

Liberation Unleashed

**A phenomenological study of helping others to
see through the illusion of a separate self**

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Abstract

This study examines the experience of those who help others to see through the illusion of a separate self. The Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* is reviewed and its potential for the basis of a 'third-wave' cognitive behavioural therapy is explored. The organisation Liberation Unleashed (LU) is introduced and its online method of guides helping seekers to see through the illusion of a separate self is described. Using a qualitative approach the study examines the experiences of six LU guides. The six participants were interviewed and the data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Eleven major shared themes were identified: Definition: the illusion of a separate self; Definition: seeing through the illusion; Motivation for helping others; The guiding relationship; Obstacles: background, beliefs, expectations; Obstacles: fear; Obstacles: choice and control; Obstacles: thinking instead of looking; Helpful pointers; The nature of guiding; The experience of seeing. Conclusions supporting the development of an *anatta*-based model of psychotherapy are: management of the therapeutic alliance and compassion fatigue; working with defence mechanisms and transference dynamics; challenging clients' beliefs and the risk to mental health; paying attention to spiritual materialism and spiritual bypassing. Limitations to the research are discussed and suggestions for further research are made.

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Declaration

I affirm that this dissertation was composed by myself and that all of the work herein (aside from the sources cited) is my own original research.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This dissertation is a significant milestone on my journey towards developing a model of psychotherapy based upon the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*, a Pali language word which is usually translated as “no-self” (Epstein, 2007, p.1).

“According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of ‘me’ and ‘mine’, selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world” (Rahula, 1974, p.51).

Buddhist psychology is founded upon the Buddha’s observation that a tendency to avoid the existential inevitability of pain, loss, and death, causes us to try to find and hold onto something substantial and enduring, and that this grasping for reassurance “creates an accumulation of habit-energies, preferences and behaviour patterns that support the illusion of an enduring self that can escape impermanence” (Brazier, 2003, p.136). Due to its conceptual nature this imaginary self requires constant reinforcement in the form of identification with other seemingly more persisting objects and concepts such as the body, possessions, relationships, and opinions. Its own existence is invested in the continuity of the objects with which it identifies so much so that if and when their own vulnerability is exposed the emotional and behavioural consequences can be devastating. Unfortunately it does not stop there. The process of self-identification continues to strengthen itself by extending its reach beyond the individual to include the symbols and narratives of groups of individuals with common themes such as a nation, a race, a religion, a political ideology, or even a football team! This fosters an ‘us and them’ mentality that when challenged leads to inter-group hostility and conflict. “The Buddha did not dispute the relative reality of the conventionally appearing self. But he did insist that we tend to give this relational self an absolute status that it does not possess. We think that it is more real than it is, and we expend an extraordinary amount of energy propping it up and protecting it, reinforcing the certainty of our own separateness” (Epstein, 2007, p.2).

Conventional psychotherapy does not question the existence of the self and indeed supports such notions as individuation and integration in the service of developing a so-called healthy sense of self. In fact self-development has often been considered to be a prerequisite to spiritual development, an attitude that is encapsulated by the oft-repeated statement by Engler (1984) that “you have to be somebody before you can be nobody” (p.31). It is my view that this is a fallacy and that it has arisen for two main reasons: it allows Buddhist ideas to be assimilated into conventional therapy without challenging the conventional paradigm; and it stems from a prejudiced understanding of the doctrine of *anatta* brought about by a negative emotional reaction to the very idea of no-self, a denial reaction which is itself one of the imaginary self’s own defence mechanisms. “Keeping the self-structure in place is a defensive position, but it is also a position that costs us highly in energy. ... We also often employ a large proportion of our life-energy in trying to be somebody and then in protecting that identity. Breaking out of these cycles and getting beyond the self-prison offers us the possibility of releasing this energy. We have the potential to live in a way that is more creative, engaged, productive and happy” (Brazier, 2003, p.153).

As a conventional psychotherapist myself my role already includes two complementary functions: to empathically support my client as he or she explores their own reality; and to congruently challenge any assumptions that I notice they might be making about the nature of their reality. It therefore seems to me to be quite appropriate for a psychotherapist to challenge their client’s assumption that they have, or that they are, a separate self. Challenging this “false belief which has no corresponding reality” (Rahula, 1974, p.51) in order to eliminate “the source of all the troubles in the [client’s] world” (ibid.) must therefore be the very *raison d’être* of any *anatta*-based talking therapy.

In recent years a number of so-called ‘third-wave’ cognitive behavioural therapies have brought Buddhist ideas into the therapy room (Tirch *et al.*, 2016): Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies, not to eliminate difficult feelings, but rather to learn to be present with whatever life brings (Hayes *et al.*, 2011); Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) employs compassionate mind training techniques to teach the skills and attributes of compassion (Gilbert, 2009); Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) was developed to treat people with

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and also includes acceptance and mindful awareness concepts largely derived from Buddhism (Linehan, 1993); and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was designed to help prevent the relapse of depression using mindfulness and meditation (Segal *et al.*, 2002).

This dissertation is my initial contribution to the literature in support of the creation and development of a new ‘third-wave’ cognitive behavioural therapy: *Anatta*-Based Cognitive Therapy (ABCT). The aim of my research is to find out what it is like in practice to challenge clients’ assumptions about the separate self by asking those who have done so to describe their experience. My key research question is: What is your experience of helping others to see through the illusion of a separate self? I aim to find out, for example, what pointers they have found to be the most helpful, what difficulties they have encountered, and how they have managed them, and I hope that the results will provide a rich source of knowledge for therapists like myself who would like to practise this approach within a psychotherapeutic setting.

There is a global movement called Liberation Unleashed (LU) which is “dedicated to helping you to free your mind from the illusion of a separate self” (LU, 2017a). The LU website and forum was launched in September 2011 by Ilona Ciunaite, Elena Nezhinsky, and Ciaran Healy. It was the coming together of the trio’s three independent online blogs in which they each invited readers to look for themselves into their own experience. Ciunaite and Nezhinsky developed a method called Direct Pointing which consists of a one-to-one asynchronous online dialogue between what they call a seeker and a guide. “The guide poses very specific questions to the seeker in order to focus the attention on the experience of the present moment. This triggers what we refer to as “crossing the Gateless Gate,” an instant in which the illusion of a separate self is seen through. A shift in perception happens. People who have crossed the Gateless Gate may become guides and pose to seekers the same questions that they themselves once tried to answer” (Ciunaite, 2016, p.5). LU claims that since its launch in 2011 over 2,000 seekers have been successfully helped to see through the illusion of a separate self by over 200 guides (LU, 2017c). LU is not affiliated with any specific spiritual philosophy and all of its online services are offered completely free of charge. In its own words: “Liberation Unleashed is dedicated to delivering a direct, clear and efficient method towards the liberation of humanity from the illusion of

separation, in the spirit of love and compassion” (LU, 2017b). Of the three founders only Ciunaite remains actively involved. Born in Lithuania she lived in the UK for twenty years until early 2017 and now lives in Mexico. Liberation Unleashed clearly provides a rich and extensive source of data regarding the practical application of the doctrine of *anatta* and is therefore uniquely invaluable for therapists seeking to integrate this way of working into their practice. For this particular study the phenomenon of interest is the experience of LU guides.

1.2 Literature Review

Liberation Unleashed has published the complete and unedited transcripts of 21 of its online dialogues between seekers and their guides (Ciunaite & Nezhinsky, 2012) as well as comprehensive documentation of its approach (Moonlight, 2015; Ciunaite, 2016) however to date it has not been the subject of any academic studies. Also there does not appear to be any research into the specific activity of helping others to see through the illusion of a separate self either within a traditional Buddhist context or from a contemporary spiritual or psychotherapeutic perspective.

The doctrine of *anatta* is a central teaching in all schools of Buddhism however its precise meaning is not universally agreed. Stout (2006) introduces his comprehensive study of the topic with the observation that “Of the many teachings the Buddha provided the whole of humanity, the doctrine of *anatta* developed into one of the most controversial and studied of Buddhist doctrines” (p.4) and his exploration nicely captures the contemporary controversy regarding the Buddha’s true intentions: “The question is quite simple: did the Buddha mean to provide a metaphysical proof against the self or was it only a prescription to end life’s suffering?” (p.19). There is canonical evidence for both positions and the debate is well documented by Stout. He also demonstrates that there is a strong opposing side that does not favour the no-self doctrine at all. One particularly convincing argument is that put forward by Vallicella (2002) that it is one thing to argue against the self by showing what it ontologically cannot be but it is something completely different to argue against the self on an absolute metaphysical level. Following a thorough discussion Stout (2006) offers his own contention that “the Buddha argued the doctrine of *anatta* as to provide reasons to believe his overall teachings and to promote his notion of right view, while also recognizing the truly relative nature of his argument and knowing that his instruction

provided the most practical and effective strategy for a follower to achieve enlightenment” (p.64).

Albahari (2002) describes and critiques the two most popular theories of *anatta* that she calls “the negative doctrine of *anatta* [and] the positive doctrine of *anatta*” (p.5). The negative doctrine takes the Buddha to have rejected all notions of self, including specifically the Upanishadic notion that upon Enlightenment the self is fully realised to be identical with Ultimate Reality, “an eternal and immutable soul ... which is doer of the deeds, thinker of the thoughts, etc.” (p.7). The positive doctrine focuses on the Buddha’s description that the self is nothing more than “an impermanent flux of psycho-physical, causally conditioned aggregates” (p.5) and concludes that the path to Liberation lies in overcoming our ignorance of the nature of conditioned existence. Albahari argues that both of these theories are ultimately untenable and instead presents a third interpretation of the doctrine, that of the contemporary American scholar-monk Thanissaro Bhikkhu, which holds that “*anatta* should be regarded less as a metaphysical doctrine and more as a practical strategy for disidentifying with elements of conditioned existence” (p.5) and as Thanissaro (2013) himself concludes: “The ultimate test of this interpretation is to put it into practice and see if it actually leads to the aim of the Buddha’s teachings: the total ending of all suffering and stress” (p.25).

The following five studies whilst not directly informing this research project would each have to offer an important perspective for the development of an *anatta*-based psychotherapeutic framework:

Fulton (2008) suggests that an understanding of *anatta* has much to offer the therapeutic relationship as “it provides a sense of “next steps” when a patient has gained what there is to gain from psychotherapy, but for whom “ordinary human unhappiness” calls for an existential or spiritual understanding that cannot be adequately provided through symptom-oriented treatment” (p.66).

Carlisle (2006) has examined the theory and practice of *anatta* and developed an account of selfhood that is based on the concept of habit suggesting that “habit can explain the continuity, stability, and order of personal identity through time” (p.86). She

concludes that “Unravelling habit means unravelling the self: this is the practice of *anatta*” (p.88).

Lancaster (1997) has explored the relationship between *anatta* and cognitive neuroscience and concludes that “*anatta* and attendant teachings, together with data from cognitive neuroscience with which they seem to relate, lend ‘scientific’ credence to the primary tenet – that the everyday ‘I’ is an inadequate vehicle for engaging in the cosmic role granted to humanity” (p.197).

Engler (1984) highlights the contradictory aims of psychotherapy and Buddhist practice: “The one tradition has emphasized the importance of becoming somebody; the other, the importance of becoming nobody” (p.53). He also warns that “the attempt to bypass the developmental tasks of identity formation and object constancy through a misguided spiritual attempt to “annihilate the ego” has fateful and pathological consequences” (p.52).

Taylor (2017) also warns about the dangers of misinterpreting the concept of no-self which is all too often used as a form of spiritual bypass, and he echoes Engler that in some cases “to see the self as an irrelevant illusion isn’t just unhelpful but also counterproductive. It will actually intensify and extend the suffering of the separate self, not end it” (p.247). Taylor suggests that spiritual awakening does not actually mean ‘no-self’ so much as ‘new self’, the emergence of a new expansive identity which ultimately encompasses the entire universe, and he offers the following important clarification: “In this sense, when traditions such as Buddhism speak of “no-self,” it may be that they strictly mean “no separate self”” (p.246). Liberation Unleashed would agree with this emphasis as they sometimes synonymously describe seeing through “the illusion of a separate self” (LU, 2017a) as seeing through “the illusion of separation” (LU, 2017b).

1.3 Rationale

My motivation for this study has been to reconcile the inconsistencies between my personal and professional development. The way that I have come to address my own psychological suffering is incompatible with the way that I have been trained to address my clients’ psychological suffering. My personal approach has gradually become more informed by contemporary and traditional spiritual teachings,

particularly Buddhism, whereas my professional approach is grounded in twentieth century psychodynamic theory and humanistic psychology. As a psychotherapist I became dissatisfied with the incongruence that I felt practising the conventional theoretical framework that I had been trained in (Clarkson, 2003) and I therefore decided to stop working with clients until I had resolved my internal conflict. I had hoped to seek some training in an existing model of transpersonal psychotherapy that aligned with my approach but I did not find such a model so instead I decided to create one.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

I chose to take a qualitative approach to this research as the phenomenon of interest is a subjective human experience and qualitative approaches “emphasise rich meaningful data, closeness to participants’ reality and analysis by theme and theory emerging from the data rather than by statistical measurement and testing” (Coolican, 2009, p.222). The data collection method was a semi-structured interview with six participants all of whom were purposively sampled. The data analysis method was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith *et al.*, 1999) which “attempts to describe an individual’s experiences from their own perspective as closely as possible, but recognises the interpretive influence of the researcher” (Coolican, 2009, p.246). IPA is both phenomenological and interpretive in that it acknowledges that the participants’ perceptions and the researcher’s conceptions are both required in order to make sense of the phenomenon of interest. This is particularly expedient when the research involves multiple participants as the researcher’s own view provides a common lens through which the participants’ individual perspectives are seen. It would also be naïve to suggest that my own experience in this area could somehow be bracketed or put to one side and therefore not have any impact on the research process, so IPA’s explicit inclusion of the researcher’s interpretative activity as an integral part of the analysis brings additional transparency to the project. As the creators of IPA themselves conclude: “However systematically a qualitative method is presented, the crucial part of the analysis remains the particular interpretative analysis the investigator brings to the text. It is also what makes it creative, exciting and, ultimately, marks its potential to make a significant and distinctive contribution to health psychology” (Smith *et al.*, 1999, p.238).

2.2 Sample

The six participants were purposively sampled from the pool of over 200 Liberation Unleashed guides. I approached Ilona Ciunaite, one of the founders of Liberation Unleashed, and she recommended a number of guides who she felt were good representatives of the LU approach and would therefore be suitable participants for the study. I then contacted the guides in question by email. All six of the guides that I approached agreed to be interviewed. The following table provides information about

the guiding experience of each of the six participants. (The number of unsuccessful guidings is not documented by Liberation Unleashed.)

Participant	Number of Years as an LU Guide	Number of Successful Guidings
P1	5 years	173
P2	3.5 years	44
P3	1 year	6
P4	2.5 years	28
P5	2.5 years	13
P6	1.5 years	15

2.3 Data Collection

Ethical approval for this study was sought from the Professional Development Foundation and Middlesex University and approval was obtained in November 2016. The data was then collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with each of the participants during November and December 2016. Four of the interviews were conducted in person at the participants' homes and two were conducted online via Skype. A participant consent form was completed and signed by the participants who were interviewed in person. The participants who were interviewed via Skype were emailed a copy of the consent form and they indicated their consent by email. The interviews ranged in length from 39 minutes to one hour and three minutes with the average interview length being 54 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All of the interviews were conducted and transcribed by myself. A semi-structured interview protocol was used in order to clarify the participant's definitions of the terms used, to gain some background information about the participant, and to provide some open questions in order to encourage the participant to elaborate the details of their experience.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data was analysed according to the following five-stage process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) described by Smith *et al.* (1999):

Initial coding or “Looking for Themes in the First Case” (p.220) involves reading each transcript a number of times adding notes to the document of anything interesting or significant. “It is important in the first stage of the analysis ... to become as intimate as possible with the account” (*ibid.*). During the latter part of this stage emergent themes are identified and documented with a short descriptive title.

“Looking for Connections” (p.222) involves creating a list of the emergent themes identified in the previous stage and seeing if there are any clusters of themes or new superordinate themes, checking back with the participant’s original words, “attempting to understand what the person is saying but, as part of the process, drawing on your own interpretative resources” (p.223).

“A Table of Themes” (p.223) is a master list of the major themes and sub-themes that have been identified. Minor themes may be dropped at this stage. It is important that “Alongside each theme you should indicate where in the transcript instances of it can be found” (*ibid.*). It is also at this stage that the analysis process is treated as cyclical and the researcher should “be prepared to go through the stages a number of times, dropping a superordinate theme if a more useful one emerges” (p.224).

“Continuing the Analysis with Other Cases” (p.224). Having performed the first three stages with each of the six transcripts independently a consolidated final list of master themes is now selectively produced from the six individual master lists, remembering that “themes are not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, including the richness of the particular passages which highlight the themes, and how the theme helps illuminate other aspects of the account, are also taken into account” (p.226).

This fourth and penultimate stage of the analysis can itself be divided into three sequential processes:

“Identifying Shared Themes” (p.230) involves searching for the themes which reflect shared aspects of the experience of some or all of the participants.

“Analysing Shared Themes” (p.231) means returning to the transcripts themselves and reassessing them in the light of these shared themes to ensure that “a new, more focused corpus of data was then available to be intensively examined” (ibid.).

“Searching for Patterns, Connections and Tensions” (p.232) is about exploring the relationships within and between thematic categories. This might involve the use of diagrammatic representations, journaling or memos, or discussing the ideas that are emerging with another researcher: “Once you verbally articulate your ideas about the data it may then be easier to identify the relationships between the various themes” (p.234).

The final stage of the analysis is the writing up and this dissertation is the result.

3. Results

3.1 Codes

Eleven major shared themes were identified. Eight of the themes are shared by all six participants and the other three themes are shared by five of the six participants. The most prevalent group of related themes refer to the obstacles which stand in the way of seeing through the illusion of a separate self and the guides' experiences of helping seekers to overcome those obstacles. The following table includes the number of occurrences of each theme for each participant along with the total number of occurrences of each of the eleven themes:

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Total
Definition: the illusion of a separate self	2	1	3	3	2	2	13
Definition: seeing through the illusion	1	4	3	1	2	1	12
Motivation for helping others	6	2	4	6	4	1	23
The guiding relationship: meeting the seeker where they are	4	4	8	4	5	6	31
Obstacles: background, beliefs, expectations	14	20	1	3	10	9	57
Obstacles: fear	7	0	2	9	6	12	36
Obstacles: choice and control	2	3	0	3	3	7	18
Obstacles: thinking instead of looking	2	4	3	2	6	5	22
Helpful pointers	7	0	2	6	5	3	23
The nature of guiding	20	3	4	9	5	4	45
The experience of seeing	6	6	2	4	2	12	32

The following eleven tables include an example quotation from each participant which illustrates each of the eleven themes:

3.1.1 Definition: the illusion of a separate self

P1	The illusion of separate self is an idea, it's a belief in an idea that there is a separate being to which life is happening, which is in charge of his own little piece of life, that is in control of what will be happening, and which has freewill and makes a free choice independently of situation
P2	the illusion of a separate self is the belief that there is something here, erm, something separate to life, usually references the body, that there is a body here, and the body is me, erm, and that separate body, or whatever you want to call it, is responsible for things, erm, of itself, erm, it's the, for example, the body, or the person, the separate entity you believe in, is responsible for choosing, is responsible for controlling the body itself, is responsible for experiencing, there's something here that is doing the activities of feeling seeing the external world, erm, but when I say belief, er, it, it, the, the illusion of a separate self is so strong it is not taken to be a belief, it is taken to be, erm, absolutely true, and because of that it's never examined
P3	it's an illusion of, of there being something that's fixed and substantial in thought that is a me or an I ... there's also a process of seeing that there's an identification with sensation as well, so it's a sort of embodied experience of there being an I, mistaking, er, mistaking sensations for, erm, a sign that there is a me there, and there's always a thought that's attached to that sensation
P4	the illusion of a separate self would be, is the illusion that there is something, some kind of entity, er, me, myself, erm, that is in control and, erm, in control of life, erm, in control of thoughts, erm, responsible, making things happen, erm, erm, a kind of controller behind the scenes, either behind the scenes or not so much behind the scenes, but it's some kind of entity that's actually there
P5	the illusion of a separate self is a, is the belief that there is a fixed unchanging entity that exists somewhere, usually, often felt to be existing inside the body

	or as the body, that is in control of life, so that can control, erm, the body that can control thoughts, that makes choices, that decides, erm, that, and it also has a history and has, erm, a narrative, erm, and that is that, you know, and that that is an integral part of the whole illusion, and therefore exists continuously through time
P6	The illusion of a separate self is thinking, or feeling even, that there is a core entity somewhere in me that thinks, experiences, sees, hears, feels the touch, tastes, or smells something, and also decides, chooses, acts, moves the body, and exerts freewill when deciding

3.1.2 Definition: seeing through the illusion

P1	seeing through that means one thing, freedom, freedom from the belief that you are a separate being to which life is happening
P2	to say there is someone here that is separate, that is responsible for doing things, and it's separate to life, is only a belief, that is all
P3	in some ways it does feel like the, reprogramming really, that it's, I mean I don't know what's happening in the brain at all but it does feel like you're disturbing some deeply held, you know, sort of, neural pathways, that you suddenly think, well there's no need for that to be there, and there's a sort of shift really, in that sense, and thoughts start behaving in a slightly different way ... Its beliefs, yeah, yes, there's a belief in, there was a belief in it, so if you, if you just see, or you question every belief, then it makes it a much looser relationship that you have, that I have with thought
P4	To see through it means to actually see it for what it is, to see that actually there isn't some kind of driver, erm, there isn't some kind of, erm, doer, erm, that there is a me that's an illusion, you can take it either way, you can say it's an illusory me, or you can say there's nothing there at all if you want to

P5	seeing through the illusion of self is investigating whether that stands up to scrutiny based on what is actually happening through perception at the moment, and when you start investigating that it, it becomes obvious that there's no actual, the evidence for that in perception is not there, erm, and that actually it's an assumption or it's a, extrapolation of what's going on which oversimplifies massively what's going on
P6	it completely changes the perspective, I would rather say the foundation on what I thought I stood, it's seeing that there is no foundation, there is no I doing everything, these are all processes going on all the time according to causes and conditions, and are, that are around at that point of time

3.1.3 Motivation for helping others

P1	A lot of fire, there was a lot of fire, there was a drive, to spread the message
P2	Why I guide, I don't know, you could say it's a calling, I want to say it's almost like giving back, or wanting to help other people ... yes of course there is a draw to want to help people, but coupled with that there, I know, unusual for me to say it but it's true, that, it's really, really is true that there is no real choice or control in anything I do, I just do it, guiding simply is, it's just happened, it's just what's happening, it is just what's going on
P3	it's about being asked actually for me, I can't say no, if someone asks me I find it very difficult to put a boundary even, it's like, yeah, okay, not next week, okay, it's now, see you then, yeah, it's like immediate
P4	the world needs a big change, you know, it absolutely does, it's in such a, people are in such a lot of trouble everywhere so, this would seem to be a good way to go, if people would actually just give back a lot more, erm, it might be like binary fission
P5	the idea that you can have this sort of different conversation with this format and, you know, it changes someone's entire paradigm, their entire outlook on

	life, it's absolutely astounding that it's even possible, so that's the first thing to say, which is probably what keeps me doing it because of the fascination
P6	when I saw how easy it is and that it is ever so simple I felt incredibly stupid that I hadn't seen it earlier, and I thought I have to pass this on, this is really not difficult, I have to learn how to pass it on

3.1.4 The guiding relationship: meeting the seeker where they are

P1	when I see what they reply I step into that place and I see what question to ask next, from that place where they are, I don't need to read the whole story where they've been, or where they come from, I don't need any background, I just need that one reply from them, so I know what question to ask next so they can look into that place
P2	A lot of initial dialog that I do is just to kind of get, whereabouts are you in the process, what words, also wording is important, what words particularly I can use with the person, erm, and as a guide I always try and, which I think is almost like, their language pointers, if they're using a particular form of language or a particular way of describing things I'll tend to mirror it back to them, because that is, they will then grasp what I'm saying, as opposed to me using continuously new ideas and new pointers which they'll have to kind of latch onto
P3	I think for me it's really important that personal relationship I have with someone, I think my, my most successful guiding on the forum was with someone that I, that I had a real, really resonated with, erm, and, and clearly over the days there was a really trusting relationship, and it felt very very real rather than, sort of, a lot of different exercises
P4	when I guide I kind of feel a bit like there's got to be a diagnosis at the beginning like what's the problem, where's the problem, ... just find out what they think they are, and when they start talking you can often tell that, you can, or you can certainly go in the direction of telling fairly quickly

P5	It's the ones that come and are just, you know, ready and honest, you know, okay, I don't care what this takes, I know I don't know you but let's just lay it all out there cos this has gotta be resolved and, you know, I trust you enough to think that you might be able to help me with this. They're the ones that, you know, it's pretty smooth sailing with
P6	I pay attention to build an emotional relationship nevertheless, to bond, to have people bond to me, so that they feel safe enough to question such core identity, it's the core identity we have, and to question that is like saying okay I'm gonna jump into this abyss now and it's gonna be fine, and they need to trust that it's gonna be fine and they need to be, feel safe in a way, and so I pay a lot of attention to that

3.1.5 Obstacles: background, beliefs, expectations

P1	that is one of my jobs as a guide, er, is just to destroy every expectation, so I just dissect every expectation, saying that, yes it may appear as this but it's not like that, it may appear like this but it's not like that, it's not like that, it's nothing like you expect at all
P2	So if a person has written a lot about I want this and I want that and I've read it in a book that you can become enlightened through this website, it's, although it wouldn't put me off directly it would suggest to me right okay, even before I can start guiding them I going to have to go to this person and explain to them the principles, what they can expect, which unfortunately will not be anything that they are asking, so straight away I know going to have to, if I'm starting to want to guide this person they're gonna be on a downer straight away because sorry, what you're asking is not it
P3	I've worked with people that think they know or think that they know what it is that they're trying, that you're pointing to, and they have, they haven't really got it at all, and that can be quite a challenge as well, so trying to get someone to look again when they think they've got it is quite a challenge

P4	I've discovered that the background is usually a hindrance, quite often a hindrance, in fact the background, whether it's Advaita or Buddhism or god knows what, it's nearly always a couple of, several extra pages of chatting to get through that
P5	what I say to them is everyone's got expectations and fears and when they come up, which they will do during this dialogue, you need to bring them to me as they come up
P6	I always address expectations first, I go into more detail about what they think, erm, the moment of seeing through the illusion of self will feel like, you know, people think all kinds of things, in the literature it has been so glorified, what's going to happen, I mean like, yeah, just having singing and trumpets sounding and bells ringing and a big light shining, so, ah, it's not like this at all, for anybody, and so I like to address expectations first

3.1.6 Obstacles: fear

P1	people have various degrees of fear, sometimes it can be actually even panic when they approach that question, selflessness, they can go into really panic or terror even
P2	Not mentioned
P3	I think there is a sticking point just by the gate, it's almost like people can see it and they, they don't want, they don't want to, or it's like thought comes up to, as a defence I guess, you know, it's like, the really loud thoughts and doubts and confusion and I'm not getting, you know, all those things, that I'm not getting anywhere, this isn't gonna work, erm, all that stuff comes up about there and it, and quite often it's about really reassuring people that it will be absolutely fine, it's okay, and, er, nothing's gonna change actually, I think, I think that seems to be the real fear for people, that they're gonna lose something by going through

P4	underestimating people's fear is a mistake that I make, erm, but I'm getting better at noticing it, er, and you really have to stop, this is my experience as a guide, you really have to stop yourself and say no, we'll make no progress while they're frightened, there's no way, if they keep on saying the same thing, like I can't really do this or I, if there's something that keeps on, erm, almost without logic stopping them from investigating then it's often fear and then the fear has to be addressed and you have to look at that with them, or get them to look at it
P5	If they're full of fear, if they've got a lot of fear reactions going on every time they look at this stuff then that's gonna be, you know, gonna need a lot of working through ... sometimes fear can come out as, erm, boredom, er, joking about, messing about, you know, it can come out in different ways
P6	I usually start with that if the fear isn't too strong, I start with simply calming them down and saying yes it feels like there, something is really lost but actually even right now there is no self, there is nothing to lose, it's just an assumption that there is a self, you won't lose anything that's real, everything that's real will stay, and often that is enough ... I also always say please, if fear comes up again when that's resolved, that usually resolves it very well, please mention it so we can look at it again

3.1.7 Obstacles: choice and control

P1	one of the places that people get stuck in, in looking, in their looking, it's just not, not willing to, to let go of control, which they never had, the control is imagined, so nothing changes if you stop imagining that control, everything keeps happening, you just don't imagine it
P2	will there be anybody in control of what is written as a reply to this message, was there ever anyone who came, who had a choice in coming here?
P3	Not mentioned

P4	do you decide to go and hunt for your car keys or does it just happen?
P5	the most common thing is that they believe they are the controller of thoughts, so that they make thoughts arise in a certain way, they control what the content of those thoughts is
P6	put two drinks in front of you you like and then look at one and think about all the advantages this drink has and then about all the disadvantages, do the same with the other one, then close your eyes, now pick up a drink, how did it work? ... it's quite shocking for most people to find out that actually they are not making the decision

3.1.8 Obstacles: thinking instead of looking

P1	No self was clear, I had read about it many places, and I even thought about that intellectually and I understood that intellectually, but the point of seeing was dropping of intellectual understanding into the obviousness of it. You no longer think about it, you see it
P2	Somebody can ask you questions or you can read up about separate self and you just take it on board and mentally examine it and if you've done a lot of study you'll just say oh yes I realise that there's no self, yeah, oh yeah, there's no chooser, of course, yeah, and you read it but you don't actually take it in, you don't actually say stop, let me actually really look at this, no, not just to mentally surf, it's, erm, chip away and say oh yes that's fine I understand all about that, actually look at what's being pointed to, and that is the moment you have the potential to see
P3	if I ask you what colour socks you've got on do you try and remember what colour socks you've got on or do you just look and see what colour socks you've got on, and I thought that was a perfect illustration of what looking is because I think so many people are just straining in their thoughts

P4	some Buddhists come in and they've got a preconceived idea of what for example they, they've all seized hold of the idea of direct experience, and they all seem to think that they know what that is, but sometimes it turns out that they're, that they've just imagined that they know what it is and then you have to pick that apart and say no, pick up on something and, you actually have to bring them back to their senses in order for the direct experience thing to start actually being there, or happening, being seen
P5	teaching them how, what's the difference between going to, the way I describe it is, going to thought content for the answers to these questions and going to, versus going to perception for the answers to these questions, that's a whole, and that's a skill, you know, and that's something that can be learnt, erm, and that's part of the guide's role I think
P6	it gives a very different feel when they're coming from thought, it's like, I find it hard to wrap my head around what they are writing and I have a hard time following when they're coming from thought and then I give it a second look and think okay, this doesn't seem to be direct experience because direct experience always sounds very fresh, it has a very fresh description, it's not conclusions or logical deductions, or something like that, and the moment that kind of thing appears it's thought

3.1.9 Helpful pointers

P1	just like Santa, I like using Santa analogy because it's just perfect. when you see that Santa is not real you can still have Christmas and enjoy it but you don't confuse this appearance with a real entity
P2	Not mentioned
P3	I've guided people by sound, it seems to be a really good breakthrough point, a lot of people say that they're completely lost in sound, they're listening to music, they disappear, so, you know, so it seems like a good place to start from maybe

P4	the way it was phrased put me in a position of having to declare what I thought it was that was doing the seeing, and of course that shunts you back straight away to where, to what is doing the seeing, and of course, you know, I trotted out, you know, well it's eyes that are doing the seeing, he said well is it really eyes, do you have an experience of eyes doing seeing or do you have an experience of just seeing?
P5	if I said to you is there a unicorn in this room, okay, you look around the room, and you think, and you say, you know, and it's almost like I'm saying to you is there a unicorn in this room and you're looking around the room and looking around the room and saying well there must be there must be, there must be a unicorn in this room, well where is it? Well there must be, you know, and it's like how long do you have to keep looking around the room for before you actually accept that it isn't blooming there, you know
P6	it's more like seeing that Santa, the tooth fairy, or Spiderman, doesn't exist

3.1.10 The nature of guiding

P1	so what the guide really does is just points attention, where attention should go, we just hold attention, so it's not teaching, it's just directing attention to a particular spot that as a guide we can see where they need to go next, as a seeker they don't know even the question exists, they never asked that question before, but as a guide we know the question to ask, so they can ask it themselves and answer it themselves, that's all it is, the guide only holds the hand of the seeker, the seeker is the one that does the work
P2	while I guide I am actually also guiding myself, because although I've gone through the gate, while I guide, I am actually continually pinging back to myself my own questions, and when I ask the client, so, have a look at this, I am actually looking at it myself, to establish, is what I am asking the client actually true for me, and can I see it? Because if I can't see it then how can they see it?

P3	it feels like a process of holding someone's hand really, rather than anything else, that's what it feels like, and that's quite a good analogy for guiding, that you're not teaching anyone anything, what you're doing is you're holding their hand and just pointing stuff out to them as you go, and see what they see
P4	there have been times when I've actually felt that it's actually like trying to help people with constipation
P5	there's many ways to evade having to actually look at something or do something and, you know, part of, a big role of the guide is to see if that's happening and call them out on it and say, you know, that isn't gonna wash, that's not what we're doing here
P6	there is so much love involved in this, it's really, it's really love flowing while guiding, sure there's frustrations sometimes, at least there will be at the beginning, and sometimes later on too, but that doesn't really matter, when you're frustrated with your child it doesn't really matter, it doesn't, er, you know, lessen the love you have for a child, and so it's like, it's really an experience of love flowing

3.1.11 The experience of seeing

P1	I saw that there is no {name} running the show, there is just one life playing as {name}, as this, as that, as that, as that, as the forms, and there was no separation from that flow, from that life, and that just became so obvious and so simple
P2	it left me with like oh, that's just so, so obvious, it's, oh yeah of course, it's just, just blindingly obvious, it's, erm, and there was a lot of laughter, and erm, nothing directly changed at all
P3	something that I thought would be like a cognitive thing became completely embodied thing for me, and for many months afterwards actually, I was, sort of, trying to work with what was there in the body, it was really important

P4	There was no pop, like some people go off, like a firework ... my first feeling was a bit like, I just respond to flowers blossoming and this is what it's like, thoughts are like flowers
P5	I remember that I was upstairs here and I, it was snowing, and I looked out the window at the back and there was just some sort of relaxation in the body and I started laughing and I actually started going is that it? Is that it? That can't be it!
P6	all of a sudden I saw that there is no I and it was like crashing a wall at full speed, really, literally, it felt, it was a very physical feeling and then there was silence and it was clear the seeking had stopped, there was no self, never had been, the truth was out, and that was it

4. Discussion

4.1 Overview

Before discussing the results it is important to recognise the researcher's and participants' assumptions about the phenomenon being studied. It is fundamental to the LU process that there is an openness to the possibility that the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* may hold some truth, and it is not within the scope of this study to debate the validity of this. In fact the LU approach, and also that of any *anatta*-based therapy, is consistent with the interpretation that "*anatta* should be regarded less as a metaphysical doctrine and more as a practical strategy for disidentifying with elements of conditioned existence" (Albahari, 2002, p.5). This strategy is similar to the Psychosynthesis exercise of dis-identification: "The technique to be used is that of successive dis-identifications from the various groups or layers of contents – physical, emotional and mental" (Assagioli, 1975, p.116). Psychosynthesis however does not view the personal self as illusory but rather as "the manifestation of a Transpersonal Self, an energetic source that is rarely experienced directly" (Brown, 2004, p.17). The LU approach does not posit a metaphysical alternative to the separate self.

All six participants in this study were consistent with their definitions of the terms used in the research question. "The illusion of a separate self" is simply a belief in a non-existent entity, like Santa Claus or unicorns, and "to see through the illusion" is to realise the fallacious nature of any apparent evidence that seems to support or reinforce that belief. "Seeing" is therefore the loss of a belief, not the loss of a (non-existent) separate self.

There was some variation in the participants' motivations for helping others and also their attitudes towards the importance of the guiding relationship. There was also the suggestion that motivation may change over time with early experiences of guiding as a form of self-help later becoming something of a hindrance to further personal spiritual development. The development of a trusting relationship elicited similarly contrasting views, from one participant's comment that it is completely unnecessary to another who emphasised the importance of paying a lot of attention to building a safe bond.

The main observation from this study is that the guide's role tends to centre around challenging the psychological obstacles that prevent seekers from seeing what is

actually already the case. These obstacles are divided into the following four themes: a seeker's expectations based upon their own background, previous experiences, or conditioning; fear expressed in its many forms such as intellectualisation, hostility, or flight; attachment to the notion of freewill and the idea that I make choices and that I am in control; and the seeker's tendency to answer the guide's questions from thought rather than direct experience. The variety of ways in which these four obstacles present themselves, and the different approaches to overcoming them that the participants describe, are perhaps the most significant results of this study.

And finally the participants' provision of helpful pointers along with their comments on and descriptions of the nature of guiding and the experience of seeing will be of great value to anyone considering guiding others in this way.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 Definitions

The main definitions of the terms "the illusion of a separate self" and "seeing through the illusion" provided by each of the six participants are included in sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 above. The belief that our psychological or mental image of our own separate self refers to a real entity that exists outside of our imagination is just "an innocent error" (P6), or "an innocent misunderstanding" (P1). However the misunderstanding is not that we imagine a psychological self, the error we make is that we believe that the image is something more than just a psychological structure. Belief is a cognitive function, arguably even "an essential part of the definition of cognition" (Egan, 1986, p.315), and as such the erroneous belief is a perfect candidate for cognitive therapy in which "the therapist seeks in a variety of ways to produce cognitive change – modification in the patient's thinking and belief system – to bring about enduring emotional and behavioural change" (Beck, 2011, p.2). This is the entire process in the words of one participant: "the client keeps feeding back to me their own beliefs, oh well there must be something separate here, look at that, oh there must be something separate here, well look at that, what about this separate thing that does this, look at that, and they come to a point whereby each thing that they've examined where they've had the belief that there is something separate here responsible for things, doing things, choosing, seeing, hearing, acting, and each time it's shown to be a, nothing more than a belief that they have, just a belief, not inherently true at all, just a belief,

and they've examined each and every facet, it comes to them that, oh my god, the entire thing is just a show, it's all just a belief, it's all entirely mentally created, and that's when the realisation happens" (P2).

4.2.2 Motivation

The general motivation for helping others to see through the illusion comes from the participants' own experiences of going through the process themselves and wanting to "spread the message" (P1) or "pass it on" (P6). One participant expresses it this way: "it's almost like when you find a cool new thing and you want to show it to everybody because it's so exciting" (P5). As this initial excitement subsides however more experienced guides found that their attitudes changed: "if people come to me then I will help them of course, but it's not up to me if they see or not, so I don't have the motivation to help as such, it's more like I'm here, use me" (P1). One participant even found himself getting slightly resentful of guiding: "I wanted to look further in my own experience, ... there was more to look at, and I wanted to try and do that, and it almost got to the point where continually focusing on guiding to no-self was not giving the time and the space and the opportunity to do that" (P5). In this context psychotherapists might recognise and should therefore be mindful of the potential for compassion fatigue which, "like any other kind of fatigue, reduces our capacity or our interest in bearing the suffering of others" (Figley, 2002, p.1434).

4.2.3 Relationship

In psychotherapy the importance of a strong therapeutic relationship is almost universally acknowledged (Clarkson, 2003) and research has demonstrated that "the strength of the therapeutic alliance ... has consistently been shown to relate to therapeutic outcomes, and seems important to establish prior to more challenging interventions" (Cooper, 2008, p.125). Participants recognised that "it's very difficult to start trusting somebody you've never met" (P5) and cultivated rapport using mirroring techniques: "if they're using a particular form of language or a particular way of describing things I'll tend to mirror it back to them" (P2); "if they're a bit more chatty I try and be a bit more chatty, if they're there just to look then I respect that and just look" (P3). One of the skills that a psychotherapist develops is a sensitivity to any relationship dynamics that threaten to rupture the therapeutic alliance and this is exactly what one participant describes: "initially they might seem that they're quite

robust and that everything's going well and then suddenly all this kind of massive reaction comes out and then that's up to the guide to be able to recognise that and back off, to not kind of push them too far" (P5). Only one of the participants implied that a relationship might be unnecessary: "I don't need any stories, or the background, just, it doesn't matter, I wasn't even reading the name" (P1).

4.2.4 Obstacles

There is a sense that seeing through the illusion of a separate self is a simple process and that the guide's main role is to help seekers overcome any obstacles that stand in the way of that simple process: "the actually seeing it is incredibly simple, that's what I say to them, it's incredibly simple, it's mind-bogglingly simple literally, but, you know, something's not clicking so, you know, we just need to work out what that is" (P5). The four obstacles identified in the analysis are all interrelated and have much in common with what Anna Freud (1993) defined and are now widely known as defence mechanisms.

The two greatest obstacles are expectations and fears: "expectations and fears are the biggest hindrances to see through the illusion of self" (P6); "something in them does not want to see it, and it's usually fear, or, and, expectations, it's two things, two main obstacles" (P1); "I always start with expectations and fears" (P5). Expectations are addressed by specifically asking seekers what they expect to happen, what they expect seeing to be like, and then "tell them that it might actually be very different to what they are thinking" (P6); "that is one of my jobs as a guide, er, is just to destroy every expectation, so I just dissect every expectation, saying that, yes it may appear as this but it's not like that, it may appear like this but it's not like that, it's not like that, it's nothing like you expect at all" (P1).

Expectations usually come from a seeker's background and beliefs that they have picked up, some of which can be quite persistent: "I've got someone at the moment who, er, gets caught in then believing they're an observer of thoughts" (P5); "if you're still clinging to awareness, that is still another belief to examine" (P2). It is also important to watch out for seekers exchanging one belief for another: "this is a sticky point with a lot of people, they go from, they actually go from the belief that there is, there is someone here, they go from that belief to the belief there is no one here, and

that's not what we point to because that is nihilism" (P2); "got to be careful not to, cos what, when these things then get conceptualised, often happens, is people go the other way, and then they latch, you know, the new belief forms of, oh, there is no controller, which unfortunately is only, yeah, that's only a partial thing because, you know, they're still assuming that there's something there that hasn't got control rather than has got control" (P5).

Fear can manifest in many ways and at any point in the process. There are obvious expressions of fear: "will I still be able to function properly, can I still drive a car, will I still love my children or my partner, will I still be able to say what I want, will I be able to work, or will I just be a vegetable?" (P6) and that can usually be addressed with reassurance: "I start with simply calming them down and saying yes it feels like there, something is really lost but actually even right now there is no self, there is nothing to lose, it's just an assumption that there is a self, you won't lose anything that's real, everything that's real will stay, and often that is enough" (P6). With stronger fears such as panic or terror other techniques might be used: "you just go really really gently, advise them like to use EFT for example to reduce the intensity of sensations"; "quite often I will give them a relaxation exercise as well" (P3). There are also other more subtle manifestations of fear: "sometimes fear can come out as, erm, boredom, er, joking about, messing about, you know, it can come out in different ways" (P5); "or they just start to act in a vaguely hostile, talking in a slightly hostile kind of way" (P4); "It often goes into intellectualisation, you know, quoting authority and, you know, science and all that kind of stuff" (P4). Clients' use of intellectualisation as an avoidance technique is well known to psychotherapists and is one of the defence mechanisms identified by Freud (1993): "*Intellectualization* of the instinctual processes as a precaution against danger from within is analogous to the constant *alertness* of the ego to dangers from without" (p.174).

The idea that the self is the part of us which makes choices and controls the body is a common obstacle and this is due to the belief in individual freewill and responsibility: "Responsibility, freewill, freewill is a strong one" (P6); "most people will agree that choice and control is the most difficult and that most guides will leave choice and control till the end" (P5). This can be addressed with a number of exercises which direct the seeker's attention to their direct experience of making a choice and

controlling their body: “exercises like who is lifting your hand, what is it that’s doing the lifting, where is the choice in lifting your hand?” (P4); “put your hand up, palm up, and turn it, turn it back, and turn it again, now let it turn and watch like a hawk, is there anybody deciding the moment when it turns, does anybody do that?” (P6). Another aspect of the belief in freewill is the conviction that we are the controller of our own thoughts and this too can be addressed with an exercise: “So you do exercises like think of a car, a specific car, describe to me what the car looked like, and where did that come from, describe to me the mechanism by which you made that car appear, and that exact type of car that’s in that image and things like that, erm, and it’s fascinating cos they’ll say they can’t they can’t, obviously, do that, they can’t describe it to you cos there’s nothing there, but they’ll start, you know, then you get the must bes and the, it just feels like there is, and all gets increasingly wishy washy to the point, and you try and just pin it down” (P5). The apparent realisation that individual choice and control, freewill and responsibility, are convenient illusions is a key shift in the LU process, and it can be a momentous one: “yeah, it’s quite shocking for most people to find out that actually they are not making the decision” (P6). It is this very absence of choice and control that is clearly articulated in one of the most well-known and oft-repeated aphorisms attributed to the Buddha: “The deed there is, but no doer thereof” (Wilber, 2001, p.49).

The fourth obstacle to emerge from the analysis is the seeker’s tendency to respond to the guide’s enquiries from memory and thought rather than from their own immediate direct experience, and “one of the key skills of being a guide is to be able to see the difference” (P5). As one participant has already been quoted in section 3.1.8 above: “direct experience always sounds very fresh, it has a very fresh description, it’s not conclusions or logical deductions” (P6). She also clarifies that “most people can’t do it intuitively, they really have to get a little bit more details instructions, and some people have to really get a detailed instruction” (P6). The following is the best example from the transcripts for teaching seekers the difference between thinking and looking: “if I said to you are your keys in your pocket? You could go to two ways of answering that question, you could go to memory and ideas and thought content and say right did I put my keys, I normally put my keys in my pocket in the morning, did I put them in my pocket today, can I remember, is there an image of me doing that, did that

happen? Or you could put your hand in your pocket and feel if there's keys there or not!" (P5).

The difficulty for guides is the potential for informed seekers to have an intellectual understanding rather than an experiential realisation and for this to go unnoticed. "The egoic mind is a highly intelligent mechanism, and we should not underestimate its extreme cleverness and the absolute efficiency with which it carries out its task of obscuring the recognition of our deeper nature, thus protecting its identity" (Caplan, 2009, p.115). The phenomena of spiritual materialism and spiritual bypassing are well documented (Trungpa, 1973; Welwood, 2000), they require constant vigilance and are perhaps the greatest obstacles to a genuine transformation.

It appears that many if not all obstacles to seeing through the illusion of a separate self could be psychological mechanisms and structures whose very function is to support and reinforce the idea that the separate self is real, however, as there is no actual real separate self the obstacles themselves are all there is to the illusion, so when the obstacles are gone, the illusion of a separate self is gone, and the obviousness of it all is revealed: "it seems to me that if you can get people past their problem, you know, whatever it is that's stopping them, and there's some wish in the client to actually look, then what they see is gonna be bright and crystal clear" (P4).

4.2.5 Pointers

Participants provided examples of pointers that they have found to be helpful, some of the most significant of which are included in section 3.1.9 above. The following additional three pointers feel particularly important to include: "what is not on automatic? ... once you start looking, what is not on automatic, you can't find anything that is not on automatic, everything is just happening" (P1); "is it possible to prevent a thought from appearing, comma, including the thought I, and you just look at that, is it possible to prevent a thought from appearing?" (P4); "you know, if there's never been a self, if there's never been a separate self, then what's lost? Nothing's lost, it's just about seeing what's already been the case" (P5).

4.2.6 Descriptions

The nature of the guiding process was described by each participant in section 3.1.10 above. Other relevant descriptions are: “it’s like a, a dance, of, of looking, like a game of, er, play and seek, hide and seek, hide and seek, and also chess. And chess is like this, I make a move, I wait for the client to make a move, and when they make a move I know what move to make next” (P1); “they can’t see their own problems, ... you can’t see what you can’t see, and they, they need to chat to someone to point out to them, hey, this, you can’t see this, oh yeah, right, course, I couldn’t see it, and you need someone there, somebody else, to point out what you can’t see” (P2). It is perhaps also important to be reminded that sometimes a guide or a therapist is surplus to requirements when a seeker or a client is particularly ‘ripe’: “When somebody is genuinely ready it’s not about the guide at all, as I say we are just a wall to bounce off, so they don’t need a guide, nobody needs a guide, but they don’t know it maybe, so they come to you, and you help them, but it’s really just asking yourself one question, is there a self, yes or no? And you don’t need a guide for that” (P1).

Each participant’s description of seeing through the illusion of a separate self is included in section 3.1.11 above. Of particular relevance to this study is one participant’s observations about gradual shifts: “for some people they have, actually it’s not just some it’s about half, they have very gradual shifts ... for some the passing through the gate is sudden and for some it’s very gradual, and for the people for whom it’s gradual they have a very hard time noticing that the illusion is gone, it’s very hard for me too” (P6). She also beautifully described her approach to guiding seekers at the moment of their seeing: “the moment people see through the illusion of self with some pointing in one direction, I let it settle, for me the shift is holy ground, I don’t ask anything then, I just tell them to share what’s going on, for two or three days, I just let it rest then, and settle, I think it’s none of my doing, I have to keep my hands off there, and then” (P6).

These descriptions could just as well be descriptions of the practice and process of transpersonal psychotherapy and the role of the transpersonal psychotherapist to whom the prolific psychotherapy researcher and educator Petruska Clarkson (2002) imparts the following: “Consider that you are responsible for little or nothing ... [and] Consider that you are responsible for everything” (p.233).

4.3 Conclusions

The motivation for this study was to gain an understanding of the Liberation Unleashed approach in order to determine its suitability as a prototype for the development of a model of psychotherapy and there are a number of conclusions which support this.

The establishment of a therapeutic alliance, or safe bond, is a fundamental requirement for effective psychotherapy and, despite one participant's comments to the contrary, would appear to be a necessary condition for guiding, particularly when seekers' fears arise. It may in fact be that a therapist's experience of maintaining a good working alliance reduces the possibility of client flight. The prospect of compassion fatigue is another factor with which therapists are familiar and which with regular supervision does not usually become unmanageable.

Much of an LU guides work involves overcoming obstacles that seekers present and this again is synonymous with a psychotherapist's approach to working with defence mechanisms and transference dynamics. It may again be that a therapist's experience of addressing these dynamics enhances the client's progress.

To guide is to challenge a seeker's belief, and psychotherapy is often also about challenging clients to re-examine their beliefs. But LU takes this one step further and looks beyond the content of any particular belief to expose the very nature of belief itself and thus in its wake undermine the content of all beliefs. This is perhaps something that psychotherapy has not encountered before and is possibly the most controversial implication for theory and practice, and further research. LU has demonstrated over six years that this process improves the psychological wellbeing of seekers and that there is little risk to mental health. This risk however small would still probably be more manageable in a face-to-face psychotherapeutic environment and is therefore an argument for its suitability rather than against. The presence of spiritual materialism and spiritual bypassing would possibly also be harder to conceal and easier to challenge in a face-to-face environment.

Finally, participants' descriptions of their own and their seekers' moments of seeing would sit very comfortably beside psychotherapists' descriptions of their own and their clients' transpersonal experiences. In this respect the entire project of helping others to see through the illusion of a separate self, whether with guidance from LU, or in the

presence of a psychotherapist, is a single-pointed cultivation of that transformative transpersonal moment. This type of therapy is therefore truly worthy of the name transpersonal.

4.4 Further Research

The LU method uses an asynchronous text-based dialogue and as such is more akin to online therapy than a face-to-face talking therapy. There are significant differences between online and face-to-face therapies such as the disinhibiting effect of online communication as well as the lack of visual cues and access to nonverbal behaviours (Rochlen *et al.*, 2004). One of the limitations of this study therefore is the questionable transferability of its findings to a face-to-face setting. There are however a small number of LU guides who offer real-time face-to-face guidance both in-person and online via Skype and a further study of this method would provide results that are more applicable to a conventional therapeutic environment.

A more direct way to research the efficacy of an *anatta*-based cognitive therapy would be to actually develop a talking therapy protocol, based in part upon the results of this study and Ilona's "Guide" (Ciunaite, 2016). A single therapist would then practise this model with a range of clients, over a reasonable number of sessions. At the end of the process the clients would be interviewed, the transcripts analysed, and the results written up. This approach would be similar to that used by Layton (2015) in which she and I developed and implemented a form of nondual therapy, with seven clients over twelve ninety-minute sessions, which she then studied for its effectiveness. I believe that the results of such a study would provide an ethical foundation and a credible rationale for the establishment of *Anatta*-Based Cognitive Therapy (ABCT).

5. References

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