relation to psychoanalytic theory. The work of Heinz Kohut that emerged in the 1970s and 1980 is considered to be a radical shift from Freud's classical psychoanalysis that became established in the early 1900s. Nevertheless, all 'four psychologies' (including drive, ego, object relations and Kohut's self psychology) are rooted in Freud's early work in psychoanalysis. While these four psychologies may overlap and intersect, each offer conceptually unique understandings of our experiences (Pine, 1988). The differences between traditional psychoanalysis and self psychology demonstrative binary divisions within psychoanalysis as each theory exists on "two different ends of the psychoanalytic continuum in their form, structure and understandings of human development and behaviour; their clinical approach; and the cultural and societal contexts from which they emerged" (Joyal, 2014, p. 7). In this study, the bringing together of psychoanalysis and self psychology must hold these historical tensions in mind.

Self psychology is predominately concerned with the fulfilment of development needs (considered to be representative of provision), whereas Freudian psychoanalysis is predominately concerned with conflicts that emerge from repeated frustrations (considered to be representative of deprivation) (Swartz, 2014). Kohut himself experienced this tension between provision in his work and deprivation in traditional psychoanalysis, writing "Freud's values were not primarily health values" (in Strozier, 2001, p. 288). Swartz (2014) eloquently suggests that these polarising divisions in psychoanalysis are not sustainable as confirmed by data from neuropsychology, attachment, and infant research. As such, psychanalysis is now forging new

understandings in which both provision and deprivation have important functions to play in development.

As a post-Freudian theorist, Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) proposes that the development of the self is broader than that which is theorised in classical drive theory. Kohut (1971) considers the libidinal investment in the self, termed *healthy narcissism*, to be a part of normal development. One's subjective experiences from infancy are guided by the narcissistic line of development as one invests energy into the gratification of one's own needs, which leads to the development of self that is responsible for the continued fulfilment of narcissistic needs and maintenance of cohesion (Banai et al., 2005). The self is theoretically conceptualised as the structure that organises one's subjective experiences in relation to a specific set of developmental needs (Wolf, 1988). This was a marked shift from Freud's topographical and structural models as Kohut (1971) introduced the concept of the self as central to analysis where "the self is no longer a representation, a product of the activity of the ego, but is itself the active agent" (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p. 353).

A defining characteristic of self psychology is the bridging of intrapsychic and interpersonal models of development, which has been shown to be especially useful with regards to exploring the unconscious meanings of siblings (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). The theory of self psychology moves beyond intrapsychic conflict between drives to show that pathology emerges from the lack of empathetically-responsive intrapsychic experiences, such as isolation, disconnection, and environmental deficiency. According to Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984), the self requires the presence of consistent, dependable significant others who provide specific types of intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences. These experiences are termed *selfobject experiences*, often shortened to *selfobjects*. Three selfobject experiences are needed for optimal

development throughout life: *idealising* (the experience of being part of an admired, protective selfobject); *twinship* (the experience of being connected to an essentially alike selfobject); and *mirroring* (the experience of being accepted and affirmed by a selfobject). Selfobject experiences can be provided by significant others that form part of the external environment and intrapsychically become autonomous parts of the self (Moberly, 1985). Selfobjects serve to fulfil the essential object-libidinal needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring to promote the structuralisation and maintenance of a cohesive self. Thus, self psychology is concerned with how the interactions between the internal and external world shape the developmental of the self, emphasising the relativism of experience.

Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) diverges from the central functionality of the classical structures of ego, superego, and id and rather considers the development of the self to be understood as the "locus of relationships" (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p. 11). With this relational centrality as its core, self psychology is a theoretical framework that acknowledges the significance of and distinction between vertical and lateral relationships. As this thesis is concerned with both vertical and lateral functions, a theory that is open to exploring the role of other significant relationships in addition to parental figures is fundamental. Kohut (1984) argued that the preparedness and ability of parents or adult caregivers to act as idealising and mirroring selfobjects to fulfil the child's selfobject needs facilitated the process of the development of a cohesive self, while siblings could serve as twinship selfobjects. Consequently, available selfobjects could include vertical and lateral figures, each possibly providing distinctive selfobject functions, to facilitate the process of self development. The potential structural importance of both vertical and lateral functions is not found in traditional psychoanalysis;

hence, these self psychological theoretical concepts offer a novel way of understanding how lateral functions can make structural contributions developmentally.

In self psychology, the development of the self occurs to form three poles of self structure: (1) the pole of the idealised parent imago or the pole of ideals, (2) the pole of twinship, and (3) the pole of the grandiose self. The pole of ideals is embedded in the selfobject need for idealising and refers to the ability to form and maintain a system of goals, ideals, and values (Kohut, 1971). The pole of twinship is embedded in the selfobject need for twinship and refers to the ability to express feelings to others, form significant relationships, and be part of a community (Banai et al., 2005). In the normal line of narcissistic development, twinship ensures a sense of belonging and acceptance including one's qualities, goals, and ideals (Kohut, 1984). The pole of the grandiose self is embedded in the selfobject need for mirroring and refers to the ability to maintain a positive and stable self-esteem, develop healthy ambitions, and accomplish meaningful work (Kohut, 1977). Each of these poles has been shown to be necessary to different extents throughout the lifetime for the development and maintenance of a cohesive self (Flanagan, 2011; Wittenberg, 2009).

A dynamic interplay occurs between the selfobject needs and the development of a cohesive self (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984). Empathetic responses to a developing child's needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring from selfobject experiences are necessary to foster an inner sense of stability and self-cohesion. As selfobject needs are satisfied, the sense of healthy idealisation, connectedness, and grandiosity are also strengthened, which then foster self-regulation. Through the consolidation of the sense of self, selfobject experiences become less necessary as sources of self-regulation. Instead of demanding and relating to others only as sources of selfobject need fulfilment, the individual acquires the ability to fulfil these functions

autonomously. Kohut (1971) termed this developmental process *transmuting internalisation* as the self-regulation functions that were offered in early childhood by parents and possibly siblings become internalised as a cohesive self. Thus, when a function undergoes transmuting internalisation, psychic structures are formed (Miliora, 2003).

As our selfobject experiences are required for the development and maintenance of a cohesive, balanced, and energetic self (Wolf, 1988), the selfobject matrix that was experienced in our early experiences and beyond must be fully considered in our attempts to interpret and understand any experience or structure that subsequently develops. The process of transmuting internalisation is dependent on the willingness and ability of significant others to perform selfobject functions for the developing child, including parents and siblings (Kohut, 1971). The ideal satisfaction of selfobject needs requires an optimal balance between empathetic gratification and empathetic failures. Just as the fulfilment of selfobject needs helps the developing child to flourish, the experience of disappointment and difficulty within a secure context allow the internalisation of self as solid, secure, and resilient (Flanagan, 2011).

The failure of satisfying selfobject needs becomes disruptive to the process of transmuting internalisation when the selfobject experiences are consistently faulty or irresponsive (Flanagan, 2011; Wolf, 1988). When selfobject needs remain unfulfilled as a result of insufficient or non-attuned early selfobject experiences, the individual will continue to seek out reparative selfobject experiences throughout life (Flanagan, 2011; Kahn, 1988; Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984; Wittenberg, 2009; Wolf, 1988). Hence, self psychology is considered to be a lifespan model, which is useful as this thesis aims to deepen understandings into the developmental significance of siblings over the course of life. In cases where there are breakdowns in selfobject experiences in early childhood or the manifestation of pathology of self

later in development, Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) suggests an exploration of the meaning and structure of such an experience, as opposed to an exploration of the manifest content.

There has been limited research using the self psychology framework in South Africa and much of the self psychology literature has predominantly been generated in clinical settings, and within western societal contexts. Self psychology has the potential for broader applications in non-clinical settings, and in diverse contexts, such as South Africa. Even though Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) outlined his framework for narcissistic patients, the theory of self psychology is considered to be inclusive of individuals who present with a "firm and healthy structure or as a more or less seriously damaged one" (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, p. 413). This assumption that the self can function with varying degrees of coherence (ranging from cohesion to fragmentation), vitality (ranging from vigour to enfeeblement), and functional harmony (ranging from order to chaos) (Kohut, 1984; Kohut & Wolf, 1978) opens up possibilities of applying self psychology concepts beyond clinical settings and the western context from which this theoretical framework originates.

Research Aims

The broad aim of the thesis is to explore the distinctive developmental functions that may be provided by a sibling. While psychoanalytic conceptualisations suggest that a sibling can offer various developmental functions, this thesis is specifically concerned with idealising, twinship, and mirroring selfobject experiences that emerge in childhood and continue into adulthood. The thesis draws upon a case study and a series of psychoanalytic interviews from clinical and non-clinical contexts to generate new theoretical understandings of siblings that can be integrated into psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Research Questions

This research is concerned with exploring the following research questions:

- What are the potential developmental functions that a sibling may serve?
- In what ways can a sibling fulfil the developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring?
- How does the potential fulfilment, by a sibling, of the developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring influence an individual's experience of self and others?
- What are the similarities and differences between a sibling as a selfobject and a parent as a selfobject?

Structure of the Thesis

As this thesis is structured as a PhD including publications, the requirements prescribed by the standing orders for the degree must be fulfilled. Four articles for publication that address the research questions have been submitted to reputable, peer-reviewed journals. In accordance with the requirements stipulated, three papers have been accepted for publication and a fourth paper has been submitted and is under review for publication. Three of these four journals are international journals. I am the sole author of these four papers and each paper is included in the thesis as chapters, comprising the main body of the thesis. Each published paper's reference list is not included in the main body of the thesis, but rather amalgamated in the final reference list at the back of the thesis. Additional chapters in the thesis serve to contextualise the study, outline the methods used, and offer a critical discussion of how this study has made a contribution to

psychoanalytic theory and practice. The contents of each chapter of this thesis are further elucidated below.

Chapter One, the current chapter, introduces the reader to the research endeavour by outlining the rationale, aims, and research questions addressed in the study. A brief overview of the theoretical framework and core concepts from self psychology are also provided in this chapter.

Chapter Two serves as the main literature review of the study. The journal article, "Hide-and-seek with siblings: A theoretical exploration of siblings in psychoanalysis" was published in 2018 in *Psycho-analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa* and is included in this chapter. This article answered the first research question, what are the potential developmental functions that a sibling may serve, through a critical review of available sibling literature within the psychoanalytic tradition. This chapter also identifies gaps and tensions in the self psychology literature that this study intended to address.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach of the study whereby unconscious fantasies, predominant defences, intrapsychic dynamics, and interpersonal relationships related to the participants' sibling experiences were foregrounded. The case study-based aspect of the research and the psychoanalytic research interview-aspect of the research are introduced, with specific focus given to case and participant sampling and selection methods, data gathering, data analysis, and ethical considerations. This chapter concludes with a detailed exploration of psychoanalytic-researcher reflexivity.

Chapter Four presents the case study-based aspect of the research and addresses the research question, in what ways can a sibling fulfil the developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring, through the examination of a clinical case study. The journal article,

"Welcoming siblings to self psychology: Exploring vertical and lateral selfobjects" was published in 2019 in the international journal, *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context*, and is included in this chapter. The clinical material presented in this article showed how parents and siblings provided selfobject experiences, suggesting that siblings fulfil the developmental functions of idealising, twinship, and mirroring in distinctive and significant ways.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of vertical and lateral functions that emerged during the psychoanalytic research interview-aspect of the research. Included in this chapter is the article entitled "I am you and you are me: A self psychology perspective on sibling relationships", which was published in the international journal *Psychoanalytic Social Work* in 2021. This article further addresses the research question that was explored in Chapter Two, what are the potential developmental functions that a sibling may serve, revealing the distinctive lateral functions that can be fulfilled by siblings, including idealising and twinship. This article also addresses the research question, what are the similarities and differences between a sibling as a selfobject and a parent as a selfobject, by showing that siblings can function as more than reparative or replacement vertical figures if parents are subjectively experienced as present and good enough at offering specific vertical functions.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the specific dynamics that repeatedly emerged between siblings and their partners during the psychoanalytic research interview-aspect of the research. Included in this chapter is the article "Sibling and sibling successors: Exploring the significance of adult lateral relationships" which was submitted to *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* and was under review for publication in 2020. This article explores the research question, how does the potential fulfilment, by a sibling, of the developmental needs for idealising, twinship,

and mirroring influence an individual's experience of self and others, with a specific focus on the continued importance of both vertical and lateral functions in adulthood.

Chapter Seven integrates and comments on the available literature, case study, and psychoanalytic interviews in order to deepen psychoanalytic and self psychology understandings of the potential developmental functions of siblings. This chapter concludes with the proposed self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions.

Chapter Eight provides a summary of the main findings and explores the implications of this study for psychoanalytic theory and practice. A reflection on the challenges of this thesis, followed by a synopsis of possibilities for future sibling research, concludes the thesis.

Concluding Remarks

Siblings, in their absence or in their presence, change our families and change us. Whether these siblings are real, imagined, or substituted by others, siblings and their lateral successors are necessary for our psychic and social development (Mitchell, 2013c). The lessons we learn and the relationships we form with our siblings are not exclusively significant in childhood. Sibling-like figures, including cousins, friends, foes, peers, co-workers, wives or husbands, and sibling in-laws, will arrive throughout our lives in many different contexts, inviting us to adjust to and make spaces for them. Yet, many questions remain regarding the developmental significance of siblings in psychoanalysis. This thesis aims to answer a few of these questions, using the theoretical framework of self psychology, by summarising what we currently understand to the developmental functions of siblings and exploring the potential developmental functions that a sibling may offer. In doing so, this thesis provides a new way of thinking about and working with siblings and other lateral figures in psychoanalytic theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Siblings in Psychoanalysis: A Literature Review

My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene,
how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
Do you know one, I ask you, one grief
that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us
while we still live and breathe? There's nothing,
no pain - our lives are pain - no private shame,
no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen
in your grief and mine.

- Sophocles, *Antigone*

Preamble

This chapter introduces the reader to the theoretical basis of the subject of this doctoral study, namely the role of siblings as understood in psychoanalysis. Having siblings is a common human experience, yet the possible functions of siblings has tended to be overshadowed by a focus on parental functions in psychoanalysis. Despite the likelihood that a sibling would be a present and consistent figure early in life for many individuals, little is known about how siblings could fulfil developmental needs. As the conscious and unconscious concerns of siblings are distinctive to the concerns of parents, siblings may offer different and valuable types of interpersonal experiences. This thesis intended to explore the potential distinctive and adjunctive developmental functions that siblings may play on the path to intrapsychic and interpersonal development.

The first research question, what are the potential developmental functions that a sibling may serve, necessitated a review of the existing theoretical understandings of the significance of

sibling relationships for pre-oedipal and oedipal development. I explore how siblings are historically understood to be a part of faulty pre-oedipal and oedipal resolution, which has limited the role of sibling relationships to the realm of pathology. The article overleaf, entitled "Hide-and-seek with siblings: A theoretical exploration of siblings in psychoanalysis", shows how theoretical understandings of siblings in psychoanalysis are incomplete as existing psychoanalytical theory has primarily conceptualised siblings within a clinical context using case study methodology. The article was published in 2018 in *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in South Africa*. In this article, I argue that inclusion of the contribution of sibling relationships toward healthy pre-oedipal and oedipal resolutions is necessary for greater depth, richness, and relational understanding in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Given the dearth of published psychoanalytical research on the developmental functions of siblings, this article shows the necessity for continued in-depth exploration of sibling relationships using a psychoanalytic lens.

The article overleaf serves as a critical literature review for the doctoral study; however, this review is not exhaustive as it is only concerned with selective works within a broad body of available sibling literature. Although the theoretical lens of self psychology informed this doctoral study, it was necessary to more broadly conceptualise siblings in psychoanalytic theory and practice to answer the first research question. After doing so in the first section of this literature review, I then turn my focus to the theoretical understandings of siblings in self psychology. The articles included in Chapter Four, Five, and Six also includes additional literature on siblings, specifically situated within the theoretical framework of self psychology.

ARTICLE: Hide-and-Seek with Siblings: A Theoretical Exploration of Siblings in Psychoanalysis

Abstract

Conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis continue to be fraught with theoretical gaps and tensions. Psychoanalytic literature on siblings outlines the ways in which lateral figures can be traumatic in pre-oedipal development, as well as complicate Oedipus complex resolution. The case material that informs this literature is generally concerned with unresolved sibling dynamics as evidenced by the developmental history and transference manifestations in the psychoanalytic clinical treatment setting. These case studies provide a futile outlook on the resolution of pathological sibling dynamics due to the greater intensity of the affect and weaker motivations for relinquishing the oedipal struggle with siblings. As such, research and theory on healthy developmental pathways of the functions of siblings in development are lacking, representing a significant gap in the literature. This paper outlines the prevailing conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis and highlights the absence of case material on diverse sibling experiences and reflexivity by the theorists themselves that may contribute to biases and tensions in existing psychoanalytic perspectives on siblings. Further psychoanalytic inquiries could look beyond the clinical setting to determine under what conditions optimal developmental outcomes may be possible. The diverse and nuanced possibilities for the functions of sibling relationships in development require greater theoretical development and exploration.

Introductory Remarks

My favourite childhood game to play with my two siblings was hide-and-seek. It was the one game that began with a level playing field and could quickly shift as new players joined in. Cousins and friends were always welcome, while adults were sometimes invited to play. We would all take turns to hide while one of us would shout: "*Come out, come out, wherever you are!*" I recall the shared excitement in the mad hunt for the perfect hiding spot or the solitary boredom in closing my eyes and counting to ten. I remember my heart pounding whether I was the hider or the seeker and the moment of discovery that evoked a mixture of relief and frustration. I am reminded of the collective deflation when some adult would call us back to the real world of home time, dinner, bath time, or bedtime. "*Don't worry*", we would say to each other, "*We will play again soon*."

In the course of my work as a therapist, I often feel like I am playing hide-and-seek with my patients. There are set rules to be followed, the hider and the seeker change roles, new players find their way into the game, and there is a constantly shifting dynamic between excitement and boredom, relief and frustration, and victory and defeat. I have found this feeling to be especially significant in my work with patients' unresolved sibling dynamics. These sibling dynamics are often initially hidden as many of my patients tend to repress their strong affective responses to and memories of their siblings from their childhood. Yet, something happens in the transference-countertransference dynamics that reveals to me a reactivation of early developmental fantasies and needs. Sometimes this presents as a parent-child transference, whereby perceptions and expectations are projected onto me that suggest a desire for me to be authoritarian or play favourites in response to current or historical conflict between lateral figures. Alternatively, this can present as a sibling transference, in which patients engage in an

equalitarian manner and seem to desire cooperation and alliance with me in response to lateral conflict. However, I have found that the experience of a parent-transference can shift to a sibling-transference as quickly as "*I found you!*" suggesting to me that the vertical and lateral axes are intersecting in complex ways as the relationship between therapist and patient develops.

My personal and clinical experiences have opened up questions regarding the place of sibling relationships in our relational world. Mitchell (2013b) argues that siblings are a biological and cultural necessity, suggesting that "siblings are there in our minds" (p. 35) in their absence or presence as a general rule. Most of my patients grew up with a close-in-age sibling, who shared their home, school, and social lives in their childhood. Even for patients who have a larger age gap with their siblings or grew up as an only child, other lateral relationships with peers, cousins and friends seem to be developmentally significant. I have found that exploring historical material and transference manifestations of siblings (or other significant lateral figures or sibling substitutes) in addition to parents both complicates and enriches the therapeutic process. My patients and I are constantly discovering distinctive and adjunctive developmental influences that siblings may play on the path to intrapsychic and interpersonal development. This shared understanding of the reciprocal importance of absent and present siblings invites a therapeutic process wherein unresolved sibling and other lateral dynamics can be surfaced and resolved.

Contemporary psychoanalysis acknowledges the multiple conscious, preconscious, and unconscious intersections that emerge in the therapeutic process (Harris, 2011), which may include the vertical and lateral axes in addition to transference and countertransference. Many therapists reflect on how their experiences of the transference-countertransference dynamics can influence and enhance psychoanalytic psychotherapy (Gubb, 2013; Kadish, 2016; Saayman, 2017; Van der Walt & Long, 2013). Yet, the identification and exploration of whether these

transference-countertransference experiences involve intersecting parent and sibling dynamics is generally absent. Typically, sibling transferences are relatively unexplored, whereas the consideration of parent-child transferences predominates in psychoanalytic work. While some authors (e.g. Coleman, 1996; Kivowitz, 1995) argue that the preference for the parent-child transference reflects the paternalistic, positivist assumptions of traditional psychoanalysis, Bank and Kahn (1982) argue that this preference reflects transference-countertransference dynamics in which therapists assume a parent-like, wise, omnipotent role which may then engender the patient to be more childlike, powerless, and affected by infantile feelings. It is also possible that some therapists may resist the more equalitarian sharing of power that is invited in a sibling-transference in favour of a parent-child transference as this may evoke less discomfort and uncertainty for both therapist and patient (Mitchell, 2000). Lesser (1978) argues that a therapist "cannot limit himself to any one role. She/he must allow her/himself to be transformed into a sibling as well as a parent. Sometimes she/he may be both simultaneously" (p. 48).

Whether due to our patients' repression of strong affective responses to their siblings or as a consequence of our own preferences for the parent-child transference, siblings should not remain hidden. In doing so, we may limit the depth and richness of our relational understandings in psychoanalytical psychotherapy. Thus, in order to attempt to fully comprehend the intrapsychic and interpersonal world of ourselves and our patients, we need to more actively engage with absent and present siblings in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Siblings in psychoanalysis have been understood predominately in relation to pre-oedipal and oedipal development and this paper will aim to integrate these main theoretical perspectives. While psychoanalytic clinical material has guided the current theoretical understandings, there is an absence of case material on diverse sibling experiences and reflexivity by the theorists

themselves that may contribute to biases and tensions in existing psychoanalytic perspectives on siblings. The paper concludes that the gaps in psychoanalytic literature on the developmental functions on siblings have implications for theory and clinical practice. These gaps will need to be acknowledged and addressed so that diverse and nuanced understandings of siblings can continue to be into integrated into psychoanalytic theory and practice.

The Emergence of Siblings in Psychoanalysis

While I assert that the therapeutic process is deeply enriched by the exploration of the intersection of the vertical and lateral axes, finding psychoanalytic theory regarding the functions of siblings in development and beyond is challenging. At the forefront of available sibling literature in psychoanalysis is Juliet Mitchell (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) who proposes a psychoanalytic model for conceptualising the matrix of family relationships, whereby the lateral axis refers to the interrelationship between siblings and the vertical axis refers to the interrelationship between parent and child. This body of work has clarified some of my clinical questions and observations regarding the developmental functions of siblings. Nevertheless, there continues to be a "lacunae between the observation of the clinical material and its transformation into a theory" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 130).

In response, the sibling relationship has become a more popular area of psychoanalytic inquiry in the last two decades due to greater acknowledgement of the significance of sibling relationships in development and their centrality in family experiences (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Charles, 1999; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2013b; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Whiteman et al., 2011). Prior to this, the study of siblings was largely considered secondary to the role of parents in psychoanalysis. If siblings were studied,

their role was often conceptualised as parental replacements or displacements. The consensus that siblings have been overshadowed in psychoanalytic theory, research, and practice has contributed to attempts to incorporate siblings into existing theories (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). Clinical studies and psychoanalytic observational studies have shown that infants form significant relationships with their siblings during the first six months of life (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Rustin, 2007).

Whiteman et al. (2011) argue that it is not possible for one theoretical perspective to fully encapsulate all aspects of sibling dynamics due to the multiplicity of developmental, family, and group differences that influence sibling experiences. Diverse conceptualisations of the role of siblings in development predominate, signifying that different aspects of sibling dynamics have been understood from various theoretical perspectives. Research has drawn upon other disciplines outside of classical psychoanalytic theory to challenge the exclusive focus on vertical influences on development, including developmental, feminist, self psychological, sociological, biological, relational, object relational, and clinical perspectives (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2013b; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Wittenberg, 2009). The potentially more positive development roles played by siblings in attachment, identity and gender development, sexuality, aggression and rivalry, peer relations, and loyalty and care have been given focus by attachment, systemic and family therapy theorists (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Dunn, 1985; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & McGuire, 1992). On the other hand, psychoanalytic theorists predominately view the sibling relationship as fundamentally conflictual and dominated by negative feelings (Coles, 2003). There is a lack of cohesion in theoretical conceptualisations of sibling developmental functions (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003) as research

findings from various theoretical perspectives on the potential functions of sibling relationships have not been integrated into psychoanalytic understandings.

Freud's conceptualisation of sibling rivalry has been especially influential in shaping existing psychoanalytic thought about sibling relationships. Freud (1900) acknowledges that children "feel their needs intensely and strive ruthlessly to satisfy them - especially against rivals, other children, and first and foremost as against brothers and sisters" (p. 250). This conceptualisation is predominately hostile and conflictual whereby any positivity that occurs in the context of a sibling relationship, such as love, equality, and fairness, is viewed as a reaction formation against underlying loathing, jealousy, and rivalry (Freud, 1921). This hostility and conflict occur as a result of the fear of annihilation that the birth of a new sibling evokes. Thus, the central role of siblings in Freudian psychoanalysis is still directly related to the dominant vertical axis in connection to the Oedipus complex and premised by rivalry for the love of a parent during early childhood (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Kivowitz, 1995; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2013b; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994).

In addition to serving as rivals for the love of a parent, literature also conceptualises siblings on a vertical axis whereby siblings may serve as compensatory or replacement parental figures. Numerous studies have found that siblings tend to fulfil developmental needs in childhood when parental care is insufficient, unreliable, or traumatic (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Wittenberg, 2009), emphasising this as an additional developmental function. A sibling may fulfil, entirely or partially, the responsibilities of the primary caregiver due to the loss or extended absence of parental care. Bank and Kahn (1982) argue that siblings are not likely to possess the maturity, sensitivity, and psychological capabilities of a parental figure. In these cases, siblings are placed into positions where parental responsibilities are adopted, contributing

to problematic consequences for individual development of the sibling who takes on the parental responsibilities, as well as the sibling who is cared for by a sibling (Wittenberg, 2009). Siblings have thus been foregrounded as impeding healthy development due to the assumption that siblings may function as compensatory or replacement parental figures in childhood. Consequently, the prevailing understandings of siblings remain fixed in vertical conceptualisations of their potential role in development. In this role, siblings repeatedly fail at fulfilling developmental needs, negatively influencing the development of the cohesive self and healthy object relations. Yet, siblings could have a developmental role to play that is distinctive from and adjunctive to the function of vertical parental figures. This can only be explored if the distinction is made between siblings serving as replacement parental figures and siblings servings as lateral figures, which may only be possible when an adult caregiver is present and responsive. This distinction is important as it may signify that the pathological outcomes are due to vertical fragmentations and ruptures which lateral relationships attempt to compensate for.

Psychoanalytic theory has a propensity to oversimplify development into binary positions in order to claim universality. However, more sophistication is needed to resolve the tensions between distinguishing the vertical axis from the lateral axis (Mitchell, 2003). As such, there is a need to explore how lateral and vertical relationships intersect in the family matrix as opposed to separating the world into the binary of vertical and lateral relationships. By challenging the assumed vertical-horizontal binary, this paper seeks to further Swartz's (2014) argument that "developments in psychoanalytic theory suggest a relationship between the two [binary positions] that makes them a single part of a whole, and not a binary at all" (p. 21). I assert that we need to establish what is absent in psychoanalytic theories by identifying gaps and tensions in current conceptualisations of the developmental functions of siblings in order to determine what

we still need to seek or develop. In doing so, we may begin to understand that parents and siblings intersect and interact in constantly shifting and nuanced ways to shape development.

'Peek-a-Boo': Siblings in Pre-Oedipal Development

In response to the tendency in psychoanalytic literature not to explore sibling relationships as significant and distinctive, due to the assumption that they could only serve as rivals for parental love or vertical replacements, some psychoanalytic theories have engaged with the potential functions of siblings in intrapsychic and interpersonal development (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Sherwin-White, 2007). Many of these studies concern the functions of siblings in pre-oedipal development.

Even before the possible birth of a sibling, certain transitions such as weaning set the stage for the infant to develop awareness that the mother is making space for another baby. Mitchell (2003) argues that a sibling's very existence stimulates the "death" of "His Majesty the Baby" (p. 205). This awareness evokes overwhelming anxiety and threatens the loss of the omnipotent fantasy of being the only child (Klein, 1955). In response, the child experiences innate envy and rage, and destroys all possible siblings that exist in the mother's womb in phantasy (Klein, 1928). The birth of a sibling, real or imagined, is hence experienced as a traumatic attack to the child's omnipotence, making the sibling loathed as the child's replacement (Mitchell, 2003).

The fantasy of being the only child protects the child from the awareness of another lateral figure, such as a sibling, who could replace the child in the family milieu. As the only omnipotent child, one would gain all the attention, love, and inheritance from one's parents, and would never have to develop a distinguished place in the world with others who occupy the same

position as oneself. The unconscious fantasy of being the only child and the longing for the exclusive intimacy with the mother is hypothesised to cause conflict after the birth of an actual or fantasised sibling (Charles, 1999; Mitchell, 2011). Rustin (2007) argues that the actual or fantasised birth of another child also represents a relational and existential loss as the child loses its known place in the family and world; that is the identity as the mother's baby.

Despite the trauma of the existence of a sibling which destroys the fantasy of the only child, the sibling can also be simultaneously loved with the resolve of the child's own narcissism. The existence of another child can confirm the child's fantasy that 'my parents love me so much that they have created another me' (Mitchell, 2013a). Furthermore, the arrival of the sibling means that despite the innate envy, rage, and annihilation of the potential sibling in phantasy (Klein, 1928), the child did not kill this sibling after all. As such, "the ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in its place" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 10).

Existing conceptualisations of siblings have suggested that a pre-oedipal infant would not be able to fully distinguish between mother, father, or sibling as whole objects (Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The experience of sibling as replacement and part object may evoke both loving and hating feelings; however these feelings and associated representations of the sibling as either idealised or devalued are dissociated and split off from each other (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994) to protect the developing ego from contradictory experiences of the self and significant others in the external world. For healthy resolution of the sibling trauma, Neubauer (1983) found that envy and competition between siblings need to be expressed, otherwise undue defences and reactions formations are observed. On a lateral level, the catharsis of unconscious fears and fantasies of destruction towards the sibling is necessary; however, a child and her/his

sibling do not have the ability to contain the anxiety that accompanies the destruction. Klein (1955) observes that following an actual or fantasied expression of aggression towards a sibling, tenderness towards the sibling who may have been damaged is notable. Hence, Klein (1955) argues that the mother should "keep in step with the fluctuations between love and hatred; between happiness and satisfaction on the one hand and persecutory anxiety and depression on the other" (p. 118) between siblings, allowing her children to experience their emotions and phantasies towards their siblings and promote reparation between siblings.

Mitchell (2003) argues that it is the function of the vertical, identified as the mother, to prohibit the destructive impulses through non-enactment, as well as differentiate her children from each other. If the child accepts the mother's prohibition against the acting out of hostility, primitive splitting would be joined and ultimately replaced by repression and reaction formations (Kernberg, 1984). The mother needs to be 'enough' (Charles, 1999) to ensure that the vertical and lateral attachment bond remains positive and strong, regardless of the hostile feelings, so that the child can be assured of her/his place in the family and the world (Neubauer, 1983). As such, the vertical function may need to be present in lateral spaces. Symbolically, this creates a structure for the concept of seriality to be internalised by the child, allowing for the management of sameness and construction of difference in ways that are not threatening or destructive (Mitchell, 2003). Therefore, the mother as lawgiver in the sibling relationship is vital in helping the child develop a secure place in her/his sense of self and in association with others.

Numerous sibling case studies exist in the literature, elucidating the paths to pathology when vertical relationships are absent in the family context. When siblings are left to manage their competitiveness without mother (and potentially father) as lawgiver, the siblings have been shown to remain fixated in a 'twinning reaction' (Shopper, 1974) in which the siblings exclude

the vertical figure and form a symbolic dual unity. In doing so, siblings have been shown to not develop individual identities and their competition is expressed in covert sadomasochistic forms (see the case of Ann in Shopper, 1974). Alternatively, the pre-oedipal fixation can present as a fight for a strong attachment to the vertical figure to the exclusion of any attachment to the sibling. The sibling can then be experienced as a part-object to be ignored or defeated without conflictual feelings (see the case of Jane in Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). It is possible that the individual becomes pre-oedipally fixated, which could result in a blurring of selfobject boundaries and fixed idealisation or devaluation of a sibling (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994).

Adam-Lauterbach (2013) found that fixation in an infantile sibling position is typical for pathological sibling dynamics, as evidenced by the prevalence of splitting and denial in a sample of adult patients in psychotherapy. To remain fixated in an infantile sibling position impacts on an individual's intrapsychic development and object relations with other lateral relationships, such as partners, spouses, peers, and friends (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Coles; 2003; Mitchell, 2003). In such cases, sibling and other lateral relationships are regarded ambivalently, with the echoes of idealisation and devaluation, due to the use of primitive splitting (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Rivalry in these relationships evokes negative, hating feelings in a way that is dissociated from any positive feelings that may exist. While there is a strong desire to eliminate the rival, this desire is associated with fear of discovery, abandonment, or disapproval from a vertical figure (Klein, 1955). Due to the inability to hold whole objects in mind (Kernberg, 1984), it may be difficult for such an individual to distinguish between lateral and vertical relationships, as well as maintain the boundaries between self and other. Rosenfeld (1947) termed this a confusional state whereby normal splitting between 'good' and 'bad' is disturbed, leading to ego fragmentation and states of depersonalisation (see Charles', 1999, dissociated and lost patient

Sophia). Sibling and other lateral object representations are then likely to be extreme, rigidified, and relatively pure, for example the sibling is a "totally hated, persecutory monster, or a totally worthless, inadequate nonentity, or a powerful, perfect, all-wise saint" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 496). Furthermore, an individual's experience pre-oedipally could impact on how rivalry is experienced in the Oedipus complex in relation to parents and siblings.

Coles (2003) argues that the historical lack of exploration of the significance of siblings is partly due to the fantasy of being the only child. Psychoanalytic theories seem to collude with this fantasy by predominately focusing on the oedipal triad, excluding the possible significance of siblings (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). The consequence of privileging the oedipal triad of mother, father, and child has meant that siblings have only been theoretically conceptualised as parentified children or displacements of the parental relationship, leaving the fantasy of the only child intact. As such, the complexity of sibling and lateral relationships and their possible unique functions in development have remained largely misconstrued through the vertical axis. Whether other significant lateral relationships can serve as sibling substitutes in cases of only children and how this may impact on development also remains unexplored. Furthermore, the process of mourning that has been shown to follow the awareness of a sibling or sibling substitute has been mostly repressed in psychoanalytic literature (Mitchell, 2003). Without exploring this mourning process necessary for development, psychoanalytic understandings of sibling relationships will remain focused on pathology. This exclusive focus on deprivation in psychoanalytic literature is associated with this emphasis on pathological sibling relationships, limiting understandings of how siblings and other lateral figures could possibly serve positive developmental functions (Swartz, 2014).

‘I Found You’: The Family Complex

While some studies on siblings examined the impact of siblings on pre-oedipal development, other studies have been concerned with siblings in relation to the Oedipus complex (Agger, 1988; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). At approximately three years of age, the child is hypothesised to comprehend that relationships exist between two other people that do not include her/himself (McWilliams, 1999). This awareness evokes preoccupations with power, relationship, and identity, which is assumed to focus on the triangular relationship between a child and mother and father (Freud, 1920). However, Mitchell (2011) argues that the first introduction to and preoccupation with a three-person relationship concerns the mother, baby, and toddler, which already emerges pre-oedipally.

Distinguishing relationships into the vertical axis, centred on inter-generational descent and ascent that occur in the hierarchical parent-child relationship, and the lateral axis, centred on intra-generational similarities and differences that occur in the serial sibling relationship, is not an absolute distinction. Many have argued that sibling experiences would interconnect with oedipal experiences and fantasies (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003, 2011; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Thus, early sibling relationships cannot be easily separated from the parent-child relationships as these experiences are embedded in an idiosyncratic and inter-determined “family complex” (Freud, 1920, p. 414).

Bank and Kahn (1982) criticised the classic psychoanalytical understanding of sibling relationships in which siblings of the same sex served as rivals for parental love and siblings of opposite sex served as displacements for oedipal desires. In order to incorporate siblings into the Oedipus complex, Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) expanded the usage of the term oedipal by referring “primarily to the developmental level of structuralisation and object relations, not to the

specific sexual fantasy regarding a parent" (p. 492). By examining historical material and transference manifestations, Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) found that oedipal-like triangles developed among siblings and between siblings and parents. Furthermore, they confirmed that sibling relationships were not mere displacements of the parental oedipal constellations. Rather, sibling oedipal triangles existed parallel and at times independent to parental relationships, influencing an individual's sense of self and object relations.

Certain characteristics of sibling oedipal and parental oedipal triangles have been shown to be similar, including intimacy and love, rivalry and competitiveness, morality, as well as guilt and shame (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The rival, which may be a parent or a sibling, is ambivalently regarded in the competition for the exclusive love of another, which may be a parent or a sibling. The hypothesised underlying fantasy is to eliminate and replace the rival, but this evokes conflict and guilt as the rival is experienced as an integrated object with good and bad qualities. As such, destroying the rival is associated with affective concern over the rival, as well as a fear of retaliation, castration anxiety, or a fear of loss of love (Charles, 1999; Klein, 1955).

Healthy resolution in the Oedipus complex requires the acceptance by the child that he or she cannot exclusively possess another (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The oedipal conflict is then repressed and the representations of self and other are of a de-idealised nature. The child identifies with the rival, contributing to a cohesive sense of self that retains the fantasy that a later love object would be similar to the primary love object (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The authority and moral values of the rival are introjected with the identification, consolidating the superego in place of the archaic all-good and all-bad images that dominate in the pre-oedipal phase (McWilliams, 1999).

The pathological outcomes of unresolved sibling oedipal and parental oedipal triangles have also been shown to be parallel in some ways (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The child who is an oedipal victor over a rivalled parent or sibling tends to struggle with excessive grandiosity, a fragile sense of healthy narcissism, and extreme guilt related to fears of retaliation. On the other hand, the oedipal loser tends to feel inferior, insecure, and unworthy of love and acceptance (see the case of Emily and Sam in Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). This has problematic consequences for later love object choice as a partner may unconsciously represent the primary rival (sibling or parent) or primary love object (sibling or parent), contributing to problems with sexuality and intimacy due to the echoes of rivalry and conflict. Furthermore, the unresolved triangles may be recapitulated in relation to one's own children who may come to represent the primary rival (sibling or parent) or primary love object (sibling or parent).

Despite the aforementioned similarities, some sibling oedipal triangles have been shown to have a distinctive structure, form, and manifestation of pathology (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Certain cases have suggested that sibling oedipal triangles may be more difficult to resolve and longer lasting (Agger, 1988; Coles, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The complexity seems to be more likely in a family milieu with several siblings, whereby sibling oedipal triangles can develop independently from parental oedipal triangles. This may present a distinctive psychic experience as these triangles could involve several varieties of triangles, such as two children and one parent or three children.

While there are sparse case illustrations of unresolved sibling oedipal triangles, specific dynamics have been acknowledged that require further elucidation (see Coles, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). While the erotic and aggressive desires in parental oedipal triangles threatens the child's safety, protection, and wellbeing, this is not the case for oedipal sibling triangles as

siblings do not depend on one another for security and survival (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). In sibling oedipal triangles, siblings are given the space in the family and social context to experience and in some cases enact their hostile and loving fantasies towards each other (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Case illustrations suggest that the opportunities to enact wishes and fantasies in sibling relationships may be greater due to easier access, contributing to more intensity whether these desires are hostile or loving (Coles, 2003). Vertical figures may encourage this access and grant it exclusivity, such as in the case of Mr Y whose mother and caretakers "were happy to let the children create a magical world together" (Coles, 2003, p. 16). In other cases, such as in the case of Jake and his brothers who engaged in simultaneous homosexual activities (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994), the desire and enactment may occur between siblings in 'secret complicity' (Klein, 1932). In addition to the increased intensity and greater access to siblings, there are fewer expectations to displace or repress sibling desires as they have become normalised and tolerated in many cultures (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Furthermore, it has been suggested that it may be harder to relinquish the erotic and aggressive aims in oedipal sibling triangles due to the potential narcissistic injury associated with relinquishing a sibling battle (Agger, 1988; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994).

Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) suggest that the effects of unresolved sibling oedipal triangles on intrapsychic functioning and object relations could be distinctly more difficult compared to unresolved parental oedipal triangles, as well as necessitate potentially different paths to resolution. In their analysis of Jake's case, repression of the oedipal conflict with his siblings did not seem to have occurred. While Jake may have withdrawn from the incestuous activity that occurred between his brothers in childhood, he then began to verbally abuse and

emotionally exploit one of his brothers. Jake's guilt and shame regarding the actual fulfilment of these erotic and aggressive aims with his brothers continued into adulthood. The most successful of all of his brothers, Jake still felt "anguished and hollow about this victory" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 503) as if it had come at the cost of crippling his brothers. For Jake, the origin and course of his sibling oedipal triangle differed to that of his parental oedipal triangle, remaining unresolved and causing significant conflict in adulthood due to the complex interplay between social and developmental factors. Further exploration of cases and clinical support are necessary to more clearly conceptualise the potential significance of oedipal sibling triangles on intrapsychic functioning.

Mitchell (2003) would agree with others who have argued that the sibling experience would interconnect with oedipal experiences and fantasies (Coles, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994); however, she identifies a distinctive structure that developed from 'the law of the mother' which may be necessary for resolution. While the Lacanian notion of the 'law of the father' has been shown to be symbolically vital for the resolution of the vertical Oedipus complex (that is, the law of castration for trying to stand in the father's place), Mitchell (2003) introduces the 'law of the mother' which operates vertically and laterally. On the vertical level, the mother decrees that children cannot procreate in response to the child's wish to give birth from a cavity within her/himself. This occurs developmentally alongside the awareness that a mother has a sexual relationship with a father which leads to more babies. If the child accepts the vertical prohibition from the mother who says "it is I, the mother, not you the child, who gives birth" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 72) and symbolically internalises this inner space within, the child is able to have a space 'in mind' in which to hold representations and think creatively (Rustin, 2007). On the lateral level, the 'law of the mother' applies to seriality: "one is a child in the same position as

one's siblings in regard to one's parent or parents, but one is also different: there is room for two, three, four or more" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 53). If the child internalises seriality, this can symbolically frame all future social interactions through the development of a social self in which sameness and difference can co-exist.

Mitchell (2003) acknowledged that her interpretations of lateral relationships were biased towards the negative in terms of focusing on intra- and inter-sibling abuse in violence, wars, and pathology. Nevertheless, a model for the function of siblings in healthy development can be extrapolated from her arguments. While the trauma of the birth of a sibling evokes normal fears of annihilation which stimulate the negative potential for sibling murder and incest, this also has the potential to stimulate healthy intrapsychic and interpersonal development if laterality is properly regulated through 'the law of the mother' and later by culture. The birth of an actual or fantasied sibling initiates mourning for the grandiose self and the necessary acceptance that the self is both ordinary and exceptional. It is the function of the mother or another vertical figure to help the child internalise seriality, without the loss of the child's experience of her/his uniqueness. The child then begins to build an internal structure of healthy narcissism and self-esteem. This is extended to a sibling when the child acknowledges that difference is not equivalent to badness and hate, while sameness is not equivalent to goodness and love. In doing so, the child is able to embrace the paradoxical feelings of similarity and difference in relation to another.

Participation in the reality of two subjects where both the self and other are realised forms the foundation of social functioning (Benjamin, 1998). Mitchell (2003) argues that this is first experienced through the sibling trauma and if the narcissistic loss is resolved, the individual is able to say: "I love myself, I will love my sibling as myself, my sibling is not myself, I must

love my sibling as another who is like me" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 215). A sibling provides the necessary conflict and context for psychological growth in terms of accepting there is space for individual needs, learning to share in a world with relational partners and groups, and experiencing multiple positions while tolerating the tension of opposing desires and identifications at the same time (Benjamin, 1998; Rustin, 2007).

'We Will Play Again Soon': Sibling Transference-Countertransference

In attempts to understand sibling functions from a psychoanalytic perspective, some theorists (e.g. Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coleman, 1996; Coles, 2003; Kivowitz, 1995) have argued the therapist's own unresolved sibling dynamics impacted on how case material has been interpreted and how theory has subsequently been constructed. It can be argued that one's own personal experiences of the vertical and lateral axes might mean that siblings have been denied or celebrated in a defensive way in current theoretical understandings, limiting the possibility of a dynamic understanding. Coles (2003) advanced this argument by proposing that while theorists may have aimed to offer a systematic and scientific theory of development, one cannot separate theory from the "complex workings of [the theorists'] own minds" (p. 4).

There have been more recent attempts to re-examine the limited theoretical conceptualisations of siblings in connection to their own personal experiences and clinical practice (Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003; Sherwin-White, 2007). Accordingly, it can be argued that the psychoanalyst's own actual or fantasied siblings should form a crucial and inseparable part of how psychoanalytic theory is contextualised. The centrality of the vertical axis over the lateral axis in classical psychoanalysis has been postulated to be connected to

Freud's own personal experiences. Despite coming from a blended family of ten children and experiencing the loss of his younger brother Julius as a pre-oedipal child, Coles (2003) reflects that Freud's siblings and the trauma of the loss of his brother are rarely acknowledged in his work or autobiography. Mitchell (2000) hypothesises that Freud may have been "struggling not to reach a knowledge of his own dead brother in his analysis" and hence "made everything come back to [the Oedipus complex] in order to avoid the dead brother" (p. 239). Therefore, casting siblings into a secondary role or as displacements of the parental relationship in the Oedipus complex may have served to protect the father of psychoanalysis and others from their own conflicted sibling relationships.

In addition to the lack of reflexivity in theoretical development, certain biases in prevailing theoretical understandings of siblings have meant that siblings as potentially positive development figures have been left out of clinical practice. Many authors (Agger, 1988; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994) have argued that the intensity of the primitive feelings stimulated by siblings and the associated sadistic fantasies and castration anxiety could be stronger than the incestuous desires and murderous fantasies toward parental figures. Consequently, the affective experience of sibling relationships may have been repressed and denied by therapists as it related to their own personal experiences and those of their patients. Mitchell (2003) argues that despite evidence of affective experiences relating to siblings, many therapists seem to deny these conflicts in their patients or interpret them as if they were vertical Oedipal conflicts. Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) found that patients seemed to find it more difficult to identify and resolve conflicts around siblings compared to parental pre-oedipal and oedipal issues, which could suggest a lack of engagement with sibling relationships in clinical practice. Perhaps it has been easier for both therapist and patient to keep the sibling hidden.

The denial of the significance of sibling relationships in psychoanalytic psychotherapy has been shown to influence transference and countertransference (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). In cases where a sibling transference was denied by either therapists or patients, the therapy became 'stuck' (see Coles', 2003, experience with Mrs K and Mitchell's, 2003, experience with Mrs X). While "all the loves, ecstasies, hatreds, jealousies, rivalries of patient-to-analyst-as-sibling" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 106) can be witnessed and release the countertransference of the therapist, this needs to be interpreted laterally and vertically. However, parent-child transference and sibling transference can be difficult to differentiate due to the interweaving of both parents and siblings in shaping development (Coles, 2003). Thus, transference-countertransference analyses and interpretations would need to make space for the lateral functions of siblings, which may be a complex and enriching process for both therapist and patient alike.

Mitchell (2003) argues that some therapists may not have explored the significance of siblings in their own personal analysis or training, suggesting that the 'therapist as sibling' may remain hidden. My relationships with my own siblings, including my memories of hide-and-seek in childhood, have formed a fundamental part of my development and experiences as a therapist in complex ways. Nevertheless, this requires continued reflexivity regarding how these ever-shifting dynamics could impact on my clinical work, as well as endeavours such as writing this theoretical paper. To be able to do so, I have needed to create a space, in my own therapy, supervision and 'in mind' (Rustin, 2007), to hold the complexities and intersections of the vertical and lateral axes in my own developmental experiences and those of my patients.

I have discovered in my work with my patients how dynamic psychoanalytic psychotherapy can become once I invite the lateral axis into my thinking and into my clinical work. The variations

in developmental experiences of siblings for my patients are vast and complex: love and hate, provision and deprivation, as well as the vertical and lateral axes, which seem to be subterraneously related. While Mitchell (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) has offered an innovative way of thinking about the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis, the conceptualisation of the vertical and lateral axes seems two-dimensional and static at times. The vertical and lateral axes are constantly shifting and intersecting in the past and the present, in the family and in the social milieu, as well as in the transference-countertransference in the therapeutic relationship. As such, we may need to also introduce the longitudinal axis - time - to explore how past, present and future are constantly intersecting and interacting when it comes to how siblings shape our development. In doing so, we may be able to more fully understand how patients relate to themselves and others, not only in early development but over the course of their lives.

Siblings are a common relational experience for many; yet, they can remain hidden in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. In our clinical work, our patients may repress the significance of lateral figures due to the intensity of the primitive feelings evoked by absent and present siblings. As therapists we may also avoid the lateral axes by casting siblings into a secondary role and instead remain focused on the importance of vertical relationships. The lack of cohesive theoretical conceptualisations of the potential developmental functions of siblings may also contribute to this avoidance. Thus, the significance of siblings and other sibling substitutes remains hidden. This paper has shown the necessity of continued interrogation of what therapists observe and experience in the therapeutic process, as well as how we engage with psychoanalytic theories to guide our emerging hypotheses. Siblings are represented as a biological and cultural necessity for our psychic functioning, whether real or in fantasy, absent or present (Mitchell,

2013a). If siblings are kept hidden in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, we lose the space to process the necessary trauma of a sibling where we can mourn ourselves and others as omnipotent. As we discover the functions of siblings in our development and how these functions intersect with parental functions, we can begin to understand that there is space for individual and social needs in a world where the vertical and lateral axes are idiosyncratically and inter-determinedly connected.

The Sibling Gap in Self Psychology

While psychoanalysis has offered some insight into the potential functions of siblings in individual development, there has been a necessity to draw upon other disciplines and theoretical perspectives to include a multiplicity of developmental, family, and group differences. The theory of self psychology is considered to be valuable in guiding and informing emerging conceptualisations so that theoretical clarity on vertical and lateral functions may be possible. While there have been some self psychology theorists who have recognised the potential influence of siblings on the development of the self, this has remained relatively unexplored. The exploration of sibling selfobject experiences is a significant issue due to the profound implications for our understandings of healthy developmental pathways in the context of ever-changing family constellations.

The importance of parents in providing selfobject experiences is more established in self psychology as “the little boy plays at shaving while his father shaves, or the little girl works in the kitchen next to her mother” (Kohut, 1984, p. 206). However, our selfobject experiences change over time. We need to be with and be like others, starting with our parents and siblings.

As we move beyond the family milieu, we seek fulfilment from our peers and later from other groups and social communities that surround and protect us.

Bank and Kahn (1982) were amongst the first to argue that siblings could serve as selfobjects, although they were not exclusively situated in a self psychology perceptive. As therapists and researchers, Bank and Kahn (1982) set out to further understand the "emotionally charged, real-life dramas" (p. 5) that unfolded in their consulting rooms related to their patients' sibling relationships. Following an in-depth process of interviewing about 100 participants whose sibling relationships appeared "unusual or interesting" (p. 17) and drawing upon various theoretical approaches, Bank and Kahn (1982) offered a comprehensive analysis of the sibling bond. While diversity in sibling experiences was emphasised in this body of work, they concluded that the development of strong sibling bonds generally relied on three conditions: high access between siblings; the need for personal identity; and insufficient parental care. Thus, Bank and Kahn (1982) contributed to the expanding interest in sibling relationships and how the lateral axis could intersect with the vertical axis in the family milieu.

While past studies have shown that siblings can offer idealising and mirroring selfobject experiences (Brothers, 2012; Hart, 2019; Martinez, 2003; Miliora, 2003; Wittenberg, 2009), cases that deepen understandings of selfobject experiences offered by siblings are limited. In Wittenberg's (2009) interview study on siblings as selfobjects, she reflects "the absence of specific references by study participants to material evidencing the provision of selfobject functions between siblings in childhood was notable, especially since that kind of connection would appear to be a natural outgrowth of the sibling experience" (p. 54). Wittenberg (2009) concluded that the exploration of how siblings could fulfil selfobject needs and the specific conditions under which this occurs was lacking in self psychology literature. The relative lack of

understandings of idealising, twinship, and mirroring and how these concepts may relate to sibling experiences in the early family milieu presents an opportunity to explore the significance and distinctive functions of sibling relationships within the framework of self psychology (Lichtenberg, 2012). Hence, selfobject experiences of siblings have emerged as an important area for exploration as the earliest lateral selfobject experiences for the child often occur in a sibling relationship.

Case studies are considered to be valuable to expand our understandings of particular phenomenon in the psychoanalytic treatment setting (Cartwright, 2004). It is the method most often employed to understand siblings from the psychoanalytic perspective in general (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Sherwin-White, 2007), as well as in self psychology (Brothers, 2012; Hart, 2019; Martinez, 2003; Miliora, 2003; Wittenberg, 2009). Yet, there are limited case studies focusing on siblings in self psychology. Generally, case studies have focused on how siblings compensated for parental selfobject failures (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Miliora, 2003; Wittenberg, 2009). Consequently, our understandings are predominately rooted in parental deficits and developmental problems related to sibling relationships. While these understandings offer us valuable insights into the nature of sibling dynamics and how they contribute to clinical conditions and their treatment, explorations of cohesive individuals' selfobject experiences of their siblings are absent.

The existing self psychology literature has found that siblings were unsustainable and problematic when they fulfilled developmental functions (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kahn, 1988; Wittenberg, 2009). Siblings have been shown to be an obstacle for healthy development primarily informed by clinical case material. However, siblings in these case examples were

serving as replacement vertical figures, as opposed to supplementary lateral figures. This distinction is important as it may signify that the pathological outcomes were due to vertical selfobject failures which lateral relationships attempted to make up for. Kohut (1984) later proposed that a family milieu tends to include both vertical and lateral figures, each serving distinctive developmental functions, to facilitate the process of the development of a cohesive self. However, the ways in which these developmentally functions may be fulfilled by vertical and lateral figures in order to facilitate the development of a cohesive self has not been explored in self psychology.

While some studies have shown how selfobject needs can be fulfilled by siblings when parental care is insufficient, unreliable, or traumatic (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Wittenberg, 2009), there is limited exploration of whether lateral figures, such as siblings, could fulfil these selfobject needs when parental care is sufficient and dependable. This study extended existing sibling studies by examining high-access siblings when there was sufficient parental care, as explored in Chapter Four to Six. In doing so, this study began to fill the gap in sibling studies that have previously mainly focused on parental deprivation that has contributed to the development of pathology.

In attempts to understand the functions of siblings from a psychoanalytic perspective, many have argued that one's own unresolved sibling dynamics impacts on how case material is interpreted and how theory is constructed (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003). Kahn (2014) states that "ignoring the sibling dynamic, to repress, dissociate, or to deny within oneself, is to unconsciously sidestep the juggling of the part-whole phenomenon that is an aspect of the acquisition and building a cohesive self" (p. 77). As personal experiences have been shown to have a considerable impact on the development of theory (Coles, 2003), Kohut's early

history and personal experiences are considered relevant when attempting to understand the absence of siblings in self psychology.

Kohut was an only child who biographers argue had limited exposure to his peer group as a result of his mother's merged relationship with him (Strozier, 2001). As he only begun attending school from the fifth grade, it is possible that Kohut was not provided the opportunity for shared games, imaginary co-constructed characters, and secrets and adventures that siblings or peers often provide. Rustin (2007) argued that a child without siblings would be concerned by their absence and deal with this in their inner world. The loneliness Kohut most likely experienced as a singleton may have been addressed through friendships with his various tutors; however, these replacement or other imaginary siblings would not have necessarily provided a respite from intense parental attention, expectations, and projections. His father struggled with trauma after World War I and his mother has been described as narcissistic (Strozier, 2001). Kohut would not have been able to depend on siblings to make up for his parents' possible relational deficiencies or share in the responsibility of their attention. This may have played a role in the lack of engagement with siblings as selfobjects in his theory, which has meant that self psychology has predominately conceptualised individual development to occur in a psychological environment that is vertically arranged.

Influenced by the emphasis on vertical relationships that has historically dominated psychoanalysis, self psychology has given little consideration to lateral relationships. While Kohut is considered to be a post-Freudian theorist who later rejected Freud's structural theory, he aligned with traditional Freudian analysis and referred to himself as "Mr. Psychoanalysis" earlier in his career. Self psychology is considered to be a psychoanalytic theory and Kohut reflects "it is to Freud's eternal credit that he created depth psychology" (in Strozier, 2001, p. 289). While it

can be argued that Freud placed more emphasis on the hierarchical parent-child relationship (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003; Neubauer, 1983), it would be remiss to hold that siblings have been entirely omitted in psychoanalytic observation and theory. Nevertheless, Freud's influence on the psychoanalysts who followed him, such as Fairbairn, Klein, Winnicott, and Kohut, may have contributed to a legacy in which models of development remained firmly rooted in vertical relationships. Consequently, the major psychanalysts did not explicitly explore sibling relationships and their distinctive functions in development (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003; Neubauer, 1983). This study extended existing theories of traditional psychoanalysis and self psychology, who both have tended to emphasis vertical functions, by introducing the concepts of lateral selfobjects and lateral functions and distinguishing these from vertical selfobjects and vertical functions.

Concluding Remarks

The lack of theoretical clarity and consensus on the functions of siblings in both self psychology and classical psychoanalysis has been established in this chapter. In both theoretical traditions, the examination of clinical psychoanalytic case studies have shown that siblings were problematic for healthy intrapsychic and interpersonal development. The selection of clinical populations in the exploration of sibling relationships has yielded valuable insights into unresolved sibling dynamics and the development of pathology. However, links between the case material and theory have been tentative, meaning that siblings have been sparingly integrated into existing psychoanalytic theories. Despite attempts to distinguish vertical and lateral relationships, there has continued to be a tendency to conceptualise siblings as replacement parental figures. This thesis aimed to address these significant gaps in psychoanalytic

understandings of siblings by examining developmental functions of siblings both inside and outside of the clinical context, considering the necessity of both vertical and lateral relationships over the life course.

CHAPTER 3

Research Method

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,
"This is no flattery. These are counselors
That feelingly persuade me what I am."
Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Introductory Remarks

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the subjective experiences of siblings that arose in the intersubjective relationship between the participants and myself and to interrogate whether these sibling experiences reveal features of sibling developmental functions that may be applied more broadly in psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice. This chapter begins by outlining the qualitative research design that informed this study. As a psychoanalytic researcher and therapist, I employed two different qualitative research methods in order to answer the research questions: the psychotherapy case study and the psychoanalytic research interview. Both methods are

introduced, followed by accounts of the case and participant selection, data gathering and data analysis pertinent to each method. This chapter also explores the possibilities provided by this novel combination of methods. The chapter then concludes with an examination of the ethical considerations, research integrity, and reflexivity that were considered throughout the process of conducting this study.

Research Design

The underlying assumption of this study, informed by the interpretivist paradigm, was that individuals subjectively and meaningfully express their experiences. This study was interested in the subjective ways that individuals make meaning of their sibling experiences, as well as the ways in which the larger social context impacted on individuals' meaning-making (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). In order to understand the experiences of individuals in interpretivist approaches requires an emphasis on subjectivity, meaning making, and empathic intersubjective engagement (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002) which were embraced in this study.

As qualitative research is also concerned with language, words, and the expressions of experiences (Levitt et al., 2018), this approach was deemed suitable to this study. To enable participants to articulate their sibling experiences in their own ways, as well as explore whether recurring patterns of experience emerged, I was a primary research tool in the data collection and analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The interpretivist paradigm assumes that my own subjectivity as the researcher, as well as the intersubjective relationship that developed between myself and researcher participants, were both fundamental to the meaning that was generated. I invited participants into interpersonal conversations focusing on a topic of mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009): their subjective experiences of their siblings. As a psychoanalytically

informed researcher and psychotherapist, I used my own knowledge of siblings, as well as my own clinical and interpersonal skills, to elicit complex and meaningful data from the participants in a non-directive way. It was through interacting with participants and allowing their sibling stories to emerge that revealed what meanings participants ascribed to the experiences and events in their lives.

This qualitative study was particularly interested in exploring specific cases in an in-depth manner, using psychoanalytic theory to understand each participant in their unique context. The development of research methodology that is psychoanalytically informed has been driven by concerns regarding the usability and accessibility of psychoanalysis in research (Cartwright, 2004; Emde & Fonagy, 1997). Psychoanalysis was used in the production of knowledge in a subjective manner in this study, whereby sibling experiences were understood in the context of individuals' psychological and social worlds (Kvale, 1999). I was concerned not just with the psychological subject as individual, but the wider psychological and social world that individuals subjectively experience (Midgley, 2006a). This means that the research process was influenced by a myriad of intrapsychic as well as external contextual factors, such as dominating ideologies, social, economic, political and cultural belief systems, and structures (Diefenbach, 2009).

Psychoanalysis can be defined as the "science of the intersubjective" (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, p. 64), implying that an indissoluble psychological system is experienced by the two people who come together in the analytic context. Through interacting with participants and listening to their stories, I sought to describe and interpret their feelings and experiences in context. The thoughts, feelings and sensations that occur within the analytic context are considered to be continually shifting and specific to the intersubjectivity between the analyst and analysand (Ogden, 1994). Furthermore, the analyst and analysand's underlying intrapsychic

dynamics will both be present in the analytic interaction (Renik, 1993). When psychoanalysis is applied to the research context, a similar interaction is assumed to occur between the researcher and participant. As such, the research context is assumed to be a site in which intrapsychic dynamics and unconscious meaning are revealed through the interaction between the researcher and participant (Cartwright, 2004). In both the psychoanalytic and research contexts, two people come together motivated by a desire to deepen understandings of the self. This coming together has been described as "unscripted and unpredictable" (Rustin, 2003, p. 141) and "alive, diverse, emotionally laden" (Holmes, 2013, p. 1184). The interpretation of this coming together of two people as a means to understand intrapsychic dynamics and unconscious meaning was central to the aims of this thesis.

Qualitative research methods, commonly guided by interpretive-based principles, is "concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience" (Smith, 2011, p. 9). Such an approach was strongly aligned to the epistemological assumptions that informed this psychoanalytic inquiry. Both the qualitative research tradition and a psychoanalytic way of thinking embraces the exploration of multiple meanings and subjectivities (Smith, 2004, 2008). Furthermore, both recognise that the researcher plays a fundamental role in facilitating empathic intersubjective engagement and thereafter analysing and understanding what is shared between the researcher and research participants (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). A qualitative approach was selected for this study due to the strong alignment between the assumptions underlying this methodology and those informing psychoanalytic theory and practice. These complementary approaches allowed the exploration of complex and nuanced sibling experiences and offered the potential for layers of diverse meanings and understandings to emerge.

The Case Study Method

My interest in deepening the theoretical knowledge of siblings was born 'on the couch' (Hinshelwood, 2013). Much of the clinical work with adult patients in my private practice was imbued with complex sibling dynamics. I turned to psychoanalytic and other literature to help me understand what was emerging between me and my patients. Hinshelwood (2018) defends "the clinical situation as the locus for nearly all the knowledge we possess in psychoanalysis and therefore [is] the best site for conducting our [research]" (p. 541). As part of my clinical practice, I had existing therapy notes, supervision notes, as well as written-up case formulations of many of my patients' experiences of their siblings. In my attempts to resolve the disjuncture between what was happening 'on the couch' that did not fit with existing theoretical constructions, this clinical material revealed how psychoanalysis may need to continue to expand to make space for sibling developmental functions.

There is an established history of using case study methodology in psychoanalytic inquiry and the use of this method has been essential to the development of psychoanalysis (Cartwright, 2004). The psychotherapy case study can be defined as a detailed analysis or description of a particular psychological experience in the life of an individual that emerged in the process of psychotherapy (Edwards, 1998). Through the careful and in-depth observation, description, and interpretation of a select individual case, this thesis aimed to contribute to the development of theory and elaborate on specific psychoanalytic and self psychology constructs to include sibling developmental functions. While case studies are often employed to support existing theoretical constructs, case studies can also lead to the "emergence of new ideas" (Midgley, 2006b, p. 125). Hence, the use of this method was to study the process of psychotherapy cases to uncover

individual meaning that could be used for hypothesis testing (Bromley, 1986; Edwards, 1998). The specific focus and depth of information regarding sibling developmental functions gleaned from this case material was considered valuable in guiding me to consider how psychoanalytic and self psychology theory may need to be expanded.

In this study, the psychotherapy case study was used to describe, explore, and interpret the sibling narratives of one patient who engaged in therapy with the researcher when I was their therapist. The body of data consisted of the case material generated from the patient's psychotherapeutic process and my subsequent supervision related to this patient's process (Spence, 1993). This data was not initially generated for research purposes; instead, case material was selected and investigated in the interests of providing material that could enhance understandings of psychoanalytic theory and practice (Greenwood & Loewenthal, 2005; Hinshelwood, 2018; Midgley, 2006b). Case material was drawn upon to describe and illustrate specific phenomenon that arose when exploring the potential developmental functions of siblings in a specific psychotherapeutic context. Guided by qualitative research aims, the case material was employed to provide an in-depth understanding of sibling dynamics by emphasising subjective experiences, the integration of context, and the therapeutic process in order to develop theory and offer new ways of understanding (Edwards, 1998).

Case studies can provide rich, in-depth material; however, the case material should not be distinguishable from the context in which it emerged (Yin, 1993). Atwood and Stolorow (1984) argue that the idiosyncratic nature of the case study material can only be understood in relation to the patient's life history and their understanding of self. This principle was aligned to the aims of psychoanalytic inquiry that informed this study as early sibling experiences were seen to impact on later development as evidenced in the patient's experiences and psychotherapeutic process.

As the patient's experiences were reflected upon in this thesis through the use of the case-based research method, the intersubjective experiences that emerged between the therapist-researcher and patient were fundamental to the meaning-making process (Bromley, 1986). As such, the psychotherapy case study used in this thesis focused on both the patient's experience, as well as the intersubjective experiences created between the therapist and patient.

The Qualitative Research Interview

The case study-based aspect of the research was concerned with case material that centred on a patient's experiences of siblings that emerged within the psychotherapeutic context. While the case study method is firmly rooted in the history of psychoanalysis and is widely utilised in psychoanalytic research (Edwards, 1998), some argue that psychoanalysis should not remain confined to this single method that is situated in the clinical context (Cartwright, 2004; Emde & Fonagy, 1997). The development of the psychoanalytic research interview was guided by the premise that psychoanalysis could be used outside of the treatment setting to yield insight into a particular research topic. The interview-based aspect of this research study was concerned with the subjective experiences of individuals from a range of sibling and family constellations, outside of the psychotherapeutic context. In using both case studies and interviews, a more dynamic engagement with the diverse developmental functions of siblings was possible.

Despite some parallels between the analytic and research context, a fundamental difference between psychoanalysis as clinical practice and psychoanalysis as a research lens is that the research inquiry occurs outside of the clinical setting (Cartwright, 2004). Unlike the clinical context where motivation for engagement is driven by the patient's desire (Holmes, 2014), I was motivated to understand the intrapsychic experiences of siblings and requested that

willing participants explore them outside of the clinical setting with me (Parker, 2010). By extending the focus to outside the clinical setting, the thesis aimed to observe, describe, and interpret possible developmental functions of siblings across diverse contexts.

In order to gain insight into the experiences of research participants, the qualitative research design of interviews was selected. The use of interviews in qualitative research is established as it allows for the exploration of issues that are too complex and nuanced to be explored quantitatively (Molyneaux & Lane, 1982; Schurink, 1998). Through the verbal exchange between researcher and participant on a topic that was significant to both, the experiences of siblings in the development of self from the subjective perspective of participants was explored. Following Hollway's and Jefferson's (2008) suggestion that the researcher's role is to be good listener and each participant's role is to be storyteller, rather than a respondent, this research method allowed open and detailed expression to explore the subjective quality and texture of participants' experiences.

One criticism of qualitative interviews is that these types of interviews tend to neglect to account for intrapsychic processes and unconscious meaning in the exploration of participants' subjective experiences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2003). As the current study endeavoured to explore the underlying intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings associated with the participant's experiences of their siblings, Cartwright's (2004) psychoanalytic research interviews were employed. This psychoanalytic research interview is viewed from a psychoanalytic position whereby unconscious fantasies, selfobject experiences, defensive functioning, and symbolic meanings related to the potential functions of siblings in development could be uncovered by inviting participants into a free-associative process where they could share whatever comes to mind. I followed the participants' free associations related to their

experiences of their siblings, finding that these associations tended to "follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 309). In doing so in this study, I adopted a quasi-therapeutic role by creating a space for free associations and tentatively sharing interpretations of the participant's experiences and interactions when appropriate (Strømme et al., 2010).

Another criticism of qualitative interviews is that they typically follow a structured or semi-structured interview outline. The adherence to pre-planned questions has been shown to restrict participants and rigidly guide the interviews into the direction that the researcher chooses (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Cartwright's (2004) psychoanalytic research interviews typically allow for open-ended questioning in order to elicit stories from participants and link participants' experiences and feelings to actual events. This unstructured approach was used in this study and facilitated inductive probing so that I could clarify expressions and meanings and invite participants to further elaborate on their stories (Guest et al., 2012).

Case and Participant Selection

The selection of an appropriate sample in qualitative research is driven by the pursuit for rich and in-depth information regarding human experiences (Fossey et al., 2002). In this thesis, non-probability purposive sampling was employed. Informed by the research aims and based on certain criteria, I selected people who were deemed to be useful for the purposes of this study (Silverman, 2008). I was interested in participants who would be willing and able to offer meaningful data related to the possible developmental functions of siblings. Participants were purposively drawn from two different populations. For the case study-based aspect of the research, a clinical case was selected from my own psychotherapy practice based on the

usefulness for theoretical exploration and development. For the interview-based aspect of the research, participants were sought from a range of sibling and family constellations, outside of the psychotherapeutic context.

Selection of the case study. As a psychoanalytically informed therapist in private practice, I treat various adult patients who present with a diverse range of intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences. Yet, the repeated emergence of dynamics related to sibling experiences led me to more intense engagement with sibling literature. I identified significant gaps in the available sibling literature predominately gathered from clinical case studies, as outlined in Chapter Two. I did not initially plan to use case study material in this study due to my own concerns regarding the use of case studies on existing psychotherapeutic processes with my patients. However, as the ideas for this study became more developed, I found myself returning to clinical material where sibling dynamics formed a focus of treatment. The rich and in-depth data that I found in my own existing therapy notes, supervision notes, as well as written-up case formulations, provided clarity to help me develop and explore potential hypotheses with regards to sibling experiences.

The use of a purposive selection method assisted me in identifying cases rich in information from the population group of past patients I had seen for psychotherapy. To answer the research questions, I required clinical material that offered relevant and analysable data (Yin, 1993). To use a case for research purposes required consideration of various factors. While I most often use psychoanalytically informed treatment approaches, this is not always suitable for all of my patients. As such, I excluded any cases in which my treatment approach was better suited to short-term treatment based on the presentation and concerns of the patient. Only patients who had remained engaged in a psychoanalytically informed therapeutic process for at

least once a week therapy for a period of longer than a year were considered eligible for inclusion as a research case. In doing so, I only examined cases that offered rich and in-depth material related to intrapsychic dynamics and unconscious meanings that emerged over time. I chose to only review cases where the patients had terminated psychotherapy. This ensured that the research had no negative implications on ongoing therapeutic processes, reduced the risk of me performing a dual role, and minimised potential conflict of interests. Only cases where written consent to use case study material for research purposes had been obtained directly from the patients themselves were viable for inclusion. I also excluded any cases with insufficiently comprehensive process or inadequate supervision notes. Then I began to identify past cases and select various potential case studies where sibling dynamics were predominant in the presentation and treatment process.

While various cases offered in-depth data, only one case was used, the case of "Natalie", which is presented in more detail in Chapter Four. This case was employed as it facilitated exploration of an exemplary theoretical construct of the subject of the research in a clinical context: sibling selfobject experiences. The case study included relevant background history, the reason for presentation, and the psychotherapeutic process that unfolded over a two-year treatment period with me.

Selection of interview participants. To access individuals outside of the clinical setting, a second population group was of interest in this study. I was particularly interested in participants who permanently shared a home environment with a sibling throughout their childhood. For the purposes of this study, sibling was defined as one of two or more individuals having two common biological parents. It was important that the participant and sibling grew up with both their biological parents being emotionally and physically present to reduce the possibility of a

sibling serving only as a replacement parental figure; however, this criterion was difficult to ascertain prior to participation. The age gap between the participant and sibling was required to be less than three years. The specific selection criteria served to increase the likelihood that participants and their siblings had a 'high-access sibling relationship' whereby they were close in age, raised together, and shared a personal history, experiences, and activities as this has been significant in prior studies (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kahn, 1988, Wittenberg, 2009). Furthermore, selfobject needs require appropriate fulfilment over the first three years of life (Kohut, 1971) so this age gap increased the likelihood of a sibling providing early selfobject experiences.

Participants were recruited through a recruitment poster (see Appendix A) that was posted online on various social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, which briefly outlined the selection criteria and invited potential participants to contact me if they were willing to participate. Many willing participants volunteered to participate in a short amount of time. This suggested that many individuals seemed to want to talk about their sibling experiences. Some individuals who did not meet the study criteria also enquired as to whether they could participate, including people who had more than a three-year age gap with a sibling, as well as an only child who asked: "*How about the group that has no siblings? Can I volunteer to be in the other group?"* There were three instances where individuals emailed me and volunteered their siblings to participate in the study. However, I did not pursue these individuals for inclusion, so none of the siblings who found out about the study in this way participated in the study.

Participants needed to be willing to subjectively reflect on their sibling experiences in three psychoanalytic research interviews over a period of a month. The decision to conduct this number of interviews was informed by Cartwright's (2004) findings that three interviews per

participant can offer sufficient psychoanalytically relevant information. A weekly interval between each interview was preferable to allow both participants and myself to "reflect on the interview, recall particular details, or begin to experience differently what they had spoken about in the previous interview" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 224).

All the participants who expressed interest in the study were willing to commit to these three interviews, held one week apart, at my practice in Johannesburg. Due to the initial influx of willing participants once the recruitment poster had been put up, some participants were requested to only be interviewed in two to three months' time. The motivation to participate did not fall away despite this delay and participants were still willing to participate when I contacted them at a later date to set up the interviews. Once set up, the interviews were adhered to by participants, with no one requesting to cancel or drop out of the study. This seemed to suggest a high degree of commitment to and investment in the interview process.

As the study was concerned with the in-depth analysis of intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings, a small sample size of participants was appropriate to yield data to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of participants. The use of three interviews with each participant ensured that sufficient data was gathered as extended time with each participant allowed for contextualised understandings of the participants' experiences of their siblings to emerge (Cartwright, 2004). After interviewing six participants and conducting a total of 18 interviews, I obtained enough meaningful data to assert data saturation had been reached.

I was interested in the diversity of subjective experiences that participants may reflect upon, including possible positive and negative intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences related to their siblings. While the selection criteria made restrictions on the sample in terms of parental

availability, the biological nature of the sibling relationship, and age differences between siblings, I was open to participants from various family constellations. Even though the majority of participants came from the same racial group, the participants came from quite diverse cultural backgrounds, including Jewish, Afrikaans, English, and Portuguese South Africans. No criteria were set for other factors that were expected to impact on participants' subjective experiences, such as birth order, gender differences, and external contextual factors, such as dominating ideologies, social, economic, political and cultural belief systems and structures. Rather, the acknowledgement and exploration of these factors in regard to participants' subjective experiences guided and contextualised the interpretative accounts (Cartwright, 2004).

"David" was a 25-year-old man who had one sibling, a fraternal twin brother. He was highly intelligent and analytical as he shared his perspectives of his family dynamics; however, the sharing of his emotional experiences slowly developed with me as the interviews progressed. He and his brother's childhood relationship seemed to have had the closest access in childhood than that of any of the other participants I interviewed, as they shared everything including their bedroom, classroom, and friends. As adults, they continued to both live with their parents. David seemed to have found a way to forge his own independent path and relationships separate from his twin brother, while remaining connected to him.

"Chaya" was a 33-year-old woman who had one younger brother. A current conflict with her brother had been part of her desire to participate in the study and we started off by exploring the dynamics of their adult sibling relationship. Chaya vividly recalled the emotional nuances of her childhood and displayed a high level of insight into herself and her family dynamics. She vacillated between the past and the present, the roles of her parents and the role of her brother, as well as between her rational processes and emotional experiences. Chaya was able to make in-

depth meaning of how her experiences have shaped her social reality and relationships and the way in which she described her experiences were visceral and alive to me.

"Yolandi" was a 33-year-old woman who had one younger brother. I felt like I had to contain her experiences of childhood trauma as it was hard for her to recall many childhood experiences due to disconnection and repression as a means of coping. I encouraged Yolandi to seek psychotherapy, which she positively responded to. As the first participant who was married with two children of opposite sexes, her own children's sibling relationship allowed us to explore generational patterns between mothers and children, brothers and sisters, and fathers and children.

"Elize" was a 42-year-old woman who came from a blended family of one older full sister, one younger full brother, and one younger half-brother. Like Yolandi, her childhood had many instances of trauma; however, Elize accessed her memories and emotions with such intensity that I felt like I was part of her experiences. Childhood and current stories of her and her older sister filled up the interviews, while there was less that she shared about her brothers. Elize and her sister seemed to share everything in childhood, and this had continued into their adult relationship where they lived in one house with their two husbands and children.

"Selene" was a 35-year-old woman with one older sister. As a participant who was currently in her own psychotherapy process, it seemed to me that Selene had begun processing her family dynamics where she experienced her sister as the favoured one. Selene's willingness to share and reflect on the intersections between her relationships with her parents and sister allowed us to explore her own needs and how she communicated them in all her relationships.

"Imogen" was a 33-year-old woman who had one younger full brother and one younger half-brother. Her initial desire was to only talk about her full brother and not engage with the

dynamics of her parents and half-brother; however, as the interviews unfolded in a free associative way, she began to explore her feelings about these other relationships with ease.

Table 1 provides background information of each of the participants who chose to participate in this study at the time of being interviewed. As this study was concerned with high-access sibling relationships, biographical information was also gathered regarding the history of the relationship between the participants and their sibling(s) focusing on the sharing of personal history, experiences, and activities. Table 2 summarises the biographical information that was gathered regarding the level of access between the participants and their siblings at different points in time.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant pseudonym	***Age***	***Gender identity***	***Ethnic identity***	***Marital status***	***Highest level of education***	***Family constellation***
"David"	25	Male	White English	Single	Bachelor's degree	First born twin Twin brother (25 years old) Parents still married
"Chaya"	33	Female	White Jewish	Single	Master's degree	First born Younger brother (31 years old) Parents still married
"Yolandi"	37	Female	White Afrikaans	Married with a son and daughter	Diploma	First born Younger brother (35 years old) Parents still married
"Elize"	42	Female	Coloured	Married with two sons	Matric	Second born Older sister (43 years old) Younger brother (34 years old) One half-brother (deceased at 25 years old) Parents divorced
"Selene"	35	Female	White Portuguese	Married with no children	Master's degree	Second born Older sister (37 years old) Parents still married
"Imogen"	33	Female	White English	Single	Bachelor's Degree	First born Younger brother (30 years old) Younger half-brother (28 years old) Parents still married

Table 2: Participant Access to Siblings

Sibling	*Shared a bedroom*	*Shared a friend*	*Shared an extra-mural activity*	*Attended primary school together*	*Attended high school together*	*Attended tertiary institution together*
			"David"			
Twin brother	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
			"Chaya"			
Younger brother	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
			"Yolandi"			
Younger brother	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
			"Elize"			
Older sister	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Younger brother	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
			"Selene"			
Younger sister	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
			"Imogen"			
Younger brother	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Methods of Data Collection

Data gathering using the case study. The case study data originated from a psychotherapeutic process that occurred prior to the commencement of this research study. The case material generated emerged in the context of an intersubjective relationship between the patient and the researcher as therapist (Spence, 1993). As such, I needed to rely on my earlier methods of writing process and supervision notes which was clinically informed rather than informed by

research purposes. As a result of psychoanalytically informed training, as well as my own preferences, I follow a note writing process that ensured in-depth and useable research data was available to me. Furthermore, additional sources of data were provided by notes from clinical supervision that occurred during the initial psychotherapeutic process, as well as research supervision with my research supervisor and seminars with other PhD candidates and supervisors that occurred after the commencement of the psychotherapeutic process. My process of data gathering is graphically represented below to show how useable data was gathered.

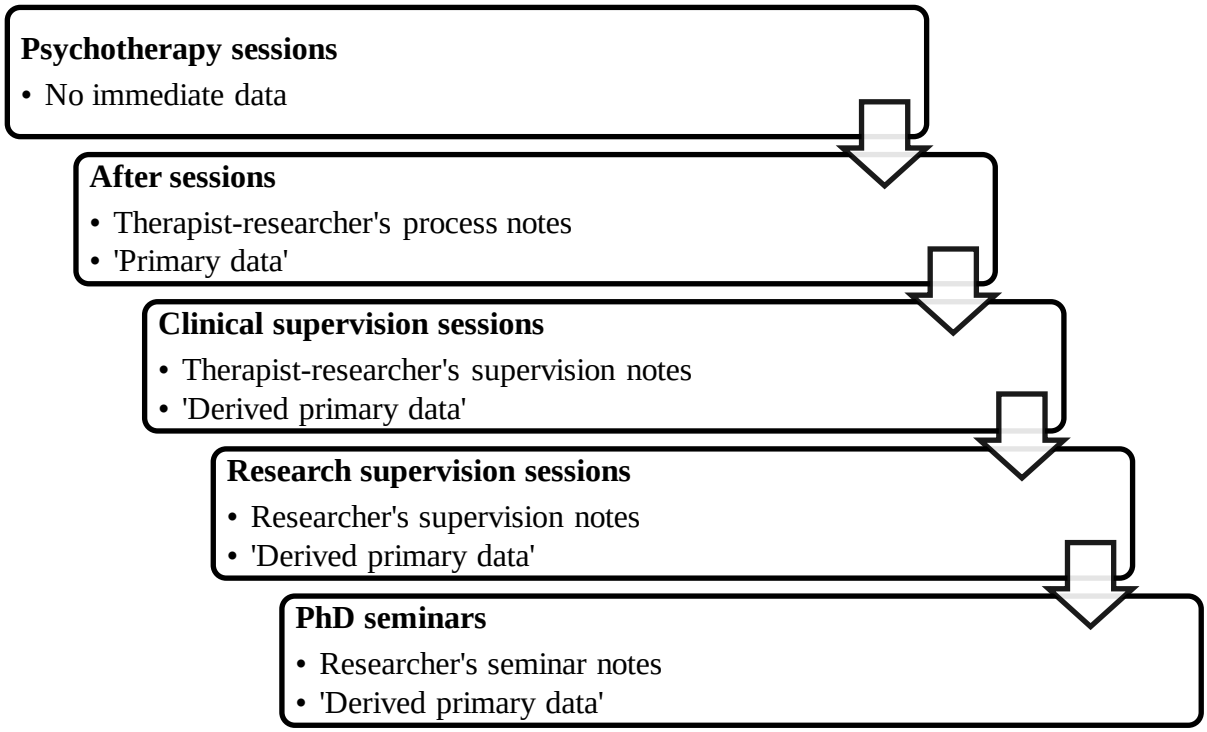


Figure 1: Process of gathering case study data

As a psychoanalytically informed therapist, I enter into the therapeutic encounter with theoretical knowledge, as well as an openness to understand and explore the patient's subjective experiences. Complete immersion in the psychotherapeutic encounter ensured that no research

data was actively generated in this context as I do not take notes in sessions. In the here-and-now of the therapy, I offered experience-near interpretations and process comments based on what I interpreted to be happening within the psychotherapeutic process; however, the usefulness of these were interpreted in the context of the intersubjectivity between the patient and myself.

After each session, I recorded my initial responses to the psychotherapeutic encounter in the form of process notes. Process notes contained what occurred in a session as much as possible, including verbatim content, the emergence of significant life experiences, non-verbal responses, emotional elements, transference-countertransference dynamics, the emergence of central themes, interpretations and process comments made and the patient's responses, as well as any resistance and defence mechanisms observed. I wrote these notes from memory, most often within an hour after each session and never longer than 24 hours after each session. These notes were not considered to objectively encapsulate each session; rather, these notes revealed the subjective and self-reflective process regarding my analytic and interpretative function in each session (Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005). These notes were used as 'primary data' (Dreher, 2000) in this study and were assumed to provide the best possible account of the therapeutic encounter and process at the time they were written.

The reliability of 'primary data' is often called into question by critiques of case study methodology. Often an argument is presented for rather employing audio- or video-taped recordings of sessions to provide more accurate data. While audio- or video-taped recordings of sessions may provide accurate data in terms of verbatim content between the therapist and patient, as well as visible non-verbal interactions, a taping device has been shown to be intrusive and interfere with the process of therapy (Midgley, 2006b; Tuckett, 1993). I chose to rely on my practice of writing up process notes due to the potentially negative effects that a taping device

brings into the therapeutic encounter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, I chose to compile my process notes after each session as I find that taking notes in the session can also be experienced as intrusive by the patient. The patient must be assured that therapy serves their own well-being first and foremost (Stajner-Popovic, 2001). While I acknowledge that recordings of sessions could have proved useful, I argue that such an approach could impinge on the therapeutic process in a negative way.

I consulted with other psychoanalytically informed therapists and supervisors on cases in order to additionally process and analyse what I understand to have occurred in the therapeutic process. I acknowledge that my understandings of my cases emerge from my own dynamics and experiences, as well as the intersubjective relationship between myself and my patient. I sought out opportunities for different meanings to emerge as this enriched my initial understandings and introduced a third perspective from outside the therapist-patient relationship (Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005). In clinical and research supervision sessions and PhD seminars, I took notes based on the contributions offered, which then allowed me to re-analyse and re-interpret what was contained in my process notes. These notes were used as 'derived primary data' (Dreher, 2000) and provided secondary forms of research data used in this study.

Data gathering using interviews. Interviews were conducted following Cartwright's (2004) theoretical and technical guidelines to facilitate the emergence of unconscious meanings and intrapsychic processes related to siblings. Psychoanalytically informed interview techniques were employed in order to access participants' experiences of their siblings as they related to the development of the self. Open-ended questioning, the eliciting of stories, avoiding why questions that tend to elicit intellectualisation, and using participants' own wording stimulated a free-associative-like interview process (Midgley, 2006a). During the psychoanalytic research

interview participants were asked to open themselves up to any amount and kind of associations related to their experiences of siblings. This added breadth and depth to the data set as unconscious processes and defensive functioning emerged in the interviews.

I wanted to allow the interviews to unfold freely and be as unstructured as possible. While I did develop an interview outline (see Appendix B) based on Cartwright's (2004) guidelines, the questions were infrequently used. Instead, I would pose open-ended, process-driven questions that focused on what was being evoked for the participants to facilitate the interview process.

The necessity to keep as much of the research context the same in each interview was fundamental as the interview setting and location could affect the interaction and communication in the interview (Cartwright, 2004), amongst other factors. I conducted three interviews with each participant, held one week apart at the same location. The first two interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner, allowing participants to direct their own thoughts about their siblings in a free and associative manner (Cartwright, 2004; Midgley, 2006a). My role was to facilitate the expression of narratives. The nature of the relationship between the researcher and participant served to encourage layers of self-disclosure that may not typically emerge in a brief research interview (Kvale, 1999). This meant that I was able to access a richer and more meaningful data set that was concerned with the participants' sibling experiences. The last interview linked to the first two interviews as participants were asked to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings about their sibling experiences, siblings, other significant others, and myself that arose during or after the interviews (Cartwright, 2004). Review and analysis of the first two interviews prior to the next interview allowed me the opportunity to explore relevant areas in further depth, as well as allow for exploration of any material evoked for participants by

the first two interviews. As such, the last interview was somewhat more directive and structured, seeking to clarify information, confront the participant with any contradictions, and offer preliminary interpretations (Cartwright, 2004).

Individual interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis within one week after the interviews took place. Additionally, I documented comments, impressions and feeling states after the interviews (Holmes, 2014). These field notes provided vital contextual data that was used "as a corroborative source of information that confirms or disconfirms analytic impressions" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 227). Thus, my reflections were valuable for data collection with regards to the verification of interpretative accounts (Strømme et al., 2010).

Methods of Analysis

Case study data analysis. The analysis of case study data is an ongoing process that involves multiple layers of subjective meaning-making that originate in the psychotherapeutic relationship (Bromley, 1986; Dreher, 2000). In this study, the primary focus was on the psychotherapeutic encounter and case material was interpreted within the psychoanalytic framework that informed this study. The data was analysed by the therapist-researcher, with the input and scrutiny of supervisors; however, the intersubjective nature of the psychotherapeutic encounter remained central to the analysis. Thus, the development of my understanding arose and deepened from the intersubjective process that was created by the patient and myself (Holmes, 2013; Rustin, 2003).

Kohut (1982) argued that the process of scrutinising the psychic reality of our patients in the psychotherapeutic encounter constituted data that can be analysed. The use of introspection and empathy was emphasised by Kohut (1977) as he suggested the therapist becomes

empathically immersed in the patient's subjective world. Introspection and empathy were implicit methods of gathering and interpreting data in psychotherapy sessions and these enabled me as the therapist-researcher to form hypotheses as the patient explored her sibling experiences in the context of our therapeutic relationship. The data analysis of the case study material focused on the following: interpretations and the patient's responses; transference-countertransference dynamics; affective responses; verbal and non-verbal communication; and narrative themes and shifts. I employed psychoanalytic theory to deepen my understandings of the patient's experiences, which in turn informed the therapeutic tools used and shaped the psychotherapeutic encounter (Dreher, 2000; Edwards, 1998). The purpose of case study data analysis was to derive meaningful understandings of intrapsychic experiences that can be integrated into psychoanalytic practice (Edwards et al., 2004).

The analysis of what occurred in the psychotherapeutic encounter continued in my writing-up of process notes after each session with the patient. Further analysis and a deepening of the interpretations of clinical material occurred at this second level of analysis. The writing up process was also augmented by drawing upon theory to understand what occurred in the psychotherapeutic encounter (Rustin, 2003). Session material was also presented to clinical supervisors which added external input on the clinical data. While tentative understandings of the case material emerged, these understandings were often challenged, modified, and changed through the secondary process of data analysis.

Finally, I re-engaged with the data from a research perspective after the psychotherapy process had been terminated. Process notes, case conceptualisations, and clinical supervision notes were re-read several times. A more active engagement with theoretical knowledge, specifically within self psychology, was required. I conducted a more focused reading of the

clinical material as it related to selfobject experiences. Examining the case material through the lens of self psychology offered new insights into the case material, which was useful for theory development. This case material was subsequently presented to research supervisors and to other PhD candidates for additional scrutiny and input. As novel hypotheses were proposed, comprehensive interrogation of the links between the case material and emerging formulations was vital to ensure accuracy and validity.

The analysed case study data informed the discussions of the journal article included in Chapter Four. In the process of accepting to publish this article, the external reviewers of the journal also required clarification of some of the hypotheses. As such, I engaged with the process notes, case conceptualisations, and supervision notes again. A specific focus on deepening my examinations of transference-countertransference dynamics in the case material was required at this point to support my emerging hypotheses on sibling selfobject experiences.

Interview data analysis. Psychoanalytic research interview analysis was utilised to interpret participants' subjective experiences of their siblings. Certain aspects of psychoanalytic technique can be used in interviews and the subsequent analysis to "gain a comprehensive understanding of an individual's internal world in relation to the subject of inquiry" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 216). The analysis focused on latent content, intrapsychic processes, interpersonal processes, and defensive functioning that were elicited in the relationship between myself and each participant. Thus, the analysis enabled systematic and purposeful illumination of conscious and unconscious processes evident in the participants' repeated narratives (Cartwright, 2004). This approach was aligned with the aims of the research as participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics regarding siblings formed the focus of the study.

The first key task in the analysis involved careful attention to feeling states and corresponding thoughts and perceptions of participants and researcher throughout the research process (Cartwright, 2004). This attention was documented in the form of reflective field notes and included my reflections as researcher on my motivations for conducting the research, countertransference responses during the data collection, and explorations on how my own sibling experiences may influence the research process. As such, this task was parallel to reflexivity. This was particularly important in this qualitative analysis as my own experiences and values informed and shaped the use of self psychology as a conceptual framework (Gilgun, 2005). The "dangers of familiarity" (McCracken, 1988, p. 12) inherent in my own theoretical and personal assumptions and experiences were considered and acknowledged throughout the research process in a critical and reflective manner. As I was the analytic tool, it was imperative that my own emotional responses and interpretations were reflexively acknowledged and explored in the analysis of the data.

The second key task was the search for core narratives or themes, which included searching for the particular characters, atmosphere, action, and motivations of characters that emerged in the participants' interviews (Cartwright, 2004). The goal of this task in the analysis was the identification of useful themes that were evident in the data set. The themes were considered useful and coherent when they aligned with the emotional content present throughout interviews and repeatedly emerged in different forms and across different contexts (Cartwright, 2004). As such, I searched for the repeated sibling stories that were organised around participants' selfobject experiences and related affects, fantasies, and defensive processes.

The third key task involved the exploration of identifications and selfobject experiences that made up each participant's internal world (Cartwright, 2004). Using the core narratives

outlined above, I aimed to formulate the way participants located themselves through the analysis of narratives that reflected participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics (Cartwright, 2004). Participants' identifications and selfobject experiences were assumed to be developmentally related to participants' relationships with their siblings, as well as other significant figures. Seeking multiple perspectives in the analysis of data in supervision, group seminars with other PhD candidates, and independent evaluators served to guard against my own biases (Gilgun, 2005). This served to provide a form of external validation of the interpretative accounts (Cartwright, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

I received ethical approval for this study from the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Non-Medical Ethics Committee (see Appendix C). As the proposed research was conducted through the lens of psychoanalysis, certain ethical issues were considered and addressed in a deliberate manner. The discussion covers ethical issues that related to both the case study-based and interview-based aspects of the research, as well as specific ethical considerations related to each method.

Informed consent. For the case study-based aspect of the research, written consent to use case study material for research purposes was obtained directly from the patient at the beginning of psychotherapy. The patient was informed of her right to withdraw her consent to use case material. It was explained to the patient that consent withdrawal was limited as once case material had been published or the thesis was submitted the withdrawal of consent could not be viable. Gabbard (2000) argues that "once the analyst has introduced the idea that the patient will appear in a publication, it inevitably affects the subsequent course of the analysis" (p. 1078). As

such, I only used case material of a patient who had terminated therapy. This ensured that the research has no negative implications on ongoing therapeutic processes, reduced the risk of me performing a dual role, and minimised potential conflict of interests.

The decision was also made to not re-contact the patient to discuss the use of the data. As a period of five years had passed since the patient had terminated therapy, I was cautious to re-engage with this patient. Upon termination, the goal is to consolidate the effects of therapy, reflect upon the therapeutic relationship, and maintain independence (Joyce et al., 2007). I communicate to patients that a time may come when they wish to re-engage with therapy and my door remains opens to them. However, I asserted that contacting the past patient for any reason, including but not limited to the use of data, would impinge on the patient's independence with regards to re-engaging with me on their own terms and in their own time.

The process of informed consent for the interview-based aspect of the research was different to informed consent involving a former patient. While the psyche of the participants formed the focus for both aspects of the research, the interview process was not intended to be psychotherapeutic (Cartwright, 2004). The participant information document (see Appendix D) outlined the aims and purposes of the study, as well as informed interview participants of their rights, to ensure that comprehensive information was provided regarding the nature and purpose of the study prior to participation. Research participants were requested to provide informed written consent to participate in the research (see Appendix E), to allow for the recording and transcribing of the interviews (see Appendix F), and to allow the use of direct quotes in this thesis and in published academic journals (see Appendix E). No person was advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate as participation in this study was voluntarily. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time during data

collection and participants were allowed to refuse to answer any particular questions if so desired; however, neither of these possibilities occurred during data collection. Participants were provided with the opportunity to discuss any concerns they had before, throughout, and after the conclusion of the interview process.

While participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw, and the right to refuse to answer any questions, participants could not anticipate the emotional and psychological process that could unfold during data collection (Saville Young, 2009). Even the researcher could not know what material could be elicited during data collection for each of the participants (Long & Eagle, 2009). Participants were informed that the interviews could elicit emotional responses; nevertheless, attempts were made to protect participants from their own unconscious content that may have been unprocessed or confusing (Kvale, 1999). The upmost care was taken in the conducting of the interviews so that participants felt their emotional and psychological states were respected in the sharing of their experiences. It was important to ascertain whether participants were in their own psychotherapy as this provided an appropriate supportive context to explore any unprocessed content that arose during data collection. Furthermore, information was provided regarding referral contact details of organisations that offer counselling services (free or otherwise) to all participants.

Non-maleficence. The ethical responsibility to cause no harm to the participants was particularly important for the interview-based aspects of this study. This required me to use my training and skills as a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapist to be consistently aware of and respond sensitively to the participants' emotional states and defensive processes. The psychoanalytical interview method has been shown to be an ethical way of conducting qualitative research, especially when researchers were also psychoanalytically informed

psychotherapists who were able to create and maintain a safe environment to share subjective experiences (Harvey, 2017a). By providing empathic immersion and experience-near understanding during the series of psychoanalytic interviews, sensitive and unprocessed material relating to siblings emerged spontaneously for this group of participants. The unstructured nature of the interviews meant that difficult emotions and painful memories were evoked at times. Attuned awareness, self-analysis, and containment of the participants was given the upmost priority during all stages of the data gathering. The end of each interview session also concluded with a debriefing where I would check if the participants felt comfortable to end the interview and where we could reflect on any feelings that were evoked.

The interview process in this study invited participants to explore their sibling experiences. Accessing preconscious and unconscious material outside of a psychotherapeutic relationship can promote participants to develop expectations that the interviews will be psychotherapeutic, especially when unexpected, unprocessed material is divulged by participants (Kvale, 1999). While the interview process offered valuable information regarding participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, in-depth exploration and resolution of these dynamics was beyond the scope of the interviews. It was necessary for me to remain in the role of researcher, even when I was using my psychotherapeutic skills, and respond to participants with the research agenda in mind (Swartz, 2015). Most participants expressed the need for further processing of these dynamics. Five of the six participants expressed the desire to commence their own psychotherapy to further explore some of the intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics that unfolded during the interviews. Even though I avoided promoting psychotherapeutic expectancy in the participants, two interview participants specifically requested to commence psychotherapy with me. While these participants may have desired to utilise the relationship we had created to

further process and work through their intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, it was discussed with these participants why this would not be possible as the relationship between us had been set up according to research principles and not psychotherapeutic ones. To prevent the onset of a dual role, all interested participants were referred back to the participant information document (see Appendix D) where contact details of organisations that offer counselling services (free or otherwise) were provided.

Confidentiality. For the case study-based aspect of the research, the upmost consideration was taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the patient in the presentation of the case material in publication (Stajner-Popovic, 2001). As the case material was also presented to various supervision and writing groups, confidentiality was also ensured in these contexts. To protect my former patient and her family's identities, I used pseudonyms and omitted or altered identifying information. Such 'thick' disguise was used so that only the patient and therapist could recognise the patient in the case material (Gabbard, 2000). The integrity of the case material was upheld in the use of 'thick' disguise to ensure that the case material accurately captured the essence of the patient's relevant history and dynamics, without placing her at risk of being identified (Aron, 2000).

For the interview-based aspect of the research, limited anonymity was upheld in the study as the data collection occurred in an interview context. Confidentiality was crucial in this study as it was possible that participants shared potential sensitive material about their own sibling experiences. The recordings and the transcripts were kept on a password protected computer to ensure no one else had access to the material. Identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts and the participants' identities were protected as I used pseudonyms on the transcripts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. If participants disclosed identifying

information during the course of data collection, I ensured that such information was removed or disguised in the transcripts to protect confidentiality. The participants' siblings' identifying information was also protected in publication through removal or the use of 'thick' disguise (Gabbard, 2000).

Identifying information was removed from the case material and the interview transcripts and the participants' identities were protected as I used pseudonyms on the transcripts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Nevertheless, participants were likely to recognise themselves if they read the results and analyses (Saville Young, 2009). As such, sensitivity to the participants' subjectivities in sharing their experiences and avoidance of indirect harm to participants was emphasised in the writing up of the results.

Research Integrity

As this study is situated in the qualitative tradition, the focus is on offering ideas and arguments, as opposed to seeking objectivity and proof that is highly valued in quantitative approaches (Dreher, 2000; Greenwood & Loewenthal, 2005). To add mechanisms of rigour to any qualitative study, it is important to consider the reliability and verifiability of both the research methods used and the resulting data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise the concept of 'trustworthiness' as a mechanism of adding reliability and validity in qualitative studies. Using the four domains outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability,* the integrity of this qualitative study for both the case study-based and interview-based aspects of the research will be explored.

Credibility. Credibility is considered to be a measure of how plausible the interpretations and research findings are established to be (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Comparable to internal

validity, it requires the researcher to engage with research participants for an adequate period of time. For the case study-based aspect of the research, Natalie was in weekly psychotherapy for a period of two years. While this period of time allowed in-depth engagement with the psychotherapeutic processes that unfolded, I also spent extended periods of time engaging with my case notes and formulations related to the particular case both during her treatment, as well as when I wrote up her case as presented in Chapter Four.

For the interview-based aspect of the research, repeated and lengthy interviews with each of the participants facilitated prolonged, in-depth engagement (Guba, 1981). Three separate interviews were conducted with each of the participants, lasting approximately one hour each, over a period of a month, as proposed by Cartwright (2004). I also extensively engaged with a diverse body of psychoanalytic sibling literature prior to the commencement of the interviews, adding another layer of in-depth engagement. Thus, Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) criteria for sufficient and prolonged engagement was strived to be met for both the case study and interview-based aspects of the research.

Prolonged engagement must be coupled with persistent and sufficient observations to ensure that the participants' data material is fully considered (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For the case study-based aspect of the research, Natalie was seen for weekly psychotherapy in which regular and intense observation was fundamental to her treatment. Process and supervision notes from the time she was in treatment included detailed observations of her therapeutic process. For the interview-based aspect of the research, the series of three interviews allowed sibling stories to be shared and be further explored through the use of open-ended questioning, being non-directive, and paying close attention to feeling states, speech patterns, and non-verbal interactions (Cartwright, 2004). The taking of notes after interviews and watching of the video

recordings several times also allowed me to identify contradictions and explore potential interpretations that emerged from the data. This was helpful as I could make more detailed observations of the participants and the dynamics between us that I may not have initially noticed when conducting the interviews. Sharing these notes and transcripts of the recordings with my research supervisor, the wider psychoanalytic supervision team, and other PhD candidates also invited additional observations of the data material.

Member checks were used for the case study and research interviews where I would share my developing interpretations and hypotheses and check whether these resonated with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the case study-based aspect of the research, multiple opportunities for checking and rechecking of interpretations and emerging hypotheses is characteristic of the relationship that develops between therapist and patient. This was part of the therapeutic process that developed between Natalie and myself and my case notes reflected how these member checks occurred and were experienced by Natalie. However, once I began to analyse the data related to this therapeutic process to inform the writing up of the case as presented in Chapter Four, Natalie had terminated psychotherapy. As a result, I could not conduct member checks with Natalie while conducting this research. While this meant that I could not refine my hypotheses based on her input, this process occurred over the course of Natalie's psychotherapy, as well as during supervision I sought on her case both during the time she was in psychotherapy and afterwards.

For the interview-based aspect of the research, the interview participants and I engaged in a process where we collectively explored and confirmed understandings of their sibling experiences over the course of the interviews. I verified with the participants what they had recounted and many times my understandings were altered and deepened by the participants'

responses to my interpretations and emerging hypotheses. Cartwright (2004) suggests that interpretations should be coherent and address any contradictions and gaps in understanding. This was done in this study by confirming interpretations against competing data with the research participants themselves, so that participants' experiences were comprehensively encapsulated. These member checks further added to the credibility of the research study as interpretations that resonated with the participants were noted in the findings.

Ongoing refinement of my hypotheses and checking my findings against the raw data was also conducted throughout the research process. I sought external checks through peer debriefing and review as I conduced the interviews and once I began interpreting the data. The analysis of detailed case and supervision notes, repeatedly watching video recordings, supervision with psychoanalytic research supervisors, sharing ideas with PhD candidates and supervisors, sharing papers with a group of professional peers, and my own personal psychotherapy enabled me to visit and revisit interpretations and emerging hypotheses. The process of writing up my findings and submitting papers for publication (included in Chapters Four, Five and Six) commenced with presenting original papers to the PhD candidates and supervisors. Once PhD supervisors provided feedback and ascertained these papers were ready, they were then submitted to peer-reviewed journals and accepted for publication after input from external reviewers. Each of these interactions invited a diverse group of my professional peers who all came from diverse theoretical perspectives to confirm or disconfirm my hypotheses, as well as concur with and diverge from my understandings. In doing so, the nuanced, detailed, and complex data could be verified with different investigators who provided alternative viewpoints. This extensive peer revision process is akin to triangulation, which was necessary to further add

credibility to this research endeavour by drawing attention to both corroborating and dissenting perspectives (Fossey et al., 2002).

Transferability. Transferability is considered to be a measure of whether the findings of this particular study would be similarly found in other contexts or setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Transferability can be compared to the concept of external validity. To acknowledge the contextual embeddedness of the findings, thick descriptions of the context surrounding the proposed hypotheses were provided (Levitt et al., 2018). For the case study-based aspect of the research, the patient's presenting problems, family relationship dynamics, relevant history, and patient-therapist dynamics were described as richly as possible in Chapter Four. The use of some of the patient's quotations and contextualised interpretations further enhanced the transferability and credibility.

For the interview-based aspect of the research, purposive sampling ensured that certain contextual factors were homogenous, including that participants lived with both parents and at least one sibling in childhood and the high degree of access of the sibling relationship. Nevertheless, interview participants were described in a relevant and detailed manner that revealed their contextual diversity. The thick descriptions of the data included many participant quotations and contextualised interpretations in order to enrich credibility of the findings and enhance potential for transferability in other contexts (Cartwright, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). It is hoped that further sibling studies will explore whether the findings from this study are transferable to other contexts.

Dependability. Dependability is concerned with whether other researchers would arrive at similar findings and interpretations of the data in order to strengthen the findings as consistent and repeatable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is similar to Cartwright's (2004) principle of

validation of the findings. This was achieved in this study through the numerous interactions between myself and psychoanalytically informed research and clinical supervisors in which an evaluation of my analysis and interpretations were conducted and reviewed. Providing access to the raw data to my peers and supervisors allowed us to explore whether they would arrive at similar interpretations and hypotheses of the data. As the idea of multiple realities is embraced by the qualitative research transition, it was expected that differences in interpretations and hypotheses would arise (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In some instances, gaps in my understandings were highlighted by my peers and supervisors, allowing me to return to the raw data and refine my findings. Each time a paper was submitted for consideration for publication, at least two external reviewers, independent to the data collection and data analysis, examined the processes of data collection, data analysis, and the results. These numerous inquiry audits determined whether the findings were supported by the data and confirmed the accuracy of the findings. The feedback from the external reviewers for the papers presented in Chapter Four, Five, and Six helped me clarify my findings and better articulate my arguments before my work was published.

Conformability. Conformability is concerned with whether the researcher was neutral throughout the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). While it is recognised that a researcher's perspectives and cultural, ethnic, and personal biases do influence research, qualitative researchers must actively think about and engage with their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings throughout the research process (Cartwright, 2004). To promote the conformability of this research endeavour, I meaningful explored my own personal desires and feelings for studying siblings and used self-reflexivity in an attempt to reduce my own biases and blind spots. It was also necessary to make this process transparent to readers so that my subjectivity and

unconscious influences can continually be considered to reach a greater degree of neutrality, which is explored in the subsequent reflexivity section.

While some consider Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four domains to be dated (Schwandt et al., 2007), the concept of trustworthiness remains the standard of credible qualitative research (Levitt et al., 2018; Tracy, 2003; Tuckett, 1993). Additional measures to ensure accurate interpretations and analysis of the data were included in this study in order to actively attain reliability and validity on completion of this study, rather than confirm reliability and validity by external reviewers (Morse et al., 2002). While a doctoral study is often considered to be an independent research endeavour, many others contributed to reviewing my interpretations of the data, including my research supervisor, clinical supervisors, other PhD candidates and supervisors, and a professional writing group where psychoanalytic ideas and writings were shared. This allowed a balanced, empowering account of the data to be presented so that the research endeavourer remained authentic (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). By outlining the strategies that were employed to ensure reliability and validity in this study, I have shown that rigour was inherent to the entire process of conducting this research.

Reflexivity

As a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapist, engaging with my own personal experiences and feeling states is an integral, constantly unfolding part of my clinical work. As I also encompassed the role of a psychoanalytically informed researcher in this study, I have also needed to be aware of my personal motivations for studying the particular phenomenon of siblings, as well as the feeling states associated with the research (Cartwright, 2004). In this study, the clinical setting and the interview setting provided particular social, cultural, and

relational contexts in which interactive meaning-making could occur between myself and the research participants on the topic of siblings. While I have attempted to provide rich descriptions of the participants' contexts, I consider myself to be a participant-observer "caught up in a process in which [my] perspective will necessarily be occasionally skewed" (Tuckett, 1993, p. 1184). To gain insight into my own reasons for conducting this research, I have used reflexivity as a research tool to understand how my own subjectivity, personal biases, and experiences have impacted on the production of knowledge in this study. By examining myself as researcher, the relationship between myself and the research, as well as the relationships between myself and the research participants, I have strived for self-awareness through psychoanalytic-researcher reflexivity.

My sibling experiences. Based on the awareness that incorporating my own subjectivity and reflexivity would be integral to this thesis, from the onset of this research endeavour I acknowledged and explored how the research process was linked to my own history and personal sibling experiences. My supervisor and I had many discussions about how my own siblings were finding their ways into the research, and this was also explored intensively in my personal psychotherapy. In many instances, the emergence of these sibling stories opened up new avenues of exploration for the research endeavour.

Harvey (2017b) maintains that "it is imperative that the researcher is in personal on-going psychoanalytic psychotherapy, so as to manage her own defences to find ways to be more attuned to feeling states and subjectivity in relation to the participants" (p. 61). My own long-term personal psychotherapy commenced before embarking on this study, where my relationships with siblings and other sibling successors, including my husband, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, friends, and colleagues, have been explored in many therapy sessions. Once I

began this research endeavour, awareness and knowledge of sibling dynamics expanded as I read sibling literature, recalled childhood sibling memories, and experienced a range of emotions related to my own sibling experiences. An exploration of some of the ways that these personal sibling experiences impacted on the research process is outlined below.

My research interest in siblings primarily arises from growing up with siblings and continuing to have significant relationship with them in adulthood. I am the only daughter and middle child born between two brothers. My older brother is 16 months older than me. While my brother's place in the family had been planned, my parents accidentally fell pregnant with me and only discovered the pregnancy late in the second trimester. My own personal psychotherapy has long grappled with how the unconscious fantasy of being the only child (Coles, 2003) was conflicted for me as I always had to share my mother and father with my brother.

Babies born this close together are often called 'Irish twins' and in many ways, I have always felt like my older brother was my twin. Part of my own therapy process has been exploring that the feeling that we were like twins may have served to deny the loss of the omnipotent fantasy that the existence of my brother threatened. As 'one entity', merged together in our twin-like bond, I could hold onto the illusion that I did not need to make space for him, and he did not need to make space for me. However, this changed when my mother became pregnant. The real or imagined arrival of a sister or brother in early childhood is experienced as the sibling trauma, where infants are required to face the reality that the mother will make space for another baby, evoking rage at having to share the mother and a desire to kill off the other (Mitchell, 2003). This occurs developmentally alongside the awareness that a mother has a sexual relationship with a father which leads to more babies. I can recall this time in my early life as I shared the following memories with my therapist.

I remember being five years old and my mother telling me that I was going to be a big sister. I was an ever-observant child and I had watched siblings being born to my cousins and friends, seeing how families changed and attention shifted. As the world that I knew suddenly began expanding into the unknown as my mother's belly grew, I became fixated on one thing. I vividly remember informing my mom, under no condition, was she allowed to give birth to a baby girl. The overwhelming anxiety I felt as my younger sibling's arrival drew nearer was expressed in different ways. I repeatedly drew my mother pregnant with a baby in many drawings (see Figures 2 and 3 for actual drawings from this time). I pretended that I had the power to determine the sex of the baby growing in my mother's belly. I feared my precious place as the only girl would be overthrown by another. While I breathed a sigh of relief when a baby boy was born, my place as the baby of the family was still overthrown. The arrival of a sibling represented a relational and existential loss as I lost my known place in my family and my world.

When my Dad picked me up from pre-school and informed me my baby brother had been born, I recall feeling a mixture of excitement and dread. However, from the first time I held my baby brother, I felt all-consuming love for him. Perhaps the existence of another child confirmed my fantasy that 'my parents love me so much that they have created another me'.



Figure 2: First childhood drawing of my mother pregnant (Claire, 5 years old)





Figure 3: Additional childhood drawings of my mother pregnant (Claire, 5 years old)

After my baby brother was born, my parents allowed space for each of us and differentiated us from each other. The resolution of the hostile feelings related to the arrival of a sibling and the associated anxiety has been shown to require containment by a vertical figure (Mitchell, 2003). For the containment of this anxiety, the parent needs to be 'enough' (Charles, 1999) to ensure that the attachment bond remains positive and strong, regardless of the hostile feelings, so that the child can be assured of his or her place in the family and the world (Neubauer, 1983; Rustin, 2007). In my family, I was called the "*rose between the thorns*" due to my identity as the only girl. While I am not overtly feminine and have always felt more comfortable playing with my brothers and other boys, my identity as the only girl in my family was important to me. It is the one place I could hold onto the omnipotent fantasy of being the

'only'. My brothers and I developed distinctive relationships with both parental figures, and each other, which allowed positive and strong attachment bonds in the family context, as suggested by my later drawings (see Figures 4 and 5 for my actual drawings from this time).

During the earlier stages of conducting this doctoral study, my eldest daughter became a big sister and had to make space for another girl in our family. Her own process of navigating this trauma played out on our family stage, from asking "*please can we go back to being just us*?" to recently informing me "*my sister is my favourite person in the whole house!*" It was been interesting to observe the family dynamics where my youngest daughter was born into a family that had existing vertical and lateral relationships, compared to my oldest daughter who was born into a family that was only vertically structured before she arrived. This ever-observant mother adores to watch their sister relationship unfold and occasionally I am required to intervene and enforce vertical rules. Nevertheless, their ever-evolving, complex lateral relationship also exists independent of their father and me at times.



Figure 4: A childhood drawing of my brother, mother and I watching fireworks (Claire, 6 years old)



Figure 5: A childhood drawing of my brothers and I playing dress-up (Claire, 6 years old)

Charles (1999) argues that since time has no meaning at the unconscious level, the arrival of a new sibling can threaten one's sense of omnipotence even in adulthood. My feelings of wanting to be the only girl re-emerged when my older brother became engaged to marry and our family needed to make space for my brother's soon-to-be wife. I was finally getting the sister I dreaded being born when I was younger. While my resistance towards my new sister-in-law surprised me, it reinforced Milevsky's (2020) finding that transitions and life events in adulthood uncover underlying sibling tensions and dynamics. This experience made me reflect on how we are often required to adjust to the arrival of sibling-like figures, which may threaten our sense of omnipotence and security. The arrival of a sibling and later sibling successors has made me realise I am ordinary in that many people will have to make space for a new sibling or sibling figure, but I am also exceptional as my response to it will be deeply personal and unique. My initial fears of being overthrown by my sister-in-law have been replaced with a desire to make space for her and welcoming the changes she has brought to our family. The introduction of new lateral relationships in my life have shown me that "revising and reworking conceptions of self are on-going tasks, as we confront 'new' obstacles that become visible over time within the rubric of changing sibling relationships" (Charles, 1999, p. 898).

My adult relationships with my siblings are also constantly evolving and changing. While our bond remains connected, how often we spend time together and what we share with each other is fluid as adults. My father suddenly passed away over the course of conducting this research, revealing certain sibling dynamics that had laid dormant for much of my adulthood. Still, our ability to create space for each other and consider each other's needs has remained. Just as my experiences of my brothers were part of the original interest in studying sibling relationships, it is their interest and support that helped me to complete this endeavour.

My clinical work with siblings. The relative absence of siblings in psychoanalytic theory has meant that many psychotherapists have neither explored their own personal experiences of their own siblings nor have paid sufficient attention to siblings in their patient's lives. Bank and Kahn (1982) expressed shock at having never fully considered siblings in their work with patients. An important shift in psychoanalytic engagements with siblings occurred when Charles (1999) linked her personal sibling experiences that were evoked in her personal analysis to themes that arose in her work with many patients, suggesting that our own unique sibling stories impact on the way we work with our patients. Coles (2003) remains critical that further work on siblings has not been taken on by psychoanalysis, whether using empirical observation or concentrating on the psychoanalytic encounter. While publications based on interviews and empirical observation birthed new interest into sibling relationships, additional clinical examples are required to fill the sibling gap in existing psychoanalytic literature to inform how we understand and work with sibling dynamics as psychotherapists.

My personal experiences of my siblings are fundamental to who I am, and these experiences inform my clinical work. Yet, I did not receive formal training on siblings, did not undergo supervision that actively encouraged an exploration of sibling dynamics, and did not often consider siblings in my early work with patients. However, during my internship training, Juliet Mitchell was a visiting Mellon Fellow at the University of Witwatersrand, igniting my interest in siblings from a psychoanalytic perspective. While being raised in a family where siblings were fundamental to my development and early experiences, Mitchell's (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) research encouraged me to begin to make links between my personal sibling experiences, psychoanalysis and siblings, which is the foundation on which this thesis rests.

Many have called for therapists to become clinically attuned to sibling relationships and to fully consider the implications for transference and countertransference (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Lesser, 1978; Mitchell, 2003, 2013). This is especially relevant as sibling transference has been shown to be distinctly different from a parental transference (Agger, 1988; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Charles, 1999; Coles, 2003; Kahn, 1988; Lesser, 1978; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). While this research has required me to look back at past psychotherapeutic processes, conducing this research has changed how I currently think about and work with my patients' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics. I found myself more curious about siblings and other lateral relationships. If appropriate, I ask my patients who are parents about their children's sibling relationships. With psychotherapists who I supervise, I explore their own and their patients' sibling dynamics as relevant to their psychotherapeutic process. I now see my patients as operating in a vertical and lateral world in the many different contexts they find themselves: at work, at home, in society at large, as well as in the psychotherapy room. I am now better attuned to how a parent-child transference might develop between myself and a parent, where they may desire for me to be authoritarian or play favourites in response to current or historical conflict between lateral figures. I am curious about my own resistance to taking on the parental transference and how I prefer a sibling transference, in which I can engage with patients in an equalitarian manner, where cooperation and alliance are fundamental to our interaction. I am working towards being more comfortable with both vertical and lateral transferences, as both are necessary.

My case-study research on siblings. My interest in deepening my theoretical knowledge of siblings was born 'on the couch' (Hinshelwood, 2013). This means that the work I was doing with patients in my private practice was imbued with complex sibling dynamics and I turned to

psychoanalytic literature to help me understand what was emerging between me and my patients. In my attempts to resolve what has happening ‘on the couch’ that did not fit with existing theoretical constructions, I felt that clinical material could show how psychoanalysis may need to continue to adapt to make space for siblings. Theoretically informed by the sibling work done by Mitchell (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), I intensely dived into my case notes, sought supervision, and begin writing up cases of unresolved sibling dynamics that were shared with me by my adult patients.

Initially, I did not intend to use clinical data in this thesis or transform my clinical case material into a paper for publication. The idea of publishing clinical work evoked resistance in me. While supervision and personal psychotherapy allowed me to explore and later resolve this anxiety, I realised that there was a part of me that wanted to show sibling relationships as ‘all good’, especially as psychoanalytical views on siblings were predominately negative. I feared that if I presented clinical case material on siblings, that had emerged many times ‘on the couch’ in my consulting room, I would be providing additional support for the conceptualisation that sibling relationships were predominately hostile and conflictual.

According to Freud (1921), any positivity that occurred in the context of a sibling relationship, such as love, equality and fairness, is a reaction formation against underlying loathing, jealousy and rivalry. Research not exclusively situated in the psychoanalytic tradition (e.g. Dunn, 1985; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & McGuire, 1992) embraces the concept of sibling love and gives voice to the positive function of siblings in attachment, identity and gender development, sexuality, peer relations, and loyalty and care. I felt there was a need for balance in psychoanalytic theoretical conceptualisations so that the diverse developmental functions of sibling relationships can be integrated into psychoanalytic understandings. The paper presented

in Chapter Four was informed by my clinical work and offered hypotheses regarding the developmental functions of siblings. I decided that this research could make space for both/and: love and hate, good and bad, and ecstasy and trauma that siblings can bring into our lives.

My interview research on siblings. My own views of the world, and the associated ontological and epistemological assumptions, influenced my choice of research methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As a psychoanalytic researcher and psychotherapist, I am interested in what is below the surface: unconscious fantasies, predominant defences, intrapsychic dynamics, and interpersonal relationships. The employment of two different qualitative research methods, the psychotherapy case study and the psychoanalytic research interview, allowed me to include both the clinical and non-clinical context in this research endeavour. The combination of these research methods served to open up possibilities for my study to offer a more balanced view of sibling relationships, and to explore the ways in which each of these methods can offer a different perspective, as well as jointly contribute to a more inclusive whole. Cartwright's (2004) psychoanalytic research interviews were suitable for this study as it allowed me to interpret the participants' subjective sibling experiences, outside of the clinical setting. The interviews provided a means of exploring intrapsychic and interpersonal processes related to the potential functions of siblings in the development of self.

Harvey (2017b) has explored the emotional demand on researchers when they form relationships with participants, especially when researchers and participants share experiences or certain aspects of identity. I often found myself thinking about my own siblings throughout the interviews: "*I am also a sister. I also have a brother. I am the elder sibling. I am also the younger sibling*." Over the course of three interviews with each of the participants, it felt to me that intimacy and comfort developed between us. This was evident in how participants dressed

over the course of the interviews, becoming more causally and comfortably dressed after the first interview. Participants' bodies seemed to become more relaxed as well, evidenced by the taking off of shoes, blowing of noses, and talking to me during bathroom breaks. I often felt like I was one of their siblings due to how intimately they described their family interactions and how openly they shared their thoughts, feelings, and bodily experiences.

While Holmes (2014) argues that it was my desire as researcher that drove the research process, participants seemed to come into the interviews with their own desires. For one, recent conflict with a sibling stimulated them to respond to my call for participants. For another, it was a desire to affirm to the world that how siblings may be represented or understood is limited: "*We are different, let me show you*." Most told their siblings they were participating in the interviews: "*I'm going to try make sense of you and your nonsense*". I tried to ensure that my only desire was to explore and understand their sibling experiences. This allowed me to follow participants as they unpacked their desires and experiences. The interviews offered the participants a space to deepen self-understanding and explore how they related to others, whereas I was motivated to learn with and from participants as they made meaning of their subjective sibling experiences (Holmes, 2013).

In the psychoanalytic interviews process, I wanted to open up spaces for both sibling-transferences and parent-child transferences to emerge spontaneously. In order to do so, I did not take the lead in interviews and instead gave the participants the power to direct the interviews. The participants could identify and dis-identify with me at different times throughout our interactions, inviting me to take on different roles. Sometimes I felt I was a sibling interacting with a sibling, and then I was a parent interacting with a child. Other times, I felt I was researcher interacting with a participant, and sometimes I felt I was being invited to become a

psychotherapist interacting with a patient. Similar to Harvey's (2017b) experiences of conducting psychoanalytic research interviews, the intersubjective processes in the relationships I shared with my participants and the "ethical and mindful use of the transference-countertransference situation within these relationships" (p. 318) facilitated the emergence of meaningful and nuanced data.

The giving up of my power in the psychoanalytic interviews also meant that participants felt comfortable asking me questions about my siblings, how I work with siblings clinically, and why I was interested in sibling relationships. I welcomed these questions, curious about these revealed about their fantasies and desires regarding our developing relationship and their relationships with their own siblings. Answering my participants' questions, with careful consideration of how this could impact on each individual participant and the interview process, allowed a deeper rapport and sense of safety to develop over the course of the interviews.

Some authors (e.g. Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coleman, 1996; Kivowitz, 1995; Mitchell, 2000) have suggested that the preference for therapists to employ a parent-like, wise, omnipotent role has implications for transference-countertransference dynamics. Outside of the therapy room, people may joke with me "*are you going to read my mind*?" when I am introduced as a psychotherapist, followed by a desire to either put up a defensive wall or to share intimate details about their lives. This assumption that psychotherapists have a sense of all-knowing omnipotence may have been shared by some of the participants as they seemed to share their sibling experiences as if I already had an established insight into their family dynamics and history. The participants would share sibling stories without providing me with any background or context, moving between the present and the past and between different places and people with ease. Participants' seemed to be communicating to me "*you can see inside my world*".

Harvey (2017a) suggests that the skills and nature of the researcher as a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapist may mean that unexpected, deeper exploration are shared by participants, especially when it relates to psychic defences and unconscious material, and this seemed to be the case for the participants in this study.

Despite my attempts to give up my power as the therapist-researcher, there were times when this dynamic still emerged in the interviews. While my psychotherapeutic skills were helpful in inviting participants to share complex sibling stories, it was also possible that my manner of engagement elicited sensitive conscious, preconscious, and unconscious material (Harvey, 2017b). The parts of my identity as both psychotherapist and researcher were not forgotten by me or my research participants. While I often tried to facilitate a side-by-side lateral relationship with my participants, the hierarchy where I was considered to be the expert helper was acknowledged, and my psychotherapeutic skills were used to create safety and containment. This was particularly notable when participants were sharing unprocessed sibling stories and I felt it was necessary to contain any difficult emotions that arose for participants. Thus, my reflexivity in the interviews helped me to be aware of what was required during "complex, intricate emotional encounters with participants" (Harvey, 2017a, p. 36).

In my process notes after the first interviews, I would often explore a hypothesis, only to have it completely thrown out in the second interview as new content and processes emerged with each participant. I reflected and sought supervision on whether my interpretations were informed by my own desires to intrude specific types of knowledge into the research encounter, as suggested by Harvey (2017b). The third interview became the space where I could directly check any interpretations I had developed. All emerging interpretations were checked against participants' experiences. As opposed to offering definite interpretations, I offered my genuine,

exploratory comments to the participants (Strømme et al., 2010). This seemed to create a space where participants would feel safe to explore strong affective responses to their siblings. The establishment of a safe space also meant that participants did contradict and clarify me. This returned the power of clarifying interpretations and guiding the interviews back to the research participants. Thus, I attempted to constantly create a space for myself and the participants to move between vertical and lateral transferences in our intersubjective relationship in order to facilitate and maintain connection and safety.

The ethical concerns of not encouraging participants' therapeutic expectancy was part of my preparation for the psychoanalytic interviews. The series of interviews allowed for repeated, intense contact between me and each participant in a way that facilitated a strong and intimate relationship to develop which, in turn, lead to in-depth and meaningful disclosure (Harvey, 2017b). Nevertheless, I was surprised by how deeply affected I was by my participants' sibling stories, often dreaming about them and talking about them in my own psychotherapy and supervision sessions. I felt that they were also deeply affected through our interactions throughout the interview process. While my own interview preparations ensured that the interviews were not the same as psychotherapy in my mind and I ensured that participants were comfortable with the depth of exploration and discussion, I think it is possible that some of the participants may have experienced the interviews as therapeutic. These types of interviews can be perceived as opportunities for psychotherapeutic engagement by participants (Birch & Miller, 2000). The extended contract between us in which personal, intimate sibling stories were shared may have suggested a psychotherapeutic relationship for some of the participants (Knox & Burkard, 2009). A couple of the participants expressed the desire to commence their own psychotherapy with me after the conclusion of the interview process. I even shared their desire to

further explore these participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics that unfolded during the interviews, which I explored in my own supervision and personal psychotherapy. I reminded myself and communicated to participants that our intersubjective relationship was set up according to research principles and it would not be ethical to pursue a psychotherapeutic relationship with them. The participants in this study were emotionally contained at the end of the interview series, supported by my responses to their emotional processes evoked by the interviews, adequate debriefing at the end of each encounter with me, and in a few cases, referrals to other psychotherapists.

Data analysis. Cartwright (2004) argues that the greater the insight that a researcher can gain with regards to their own personal reasons and responses to the particular phenomena being studied, the greater the likelihood that data analysis will accurately reflect the participants' experiences. My own process of reflexivity that has been outlined above has shown that reflexivity has been a research tool throughout this study, from deciding which methodology to use, to writing up case studies, and conducting literature reviews and interviews. Nevertheless, the interpretation and analysis of data involved reflexivity in a significantly different way. Informed by ethical principles and a desire to show research integrity, data analysis involved many others, including my research supervisor, clinical supervisors, other PhD candidates and supervisors, and a psychoanalytically informed writing group. While it was anxiety-provoking to share my clinical case notes, field notes, and transcripts of the interviews with professionals who I look up to and admire, this sharing enabled me to revisit and rework interpretations and emerging hypotheses. My own "projections, introjections and fantasies that [were] elicited by the research relationship" (Saville Yong, 2009, p. 7) were vital sources of data on the intersubjective dynamics between myself and participants; however, sharing and exploring these experiences in

an open and vulnerable way meant that I needed to first feel safe and contained by those offering feedback. Most of the time the feedback was tough to hear, but the additional observations of the data from a group of my professional peers who come from diverse theoretical perspectives helped identify blind spots in my thinking and strengthened my analysis and interpretation of the data.

As a psychanalytically informed therapist and researcher, I am in an on-going process of self-reflection, which is supported by my personal psychotherapy and supervision, and this is considered to be beneficial for fostering reflexivity (Harvey, 2017b; Holmes, 2014). To understand the impact my own subjectivity, personal biases, and experiences has had on this research endeavour has required self-analysis, moment-to-moment awareness when engaging with participants, careful attention to feeling states and transference-countertransference dynamics, and containment of emotionally intense reactions in response to difficult and sensitive material for myself and the participants (Harvey, 2017a). While I aimed to be reflexive throughout the research process, this willingness does not necessarily lead to the self-awareness and insight required in order to fully acknowledge the impact on the research process. An understanding of the researcher's contribution to the research is never complete due to the "complex unconscious processes interacting with the research work, encouraging some ways of going about things, inhibiting others" (Frosh & Saville Young, 2008, p. 113). I expect I will continue to grapple with siblings long after the conclusion of this research, both 'off the couch' in my personal life and 'on the couch' in my clinical work with patients.

Concluding Remarks

Informed by the gaps in self psychology and traditional psychoanalysis regarding the functions of sibling relationships, this chapter has outlined how this research endeavour set out to explore the potential developmental functions of siblings both inside and outside of the clinical context. Two different qualitative research methods were employed to answer the research questions: the psychotherapy case study and the psychoanalytic research interview. The results from the case study-based aspect of the study are presented in Chapter Four, where vertical and lateral selfobjects are introduced. The results from the psychoanalytic research interviews are presented in Chapter Five and Six, where vertical and lateral functions are defined and applied to childhood and adulthood respectively. Chapter Seven provides an integration of the available literature (presented in Chapter Two), the case study (presented in Chapter Four), and psychoanalytic interviews (presented in Chapter Five and Six), in order to deepen psychoanalytic and self psychology understandings of the potential developmental functions of siblings.

CHAPTER 4

Introducing Vertical and Lateral Selfobjects

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

- William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*

Prescript

As a psychoanalytic therapist and researcher, this thesis was interested in the potential developmental functions that siblings may serve, specifically using theoretical constructs from self psychology. The literature review in Chapter Two concluded with a call for psychoanalytic therapists to interrogate how sibling experiences may emerge in therapeutic processes, as well as engage more actively with psychoanalytic theories to guide emerging hypotheses on sibling experiences. This chapter introduces the reader to the case study-based aspect of the research study. By examining a clinical case study from my own private practice, I endeavoured to answer the second research question: in what ways can a sibling fulfil the developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring? The exploration of several preliminary hypotheses in response to this research question was published as an original article, entitled “Welcoming siblings to self psychology: Exploring vertical and lateral selfobjects”. The article was published in 2019 in *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context*. The article overleaf shows that the intersection between the vertical and lateral axes in a specific psychological environment can offer diverse selfobject experiences to complement and supplement the development of a cohesive self.

ARTICLE: Welcoming Siblings to Self Psychology: Exploring Vertical and Lateral Selfobjects

Abstract

The early selfobject experiences for many individuals may include both parents and siblings. While parents' responses to selfobject needs are well documented in clinical case studies, cases in which siblings also provide selfobject experiences seem to be relatively unexplored in self psychology. The selfobject needs of idealising, twinship, and mirroring have been conceptualised predominately as fulfilled by parents or by siblings replacing or compensating for deficient parental functions. An exploration of a clinical case study is presented in which both a parent and siblings provided selfobject experiences. Based on the developmental history, selfobject transferences, and psychotherapeutic process of this case study, several hypotheses regarding siblings and parents fulfilling selfobject needs are proposed. It would seem that a family milieu that contains siblings can provide opportunities for more diverse selfobject experiences. While this introduces more developmental complexity as parents and siblings may respond to selfobject needs differently, the occasional frustration of selfobject needs are also developmentally necessary for the development of a cohesive self. Future research and theoretical exploration on the potential functions of siblings in self development would be valuable, as many questions regarding the fulfilment of selfobject needs by siblings remain unanswered.

Introductory Remarks

Our unique selfobject experiences are significant from birth to death, influencing who we are and how we relate to others. Selfobject needs can be fulfilled by significant people or things outside

of ourselves, offering us validation, a sense of belonging, and sources of perfection to idealise and merge with. While there is a well-developed understanding of parents fulfilling selfobject needs in the family milieu, there have been few attempts to explore how siblings can fulfil selfobject needs and how this may shape our intrapsychic and interpersonal development.

Kohut (1984) argued that "the self's autonomy is only relative. … [A] self can never exist outside a matrix of selfobjects" (p. 61). Siblings as part of this matrix have not been given emphasis in self psychology, as siblings have been considered secondary to vertical figures, such as parents (Coles, 2003; Lichtenberg, 2012; Mitchell, 2003; Wittenberg, 2009). Some authors (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kivowitz, 1995; Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009), including Kohut (1984), have proposed that siblings can fulfil selfobject needs if siblings are experienced as responsive in the family milieu. There may be two types of selfobject experiences available to a developing child in the family milieu: a vertical selfobject experience (provided by one that yields more hierarchical power than me, e.g., a parent or other authority figure) and a lateral selfobject experiences (provided by one that reflects and is like me, e.g., a close-in-age sibling, peer or cousin; Mitchell, 2000). Generally, the earliest vertical selfobject experiences for the child may occur in the parent-child relationship (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984). On the other hand, the earliest lateral selfobject experiences for the child may occur in the sibling relationship. The selfobject experiences offered by siblings could intersect with the selfobject experiences offered by parents, shaping early development in unique ways.

Bank and Kahn (1982) argued that a case-by-case approach is necessary to recognise the unique potential functions of siblings in development instead of examining universal selfobject experiences that siblings may provide. In this article, I explore the subjective selfobject experiences that unfolded in a long-term psychotherapy process. The patient's matrix of

selfobjects seemed to include the intersection of vertical and lateral selfobject experiences related to early developmental experiences of parents and siblings that continued into the present as selfobject transferences. The use of selfobject theory in this article hence focuses on the patient's selfobject experiences offered by the particular matrix of selfobjects, recognising that these theoretical formulations can be used to elucidate psychological reality.

Where are Siblings in Self Psychology?

To explore siblings as significant others who may fulfil selfobject needs, it is necessary to clarify the term selfobject. Kohut's (1971, 1977, 1984) use of the term underwent developmental shifts as he distanced from classical drive theory and established an alternative depth psychology. Consequently, Kohut's (1971, 1977, 1984) use of the term selfobject is fundamentally different to Freudian usage of the term object. While an object can be identified through representation and originates from desire, selfobject can be identified through function and originates from the intrapsychic need for cohesion, strength, and harmony. Kohut (1984) defined selfobject as "that dimension of our experience of another person that relates to the person's functions in shoring up our self" (pp. 49-50). The significant other can be any person or thing that provides functions that become inseparable from the self (Moberly, 1985). Thus, the term *selfobject* is considered to be multifaceted, as it is an intrapsychic experience that provides vital psychological functions, as well as involves our experiences of significant others present in the external environment.

In self psychology, our experiences of significant others are assumed to offer the functions of fulfilling selfobject needs (Kohut, 1971). Available and responsive significant others can provide three functions: idealising (the need to be a part of an admired, protective other), twinship (the need to be connected to an essentially alike other), and mirroring (the need to be

accepted and affirmed by another). It is our experiences of these significant others in the external environment that promote the structuralisation and maintenance of a cohesive self. Kohut (1984) proposed that selfobject experiences could include available vertical and lateral figures:

> "The selfobject dimensions of the relations of children to parental adults (mirroring selfobjects and idealised others) and sibling figures (alter-egos) concern to a considerable extent selfobject experiences" (p. 704).

If the external environment contains siblings who are experienced as available and responsive significant others, siblings may provide lateral selfobject experiences. Furthermore, lateral selfobject experiences may be distinctive from the selfobject experiences offered in the vertical parent-child relationship.

In existing research, siblings are intensively studied only as replacement parental figures, focusing on their capacity to fulfil selfobject needs when parental care is absent or lacking in consistency and reliability (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kivowitz, 1995; Wittenberg, 2009). For cases in which siblings are placed into positions where parental responsibilities are adopted, problematic consequences for development of the sibling who takes on the parental responsibilities, as well as the sibling who is cared for by a sibling, is shown. When siblings are conceptualised as replacement parental figures, unreasonable expectations are placed on them to show the maturity, sensitivity, and psychological holding of a parental figure. In doing so, the possible functions of siblings in development are reduced to mere substitutes for providing vertical selfobject experiences. To explore the potential distinctive and adjunctive ways that siblings could fulfil selfobject needs would therefore require the presence of an available and responsive vertical figure to reduce the possibility of a sibling serving only as a replacement parental figure.

This article seeks not to undermine the foundation of self psychology that emphasises the primary importance of the vertical axis. Rather, this article additionally explores the possible importance of the lateral axis in self development. The use of self psychology as the theoretical grounding serves to direct the focus of this article on the importance of siblings in fulfilling specific developmental needs: idealising, twinship, and mirroring, which have previously been conceptualised only as vertically fulfilled by parents or by siblings replacing parental functions.

The Case of "Natalie"

As some authors (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kivowitz, 1995; Kohut, 1984; Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009) have suggested that siblings can fulfil selfobject needs in unique ways, a long-term clinical case was selected in which both siblings and a parent seemed to offer selfobject experiences. A contextualised developmental history of the case of Natalie is presented, followed by an introspective analysis and discussion of how her selfobject experiences may have impacted her development as evidenced in her adult psychotherapeutic process.

Natalie, a woman in her early twenties, willingly presented for psychotherapy on her older sister's recommendation. She presented as overtly idealistic, yet she battled to set goals for her life. She lacked an internal state of security and stability and relied heavily on others to regulate her sense of self. The conflict between her well-developed system of ideals and her unstable sense of self-esteem was her main reason for engaging in psychotherapy.

For the purposes of this article, a sibling is defined as one of two or more individuals who share two common biological parents and a home environment throughout childhood. Natalie was the last born of three siblings. The oldest child was Natalie's brother, who was 3 years older

than her. The second born was a sister, who was 15 months older than her. Natalie felt that both her siblings were present and significant figures in her childhood. Due to the close age gap between the siblings, they consistently engaged with one another at home and school and continued to have close relationships in adulthood. Natalie recollected that her parents encouraged their children to play and look after one another. She had few memories of parental involvement or supervision of the siblings' experiences of one another.

Natalie experienced her mother as a present and responsive parental figure, especially during one-on-one interactions. She considered her mother to be "*a strong woman who holds our family together with her values*." Natalie never felt she was able to leave her mother's side during family interactions. When the family interacted, Natalie recalled that there would be a split between the males and females: her older brother and father would be occupied in one stereotypically masculine activity while her mother, older sister, and Natalie would be occupied in a separate stereotypically feminine activity. Natalie had few childhood memories of interacting with her father, but she did recall him teasing Natalie and her mother by calling them both "*sensitive*," "*moody*," and "*overemotional*."

Natalie felt adoration for her older sister as a child. In their childhood games, Natalie remembered that her older sister demanded that Natalie be just like her. As Natalie looked up to her sister, she was happy to conform to these demands of sameness. This was a time in their relationship that Natalie remembered fondly as they shared interests and talents, such as singing, dancing, and playing pretend mommy games. However, the relationship became conflictual when her sister demanded that Natalie be different: "*Stop copying me*," "*Don't be like me*," and "*We can't both be the mommy*." Natalie engaged in the conflict by either competing with her sister despite her demands for difference or going to play with her older brother instead.

While Natalie felt distanced from males in family interactions, her older brother played with Natalie when their father was not present. Natalie's brother also demanded that Natalie be similar to him when she engaged with him, which mainly consisted of playing sport with him and his friends. Natalie enjoyed "*being one of the boys*," and she developed strong sporting abilities as a result. Natalie's sister would often interrupt this "*boys only*" play by demanding that Natalie come and play with her.

In adolescence, Natalie experienced some distance from her siblings as their peer relationships took precedence. She developed strong peer relationships in the church and aligned her appearance, opinions, and values strictly to Catholicism. Her mother strongly supported her church activities. However, there were elements of herself that were not fully allowed expression in the church, causing confusion for Natalie, such as engaging in sexual exploration and her acceptance of homosexuality. Her questioning on these matters was not welcome in church or by her mother. She feared what would happen if they knew her true feelings on these matters. Natalie's school and university friends allowed more space for self-exploration; however, they always called her the "*good Catholic girl*," sometimes excluding her from their more rebellious endeavours. Natalie found it easier to downplay her strong religious beliefs when interacting with her friends. At the time of presentation, Natalie felt as if she had to hide different parts of herself, as she was not accepted for her totality, whether in her family, in her church, or with her friends. She deeply desired that someone tell her what she should be doing with her life, yet different people told her to pursue conflicting paths.

Discussion

Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984) argued that when selfobject needs are not adequately fulfilled in childhood, they persist as unmet needs throughout life and continue to require fulfilment. These unmet selfobjects needs arise spontaneously as selfobject transferences in other relationships, including the analytic situation. The differentiation between different selfobject transferences as they unfold in the analytic situation by the analyst is integral as these transferences can be transformed through a systematic and patiently worked-through process to promote growth and further structuralisation (Kohut, 1984). While the idealising, twinship, and mirroring selfobject transferences are central, Kohut (1984) acknowledged "that there are still transferences - probably varieties of selfobject transferences - that have not yet been discovered and which, therefore, remain unanalysed" (p. 209). Therefore, it may be useful to attempt to differentiate between lateral and vertical selfobject transferences, as analysts can be transformed into a sibling or a parent or both simultaneously in the analytic situation (Lesser, 1978).

While the discussion will include a differentiation between lateral and vertical selfobject transferences, the distinction between the vertical and lateral is not absolute as any relationship can include vertical and lateral experiences. The relationships between close-in-age siblings often also include vertical concerns of hierarchy and ascent and descent, while relationships between parents and children can be concerned with lateral connection. This is further complicated by the multiplicity of family constellations, birth order, gender and age differences, and external contextual factors, such as dominating ideologies, social, economic, political and cultural belief systems, and structures that impact on and shape our experiences. Therefore, separating the matrix of selfobjects into the binary of vertical and lateral experiences is limiting due to the intersecting and constantly shifting vertical and lateral axes, as well as these

contextual factors. As such, the discussion acknowledges the contextualised and shifting nature of the vertical and lateral selfobject transferences as they emerged throughout the therapeutic process.

Fisch (2008) argued that although selfobject transferences are useful when analysing clinical case material, there is also value in broadening the theoretical lens to include other modes of analysis when necessary. Kohut (1982) also acknowledged the limitations of his analytical approach:

> As is the case with extrospection and internal reality, introspection and empathy may misperceive the psychic reality we scrutinise (already on the level of data collection), either because we are guided by erroneous expectations, by misleading theories that distort our perception, or because we are not sufficiently conscientious and rigorous in immersing ourselves for protracted periods in the field of our observation. We must, in other words, be able to tolerate uncertainty and to postpone our closures. (p. 396)

Postmodern critiques of the primary focus on selfobject transferences suggest that this analytical approach also fails to acknowledge the intersubjective context of all experience (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992). The assumption that selfobjects are experienced intrapsychically as autonomous parts of the self (Moberly, 1985) is heavily criticised by relational theorists due to the exclusive focus on the subjectivity or experience of one party in a two-party interaction (Benjamin, 1998).

The discussion is hence guided by the assumption that "no thought, feeling or sensation can be considered to be the same as it was or will be outside of the context of the specific (and continually shifting) intersubjectivity created by analyst and analysand" (Ogden, 1994, p. 8). As such, I analyse the process that unfolded in the therapeutic relationship from within the 'contextual unit' or 'inter-subjective field' which is being observed (Stolorow et al., 1983). Instead of standing outside of the patient's psychic reality, where I am restricted to making inferences about the complex sense of self, I attempt to employ an empathic introspective stance

of observation of selfobject transferences. I have attempted to be rigorous in my immersion and introspection of what emerged in the therapeutic process, with a specific focus on the underlying intrapsychic dynamics of both the patient and myself (Renik, 1993). Thus, the discussion tentatively makes sense of the patient's lateral and vertical selfobject experiences that emerged in an indissoluble psychological system experienced by the two people interacting in the analytic context.

Idealised Beginnings

When I met Natalie for the first time, she explained that she had never engaged in psychotherapy before. She eagerly responded to me and proceeded to compliment me on my office décor and attire. It seemed to me that there was an underlying uneasiness in her rushed chatter and stream of compliments. My mirroring of this uneasiness was met with a quick reply: "*I was nervous about coming, but you are so calming and easy to talk to.…I am now feeling good about being here*." As we neared the end of the session, Natalie was eager to set up another appointment. As she left my office, it felt to me like she did not want to leave.

The calm and predictable therapeutic space alleviated some of Natalie's anxiety regarding her sense of self in the beginning stages of our relationship. It is possible that Natalie's selfobject need for idealising was reactivated in therapy, which may be connected to early idealising selfobject experiences. Natalie initially seemed to experience me as the "*right therapist*" and wanted me to show her the "*right path for my life*." She would copy phrases I frequently used, approve of books in my office, and praise me as "*really helping*." This could suggest the development of idealising transference (Kohut, 1971), as Natalie seemed to experience me as strong, calm, and admirable.

Kohut (1984) argued that the selfobject experiences of childhood will establish themselves in the analysis, provided the analysis does not block the spontaneous unfolding of selfobject transferences. During the beginning stages of therapy, I struggled with Natalie's idealisation of me. I often feel uncomfortable when patients idealise me, and I tend to emphasise agency and mutuality in the therapeutic relationship, as opposed to dependency and hierarchy, which naturally can arise in the analytic situation (Moberly, 1985). The early idealising selfobject transference often felt as if I were a parental figure due to the level of dependency and Natalie's strong respect for my authority, which may indicate vertical idealising selfobject transference. I predominately experienced irritation when Natalie would praise or elevate me. In response, I would abruptly interrupt her and redirect us back toward her own underlying anxiety. My harsh rejection of her idealisation of me heightened her anxiety and threatened the safety of our therapeutic relationship.

Natalie retreated from me and turned to her sister, a figure she respected and admired, to process my rejection of her idealisation. Natalie revealed that she phoned her sister in tears after a session in which such rejection occurred and considered terminating therapy during this time. Natalie's sister suggested she bring up her feelings with me. Drawing upon the strength she received from her sister, Natalie's assertively communicated her frustration regarding my lack of affirming responses to her compliments: "*It feels like my opinion of you doesn't matter to you at all, where your opinion of me is so important to me*." Surrounded by some safety remaining in our therapeutic relationship, Natalie was able to identify my failing and challenge me on it. My response to this identification was not defensive; rather, I acknowledged my empathic failure and actively made reparation by accepting and allowing her idealising need for me. I owned my

irritation and subsequent abruptness as my own defence against my fears of falling off the pedestal on which Natalie had placed me.

During the processing of the therapeutic rupture and repair, the initial idealising selfobject transference was no longer blocked by me and could now reveal itself more spontaneously. The experience of Natalie's intense need to merge with an external ideal was now welcomed in the analysis, opening up spaces for me to respond with experience-near understanding and empathy. In the here-and-now of our relationship, we could experience her negative feelings about sharing me with other patients, her reliance on me between sessions, and her struggles with saying goodbye at the end of each session. Natalie felt like she could trust in the reality and reliability of our relationship, and I felt I could share my understandings of her reactions in dynamic terms. From this foundation, I could begin to make interpretations of the idealising transference that strengthened our developing empathic bond and deepened her understanding of herself.

A source of tranquillity and security for Natalie that became apparent in the early stages of our relationship was talking about her mother and siblings. Hence, empathic understandings of Natalie's need for idealisation were developmentally connected to experiences of her mother and her older siblings. We came to understand that Natalie's idealising transferences with her siblings and mother may have provided her with a sense of strength, calmness, and admiration. Her older sister received the most admiration from Natalie. Everything that Natalie wished she could be, such as progressing in her career, married to a wonderful man, and confident in her own beauty, was possessed by her sister. Natalie would also liken me to her sister at times and tirelessly strived to imitate her. By merging with her sister, Natalie was able to experience admiration and find a sense of self in becoming like the admired other. Furthermore, it was

merger with her sister that helped Natalie confront my failing when I blocked the spontaneous development of an idealising transference in the analytic situation. Natalie's older brother was admired for different qualities, such as his ambition and independence from the family, which Natalie considered to be more masculine. By merging with her brother, Natalie was able to receive strength from a male figure and draw upon these qualities. Her mother was idealised for her commitment to her family. By merging with her mother, Natalie received a solid set of family goals and ideals as she held on tightly to the values of caretaking and self-sacrifice that her mother represented.

In exploring Natalie's idealising selfobject experiences, there were instances in which my interpretations were incorrect. Kohut (1984) argued that "analysis is disrupted time and time again by the analyst's unavoidable, yet only temporary and thus non traumatic empathy failures" (p. 66). Natalie would confront these optimal failures as opposed to retreating from me as she had done earlier in therapy, allowing me to recognise my failings and empathically interpret the dynamics that emerged between us in the repair. In particular, my empathic failures seemed to lessen the strength of the vertical idealising selfobject transference as Natalie experienced me as a real person who made mistakes. Through the processing of these failures, I felt like I was transformed into a lateral sibling-like figure who could be challenged and with whom power could be shared, which perhaps suggested the emergence of lateral idealising selfobject transference. Natalie also began to claim a sense of responsibility for ensuring that therapy continued to be a space where all parts of herself could be expressed, as opposed to terminating therapy. This solidified her sense of her own strength as she was able to withstand and confront my empathic failures in order to have her selfobject needs fulfilled. She also began to explore and confront failures in her other idealising vertical and lateral selfobject experiences.

On the vertical axis, the focus of the therapy shifted to Natalie's struggles with her mother and feeling like there was not space for Natalie to be herself. Natalie began to question whether her ideals and goals were consistent with her sense of self or just "*exact copies of my mom*." She was also considering moving out of the parental home and moving in with her boyfriend, which her mother vehemently opposed on religious grounds. During this time, Natalie's mother made contact with me in an attempt to convince Natalie it would not be good for her to move in with her boyfriend. In my brief discussion with her mother to reinforce the boundaries of my therapeutic relationship with Natalie, I sensed her mother's lack of attunement to Natalie's need to be endopsychically separate from her. I wondered whether the idealising transference served Natalie's mother as a validation for her sense of self, which Natalie was now beginning to challenge.

Childhood memories in which Natalie desired to leave her mother's side during family interactions re-emerged for Natalie. Natalie felt that she would disappear into her mother during these family interactions. Natalie experienced her mother's need for her to be close as threatening and overwhelming as a child: "*It was too much. … I could never challenge her on that*." However, Natalie now desired to establish her own values and ideals, separate from her mother. Natalie was starting to experience her idealising selfobjects as more realistic figures that could be challenged to allow a firmer sense of self to emerge.

Natalie's idealising selfobject experiences of her siblings also included failures at times; however, there are some apparent differences in the way Natalie was able to work through these lateral failings. Natalie's siblings would demand nonseparateness and undifferentiation in their shared play as children, creating possibilities for Natalie to give up her sense of self and become the same as the idealised other (Kohut, 1971; Loewald, 2000). This idealising transference

served the siblings developmentally for a time; yet Natalie seemed to also long for spaces for separateness and differentiation. While Natalie also experienced this longing for separateness in her vertical relationship with her mother, it was only in the lateral relationships with siblings that she was able to enact this longing by competing with her sister or playing with her brother. Natalie's lateral idealising selfobject experiences with her siblings allowed her to challenge the threat of the merger, which she felt she could not with her mother.

While Kohut (1971) argued that there is a longing for merger with an idealising imago for safety and strength, the threat of the idealising transference is a loss of self into the idealised other. Flanagan (2011) argued that a sibling may pose less of a threat of loss of self "into the bigness and greatness of another" (p. 173), proposing that a sibling may provide less threatening idealising selfobject experiences. Studies have shown that when idealising selfobject experiences are too great or overwhelming, the child can be left feeling worthless, powerless, little, or lacking a sense of self (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Flanagan, 2011; Kahn, 1988; Kohut, 1971). It is possible that this threat of merger is greater in the vertical parental-child relationship due to the hierarchical structure in place and imbalance of power. Perhaps the experiences of lateral idealising selfobject are less overwhelming due to the more equalitarian sharing of power that may exist between siblings.

Natalie's case may suggest the potential for both parents and siblings to fulfil the selfobject need for idealisation. In Natalie's case, the availability of her mother and idealisation of her did not preclude Natalie from idealising her siblings as well. It may be possible that vertical and lateral figures could fulfil the child's needs for idealisation if these figures are experienced in an idealised manner, present, and respond with attunement at least some of the time. Being born into a family milieu with siblings provided Natalie with the opportunity to have

more diverse selfobject experiences, each with the potential to respond to her needs appropriately or not. Idealised imagos may be sought in the external environment, and if consistently available older siblings are present, the siblings may be likely to provide lateral idealising selfobject experiences in addition to available vertical idealising selfobject experiences provided by parents. Whether a younger sibling could also provide lateral idealising selfobject experiences may be an interesting developmental possibility to further explore.

Twinship Belonging

From my first meeting with Natalie, I felt a sense of kinship with her. Our lives had many similarities in terms of our family composition, educational opportunities, and even where we grew up. I am cautious of feeling similar to my patients, as this has the potential to blind me to differences that I would more actively interrogate with dissimilar patients. Consequently, I aimed to keep my similarities with Natalie hidden and attempted to allow my understanding of her to unfold as our relationship developed. My caution regarding our kinship may have been a barrier to the therapy in the earlier stages. I may have unconsciously favoured and encouraged the vertical selfobject transference to initially develop to lessen my discomfort and uncertainty about our familial similarities (Mitchell, 2000).

Once Natalie began to experience me as a "*real therapist*" (as opposed to the ideal one) and continued to experience the predictability and empathic attunement of the therapeutic environment, she began to search for similarities with me. Natalie desired to know details about my life, such as whether I was married, religious, had siblings or children. The twinship transference is conceptualised as the need to feel similar to others and to be accepted, which seemed to be emerging in our relationship. This is considered to be as a more developmentally

mature phase than the idealising transference as there is recognition that the other has a separate existence (Kohut, 1971).

Kohut (1984) acknowledged the selfobject need for twinship required further theoretical clarification. Contemporary self psychologists have further explored the selfobject need for twinship (Brothers, 2012; Lichtenberg, 2012; Togashi, 2008, 2012, 2014; Togashi & Kottler, 2012), proposing that twinship selfobject relationships are fundamentally concerned with belonging and acceptance "by one's cohort" (Basch, 1994, p. 4), without denying the complexity of similarity and difference. While it could be argued that siblings are likely to provide twinship selfobject experiences due to their intra-generational shared status, this has not been explored due to the relative lack of theoretical clarity on how twinship could relate to sibling relationships (Lichtenberg, 2012). A vertical figure, such as a parent, may not be able to exclusively fulfil twinship selfobject needs due to the intergenerational hierarchical structure in place (Mitchell, 2003).

Marmarosh and Mann (2014) proposed that the process of repairing therapeutic ruptures promotes changes in the patient's selfobject needs. In our relationship, my acceptance of Natalie's idealising selfobject need, our working-through of my inaccurate interpretations, and the transformation of the vertical selfobject transference into lateral selfobject transference may have been necessary for the twinship selfobject transference to emerge. Natalie's awareness that I was a person who also experienced defences, fears, and imperfections possibly made me more accessible and stimulated her desire to know more about me. Similar to the stream of compliments in the earlier stages of our relationship, I initially experienced her questions about me as a cover for her anxiety regarding her sense of self, and I felt a strong need to hold on to my privacy in response. Outside of our sessions, I questioned her underlying motivations for wanting

to know more about me: Did she want to know me so she could imitate me, as she had done as a child with her sister? Did she hope that by finding similarities with me our connection would deepen? Or did she hope she could find aspects of me that replicated parts of herself, providing her with more substance and validity? My deliberate and considered self-disclosures then served to build our connection, and she found herself in me and also finding not-herself in me, as well as me finding myself in Natalie and also finding not-myself in Natalie. I was also aware of the need to continue to address the echoes of her earlier frustration: "*It feels like my opinion of you doesn't matter to you at all, where your opinion of me is so important to me*" by creating a space together where two people could experience each other's similarities and be different without sacrificing connection.

Developmentally, the close age gap between Natalie and her siblings, as well as the availability and willingness to engage with one another, may have created opportunities for lateral twinship selfobject experiences in childhood. Natalie recalled that both she and her sister seemed to experience a sense of belonging and similarity in their shared play. Natalie's relationship with her older brother seemed to be another lateral twinship selfobject experience where her brother also demanded that Natalie be similar to him, despite their gender and age differences. Natalie seemed to enjoy "*being one of the boys*," suggesting that her brother's friends may also have provided lateral twinship selfobject experiences. In these relationships, Natalie felt fulfilment at having a space where she belonged and was able to develop a sense of self that was connected to others. However, conflict seemed to arise whenever difference was introduced into their relationship, such as when her sister wanted Natalie to be different or when Natalie played with her brother.

According to Lichtenberg (2012), twinship selfobject experiences are vitalising when the complexity of similarity and difference is maintained. Brothers (2012) identified 'the dark side of twinship', wherein the complexity of same and different is reduced to 'same only' due to the need to feel connected in selfobject experiences. In this respect, it appears that a healthy twinship experience was not consistently fulfilled in Natalie's relationships with her siblings, as both seemed to demand similarity for belonging. It is possible that Natalie did not experience lateral twinship selfobject experiences with her siblings where her differences and similarities could be embraced. In her relationship with her sister, acceptance and rejection were based on being merged with her when it served her sister and being distinct from her when it threatened her sister's narcissism. In her relationship with older brother, her acceptance was based on her ability to be "*one of the boys*," and hence their twinship transference involved same-only. These lateral selfobject experiences did not seem to allow the exploration of the parts of Natalie that were different from others, possibly contributing to an unmet developmental need for twinship

Natalie may have become fixated on gaining a sense of belonging in sibling twinship selfobject experiences and later with her peers. In adolescence and early adulthood, she aligned her appearance, opinions, and values to others' expectations of her, including her mother, her siblings, and her friends at school and church. This has been shown to be associated with a deep sense of insecurity or anxiety and an unstable connection to others (Togashi, 2012). It is possible that my awareness of this fixation and her anxiety partly contributed to my desire to hide my similarities, as Natalie seemed to gain a sense of self only when she was in relationship with others that demanded conformity. As I was able to process my own resistance to a lateral selfobject transference developing with Natalie, and allow myself to be experienced as a sibling figure in addition to a parental figure (Lesser, 1978), the rigidity of conformity seemed to

dissipate in our relationship. Natalie challenged me, disagreed with me, and revealed her differences more openly. While sharing similarities did lessen Natalie's anxiety, she developed the awareness that belonging established on this foundation was not vitalising and actively sought out relationships that embraced similarities and difference outside of therapy.

While Kohut (1984) and others (Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009) have focused exclusively on either parents or siblings as providing twinship selfobject experiences, it can be argued that a vitalising twinship selfobject experience may need to involve both vertical and lateral figures. As the child develops the psychic structures to recognise self-other distinctions and become more differentiated, the child is hypothesised to be able to acknowledge the distinctions between vertical and lateral relationships, as well as similarity and difference (Benjamin, 1998; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). As such, the need to belong would require fulfilment from both vertical and lateral figures: a sense of belonging with one's parents and other significant elders, as well as a sense of belonging with one's siblings, cousins, or peers. However, when the other is experienced as demanding conformity only, the parts of the self that may be different can become fragmented or denied, as Natalie seemed to experience. Connecting with others as 'same-only' negates the experience of a cohesive self, which may contribute to insecurity, anxiety, and unstable connection to oneself and others (Togashi, 2012).

Natalie expressed a fear of being "*caught out*" by a vertical authority figure, as there were always hidden parts of herself that she had to keep secret in order to retain her sense of belonging. This was evidenced in her fear of her playing with her brother when their father was around in childhood, as well as the church leaders or her mother discovering some of the ways she strayed from Catholicism as an adult. This may confirm that the need for twinship may not be fully realised without the involvement of a vertical figure, which seemed to be absent in

Natalie's development. Natalie's parents did not seem to regulate her lateral selfobject experiences or fulfil her twinship selfobject needs. Expressing her desire to move out, despite her mother's opposition, suggested to me that Natalie was asking her mother, "*Allow me to be different to you. Accept me for my differences*." Perhaps a vitalising twinship experience may be possible only when one is able to experience both vertical and lateral twinship selfobject experiences in which the complexity of similarity and difference is retained in each axis.

The developing child is preparing to function in a world where vertical and lateral relationships will need to be distinguishable (Mitchell, 2000), despite early intersections in the idealising selfobject experiences of lateral and vertical figures. As the child surrenders the idealisations of others, he or she is able form a more realistic understanding of both vertical and lateral figures, as well as the self. Whether the selfobject experiences will allow for sameness and difference to coexist in nonthreatening ways may depend on the other's own developmental needs. It is possible that twinship selfobject experiences can help the child learn to differentiate the rules and functions of lateral and vertical relationships that are originally merged by offering mirroring and validation of the developing child's similarities and differences.

Mirror Hungry

One of my first impressions of Natalie was that she could be singing, dancing, and performing on a stage. Natalie deeply desired to be distinguished, different, and noticed. Her performance would change based on her read of the audience, but it seemed to me that when she was offstage, the uncertainty and anxiety regarding "*who I am*" was overwhelming. While the onstage Natalie was captivating and appealing, I was invited to sit with her offstage as the therapy progressed and appreciate the self beyond the performance.

Natalie expressed a deep longing for mirroring. Mirroring is the child's need to feel omnipotent, perfect, and all-powerful. The mirror transference is defined as the longing to be mirrored as a separate person in order to satisfy the child's narcissistic desires (Kohut, 1971). This selfobject need is fulfilled when others reflect and identify the unique capacities, talents, and characteristics of the child (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984). Natalie rarely experienced feelings of being omnipotent, perfect, and all powerful in her relationships. Kohut (1984) emphasised that parents can provide appropriate mirroring selfobject experiences if the structure of healthy narcissism is already established. If vertical figures create a mirroring identification by fostering empathy within the family milieu, it may be likely that a sibling can develop the ability to also provide appropriate and responsive mirroring selfobject experiences. A lateral figure can then help the child differentiate themselves from other figures. Thus, the need for mirroring could be fulfilled by both or either lateral and vertical figures.

In our relationship, my initial lack of mirroring regarding Natalie's needs to idealise me and find similarities with me was frustrating, as Natalie was not sure who to be with me. I accepted responsibility for these empathic failures and affirmed her selfobject needs for idealisation and twinship with me. This reduced Natalie's anxiety, regulated the tensions between us, and allowed soothing, strength, and belonging to be internalised in the here-and-now. The reliable therapeutic space and my consistent, mostly empathic responses provided the opportunity for Natalie to now offer her whole self for validation, which allowed her to begin to explore the parts of herself in therapy she usually kept hidden from others.

Developmentally, Natalie's desire to be seen and acknowledged as herself was often counteracted by demands for merger and sameness in her vertical and lateral selfobject experiences. Her mother seemed able to mirror the parts of Natalie that reflected her, such as

their shared emotionality and values. This made it difficult for Natalie to distinguish her own thoughts, wishes, and intentions from those of her mother at times. However, when Natalie explored parts of herself that were different from her mother, such as her interest in sport or challenging certain religious beliefs, her mother seemed unable to provide responsive-empathic mirroring responses. Instead, her mother would respond with guilt-inducing emotional displays of abandonment and an insistence on a return to the archaic merger once more, as evidenced by her response to Natalie's desire to move out. Thus, it does not seem as if Natalie received consistent and appropriate mirroring selfobject experiences from her mother.

Mirroring selfobject experiences may have been sought in Natalie's relationships with her siblings more intently in the absence of appropriate vertical mirroring selfobject experiences. Yet Natalie could not recall her siblings offering lateral mirroring selfobject experiences by acknowledging her unique singing or sporting talents as anything except reflections of their own abilities or involvement. Natalie's older siblings may have been more developmentally concerned with narcissistic gratification of their own mirroring needs. When Natalie merged with either of her siblings, this possibly created a space where they felt idealised, as Natalie may have offered mirroring of her siblings' omnipotence and perfection. When siblings function as a replacement for chronic parental failure by providing responsive-empathic mirroring responses, it would seem that both siblings can become trapped in a pathological self-selfobject dynamic of idealising and mirroring (Kahn, 1988), which may have occurred in Natalie's case. Both siblings' sense of self can become rooted in the dynamic that each sibling must fulfil these specific selfobject needs or else their sense of self would be annihilated completely.

The ability of a sibling to fulfil a mirroring selfobject need would depend on maturity, as it would require the structure of healthy narcissism to already be established. Studies show that if

a sibling is expected to serve as a mirroring selfobject before they themselves have experienced mirroring in an optimal way, the sibling is dominated by "fear that you're not measuring up or that you're letting somebody down or that you're doing something wrong or that you're defective in some way" (Wittenberg, 2009, p. 50). As such, it is unlikely that a younger sibling can provide appropriate mirroring responses to an older sibling due to the other's own unmet developmental needs. It is also unlikely that an older sibling can provide appropriate mirroring responses unless the older sibling has already experienced his or her own appropriate mirroring selfobject experiences.

In a healthy childhood milieu, it is possible that a parent, as well as a sibling, could fulfil the need to feel omnipotent, perfect, and all-powerful by reflecting and identifying the unique capacities, talents, and characteristics of the child. Vertical figures would first need to create a mirroring identification by fostering empathy in their children, which would then enhance the ability for a sibling to provide appropriate lateral mirroring selfobject experiences for another sibling. The mirroring figure would immerse him- or herself in the child's world, empathically attuning him- or herself to the child's experiences (Kohut, 1971). In doing so, the mirroring selfobject experience offers acknowledgment and participation in the reality of two subjects where both the self and the other can coexist (Benjamin, 1998) and be validated.

Minor, non-traumatic empathic failures will inevitably occur, as one can never be completely attuned to the experiences of another. These failures in mirroring are vital for healthy development to facilitate the "gradual recognition of the realistic imperfections and limitations of the self" (Kohut, 1971, p. 108). These failures in empathic attunement and gratification serve to diminish the domain and power of the grandiose fantasy, ensuring the development of healthy narcissism. It is possible that both parents and siblings will make these empathic failures,

providing developmental opportunities for the child to work through failure and disappointment in relationships with others (Flanagan, 2011). Optimal balance between empathic gratification and empathic failure can be more easily obtained through all of the child's selfobject experiences, contributing to the development of a secure and resilient sense of self.

As previously discussed, past research has shown that siblings can provide selfobject experiences in the failure or absence of parental care (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Wittenberg, 2009); however, it is important to emphasise that these failures are relative to the other's capacity to fulfil selfobject needs (Flanagan, 2011; Kahn, 1988; Kohut, 1977) This could mean that even if a parent is responsive and present some of the time, a high-access sibling may also provide additional opportunities for selfobject experiences, as in Natalie's case. When a vertical figure, such as a parent, may fail to offer optimal frustration at least some of the time, a lateral figure, such as a sibling, may provide the opportunity for idealisation, twinship, or mirroring in an appropriate way at that time. Pathological outcomes seem to be more likely when siblings are exclusively required to fulfil selfobject needs, which may occur when the vertical figure chronically inappropriately responds to selfobject needs due to his or her own disorder of the self (Kohut, 1977). That which has been unresolved by the parent has the potential to be more problematic for the child's adaptation, providing a possible reason as to why vertical figures have been prioritised over lateral figures. If the lateral and vertical selfobject experiences are contradictory or inconsistent, developmental failures may also be more likely to occur. Thus, vertical and lateral selfobject experiences may need to be supplementary and integrating, even in their occasional failures. It is possible that in a family milieu where both parents and siblings provide confirming selfobject experiences, it may be more likely to facilitate the development of a cohesive self.

Concluding Remarks

Using selfobject theory, this article has yielded some preliminary hypotheses on the ways in which parents and siblings can provide vertical and lateral selfobject experiences. The analysis of a long-term psychotherapy case study presented in this article occurred in the treatment setting and has privileged the analyst's subjective perspective of the psychotherapy process. While I have attempted to immerse myself in the observation and acknowledge the intersubjectivity inherent in the analysis of the case, the hypotheses presented in this article are tentative and open to scrutiny. As experiences are embedded in cultural, generational, age, and gender contexts, these also need to be interrogated in analyses. Further analyses integrating other approaches could deepen understandings of the ways in which siblings could fulfil developmental needs beyond this article's main focus on selfobject experiences. The multiplicity of functions and intersecting influences of parents and siblings on self development are an important area for future theoretical exploration and analytical application.

CHAPTER 5

Introducing Vertical and Lateral Functions

So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry—seeming parted
But yet an union in partition—
Two lovely berries molded on one stem.

- William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Prescript

The analysis of a clinical case study in Chapter Four used selfobject theory to elucidate the concepts of vertical and lateral selfobject experiences. While the paper presented in the previous chapter was situated within the clinical context and privileged my interpretations of a long-term psychotherapy process, the aims of this thesis also required me to look beyond the clinical context to explore how these concepts can be understood and applied in other contexts. This chapter introduces the reader to the interview-based aspect of the research study, which was conducted outside of the psychotherapeutic context. To answer the two research questions: what are the potential developmental functions that a sibling may serve, and, what are the similarities and differences between a sibling as a selfobject and a parent as a selfobject, a group of six adults, who had high-access sibling relationships in childhood, participated in a series of unstructured, free-associative psychoanalytic interviews. The analysis of the participants' unconscious fantasies, selfobject experiences, defensive functioning, and symbolic meanings related to their siblings that emerged during these interviews was published as an original article, entitled "I am you and you are me: A self psychology perspective on sibling relationships". The article was published in 2021 in *Psychoanalytic Social Work*. The article overleaf shows the

importance of both vertical and lateral functions in order to develop a cohesive sense of self and form healthy relationships with others.

ARTICLE: "I am You and You are Me": A Self Psychology Perspective on Sibling Relationships

Abstract

Vertical and lateral functions shape one's sense of self and help one understand their place in the world. Yet, there are significant gaps in self psychology regarding the subjective aspects of self-sustaining functions provided by siblings and how these may differ from parental functions. This article examines these concepts from the perspective of a volunteer group of six adult participants who had high-access parent and sibling relationships in childhood. The analysis of 18 psychoanalytic interviews showed that siblings can function as more than reparative or replacement vertical figures. As the participants' parents were subjectively experienced as present and good enough at offering specific vertical functions, this article outlines some of the distinctive lateral functions that can be fulfilled by siblings, including idealising and twinship. Further theoretical and clinical engagement with vertical and lateral functions is necessary in order to deepen self-psychological understandings of parent and sibling relationships.

Introductory Remarks

I have always loved this quote from Kohut (1984) describing family life:

> The mere presence of people in a child's surroundings - their voices and body odours, the emotions they express, the noises they produce as they engage in human activities, the specific aroma of the foods they prepare and eat - creates a security in the child, a sense of belonging and participating. (p. 200)

This quote takes me back to my own childhood as I recall the comforting smells of my parents' bedroom, the sound of my older brother's Lego pieces creating technical masterpieces, and the giggles of my baby brother as he wandered around our house. My early selfobject experiences

include both my parents and my brothers in different and meaningful ways. Yet, self psychology is only beginning to engage with the subjective aspects of self-sustaining functions potentially provided by siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Hart, 2019; Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009).

In self psychology, developmental functions of idealising, twinship, and mirroring are fulfilled by significant others who could be vertical or lateral figures (Kohut, 1984). This study will use the terms vertical and lateral functions to refer to a set of developmental needs that could be fulfilled by any significant figure who is willing and able to fulfil particular needs for another. The lateral function will refer to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a lateral figure, such as a sibling, step-sibling, half-sibling, cousin, peer, friend, or foe. The vertical function will refer to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a vertical figure, such as a parent, step-parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt, teacher, or other authority figure. Some case studies have shown that there are differences in the ways in which vertical and lateral figures can fulfil developmental functions (Hart, 2019; Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009). This suggests that there is a need to further differentiate and distinguish between vertical and lateral functions in self psychology. This article explores the potential ways developmental needs could be fulfilled by vertical and lateral figures in the family milieu.

Psychoanalytic sibling scholars, such as Coles (2003) and Mitchell (2003), argue that both intrapsychic and interpersonal models of development are particularly important when exploring the subjective experiences of siblings. Similar to the work of object relations and interpersonal theorists, such as Fairbairn, Klein and Winnicott, self psychology is concerned with the intrapsychic importance of interpersonal relationships. Thus, the psychoanalytic theory of selfhood and self development proposed by Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984) and contemporary self psychologists is considered to be a useful theoretical grounding for psychoanalytic sibling

studies. While grounding in a singular theoretical perspective can provide the depth of understanding necessary to encapsulate specific developmental functions of diverse sibling experiences, the theoretical concepts drawn from self psychology will continue to require greater exploration both on their own and in relation to the broader body of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Instead of attempting to develop a unifying theory that accounts for all types and stages of sibling subjective experiences, this article aims to adds value by exploring diverse sibling experiences and functions as they relate to self psychology particularly.

When exploring the subjective experiences of siblings, I found that self psychology provided unique theoretical concepts that deepened my understandings of the developmental significance of siblings. According to Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984), the self requires the presence of consistent, dependable significant others who provide specific types of intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences. These experiences are termed selfobject experiences, often shortened to selfobjects. Three selfobject experiences are needed for optimal development throughout life: idealising (the experience of being part of an admired, protective selfobject); twinship (the experience of being connected to an essentially alike selfobject); and mirroring (the experience of being accepted and affirmed by a selfobject). Selfobject experiences can be provided by significant others that form part of the external environment and intrapsychically become autonomous parts of the self (Moberly, 1985). Proper attunement of the environment and the experiences of the relationships within that environment are required for the healthy development of self, while disturbances in these experiences result in the fragmentation of self and other personality disturbances (Flanagan, 2011; Kohut, 1982; Kohut & Wolf, 1978; Wittenberg, 2009).

Self psychology attempts to bridge biological and environmental influences by assuming that although individuals are born with certain innate potentials, the presence of others who provide specific types of experiences is also necessary in self development (Wolf, 1988). Intrapsychic development is assumed to occur in an environment that requires attunement to needs by significant others, including but not limited to parents and siblings. Kohut (1984) acknowledged that early selfobject experiences are concerned with the relations of children to both their parents and siblings. Thus, siblings and parents can provide "the subjective aspect of a self-sustaining function performed by a relationship of self to objects who by their presence or activity evoke and maintain the self and the experience of selfhood" (Wolf, 1988, p. 184).

Most existing psychoanalytic case studies on siblings have not used a self psychology perspective (Lewin, 2018; Mitchell, 2003; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Vivona, 2007, 2010). Through the examination of a long-term clinical case study, I previously explored the ways in which parents and siblings can offer selfobject experiences (Hart, 2019). Whereas at that time I proposed several hypotheses regarding parents and siblings fulfilling selfobject needs, in this article I expand and deepen these emerging hypotheses through the analysis of a series of individual psychoanalytic interviews that I conducted with six adults with high-access sibling relationships. Participants invited me into their childhoods, their stories rich with detail and alive with family members. For David, a shared bedroom was the site of two brothers playing games in the absence of parental supervision. I observed many Shabbos meals with Chaya, the underling emotional tensions within the family contrasted with the ease of sharing delicious food. I could clearly envision the kitchen sink where a lonely Selene would repeatedly wash Tupperware for hours. Imogen's house came alive at night as her parents' hosted dinner parties; the children being invited into many adult conversations instead of being sent to bed. There was

the pink duvet under which Elize and her sister slept, each night sharing stories of their days and bodily warmth. For Yolandi, inside her closet was where she and her brother would hide away and one time fell asleep, causing their parents to think they had run away from home. These physical places were visited and revisited as participants' memories of their siblings emerged, elucidating the complexities of their selfobject experiences of their siblings and parents.

While the aforementioned case studies have examined how siblings can fulfil developmental needs, these have been conducted in the clinical setting and have privileged the analyst's perspective of the clinical process. Furthermore, these understandings have tended to be biased towards the negative in terms of focusing on pathological sibling dynamics (Mitchell, 2003). For interpretations to encapsulate the potentially diverse experiences of siblings, there is value in broadening the psychoanalytic lens to outside of the clinical setting. In order to deepen our understandings of the potential developmental functions that a sibling may offer and how these may be different from those functions offered by parents, this article will explore the subjective experiences of vertical and lateral functions from the perspective of participants who grew up with both parents and siblings.

Method

As the focus of this article is on the subjective aspects of self-sustaining functions available in the early family milieu, I was interested in the subjective and meaningful ways that individuals made sense of their unique experiences. The qualitative approach was particularly suitable as it allowed a focus on the participants' experiences of feeling understood, connected, and protected (the subjective aspect of vertical and lateral functions) by significant others. Through the use of language, words and expressions, the qualitative research approach allowed participants to

articulate their experiences of their siblings in their own terms, as well examine whether recurring patterns of experience occurred.

In qualitative research, interviews are frequently used as a method of data collection. This method allows for the exploration of processes that may be too complex to be explored quantitatively (Molyneaux & Lane, 1982). The qualitative research design of interviews was selected as it facilitated insight into the experiences of research participants through the verbal exchange between myself and each of the participants on a topic that was significant to both. The topic of interest in this study was the experiences of siblings in the development of self from the subjective perspective of participants. The research method allowed open and detailed expression to explore the subjective quality and texture of participants' experiences.

Hollway and Jefferson (2003) argue that qualitative research often neglects to account for intrapsychic and interpersonal processes in the exploration of participants' subjective experiences. Due to the study's aims to explore the underlying intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings associated with the participants' subjective experiences of their siblings, Cartwright's (2004) psychoanalytic research interviews were employed with a group of volunteer adult participants. These interviews were viewed from a psychoanalytic position whereby unconscious fantasies, object relations, defensive functioning, and symbolic meanings related to the potential functions of siblings in development could be uncovered (Cartwright, 2004). Integrated psychoanalytic understanding relied on capturing contextualised experiences of siblings that reflected intrapsychic and external influences on meaning (Cartwright, 2004). I made interpretations of the participants' experiences and interactions by adopting a quasi-therapeutic role (Strømme et al., 2010). I did not set prescriptions or restrictions as to what

participants could explore in the interviews. Material relating to vertical and lateral functions in relation to developmental needs emerged spontaneously and formed the focus of this study.

Participants. The study included a nonprobability purposive sample of six adults who permanently shared a home environment with parents and a biological sibling in childhood. The age gap between siblings was restricted to less than three years to increase the likelihood that they shared a personal history, experiences, and activities, which has been significant in prior studies (Hart, 2019; Wittenberg, 2009). Individuals were only asked to participate if they experienced their parents as being present during their childhood to reduce the possibility of a sibling serving primarily as a replacement parental figure.

Five participants identified as female, while one identified as male. Participants ranged in age from 25 years to 43 years. Religious orientation and cultural beliefs were varied. Participants were either white or of mixed race, all middle to upper class, currently residing in major cities in South Africa. Birth order and sibling constellations included the first born of non-identical twin brothers (David), three older sisters of a brother from different families (Chaya, Yolandi and Imogen), a second born sister of two sisters and a younger brother (Elize), and a second born sister of two sisters (Selene). Three participants were married (Yolandi, Elize and Selene) and two participants had children (Yolandi and Elize).

Procedure. Adhering to Cartwright's (2004) guidelines, three individual psychoanalytic research interviews of approximately 60 minutes were held one week apart with each of the six participants, such that a total of 18 interviews were conducted. The first interview began in the same way:

> *I am really interested in your experiences of your siblings as you grew up and how you feel they may have impacted on the person you are today. I'm also interested in anything about your life or background that you might feel you want to discuss even if you think it*

> *might appear to be off topic. There is no particular place to start. You can begin wherever you'd like to.*

While a brief biographical questionnaire preceded the interviews, participants began to share their recollections of their family experiences without providing me with any background or context to these stories. The unstructured nature of the interviews and my interviewing approach seemed to facilitate a free associative thinking and feeling space. Participants reflected upon their thoughts and feelings about their childhood experiences, siblings, significant others, and myself.

Data analysis. Three key tasks characterised the data analysis: careful attention to feeling states and corresponding thoughts and perceptions of participants and myself; search for core narratives; and exploration of identifications and object relations that made up the participant's internal world (Cartwright, 2004). I immersed myself and introspectively reflected on the interview processes that emerged between the participants and myself (Holmes, 2014). Saville Young (2009) argue that the measure of research legitimacy is application and the provision of useful knowledge as opposed to scientific justification and capturing positivistic 'truths.' Consequently, the rigorous verification of interpretative accounts was fundamental. This required insight and active interrogation into intersubjective motivations, feelings, conflicts, and perceptions. In addition to the transcripts, my comments, impressions, and feeling states during and after the interviews were also documented, providing corroborative sources of information that were employed to support analytic interpretations.

When analysing data, we must "tolerate uncertainty and postpone our closures" (Kohut, 1982, p. 396). After review and analysis of the previous interviews, I explored any material evoked for participants in further depth in the final interview. I clarified information, explored any contradictions, and offered preliminary interpretations to assess how these resonated with

participants. These ‘member checks’ served to ensure participants felt adequately understood and that my interpretations reflected their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Consulting with other psychotherapists enriched my interpretations and introduced a third perspective (Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005). These approaches served to reduce my potential biases and maintain that my interpretations were reliable and authentic according to the participants, as well as a professional body of my peers.

Ethical considerations. Prior to participation, comprehensive information was provided to participants regarding the study. Participants provided written consent to participate, agreeing to video recording, interview transcription, and the use of direct quotes in publication. Participation was entirely voluntary and all records of the study, including participants’ identities and identifying information, were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and ‘thick’ disguise (Gabbard, 2000). While participants had the right to withdraw from the study, no participants chose to do so at any point. As participants were likely to recognise themselves in publication (Saville Young, 2009), sensitivity to the participants’ subjectivities in sharing their experiences and avoidance of indirect harm to participants was emphasised in the writing up of the findings and discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Core narratives were identified from the interview data through identifying what stories participants shared about their parental and sibling relationships, who the main characters were in these stories, and what the actions and responses were of these characters. The consideration of vertical stories, predominately involving parents, and lateral stories, predominately involving siblings, became important for me to explore and understand with each of the participants. Still,

some participants actively attempted to not speak about their parents during the interviews. Despite Chaya's "*I don't want to go into my parents*", later she conceded "*I can't separate my relationship with my brother from my family. When I think about growing up with my brother, my parents are automatically there*". Imogen's first words to me were: "*My parents are not going to take part in the session today*", yet such an approach proved impossible for us:

Res: *It wasn't just the two of you?*

Imo: *It really felt like that sometimes... I try to think what exactly made us. Did our parents make us like this? No, not really. Did* [me and my brother] *make each other like this? I don't really know. I think we're a culmination of everyone in our lives, bringing us up.*

Participants acknowledged that they lived in a vertical and lateral world and to understand their experiences of themselves required an inclusion of both vertical and lateral relationships. Participants could recall differences in these relationships, which can be linked to different developmental needs. This discussion will explore how vertical figures fulfilled the needs for idealising, hierarchy, and creating spaces for difference, while lateral figures fulfilled the needs for idealising and twinship for this particular group of participants.

The Need for Idealising: A Vertical or Lateral Function

A preoedipal infant is unable to fully distinguish between self and mother, father, or sibling as whole objects (Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). This means the developing child originally experiences themselves as merged with others as the recognition that the other has a separate existence has not yet developed (Kohut, 1971; Togashi & Kottler, 2012). This initial merger can be associated with vacillation between reality and fantasy, self and other, good and

bad, and hate and love. Developmentally, the idealisation or devaluation of another precedes a conception of inner space and three-dimensionality in relation to others (Symington, 2002).

The first narratives that unfolded were experiences where the participants' siblings were idealised in such a way that it seemed to echo the resolve of their own narcissism:

> *My sister is the best. I always want to be like her.* (Elize)
>
> [My brother] *is my favourite.* [He] *can't do anything wrong. He's the closest person to me. It's not like anyone's ever going to replace him. He's my best friend.* (Imogen)

While devaluation is another developmental possibility, most participants did not spontaneously recall the devaluation of the sibling. An exception to this was Yolandi who recollected "*My brother still reminds me to this day that I messed up his life* (laughs hard)." The narratives regarding idealisation and devaluation suggested that the participants' object representations seemed to be extreme and rigidified where "the sibling is a totally hated, persecutory monster" like in Yolandi's case or "a powerful, perfect, all-wise saint" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 496) like in Imogen and Elize's cases. As idealisation of the sibling was a shared experience for most of the participants in this study, the discussion will focus on this particular sibling dynamic. However, the devaluation of the sibling and the "wish to kill" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 40) is another developmental possibility (see Lewin, 2018, for a thorough discussion on the sibling hatred dynamic).

The experiences participants shared about idealising their siblings seemed to suggest a merger transference (Kohut, 1971) where the participant's sense of self was held together by being merged with the sibling to create a sense of security and predictability. For Imogen, childhood memories of "*We bathed together… slept in the same bed together… like twins*"

become replaced in adulthood with "*If I had to get caught on an island, would it be unfair to say I would take my brother with? Or do I have to take* [my partner] *with? How do you pick one?"* For Elize and her sister, a childhood of "*we did everything together*" became an adulthood where they lived in the same house and shared everything:

> *Everybody jokes about us being the pack wolves because we're always together… She's the only person that I need to give attention to. The only person I talk to every single day is my sister.* (Elize)

Elize viewed both her own husband and her sister's husband as irrelevant in the smooth running of their families. These participants reflected a deeply held desire to hold onto the fixed dichotomy where they would remain exclusively unified with their siblings, often to the exclusion of others.

While the occasional failure of the sibling to live up to the idealised imago is meant to lead to "the acquisition of permanent psychological structures which continue, endopsychically, the functions which the idealised selfobject had previously fulfilled" (Kohut, 1971, p. 45), some participants, like Imogen and Elize, struggled to surrender the idealisation of the other:

> *I was talking to my aunt and I said "[*My brother] *was the most amazing child". And she said "No, he wasn't! No, no, he was a nightmare. He was so naughty as a kid." I actually felt so defensive. There is nothing wrong with him. I don't at all feel like* (trails off)… *That was the moment when I was like maybe I do put him on a pedestal.* (Imogen)

The holding onto the sibling merger sometimes made it difficult for participants to tolerate feeling different from their siblings who were still meant to occupy the same position as themselves:

> *If* [my sister was] *going to the neighbour's house, why can't I go to the neighbour's house? Why can't I walk down the street with you? Almost like, we're the same. In my mind, we're the same. We're both the kids.* (Selene)
>
> *I just want* [my sister] *to feel the way I feel about her. Why do I get upset about that?* (tears up). *I just want her to need me as much as I need her. And I don't know if she does.* (Elize)

Thus, a rigid sense of sameness served as a source of comfort and security in relation to the sibling relationship (Brothers, 2012), while the possibility of differentiation and change caused significant uncertainty and anxiety.

Participants attempted to recreate or return to the merger transference with their sibling when faced with uncertainty and anxiety. The threat of the merger transference is a loss of self into the idealised other could be an example of a fragmented self (Kohut, 1971). For example, Elize's experience of being "*exactly the same*" as her sister seemed to contribute to uncertainty about her sense of self and her need to be the same as her:

Eli: *It's weird how people always say we look exactly the same. Then there are some people that say, "We didn't know that you were related". It's just so strange… Do we look alike or don't we? I don't know.*

Res: *What are your feelings depending on people's reactions?*

Eli: *My feeling is… a couple of things, which is weird… Now I'm being very personal* (hesitates). *It's nasty stuff. But my skin is different. I don't have the marks on my skin from acne. I want to say: "How did you not see this?" Okay* (more hesitation). *And I'm not as big as her. I think: "Are you saying that I look bigger?" It's nasty thoughts; it's nasty, ugly thoughts. I think I look younger. But age doesn't bother me, why would I say that*? (shakes head). *But then, when I was all nice and thin and the guy said to me at the gym: "Do you have a sister? I thought I saw you the other day but I didn't understand how your body had changed so much." And I was just like: "You did notice that there was something different?" That felt okay. Okay, my body is actually noticeably different. Ugly thoughts. I think: "Are you not looking properly or what is it?" And it's strange because I always want to be like her. I can't understand my thoughts.*

It seemed to me that Elize's experience of being merged with her sister contributed to insecurity, anxiety, and an unstable connection to herself and others (Togashi, 2012). Awareness of the ways she differed from her sister was then also experienced as confusing as she questioned whether to celebrate or reject these differences. It seemed that a blurring of selfobject boundaries complicated Elize's ability to differentiate between herself and her sister, contributing to difficulties with differentiating herself and developing herself towards independence from her sister in healthy ways (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994).

The blurring between vertical and lateral figures seemed to be absent for participants who held onto the merger transference. Imogen called her adult brother "*my child*" and Elize described her older sister as "*The mom that I never had…"* If siblings remain merged in this way, the vertical and lateral functions may also remain merged as a blurring between self and other may compromise the ability to distinguish between vertical and lateral functions. While this initial merger between vertical and lateral functions is developmental necessary, there is also a necessity to relinquish the merger transference in order for parts of the self to become more sufficiently differentiated.

Kohut (1971) employed the term 'idealised parent imagos', assuming that in the course of development the need for idealising would have been a vertical function. It has been assumed that parental figures would provide strength, wonder, and admirable qualities which the child could idealise and merge with. Some of the participants idealised at least one of their parents in addition to the idealisation of the sibling:

> *I looked up to my dad… I could play on his strengths: the sports, the logical side, the numbers. What can I learn, try to pick it up, try to do, try to build? Even if I didn't have the same skill level as him… You can admire and acknowledge that they can do this and if you ever need advice, that's the person to go to as a source of knowledge.* (David)

> *My dad is a total rock star. He's like you can do anything. The kind of dad who would read books to us before we went to bed and tell us we could do the most amazing things and ask us: "What are you going to dream about?"* (Imogen)

The retrospective stories offered by this group of participants showed that when growing up with high-access parents and siblings, either can fulfil the need for idealising. Thus, this study confirmed Bank and Kahn's (1982) assertion that siblings can also merge with each other in order to "feel more whole, more integrated, and less vulnerable to the vagaries of an uncertain world." (p. 31). While past studies have shown that siblings can fulfil each other's need for idealising, this has mainly been observed when parental care is insufficient, unreliable, or traumatic (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Wittenberg, 2009). Yet, in this study the sibling seemed to function as more than a reparative figure or vertical replacement, possibly as the participants' parents were subjectively experienced as present and good enough. Idealising can thus be understood as either a vertical or lateral function, provided that there is an experience of a willing and available vertical or lateral figure who can provide strength, calmness, and security through merger.

The Need for Hierarchy: A Vertical Function

The ability to make the distinction between vertical and lateral functions would need to be preceded by the development of the distinction between self and other (Hart, 2018). According to Benjamin (1988), the realisation of the self and the other as separate allows participation in the reality of two subjects which forms the foundation of social functioning. In sibling case studies that show merged sibling dynamics (for example, the cases of Celeste and Adrian in Lewin, 2018, the case of Jane in Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, the case of Lisa in Vivona, 2010), the

absence of a vertical figure to manage the lateral relationships has been observed, with pathological consequences. It is through the relinquishing of merger that allows a recognition of the distinction between self and other, followed by a distinction between vertical and lateral functions. Thus, the first distinctive function of the vertical is to challenge the merger transference through the introduction of hierarchy.

The participants spontaneously recalled a series of laws that governed family life that were communicated and enforced by parents. One such rule was the enforcement of a hierarchical structure so that the developing child could develop a boundary between the vertical and lateral axes: 'I am the parent, you are the child. I make the rules, you follow them'. Mitchell's (2003) 'law of the mother' includes the vertical prohibition that says "it is I, the mother, not you the child, who gives birth" (p. 72). Such a prohibition introduces the concept of hierarchy between self and other, and enforces the vertical and lateral axes. Participants could recall their parents enforcing this hierarchical structure:

> *This is your brother and you're not the mom. Be the mom to your dollies but this is not your baby*. (Chaya)

This first vertical function needs to initially be communicated by someone in a position of authority with the primary purpose to challenge the merger transference. To accept the subsequent position as a child in the lateral position requires an acceptance of the loss of merger with a vertical figure, but there continues to be connection with the sibling as both remain side-by-side in lateral positions:

> *My parents have always been if anything happens to us, there's only the two of you and you* [and your sister] *must always look out for each other.* (Selene)

Thus, the acceptance that "one is a child in the same position as one's siblings in regard to one's parent or parents" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 53) is dependent on a vertical function and later becomes particularly vital for the need for twinship, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

The Need for Twinship: A Lateral Function

Togashi (2012) defines twinship as "the subjective experience of people who feel themselves connected to others" (p. 358). It is through twinship selfobject experiences that needs for belonging and acceptance are fulfilled, without denying the complexity of similarities and differences (Brothers, 2012; Lichtenberg, 2012; Togashi, 2008, 2012; Togashi & Kottler, 2012). The importance of parents in fulfilling the need for twinship is more established in self psychology (Kohut, 1984). Parents communicate to their developing child "I know you - you like to eat slowly and be talked to and play in the water and - you belong to this mother and this father - and we belong to you" (Lichtenberg, 2003, p. 506), establishing a sense of connectedness and acceptance that becomes part of the child's sense of self. The need for twinship is also necessary "by one's cohort" (Basch, 1994, p. 4) which would include siblings or other lateral figures. Once the child can recognise self-other distinctions and become more differentiated, it would seem that twinship needs require fulfilment by vertical others who yield more hierarchical power than the child (e.g., a parent or other authority figure), as well as lateral others who reflect and are like the child in some ways and different in other ways (e.g., a close-in-age sibling, peer or cousin; Mitchell, 2000). Therefore, twinship selfobject experiences require the nuances and complexities of sameness and difference to be retained in both parent and sibling relationships (Hart, 2019).

Past research has shown that "similarity in interests and talents, along with the sense of being understood by someone like oneself" (White & Weiner, 1986, p. 103) is considered essential in twinship experiences. A longing for twinship was evident in all of the participants' narratives about their siblings, yet rarely emerged in relation to parents. For most participants this happened through sibling play where there was an active and consistent seeking out of a sibling and relying on the presence of them:

> *From the moment that I could walk, I would always be trying to find* [my sister] *and I would always want to spend time with her… Here I am! I want you to do stuff with me.* (Selene)
>
> *I always wanted to sleep with* [my brother] *in his bed, play with him in his room, be in his space*. (Yolandi)
>
> *I've got a sidekick. There's always someone next to me… It's your sister. It's your brother. It's got to be close. We've got to stick together. It's us.* (Elize)

If siblings were available and aligned in their willingness to play together frequently, the sense of being "*stuck together*" (Elize) or feeling like "*one entity*" (David) seemed to dominate their experiences. This offers further evidence for the existence of a merger transference (Kohut, 1971) where the developing sense of self was initially held together through mimicry of the sibling or being merged with the sibling in play. Finding similarities with a sibling helped participants in this study to form twinship bonds by providing feelings of belonging and acceptance.

For the participants in this study, the search for similarities did not predominately involve a vertical figure. In cases where a vertical figure was absent, this resulted in a rigid holding onto the similarities found with the sibling (Hart, 2019). However, in healthier cases where a vertical figure was available, the participants' narratives suggested a preference for seeking out lateral

figures for the fulfilment of twinship needs. It is possible that the sense of "essential alikeness" (Kohut, 1984, p. 193) that characterises twinship experiences may be much harder to obtain with a parent who is so much bigger and greater than the developing self (Flanagan, 2011). The intergenerational hierarchical structure and top-to-bottom power imbalance between child and parent may mean twinship selfobject needs cannot be exclusively fulfilled in the vertical axis, as "someone like oneself" (White & Weiner, 1986, p. 103) may be a developmentally necessity, such as a close-in age sibling, cousin, or peer.

Twinship selfobject experiences are distinguishable from the merger transference as there is recognition that the other has a separate existence (Togashi & Kottler, 2012). Kohut (1971) argues that twinship experiences may initially involve idealisation and merger with another who provides strength, calmness, and admirable qualities and this was apparent for the participants in this study. However, some participants seemed to recognise that the sibling was psychologically separate, as well as had qualities that were not all-good or all-bad:

> *I know you. I see your best and your worst. 24 hours a day*. (Selene)
>
> *I think* [my brother is] *an incredible human being, and I think he sucks in many ways too, and it's ok.* (Chaya)

Through surrendering sibling idealisations, participants could experience their siblings as separate and began to differentiate themselves from their siblings. They gained the opportunity to explore similarities and differences with a sibling without losing the sense of connection and security within the sibling relationship. Thus, the fulfilment of the need for twinship requires the relinquishing of the merger transference so that the distinction between the self and the other can emerge developmentally.

This study confirmed that siblings have a distinctive function to play in the fulfilment of the developmental need for twinship. While Wittenberg (2009) has argued that "the provision of twinship selfobject functions between siblings in childhood was… the kind of connection [that] would appear to be a natural outgrowth of the sibling experience" (p. 54), these conceptualisations have not been reflected in past clinical case material. Consequently, the fulfilment of the need for twinship has not been extensively connected to siblings. The analysis of the core narratives that emerged from a series of psychoanalytical research interviews in this study showed that siblings fulfilled the developmental need for twinship by offering a sense of being connected to another in a side-by-side lateral relationship. However, the fulfilment of twinship needs as conceptualised by Kohut (1971, 1982, 1984) and others (Brothers, 2012; Hart, 2019; Lichtenberg, 2012; Togashi, 2008, 2012, 2014; Togashi & Kottler, 2012) requires belonging and acceptance without denying the complexity of similarities and differences between the self and the other. For the participants in this study, the lateral function was vital in the search for similarities, but the vertical function became particularly necessary when experiences of difference needed to be negotiated.

The Need for Spaces for Difference: A Vertical Function

While connection with others through sharing similarities is fundamental to twinship experiences (Kohut, 1984), spaces for connections that allow for the co-existence of our differences are also developmentally necessary. Togashi (2012) argues for a "delicate balance between mutual findings of oneself and not-oneself in the other" (p. 352). Differences are often experienced as threatening and destructive, making it difficult to develop a secure sense of self and association with others (Mitchell, 2003).

Narratives relating to participants' experiences of differences with their siblings spontaneously emerged in interviews. Numerous factors introduced an awareness of difference into the sibling relationship, but differences in age and sex emerged as particularly important. The biological nature of these differences meant that reminders of differences between participants and their siblings were both physically experienced and socially reinforced. Experiences in which participants could not find themselves in their sibling were initially experienced as a disruption to twinship and caused significant anxiety, accompanied by high levels of defensiveness. The threat of difference on the twinship bond could not always be mitigated by searching and finding similarities with the sibling. For healthy resolution, it seemed that consistent involvement from a vertical figure for the participants was necessary.

For the participants in this study, the search for similarities in twinship selfobject experiences allowed for the developing child to distinguish between self and other. However, the distinction between self and other became more complex as participants realised the other can be either a lateral or vertical figure:

> *If I didn't do something with* [my brother], *I was doing it with my dad. But there was vast differences. I looked up at* [my dad] *and what he achieved. I didn't have the same skill level as him.* (David)

Participants' narratives suggested that as they become aware of the differences between themselves and their parents, these differences were experienced as substantial and fixed. Differences between child and parent seemed easier for participants to accept as this hierarchy and power imbalance was perhaps deemed biologically normal and tolerable (Hart, 2019). Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) argue that children are aware that they depend on their parents for safety, protection, and wellbeing, and erotic and aggressive desires towards parents in response

to differences may threaten this. However, this is not the case for siblings who do not depend on one another for their security and survival. Participants in this study experienced intense feelings about difference stimulated by siblings that appeared to be stronger than desires and fantasies towards parental figures at times.

As twinship selfobject experiences are rooted in sharing similarities, the introduction of difference is expected to be disruptive. Differences in age between the participants and their siblings were painfully recalled. As the older sibling began to engage in more mature activities, younger siblings felt left behind:

> *I remember when she got older and she didn't want to play Barbies anymore. I was so sad she didn't want to play with me anymore and I had to play by myself.* (Elize)

> *We were drifting apart... Who am I going to be? How am I going to do things? I only know things one certain way… If we were doing this completely together, would it be easier? Things definitely would have been a bit easier if I had him to fall back on*. (David)

The differences between participants and their siblings felt unfair:

> *You're set up to be the follower. They're always ahead of you. I felt like I'm behind. You're never going to be equal.* (Selene)

> *When I came along, my parents were like: "I'm sure she'll be fine… that one will just have to sort it out somehow." But* [my sister, as the older child] *got some help along the way* [from my parents] *and I felt like I didn't.* (Elize)

Participants sought comfort from the threat of age differences by holding onto something shared with the sibling, like their shared side-by-side lateral position in the family:

> [My brother] *is changing and I'm also changing. We're different in certain ways but there are still a lot of commonalities that we've always had that haven't gone away... We still understand each other… We can relate.* (David)

Many participants recalled the contradicting desires of wanting to destroy any sense of difference between themselves and the sibling and also enjoying their developing independence from each other. The ability to tolerate these differences showed the changing nature of the participants' sibling relationships in their narratives.

Biological sex differences were experienced as a threat to the established sense of "essential alikeness" (Kohut, 1984, p. 193), particularly for participants with siblings of the opposite sex in this study. The differences were generally first realised during play when participants were introduced to the idea of certain toys and games being gendered for "*boys*" and others for "*girls*" by vertical figures. For Yolandi, these socially prescribed gender differences polarised her and her brother as she described them as "*cat and dog*". She fantasised she would have experienced a deep sibling connection if she had a same-sex sibling and showed unceasing attempts to 'find a twin' in any new situation (Miliora, 2003), which seemed to reflect a desperate longing for a substitute sister she never had in childhood. The strict divide between boys and girls that were prescribed to her in childhood seemed to have led to a reliance on strict gender dichotomies in adulthood where "the social stereotyping of masculine and feminine [were viewed] as absolutes so that, to feel connected, the complexity of same and different [was] reduced to same only" (Lichtenberg, 2012, p. 410). This defensive position was reactivated with her children, where connecting with her son, who was likened to her devalued brother, felt difficult:

> *He looks exactly like my brother. He could have been my brother's child. He is like my brother… I never felt a connection with* [my son]. *I sat there crying and said: 'This is not my baby; please can you take him away.'*

Connecting with her daughter, on the other hand, was experienced as easier: "*My daughter, everybody says* [she] *is just like me... I feel more of a connection with her."* Defining her own gender as strictly feminine and connecting to other feminine sisters may have served to provide a "rigid certitude" (Brothers, 2012, p. 394) as a means to transform feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially in relation to masculine figures in her life. However, rigid and restrictive relational patterns remained where there was not space for the co-existence of sameness and difference, limiting Yolandi's ability to negotiate relationships with others who were different to her.

Imogen resolved her experiences of the threat of biological sex differences with her brother by embracing gender fluidity:

> *Our relationship allowed me to not just be a girl or boy. I feel like I'm a lot more gender fluid because of him, and he is because of me… I don't see him as a boy and me as a girl. It's like soul to soul.*

Imogen's gender identity can "mutate, dissolve and prove irrelevant or insubstantial" (Harris, 1991, p. 197), offering her twinship selfobject experiences that were not restricted by strict gender dichotomies and gender stereotyping. Unlike Yolandi, the resolution of the threat of biological differences with Imogen's brother did involve vertical figures: "*Obviously my parents have a lot to do with it. I think we both grew up gender-neutral*." This suggests that a parent's ability to identify the impact of the introduction of difference to the sibling relationship, as well

as help their children tolerate and process their resulting intense feelings, was vital for healthy development.

While the experience of changes in the sibling relationship over time were emotionally evocative to recall for the group of participants in this study, vertical limits and rules seemed to provide a sense of security and certainty:

> *Our parents helped with that… you two are the same but you can be different. You don't have to do the same thing.* (David)

> [We're] *completely different: he's palm tree, I'm rose bush… I didn't have to engage with my brother if I didn't want to. I appreciated not having to force something that wasn't there.* [Our parents] *were quite good at managing our needs together and making us play fairly.* (Chaya)

Hence, the function of the vertical is also to invite spaces for difference as self and other become differentiated. This illustrated that "one is a child in the same position as one's siblings in regard to one's parent or parents, but one is also different: there is room for two, three, four or more' (Mitchell, 2003, p. 53). When participants felt that vertical figures created a family milieu where there were spaces for each child as individual lateral figures, they felt they could experiment with different versions of self and other.

Concluding Remarks

The ever-shifting ways participants experienced me, and I experienced them during this series of psychoanalytic interviews allowed diverse vertical and lateral stories to be shared and explored. As the interviews progressed and a lack of formality was established between us, participants seemed to become more comfortable and relaxed. The participants' awareness of their own bodies in the physical spaces in their childhood memories seemed to be reactivated in the room

with me during the interviews. Most of the participants got up to use the bathroom mid-interview, often excusing themselves mid-sentence, something I have rarely experienced in my consulting room with patients in the past. While Yolandi dressed formally in her first interview, she came to the third interview in her slippers and a tracksuit. During the beginning of our first meeting, Elize took off her shoes to show me a developing wart. Imogen loudly shouted at her snot as she blew her nose: "*Get out, you heathen!"* While there are many interpretations one could make of these dynamics, for me it felt like this overt desire to share these bodily experiences were expressions of longings to reinforce our shared humanity through our shared physicality.

Lichtenberg (2003) writes: "a common bond, a form of fundamental twinship, exists in that all humans have similar feelings, and this commonality can be actively sought" (p. 508). Perhaps the participants wanted to form a twinship bond with me by showing me that we shared physical experiences. The ease of sharing a physical space with each of the participants felt like a reactivation of the sense of physical comfort I experience in my own relationships with my siblings where we can be unguarded and intimate. I felt like participants invited me into their inner worlds and I experienced myself as one of their siblings or a friend visiting their childhood homes, similar to each of the participants at the time of their memories.

The findings and discussion presented from this series of psychoanalytic interviews can help us understand the diverse ways self psychology constructs were experienced from the perspective of a group of adult participants. While vertical rules and limits may prevent the continued merger between lateral figures by creating spaces for difference, the shared positioning of lateral figures may prevent the continued merger with vertical figures by introducing hierarchy. The siblings' shared experience of their positionality can open up psychic

spaces to relinquish the merger transference within the family and serve the emerging need for differentiation from both vertical and lateral figures. Rooted in the ability to participate in the reality where both the self and the sibling can exist separately (Benjamin, 1998), participants were able to mourn the loss of the exclusive child-parent or sibling dyad and welcome the presence of other vertical and lateral figures. This promotes optimal levels of closeness and differentiation in the face of the influence of significant others and facilitates the ability to tolerate difference within oneself and in relationships with others (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). If negotiated healthily, a person will be able to organise relationships and figure out where they fit in in relation to both vertical and lateral figures.

The vertical and lateral functions offered to these participants within the family milieu allowed for differentiated experiences of self and other in which they could accommodate sameness and difference in both the vertical and lateral axes. This way of anchoring themselves could then be experienced in the world and be invigorated by the nuances of their interactions with others in both the vertical and lateral dimensions, without being destabilised or losing one dimension. More psychoanalytical enquiries are required to fully encapsulate the complexities of the vertical and lateral dimensions of relationships and how these understandings can inform our conceptualisations of self development, as well as our clinical work. For example, it may be helpful to explore how lateral functions may be performed by other lateral figures who are not siblings, including cousins, peers, friends, and foes, over the course of development. A deeper awareness of vertical and lateral functions may contribute to new ways of conceptualising self development and inform how clinicians work with the complexities of developing within and living in a vertical and lateral world.

CHAPTER 6

Expanding Vertical and Lateral Functions in Adulthood

We came into the world like brother and brother,
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another.

- William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*

Prescript

The analysis of the interview-based data in Chapter Five used self psychology constructs to explore the participants' experiences of feeling understood, connected, and protected (the subjective aspects of vertical and lateral functions) by significant others in childhood. While the paper presented in the previous chapter outlined the distinctions between lateral and vertical functions, this thesis is also concerned with how developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring can influence an individual's experience of self and others. This chapter focuses on the specific dynamics that repeatedly emerged between siblings and their partners during the psychoanalytic research interviews with a group of six adults who had high-access sibling relationships in adulthood. Included in this chapter is the article "Sibling and sibling successors: Exploring the significance of adult lateral relationships" which was submitted to *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* and was under review in 2020. This chapter answers the research question, how does the potential fulfilment, by a sibling, of the developmental needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring influence an individual's experience of self and others, with a specific focus on the continued importance of both vertical and lateral functions in adulthood. The article overleaf shows both vertical and lateral functions continue to be important as sibling relationships and family dynamics change over time.

ARTICLE: Sibling and Sibling Successors: Exploring the Significance of Adult Lateral Relationships

Abstract

Sibling relationships can have a profound influence on individuals, even in adulthood. The arrival of a sibling successor in adulthood, represented as a sibling's partner, has been shown to evoke shifts in established sibling relationships. This study examines these shifts from the perspective of a group of six participants whose siblings were in long-term relationships with a significant partner. Based on the analysis of 18 psychoanalytic interviews, as well as psychoanalytic sibling literature, merged and oedipal sibling dynamics were identified in the core narratives regarding the three-person relationship between the participant, their sibling, and their sibling's partner. While adult sibling relationships are often assumed to be independent to vertical involvement, this study revealed the continued importance of both vertical and lateral functions. Consideration of vertical functions in the development of lateral developmental pathways expands our understanding of how vertical and lateral functions can be significant throughout our lives.

Introductory Remarks

Sibling relationships may be among the longest lasting relationships of our lives (Cicirelli, 1995), yet they have received limited attention in psychoanalytic theory and research. In my own life, the importance of my sibling relationships have continued to be significant over time. My two brothers and I have walked together through the tragedies and triumphs of our shared childhood. We have witnessed how our paths have separated, both resisting and welcoming the

importance of other relationships. We have stood side-by-side at each other's weddings, making space for our family to grow to include each other's partners. We have waited outside hospital rooms to meet each other's children, needing to expand to embrace more complexity with each birth. We have felt our family became smaller when we lost our father, somehow managing to grieve in our own individual ways and be there for each other. My relationships with my siblings have shifted in many ways over the course of my life thus far, shaping and changing how I relate to myself and others.

Historically in psychoanalysis, parental figures have been conceptualised as significantly more important than sibling relationships (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). Juliet Mitchell (2000) proposed a theoretical model to widen psychoanalytic thinking beyond an exclusive focus on parents that included the concepts of vertical and lateral relationships. According to Freud (1914):

> The nature and quality of the human child's relations to people of his own and the opposite sex have already been laid down in the first six years of his life. He may afterwards develop and transform them in certain directions but he can no longer get rid of them. The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters. All those whom he gets to know later become substitute figures for these first objects of his feelings. (p. 243)

This quote suggests that early developmental functions are subjectively experienced in a specific psychological environment that is both vertically and laterally structured. The first vertical relationship tends to be the top-to-bottom relationship between a parent and child, while the first lateral relationship is often the side-by-side relationship between siblings.

While parents and siblings are significant in early development, vertical and lateral functions also continue in our relational world throughout over lives. In order to understand how vertical and lateral relationships may exist in our minds and shape our development, we should

not solely focus on real parents and siblings (Mitchell, 2011). Parents will be substituted and followed by many other vertical successors, such as step-parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, teachers, and bosses, while siblings will be substituted and followed by lateral successors, like step-siblings, cousins, peers, friends, foes, and colleagues. Other psychoanalytic thinkers (for example, Davies & Eagle, 2013; Maiello, 2007) have used the term *function* as a metaphorical place-holder to conceptualise variations in maternal and paternal positions and roles and what these each offer developmentally. However, the possibility of specific lateral functions has been neglected in these psychoanalytic understandings. In this study, the *lateral function* refers to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a figure who can be designated as having "minimal difference" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 46) to the other whose particular needs are being fulfilled. The *vertical function* refers to the fulfilment of a set of developmental needs that are provided by a figure who can be designated as having significant difference and "acts on and between" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 50) the other whose particular needs are being fulfilled. By extending the focus beyond specific vertical or lateral figures in the family milieu opens up potential applicability to different types of families, including blended families, families with only children, and other types of families that are "made" rather than given.

Psychoanalytic inquiries into sibling relationships have recently grown; however the predominant focus has tended to remain on early childhood sibling experiences (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Rustin, 2007; Sherwin-White, 2007; Vivona, 2007, 2010). The sibling relationships most often explored are those with early and prolonged access to each other. These *high-access siblings*, which are defined as siblings who were born close in age, raised together, and shared a personal history, experiences, and activities, have been have been shown to be more intense and

enduring over time (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Cicirelli, 1995; Hart, 2019; Kahn, 1988; Milevsky, 2020; Wittenberg, 2009). Transitions and life events in adulthood, such as starting a career, getting married, having children, getting divorced, caring for aging parents, and the death of parents, have been shown to uncover underlying sibling tensions and dynamics (Milevsky, 2020). Therefore, the psychodynamics of sibling relationships in adulthood requires further exploration.

Exploring the Arrival of a Sibling Successor in Adulthood

My interest in adult sibling relationships has originated from my clinical work with adults where siblings are often relevant to the psychotherapeutic process. Siblings seem to find their way into the room in explorations of the past and the present, the family and the social milieu, as well as transference-countertransference dynamics that unfold with many of my patients (Hart, 2018). Using the lens of self psychology, I have previously presented a clinical case study that explored how parents and siblings offered different developmental functions for an adult patient in long-term psychotherapy (Hart, 2019). Other case studies that have examined sibling relationships in adulthood from a psychoanalytic framework have shown the intensity of unresolved sibling dynamics and the complexity they bring to clinical processes (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Kahn, 1988; Milevsky, 2020; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994; Wittenberg, 2009). However, my past explorations and the existing body of psychoanalytic literature has been informed by clinical and observational studies, with a specific focus on pathological sibling dynamics.

Exploring adult sibling relationships may offer different ways of thinking about the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis. Two important shifts occur in adulthood

that may be relevant to sibling dynamics. The first is the shift towards a more balanced and egalitarian relationship (Laursen et al., 2001) whereby the age or gender hierarchies that may have dominated the earlier sibling relationship can lessen. The second is the shift towards a more self-determined and independent relationship (Stewart et al., 2001) whereby parental rules and external governance over the sibling relationship may subside. The adult sibling relationship may have the potential to be a lateral relationship with minimal vertical involvement or interference. Thus, the historical propensity to conceptualise siblings through a vertical lens whereby siblings are seen as compensatory or replacement parent figures (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2013a, 2013b; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994) may be overcome by focusing on adult sibling relationships.

Our early sibling relationships offer us a microcosm of the content and structure of the lateral dimensions of the social world, providing many opportunities to learn about language interpretation, personal identification, family differentiation, emotional regulation, social engagement, problem solving, and conflict resolution (Milevsky, 2020). The lessons we learn and the relationships we form with our siblings are not exclusively significant in childhood as we are required to adjust to the arrival of sibling-like figures throughout our lives in many different contexts, such as cousins, friends, foes, co-workers, wives or husbands, and sibling in-laws. Mitchell (2011) acknowledges that siblings will be succeeded by many others who designate minimal difference from each other. As actual, symbolic, and substitute brothers and sisters will always exist in our relational world, this study focuses on exploring sibling and other lateral relationships as they play out in adulthood.

According to Mitchell (2011), the real or imagined arrival of a sister or brother in early childhood is experienced as the sibling trauma, which sets up unconscious and conscious

responses that can be compulsively repeated or avoided. Infants are required to face the reality that the mother will make space for another baby, often before the Oedipus complex, through weaning, pregnancy, or the birth of a sibling (Mitchell, 2003). Siblings are a biological and cultural necessity that exist in our minds as the first social relationship, even for only children (Mitchell, 2013a). The fantasy of remaining the only child protects the child from the awareness of another lateral figure who could replace the child in the family (Charles, 1999; Mitchell, 2011). While the intrusion of a lateral figure is expected to evoke overwhelming anxiety, innate envy, and rage through introducing the loss of the omnipotent fantasy of being the only child (Klein, 1928, 1955), the introduction of a sibling successor in adulthood, for example when a sibling brings a partner into the family milieu, may evoke similar primitive responses for some. In interviews with adults about their current sibling relationships, Milevsky (2020, p. 95) found that participants experienced strong responses to the introduction of the sibling's partner:

> *We were brother and sister. Everything was okay until ... well she met this guy ... I just got to the point where you know, I don't have to talk to you anymore. It's not really my sister, it's her husband.* (Gary)
>
> *I think it's really sad when someone tries to come between siblings. Like* [my brother's] *second wife. I just think that's sad, because she destroyed something that was*. (Dolores)

The introduction of new partners in the relationship between siblings has dynamic consequences for ongoing adult development that requires further theoretical and clinical consideration. The aim of this study was to look beyond the clinical setting and explore the diverse experiences of adult sibling relationships from the perspective of a group of six participants who had high-access sibling relationships and volunteered to participate in a series of three unstructured, free-associate interviews with me. To deepen understandings of this specific transition in adult sibling relationships when a new sibling-like figure is introduced to an established sibling relationship, I

explore the three-person relationship between two siblings and the sibling's partner. This study extends psychoanalytic understandings of adult lateral relationships with a specific focus on how the introduction of a new lateral figure impacts on existing sibling relationships in adulthood. By focusing on laterally-dominated triangles between two siblings and the sibling's partner that were experienced and recollected by this group of participants, this article offers more nuanced explorations of the psychodynamics of adult sibling relationships.

Method

The Qualitative Research Interview. Psychoanalytic research has tended to remain firmly rooted in the case study method, guided by the premise that clinical material from extended psychoanalytic therapy sessions offer in-depth and analysable data (Edwards, 1998). Hinshelwood (2018) defends "the clinical situation as the locus for nearly all the knowledge we possess in psychoanalysis and therefore the best site for conducting our [research]" (p. 541). However, others argue psychoanalysis should not remain confined to the single method of case studies situated in the clinical context and have called for psychoanalytic research to 'get off the couch' (Cartwright, 2004; Emde & Fonagy, 1997).

The use of psychoanalytic interviews as a method for deepening understanding of psychoanalytic concepts is emerging as various scholars have applied psychoanalytic concepts to the interview situation (Cartwright, 2004; Harvey, 2020; Holland, 2007; Hollway & Jefferson, 2008; 2007; Holmes, 2014; Long & Eagle, 2009). While I have previously used the case study method to deepen my understandings of sibling relationships (Hart, 2019), in this study I was interested in the subjective experiences of individuals from a range of sibling and family constellations, outside of the psychotherapeutic context. Using psychoanalysis as a research lens,

I sought to understand the intrapsychic experiences of siblings and requested that willing participants explore them with me outside of the clinical setting through the use of a series of psychoanalytic research interviews.

While qualitative interviews have been criticised for neglecting to account for intrapsychic processes and unconscious meaning in the exploration of participants' subjective experiences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2003), I followed Cartwright's (2004) psychoanalytic research interview guidelines. Unconscious fantasies, selfobject experiences, defensive functioning, and symbolic meanings related to the potential functions of siblings in development were uncovered as participants engaged in a free-associative process as they were invited to recollect experiences of their siblings. As qualitative interviews typically follow a structured or semi-structured format, participants responses may be restricted and interviewers can rigidly guide the direction of interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). However, an unstructured interviewing approach was used in this study to elicit sibling stories from participants and to facilitate inductive probing.

Participants. In this study, non-probability purposive sampling was employed as I was interested in participants who could offer meaningful and in-depth information about their sibling experiences. I was particularly interested in finding individuals who permanently shared a home environment with a high-access sibling throughout their childhood. The recruitment poster that was placed online informed interested participants that participation would entail a series of three unstructured interviews over a period of a month in which they could subjectively reflect on their sibling experiences with me. Many participants volunteered to participate in a short amount of time and were willing to commit to these three interviews, held one week apart, at my psychotherapy practice in Johannesburg. A total of 18 interviews were conducted. No

participants dropped out or requested to withdraw from the study, suggesting a high degree of investment in the interview process.

The presence of a sibling's partner was not an inclusion criteria in the study; however, all of the participants revealed in the interviews that their sibling was in a long-term relationship with a significant partner. The three-person relationship between the participants, their sibling, and their sibling's partner emerged spontaneously and repeatedly in the interviews as a relational dynamic that participants desired to explore.

As in-depth analysis of intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings formed the focus of this study, a sample size of six participants was appropriate and yielded sufficient data to facilitate in-depth exploration. Extended time with each participants over the series of three interviews allowed for contextualised understandings of the participants' experiences of their siblings to emerge. The six participants came from their own distinctive family constellations with quite diverse South African cultural backgrounds. Other factors that may have impacted on these participants' subjective experiences, such as birth order, gender differences, and dominating ideologies, social, economic, political and cultural belief systems and structures, were acknowledged and explored to contextualise the interpretative accounts (Cartwright, 2004).

"David" was a 25-year-old English man who had one sibling, a fraternal twin brother. Highly intelligent and analytical perspectives of his family dynamics unfolded as he shared stories of his relationship with his brother and parents. He was initially reserved; however, the sharing of his emotional experiences slowly developed with me as the interviews progressed. He and his brother's childhood relationship seemed to have had the closest access in childhood than that of any of the other participants I interviewed, as they shared everything including their bedroom, classroom, and friends. David seemed to have found a way to forge his own

independent path and relationships separate from his twin brother, while remaining connected to him. As adults, they continued to both live with their parents and were in long-term relationships with women.

"Chaya" was a 33-year-old Jewish woman who had one younger brother. A current conflict with her brother had been part of her desire to participate in the study and she immediately began exploring the dynamics of their adult sibling relationship, as well as the current and historical frustrations caused by her sister-in-law. Chaya vividly recalled the emotional nuances of her childhood and displayed a high level of insight into herself and her family dynamics, possibly due to being in her own long-term psychotherapy process. She vacillated between the past and the present, the roles of her parents and the role of her brother, as well as between her rational processes and emotional experiences. Chaya was able to make in-depth meaning of how her experiences have shaped her social reality and relationships and the ways in which she described her experiences were visceral and alive to me.

"Yolandi" was a 33-year-old Afrikaans woman who had one younger brother. As the first participant who was married with two children of opposite sexes, her own children's sibling relationship allowed us to explore generational patterns between mothers and children, brothers and sisters, and fathers and children. She also had an intensely close relationship with her sister-in-law, which often excluded her brother. I felt like I had to contain her experiences as it was hard for her to recall many childhood experiences due to disconnection and repression as a means of coping. I suggested to Yolandi that she seek psychotherapy, which she engaged with after the conclusion of the interviews.

"Elize" was a 42-year-old multiracial woman who came from a blended family of one older full sister, one younger full brother, and one younger half-brother. Childhood and current

stories of her and her older sister filled up the interviews, while there was less that she shared about her brothers. Similar to Yolandi, her childhood had many instances of trauma; however, Elize accessed her memories and emotions with such intensity that I felt like I was part of her experiences. Elize and her sister seemed to share everything in childhood, and this had continued into their adult relationship where they lived in one house with their two husbands and children. While not currently in psychotherapy, Elize had engaged in a psychotherapy previously to explore issues in her marriage, but she reflected that sibling dynamics had not been explored.

"Selene" was a 35-year-old Portuguese woman with one older sister. As a participant who was currently in her own psychotherapy process, it seemed to me that Selene had begun processing her family dynamics where she had always experienced her sister as the favoured one. The recent marriages of both her and her sister had meant the introduction of brothers-in-law to the family. Selene's willingness to share and reflect on the intersections between her relationships with her parents, her sister and brother-in-law, and her husband revealed her own needs and frustrations in these relationships.

"Imogen" was a 33-year-old English woman who had one younger full brother and one younger half-brother. Her initial desire was to only talk about her full brother and not engage with the dynamics of her parents and half-brother; however, as the interviews unfolded in a free associative way, she began to explore her feelings about these other relationships with ease. She was currently not in her own psychotherapy, but expressed the desire to resume upon reflection at the conclusion of the interviews. Both her and her brother were in long-term relationships and often socialised with each other with their both partners present, evoking many stories of how they navigated the changing dynamics of their adult sibling relationship.

Data Collection. Cartwright's (2004) individual psychoanalytic research interviews were employed in this study. The unstructured, free-associated nature of the interviews meant that participants were free to explore anything that arose in the interviews. Each interview was conducted by me and began with the words:

> *I am really interested in your experiences of your siblings as you grew up and how you feel they may have impacted on the person you are today. I'm also interested in anything about your life or background that you might feel you want to discuss even if you think it might appear to be off topic. There is not particular place to start. You can begin wherever you'd like to.*

Participants used the interview space to share and process their relationships with and experiences of their siblings and their siblings' partners. I sensed that this was may not be given importance outside of the interviews. As my desire was to explore and understand, I followed participants as they unpacked their desires and experiences. My roles as interviewer was to follow the participants' free associations, which tended to "follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 309). At times, I would seek clarification by probing "*I am really interested in understanding more of…"* or "*I'd like to know more about…".* I would also identify and confront contradictions that I may have experienced in the interviews by reflecting "*There seemed to be a contradiction in*…" or "*On the one hand, you seemed to experience this, but on the other hand*…" Furthermore, I would tentatively put forward preliminary interpretations of the participant's experiences and interactions by saying "*From our last two interviews, I was struck by…"* or "*When you said this, it made me think about this other thing you said…"* For some, my lack of structure was initially confusing: "*I thought* [the interviews] *would be more directive and questioning"* (Chaya). I was

met with questions such as "*Do you have everything you need*?" (Yolandi) and "*Do I have the insight I should have?"* (Chaya).

By the end of the third interviews, participants had predominately used the space as they desired due to the unstructured nature of the interview process. Participants' anxiety about the lack of structure and the need to appear a certain way seemed to dissipate: "*I didn't think* [the interviews] *would feel so comfortable and easy and flowing. My anxiety is not as high as I anticipated it to be*" (Chaya). It seemed that participants processed in the week between each interview, in a similar way that my patients have done between therapy sessions. This meant that they would return and re-engage with certain sibling experiences, providing me with deeper opportunities to understand the nature of their sibling dynamics. I sensed that participants had much more to say and many welcomed further communication from me if I had any follow-up questions.

Data Analysis. All the interviews were video recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Three key tasks characterised the data analysis of the research process: careful attention to feeling states and corresponding thoughts and perceptions of participants and myself; search for core narratives or themes; and exploration of identifications and selfobject experiences that made up the participant's internal world (Cartwright, 2004). Due to the unstructured nature of the interviews, I did not have set expectations about what processes would emerge in each series of interviews. While various other narratives were identified in the data, material relating to a sibling's partner and shifts in adult sibling relationships was analysed in greater depth to form the focus of this article.

The participants seemed to assume that I had a high level of familiarity with their family constellations and history. While a brief biographical questionnaire formed part of the consent

forms, the participants jumped right into sharing stories of their siblings and their siblings' partners from the beginning of the first interview without providing me with any background or context. The unstructured nature of the interviews and my interviewing approach seemed to facilitate a free associative thinking and feeling space. Participants would jump between the present and the past and between different contexts with ease, without feeling the need to provide a context for the content they offered. The fluidity of the stories that were shared made it hard for me to initially hold onto a core narrative; however the feeling states could be followed as the interviews unfolded.

Cartwright (2004) argues that transference-countertransference dynamics that emerge in psychoanalytic interviews can provide valuable information regarding participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics. Nevertheless, understanding how transference-countertransference dynamics may emerge and potentially be transformed in contexts outside psychotherapy has not been fully explored. In this study, attempts were made in the psychoanalytic interviews to allow transferences to emerge spontaneously by providing empathic immersion and experience-near understanding in a similar way that occurs in psychotherapy. Certain factors seemed to enable transference to develop throughout the interview process, including creating a comfortable space of not-knowing, allowing the free flowing of narratives, and using unstructured interview techniques, such as free association. It is also possible that by conducting a series of three psychoanalytic interviews may have allowed transferences to develop. David reflected:

> *It is weird because you ask "Have you had any thoughts over the week?" and I'd say "No"… But then I have new points so my mind has processed at some point, maybe when I was sleeping. I think each week my thoughts have grown and developed a bit more in terms of how everything works together.*

While Frosh and Saville Young (2008) argue "it is unusual for researchers to spend enough time with research participants for the kind of deeply emotional relationship found in psychoanalysis to develop" (p.123), participants in this study did seem to have accessed previously repressed material, gained deeper understandings of the self, and many expressed the desire to deepen these understandings and further process these dynamics in their own personal psychotherapy.

As experiences between people develop in an intersubjective context (Togashi, 2009, 2012) the intersubjective approach to data analysis was considered to be suitable for this study. Recognition of the reciprocity and mutuality of human experiences was important as when two people come together, their thoughts, feelings and sensations continually shift and are specific to the dynamics of their interaction (Ogden, 1994). An indissoluble psychological system was experienced between each participant and myself. In my discussion, I have analysed the process from with the "contextual unit" or "inter-subjective field" that was created between each of the interview participants and myself (Stolorow et al., 1983). I vigorously immersed myself and introspectively reflected on the interview processes, specifically focusing on the intrapsychic dynamics of both the participants and myself (Renik, 1993). Any thoughts, feelings, and sensations that emerged during interviews were understood from within this continually shifting and specific intersubjective context (Holmes, 2013; Rustin, 2003). In the final interviews, after review and analysis of the previous interviews, I shared some of my emerging interpretations with each of the participants, providing the opportunity to further clarify or contradict me. In addition to the transcripts, my comments, impressions and feeling states during and after the interviews were also documented, providing corroborative sources of information that were employed to support analytic interpretations (Cartwright, 2004).

Ethical considerations. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Non-Medical Ethics Committee. Prior to participation, comprehensive information was provided to participants regarding the nature and purpose of the study. All participants provided written consent to participate, agreeing to the video recording and transcription of the interviews, as well as the use of direct quotes in publication. Participation was entirely voluntary and all records of the study, including participants' identifies and identifying information, were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were given to each participant to ensure confidentiality and any identifying information was protected through removal or the use of 'thick' disguise (Gabbard, 2000). The writing up of the findings and discussion was informed by the consideration that participants may recognise themselves in publication (Saville Young, 2009). As such, sensitivity to the participants' subjective experiences and the avoidance of indirect harm was emphasised.

Findings and Discussion

While the focus in psychoanalysis has tended to be on the triangular relationship between a child, mother, and father (Freud, 1920) or the three-person relationship between a mother, baby, and toddler (Agger, 1988; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003, 2011; Neubauer, 1983; Parens, 1988; Rustin, 2007), there are likely to be multiple triangular relationships that involve different mixes of vertically dominant or mixed vertical and lateral figures or all lateral figures within a particular family milieu at a particular point in time (Hart, 2019). This adds developmental complexity as these multiple triangular relationships can shape how our relational dynamics play out later in life.

This discussion is focused on a particular three-person relationship that emerged in adulthood for a group of participants. All of the participants in this study spontaneously spoke about their siblings' partners and the triangular relationships between themselves, their siblings, and their sibling's partners were the source of strong affective responses. For the participants, the arrival of another lateral figure, particularly their sibling's partner, resulted in a resurgence of partially solved sibling conflicts and offered an opportunity to understand their sense of self and selfobject experiences based on the analysis of the participants' core narratives. I have focused this discussion on the specific transition of adapting to the arrival of a sibling successor in adulthood to explore how the sibling relationship can potentially shift during this transition. This article explores how the presence of a sibling's partner in adulthood impacted on the participants' experiences of self and others, which can assist in broadening psychoanalytic understandings of different functions of sibling and other lateral relationships throughout our lives.

"What Are They Doing Here?": Excluding the Sibling Successor

Most of the participants in this study started their interviews sharing with me how much they admired, connected with, and understood their siblings. For example, participants described their siblings as "*my favourite person*" (Imogen), "*the only person that I need*" (Elize), and "*my best friend*" (David), suggesting idealisation and merger with the sibling in adulthood. The participants' sibling representations seemed to show the sibling as a "totally powerful, perfect, all-wise saint" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 496). Chaya boasted that her and her brother could "*take over the world if you put us together*." However, the idealisation that Chaya expressed for her brother was in stark contrast to how she devalued her brother's wife. Other participants

seemed to share this narrative of a potent and exclusive merged sibling dyad, contrasted with a strong hostility towards and exclusion of the sibling's partner. In this first section, I will discuss how the relationship between the participant and their sibling can potentially remain merged to the exclusion of the sibling's partner.

In their adult sibling relationships, most participants in this study expressed a strong desire to remain intensely close with their sibling. For instance, Elize and her older sister seemed to be a merged sibling couple, living together in one house with their husbands and children and sharing parenting, transport, and household responsibilities. Elize and her sister seemed to have mutually side-lined their partners as both their husbands seemed to have limited involvement in family decisions. Similarly, Chaya desperately longed for exclusive one-on-one time with her brother, without his wife present, expressing: "*It's not about excluding her. It's just about you and me*." Furthermore, Chaya reflected that she felt that she held her brother "*in a way that his wife doesn't*", reinforcing the exclusive intimate connection she believed she shared with her brother. By forming and remaining as a merged couple, participants seemed to feel more whole, cohesive, and integrated (Bank & Kahn, 1982). Some of the participants resisted against separating from their siblings in adulthood as this could potentially expose a part of themselves that would be left feeling vulnerable and unintegrated in the absence of closeness with the sibling.

Hostile feelings towards the sibling's partner dominated the interviews and the associated representations of the lateral other as devalued were dissociated and split off from any positive feelings. In childhood, siblings are often socially sanctified to enact their hostility towards each other (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). This seemed to be relayed in adulthood to a sibling successor as some of the participants felt that

hostility towards their siblings' partners was acceptable. Instead of expressing hostility towards the sibling due to the threat of separation from the sibling, it seemed that the sibling successor became the target of devaluation and hostility. For example, Chaya attacked her sister-in-law, who had been in a relationship with Chaya's brother for over a decade, with regularity and unabashed intensity throughout the interviews. Five minutes into our first interview, she declared: "*I can't stand* [my brother's] *wife*" and later called her "*the bitch".* She felt strongly that her sister-in-law was not the right partner for her brother:

> *When* [my brother] *was going to propose to her, he told me about it and I told him why I thought it was a bad idea. And I said 'I'm telling this to you once because I never want you to come back to me and say why didn't you say something earlier? These are my reasons why I don't think it's a good idea. These are my concerns; however should you want to go ahead, you're my brother, I will always support you.'*

Despite causing conflict between her and her brother, as well as between her and her sister-in-law, Chaya accepted her hostility towards her sister-in-law and actively devalued her place in the extended family. Similarly, Elize repeatedly attacked her sister's husband throughout the interviews, calling him an "*idiot*" and "*shmuck*". Elize acknowledged that "*we are always bashing him",* but was not concerned about addressing the hostility in her relationship with her brother-in-law.

A variation of this dynamic seemed to have occurred in Yolandi's case with her younger brother and sister-in-law. Instead of experiencing her sister-in-law as her rival, contributing to a devaluation of her, her brother was excluded:

> [My sister-in-law and I] *get along so well and both of us feel that* [my brother] *doesn't understand us. He's very jealous of our relationship to the point that he's angry…. He'll say to her she's not allowed to spend so much time with me. He says that the closer she gets to me, the further he gets from me. He also wants me to tell him everything and be*

> *close to him, but now I tell his wife and then he has to hear from his wife what's happening with me.*

Yolandi had always longed for a sibling connection but this seemed to be impossible with her brother: "*My brother and I fight like cat and dog… He still reminds me to this day that I messed up his life* (laughs hard)". While she shrugged this off in the first interview, later explorations revealed a sense of isolation and rejection from her brother that she fantasised she would not have experienced if she had had a sister instead. Yolandi seemed to show a deep longing to 'find a twin' in any new situation (Miliora, 2003) and she managed to find such a connection with substitute sisters, especially with her brother's wife. The closeness of her relationship with her sister-in-law seemed to ensure her brother was left out and despite his protests, Yolandi made no effort to address his jealousy. By withholding her vulnerability from him, she in some way could be punishing him for separating from her and offer her a way to tolerate her unmanageable feelings towards him. Similar to Chaya and Elize's dyadic longings with their siblings, Yolandi longed for the intense, idealised connection with her sister-in-law to remain intact, while her brother remained excluded. This could also serve to avoid the most painful feelings of exclusion by her brother, which she frequently recalled experiencing in childhood.

In Chaya and Elize's cases, the sibling's partner did seem to be experienced as a traumatic attack on the exclusivity of the sibling relationship, thereby threatening the potency of the merged sibling couple. The fantasy for these participants seemed to be a longing for lateral figures in the family to remain fixed, as if a sibling's partner represented a sibling successor who was threatening the existing order and hence was regarded with loathing and hostility. It seemed that these participants wanted to create a fixed dichotomy where they were always unified with their siblings (or sibling-in-law, in Yolandi's case), and the rest of the world was excluded on the

outside. To remain ‘coupled’ seemed to necessitate things staying the same in the current lateral relationship dynamics where someone is overtly close and someone else is excluded.

In sibling case studies that show similar fixations in sibling dynamics (for example, the cases of Celeste and Adrian in Lewin, 2018, the case of Ann in Shopper, 1974, the case of Jane in Sharpe and Rosenblatt, 1994, and the case of Lisa in Vivona, 2010), the absence of a vertical figure to manage the lateral relationships has been observed. The adult sibling relationship may often exclude the vertical axis, as parental figures did not feature as lawgivers in the narratives related to sibling successors for Yolandi, Chaya, or Elize. These participants did not seem to experience fear of discovery, abandonment, or disapproval from a vertical figure in association with their strong desire to eliminate their lateral rival (Klein, 1955). Moreover, the distinction between vertical and lateral figures was lost as Chaya called her adult brother “*my baby*” and Elize described her older sister like: “*My mom. The mom that I never had…”,* furthering suggesting a blurring of selfobject boundaries (Hart, 2018, 2019). Thus, Mitchell’s (2003) function of the vertical may also be necessary in adult lateral relationships to ensure the prohibition of both hostility and desire, as well as introduce spaces for seriality, which was absent for these participants.

Specific dynamics were observed in this group of participants’ core narratives regarding the three-person relationship between the participant, their sibling, and their sibling’s partner. The introduction of the sibling’s partner was experienced as threatening to the existing relationship between the participant and their sibling. As such, participants attempted to recreate or return to the merger transference with their sibling, as evidenced by fixed idealisation of the sibling and the potency of the merged sibling couple. In doing so, the sibling’s partner was excluded and devalued. The rules and functions of the vertical and lateral relationship was

merged, possibility as a result of the absence of a consistent vertical function. The participant, their sibling, and their sibling's partner could not be experienced as separate and whole objects due to a blurring between self and other. Participants seemed unable to develop a distinctive relationship with the sibling successor and only experienced the sibling's partner through the merger with the sibling. Additionally, participants seemed to deny that their sibling and their sibling's partner had a relationship that excluded them. To remain fixated in this position could create other relational challenges as external others may not be experienced as whole objects (Adam-Lauterbach, 2013; Coles; 2003; Mitchell, 2003) in order to protect the developing ego from contradictory experiences of the self and significant others in the external world (Hart, 2018; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The echoes of idealisation and devaluation due to the use of primitive splitting could mean that siblings and other lateral figures, such as partners, spouses, peers, and friends, may be regarded ambivalently for these participants.

"And Then There Were Three": Welcoming the Sibling Successor

The potential three-person relationships in early childhood are not limited to father-mother-child as we have come to understand that there are common developmental variations, including father-sibling-child, mother-sibling-child, as well as sibling-sibling-child. Separated by the distinctions between self and other, as well as vertical and lateral relationships, another type of three-person relationship is possible, which is an oedipal sibling triangle. Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) use the term oedipal to describe "the developmental level of structuralisation and object relations, not to the specific sexual fantasy regarding a parent" (p. 492), which seemed applicable to this group of participants. In this section, I discuss how the relationship between the

participant, their sibling, and their sibling's partner can be an oedipal sibling triangle and how this relational dynamic may be distinguishable from a sibling merger.

While Chaya, Elize, and Yolandi rigidly held onto the merger transference to the exclusion of the lateral other, some participants seemed to be able to make shifts in the lateral sibling relationship to include the sibling's partner in more inclusive ways. The ability to make the distinction between vertical and lateral relationships, as indicated by the presence of hierarchy, would need to be preceded by the development of the distinction between self and other (Hart, 2018). According to Benjamin (1988), the realisation of the self and the other as separate allows participation in the reality of two subjects which forms the foundation of social functioning. Mitchell (2003) argues that this is first experienced through the sibling trauma and if the narcissistic loss is resolved, the individual is able to say: "I love myself, I will love my sibling as myself, my sibling is not myself, I must love my sibling as another who is like me" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 215). Thus, it is through the challenging and relinquishing of the merger that allows a recognition of the distinction between self and other, followed by a distinction between vertical and lateral relationships.

All participants initially experienced the sibling's partner as a rival and the sibling's partner was ambivalently regarded in the competition for exclusivity with the sibling. While Chaya and Elize quickly revealed their hostility regarding the sibling successors early in the interviews with little concern for how the other would respond, Selene, Imogen, and David were more tentative in sharing these ambivalent feelings with me. For example, Imogen could only express her feelings of jealousy when interacting with her brother and his partner in our last interview:

> *Sometimes when I'm around them and she bosses him around, I actually get a little bit territorial. Like I want to say: 'Excuse me, don't talk to him like that!' I don't like it. The only person that should boss him around is me (*laughs).

Similarly, Selene struggled to articulate her jealousy about how her older sister's partner was welcomed and treated favourably in the extended family compared to her own husband:

> *I used to be blind to the family dynamics, even though* [my husband's] *been saying this for years: 'Things aren't fair, things aren't the same.' But I'd always said to him: 'No, everything is fair, it's equal'. It's hard to identify problems within your own family. I thought everything was always fine. We have a great family with great relationships There weren't any unresolved issues.* (laughs). *And then slowly but surely, these things came through…* (long silence).

David could also only share his discovery of his twin brother's depression from his girlfriend later in the interview process. This experience had evoked feelings of exclusion as he was not the person there to support his brother:

> *I discovered* [my brother was depressed] *from my girlfriend who talks more to him and she found out he was depressed. I hadn't noticed… That was a shock to me. It happened and I didn't know. I felt sort of left out*… (trails off).

The experience of being "*caught off guard*" by ambivalent emotions that arose in the interviews in response to sharing these particular sibling stories was evident for Selene, Imogen, and David, often followed by a desire to "*erase the recordings* (looks directly into camera and laughs)" so there would be no evidence of these confessions. Thus, one structural difference between these participants and Chaya, Elize, and Yolandi was the experience of guilt associated with the negative feelings towards the sibling's partner as rival. The anger and hostility towards the sibling successor was internalised and sharing these ambivalent feelings with me about these

sibling triangles were associated with a sense of shame and guilt about hurting another, followed by a desire for reparation. Neubauer (1983) argues that it is necessary for envy and competition between siblings to be expressed in a way that contains the anxiety that accompanies the destruction, otherwise undue defences and reactions formations can develop, and this may also be applicable to sibling successors. All these participants seemed to use the containing interview space to express and explore their "*messy feelings*", perhaps allowing catharsis of unconscious fears and fantasies related to their siblings and their partners.

Another difference between those participants whose narratives suggested sibling merger (Chaya, Elize, and Yolandi) and those participants whose narratives seemed more oedipal (Selene, Imogen, and David) was how the sibling and the sibling's partner was described and represented the participants' minds. For example, Imogen's was aware of how her adult relationship with her brother impacted on both of their partners. She and her brother frequently socialised together with their partners present, their similarities and merger causing conflict in their own relationships with their partners:

> *We're very similar... Last night we went to a film premiere and* [my brother] *and I love talking to people so we'll talk to people all the time. Our significant others get so irritated and say: 'Now we can't leave… Can you guys stop talking already?'*

Imogen longed for and enjoyed a close sibling bond with her brother and expressed the following fantasy: "*I suggested* [to my brother that] *we buy house together. 'Come on! It would be so cool.' But our boyfriends and girlfriends would feel left out."* The fantasy of buying a house together could suggest an unconscious desire to take the place of her brother's partner, yet Imogen perceived her brother's girlfriend and her own boyfriend as whole objects who could be injured by this fantasy. While there may be a desire to be exclusively coupled with her brother and

eliminate her sibling's partner as rival, Imogen seemed aware that this could mean a loss of love (Charles, 1999; Klein, 1986). Imogen did not seem to fear the loss of her brother's love, declaring "*If I had to kill someone,* [my brother] *would still be there*", but acknowledged that her own relationship with her boyfriend could be threatened: "[My brother is] *my favourite person in the whole world. I try not to say it because I don't want people to be jealous,* (hesitates) *like my boyfriend."* Resolution of this conflict required Imogen to accept the reality that she could not exclusively possess her brother:

Imo: *I like* [my brother's girlfriend]. *She's not what I imagined for my brother, but honestly I'm thankful. Without her, where would he be? When we were young, he would do anything I asked him to do. Do you know what I mean? Get in the cupboard. Cool, I'll get in the cupboard. Make me tea. Do this for me. Do that for me. But now that I'm an adult, he doesn't listen to me as much as he used to, which is irritating. But that's obviously the way things go. I don't have as much of a spell on him.*

Res: *You don't have the same power you used to have?*

Imo: *I think probably* [his girlfriend] *has more of that power now. I see it… But the thing is I'm glad. She keeps him in check, you know?*

By identifying value in her brother's partner and laying to rest the competition of who has more power over him, the loss of the couple fantasy can be tolerated and the oedipal conflict could be repressed and replaced to allow spaces for more realistic representations of the self and others (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994).

David was also able to successfully resolve the oedipal sibling triangle between himself, his brother, and his partner. The closeness and exclusivity of the relationship between David and his brother was also threatened by the arrival of girlfriends: "*Before we both had girlfriends, we would still do a lot of things together…* [Before we would] *just be seen as one, going in the same direction, everything the same."* David and his brother became more independent of each other as they invested more time in their relationships with their girlfriends, causing significant anxiety

for David. He reflected "*things had changed quickly… All of a sudden and it's just been dropped on me…. There was an initial sense of dread and hopelessness*". The primary positive attachment to his brother became modified by negative feelings as a result of his new girlfriend, and the initial negative feelings towards her later became modified: "[My brother has] *someone there to support him… That's his girlfriend's problem more of the time than mine on most days*". Resolution for David meant that his brother no longer represented the ideal primary love object. While the close relationship with his brother offered him "*training wheels*" for other lateral relationships, David now had the freedom to deepen his connection with his girlfriend and consider starting his own family:

> [My brother] *is changing and I'm also changing and we're different in certain ways but there are still a lot of commonalities that we've always had that haven't gone away... We still understand each other… In a few years' time, we will learn that we've got our own people,* [like] *wives or children.*

Similarly, Imogen also expressed the desire to become more independent and have her own child with her current partner to allow her to stop "*mothering*" her younger brother: "*Maybe I should go home* [to my boyfriend] *and say 'It's time! Inseminate me." Then, I can learn about boundaries and* [my brother] *can no longer be my child* (laughs hard)." Both David and Imogen were able to separate from their brothers and forge a distinctive, de-idealised sense of themselves, their siblings, and their siblings' partners. In doing so, these participants were able to imagine a future in which they could still be connected to their siblings, but there were distinctive opportunities and spaces for other significant relationships to be developed.

Specific dynamics were observed in this group of participants' core narratives regarding the three-person relationship between the participant, their sibling, and their sibling's partner. The introduction of the sibling's partner was also experienced as threatening to the existing

relationship between the participant and their sibling. However, instead of returning to the merger transference and excluding the sibling successor, these participants experienced themselves, their sibling, and their sibling's partner as whole objects. As such, the presence of rivalry and competitiveness was also associated guilt and shame about hurting the sibling and their sibling's partner. The non-enactment of the fantasy to destroy the rival was informed by the awareness that such an enactment could mean a loss of love. Instead, participants accepted that exclusively possessing the sibling was not desirable and made space for the development of other relationships, specifically with the sibling successor, in order to love and gain their love.

"Room for Two, Three, Four or More:" The Need for Vertical and Lateral Functions

The arrival of a sibling successor in adulthood was experienced as a transition that necessitated shifts in the participants' sibling relationships. While some participants sibling dynamics seemed to remain fixed, others were able to adjust to the introduction of a third in the sibling relationship and negotiated healthier intrapsychic and interpersonal functioning. In order to understand the similarities and differences between these participants, I searched for commonalities and intersections of the participants' core narratives and feeling states. Narratives including vertical functions in the adult sibling relationship were particularly important when it came to learning how to tolerate changes in the sibling relationship. Understanding how this played out with the participants in this study can help us distinguish between merged sibling dynamics from oedipal sibling dynamics, which would have divergent implications for an "individual's later identifications, choice of adult love object, and patterns of object relating" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 492). In this section, I will argue that even in adult sibling relationships, vertical functions may still be necessary.

For participants in this study, the realisation of the self and other as separate seemed to be a lateral function which involved the sibling trauma. At the beginning of the interviews, their recalled experiences of their siblings were of merged relationships, offering a sense of security and predictability (Kohut, 1971). They idealised this merger until a transition forced them to acknowledge the real arrival of a sibling successor (Mitchell, 2003), such as the introduction of the sibling's new partner to the family. The fantasy where there are no distinctions between self and other was destroyed, followed by the fantasy of remaining as the fixed sibling dyad. Thus, the function of the lateral is to destroy the merger transference and fantasy of omnipotence through the introduction of a successor to the symbolic "His Majesty the Baby" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 205). The function of the vertical is to provide security by containing the subsequent trauma of the destruction of the merger transference and fantasy of omnipotence in two ways. Firstly, the vertical must hold the aggression, persecutory anxiety and depression that accompanies the desire to merge with or eliminate the sibling (Klein, 1955). Secondly, the vertical must enforce prohibitions against the continued merger with or destruction of the lateral and promote reparation on the lateral axis (Klein, 1955). For the participants who we were able to accept the vertical function, the primitive desire or hostility towards the lateral and associated splitting between self-other and vertical-lateral were replaced by repression and reaction formations (Kernberg, 1984). This meant those participants, including Selene, David, and Imogen, were able to participate in the reality of two subjects (Benjamin, 1988), which included a distinction between self and other, and vertical and lateral relationships.

While the participants seemed to carry this distinction between self and other and vertical and lateral relationships into adulthood, the experience of meeting their sibling's partner and subsequent interactions suggested the re-emergence of earlier conflicts. Some participants,

including Chaya, Elize, and Yolandi, seemed to temporarily forget the vertically enforced rules of childhood, such as you and this sibling successor are in the same position and there is room for more than one lateral figure in this family. The introduction and acceptance of seriality, a vertical function where "one is a child in the same position as one's siblings in regards to one's parent or parents, but one is also different: there is room for two, three, four or more" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 53), was missing for these participants. To feel connected to others, a longing for "essential alikeness" (Kohut, 1984, p. 193) with a sibling or sibling successor was observed, often to the exclusion of others. Remaining fixed in merger made it difficult to attain realistic understandings of the complexities of the self and the other (Hart, 2019).

The initial experience of the sibling's partner as an "unwelcome intruder to be ignored or defeated without conflicted feelings" (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 498) seemed to be connected to the participants' childhood relationships with both with their sibling and parents. The availability of parents in childhood had a significant impact on the sibling developmental pathways for the participants in this study. While I initially set out to focus on participants whose childhoods involved both vertical and lateral functions, some participants did not experience their parents as emotionally or physically present at all times. In the cases where sibling dynamics remained fixated on maintaining the exclusive sibling dyad and excluding all others, parental absence or dissociation was more frequent. As such, these participants were sometimes left to manage their relationship with their siblings without vertical lawgivers. Yolandi recalled "*I think* [my brother and I] *had to look after each other because there sometimes wasn't anyone else*." For some participants, the absence of a vertical lawgiver meant that the fantasy of remaining the only omnipotent child that originated in childhood became replaced by the fantasy of remaining the potent sibling couple in adulthood. Perhaps this fantasy was allowed to continue

too long without vertical interjection and offered a more powerful way to defend oneself against the threat of vertical intrusion or another common target of hostility. Without a vertical figure enforcing Mitchell's (2003) law of the mother, the boundaries between vertical and lateral dimensions, and self and other, remained blurred. In the absence of a vertical figure that could provide certainty, safety, and strength, some participants and their siblings also served as replacement parental figures to each other at times.

Other participants' ability to tolerate differences and adjust to transitions, such as the arrival of a sibling successor in adulthood, showed the potential of sibling relationships to change over time. While some sibling dynamics remained from childhood, for many of the participants their adult sibling relationship could be redefined in a way that was acceptable for both siblings. Rooted in the ability to participate in the reality where both the self and the sibling can exist separately (Benjamin, 1998), participants were able to mourn the loss of the exclusive sibling dyad and welcome the presence of other lateral figures, including their siblings' partners. In doing so, participants could create lateral relationships in which there were spaces for each individual's needs, share the world with their siblings and siblings' partners, and tolerate the ever-shifting tension of opposing desires and identifications (Benjamin, 1998; Rustin, 2007).

Concluding Remarks

Using psychoanalytic theory, this article has proposed different types of three-person relationships that occurred in adult sibling relationships when a sibling successor, represented as the sibling's partner, was introduced to an established sibling dynamic. The analysis of the core narratives that emerged through a series of psychoanalytically-informed interviews with six adults who had high-access relationships with their siblings revealed differences between merged

sibling dynamics and oedipal sibling dynamics. While this study focused on a specific types of three-person relationships that developed between the participants, their siblings, and their siblings' partners, this study has introduced some new ideas about vertical and lateral functions. Our lifelong experiences of vertical and lateral functions teaches us to differentiate between self and other and share in a world with relational partners and groups with whom we share similarities and differences. Further explorations of sibling relationships could help deepen our understandings of the many ways siblings and their successors can be significant as we journey together in life.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
Brutus and Caesar—what should be in that "Caesar"?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name.
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well.
Weigh them, it is as heavy. Conjure with 'em,

- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Introductory Remarks

Guided by the study's broad aim to explore sibling developmental functions, I set out to identify potential developmental functions that can be provided by siblings and understand how these developmental functions may influence an individual's experience of self and others, with a specific focus on the subjective experiences of idealising, twinship, and mirroring. A consideration of how parents can fulfil these same developmental needs in adjunctive or distinctive ways also formed the focus of this study. Past sibling studies have been criticised for reinforcing rigid boundaries between sibling and parental relationships and, in response, this study attempted to understand the embeddedness of lateral and vertical functions that are first experienced in the family milieu and then continue into adulthood.

This thesis identified fundamental gaps in self psychology with regards to the developmental significance of siblings and other lateral relationships. Self psychology has predominately conceptualised self development to occur in a psychological environment that is vertically arranged. Lichtenberg (2012) proposes that a sibling selfobject experience can present in a multiplicity of forms, which can make it difficult to categorise in theoretical understandings. This study explored how Mitchell's (2000, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) concepts of lateral and vertical relationships may be applicable to self development, in order to widen current understandings of developmental functions. The focus of this study was sibling relationships inside and outside of the clinical setting, using methodologies that acknowledged the influence of subjective experiences, in order to explore the potential range of functions that siblings may offer in self development. This chapter explores how vertical and lateral functions are both required to move from pre-social infancy into healthy social functioning and concludes with an original self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions.

Pre-Social Infancy: The Merged Vertical and Lateral Function of Idealising

As this thesis is concerned with the developmental functions of siblings, it is considered useful to delineate the potential developmental pathways of sibling relationships, starting from pre-social infancy. The beginning of mental life starts with a phase of uncoordinated, separate nuclei of function from which the whole cohesive self will emerge through interactions with the environment (Kohut, 1971). Psychoanalytic understandings confirm that during the symbiotic phase (from about six weeks to five months of age; Mahler et al., 1975) there is a lack of distinction between self and other as the preoedipal infant is unable to fully experience others as whole objects (Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). At this stage, the infant does not

recognise the other has a separate existence and the experience of self occurs through merger with a calm, responsive other (Kohut, 1971; Togashi & Kottler, 2012). This means that early selfobject relationships can be considered a 'one-person' system as the other is experienced as an integral, indistinguishable part of the self. As object constancy has not developed, the experiences of objects provide need fulfilling functions for the developing self and these are termed 'selfobjects' in self psychology.

Mahler's normal symbiotic phase (Mahler et al., 1975) can be linked to Kohut's (1971) earliest developmental need for idealising. The relationship that develops between infant and selfobject is characterised by a merger transference, which Mahler (Mahler et al., 1975) termed 'symbiotic'. In a letter Kohut (1980) wrote to Mahler, he stated they were "digging tunnels from different directions into the same area of the mountain" (p. 477). Both are considered influential modern psychoanalytic figures, primarily focusing on relationships in the course of development and the impact of early environmental failures on development (Kramer & Akhtar, 1994). The focus on the significance of the relationship between infants and their caregivers in the earliest period of life is shared by both theorists. Both psychoanalytic theorists assume that pre-oedipal development will involve the infant and mother relationship, neglecting to account that available and responsive siblings (or other figures) may also fulfil these early developmental functions. However, infant observational studies have noted that during the normal symbiotic phase, infants often develop "a form of healthy symbiosis" (Leichtman, 1985, p. 136) with an available sibling. Brazelton (1969) noted that infants seem to watch other infants and children with intense interest and often gaze at other lateral figures instead of adults. This suggests that even before dyadic and triadic family relationships are formed, sibling relationships can be considered to be developmentally significant in pre-oedipal development.

While there is an established understanding of how the selfobject need for idealising emerges in pre-oedipal development, this study was interested in the ways in which a sibling or other lateral selfobject can fulfil the need for idealising. According to Kohut (1971), the need for idealising presents as a longing for merger with an idealising imago in order to gain a sense of safety and strength, which emerges before a conception of inner space and three-dimensionality in relation to others has developed (Symington, 2002). As such, there is no distinction in merger between self and other, vertical and lateral, reality and fantasy, good and bad, and hate and love. The need for idealising emerged in the spontaneous unfolding of selfobject transferences in the case of psychotherapy case study and during the free associative narratives shared with me in the psychoanalytic interviews. The participants' subjective experiences of their siblings, shared in their narratives and revealed in their transferences, suggest that the developmental need for idealising can be a merged vertical and lateral function.

The analysis of the clinical case study of Natalie, as outlined in Chapter Four, and the analysis of the psychoanalytic interviews, outlined in Chapter Five and Six, established the importance of the subjective experience of feeling protected by another's strength and guidance in the development of the self. In the case-study, the relationship between me as the researcher-as-therapist and the patient developed over time, revealing the need for idealising in distinctive ways. Natalie's idealising transference was the first to emerge in our therapeutic relationship and we were able to connect this to her early family experiences where she desired to be part of an admired, protective other. As her family milieu included parents and older siblings, both vertical and lateral selfobjects offered her idealising selfobject experiences. A similar finding emerged in the psychoanalytic interviews for many of the participants, including Elize, Imogen, and David, whereby both parents and siblings fulfilled the need for idealising by being sources of perfection

to idealise and merge with. Findings from the case study-based aspect of the research and the psychoanalytic research interview-aspect of the research suggested that either or both parents and siblings can fulfil the function of idealising under the following conditions: the figure is present; the figure is experienced in an idealised manner; and the figure responds with attunement at least some of the time. As the distinction between vertical and lateral relationships has not been established during the developmental phase when the need for idealising first emerges, idealising can be considered to be a merged lateral and vertical function that can be provided by vertical and lateral selfobjects.

The spontaneous unfolding of selfobject transferences have been shown to emerge in psychotherapy as proposed by Kohut (1984). Selfobject transferences can be more easily recognised in clinical cases studies as the relationship between psychotherapist and patient develops slowly and understanding transference-countertransference dynamics is integral. The transformation of selfobject transferences did occur in the long-term psychotherapeutic process with Natalie. As Natalie's therapy progressed, an interesting shift began to emerge in the idealising functions performed by her mother and older siblings. It is necessary to unpack this process in greater depth than was explored in Chapter Four as it reveals some potential differences between a sibling as an idealising selfobject and a parent as an idealising selfobject.

Natalie's initial desire for merger with me in the therapy served to provide her with a sense of safety and strength. In a similar way that Natalie had merged with her mother and her older siblings in childhood which resulted in struggles with claiming her own sense of self and differentiation, in adulthood she struggled to establish as sense of her autonomy separate from the idealised other. Natalie felt it was demanded of her to give up her separateness and differentiation in her shared play with her siblings and in her emotional interactions with her

mother. As such, Natalie became the same as the idealised (m)other in order to gain the desired safety and strength that such a merger offered (Kohut, 1971; Loewald, 2000). However, Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) found that such merger can contribute to an overidentification with the idealised other (either parent or sibling) which works against the development of an autonomous self. In Natalie's case, there seemed to be evidence of such an overidentification with her mother. When she first presented for therapy, she was feeling worthless, powerless, little, and lacking a sense of self, which has been shown to be connected to idealising selfobject experiences that are too great or overwhelming (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Flanagan, 2011; Kahn, 1988; Kohut, 1971). As the therapy progressed, Natalie began to long for spaces for separateness and differentiation, which both her mother and siblings initially resisted. It was much harder for Natalie to confront this resistance in relation to her mother. Natalie was not able to overcome the dynamic with her mother whereby merger was demanded of her during our time together in therapy; however, in her sibling relationships, Natalie was able to challenge the threat of merger and form relationships where separateness and differentiation were introduced and tolerated.

The analysis of Natalie's case suggests that vertical idealising selfobject transference may be more likely to be experienced as too great or overwhelming to challenge, which can disrupt the development of an autonomous self. Thus, it seems possible that overwhelming idealising selfobject experiences may be more likely to develop in the vertical parent-child relationship due to the hierarchical structure in place and accompanying imbalance of power. Conversely, confronting lateral selfobjects may be less overwhelming due to the equalitarian sharing of power that is possible between siblings and other lateral figures.

While the analysis of selfobject transferences in psychotherapy is established in self psychology, understanding how selfobject transferences may emerge and potentially be

transformed in other contexts has not been fully explored. The analysis of selfobject transferences in the research context offered in this thesis is novel and can provide insight into how selfobject transferences may operate outside of the clinical setting. As Cartwright (2004) argues that transference-countertransference dynamics offer valuable information regarding participants' intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, attempts were made in the psychoanalytic interviews to allow selfobject transferences to emerge spontaneously by providing empathic immersion and experience-near understanding in a similar way that occurs in psychotherapy.

Within the research context, certain factors enabled selfobject transference to develop, including giving up of my power as researcher and psychotherapist, creating a comfortable space of not-knowing, allowing the free flowing of narratives, and using unstructured interview techniques, such as free association. I followed the principle offered by Kohut (1982) with regards to selfobject transferences: "tolerate uncertainty and postpone closures." (p. 396). The series of three psychoanalytic interviews allowed a surfacing of sibling dynamics and the development of transference-countertransference dynamics between the research participants and myself. It surprised me that using a series of psychoanalytic interviews allowed selfobject transferences to develop and, in some cases, change over time. David reflected:

> *It's weird because you ask "Have you had any thoughts over the week?" and I'd say "No"... But then I have new points so my mind has processed at some point, maybe when I was sleeping. I think each week the answers have grown and developed a bit more in terms of how everything works together.*

The experiences of participants of the series of psychoanalytic interviews offers some interesting insights into how psychoanalytic interviews can stimulate psychotherapeutic work. Frosh and Saville Young (2008) argue:

> It is unusual, except in some ethnographic work, for researchers to spend enough time with research participants for the kind of deeply emotional relationship found in

> psychoanalysis to develop, and this places strong constraints on the extent to which, for example, transference material can be fostered and examined as part of the research. (p.123)

While I did not expect a transformation of selfobject transferences as this was beyond the aims of the research interviews, participants seemed to have accessed previously repressed material, gained deeper understandings of the self, and expressed the desire to deepen these understandings and further process these dynamics in their own personal psychotherapy.

This thesis was also concerned with exploring how parents and siblings can function as selfobjects in distinctive ways. While this study has suggested that a sibling may fulfil the idealising function, Kohut (1971) initially proposed that the idealising imago should ideally be a parent. In past studies, it has been shown that it is problematic if a sibling solely fulfils the idealising function (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Kahn, 1988; Wittenberg, 2009) as siblings cannot offer maturity, sensitivity, and psychological capabilities in the same way that a vertical figure can. While Natalie and the interview participants' early childhood experiences involved mostly present and responsive parents and siblings, there was one interview participant whose sibling exclusively fulfilled the idealising function due to prolonged parental emotional absence. For Elize, a series of childhood losses including her mother's incarceration and the divorce of her parents, contributed to a childhood of "*darkness*" where the only light was the certainty of her older sister's presence: "*If* [my sister] *wasn't there, I don't know how I would have got through that*." Looking closer at the narratives that emerged in Elize's interviews can offer additional insight into the potential developmental failings that may arise if a sibling is exclusively required to fulfil the idealising function. Elize's mother seemed to be experienced an unstable, emotional figure:

> *I didn't want anything from her* (louder, aggressive). *I didn't want her around* (squirms in seat). *When we heard her car coming up the road, there was just this sound, rrrrrrrrrrrr, and we knew it was the sound of her car, she's on her way home. Incoming. We would all get busy so that we were somewhere that we didn't have to get involved or talk to her. Just clear the room, go play, do homework, watch TV, do something. Just don't want to have to interact... I think she left us alone, unless, unless what?* (long pause) *Unless we had to do something for her, or we touched her towels. I don't know. Or she'd be in a worse mood and should come home and lash out for whatever had happened in her day. I don't know what happened in her day - she didn't work.* (silence).

Elize's older sister was like a mother to her and they seemed to develop a bond that promoted a sense of wholeness for both of them, in absence of a mother. Kohut (1971) proposes that these types of interpersonal dynamics lessen feelings of defencelessness and can provide siblings with a sense of safety. However, in adulthood this meant that Elize presented with difficulties separating from the merger with her sister, anxiety regarding differences between herself and others, and an unstable sense of self. Just like Charles' (1999) patient Sophia, it seemed to me that Elize "struggled with confusion between self, sister and mother, in which neither were separate or whole" (p. 885). The case of Elize, as well as others case studies I engaged with in the literature (see the cases of Celeste and Adrian in Lewin, 2018, the case of Ann in Shopper, 1974, the case of Jane in Sharpe and Rosenblatt, 1994, and the case of Lisa in Vivona, 2010), revealed how vertical figures can chronically and inappropriately respond to selfobject needs, often due to their own disorders of the self (Kohut, 1977). When siblings were required to compensate for any vertical function, pathological outcomes seemed more likely to develop for the siblings involved. This reinforced that both vertical and lateral functions are necessary for the development of a cohesive self.

Experiencing the Sibling Trauma: A Lateral Function

In the previous section, I have elaborated on the merged vertical and lateral function of idealising that is developmentally necessary during pre-social infancy. Mitchell (2011) argues that the transition from the narcissistic, omnipotent infant to a social child occurs through a rite of passage that she calls '*the sibling trauma'*:

> It is a trauma that must be resolved by an instance of acculturation for it marks a break between pre-social infancy and social childhood and necessitates a rite of passage between the two. The toddler who was the baby one moment has to be the child the next. (p. 53)

It is the presence of a sibling, in reality, fantasy or substitution, that marks the break between infancy and childhood; hence, the sibling trauma is considered to be a lateral function. It is the arrival of a new or imagined sibling that destroys the fantasy where there are no distinctions between self and other (Mitchell, 2003). The sibling trauma then destroys the merger transference that dominated in pre-social infancy, challenging the rigid idealisations that served to hold the merger together and initiating the necessary process of mourning.

While I was interested in the journey from pre-social infancy into a new state of childhood via the rite of passage that is the sibling trauma, trying to explore the sibling trauma in this study was challenging as interview participants did not necessarily recollect any hostile responses to the arrival of the sibling. At the beginning of the interviews, most participants earliest recollections were of merged relationships with their siblings, which offered them a sense of security and predictability (Kohut, 1971). However, by the third interviews, certain hostile memories had spontaneously surfaced which participants shared with me. Some interview participants who had younger siblings were told stories by their parents that suggested that "the new baby erupt[ed] into the scene with a paradigmatic too-muchness which [was] traumatic"

(Mitchell, 2011, p. 53). Yolandi reflected that she could not recall her feelings about her brother's birth: "*I blocked out because it was just traumatic, I think*." Imogen told me: "*Apparently, when* [my brother] *was born I would take my nappy off and poo all over the house, in protest.*" Elize guiltily recalled the following about her baby brother:

> *No, I was just ugly to him when he was a child. I was never loving to him and always fighting with him. And not* (hesitates)… *I don't know what was wrong with me. He was just a little boy. Why was l ugly to him?* (shakes head). *I don't know why. It was just like if he wasn't there, life would have been easier. I know that's terrible. Because my mum went even more mad. And there was just more for us to do and we would always just be lugged with him. My dad was out, and my sister was out, and I was the only one looking after him. And it wasn't my fault. I don't know. He shouldn't have been there. And everybody always said that he shouldn't have been there. Why did your mother have another child? But it was. And why didn't I love him?*

These older siblings seemed to have felt that they had to make space for a new baby and recalled instances of being especially harsh towards their younger siblings. Chaya admitted that she tried to deny her younger brother's existence by refusing to play with him: "*When I was small, I didn't want anything to do with him. Go. You're annoying. You're stupid. Just go away!"* On the other hand, Yolandi would actively seek out and terrorise her younger brother: "*If I knew it was going to piss my brother off, I would do it. I enjoyed it*." The reality that these participants had to make space for another baby did seem to evoke overwhelming anxiety, innate envy, and rage, as expected during the sibling trauma (Mitchell, 2003).

To avoid the painful and evocative feelings that arose during the sibling trauma, most participants could recall fantasies that related to these traumatic experiences of their siblings. The participants spontaneously shared these sibling fantasies with me over the course of the interviews where reality was temporarily suspended, and it felt like I was brought into their fantasy worlds. A common fantasy of "*being twins*" emerged where participants could occupy the exactly same position as their sibling and be treated as equals in all ways: "*We're the same.*

In my mind, we're the same." For Selene, a second born who had spent her life feeling like she always came second place to her older sister, the fantasy of being twins could ensure that there would be no older or younger sibling, as well as no first, middle, or last born. For Imogen, being "*like twins*" with her brother allowed her to hold onto a sense of gender fluidity where neither were boy/girl. Perhaps by being like twins the omnipotent fantasy of being the only child (Klein, 1955) could be retained in some way by remaining in state of merger with the idealised sibling, temporarily negating the reality of the sibling trauma.

Another fantasy that dominated many of the participants' childhood play was the formation of a symbolic dual unity to the exclusion of vertical figures and their associated authority. Despite her hostility towards him, Yolandi recalled how her and her brother created secret worlds inside her bedroom cupboard that their parents never discovered. Instead of trying to eliminate the sibling as a rival for the exclusive love and attention of vertical figures, some participants destroyed the need for vertical figures in their fantasies. The fantasy where siblings could give birth to and parent each other also emerged. Older sisters Imogen and Chaya called their brothers "*my child*" and "*my baby*" respectively, while Elize described her older sister as "*my mom*." These types of fantasies opened up a psychic space of endless possibilities of who participants could be and the worlds they can create. However, these fantasies also signalled a blurring of selfobject boundaries which complicated the participants ability to differentiate between self and other, as well as vertical and lateral relationships. This has been shown to contribute to difficulties with differentiating oneself and developing the self towards independence if not resolved (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Thus, the feelings evoked by the arrival of a sibling in childhood challenged certain fantasies that accompanied the participants' merger transferences.

How we experience the sibling trauma in childhood can set up certain unconscious and conscious responses that can be compulsively repeated or avoided in adulthood in pursuit of resolution (Mitchell, 2011). The introduction of the participants' siblings' partners evoked intense feelings in adulthood, as explored in Chapter Six. Similarly, the clinical case study of Natalie revealed her subjective experiences and intense feelings in response to the sibling trauma she experienced in adulthood. Since Natalie was the last born in her family of origin, the sibling trauma was more easily recognised when she had to make space for new siblings in adulthood. Still, similar processes that occurred in childhood for the interview participants in response to the arrival of a sibling were noted in the case study. Natalie seemed to have experienced the sibling trauma in the therapy process when she realised that she was not my only patient. One day she left my consulting rooms to find my next patient in the waiting room. While in reality I have many patients, this encounter with another patient had not happened to Natalie before, potentially introducing the reality that she was one of many patients I was working with. Natalie expressed hostile feelings about sharing me with my other patients as the existence of another was possibly experienced as a threat to our developing idealising transference. It is possible that some patients may experience this omnipotent fantasy of being the only patient, which may echo early longings of being the only child (Klein, 1928, 1955), in order to deny the sibling trauma.

In this section, I explored the necessary sibling trauma which serves as a lateral function to destroy the omnipotent fantasy of being the only child and challenge the merger transference that dominated in pre-oedipal development. Childhood experiences of sibling trauma were often hard to access in this study due to defensive processes, making it difficult to establish how sibling traumas were resolved. I can only offer interpretations based on the subjective experiences that were explored in Natalie's long-term psychotherapy and in the psychoanalytic

interviews I conducted. From the interpretations and analysis of this rich and meaningful data, it seemed that there were necessary vertical functions that a parent must fulfil during this rite of passage. When the sibling trauma is met by appropriate vertical functions, the sense of self may become structured in ways that prepare us for appropriate social functioning.

Resolving the Sibling Trauma: A Vertical Function

In order to function as a social being, a child will need to be able to distinguish between self and other as this forms the foundation of social functioning in the vertical and lateral world (Benjamin, 1998). While a pre-oedipal infant may not yet be able to distinguish between self or other, or lateral and vertical relationships, the sibling trauma introduces the reality that two or more similar subjects can exist in the world (Mitchell, 2003). This reality threatens the fantasy of omnipotence, as well as the merger transference where self and other (vertical or lateral) remain a fixed dyad. Thus, the sibling trauma, a lateral function, opens up a path of development where the self and other can be psychically structured and subjectively experienced as separate.

The sibling trauma emerged in adulthood in the case of psychotherapy case study, as well as in childhood and adulthood for the interview participants, resulting in overwhelming anxiety, innate rage, and hostility towards the sibling or sibling successor. The sibling trauma also threatened the idealising transference which offered a sense of security and predictability for the participants in this study. The ability to contain the anxiety that the sibling trauma evoked, as well as experience a sense of predictability and security, seemed to be temporarily compromised for the participants in this study, especially in childhood but sometimes also in adulthood. In all cases, the resolution of the sibling trauma necessitated involvement from a vertical figure. As such, the findings from this study suggest that resolving the sibling trauma is a vertical function.

Most participants in this study could distinctively recall their parents' involvement in their sibling relationships. Children need a vertical figure to provide laws to govern their vertical and lateral relationships. Interestingly, when Klein (1955) engaged in a child's game as part of treatment, she would sometimes say "*I'll pretend to be…"* the role assigned to her, inserting an awareness of reality in the play, as well as her subjecthood. This is a potential function that only a vertical figure can offer: differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy, what is self and what is other, what is possible and what is limited. Mitchell (2003) argues that the vertical figure that governs family relationships is most likely the mother, conceptualised as a subject, not just a fantastical imago or maternal thing. The laws she creates shape the developing subjecthood of her children. Mitchell (2003) terms this function '*the law of the mother',* in contrast to Lacan's '*law of the father'*. Nevertheless, for most of the participants in this study, both mother and father fulfilled this function. While the sibling trauma is a lateral function that is necessary to initiate mourning for the grandiose self and acceptance that the developing child is both ordinary and exceptional, the resolution of the sibling trauma is considered to be a vertical function that necessitates involvement from a figure in a position of authority or power.

The sibling trauma brings with it a disruption to the idealising transference, whether the merger is with a vertical or lateral figure. In response, participants in this study tried to hold onto the merger and would create fantasies where vertical or lateral figures did not exist as separate. Memories that related to disruptions to the merger transference and its associated fantasies were rarely shared with me, such as remembering when siblings were separated in school or recalling experiences in which siblings were treated differently by parents. Just as participants may have needed their parents to provide security by containing the trauma of the destruction of the idealising transference and fantasy of omnipotence, I also felt like I needed to offer catharsis of

their difficult feelings and containment of their anxiety as their experiences of their sibling traumas emerged. During the interviews, I held the contradicting feelings that arose when talking about desires to merge with or eliminate their siblings, including desire, aggression, persecutory anxiety, and depression. During these instances, I felt like I was performing a vertical function and experienced parent-child transference dynamics between each of the participants and myself.

While I did not enforce prohibitions against the continued merger with or destruction of the lateral and promote reparation between participants and their siblings during the interviews, many participants, including Chaya, Selene, David, and Imogen, could recall their parents fulfilling this vertical function. Aggression seemed to be expected by parents due to hostility and conflict that arose between participants and their siblings; however, these destructive impulses were prohibited through non-enactment. This aggression was effectively contained by parents by allowing the siblings to experience their emotions and fantasies towards their siblings and then facilitating reparation between siblings (Klein, 1986). It seemed that the participants' subjective experiences of this vertical function enabled the primitive hostility towards the lateral and associated splitting between self and other and vertical and lateral to be joined and replaced by repression and healthier reaction formations (Kernberg, 1984).

For some participants in this study, subjective experiences of this vertical function were hard to recall in childhood. When siblings were left to play and engage with each other without vertical involvement, the participants recalled some dangerous pursuits and outcomes:

> *When we were very, very young, my mum left us in the lounge by a wine glass cabinet which we managed to open… Breaking glass and poked each other with glass, not comprehending what we were doing and my mum coming back to two babies covered in blood.* (David)

> *The two of us packed everything out of my closet at the bottom and hid away in the closet and put all the stuff in front of us and then we fell asleep in there. My mom got home,*

> *and they couldn't find us… It was massive fighting, they were always fighting, and they phoned the police… Eventually they found us in the cupboard.* (Yolandi)

> *I would* [say to my brother] *"Climb into this cupboard, let's see if you can fit" and then I would lock the cupboard. Terrible. But then I'd let him cry for a bit and let him out.* (Imogen)

For most of the participants, these dangerous situations were infrequent, and parents intervened by warning: "*Be careful, your brother's going to be bigger than you and then you going to cry. And then he got bigger and I did cry, and my mom said: 'Don't come crying to me, I told you'"* (Chaya). After a period when David and his brother both got stitches from rough housing, their father said: "*Be careful or things are going to get worse… Then he horrified us with scary stories from his childhood and what happened to his friends."* These vertical interventions were internalised and resulted in future non-enactment of violent sibling interactions.

While hostility and aggression commonly arose in the participants' childhood narratives about their siblings, the desire to continue to merge with the sibling also emerged. Mitchell (2003) describes children longing to parthenogenetically birth children from within themselves or with each other. While the child can create a fantasy world in play where any version of self and other is possible, the vertical law of the mother allows internalisation of a reality where parts of my fantasied self may never be born. "It is I, the mother, not you the child, who gives birth" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 72). The child is left with the awareness that is only a mother who has a sexual relationship with a father which can make babies. This vertical function initiates the necessary loss and mourning of a self-generated birth and prohibits incestual impulses between siblings through non-enactment (Mitchell, 2003). Symbolically, this means the child can begin to internalise their own empty inner space within; a space 'in mind' in which to hold representations and think creatively (Rustin, 2007). Thus, the reinforcement of the child's

position in hierarchy is a vertical function that sets up the distinctions between who is the mother and who are the children in the mind of the developing child (Mitchell, 2003), introducing the developing child to the awareness of a vertical and lateral world.

Two participants recalled consistent lack of involvement from vertical figures in childhood. While I had invited participants who had experienced their parents as available and present, it is possible that conflicts in relation to both parents and siblings prompted some of the participants' participation in this study. Yolandi reflected, "*I think we kind of had to look after each other because there wasn't anyone else*". Elize similarly said of her sister, "*She's like my mom. The mom that I never had."* This was problematic as these participants struggled to resolve the sibling trauma and remained in sibling dynamics where splitting and denial predominated, coupled with ambivalence regarding self and others. While Elize and her sister seemed to show evidence of Shopper's (1974) 'twinning reaction' where they excluded any others and formed a symbolic dual unity that continued into adulthood, Yolandi and her brother seemed to vacillate between idealisation and devaluation, as well as merger and avoidance, in almost sadomasochistic ways (Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). Explorations of these participants selfobject experiences with lateral relationships in adulthood, such as partners, spouses, peers, seemed to suggest that this infantile sibling position had not been resolved and these participants remained stuck in the sibling trauma.

The trauma of a sibling (fantasied or actual) and the subsequent 'death' of "His Majesty the Baby" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 205) is experienced as an attack to the child's omnipotence, injuring the narcissistic sector of the developing personality. The developing child loses a sense of self as the only child and as mother's baby (Rustin, 2007). While the trauma of the birth of a sibling evokes normal fears of annihilation which stimulates the negative potential for sibling

murder and incest, this also has the potential to stimulate healthy development if laterality is properly regulated through the vertical function and later by culture. The early family milieu may be an ideal space for the developing child to act out their hostile fantasies towards lateral others and be assisted by a vertical other to promote reparation so that belonging and acceptance can be gained.

The sibling trauma challenges the idealising transference (a lateral function) while the introduction of hierarchy allows for the relinquishing of the idealising transference while retaining a sense of security (a vertical function). The developing child is then able to distinguish between self and other, as well as between vertical and lateral relationships. While this distinction between who is mother and who is child creates an awareness of hierarchy in a vertical and lateral world, a developing child is also faced with this dilemma: "before [children] are equal in their sameness to each other, children must be equal in their difference from each other." (Mitchell, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, the need to introduce seriality where siblings are differentiated from each other to relive the threat of destruction entailed by their sameness is also developmentally necessary. This will be discussed in more detail below as it relates to twinship selfobject experiences.

Finding 'Not-Me and Me': The Vertical and Lateral Functions of Twinship

In the previous section, I have examined how either parents and siblings can fulfil the need for idealising and suggested that siblings are necessary for the introduction to the sibling trauma and parents are necessary for the resolution of the sibling trauma. Moreover, this study was interested in whether a sibling can fulfil the need for twinship. Pre-oedipally, siblings tend to be experienced archaically as identical to the self, forming part of an organised whole of

unconscious representations and possessing deeply narcissistic dynamics since the other is experienced as a reflection of the self. However, after the distinction between self and other can be symbolised in the mind of a developing child, sibling relationships can be understood as synchronic intersubjective and generational organisations where individuals must grapple with the coexistence of love and hate, sameness and difference, as well as mirroring and otherness (Kaës, 2008). Once the developing child has resolved the sibling trauma, the child experiences conflict between generations, allowing the child to "experiment with essential experiences such as collaboration, comparison, and solidarity, but also difference and autonomy" (Liotta et al., 2014, p. 11). To explore the selfobject need of twinship starts with a consideration of the vertical and lateral family relationships in which this need can be fulfilled.

While psychoanalytic theories have widely explored the developmental pathway of a child's dyadic relationship with the mother and later includes the child's triadic oedipal relationship with the mother and father, the sibling is mostly absent. Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994) proposed developmental pathways where sibling relationships "evolve from dyadic to triadic oedipal forms in many, if not all, families" (p. 515). In order to gain an integrated understanding of the functions of siblings in development, an examination of how lateral and vertical relationships intersect in the early family milieu is required. In this study, the complexities of three-person relationships came to the fore in both the case study and psychoanalytic interviews. I will explore these vertical and lateral complexities in relation to the selfobject need of twinship.

The need for twinship can be understood broadly as the feeling of being human among other humans (Kohut, 1984). Togashi (2012) defines the "sense of sameness and difference [as] an experiential concept that describes the subjective experience of people who feel themselves

connected to others in a twinship" (p. 358). To be fully ourselves and accepted by others requires an acceptance of the complexities of all that it means to be human. While connection with others through sharing similarities is fundamental to twinship selfobject experiences (Kohut, 1984), spaces for connections that allow for the co-existence of our differences are also developmentally necessary.

Differences are often experienced as threatening and destructive, making it difficult for us to develop a secure place in our sense of self and in association with others (Mitchell, 2003). We also live in a world that divides us by race, class, language, age, and gender, impacting the ways in which we experience ourselves and each other as human beings. It is through twinship selfobject experiences that our needs for belonging and acceptance are fulfilled, without denying the complexity of our similarities and differences (Brothers, 2012; Lichtenberg, 2012; Togashi, 2008, 2012, 2014; Togashi & Kottler, 2012). While contemporary self psychologists have attempted to deepen understandings of how twinship selfobject experiences relate to theory and clinical practice (Brothers, 2012; Lichtenberg, 2012; Martinez, 2003; Miliora, 2003; Togashi, 2008, 2012, 2014; Togashi & Kottler, 2012), there is still a lack of clarity and cohesion regarding twinship as a selfobject experience.

While there may be many more faces of twinship (Togashi & Kottler, 2012), specific twinship selfobject experiences specifically related to sameness and differences in relation to siblings emerged from the case study and the psychoanalytic interviews. The exploration of how participants negotiated sameness and difference in relation to their siblings revealed how twinship needs for belonging and acceptance can be fulfilled within the early family milieu. Past research has shown that "similarity in interests and talents, along with the sense of being understood by someone like oneself" (White & Weiner, 1986, p. 103) is considered essential in

twinship selfobject experiences (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Lichtenberg, 2003, 2012; Togashi & Kottler, 2012).

Through regular playful interactions, similar interests, talents, and personality traits seemed to develop which became fundamental to how siblings interacted in the case study of Natalie and in many of the narratives that emerged in the psychoanalytic interviews. Even in adulthood, these similarities continued to bring participants and their siblings together, whether enjoying musical theatre together, visiting new restaurants together, taking apart electronics, going on family holidays with their children, or passionately dissecting films. The twinship bond provided participants with a sense of security and connection with their siblings that was established in childhood and often carried into adulthood. Sharing similarities with a sibling meant participants could "fuse or merge with another person, feel more whole more integrated, and less vulnerable to the vagaries of an uncertain world." (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 31). A longing for the presence of "essential alikeness" (Kohut, 1984, p. 193) was evident in all of the participants' narratives about their siblings and was less apparent in relation to parents. Shared interests created spaces where participants' connection to their siblings could be reinforced, as well as their connection to their developing sense of self.

Despite these shared interests, most participants could experience their siblings as separate and had differentiated themselves from their siblings in many ways. Togashi (2012) argues that "a twinship experience, which is described as being based on the dialectic between a sense of sameness and difference at the experiential level, can be described as being organised as a delicate balance between mutual findings of oneself and not-oneself in the other at the explanatory level" (p. 352). Play and playfulness seemed to create the ideal spaces for vitalising twinship selfobject experiences for Natalie, as well as the interview participants, as this provided

the opportunity for them to find a sense of self through interactions with another. Ramsey (1998) argues that "while [play] cannot change the external realities of children's lives, [play] can be a vehicle for children to explore and enjoy their differences and similarities and to create, even for a brief time, a more just world where everyone is an equal and valued participant" (p. 10). Wittenberg (2009) adds:

> As they play, compete, and fight with siblings whose emotional and cognitive strengths and weaknesses are moderately well matched to their own, due to similarities in development and experience, children get a clearer sense of who they are and who they are not. (p. 40)

In childhood play, a child's sense of self is not fixed and siblings who play together regularly amend and change their conceptions of self (Charles, 1999). In this study, close-in-age sibling relationships opened up spaces for siblings as playmates to experiment with different versions of themselves, others, and the world. The experiences of both positive and negative interactions between siblings were helpful to facilitate the ability to tolerate selfobject failures, as well as develop an autonomous sense of self.

While vertical figures were not particularly important for Natalie and for the interview participants in their search for similarities, the function of vertical figures were important for introducing the concept of hierarchy and seriality, when necessary. In addition to ensuring non-enactment of destructive fantasies and regulation of appropriate lateral relationships, Mitchell (2000) proposes that a vertical figure is necessary for enforcing differentiation so that the developing child can mourn parts of the fantastical self and begin to internalise a sense of self and other. This vertical function is concerned with seriality, which affirms that siblings are in the same position to each other in the family structure, and that there is room for each of the siblings in the family structure (Mitchell, 2003). The experiences of this vertical function ensured that

participants gained the opportunity to explore similarities and differences with a sibling without losing the sense of connection and security within the sibling relationship, as well as explore similarities and differences with a parent without losing the sense of connection and security within the child-parent relationship.

The absence of this vertical function meant that sibling interactions were inflexible and rigid, as sometimes seen in Natalie's and Elize's sibling dynamics. When they experienced their older sisters demanding conformity from them, the parts of the self that were different seemed to become fragmented or denied. As a result, the boundaries between vertical and lateral and self and other remained blurred. Connecting with others as 'same-only' negated the experience of a cohesive self, which may have contributed to insecurity, anxiety, and unstable connection to oneself and others (Togashi, 2012). Hence, the findings from these cases suggest that parents were necessary and active participants in allowing spaces for difference in their children's twinship selfobject experiences of their siblings.

Natalie's experiences of insecurity, anxiety, and unstable connection to herself and others was what brought her to psychotherapy. It was necessary for me to introduce the vertical function through the introduction of seriality in the psychotherapeutic process that unfolded between us. Once she realised the reality of the existence of other patients, a necessary lateral function, I fulfilled the vertical function of exploring and containing the aggression, persecutory anxiety, and depression that accompanied the awareness of me having other patients. This was expressed through the words: "*Yes, I do have other patients and while you are allowed to have difficult feelings about sharing me with them, know that you are the only Natalie to me."* Therefore, I emphasised that while Natalie was in the same position as my other patients, Natalie

was distinctive to me and there was room for more than one patient in my practice (Mitchell, 2003).

Just as the sibling trauma had evoked intense feelings for Natalie when she became aware of the existence of other lateral figures in my practice, the introduction of the participants' siblings' partners served a necessary lateral function which threatened the existing sibling dyad in adulthood. When the vertical function was absent, merged relationships between lateral figures remained fixed. When the vertical function was present, participants could mourn the loss of the exclusive sibling dyad and welcome the presence of other lateral figures, including their siblings' partners. The analysis of the experiences of the participants in this study suggest that this lateral function may be repeated over many transitions in our lives, each time prompting us to either return to merger or adjust and make space for relational complexity. In each transition, the function of the vertical remains equally important to prevent the continued merger between lateral figures by introducing seriality and creating spaces for difference.

What seemed to allow for a warm, accepting, and supportive relationship between siblings to develop was a guiding and containing vertical figure that kept in mind external realities that contained the siblings. In Natalie's case, it was me as psychotherapist who offered the guidance and containment that allowed her to develop spaces in her mind to eventually hold my other patients as her "*brothers and sisters in therapy*". In the cases of David, Selene, Chaya, and Imogen, the potential relational dynamics between siblings were overseen by appropriate rules, rigidity, and structure imposed by parents. Over time, even in the absence of vertical presence, siblings internalised this function and could serve this vertical function as existing vertical roles and norms remained in sibling interactions. This created a sense of security and the

ideal environment for siblings to explore, develop, and maintain a sense of self without losing connection to others (Charles, 1999).

The twinship selfobject need for experiences that provide connection and belonging is fundamental, yet so often our experiences are concerned with what divides us. While finding similarities with another as a means of connection offers us a sense of safety, security, and admiration, this merger connection as 'same-only' negates the experience of a cohesive self, contributing to insecurity, anxiety, and an unstable connection to oneself and others (Togashi, 2012) as shown by some of the participants in this study. Only by relinquishing the merger to make spaces for sameness and difference can we fully experience the feeling of being human among our fellow human beings (Kohut, 1984). The introduction of differences to our awareness is disruptive and initially anxiety provoking, but we need spaces to explore our differences in nonthreatening ways to fully experience vitalising twinship.

Once a developing child relinquishes the merger transference, develops the structures to recognise self-other distinctions, and becomes more differentiated, the experiences of difference between self and others as vertical and lateral figures emerges (Benjamin, 1998; Rustin, 2007; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). The participants in this study showed that their experiences of differences between themselves and vertical figures were tolerable, while the differences within their sibling relationships were experienced with higher levels of intensity and defensiveness. The consistent presence of both vertical and lateral twinship selfobject experiences seemed to be necessary to facilitate vitalising twinship where participants could find themselves and not find themselves in another and still retain a sense of belonging and acceptance.

While past research has tended to focus on either parents or siblings as providing twinship selfobject experiences (Lichtenberg, 2012; Wittenberg, 2009), this study has shown that

vitalising twinship selfobject experiences should involve both vertical and lateral figures. The intersections between vertical and lateral in the family milieu offers selfobject experiences to negotiate the complexities of sameness and difference in both axes. These experiences seem to provide a strong foundation for anchoring the self and developing a multitude of relationships with others. By allowing for differentiated experiences of the self and other, we can step into the world and be invigorated by the nuances of our interactions with others in these dimensions, without being destabilised or losing dimensions of ourselves in order to belong and connect.

Seeing Me: The Vertical and Lateral Functions of Mirroring

While the developing child is able to explore similarities and differences between the self and others, the need for mirroring and validation of one's sense of self is also developmentally necessary. The need for mirroring is defined as the longing to be seen as a separate person in order to satisfy the developing child's narcissistic desires (Kohut, 1971). All of us want to be distinguished, different, and noticed. We require others in our external environment to reflect and identify the unique capacities, talents, and characteristics of ourselves (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984). For David, a twin, he expressed his desire for mirroring by stating "*You want to be you and you alone and people to find out you are a twin later*." Chaya also desired to be seen: "*I stomped and performed. See me, see me, hello, I'm here! See me, I exist. I matter."*

This study was interested in the ways in which a sibling as a lateral selfobject can fulfil the need for mirroring. In self psychology, parents are typically assumed to fulfil this developmental function; however, the need for mirroring could be fulfilled by both lateral and vertical figures for the participants in this study. For some participants, mirroring their siblings was natural and reciprocal. David would say to his brother "*I'm proud of you, nicely done!"*

Selene's sister once said to her: "*I do envy your ability to do that*", making Selene realise that her sister does actually "*see me sometimes*". Witnessing and mirroring their siblings also helped the participants identify both good and bad qualities in themselves. Imogen reflected that "*We both love people, we are both pretty easy going, quite politically open…*", while Elize shared:

> *My sister's given me an insight into myself of how I like things done myself. She'll be in the house and say, "You must do this. You must do that." I reply, "Ok, I will"* (with childlike irritation). *You know, I'm also always telling people what they must do.* (laughs).

Kahn (1988) described cases in which typically younger siblings tend to idealise their older siblings. As such, the younger sibling is able to merge with the older, and the older sibling reaps the rewards of mirroring and narcissistic gratification. While I hypothesised that it would be unlikely for a younger sibling to provide appropriate mirroring responses to an older sibling in Chapter Four, the data that emerged from the psychoanalytic interviews suggested that both older and younger siblings could fulfil the function of mirroring if they had already experienced their own appropriate mirroring selfobject experiences.

For others, mirroring the unique capacities, talents, and characteristics of their siblings and giving their sibling recognition was withheld. When they were children, Chaya would always encourage her brother by saying "*You can do it boy! You can do it boy! Go boy! You've got this!"* However, in adulthood, Chaya recalled a family Shabbos meal in which mirroring her brother turned into this spectacle:

> *My brother had to fix stuff for my parents. Everyone was like he's a genius and I went* (dramatic fake hand clap) *WELL DONE! A completely dick move. But seriously you don't have to. He is smart like that and he can do that for you. But it's ridiculous. Wow, my brother can fix the TV.* (claps)

When Yolandi's brother completed his postgraduate degree with distinction, the experience evoked confusing feelings for her:

> *I can't describe the feeling. I'm really bad at describing how I feel. I feel something but I can't put words to it. I'm not jealous. I'm proud, but I'm also like* (shrugs shoulders)*... whatever. I'm not going to go "My god, you're amazing, well done."*

In these cases, it seemed that vertical figures had not created a mirroring identification by fostering empathy between family members. As such, these siblings may not have developed the ability to provide appropriate and responsive mirroring selfobject experiences. Thus, the experience of mirroring and validation was absent, disrupting the development of "security [in] the expectation of another's receptivity" (Lichtenberg, 2012, p. 409).

This study has shown that the need for mirroring could be fulfilled by both lateral and vertical selfobjects who reflect and identify the child's unique capacities, talents, and characteristics. This would depend on maturity as the ability of a sibling to fulfil a mirroring function requires the structure of healthy narcissism to already be established. Nevertheless, minor, non-traumatic failures in mirroring are vital for healthy development in order to challenge the grandiose fantasy and ensure the development of healthy narcissism (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984), which will be discussed in the section below.

Transmuting Internalisation: From Vertical and Lateral Functions to Self Functions

Kohut (1971) uses the term *transmuting internalisation* to describe the process whereby the selfobject experiences of idealising, twinship, and mirroring become internalised as a cohesive self. This gradual process relies on innate capabilities that are potentially available in the course of development. Each family milieu may offer a distinctive selfobject matrix which will have different responses to a developing child's needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring. Thus, the beginning process of transmuting internalisation depends on the distinctive selfobject matrix in the early family milieu, which may include parents, siblings, and other family members who will each

have their own abilities and willingness to perform vertical and lateral functions that are needed by the developing child.

The process of transmuting internalisation can be likened to Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory whereby the internalisation of interactions with significant others contributes to the development of attachment security. In self psychology, transmuting internalisation describes how a developing child gradually internalises self-regulation functions and acquires the ability to perform these functions autonomously. Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) did not distinguish these self-regulation functions into vertical and lateral functions as he assumed that all functions would mainly be fulfilled by parents in early childhood. However, permanent psychic structures within the ego and superego are transformed within an empathic selfobject matrix that often includes parents and siblings. Thus, this thesis extends self psychology theory by introducing the concepts of vertical and lateral functions in order to deepen understandings of how the process of transmuting internalisation can occur.

Transmuting internalisation is proposed by Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) to unfold as a developmental analogue. A child is born with the innate selfobject needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring into an early selfobject matrix that will appropriately respond to these needs, as well as fail to fulfil these needs, in distinctive ways. In order to foster an inner sense of stability and self-cohesion, the developing child requires the optimal balance of empathetic gratification and empathetic frustration, which Kohut (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) considered to be the ideal early selfobject matrix. When the developing child's selfobject needs for idealising, twinship, and mirroring are met with appropriate empathetic responses, the child subjectively experiences vertical and lateral functions which strengthens their sense of healthy idealisation, connectedness,

and grandiosity. These subjective experiences serve to contain the developing child, reduce overwhelming anxiety, and form the foundation of self-regulation.

Minor empathic failures and delayed responses to the developing child will also occur and are necessary in the early selfobject matrix. The subjective experiences of disappointment and difficulty serve to facilitate the development of self as solid, secure, and resilient so that selfobject experiences become less necessary as sources of self-regulation (Flanagan, 2011). Kohut and Wolf (1978) propose that "these failures lead to the gradual replacement of the selfobjects and their functions by a self and its functions" (p. 415). Similar to the process of mourning, after the experience of selfobject failure, idealisations are gradually withdrawn from significant others as libido invested in the lost selfobject is withdrawn so that psychic structures can take form. However, the lost selfobject remains in memory and qualities of the lost selfobject remain. The new structures assume the functions previously performed by the selfobject, but the personal qualities of the object are no longer necessary (Antony, 2005). For Kohut (1971), identification with selfobjects and their functions is temporal and transitional as when the autonomous self emerges it is not just a replica of the developing child's selfobjects. If the developing child experiences both empathetic gratification and empathetic frustration from vertical and lateral selfobjects in the selfobject matrix in a gradual and manageable way, over time a fractioned withdrawal of idealising, twinship, and mirroring from selfobjects will occur to allow an internalised and consolidated sense of self to emerge. Therefore, psychic structures are built through transmuting internalisation of vertical and lateral functions in the early family milieu.

Transmuting internalisation is the process of structure formation in which aspects of the vertical and lateral function are internalised "under the pressure generated by optimal frustration" (Wolf, 1988, p.187). However, consistently faulty or irresponsive vertical and lateral functions are

disruptive to the development of a cohesive self as the developing child cannot fractionate the overwhelming loss and transmuting internalisation does not occur appropriately (Antony, 2005). This may have been the case for interview participants Elize and Yolandi as their selfobject experiences seemed to consistently involve overwhelming loss and trauma. The internal structures that allow the self to function in the world did not seem to be taken over by the self and they continued to seek reparative selfobject experiences (Flanagan, 2011; Kahn, 1988; Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984; Wittenberg, 2009; Wolf, 1988).

The case of Natalie presented in Chapter Four showed reparative selfobject experiences can be sought in psychotherapy to re-initiate the process of transmuting internalisation. The opportunity to merge with my calm and guiding explorations of Natalie's early family milieu initially intensified her idealising transference. A series of empathetic failures that were appropriately contained and processed allow the emergence of twinship and mirroring transferences in psychotherapy. Gradually, Natalie began transmuting some of those functions on her own as she tried them out for herself. The vertical and lateral functions offered by me become self functions for Natalie through the process of transmuting internalisation that unfolded during her psychotherapy process. According to Kohut (1984), termination of psychotherapy is ideal when "the conditions are provided for the patient's living a meaningful life through the ability to realise the program of [her] nuclear self via the instrumentalities of work and love" (p. 43). At termination, Natalie was better able to regulate her emotions, experienced a stable sense of self and self-esteem, could decide which ambitions and goals to pursue, and sought out empathic contact with responsive others in her life. Thus, the case of Natalie outlines a process of transmuting internalisation whereby vertical and lateral functions offered in psychotherapy were transformed into psychic structures.

A Proposed Model of Vertical and Lateral Functions

I have argued for the necessity of vertical and lateral functions to facilitate development from fragmented self nuclei to a cohesive self through the process of transmuting internalisation based on the analysis of the participants' experiences of their siblings, as well as informed by sibling literature. In this section, I propose a self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions which offers a consolidated representation of the theoretical contributions of this study (see Figure 6). This model shows that the intersections of vertical and lateral functions enable the development of a sense of self and healthy relationships with others through the subjective experiences of idealising, twinship, and mirroring.

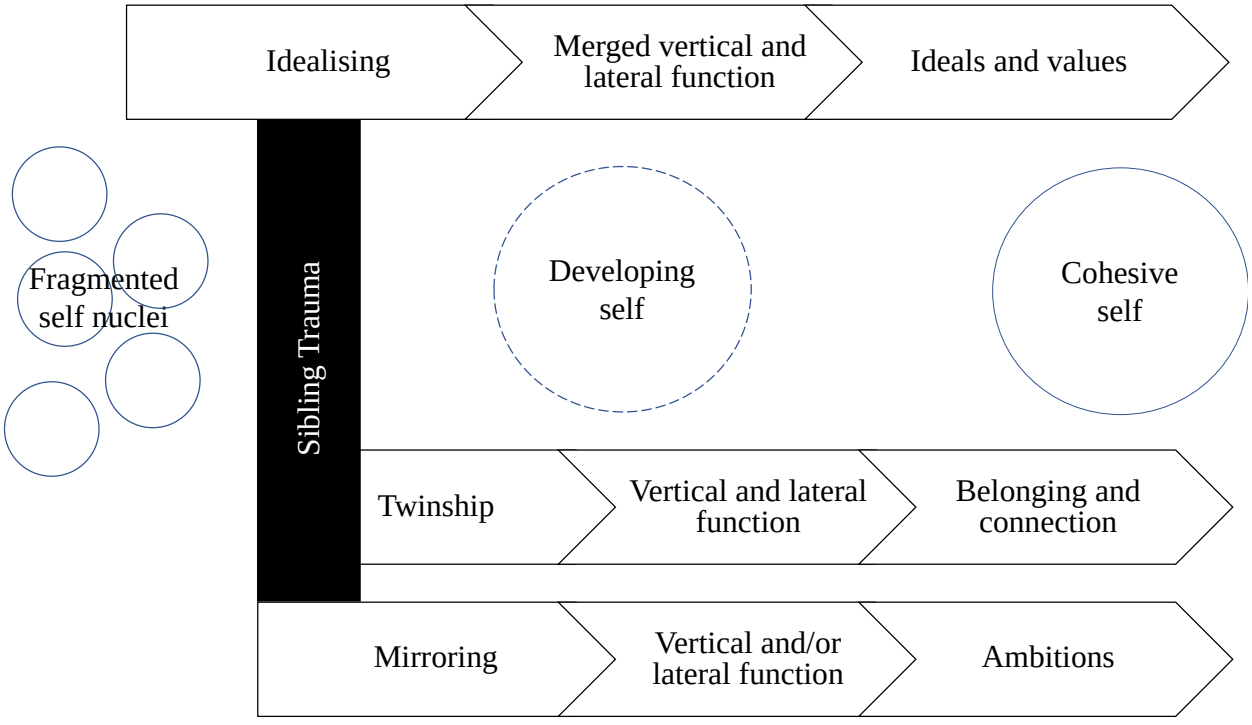


Figure 6: Self Psychology Model of Vertical and Lateral Functions

At the beginning of life, the experiences of self are fragmented and the self and other are merged, offering a sense of security and predictability (Kohut, 1971). This merger is idealised until a transition, such as weaning, pregnancy, or a birth of a sibling, forces the acknowledgement of the real or imagined arrival of a sibling (Mitchell, 2003). The fantasy where there are no distinctions between self and other is destroyed, followed by the fantasy of remaining the only omnipotent child (Klein, 1955). The function of the lateral is hence to destroy the merger transference and fantasy of omnipotence, both of which evoke significant anxiety, through the sibling trauma. The function of the vertical is to contain the sibling trauma by enforcing prohibitions against the destruction of the sibling, holding the aggression, persecutory anxiety, and depression that accompanies the desire to eliminate the sibling, and promoting reparation between siblings when required (Klein, 1955). If this vertical function is experienced consistently, the primitive hostility towards the lateral and associated splitting will be replaced by repression and reaction formations (Kernberg, 1984). This contributes to the development of the ability to participate in the reality of two subjects (Benjamin, 1988), which includes a distinction between self and other, and vertical and lateral relationships.

Once a developing child holds the distinctions between self and other in mind, the vertical function is required to introduce the concept of hierarchy between self and other and enforces the vertical and lateral axes: “I am the parent, you are the child. I make the rules, you follow them”. Another vertical function is the introduction of the concept of seriality: “This is your sibling. You are also a sibling. There is space for all of you. You can be the same. You can be different”. If the earlier vertical function involved a sense of security and predictability, the experience of this hierarchy, seriality, and the associated rules enforced by the vertical would not be experienced as hostile. These vertical functions of hierarchy and seriality introduce the reality

and logic of succession and continuity over time. The developing child is then able to locate the self temporally by accepting what/who came before them and what/who comes after, so that the self structure can be located and ordered in physical and psychic space and time.

The function of the lateral becomes important again after the experience of the introduction of hierarchy and seriality. As siblings are both situated on the lateral axis, together they can begin to mourn the grandiose self. In relation to each other, siblings can accept they are ordinary (Mitchell, 2003). In the loss of the grandiose self, there is also the simultaneous gain of sibling companionship. While archaic merger offered comfort in earlier development, twinship now emerges as developmentally necessary as siblings find they belong to each other as they share a position in their family (Kohut, 1984). The vertical function also becomes significant again as siblings need to also be assured of their belonging to their parents. Thus, a more realistic, complex, and nuanced version of the self can be reflected back through the multiple lenses offered by available vertical and lateral figures.

Once siblings feel secure in their security and belonging in both vertical and lateral relationships, they need to feel that others can mirror their similarities and differences to assure each other that they are unique and exceptional. While the need for mirroring could be fulfilled by both or either lateral or vertical figures, it requires an immersion in the other's world, empathically attuning the self to the other's experiences (Kohut, 1971). Unlike the grandiose self that was earlier mourned, the need to be mirrored allows the development of healthy narcissism and a cohesive sense of self where there is also a "recognition of the realistic imperfections and limitations of the self" (Kohut, 1971, p. 108).

The process in which the subjective experiences of the developmental functions of idealising, twinship, and mirroring become part of psychic structures is called transmuting

internalisation in self psychology (Kohut, 1971). The attainment of permanent psychic structures within the ego and superego that now provide the vertical and lateral functions previously performed by vertical and lateral selfobjects can unfold in the early family milieu, in adult relationships, as well as during psychotherapy (Antony, 2005). This slow and gradual process occurs where the vertical and lateral functions of idealising selfobjects, twinship selfobjects, and mirroring selfobjects are relinquished and internalised. The acquisition of values, ideals, commands, approvals, and prohibitions that are internalised through selfobject experiences form the contents of the superego. The ability to tolerate painful and threatening overstimulation, the effective management of drives, and protection against narcissistic vulnerability are internalised through selfobject experiences, providing a stable sense of self-regulation and self-esteem (Ornstein, 1978). The subjective experiences of the vertical and lateral functions offered to us throughout life then continuously shape who we are and how we are able to relate to others.

Concluding Remarks

Using the theoretical framework of self psychology, this chapter has shown how the developmental functions of idealising, twinship, and mirroring were provided by a sibling and provided by parents based on the subjective experiences of participants in this study. The specific ways the participants experienced these lateral and vertical functions in the early family milieu had implications for how they experienced themselves and others through the process of transmuting internalisation. The integration of literature on siblings, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the case study and psychoanalytic interviews, has suggested that vertical and lateral functions are significant in distinctive ways in early childhood and remain part of us as we interact with the social world.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Introductory Remarks

Informed by my own experience of disjuncture regarding the absence of consideration of the developmental functions of siblings in psychoanalysis, this thesis has focused on exploring intrapsychic processes and unconscious meanings associated with siblings in distinctive ways. Firstly, this study extended the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry into siblings to include the clinical and non-clinical context. Secondly, this study included an exploration of the multiple triangular relationships within family milieus beyond the triangular relationships between a child, mother, and father, or mother, baby, and toddler that traditional psychoanalysis tends to foreground. Thirdly, this study explored the importance of sibling relationships beyond early childhood experiences by also examining sibling tensions and dynamics that emerged in adulthood. Based on the analysis of participants' experiences of their siblings, as well as informed by sibling literature, this study has contributed to psychoanalytic thinking by proposing a self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions. The potential ways this model can be

applied to clinical practice, social relationships, and future research are explored in this chapter to show some of the broader implications and limitations of this study.

Applications to Clinical Practice

The development from fragmented self nuclei to a cohesive self through the process of transmuting internalisation for each patient is distinctive and depends on their unique selfobject matrix. The self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions proposed in this thesis suggests that psychotherapists need to be aware of and explore variations in the idealising, twinship, and mirroring selfobject experiences offered in an early selfobject matrix that often includes both siblings and parents. In the clinical context, it is necessary to consider the historical and current vertical and lateral selfobject experiences of our patients and how these may have shaped a patient's sense of self and relationships with others. Furthermore, we need to be aware of how we can offer reparative vertical and lateral selfobject experiences to our patients in our clinical work.

The self psychological theoretical framework used in this study assumes that selfobject needs of idealising, twinship, and mirroring persist throughout life, continuing to require fulfilment if unmet during early childhood (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1984). This means that unmet selfobjects needs often emerge spontaneously as selfobject transferences in other relationships repeatedly over the lifespan. Kohut and Wolf (1978) provide an outline of how individuals may present with unfulfilled selfobject needs in a clinical context. These categorical descriptions show specific patterns of manifest behaviour that Kohut and Wolf (1978) consider to be universally present psychological conditions. While rigid classifications can limit our thinking and hamper our ability to fully understand the complexities of our patients, Kohut and

Wolf (1978) argue for the necessity of such classifications as "valuable guides in psychological territory in which we feel not yet at home" (p. 419).

If there are consistent idealising selfobject failures (from either vertical or lateral selfobjects), a patient may present with an *ideal-hungry personality* where they may seek admiration towards others in order to gain a sense of power, security, and moral standing (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). The need for idealising selfobject experiences may be temporarily filled by the experiences of a vertical or lateral selfobject to whom the patient can look up and merge with. However, the disappointment of imperfection is inevitable, and the ideal-hungry patient continues to seek the next great figure to idealise and merge with. This seemed to be the case for Natalie in her early psychotherapy process as outlined in Chapter Four and may have also been the case for Elize, who constantly idealised her older sister in order to feel secure, and Yolandi, who consistency sought perfection in others only be to repeatedly disappointed, as discussed in Chapter Five and Six. If a patient presents with the need for idealising selfobjects in their relationships, this patient may not have distinguished between vertical and lateral selfobjects. Pathological, pre-oedipal sibling dynamics may become fixed for this type of patient. Others in the patient's external world, including the psychotherapist, are likely to regarded ambivalently with the echoes of idealisation and devaluation. The patient may present with idealising selfobject transference and the psychotherapist could explore how the patient has experienced idealising selfobject failures in childhood and beyond.

This study has shown that a vitalising twinship selfobject experience requires the fulfilment of twinship selfobject needs through the experiences of a sense of belonging with both vertical and lateral selfobjects, incorporating the complexities of similarly and difference. If this selfobject need for twinship is not fulfilled, an *alter-ego personality* may present where the

patient conforms to the selfobject's appearance, opinions, and values in order to confirm the reality of the self (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). It is possible that a vertical alter-ego personality may present where there is a relentless conformity to a vertical figure in order to gain a sense of belonging, like in the case of a student mimicking their teacher in order to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Alternatively, a lateral alter-ego personality may present where there is a relentless conformity to a lateral figure in order to gain a sense of belonging, for example when a group of friends all dress and talk the same. While alter-ego-hungry personalities may be able to form lasting twinship bonds on the basis of their shared similarities, difference will eventually be introduced into the relationship, disrupting the twinship tie. This seemed to be the case for David and his twin brother who in adolescence began forming separate identities, interests, and social relationships as explored in Chapter Five. In the case that a patient presents with the need for twinship selfobjects in their relationships, it will be helpful to establish how twinship selfobject failures were experienced in both vertical and lateral relationships. Additionally, it will be important to explore how the introduction of difference has been negotiated in twinship selfobject experiences and whether the complexities of sameness and difference can be embraced.

In the absence of appropriate mirroring selfobject experiences, a patient may present with a *mirror-hungry personality* where there is a need for both vertical and lateral others to provide confirmation and admiration to feed the famished sense of self (Kohut & Wolf, 1978). This consistent seeking out of others who can offer attention and recognition serves to temporarily fulfil their inner sense of worthlessness and lack of self-esteem. This may have been the case for Selene and Chaya who both expressed the need to be seen, heard, and acknowledged for their unique capacities, talents, and characteristics by both vertical and lateral selfobjects as discussed

in Chapter Five and Six. Similar to the case of twinship selfobject failures, it would seem that it would be necessary to establish how mirroring selfobject failures were experienced in both vertical and lateral relationships if a patient presents with a mirroring transference in the clinical context.

The aforementioned categorical descriptions of how patients may present if they consistently experienced idealising, twinship, or mirroring selfobject failures can offer a broad framework for identifying the specific patterns of manifest behaviour that may guide the focus of a patient's psychotherapy process. However, I assert that these rigid classifications and the limits of their applicability can be overcome by including an exploration and analysis of how selfobject transferences unfold. This study has shown that idealising, twinship, and mirroring transferences can play out laterally or vertically in the early family milieu, as well as in the clinical and research context. While it is common that these transferences would also arise in the analytic situation and be transformed if engaged with appropriately, psychotherapists need to be able to differentiate selfobject transferences as they unfold in order to understand the nuances and complexities of a patient's functioning. Thus, it is important to identify and work with both vertical and lateral "varieties of selfobject transferences" (Kohut, 1984, p. 209) in psychoanalytic practice.

As a psychoanalytically informed psychotherapist, this study has opened up my thinking about how vertical and lateral functions may be introduced and applied to the therapeutic relationship. Lesser (1978) argues that psychotherapists must allow themselves to be "transformed into a sibling as well as a parent" (p. 48). A psychotherapist may need to fulfil the vertical function in order to challenge a merger transference between lateral figures; however, a rigid parent-child transference in therapy can be problematic as the parent-like, wise, omnipotent

therapist role may mean patients experience themselves as powerless children, dominated by infantile feelings (Bank & Kahn, 1982). There are other times when the psychotherapist is required to be a lateral figure who is experienced by the patient as 'someone like myself'. Patients may desire to engage in the equalitarian sharing of power whereby cooperation and alliance is needed from the psychotherapist. Understanding when and how vertical and lateral functions are developmentally necessary can inform understandings of patients' needs at different parts of the psychotherapy process.

In Chapter Four, I described a clinical case where my patient experienced the sibling trauma in the therapy process when she realised that she was not my only patient. It was necessary for me to introduce a vertical function through containing her anxiety about sharing me with others by introducing seriality in a containing way. My own resistance to certain vertical transferences was also explored in relation to this patient's psychotherapeutic process, reinforcing the necessity of psychotherapists to be aware of how preferences for certain transference-countertransference dynamics can be problematic if unresolved (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). This may be especially applicable for past sibling experiences which too often remain repressed and unprocessed for both psychotherapists and patients (Agger, 1988; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Coles, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Sharpe & Rosenblatt, 1994). This limits the depth and richness of our relational understandings of ourselves and others, as well contributes to unresolved primitive feelings, overwhelming anxiety, and defensive functioning.

While the clinical case in Chapter Four revealed the necessity of vertical and lateral functions in a clinical context, the subjective experiences of the interview participants as discussed in Chapter Five and Six revealed similar developmental needs in relation to vertical

and lateral functions. When exploring emotionally difficult feelings related to their siblings in the interviews, I often felt the need to respond with containment and empathy which I experienced as offering an idealising and mirroring vertical function. Nevertheless, at other times, I felt like I was offering the lateral function of twinship as we found ourselves in each other through empathic immersion and self-disclosure, which Kottler (2015) proposes is a defining characteristic of a twinship selfobject transference.

Within the clinical context and while conducting the interviews, vertical and lateral functions intersected in complex, ever-shifting ways as the relationship between myself and the participants developed. I will continue to explore relevant clinical material and transference manifestations of siblings and other significant lateral figures or sibling substitutes, in addition to parents and their vertical substitutes, as this complicates and enriches each distinctive psychotherapeutic process. This thesis has shown that it is necessary to continue to invite absent and present siblings onto the couch so that unresolved sibling and other lateral dynamics can potentially be surfaced and resolved.

The self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions that has been proposed in this thesis offers a new theoretical understanding to guide clinical practice. Reconceptualising siblings in self psychology literature has been theoretically valuable in terms of understanding pathways to healthy and pathological development. By broadening the psychoanalytic lens to outside of the clinical setting where the focus tends to remain on vertical relationships, this study has offered greater understandings of dysfunction and cohesion in relation to the developmental influences of siblings, as well as also opened up some of the tensions and possibilities for future exploration. Therefore, the proposed self psychology model of vertical and lateral functions

contributes to enriched understandings of both lateral and vertical relationships in clinical settings.

Social Applications

In the process of conducing this research, I have also been more attuned to the ways in which vertical and lateral functions are evident outside the clinical setting and the family milieu. The conceptualisation of political, social, and national phenomena using psychoanalytic principles related to siblings is another thesis on its own. However, psychoanalysis can be a "progressive social force" (Berg, 2009, p. 110) as I briefly consider the relevance and applicability of psychoanalytic conceptualisations of siblings to social functioning more broadly.

The question of who we consider to be our social family and who are our social siblings and parents requires us to reflect on vertical and lateral functions in global dynamics. We tend to find our belonging in us-versus-them social groups based on nationality, race, language, politics, religion, sexuality or gender. Sameness within the social groups are seen to be equivalent to goodness and love, whereas difference is equated with badness and hate. Interactions between these different social groups seem to mirror sibling rivalry characterised by envy, jealousy, hatred, and a ruthless fight for survival (Money-Kyrle, 1978). Often, fragmentation of different social groupings has resulted in conflicts between these different groups. This way of experiencing ourselves in the social world means we tend to reduce others to either our friend or our enemy and fosters defensive functioning that maintains biases and unresolved conflict between groups.

Structural changes are required in order to overcome these unresolved social sibling dynamics between social groups that there are spaces for differences between us and fairness in

how we all treated. While the role of parents in facilitating healthy sibling relationships has been underplayed in psychoanalytic literature, it can be argued that mother as country and father as government have distinctive and vital functions regarding their children as citizens. It is the vertical function of our collective mother to help us internalise seriality by claiming that there is space in the world for all her children and their needs. This could allow individuals to build an internal structure of healthy narcissism and self-esteem that can be extended to all other citizens, irrespective of similarities and differences. However, if self-other distinctions are emphasised, this will threaten seriality on a structural level as citizens will continue to deny or devalue the other and struggle to accept the complexities and tensions of similarity and difference (Kilian, 2010; Kottler, 2007). In order to embrace the paradoxical feelings of similarity and difference in relation to another, we need to move to a more conscious and productive grieving process that acknowledges the reality of two subjects where both the self and other can be realised as ordinary and exceptional (Benjamin, 1998; Mitchell, 2003). Until we demand that our social structures create and regulate laws for our society that allow for diversity in opposing desires and identifications, we shall remain divided 'brothers and sisters'.

If psychoanalysis is to remain relevant and applicable as a theory and a practice, critical engagement and interrogation into the functions of psychoanalysis in diverse settings is required (Berg, 2009). The prevailing theoretical insights into the potential psychological and social developmental functions of siblings remains underdeveloped. Further consideration of how the theoretical concepts of lateral and vertical functions could be operating in various different social contexts may be helpful. Psychoanalysis can offer new understandings of social problems by interrogating why certain social problems persist across history and contexts, as well as explore

how social structures are constructed to cause divisiveness and conflict between different social groups based on nationality, race, language, class, religion, politics, sexuality or gender.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research

Certain methodological limitations will be reiterated as to acknowledge the potential limitations of this thesis. As a qualitative research design was used, based on a limited group of participants, the findings from the case study and 18 psychoanalytic interviews cannot be generalised or transferred. However, this study did not intend to generate data that could necessarily be generalised to the wider population as the aim of the study was to examine singular selfobject experiences that siblings provided in specific family milieus. The in-depth and rich material that emerged as a result of using qualitative research methods were useful to propose hypotheses and expand theoretical perspectives on the potential developmental functions of siblings using a case-by-case approach. It is hoped that the findings from this study will invite more psychoanalytical enquiries in order to fully encapsulate the complexities and permutations of vertical and lateral relationships over the lifespan in different contexts.

The decision to use the singular theoretical framework of self psychology was informed by a desire for this study to have focus and clarity; yet, there are many theoretical positions that I could have explored with regards to sibling relationships. During the process of conducting this study, I found myself drawn to diverse theoretical frameworks in my attempts to understand the sibling dynamics that emerged in my reading of the literature, during my clinical work, and while analysing the clinical and interview material. Most psychoanalytical theories have not integrated siblings into their conceptualisations of development. I remain curious to the applications of this study to other psychoanalytic theories, particularly how these findings could

potentially intersect with Winnicott's work on play, Jung's concept of individuation, and Mahler's symbiotic phase. These are potential areas for future theoretical exploration as understanding intersecting concepts between different psychoanalytic theories could confirm different trajectories of healthy and pathological development.

I recognise that broadening the research to include other theoretical perspectives could have deepened this study in different ways and allowed alternative hypotheses to be developed, but the use of self psychology ensured that this thesis offered greater theoretical coherence. This research offered a theoretical integration of concepts from self psychology and existing psychoanalytical sibling studies to understand self development in the early family milieu. As these theoretical links has not been established in prior literature, further research is necessary which can focus on how this synthesis can be operated and applied to understandings of development. Furthermore, integration with literature from other theoretical perspectives outside of self psychology, such as developmental, feminist, sociological, biological, relational, object relational, and clinical perspectives, will open up spaces to understand different aspects of the developmental functions of siblings.

It will also be interesting to explore how the theoretical model proposed in this study can offer potentially innovative ways of thinking and working with sibling dynamics in clinical practice. Particular attentiveness towards idealising, twinship, and mirroring selfobjects transferences, as well as the vertical and lateral varieties of these transferences, may invite complex and enriching psychotherapeutic processes. Nevertheless, unresolved and unprocessed sibling dynamics may require a carefully and systematically working through process in order to address primitive feelings, overwhelming anxiety, and defensive functioning related to the early family milieu. The particular techniques associated with working with sibling dynamics was

beyond the scope of the thesis and further research into this area is required to guide clinical practice. The findings from this study, as well as other psychoanalytic sibling studies, suggest that including siblings in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is beneficial and necessary work.

The applicability of this study's findings to working therapeutically with families could include developing interventions for caregivers in residential child care settings, helping blended families navigate vertical and lateral conflicts, strengthening intergenerational households that have a more diverse composition of vertical and lateral figures, as well as supporting diverse dimensions of self development in single child families. The potential for exploring how this study's findings can help us better understand different groups, such as only children and twins, remains a necessary avenue for further study. While I have predominately focused on the clinical applications for adult psychotherapy as this is the context in which I work, the findings from this study may open up possibilities for new models of play therapy with children and group therapies that involve a consideration of vertical and lateral group dynamics. There are also applications to understanding educational approaches as vertical and lateral dynamics are fundamental to how learning is currently structured.

As experiences of lateral and vertical functions shapes the people we become, as well as the societies we build and shape, this research can help us understand the transmission of unique aspects of families, as well as the more universal aspects of self development and those that are more cultural or context-specific. It is important to be critical of the notion of the independent self in western societies and how this varies from the more interdependent models of the self in many African and Asian cultures. As the findings from this study were particular to a specific group of South African, mostly white, middle-class participants, further studies are required to understand how vertical and lateral functions could operate in diverse families and with diverse

social groupings. While this study looked beyond the clinical setting, the diverse and nuanced possibilities for the functions of sibling relationships in development have not been fully encapsulated. Greater theoretical development and exploration is required as we seek a full and comprehensive understanding of the intrapsychic and interpersonal world of ourselves and others in psychoanalytic theory and practice.

This study has offered a self psychology model of potential vertical and lateral functions in order to show that both parents and siblings (or other figures that serve similar vertical and lateral functions) are necessary in our early childhood experiences, shaping the people we become and the relationships we form with others. Furthermore, this study has shown that is possible to acquire permanent psychic structures of vertical and lateral functions through a reparative psychotherapy process in adulthood if selfobject experiences of these functions in the early family milieu were consistently faulty or unresponsive to selfobject needs. By building bridges between diverse sibling experiences and ways of understanding psychoanalytic concepts, as well as making space for siblings in psychoanalysis, this thesis has shown the structural importance of lateral relationships for the development of the self.

Concluding Remarks

At the end of this thesis, I find myself returning to where this all began. I start at my own family, appreciating how from their initial surprise regarding my arrival, they made space for me. I think about all the time I have spent reading psychoanalytic and other literature, lost in the stories of how we come to be the people we are and how we interact with those around us. I see myself sitting across patients who have invited me to play many different parts in their lives. I wonder, "Who do you need me to be today?" I hold the new family I have created with my husband and

children, remembering how many changes we have navigated to nurture safety, belonging, and validation between us. I think about the journey this thesis has taken me on and the many vertical and lateral others who have shaped and witnessed my experiences of the process. The use of different methods also allowed me to straddle the different roles of researcher and clinician and showed me how they may vitalise each other. The intersections between my past and my present, my clinical, research and personal life, and my experiences of vertical and lateral functions have been fundamental to writing this thesis.

My initial sense of disjuncture may be temporarily resolved at the conclusion of this thesis. However, my learning throughout conducting this research ends with an acknowledgement of the incompleteness of what I think I have come to understand about siblings. “For as long as I continue to learn, I remain an unfinished person – the possibility of more growth, more experience, and so on remains – I am still learning to be me” (Jarvis, 2009, p. 30).

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Appendix A Recruitment Poster



Appendix B Interview Outline

First interview

Purpose: free associative, unstructured

I am really interested in your experiences of your siblings as you grew up and how you feel they may have impacted on the person you are today. I'm also interested in anything about your life or background that you might feel you want to discuss even if you think it might appear to be off topic. There is not particular place to start. You can begin wherever you'd like to.

What was it like for you to talk to me about your siblings today?
Was there anything that you found surprising or unexpected in your responses?
Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?
Do you have any questions?

Second interview

Purpose: free associative, unstructured

How did you find the first interview?
What was it like talking about your experiences?
Has anything come to mind since your last interview?
Was there anything else about the last interview that you would like to mention or add?
Do you have any questions, thoughts or feelings after the first interview?
Do you have any questions, thoughts or feelings that relate to me?
Do you have any questions, thoughts or feelings that relate to other significant others in your life?

Third interview

Purpose: biographical and historical, semi-structured

I am really interested in understanding more of… (seeking clarification)
I'd like to know more about…(seeking clarification)

There seemed to be a contradiction in… (confronting contradictions)

On the one hand, you seemed to experience this, but on the other hand… (confronting contradictions)

From our last two interviews, I was struck by… (putting forward preliminary interpretations)

When you said this, it made me think about this other thing you said… (putting forward preliminary interpretations)

Appendix C Ethics Clearance Certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Hart

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H16/06/15**
PROJECT TITLE	Surfacing the sibling in self psychology: Exploring the potential developmental functions of siblings
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mrs C Hart
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	24 June 2016
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	17 July 2019

DATE 18 July 2016 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor T Graham

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix D Participant Information Document

Department of Psychology
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel: 011 717 4500 Fax: 011 717 4559

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Hello

My name is Claire Hart. I am a Counselling Psychologist and PhD candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My research aims to better understand how a sibling may influence the development of a sense of self. The research will involve up to three interviews in which you will be asked to talk about and reflect on their experiences of your sibling in your childhood. If you have no children, permanently shared a home environment with one or more siblings throughout your childhood, have less than a three year age gap with one sibling, and consider your parents to have been available and responsive to your needs as a child, I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and no person shall be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. Participation will entail you being interviewed by me on three separate occasions over a two month period, at a time and place that is convenient for both of us. No preparation for the interviews will be necessary. Each interview will last approximately one hour. You will be asked questions on your experiences of your siblings and how they have influenced who you are today. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to answer, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded and transcribed. Only I and my supervisor will be allowed to process the interview material (tapes and transcripts). The interview material will be safeguarded to ensure no unauthorised access and will be kept electronically under password protection that only I will have access to. Your identity will be protected as I will use a pseudonym in place of your name and remove any identifying information, such as names of people and places, to ensure your confidentiality is maintained. The research will be published in academic journals and direct quotes may be included in the published material, but no identifying information will be included. If you are interested in the findings of the research, you can contact me using the details provided below and I will provide you with an executive summary of findings once the research is complete.

There are no direct risks or benefits in participating in this study. I do not expect the interviews to distress you in any way; however, the questions may elicit emotional responses. If you are feeling emotional after your interviews and would like to talk to someone, I have provided referrals to counselling services below.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please contact me telephonically or by email. We will then arrange a meeting to conduct the interviews at a time and place that suits us both. If you have any additional questions about the study please feel free to contact me or my research supervisor.

Kind Regards,
Claire Hart
Tel: 079 653 0712
Email: info@clairehart.co.za

Research supervisor: Prof. Tanya Graham
Tel: 011 717 8330
Email: Tanya.Graham@wits.ac.za

If you would like to report any problems or complaints that you have concerning participating in this study you may contact the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee Chair, Professor Peter Cleaton-Jones on 011 717 2301, or administrator, Lucille Mooragan on 011 717 1408.

I do not expect the interview to harm you in any way, but if you feel you are having problems after you have participated in this study, please seek help from these counselling services:

South African Depression and Anxiety Group: 011 262 6396

Life Line: 012 342 2222

Appendix E Participant Consent Form

Department of Psychology

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: 011 717 4500 Fax: 011 717 4559

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _____, have read the Participant Information Document and give my permission to participate in this research study. I understand that:

1. Participation in the three interviews is voluntary.
2. I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to answer.
3. I may withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences.
4. My identity will be protected.
5. The interview material will be shared with the researcher's supervisor.
6. There are no direct risks or benefits in participating in this study; nevertheless, the researcher will be available for contact should I have any concerns.
7. Direct quotes may be included in the published material and all identifying personal information will be removed.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F Consent to Record and Transcribe Interviews

Department of Psychology

Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: 011 717 4500 Fax: 011 717 4559

CONSENT TO RECORD AND TRANSCRIBE INTERVIEWS

I, _____, have read the Participant Information Document and give my permission to have my interviews recorded and transcribed. I understand that:

1. The interview material (tapes and transcripts) will be kept confidential.
2. My identity will be protected and no identifying personal information will be included in the transcription.
3. The interview material will only processed by the researcher and will only be available to the researcher and the supervisor.
4. The interview material will be stored electronically under password protection that only the researcher will be able to access.

Signed: _____

Date: _____