POINTING AT THE MOON

Exploring the question:

What is psychological freedom?

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To raise the question, what is freedom? seems to be a hopeless enterprise. It is as though age-old contradictions and antinomies were lying in wait to force the mind into dilemmas of logical impossibility so that, depending which horn of the dilemma you are holding on to, it becomes as impossible to conceive of freedom or its opposite as it is to realise the notion of a square circle.

(Arendt 2006, pg. 142)
Acknowledgements

Every story of success is a story of community.

(Jeff Goins 2015, online)

It is with thanks to a big team, both close and far (spatially and relationally), that I submit this thesis.

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Lastly, thanks to my mum. She died a year before I started this thesis but she is in everything I do.
STOP! You don’t need to read the whole thing!

When it comes to non-fiction texts, I am an impatient reader and often wish the author would provide me with a short summary of the salient points, I don’t want to read all the filler/padding/context etc, life is too short! Edward de Bono did this in his book *Simplicity* (1998) and I have never understood why it didn’t catch on more widely.

If you dear reader, are like me in this way, this section is my gift to you: the salient points of the whole thing, chapter by chapter. Of course, my interpretation of what those salient points are might be different to your interpretation, because salience is somewhat subjective and relative to one’s life experiences, values, learning journey etc. This is perhaps one of the prices of impatience.

I have made **bold** specific Processwork terms in their first usage within the text. Sometimes I explain them, sometimes I don’t. In the *Scope* section there are recommended reference sources if you are unfamiliar with Processwork terminology.

**Introduction**

It was a long and arduous journey full of highs and lows, dreams and body symptoms, tears and wrist strain; but I did come up with an answer and it’s centred around identity and perception: Psychological Freedom is a subjective, unpredictable and active experience, accessed to greater and lesser degrees, involving;

1. An active and appreciative awareness of one’s individuality relative to dominant cultural norms

2. An expanded and expanding sense of identity and a fluidity relative to psychological boundaries

3. The capacity to consciously access a metaphysical state of unbounded identity.
Why psychological freedom?: I didn’t pick this topic, it picked me – it’s my childhood dream (a bike ridin’, skull crackin’, rollin’-with-Jesus adventure).

Scope: “What is psychological freedom?” was a bold and ridiculous idea for a thesis topic as it literally knows no bounds. There is more out than in. I mostly draw from the realms of philosophy, spirituality and liberation psychologies, plus a small selection from physics and neurosciences.

Methodology: I interviewed people about the topic, read lots and lots of published materials, pondered deeply and worked on it in therapy and supervision.

Part I: Key Frameworks

First I give a brief critique of the concept of freedom, then devote the first three chapters to freedom from the perspective of philosophy, spirituality, and liberation psychologies.

In the philosophy chapter I describe the concept of positive freedom (freedom to do what you want), and negative freedom (being free from obstructions).

Spiritual freedom is very different, essentially being free from a dualistic perception of the world and being one with divine unity.

Liberation psychologies are essentially those that recognise the psychological impacts of social oppression on the individual and the need to challenge oppressive cultural dynamics.

Part II: Defining Psychological Freedom

Using the data from the research interviews I define psychological freedom relative to the three levels of awareness as posited by the Processwork model: consensus reality, dreamland and essence levels.
Part III: Underpinnings

In the first chapter of this section I review three foundational capacities necessary for psychological freedom, as suggested by the interview data; a beginners mind; detachment; and curiosity.

In the second chapter I highlight the paths to developing psychological freedom, as suggested by the interview data; suffering; growing and dying (metaphoric); community; and acts of grace.

In the third chapter I emphasise the essential nature of psychological freedom being an active experience: it doesn’t exist if it’s just in your head, it must be expressed in the world somehow.

Part IV: Drawing Down the Moon

In this final section I make a few cautionary comments about psychological freedom; it’s not for everyone and that’s OK; the tyranny of choice; and, don’t let it make you arrogant.

I then comment on psychological freedom relative to process-oriented individual therapy and group facilitation.

My two final points are that Processwork accidentally, in its effort to learn to follow nature, actually develops psychological freedom as defined here; and that Processwork should be considered a liberation psychology.

Closing Comments

A good question can set the soul on fire, let’s ask more of them.
Introduction

In this thesis I set out to answer the question: what is psychological freedom? Unlike most research projects, I didn’t start with a hypothesis, just the question, and for the first 18 months of research I was convinced there was no answer to this question, or if there was, it was paradoxically impossible to put into words. It felt like an elaborate exercise in tail-chasing, that while interesting to me personally, was slowly and surely going nowhere in terms of a thesis. For someone with a very structured way of thinking and studying, this has been both a nightmare and a great teacher.

I will say from the outset that I believe there is no fixed and objective truth for almost anything in this world. The world only makes sense to me when I acknowledge the subjective nature of thought and experience, so the definition and exploration of psychological freedom within these pages is really only mine, and only mine for a moment. No doubt I will wake up the day after submitting it with new ideas, interpretations and things I wish I had included!

Every step in developing this thesis has been an act of faith and an endless dance with inner criticism. I can’t say I’ve enjoyed the whole journey, but one of most valuable lessons within it has been getting to know myself in the unknown, and how to sit there, or more accurately, how to deal with the discomfort.

As I am sure is common to many writers, I endured nearly constant inner criticism throughout: everyone has already thought about everything I was thinking about and had already read everything I was reading; who was I to research such a big question; nothing useful would come of the exploration; how can you research without a hypothesis etc, etc. The only way I was ever able help myself out of this defeating diatribe was to rest back in the arms of faith. Faith that it wasn’t really me, Liz, who picked this topic; this topic picked me. The bee might think it is picking which flowers to visit, only because it forgets the endless journey of evolution they have travelled
together, to find themselves on a warm and fragrant day, simultaneously calling and answering to each other.

**The body symptom**

On the day I created a plan and set a deadline for thesis submission I developed a nerve twitch under my right eye. It would come at seemingly random times and I couldn’t make a causal connection between the symptom and any apparent triggers. It was quite strong, distracting, and would persist for up to five minutes at a time.

I attempted to unfold the experience myself, to try and discover the underlying meaning. In unfolding the *symptom-maker* I became strong hands gripping me and shaking me to ‘Wake Up!’ I had no idea what I was supposed to wake up to, but I knew it was something to do with this thesis.

**The answer**

Then half-way through the last day of my self-imposed deadline to finish literature review readings, an answer and I finally found each other. I was excitement, nausea and self-doubt all at once. I was reading Mindell’s book *Process Mind* (2010), which had given me pause to think about the identity of the questioner in my thesis. For a moment I stopped thinking that *I* was researching psychological freedom, and instead enquired as if the universe was researching itself (through what *I* call *me*); and in that moment, the universe immediately knew the answer – psychological freedom is all about *perception*. 
The dream

Two nights before the answer, I dreamt I was pregnant but very busy with lots of things to do helping a group of other Processwork students. A few other people had also been pregnant and had successfully given birth, and I was thinking about how hard giving birth is; such a lot of work. Then I remember that I hadn’t been taking much notice of whether my growing baby had been moving or not, and in fact I realise that it hasn’t been moving. I ask another student (a medical doctor in waking reality) to get a stethoscope so we can listen for a heartbeat. We hear no heartbeat and it is most likely the baby is dead (although not certain). I am a little saddened, but mostly disappointed that I will have to go through all the work of labour with little hope of the live baby prize.

This dream, plus the wake up message from the twitching eye, made me worried that I needed to wake up to the fact that my research topic was a dud; I was doing all this work to deliver a dead thesis.

But like most dreams, this one is multi-faceted, with many symbols and ways to understand them. The dead baby is not just a result of a lack of awareness, but might also symbolise an incredible freedom; a spirit so free that it can change its mind about coming into creation.

The evolving definition

But on the last day of my self-imposed literature review deadline, when the answer and I found each other, the dream and the body symptom made sense, and the symptom subsided. The body symptom was telling me to wake up and notice the larger field in the moment. That day the twitch appeared again twice, but in the lightest possible way. Both times I sat back and shifted my attention to take in more of my surroundings, and the twitching stopped immediately. In the following two weeks the same thing happened in a variety of scenarios. The twitch would start, I
would step back with my attention, the twitch would stop. The connection wasn’t about contexts, but about the quality of my attention in the moment; I was too finely focused. This helped me have a little more faith that this answer, about noticing, was somehow on the right track.

And the dream also made sense. Noticing was important; not getting too caught up in tasks. But so were potentially *dead babies* and the capacity to work hard without knowing what the outcome will be, to have faith in the unknown that is pregnant with possibility.

I used this *answer* about perception to create my first attempt at a definition: Psychological freedom is characterised by the degree to which you can notice phenomena in the momentary field. As I applied this embryonic definition back to the interviews and prior readings, and started structuring the thesis around this answer, I realised it didn’t fit the data well enough.

I went back into a new round of data review, readings and ponderings, and emerged with this extended definition:

Psychological freedom is a dynamic, unpredictable and subjective experience, characterised by two essential elements;

1. The capacity to notice phenomena in the momentary field from a metaphysical state of un-bounded identity, and

2. An *internal* experience in the *individual* finding *external* expression in the *world*, (it doesn’t just exist as an experience in the psyche).

I viewed it as both transformative perception and a perceptual transformation: an awareness that transcends everyday constructs of identity; driving and requiring a lived expression.

In taking this new definition back to the interview data and literature reviews I realised I was preferencing a metaphysical/spiritual definition of psychological
freedom, and excluding a more cognitive, or everyday understanding, which was very obviously present in the data. I noticed there were three strands of definition emerging that could be loosely captured by culture, psychology and transcendence, with identity and perception the unifying threads woven throughout. I took this new understanding of the data and transposed it onto Processwork’s three levels of awareness, consensus reality, dreamland, and essence levels, and finally came to rest on the following definition:

Psychological Freedom is a subjective, unpredictable and active experience, accessed to greater and lesser degrees, involving;

1. A positively regarded awareness of one’s individuality relative to dominant cultural norms,

2. An expanded and expanding sense of identity and fluidity relative to psychological boundaries,

3. The capacity to consciously access a metaphysical state of unbounded identity.

From this definition I came to see that in Processwork’s attempts to learn to follow nature, we invariably develop psychological freedom and that it is perhaps one of the central and essential teachings of Processwork, and the distinguishing gift Processworkers offer their clients, be they individuals, groups or institutions.

Why psychological freedom?

I am five years old, riding my bike to school, on a concrete pedestrian bridge spanning a dry creek bed. This is red desert country and the creek beds are almost always dry. I have a calico library book bag hanging off the handle bars, rhythmically bumping into the front tire; and I am outraged.
I am furious that my parents could be so neglectful as to let me ride alone to school at such a young age – have they never heard of stranger-danger?! And I’m furious that they have obviously failed to comprehend the danger of a dangling book-bag.

I’m also cross at whoever’s responsible for the supposed safety railing along the sides of the bridge. It is just a steel post-and-rail design, strong materials but an insubstantial design; it would be easy to climb through it. And if your book-bag got jammed in your bike tire and caused you to fall off your bike, it would also be easy to fall under the railings and off the bridge.

This is exactly what I see happening. The bag will jam and I will come off the bike. I will fall under the railings and land on the rocks below. My head will crack open on a sharp rock and my brains will slowly ooze out. Then after a period of oozing (which is oddly very relieving), some ethereal part of me will get up and walk away with Jesus - as you do!

Everything in this thesis seems to be an exploration of different elements of this childhood dream/memory; boundaries, safety, conservatism, wildness, learning, suffering, justice, liberation, leaps (and falls) of faith, transcending intellect, and spirituality. A life-time journey with all these elements is my path if Jung’s theory of childhood dreams is accurate (Jung et al. 2008).

Then in 2012 this path intersected with the book Liberatory Psychiatry (Cohen and Timini 2008), a collection of critical psychology articles. I serendipitously misinterpreted several of the introductory statements, prompting me to ask, what is a liberated mind? What does it mean to be free in one’s mind? And does Processwork work support this kind of liberation?

Scope

Psychological freedom is a boundless topic and impossible to represent comprehensively. The major spheres I have left out or only briefly noted, are
neurosciences, Shamanism, the arts, anti-psychiatry, cognitive liberation (in political process theory) and a history of liberation motifs in psychoanalysis. I have also not been able to fully report all of the research interview data.

The cultural context of this work should also be noted in that it is a work commenting from a primarily Western cultural perspective and in no way claims to be culturally translatable to other cultures.

While many of the Processwork terms used in this text are defined at the time of usage, I have not included a specific section devoted to definitions or explicating the model. Rather, I refer the reader with limited knowledge of Processwork to the book *A Path Made by Walking* (Diamond and Jones 2004) or to [www.iapop.com/glossary](http://www.iapop.com/glossary) for basic explanations.

I also note the use of masculine personal pronouns in the excerpts I have taken from some texts. I have chosen to maintain the excerpts as originally written for the sake of readability and acknowledge and apologise that this usage can be experienced as exclusionary to people who don’t identify as male.

**Methodology**

This is a mixed-method thesis, combining the following research tools;

1. The initial research phase utilised Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This is a general, practical and inductive approach that can be used with qualitative or quantitative data (Groundedtheory.com 2014) and is significantly characterised by intentionally not developing an initial hypothesis, nor conducting a literature review, prior to data collection. A substantive topic (in this case *psychological freedom*) is explored via interviewing research participants, with themes then emerging from the data through methods of constant comparison. Due to the small sample size in this
research, we can really only say that the data hints at emerging themes rather than attests any stable patterns or conclusions.

I conducted interviews with eight Processwork Diplomates and seven people with no knowledge of Processwork, asking them all the same five questions;

a. How would you define psychological freedom (assuming it exists)?
b. How did you get it (assuming you think you have it sometimes)?
c. What makes it hard to access?
d. What are the pros and cons of having psychological freedom?
e. Hypothetical: Imagine you are observing two people in conversation and you are trying to assess their levels of psychological freedom, what are you looking/listening for?

Throughout the thesis, paraphrased extracts from the interviews are included in speech boxes.

2. Research synthesis (Cooper, Hedges and Valentine 2009) and intertextuality (Kristeva 1980) were engaged as part of the discursive strategy, whereby the ideas in this thesis are partly informed by, and inferred from readings primarily in the fields of philosophy, mysticism, and liberation psychology. Attempts were also made to synthesise and further develop some of these ideas by combining them with the interview data.

3. Phenomenological Reduction (Husserl and Kersten 1982) and Intuitive Inquiry (Braud and Anderson 1998), developed through inner work, therapy and supervision, including working with current dreams, childhood dreams, and body symptoms.

I have also included a selection of poetry throughout the text that demonstrates a very different style of exploring freedom.
I contextualise this work using Kenneth Burke’s (1967, pg. 110) Parlor Tricks parable, whereby research is seen as unending conversation:

*Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar...the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.*

It is impossible to say when this conversation about freedom began but there is no doubt in my mind that it extends well before written history and even before the emergence of *homo sapiens*, and that at its deepest level, it is perhaps a *conversation* inherent within the cosmos itself. As will become apparent in this work, it is a conversation that certainly doesn’t end here. So let’s step into the parlour for a moment...

*Psyche means soul: so you’re actually enquiring into the freedom of the soul.*
*That’s a big question.*
PART I: KEY FRAMEWORKS

Almost every moralist in human history has praised freedom. Like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, it is a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.

(Berlin 1958, pg. 2)

When the concept of freedom first entered human intellectual discourse it was in the political realm: you were either a free person or a slave, in the objective, literal sense. While the topic of freedom is now considered a core question in the philosophical realm, it wasn’t on the agenda for the ancient philosophers:

...in Greek as well as Roman antiquity, freedom was an exclusively political concept, indeed the quintessence of the city-state and of citizenship.

There is no preoccupation with freedom in the whole history of great philosophy from the pre-Socratics up to Plotinus, the last ancient philosopher.

(Arendt 2006, pg. 156, 144)

Freedom, as a construct of an inner experience of feeling free, was a retreat from the external world of coercion and oppression and was introduced to philosophical discourse through the religious conversions of Paul the Apostle and then Augustine of Hippo:

...inwardness as a place of absolute freedom within one’s own self was discovered in late antiquity by those who had no place of their own in the world and hence lacked a worldly condition which, from early antiquity to almost the middle of the nineteenth century, was unanimously held to be a prerequisite for freedom.

(Arendt 2006, pg. 145)
In this opening section, I do not explore the political context of freedom, but instead focus on three backdrops to the discussion of psychological freedom that I think are most pertinent: philosophy (modern era), spirituality, and liberation psychology. The following three chapters explore some central contributions to the topic from each of these domains, but do not attempt to present a comprehensive review of each school of thought.

The idea that there are multiple domains of freedom is questionable. From a phenomenological perspective, all freedoms, be they physical, spiritual, economic, political etc, are experienced subjectively, that is from the perspective of the individual, and therefore all freedoms are essentially psychological. That is not to say that having less social freedoms is preferable to having more, or that the incarcerated person does not suffer as a result of their lack of physical freedom, just that it is important to not assume that they are wholly negative experiences or that a lack of such ‘external’ freedoms can predict or dictate the state of one’s sense of psychological freedom.

Before we begin this exploration though, I would like to present a short critique of the notion of freedom.

**Critiquing Freedom**

The notion of freedom is the supreme political objective of Western democracies, and the supposed supreme psychological objective of human beings.

*Everyone is looking for freedom – inner and outer.*

While societies need spontaneity (one definition of freedom) for their evolution, they also need boundaries and constraints for social cohesion and relative order. The balancing of these two seemingly opposite parameters is the central axis of political
The term ‘freedom’ itself needs to be considered from within one’s cultural context. It is a highly emotive and romanticised ideal that has been, and continues to be, used to convince hundreds of thousands of people to risk their lives in wars; to ironically trade-off our civil liberties and rights to data and personal privacy; and to turn away from the suffering experienced by those without first-world privileges, that provides the rest of us with so much freedom.

Freedom is also used as a measurement tool by which to judge and compare cultures, according to the criteria applied from the Western position of cultural superiority. This is evidenced in so-called freedom indices, for example, *Freedom in the World* by Freedom House; the *Index of Economic Freedom* by The Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal; and the *Press Freedom Index* by Reporters Without Borders: all Western organisations.

Some would also argue that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the pre-eminent example of a Western tool for cultural judgement. The Declaration is positioned as the supreme trans-cultural statement of freedoms for all people, but is fundamentally underpinned by the values of Western democracy, most evidently, individualistic versus communitarian cultures (Ignatieff 2001). Thus the Declaration is perceived by some (and not just those who seek to violate human rights) as an example of Western colonialism.

That is not to say that the Declaration and freedom indices have not done significant good in the world, just that the cultural-colonialism within them and other presumptions of the value of freedom, should give us pause to question this ideal.
Chapter One: Freedom in philosophy

Humans are ponderous creatures. We have many little daily ponderings; why do some breads toast quicker than others; why do wombats run at passing cars; why are doctors always running late, even for their first appointments for the day? And bigger ponderings; how did the universe begin; what does it mean to be human; am I really free? This last question is one of the central problems in modern philosophy.

In this chapter I explore the current definition of freedom offered by philosophy and what it might offer to an understanding of psychological freedom.

Positive and Negative Freedom

Freedom is conceptualised in the philosophical approach as either freedom from something, or freedom to do something.

Freedom from- is well articulated in the writings of 16th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Pettit (2005), in his article Liberty and Leviathan, explains the two constructs of freedom posited by Hobbes. The first was non-commitment, whereby freedom comes from being able to choose between alternatives without prior commitments or obligations, but also that the very act of deliberating and making a decision reduces one’s freedom (we see this pattern also in the physics experiments where light collapses into either waves or particles when a decision is made as to how to manifest based on observational interaction). There is freedom in having choices, but not once you choose.

The second kind of freedom he suggests is freedom to-, or non-obstruction. This is the freedom to act on what you have chosen (with the assumption that it is within your abilities). Any deliberate imposition by others that might stop you acting upon your will, (not by natural causes or inherent inability) is an obstruction. So the fact
that I cannot run as fast as a cheetah is not an issue of freedom, but the fact that I am not able to travel to and live in whatever country I like, is.

In Hobbes’ own words:

*The [equivalent] terms Liberty and Freedom, properly understood, signify the absence of opposition, i.e. absence of external impediments to motion.*

*These terms may be applied to unthinking and inanimate creatures just as much as to thinking ones.*

...when the impediment to motion lies in the constitution of the thing itself—as when a stone lies still, or a man is held to his bed by sickness—what we say it lacks is not the ‘liberty’ to move but rather the ‘power’ to move.

...a free man is he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do.

(Hobbes 2015, pg. 96)

Debates about the extent to which society should or should not impinge on individual freedom (i.e. be obstructive) are at the foundation of all political ideologies. How much state protection from the extremes of human’s expression of freedom does society require to function? This same idea is also patterned in Freud’s theory of the superego’s role (as an internalised representation of the state) in management of the id, to enable a functional ego.

Philosopher and social psychologist Erich Fromm is attributed to having first applied the terms *negative* freedom (Hobbes’ non-obstruction, freedom *from-* ) and *positive* freedom (freedom *to-* ), in his 1941 work, *The Fear of Freedom*. He defines freedom in the positive sense as;

...the realization of his individual self; that is, the expression of his intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities. (pg. 4)

...based upon the uniqueness and individuality of man (pg. 4)

...the growth of an active, critical, responsible self (pg. 93)

...man’s share in the determination of his fate, his strength, his dignity, and the freedom of his will (pg. 87)
Positive freedom is basically about who or what decides, who or what you become. It is connected to one’s sense of agency within the society one lives in, which is inherently linked to the social structures that inhibit educational and aspirational opportunities (i.e. sexism, racism etc). Someone with a high level of education who more or less aligns with the preferential norms of a culture should feel they are more able to express their will; therefore they have more positive freedom. So it could be said that the degree to which you have positive freedom is significantly linked to the social privileges you have, however, the intersection of between social rank and freedom is much more complex:

_Beating the system at its own game by adopting the patterns of internalised superiority is certainly not the way the oppressed will be liberated from internalised inferiority, as if these patterns of superiority were antidotes. As we well know - from the vantage point of our own dominant social identities - even while we, in certain contexts, may enjoy relative power and privilege, we are far from being free, fulfilled, or integrally developed._

(Quiñones Rosado 2007, pg. 93-94)

This is where I propose the delineation between positive and negative freedoms becomes moot. Cultural values and socialised power imbalances leading to oppression are human-made obstructions to the expression and fulfilment of self.

In terms of the impact on psychological freedom, one’s ability to access psychological freedom is impacted on by your place in society, and the degree to which experiences of external oppression and normative pressures are internalised in one’s psyche, and the impact of trauma resulting from these experiences. Several interviewees discussed the role previous trauma and cultural oppression plays in reducing psychological freedom.
In philosophical discourse, the categories of freedom are primarily debated relative to political freedom, not psychological freedom. If applied to psychological freedom, *negative* psychological freedom might be the extent to which one can be free to notice phenomena, based on one’s abilities, without human-made obstructions. Examples of relevant obstructions include the impact of cultural messages embedded in the family, educational institutions, religions, commercial advertising, and political propaganda. Less common but more dramatic examples include the forced administration of psychoactive drugs, transcranial magnetic stimulation, and electroconvulsive therapies.

Positive psychological freedom might then be how free you are to alter or enhance your own perceptive abilities. This might be through specialised training programs, self-improvement, social interaction, meditation, or psychoactive drugs.

The Cognitive Liberation movement is an example of how the modern philosophic definition of freedom is being applied to the mind. It campaigns against state control of the individual’s right and freedom to think (*freedom from*) and for legalising psychoactive substances (*freedom to*).

*The right to control one’s own consciousness is the quintessence of freedom. If freedom is to mean anything, it must mean that each person has an inviolable right to think for him or herself. It must mean, at a minimum, that each person is free to direct one’s own consciousness; one’s own underlying mental processes, and one’s beliefs, opinions, and worldview. This is self-evident and axiomatic.*

(Boire 2000, para 15)
Chapter Two: Freedom in spirituality

While there is no doubt the impact political freedoms can have on psychological freedom, they do not best describe it because psychological freedom is essentially a metaphysical state; it can’t be seen, heard or touched; and it is completely subjective.

The most extensive explorations into metaphysical freedom are found in the works of contemplative theologians. Contemplative theology from any of the major religions, Eastern or Western, tells us that real freedom has nothing to do with political freedom. That real freedom is only found when you experience yourself in unity with the divine; and that this can happen under any conditions because it is the will of the divine, an act of grace, that bestows this state, not any action or desire of a person.

The history of the many abuses enacted and hidden by religions, including the damaging minority of evangelical and fundamental acts attributed to them can sometimes make it hard to bring religion into a seemingly secular discussion. I acknowledge these difficulties and yet their place in this discussion is crucial. In this work I refer only to the deep, esoteric teachings, which distance themselves from the external manifestations of religious organisations, rituals and rules. I invite the

The inner freedom from the practical desire,
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood

The Four Quartets, Burnt Norton (Eliot 2000, online)
Psychological freedom is an intuitive spiritual knowing. It leads to openness which leads to psychological freedom.

In 1945, writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley published *The Perennial Philosophy*, an attempt to find the “Highest Common Factor” (pg. 1) of all major theologies:

*Philosophia Perennis – the metaphysic that recognises a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being - the thing is immemorial and universal.* (pg. 1)

In many religions, the path to freedom is described as seeing through the illusion of duality, into the essential unitive nature of the universe:

*Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.*

The Bhaghavad Gita - *Hindu* (Sivananda 2000, pg. 43)

Below, Meister Eckhart (contemplative Christian) also suggests a collapsing of the illusion of duality in order to know God, transcending the idea that there is a seer and a seen; there are no objects and subjects, only verbs; seeing, knowing, loving:

*The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God’s eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.*

(Rohr 2013, pg. 106)
Another contemplative Christian Thomas Merton (1961), infers that freedom is paradoxically about following the deeper spirit that is within one:

*Freedom of choice is not, itself, the perfection of liberty. But it helps us take our first step toward freedom or slavery, spontaneity or compulsion. The free man is the one whose choices have given him the power to stand on his own feet and determine his own life according to the higher light and spirit that are in him. The slave, in the spiritual order, is the man whose choices have destroyed all spontaneity in him and have delivered him over, bound hand and foot, to his own compulsions, idiosyncrasies and illusions, so that he never does what he really wants to do, but only what he has to do.* (pg. 177)

I think Processwork shares this paradox if it were to define freedom as the extent to which you are able to follow your own Tao: how free you are to surrender to the not-freedom that is your life’s path?

Being free enough to recognise your own unique destiny; being able to do precisely what is dictated by the moment, not being the dictator. Like an acorn has ‘oak nature’, we each have our own nature. Psychological freedom is having easier access to the flow and expression of that nature.

The freedom implied in this is the capacity to follow your own dreaming nature when it runs contrary to the norms of the society you live in (as they tend to do) and when it requires moving beyond the limitations imposed by the forces that shape identity development.

Zen Buddhism refers to seeing through illusion as a path to freedom which is characterised by spontaneity:

*The term that Zen uses to express the idea of “freedom” is “jiyū” and it consists of two characters; “ji” meaning “self on its own,” while “yū” means “out of.” When they are used together as a compound, the phrase as a whole designates an action arising out of self on its own. This action then carries a sense of spontaneity, much like the spontaneous creative act of living nature.*

(Nagatomo 2006, sec. 8.2)
This is what I mean by freedom, giving free play to all the creative and benevolent impulses inherently lying in our hearts. Generally, we are blind to this fact, that we are in possession of all the necessary faculties that will make us happy and loving towards one another.

Zen in its essence is the art of seeing into the nature of one’s own being, and it points the way from bondage to freedom.

Zen ... must be directly and personally experienced by each of us in his inner spirit. Just as two stainless mirrors reflect each other, the fact and our own spirits must stand facing each other with no intervening agents. When this is done we are able to seize upon the living, pulsating fact itself. Freedom is an empty word until then.

(Suzuki 1961, pg. 23)

The spiritual traditions seem to agree that freedom is essentially seeing beyond the human constructed dualistic nature of reality (where there is such a thing as free and not-free), to the actual nature of reality:

Saints and mystics throughout history have adorned their realizations with different names and given them different faces and interpretations, but what they are all fundamentally experiencing is the essential nature of the mind. Christians and Jews call it “God”; Hindus call it “the Self,” “Shiva,” “Brahman,” and “Vishnu”; Sufi mystics name it “the Hidden Essence”; and Buddhists call it “buddha nature.” At the heart of all religions is the certainty that there is a fundamental truth, and that this life is a sacred opportunity to evolve and realize it.

(Sogyal, Gaffney and Harvey 1992, pg. 47)
Chapter Three: Freedom in psychology

To discuss the role and performance of psychology/psychiatry relative to human liberation is an entire other thesis, but it is obviously important to make some note of it, however brief, in this exploration of psychological freedom.

It is no secret that the goal of mainstream psychology/psychiatry is to restore people to functionality; it is a key criterion in diagnosing all mental illness and a key outcome measure of successful treatment. However for some streams of non-mainstream psychological theory, functionality within the social context is considered only one small part of a meaningful and liberated life. For others, functionality is a sign of internalised oppression. The anti-psychiatry movement that gained momentum in the 1960s, championed by psychiatrists like David Cooper, Thomas Szasz, Jacques Lacan and R. D. Laing (to name only a few), asserted that mainstream psychology was fundamentally oppressive, coercive and dangerous in its treatment approaches.

...psychiatry has always been vulnerable to being used as part of the state’s tools for social control. The modern neoliberal state is no exception. By individualising and commodifying mental health, the radical and liberatory potential of psychiatry is neutralised.

(Cohen and Timimi 2008, pg. 1-2)

In this chapter however, I will focus on the contribution of liberation psychologies to the discussion of psychological freedom. Firstly, I will briefly cover some of the main criticisms of modern psychology as found in the liberation psychology discourse, then discuss some of the key constructions of liberation psychology that contribute to an exploration of psychological freedom. In Chapter Twelve I briefly demonstrate why Processwork should be considered a liberation psychology.

The term liberation psychology emerged from Latin America in the late twentieth century, informed greatly by the liberation theology movement that preceded it by
several decades. It was, and continues to be, not only a critique of modern psychology, but has developed an extensive understanding of the impact of oppression on individual psychology and supports many creative and collaborative strategies for freedom and development.

There is not one liberation psychology, but many psychologies of liberation, including, peace psychology, critical community psychology, feminist psychology, black psychology (not an exhaustive list). There is much diversity in these psychologies and indeed the valuing of diversity is a central tenant in liberation psychologies. In this chapter I will be making general statements about the underpinnings of psychologies of liberation, knowing that they won’t always completely reflect the nuances of how these psychologies emerge uniquely in different places, contexts and points in history.

**Critical psychology’s critique of psychology**

Liberation psychologies are considered critical psychologies in that they are critical of mainstream psychology (which could be defined simply as that which gets the majority of research funding and institutional/governmental validation).

Some of the central criticisms of mainstream psychology made by liberation psychologies, as described in Watkins and Shulman (2010, pg. 24) (drawing on the work of Martin-Baró, originator of the term liberation psychology) include;

1. the assumption that the unit of psychological analysis was a freestanding, autonomous individual whose most important goal was personal happiness,

2. a universalist and ahistorical assumption of the existence of fundamental realities of personality and psychopathology that are the same across times and cultures,
3. the assumption of the persistence of essential social structures rather than any vision of their possible transformation,

4. a sterile scientism focused on quantifiable variables measured in laboratories rather than an analysis of lived experience.

All of these inform and emerge from the central criticism of mainstream psychology; that it doesn’t acknowledge the role social oppression, colonialism and globalisation play in diminishing individual wellbeing, and that it works in service of the dominant Western colonising agenda by helping people adapt and adjust to oppression, rather than seeking to analyse and transform it.

*Because of its positivistic scientific orientation, much of mainstream psychology has emerged as a search for universals, for norms of emotional life and behaviour, and for modes of treatment for individuals who deviate from these norms. This orientation decontextualises the individuals under its scrutiny. Obscuring the impact of collective trauma on mental health has led to treatments for single individuals while leaving intact the social environments that mitigate against psychological well-being.*

(Watkins and Schulman 2010, pg. 4)

In this way, mainstream psychologies offer little to an exploration of psychological freedom as it is just not part of their agenda.

*Traditional Western psychiatry has focused primarily on the biological and individual elements of psychology, and has had a much narrower view of liberation. Thus, freedom from mental illness/distress and self-realisation is addressed within the confines of the existing social structure.*

(Cohen and Timimi 2008, pg. 2)

**Defining liberation psychologies**

Liberation psychologies are “a set of practices that seek to nourish capacities for dialogue, complex and multifaceted identity formation, critical analysis and action”,

inspired by “the hope for peaceful, just and ecologically vibrant communities that support psychological well-being.” (Watkins and Schulman 2010, pg. 10).

As valuing diversity is central in liberation psychologies there tends not to be a fixed, specific utopian goal, because the goals of those seeking liberation will differ depending on many variables. As such, many of the stated goals are somewhat non-specific, as the emphasis is on the process of liberation, not predetermining exactly what that should look like:

A psychology of liberation aims to facilitate social change by providing insights into processes which can aid in the development of a clear analysis, confront the psychological difficulties associated with oppression, and enhance the psychological capacities involved in organising and taking action.

(Moane 1999, pg. 98, cited in Quiñones Rosado 2007, pg. 97)

[Psychologies of liberation are] orientations in the form of ideas, practices, and projects that nurture an imagination of alternative ways of thinking and acting together that can transform participation in social, economic and ecological change and address psychological sufferings.

(Watkins and Schulman 2010, pg. 3)

Liberation psychologies tend to be characterised by action learning patterns: preceded by, and concurrently informed by, the development of critical consciousness, (a term coined by radical educationalist Paulo Freire in his book Education for Critical Consciousness (2013, pg. 41-42)):

The more men grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be. Their understanding will be magical to the degree that they fail to grasp causality. Critical consciousness always submits that causality to analysis; what is true today may not be so tomorrow. Naïve consciousness sees causality as a static, established fact, and thus is deceived in its perception.

Critical consciousness represents things and facts as they exist empirically, in the causal and circumstantial correlations...naïve consciousness considers itself superior to facts, in control of facts, and thus free to understand them as it pleases. Magic consciousness simply apprehends facts and attributes them to a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit.
Critical consciousness is integrated with reality; naïve consciousness superimposes itself on reality; and fanatical consciousness, whose pathological naïveté leads to the irrational, adapts to reality. Critical understanding leads to critical action; magic understanding to magic response.

Liberation psychologies apply this critical consciousness of oppressive social dynamics to understand the social and psychological impacts of oppression, and to inform actions to challenge those social structures, simultaneously improving the wellbeing of citizens through the diminution of internalised oppression.

I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities and a thousand unremembered moments produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people. There was no particular day on which I said, Henceforth I will devote myself to the liberation of my people; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise.

(Mandela 1995, pg. 93)

Psychological freedom through the lens of liberation psychologies

Liberation psychologies contribute to this exploration of psychological freedom in several ways. Firstly, they reinforce the idea that perhaps there is not one way to define psychological freedom, that only each individual, in each specific context and time, can really define this experience for themselves, if they so chose to. It also suggests that my attempts to find a universal definition is perhaps a symptom of my own subscription and enculturation to mainstream psychology’s tendency to generalise and define the human experience.

Liberation psychologies support the importance of a critical analysis of one’s culture, especially in reference to oppression and privilege, which emerged as a key theme in the interview data.

Lastly, it makes a strong case for the idea that psychological freedom is not something that can exist solely in one’s own mind, but that it must also be put into
action. If psychological freedom is partly about an expanded sense of identity, this expanded self must also find representation in consensus reality, in one way or another.

As social justice educator Quiñones Rosado (2007, pg. 100) says, “...critical consciousness is not, in and of itself, liberating; consciousness without action only leads to cynicism. It is consciousness in action, nurtured by a vision and a sense of hope, that can lead to liberation and transformation.”

I recall in my very first therapy session I needed to determine if my personal therapy could be anything other than privileged introspection. If it couldn’t be of benefit to the wider world somehow, I couldn’t subscribe to it. Looking back at this attitude, I see in it a natural drive for awareness to flow into action and expression, and an unconscious connection between my own liberation and that of others. That this is so important to me sits behind my secondary research question; is Processwork a liberatory psychology?

Commerce is supported by keeping the individual at odds with himself and others,

    by making us want more than we need,
    and offering credit to buy what refined senses do not want.

    The masses become shackled; I see how their eyes weep
    and are desperate—of course they feel desperate—for something,
    for some remedy that a poor soul then feels needs to be bought.

    Meister Eckhart in (Ladinsky 2002, pg. 115)
PART II: DEFINING PSYCHOLOGICAL FREEDOM

What is freedom? I do not know!! We cannot know what it is, it is not belonging to the human domain. If I tell you what freedom is, it will not be freedom anymore. Nobody can say: "That is freedom!" you would be chaining yourselves to a definition of freedom. Freedom is a prisoner's concept, not a concept of a free man.

(Kosen 2015, online), Zen Master

To attempt to define psychological freedom, fraught as that is, I have overlaid the research results onto Processwork’s three levels or dimensions of awareness; consensus reality; dreamland; and sentient essence. The definitions of psychological freedom given by the interviewees more or less fell into three general categories of culture, identity, and spirituality, which seem to somewhat correspond with these awareness levels.

I have devoted a chapter to each level, wherein I briefly define the level, then explore a definition of psychological freedom at that level, as suggested by the research. It is of course a false distinction to view these levels as completely distinct or separate from each other because in reality they are interwoven. The distinction simply facilitates the communication of ideas.

One theme that was conspicuous through all phases of research was that freedom, however that was defined and in whatever sphere or level of experience, was mostly assumed to be a good thing and strongly preferred. Boundaries and a state of being stuck were generally devalued, both implicitly and explicitly. Therefore in each chapter I have also explicated the nature of boundaries at that level of reality, and the role they may serve, if any, in the emergence/development of psychological freedom.
Psychological freedom could be seen as a question of identity and the influence identity has on perception. At the consensus reality level it is a matter of defining ourselves against the backdrop of the mainstream culture; claiming one’s own diversity and becoming a differentiated and distinct I. At the dreamland level it is about expanding this sense of I to also be everyone I’m not, in a way that serves to increase our inner diversity. At the sentient level it is transcending the notion of I completely.

Looking at my childhood dream through the definitions of psychological freedom at these three levels I see three corresponding symbols for freedom. Firstly, I have always associated bicycles with freedom and they tend to appear in all my pivotal dreams about my Processwork studentship. In this dream, the bike rider is a book learner riding on a human-made bridge – it is a symbol of psychological freedom at the consensus reality level. Secondly, and perhaps most obviously, a head cracked open on rocks perfectly symbolises an expanded identity, such as psychological freedom at the dreamland level is defined here. Thirdly, the ethereal self that emerges to walk with Jesus, to follow a spiritual path, might reflect psychological freedom at the essence level.

*Even thinking you have psychological freedom can set you up to be less free. If you prize and strive for psychological freedom, you risk marginalising ‘stuckness’ and ‘not freedom’ – it is another paradox to add to the mountain of paradoxes that are the human experience.*

(Krishnamurti 2010, pg.68)
Chapter Four: Psychological freedom at the consensus reality level

Consensus reality is the level of real things, where we mostly agree on what we see, hear etc – there is a consensus on what we are observing or experiencing. In the Processwork literature it is defined;

[Consensus reality] is [t]he generally agreed-upon idea of what is “real.” In the twenty-first century, this means that which can be observed “objectively” in time, space, matter, and energy.

(Mindell 2010, pg. 272)

For example, most people will agree that a given river is about five feet deep. But most will not agree on the idea that there are demons, monsters, or mermaids in that water.

(Mindell 2000, pg. 25)

...an implicit general agreement as to what is real and what is not.

(Goodbread 2011, pg. 44)

At the consensus reality level, psychological freedom is developed through an essentially objective educational process that reveals the impact of the real world on one’s life and psychology. It is about the individual becoming more aware of themselves in contrast to their culture; the development of a more distinct identity of what is me and not-me, and the valuing of constructs like free-will and self-determination relative to normative influences.

Many of the non-Processwork interviewees defined psychological freedom in terms of a capacity to critically analyse the cultures they live/d in, both familial and social:

To be more, and different, to how you were conditioned to be by your upbringing and culture. Being able to think outside the paradigms we exist in.
Culture could be said to straddle both consensus reality and dreamland levels of awareness because it has both objective and subjective aspects. I discuss it here at the consensus reality level to reflect the theme in the research that psychological freedom is about how you are *in the world*, and relative to the world. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this is different to the dreamland level where psychological freedom appears to be a more internal experience relative to one’s identity.

Psychological freedom at the consensus reality level is not necessarily about constantly challenging or conflicting with the culture, but about critical analysis and making *choices* or assessments about which elements of the culture one feels aligned with, or represented by, and which elements one does not.

*Freedom is a state of mind – not freedom from something but a sense of freedom, a freedom to doubt and question everything and therefore so intense, active and vigorous that it throws away every form of dependence, slavery, conformity and acceptance.*

(Krishnamurti 2010, pg. 69)

Of course many ways in which we don’t align with the mainstream preferences are not a matter of choice, for example, skin colour or gender identity. Psychological freedom at this level entails understanding that the ways we are discriminated against because of such diversities (and the way this impacts on our wellbeing) is a socio-cultural issue, not a personal failing or pathology.

This would also suggest that if you are a member of the dominant group within your culture, you are less inclined to develop psychological freedom as you are less frequently and noticeably confronted with the ways in which you do not *fit* with this dominant group – the difference between you and the *mainstream* are too subtle to disturb your wellbeing and therefore psychological freedom is frequently less developed.

In this way, psychological freedom at the consensus reality level is akin to liberation psychology’s critical consciousness as discussed in Chapter Three, whereby
educational processes reveal previously unquestioned assumptions about the nature and dynamics of one’s culture and one’s position in that culture. It is primarily an objective educational process, as discussed by Freire (2013, pg. 30):

The education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context – and to intervene in that context; it would warn men of the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others. By predisposing men to reevaluate constantly, to analyse “findings,” to adopt scientific methods and processes, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality, that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it.

At the consensus reality level many of us frequently feel victimised by the normalising forces of the culture, because to greater or lesser degrees we are all oppressed by collective demands, with victimhood one of many valid responses. Psychological freedom at this level is therefore infused with a spirit of breaking free, a reflexive need for relief and release from oppression.

Many things are, and must be, differentiated at this level of psychological freedom, prioritising some paths and setting aside others. Such awareness will frequently bring us into conflict with those who hold fast to values and approaches antithetical to psychological freedom. For example, in political systems which promote oppression, constraint and homogenisation as necessary for good order, the psychological value that might be found in these constraints is difficult, and perhaps not reasonable, to access when you are in the midst of suffering and subjugation.

Psychological freedom is also linked to our physical experience in the world, a world where our bodies interact physically with other bodies and objects in the physical plane. Confidence in moving, balancing, catching, running and other physical abilities used to be highly prized in earlier societies and remain a powerful determinant of our sense of psychological freedom. So too is our physical health and freedom from difficult inherited or acquired conditions that limit our physical ability. In both cases,
our levels of fear or confidence born of our physical capacities alter our perception of our psychological freedom.

*Critical consciousness involves decoding the social lies that naturalize the status quo, while searching for alternative interpretations of one's situation.*

(Watkins and Schulman 2010, pg. 18)

For a huge proportion of the world’s people psychological freedom is severely constrained by the difficulties of such ‘social lies’ and oppressive political systems, making such freedom an almost impossible task. The overwhelming need to survive can dominate all other concerns.

In my childhood dream, psychological freedom at the consensus reality level is represented in the education motif of the library book bag, and the outrage at parents and the *state* for failing in their protection of someone so young – both elements of critical consciousness (although outrage is not a necessary response arising with critical consciousness, it is a valid one). Jesus as a symbol for social activism might also represent the consensus reality level as well as the more obvious essence level.

**Neuroscience and psychological freedom**

There are many comments neuroscience might contribute to the conversation on psychological freedom but in this thesis I will limit them to a brief exploration of Iain McGilchrist’s work on hemispheric characteristics, as it is related to issues of cultural homogeneity and critical consciousness.

In McGilchrist’s tome *The Master and his Emissary: the divided brain and the making of the Western world* (2009) the author takes a new approach to the differences between the left and right brain hemispheres. Traditionally neuroscience attributed
different cognitive functions to either side of the brain, as McGilchrist in his later work (2012, loc. 63) puts it:

*The left hemisphere, we learnt, was rational and linguistic, while the right hemisphere was pink and fluffy, emotional, creative, vague and given to painting pictures.*

After this theory was dispelled by observations that both sides of the brain are engaged in almost all tasks, a new hypothesis and McGilchrist’s central message emerges; the left and right don’t *do* different things, they do things in different ways, it is their *way of doing* that is different, and “the most fundamental difference between the hemispheres lies in the type of attention they give to the world” (pg. 4).

He goes on to clarify that:

*Attention is not just another ‘function’ alongside other cognitive functions. Its ontological status is of something prior to functions and even to things. The kind of attention we bring to bear on the world changes the nature of the world we attend to* (pg. 28)

*The right hemisphere underwrites breadth and flexibility of attention, where the left hemisphere brings to bear focussed attention...the right hemisphere sees things whole, and in their context, where the left hemisphere sees things abstracted from context, and broken into parts, from which it then reconstructs a ‘whole’: something very different.* (pg. 27)

It is these different kinds of attention that he says are responsible for the brain being divided in the first place – the division allows two concurrent types of attention. Left hemisphere attention used to “get and grasp” (2012, loc. 133) with a view to manipulate the environment, and right hemisphere attention which is “in the service of connection, exploration and relation.” (2012, loc. 146).

His work then explores how a preference for the left-brain style of attention has shaped the development of the Western world over the course of the renaissance, reformation, enlightenment and industrial revolutions. Thus, I propose that in cultures where left-brain perception is dominant, as is the case in Western cultures (and not only), learning the skills and language of right brain perception are inherent
in developing psychological freedom. If awareness at the consensus reality level is partly about having a critical consciousness of the culture you are embedded in, using the different hemispheric perspectives is imperative.

The left hemisphere clutches tightly to the idea of knowledge and knowing, but to the exclusion of insights from the right hemisphere. It is culturally reinforced and we become bewitched by our own knowing. Paradoxically, limiting our knowing (like in meditation) can lead to valuable right-brain awareness, insights and knowledge that contrast with our dominant left-brain style of perception.

An example of enabling this right-brain perception during this thesis development was when I first encountered an answer to the central research question (after 18 months of thinking there was none). As described in the Introduction, this answer came from a shift in perception as to the identity of the enquirer. This was a shift from left- to right-brain perception whereby I stopped thinking about the topic from a parts-based perspective, to a more unitive approach. I dropped out of left-brain attention, allowing myself to become informed from a seemingly mysterious awareness, enabled by right-brain attention.

The nature and role of boundaries at the consensus reality level

At this level, boundaries are real and manifest, existing physically, but also predicking most of our legislative and relational boundaries. For example, there is a fence between my property and that of my neighbour. It creates a boundary between us, between what is mine and what is hers. It is a physical representation of words and numbers on land division maps, which are in turn part of the legal construction of land ownership. It creates an object that I can use, sell, or bequeath to others when I die. The fence is also a mediator of relationship with my neighbour; dictating some, and inferring other, rules of engagement.
My skin is similarly a boundary. It and everything within it is me, everything outside of that is not me. All the laws of my country concerning personhood are in reference to this thing, this me, bounded by my skin. This skin-bound thing can also own things, but these things are not me.

These are the kinds of boundaries we tend to like; those that protect us and our possessions. Some of that protection is by way of legislation, but some is based in the manifest physicality of the barrier; a good fence protects my tree plantings from hungry wallabies, unbroken skin protects me from infection. These kinds of boundaries could be said to facilitate freedom.

However, whether a boundary enables or oppresses may depend on which side of the boundary you are on. Many social boundaries serve to reinforce power differentials such that those in dominant groups stay dominant and those in subordinated groups stay subordinate. The same could be said for some physical boundaries. My fence for example, gives my trees freedom to grow (and me freedom to harvest firewood in the future) but is obstructive to hungry wildlife. The boundary the fence represents socio-legally is part of a land ownership construct, (which gives me some financial freedoms and rights of use), that is tied to a brutal colonialism that disposed traditional land custodians. It made and continues to make them less free.

Boundaries are inherent in oppression, but are also somewhat paradoxically essential for creativity. Stokes (2006, pg. xii) in her book Creativity from Constraints explains:

*The more constrained the solution paths, the more variable, the more creative, the problem solvers.*

“But,” someone always asks, “what about artistic freedom”? Free to do anything, most of us do what’s worked best, what has succeeded most often in the past. This is, in

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.

The Four Quartets, Little Gidding
(Eliot 2000, online)
fact, the definition of an operant: a behaviour that increases in frequency because it has been successful. Successful solutions are reliable, not surprising; predictable, not novel; already accepted, not creative.

In describing how to develop creativity, Stokes goes on to say that “the first step is mastering the constraints that define a domain; the second is devising novel constraints that expand it.” (pg. xiv). Creativity and boundaries, like freedom and boundaries, are two parts of the one process.

At the consensus reality level, and if our psychological freedom is to progress to the dreamland level, we must rethink the notion of boundaries. That while physical and social boundaries exist, they not only separate things, they unite them. In his book No Boundary, Wilber (2001, pg. 26) makes a perhaps useful distinction between lines and boundaries:

> All of the lines we find in nature, or even construct ourselves, do not merely distinguish different opposites, but also bind the two together in an inseparable unity.

> A real line becomes an illusory boundary when we imagine its two sides to be separated and unrelated; that is when we acknowledge the outer difference of the two opposites but ignore their inner unity.

Boundaries serve not only to separate and unite, they also enable awareness:

> Why, then, does God need man? He needs humankind, says Jung, in order to achieve a greater consciousness, a more precise rendering of himself to himself.

(Spiegelman 2006, pg. 3)

Boundaries create a this-not-that, reality. This duality is inherent in, and essential for, communication, which is in turn the mediator of human thought, relationships and culture.

Chapter Two of the *Tao Te Ching* (Laozi 2015, ch. 2) tells us that by describing one thing, we create its opposite. Something cannot be called long if there is nothing else to compare it to that is less long:
When the world knows beauty as beauty, ugliness arises
When it knows good as good, evil arises
Thus being and non-being produce each other
Difficult and easy bring about each other
Long and short reveal each other
High and low support each other
Music and voice harmonize each other
Front and back follow each other

If we follow McGilchrist’s findings we can also understand boundaries as a feature of the very structure of our brain’s functioning. It is the obligate function of the left hemisphere to break up all that we perceive into parts, to better to put them to our service. At this level boundaries serve to support the myriad ways humans have dominated the apparent world around them. While often disastrous, our tendency to abstract and separate all perceptual input into parts, sets up structures from which we benefit as well as suffer.

There is no one, definitive answer as to ‘why boundaries?’, but it would seem reasonable to state that they are paradoxically necessary for the development of awareness. In Processwork it is contended that the universe is self-reflecting and requires manifestation and marginalisation for this reflection (Mindell 2000, 2010, 2013). Contrast, conflict and polarisation (all requiring a boundary) enable perception by being something to perceive. If there is no this and that, then there is neither, there is nothing. And if there is nothing to notice, there is no noticing.

Our ability to reject deep experience is in fact important to our overall nature as humans. This rejection separates us from our deepest nature, creating diversity, a world of many parts, and the possibility for reflection – that is self-reflection!

...the processmind needs our everyday mind, our infamous ‘ego’ or primary process in order to objectify itself. Marginalisation of our dreamlike and quantum nature allows us to observe, measure, and create reality as if it were not us.

(Mindell 2010, pg. 21, 66)
Something about our universe wants to forget its state of oneness and create diversity processes, conflict, and remember the need for unity again.

(Mindell 2013, pg. 17)

At the consensus reality level, psychological freedom could be said to come from a heightened awareness of the boundary between the society and the individual; of knowing how we are different to others and the physical world around us. Perhaps paradoxically it also supports our awareness of connection with this other, if not our actual unity with everything around us.

To meet a condition of psychological freedom however, this awareness of self as different cannot be self-critical. We can all be aware (and hurt) by the ways we don’t fit in, but this doesn’t in itself make us more free. Seeing that this self-criticism is a result of social marginalisation and then claiming an acceptance or love of our diversity is essential for psychological freedom.
Chapter Five: Psychological freedom at the dreamland level

In Processwork, the dreamland level of awareness is sometimes referred to as non-consensus reality. It is the level of subjective experience:

A general level of awareness including dreams, dreaming while awake, and non-consensual experiences (relative to a given community).

(Mindell 2010, pg. 272)

...perceptions that do not collectively correspond...

(Mindell 2000, pg. 25)

[Non-consensus reality] consists of subjective, dreamlike experiences that are not generally consented upon as “real,” such as dreams, feelings, fantasies, projections, and other experiences that make up our inner world...[experiences that] people do not normally permit themselves to feel, talk about, or notice.

(Diamond and Jones 2004, pg. 21)

Dreamland is a more psychological level of reality than the others (although it could be argued that life is inherently only psychological). It is not the river that is approximately five feet deep as observed at the consensus reality level, but the beliefs and subjective experiences of the demons, monsters, or mermaids in that river.

For example, when I attend to my lower back pain, the consensus reality chiropractor tells me it is an issue in my sacroiliac joint, but my dreamland inner-work tells me it is an issue of being more sensitive to signals that show me the direction of my personal Tao. Many chiropractors will concur with the sacroiliac diagnosis, but no one can confirm or refute the accuracy of my dreamland diagnosis.
At the dreamland level, psychological freedom is about how diverse your identity can be. It is your capacity to move fluidly between multiple roles within your own psychology and openness to the idea that every role out there, is also in here.

The Processworkers interviewed most commonly defined psychological freedom in terms of fluidity.

Fluidity is linked to the capacities of detachment and curiosity (see Part III), and the Processwork concept of deep democracy; and are self-reinforcing. Being somewhat detached from your everyday identity makes it easier to be curious about other roles (deep democracy). Curiosity and detachment both predicate fluidity, which in turn supports increased detachment. Fluidity is not a capacity of either the primary or secondary process, but belonging a third aspect of awareness, the metacommunicator:

The “I” or “we” who performs this operation [expanding our identities by incorporating the content from the secondary process into the primary process] is not identical with the primary process. Frequently there is a third, separate, and more detached piece of awareness, a metacommunicator, who sees both the primary and secondary content.

(Diamond n.d., pg. 13)

Fluidity is aided by a welcoming curiosity relative to diversity. This is not always easy to achieve, in part because the norms of many cultures are inherently against
diversity and because many of us are conditioned to go through life feeling a victim of forces beyond our control and that are not us.

Politically I vote Left and am frequently outraged by the policies of the Right, but if I really want to be more psychologically free I have to, even begrudgingly at first, find the part of me that is also Right-wing. When my back is really sore, at first I lie in bed (because I can’t stand) feeling like a victim and poor me, and this is very valid. However, if I want to be more psychologically free I also need to experience myself as the one who creates the sore back; that I am not just a victim of a loose joint but I am also the one who creates a loose joint to get my attention and teach me something.

Psychological freedom at this level requires not only an interest in diversity, but a capacity to facilitate your inner diversity – it is not just about recognising the many inner selves, but facilitating the relationships between them. This diversity is not limited to the human realm but also extends to non-human forms as seen in Shamanic traditions and deep ecology:

*When one thinks like a mountain, one thinks also like the black bear, so that honey dribbles down your fur as you catch the bus to work.*

(Seed 1988, pg. 39)

In contrast to psychological freedom at the consensus reality level, where developing a distinct identity relative to the mainstream is required, at the dreamland level we must explore the ways in which we are also the mainstream. At consensus reality level we cannot recognise value in homogenisation, but at dreamland level we must find it. We must also find the value in suffering, oppression and constraint.
The development of psychological freedom at both consensus reality and the dreamland level is challenging, but at the dreamland level it is all the more difficult because it is a completely subjective process; you can’t learn it from a book. Consensus reality level psychological freedom is greatly aided by cognition-based education but dreamland level psychological freedom must be primarily developed experientially. It is also the level of polarised and paradoxical experience, where we learn to consciously hold (rather than unconsciously ignore) the multiple paradoxes inherent in being.

At the dreamland level, values include diversity, conflict, the wisdom of nature, interdependence, relationship and community. The work at this level is to notice and explore what we are marginalising, which can sometimes conceal the role and value of stuckness. Stuckness is when I am only a victim of my sore back and can’t conceive of any other options, let alone access them. By nature, stuckness exists in the absence of awareness, so it is paradoxically impossible to welcome it into our identity when we are experiencing it. In hindsight however, the value of stuckness can be integrated and contribute to psychological freedom. As one interviewee commented, Jesus on the Cross is the supreme symbol of stuckness, and tells us that suffering without escape can somehow be meaningful.

When I am stuck in bed with a sore back, and stuck in suffering with it, I learn about being overwhelmed, about not being able to do things, about the connection

When you are with everyone but me,
you’re with no one.
When you are with no one but me,
you’re with everyone.
Instead of being so bound up with everyone,
be everyone.
When you become that many, you're nothing.
Empty.

(Rûmî and Barks 2004, pg. 28)
between doing and self-esteem, about vulnerability and unreliability. If I am too fluid, I may not spend enough time in my suffering to fully experience these things.

The nature and role of boundaries at the dreamland level

_If I was any more open-minded...my whole brain would fall out._

(Buffy the Vampire Slayer 2000)

The point of contact between seemingly opposing parts of one’s identity, one more welcomed into awareness than the other, is what Processwork calls the **edge**. The concept of edges, which are the dreamland level boundaries, provides us with language and mapping tools for working with the limits of awareness and identity, and thus the limits of our psychological freedom at this level.

The edge is variously defined as:

_The “something” that stands between the observer and his secondary process we will call an edge. It is...the edge of the observer’s identity._

(Goodbread 1997, pg. 50)

_I use the term “edges” to describe the borders or barriers that exist to the eternal and continual flow of inner processes._

_Edges give form to your inner processes. Edges are neither good nor bad; the simply divide us into different worlds._

_Edges protect us in a way, from the unknown, from the unfamiliar._

(Mindell 2000, pg. 57, 61)

...the **limit** of the known identity as well as a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities.

...[part of] a conceptual framework for tracking experience and organising perceptual information

(Diamond and Jones 2004, pg. 20)
The edge as a boundary is a subjective, psychological construct, not a consensus reality level boundary, although our psychological edges are of course manifest at the consensus reality level. It is a marginalisation of awareness because of the threat awareness poses to a preferred state of identity stability.

...the edge may be one of Process Work’s most significant contributions to psychological understanding and to the study of personal and social change.

(Gronda 2013, pg. 9)

For me, and for many in tall-poppy syndrome cultures like Australia, our edges are intertwined with edges to personal power and expression. In a tall-poppy syndrome culture it is literally dangerous to express an opinion, to show leadership or passion, or to be in the public sphere. Accusations of arrogance fly at the speed of light and it only gets worse, depending on how long and how adamantly you stay in the public sphere. Growing up in this kind of culture, this danger is internalised and prowls at the edges of our identity, barricading our access to growth and power with a seemingly protective lay-low and blend-in strategy, frequently manifested in our inner dialogue as a self-doubting commentary. In this dynamic, elevated levels of inner criticism would signal we are working at the edge of our identity and therefore our comfort zone. However, the skills we learn by working at this edge will ironically be exactly the skills we will need to deal with the dangers of being a tall poppy. So the edge doesn’t sit between our current selves and future selves. It is where we learn how to be this future self; it’s where we become our future.

The edge doesn’t just sit between our primary and secondary process. We also have edges to different channels of perception and levels of awareness, and sometimes even edges to our primary process. The primary process is made up of several different aspects that are not always in alignment with each other, for example, identity and action. I self-identify as being quite an organised person and somehow I give everyone else the impression I am organised, but my office, my bedroom and my shed all tell a different story. In those places, organisation is an ephemeral
condition followed in turn by cyclonic (and long-lasting) chaos. My identity and actions are not aligned; there is an edge within my primary process.

Edges are also a time and place phenomena. For example, if I can stay over my edge to keep my house organised long enough, the edge will eventually disappear; or I might cross my edge to keep my bedroom organised, but I can’t yet do it in my office.

In Processwork parlance we often say things like “I am at an edge”, “we’ve got to an edge” as though it was a place (and therefore bounded) and the self that is beyond this edge exists somewhere in some future. These statements provide a useful shortcut for efficient communication, but overtime they can reinforce illusionary boundary concepts, creating false separation of what is a unified whole. Alternatively they can create more of a barrier to growth since they reinforce a perception that we haven’t reached a certain state, when in fact we are partly already there, or we would not have noticed the edge to begin with.

Edges in our psyche (and our psyche itself) are not things, places or parts, but experiences of relationship between the unified opposites that we call our primary and secondary processes. They are a dynamic negotiation of multiple aspects of the one process; wrestling, dancing, courting, in a moment of creative instability that enables the emergence of awareness, novelty and new order.

More accurately, although not more elegantly or efficiently, we might instead say: The present moment (the field, the Tao) is characterised by a heightened state of instability and the limits of my perception are being renegotiated such that previously marginalised awareness and capacities may become apparent and a new, albeit temporary, order (or at least a less disturbing state of instability) may be experienced.

Edges are the experience of transition; of being out of one’s comfort zone and in a space of not-knowing, but where the potential for evolutionary progress are highest. As described by Gronda (2013, pg. 17-18):
...the edge [is] not just a barrier but...an essential and generative phenomenon which creates the condition for diversity. It is not simply an obstacle, or merely the dividing line between this and that. Edges constitute our sense of identity and paradoxically bring us into contact with what we think we are not.

When working at the dreamland level, Processwork puts significant emphasis on working at, or with, this edge experience (see Goodbread 1997; Diamond and Jones 2004; Gronda 2013). Here we have the opportunity to not only expand our identity and develop fluidity, but to enrich our relationship with our unique dreaming processes.

In my house I have five pairs of general use scissors (not including sewing scissors of course), and one of them is supposed to live on my office table. One day, in the middle of some task, I rushed through the office to grab the scissors from my desk but they weren’t there. I made my way to the kitchen (about seven meters from the office) to get an alternate pair, and heard: “Why didn’t you put the office scissors back where they live in the first place? Now you’ve lost all this time hunting for another pair of scissors. That’s not very efficient. You’ll never achieve anything of note in this life if you waste so much time through being undisciplined and therefore inefficient.” This is a fairly dramatic over-reaction by most people’s standards including my own, but such intense catastrophising over a seemingly minor inconvenience (it cost me around ten seconds to get the kitchen scissors instead), tells me something is up.

Working with this inner criticism (a manifestation of the edge), the critic role first demands I take life more seriously and stop being so disorganised because I have important work to do in the world. My everyday identity can’t bear the idea of taking life too seriously and argues that a state of relaxation underlies being disorganised and that being relaxed is important. For a moment I think I’ve nailed this inner critic; it’s just a pushy work ethic inherited from my family running me into the ground! But then it comes back at my everyday identity, revealing a deeply held value that was all but intellectually marginalised in me; that life is the most incredibly precious gift and
all I have of it is time – “SO DON’T WASTE EVEN TEN SECONDS LOOKING THINGS YOU’VE MISPLACED!”

This example demonstrates how edges are not the border of identity but also encode the deepest secrets of our identity, or dreaming, if we can just work out how to unlock them.

In my childhood dream there are several edge motifs and scenes of edge negotiations. The bridge itself could be seen as an edge to nature. It is a human-made construction that enables me to not engage with the rocks underneath – to not battle nature – to traverse life by way of a book based understanding of the world. It is the dreamland level edge between one who learns by books and will and one who learns by nature and faith. Going off the side of the bridge is a leap of faith and in my waking life, a lot of my unconscious edgework has been by way of *throwing myself over edges*.

Another edge in the dream is my skull. It is the edge to transcending identity, the essence level psychological freedom – which is crossed by a dramatic *meeting* with the rock. The rock is part of the style of edge work, as well as the main nature motif in the dream. Although it seems a sudden, sharp interaction, to me the rocks are ancient, with an enduring and timeless quality to them; they are still and waiting, tempting me over the edge of the bridge. In my waking life I have had several spontaneous experiences of what I would call a transcended identity state, all through unexpected dramatic *contact* with nature.

The abstraction of the edge is a result of the left brain style of perception and is incredibly useful. However, it can sometimes mean we get attached to *getting somewhere* with our inner work, our personal development. When we work at our edges, unfolding phenomenological experiences, we are actually *living* ourselves and our process – this is the right brain. The left brain then translates these experiences into words and amends our narrative of who we are and what we will do next. In a
left-brain dominant culture we have to take care to value the actual experience at the edge and the meaning inherent in the embodied experience, not just the abstractions we then create from it.

Psychological freedom cannot be gained by overcoming boundaries but by valuing them, engaging with them and seeing them as they are; not boundaries but areas of engagement that are essential for awareness and therefore freedom.

The role of constraints, boundaries and even oppression can easily be marginalised while in pursuit of freedom. The very notion of pursuing freedom implies the existence of oppression or limitations that we strive to be liberated from.

We risk marginalising the importance of boundaries and structures, and can undermine the incredible learning and growth gained from studying with the great teacher, oppression.

It’s always good to have edges to work on.

The skills we build in our striving are grown by encountering and engaging with oppression and limitation – they go together. Encounters with boundaries are actually the only opportunities we have to become more free, because they are interwoven parts of the same process.

No matter how fast you run, your shadow more than keeps up.

Sometimes, it's in front!

Only full, overhead sun diminishes your shadow.

But that shadow has been serving you!

What hurts you blesses you.

Darkness is your candle.

Your boundaries are your quest.

(Rūmī and Barks 2004, pg. 20)
Chapter Six: Psychological freedom at the essence level

The essence level of awareness (sometimes referred to as the sentient level) is a subtle, non-dualistic, unified field experience that is difficult to clearly describe because language is a dualistic construct and therefore cannot succeed in describing non-dualism; we can’t really describe it, but we can point at it in various ways:

[It is t]he non-dual level of awareness, such as “the Tao that can’t be said.” This level corresponds to experiences which are implicit or not yet explicit to our everyday minds. This is the basic level of the processmind, a noncognitive “knowing” that is difficult to explicate.

(Mindell 2010, pg. 273)

Awareness of the Sentient level can be likened to a ‘felt sense’, vague and difficult to describe in words, our experience of the basic ground from which all else arises. It can be akin to a mood state, a sensed awareness of something profound where we no longer feel conflicts or notice separate parts.

(Maclaurin 2005, pg. 15)

The essence level represents a unified sense of self within the context of space and time. In this nondualistic or nonpolarized level of consciousness, people have an experience of “sentience,” a transpersonal awareness that is a subtle yet meaningful experience. This can further be described as the “seed” or prethought stage of a tendency before awareness and action.

(Richardson 2015, pg. 5)

As the reader may recall from Chapter Two: Freedom in spirituality, mystics from all times and all faiths have also known that this aspect of reality is beyond words. The similarity between Processwork’s essence level and the ultimate ground variously described in contemplative spirituality need not imply that a religious belief is required to entertain the ideas herein. As the reader will discover further in this
chapter, only an acceptance of some of the indisputable theories of quantum physics is required (which physicists also find difficult to describe).

Ultimate reality, whether it is called the Tao, Buddha-nature, En-sof, God, Brahman, or sub-atomic reality, cannot be grasped by thought or by words because they create distinctions – *this* but not *that* – and duality cannot describe non-duality.

...what is mutually conditioning and produced by the law of causation cannot express the highest reality, because the indications [pointing to the distinction between] self and not-self are non-existent. Mahamati, words are these indications and do not express [the highest reality].

*(Lankavatara Sutra n.d., sec. XXXIII)*

Similarly in quantum physics, we can kind of point to the *not-characteristics* of this *not-thing*, but we can’t say what it actually is:

*The mathematical framework of quantum theory has passed countless successful tests and is now universally accepted as a consistent and accurate description of all atomic phenomena. The verbal interpretation, on the other hand – i.e., the metaphysics of quantum theory – is on far less solid ground. In fact, in more than forty years physicists have not been able to provide a clear metaphysical model.*

*(Capra 2010, pg. 132)*

At the essence level, psychological freedom is a transcendence of identity to an unbounded state of *access* to the Ultimate Ground, Tao, God etc. At this level, nothing is excluded because there are no *things* and exclusion doesn’t exist.

In Processwork, psychological freedom at the essence level seems synonymous with being able to access what Mindell calls the *Processmind*. In his book of the same name (2010, pg. 272, 4, 11), Mindell characterises the Processmind as:

...a non-local “oneness” experience...[which] appears in dreams and reality as the diversity of things catching our attention and interest.

...an organising factor – perhaps the organising factor – that operates both in our personal lives and in the universe.
...both inside of you and, at the same time, apparently connected to everything you notice.

...a kind of emptiness, a potential, an invisible field like gravity or the wind. It is always there, pulling us, moving us, one way or another.

While the consensus reality and dreamland levels share the same locus of observation; the me or I as observer, the essence level does not. At consensus reality and dreamland levels, me (the seer), sees something (the seen): the locus of observation is me. But psychological freedom at the essence level requires a transcendence of the identity of being the seer, thus freeing the phenomena around me from the identity of being seen; such that we are unified in the act of seeing, both liberated from identity. In my childhood dream, essence level psychological freedom is represented by the ethereal self-image that joins with Jesus, a symbol of spirituality.

For when there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should One know That owing to which all this is known—through what, my dear, should one know the Knower?

(Upanishads, pg. 93)

It was only when I stopped thinking about my thesis as a construction of two parts – a question and an answer, an asker and an answerer – that anything like clarity about the topic emerged.

A state of no-identity could be considered either a channel-less experience or a state experienced across all channels simultaneously. It is variously described as both a nothingness-that-is-something and an all-senses-perceiving-reality-as-it-is-all-at-
once-but-without-being-overwhelmed experience. Exploring or debating this is beyond the scope of this thesis except to note that no-identity awareness does not rely on or require the use of sensory perception as we experience it in our everyday lives, but can be accessed through the sensory channels as described by many of the training exercises in Processmind (Mindell 2010).

This characteristic of psychological freedom assumes that consciousness is not located in the individual, but is in fact non-local in nature.

The Processmind reconnects us to where we came from before birth.

The edge described in the dreamland level is not only an edge to different parts of our selves, but to the whole unitive field in which we both exist and don’t exist; both Wilber (2001) and Mindell (2000) discuss this. Mindell describes four levels of edges: the edge to decide to notice what is happening; the edge to thinking what you notice is significant; the edge to letting this new awareness manifest in our lives; and the edge to the Processmind, to experience ourselves as the universe, rather than an observer of the universe. Wilber also describes four levels of edges: the edge to ones shadow selves (where our ego is split into persona and shadow. In Processwork it roughly translates to primary and secondary identities/processes); the edge to one’s body (whereby we have a body instead of we are a body); the edge to the external environment (the skin-boundary where everything within my skin is me and the things outside my skin can be mine or not-mine, but they cannot be me); and the edge to what he calls the unitive consciousness (similar to the Processmind).

To grow psychological freedom using Wilber’s and Mindell’s models, we not only need experiences of growing our sense of self by integrating our marginalised shadow traits, our secondary processes, into our identity, but radical shifts in our conceptualisation and experience of our physical bodies relative to our consciousness and the external environment.
Corporeal life is indeed difficult. To identify with the sheer physicality of one’s flesh may well seem lunatic. The body is an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults – to scars and the scorn of others, to disease, decay and death.

(Abram 2011, pg. 6)

Even further, we need to collapse the false dichotomy of the seer and the seen as being separate entities and understand that there is only the act of seeing.

In my childhood dream, the essence level experience is visually symbolised by the image of Jesus, a central image of spirituality in my culture. For me, the symbol of Jesus is not about supernatural miracles or religious dogmas but about a humanity so deeply felt and lived, one comes to know oneself as God, not separate from God.

The nature and role of boundaries at the essence level

The profoundly ‘atomic’ character of the universe is visible in everyday experience, in raindrops and grains of sand, in the hosts of the living, and the multitude of stars; even in the ashes of the dead. When we probe beyond a certain degree of depth and dilution the familiar properties of our bodies – light, colour, warmth, impenetrability, etc. – lose their meaning. Indeed our sensory experience turns out to be a floating condensation on a swarm of the undefinable.

(Teilhard de Chardin 1961, pg. 41)

Once upon a time, physicists used to believe that the atom was structured like a mini solar system, with a nucleus in the middle (like the sun) orbited by electrons (like the planets). It was a theory based on the reasonable assumption that discrete, separate things exist. But then, as summarised by Wilber (2001, pg. 34), in the space of one generation, 1905-1925, from Einstein’s relativity theory to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, classical physics was completely undermined, as Capra (2010, pg. 68) articulates:
At the subatomic level, matter does not exist with certainty at definite places, but rather shows ‘tendencies to exist’, and atomic events do not occur with certainty at definite times and in definite ways, but rather show ‘tendencies to occur’.

Quantum physics discovered that there are actually no finite, measurable elementary particles; no central sun, no orbiting planets, only relationships within a whole:

A careful analysis of the process of observation in atomic physics has shown that the subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities, but can only be understood as interconnections between the preparation of an experiment and the subsequent measurement. Quantum theory thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated ‘basic building blocks’, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole.

(Capra 2010, pg. 68)

Essentially, at the sub-atomic level, there are no boundaries and therefore no things. There are tendencies, reachings and potentials, but no actual things.

It is often stated that of all the theories proposed in this century, the silliest is quantum theory. Some say that the only thing that quantum theory has going for it, in fact, is that it is unquestionably correct.

(Kaku 1994, pg. 262)

This is a dramatic and noteworthy convergence with the esoteric teachings of the major world religions. While deviating in many of their exoteric forms, all share a central gnosis (that quantum physics also shares) that boundaries, things and separateness are only real at certain levels of reality and that underpinning them is a boundary-less reality.

The universe of duality which is cognized is mere illusion (maya); Non—duality alone is the Supreme Reality.

(Upanishads 1949, pg. 70)
All nature, all formations, all creatures exist in and with one another, and they will be resolved again into their own roots. For the nature of matter is resolved into the elements of its particular nature.

*Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (Gnostic Society 2015, chp. 4)

So the nature of boundaries at the essence level is that they simply don’t exist; nothing *exists*. When one can access perception at this level, (generally only possible for short periods of time), unique wisdom is accessed, often very different to that gained at either the consensus reality level or the dreamland level. As nonsensical as it is to consider the notion of an *ultimate* psychological freedom, for me it is psychological freedom at the essence level; where perception is free from having a *psychology* in the first place.
PART III: UNDERPININGS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FREEDOM

It is like cleaning a room and keeping it in order. Keeping the room in order is important in one sense but totally unimportant in another. There must be order in the room but order will not open the door or the window. What will open the door is not your volition or desire. All that you can do is to keep the room in order, which is to be virtuous for itself, not for what it will bring. Then perhaps, if you are lucky, the window will open and the breeze will come in, or it may not.

(Krishnamurti 2010, pg. 29)

In this section I describe some of the psychological skills required for psychological freedom and how to develop them, as indicated by the data.

In Chapter Seven: Foundations of psychological freedom I explore three key psychological capacities necessary for psychological freedom. These come from the interview data although it was not a direct interview question, because many interviewees tended to define psychological freedom through the language of the skills needed to have it, rather than what it actually was.

In Chapter Eight: Development paths I explore the themes that emerged from the question about how the interviewees thought they had developed psychological freedom. While everyone had comments about this development path, many also stated that the development of psychological freedom was just part of their nature, their destiny if you like.

I’ve always been someone who thinks about thinking.

...there is a sense of a calling, a mythical nature, to seek the meaning of life, to learn about yourself and the world, to ask questions that matter.

In Chapter Nine: Freedom in action, I make a case for psychological freedom to be viewed as an inherently active principle.
Psychological freedom is detachment from a causal chain: it is the space between a stimulus and response, in which you make choices about how to respond. How free you are depends on how many options you perceive.

In this chapter I will present three key requirements for the conditions of psychological freedom as suggested by the research. Undoubtedly there are more and for each individual they may differ, but it is not too presumptuous to suggest that psychological freedom is at least predicated on the capacities of empty-mindedness, detachment and curiosity.

Knowing nothing

We close the door to perception if we come to it with an opinion, with some conclusion, with our own personal little experience. We have closed the door... you can't investigate, but if you come to it openly, freely, eagerly to find out then the door opens, you can look through

(Krishnamurti 1978, online)

For the conditions of any kind of psychological freedom to be met, there must be a pause in reflexive predicting of the future. If our perceptual field is full of assumptions and expectations about what we will see, that’s all we will see.

The highly influential anonymous contemplative Christian text from the fourteenth century, The Cloud of Unknowing (Underhill 1922) is centred on the idea that between oneself and knowing God is a Cloud of Unknowing, “a lacking of knowing” (pg. 8). It is in one’s capacity to let go of knowledge about God and sit with the unknown that is one’s only hope of glimpsing God (through right-brain attention perhaps). To translate this into Processwork terms, we might say that the way to access or know the Processmind, is through an empty mind state-of-being. At all
levels of reality and in all contexts, Processwork identifies empty-mindedness as a key requirement for being able to notice unexpected, non-congruent signals. It is a foundational capacity for Processworkers.

Wilfred Bion (1967 online) was also a particularly strong advocate for empty-mindedness in therapy and the wisdom in the unknown:

*The psychoanalyst should aim at achieving a state of mind so that at every session he feels he has not seen the patient before.*

*What is ‘known’ about the patient is of no further consequence: it is either false or irrelevant. If it is ‘known’ by patient and analyst, it is obsolete. The only point of importance in any session is the unknown. Nothing must be allowed to distract from intuiting that.*

In the Zen Buddhist tradition, this empty-mindedness is called beginners mind, and is the practice of Zen mind:

*In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.*

(Suzuki 1970, pg. 21)

Rigid attachments to a narrowly defined identity populate our perceptual field with only that which will not challenge the identity. As explored in Chapter Five, the edge of our identity is one of the limits to our psychological freedom due to its influence on our perceptual capacities.

*...not knowing is an agent of ‘knowingness’: unrestricted, unfounded, the self-founding ‘zero-point’ that can transform each barrier into a gateway.*

(Tarthang Tulku 1990, pg. 276)

There is, it seems to us, 
At best, only a limited value 
In the knowledge derived from experience. 
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies, 
For the pattern is new in every moment 
And every moment is a new and shocking 
Valuation of all we have been. 

*Ash Wednesday (Eliot 1972, pg. 93)*
Empty-mindedness, or a capacity to sit with the unknown, is supported by a kind of faith in nature or the Tao. Even when in the moment we don’t know what is happening or why, if we trust nature, we will not be overwhelmed and can therefore hold a space of unknowing, such that we might perceive the field more widely and deeply.

\[\text{Remembering that 'something is happening', that the Tao is in the background of all situations, all experiences, all disturbances, helps you be freer.}\]

**Leaning out**

Detachment from one’s identity is inherent in the transcendent experience of psychological freedom.

\[\text{Psychological freedom includes a kind of detachment from one's everyday identity and personal history. To be able to move beyond the issues you inherited from your family and the situation you were born into.}\]

Almost all of the Processwork interviewees partially defined psychological freedom as the capacity for fluidity; the ability to defy or move out of one’s regular identity and inhabit positions or roles that we tend to think are not us. Inherent in this capacity is the notion of detachment.

In Processwork, detachment is seen as a key facilitation capacity, as evidenced in its inclusion in Amy Mindell’s *Metaskills* (2003, pg. 98-99):

\[\text{Detachment is a particular feeling in which we are released from the apparent situation, when we step back and discover a “meta”- or outside - point of view. Following this sense of detachment provides a perspective not wholly immersed in the ongoing drama of life.}\]
Being detached is not about not caring, but about the stability of your identity not being heavily reliant on the external environment, such that you are free to notice and relate with a diverse range of phenomena.

Mindell (1992) aligns detachment with being able to consciously become neutral and to “maintain awareness in the midst of group chaos and confusion” (pg. 64). When you are detached, the issues are still important but don’t trigger personal complexes, thereby allowing you to facilitate and be curious and aware.

**Leaning in**

During the research interviews I was sometimes overcome by such profound experiences of curiosity that for a short while I changed the topic of my research to focus only on curiosity; its usefulness (and contraindications) in therapy and conflict resolution and its spiritual depths. I wanted to know why, “why”? What is curiosity and why are we so curious?

Neuro-biological sciences offer several ideas to explain curiosity. One theory is that curiosity drives us to make the unknown known because we are uncomfortable with the unknown as it is less safe. Curiosity also enables us to gather data that may be useful in the future if not in the present. Basically it gives us more options, which help us feel more powerful or in control of our lives, and therefore safer. However, neither of these account for the fact that we get curious about trivial and inane things that are not directly relevant to our lives, nor present a threat to our safety.

Another theory suggests neurological reward-pathways whereby curiosity leads us to solve questions which in turn makes us feel good, but ultimately, the mechanisms by
which curiosity emerges and the reasons why are not clearly understood by neuro-biological sciences. Perhaps the brain is not the seat of curiosity?

The weak anthropic principle in physics perhaps suggests something similar:

...the world is the way it is, at least in part, because otherwise there would be no one to ask why it is the way it is.

(Weinberg 1989, pg. 6, cited in Kaku 1994, pg. 258)

I conceive of curiosity as a multi-channelled experience. It is lived in both the world and relationship channels through its ability to connect us with others and the world, but it is also a proprioceptive, movement, visual and auditory based experience. During the interview phase of this research I observed in myself noticeable proprioceptive and movement experiences when my sense of curiosity was most heightened. It creates a particular quality of focused attention, and when deeply engaged with the subject, a whole body experience.

However, at its deepest expression curiosity transcends channels to become a numinous experience, and might then be called wonderment. Abraham Heschel, Jewish theologian and philosopher, viewed wonder as central to a spiritual experience of life:

Wonder, or radical amazement, is a way of going beyond what is given in thing and thought, refusing to take anything for granted, to regard anything as final. It is our honest response to the grandeur and mystery of reality, our confrontation with that which transcends the given.

(Heschel 1965, pg. 78)
I think of wonderment as curiosity and agape; a desire to know coupled with divine love. This is what Krishnamurti (2010, pg. 27) refers to when he ties together understanding, awareness, attention and love:

*If you want to understand the beauty of a bird, a fly, or a leaf, or a person with all his complexities, you have to give your whole attention which is awareness. And you can give your whole attention only when you care, which means that you really love to understand – then you give your whole heart and mind to find out.*

Curiosity helps us build our capacity for psychological freedom as well as being an inherent characteristic of it. For when curiosity is greater than fear of the unknown, we can then redraw and transcend the boundaries of our identity.

Processwork goes beyond the idea that curiosity is a one way process directed by a curious observer toward an object of interest. It suggests that curiosity is a two way process (at least) where our attention is also drawn by the objects we get curious about; they *flirt* with us (Mindell 2013). It is the universe’s way of directing our attention to phenomena that need to be known. If the universe is indeed self-reflecting, curiosity may be ultimate force behind this self-reflection. Perhaps the universe is essentially curious.

*What if thought is not born within the human skull, but is a creativity proper to the body as a whole, arising spontaneously from the slippage between an organism and the folding terrain that it wanders? What if the curious curve of thought is engendered by the difficult eros and tension between our flesh and the flesh of the earth?*

(Abram 2011, pg. 4)

In Processwork, curiosity is a key metaskill for noticing and unfolding secondary processes. When aspects of the field are shunned and no interest is shown in them, they disappear from our awareness but not from the field, and they still exert a pressure to be noticed. Showing curiosity in these disavowed parts is a welcoming intervention to bring them back into awareness and is an important atmosphere for working at the edges of awareness.
It should be noted however, that curiosity is an overarching term that does not always clarify the tone of the experience. Depending on how we are curious might determine the subjective experience, ranging from a simple working out something to full wonderment. Perhaps the left brain does curiosity underpinned by a practical goal and the right brain facilitates wonderment underpinned by a transcendent goal.
Chapter Eight: Developing psychological freedom

One of the most interesting questions to me in this research was exploring how people thought they had developed psychological freedom. In this chapter I highlight the key themes that emerged in answer to this question; suffering, personal growth, community and acts of grace. I have also added forgiveness to the list from my own experiences.

Suffering and stuckness

The effects of suffering may be morally and spiritually bad, neutral or good, according to the way in which the suffering is endured and reacted to...it may stimulate in the sufferer a conscious or unconscious craving for the intensification of his separateness; or it may leave the craving such as it was before the suffering; or, finally, it may mitigate it and so become a means for advance towards self-abandonment and the love and knowledge of God.

(Huxley 1947, pg. 263)

The only theme that appeared consistently in every research interview was the connection between suffering and psychological freedom. Or more accurately, what one does with suffering.

I had to seek the Physician because of the pain this world caused me.

I could not believe what happened when I got there - I found my Teacher.

Before I left, he said, "Up for a little homework, yet?"

"Okay," I replied.

"Well then, try thanking all the people who have caused you pain.

They helped you come to me."

Kabir in (Ladinsky 2002, pg. 229)
For many this was related as the provocation of childhood trauma to the development of heightened interpersonal awareness and/or a spiritual self-containment, as necessary for survival during the traumatic period.

**Being in dangerous situations as a child forces you to develop awareness as a defensive capacity. You pay close attention so you can work out what is going on around you, and how to minimise risk by understanding the system or culture you are in.**

**Being in a chaotic family growing up, I learnt to be still and safe in my own mind from a very early age.**

Marginalising suffering, in an attempt to be free of it, paradoxically makes us less free. Amma Syncletica, one of the Desert Mothers quoted in the third century contemplative Christian text *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, implies that suffering is implied in growth towards spirit:

*In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek (as it is said: "Our God is a consuming fire" [Heb. 12.24]): so we also must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.*

Desert Mother Amma Syncletica (Ward 1975, pg. 230-231)

When we can’t find meaning in our suffering, or worse still, when we have lost faith that there is meaning in our suffering, we are truly stuck. But even stuckness is meaningful and while we might preference fluidity and freedom over stuckness, we must be careful not to do it to the exclusion of stuckness, or ironically we are stuck chasing an illusory freedom.

*If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death.*

(Frankl 1984, pg. 88)
So while one aspect of psychological freedom is the cultivation of an interest or curiosity in our suffering, unaware suffering is also part of the diversity of meaningful, human experience.

*The more you suffer the deeper grows your character, and with the deepening of your character you read more penetratingly into the secrets of life. All great artists, all great religious leaders, and all great social reformers have come out of the intensest (sic) struggles which they fought bravely, quite frequently in tears and with bleeding hearts.*

(Suzuki 1961, pg. 16)

In the interviews, suffering was also referred to in the context of the costs of being on a *path of awareness*. Some reported that it was at times an overwhelming experience, burdened with high levels of responsibility. Or that having increased awareness made it difficult to connect with others, that genuine relationships were limited.

Jung also knew this;

...today as then [childhood] I am a solitary, because I know things and must hint at things which other people do not know, and usually do not even want to know.

Jung and Jaffe (1989 pg. 41-42)
Growing

‘Seeing.’ We might say that the whole of life lies in that verb – if not in the end, at least in essence...union can only increase through an increase in consciousness, that is to say in vision...the history of the living world can be summarised as the elaboration of every more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen.

(Teilhard de Chardin 1961, pg. 31)

It almost goes without saying that personal growth is needed for the development of psychological freedom.

Personal work and therapy for over 20 years certainly helped!

Personal growth means different things to different people but in this thesis I use it to mean a wilful development of awareness resulting in a deeper understanding of self and others and an increased flexibility of identity. Personal growth is essentially growing our identity by welcoming more of our diversity into awareness.

Man is not free to choose whether or not he wants to attain knowledge about himself. He necessarily and under all circumstances possesses a degree of such knowledge, preconceptions, and standards of self-interpretation.

(Heschel 1965, pg. 6)

There are an endless number of ways that one could attempt to achieve personal growth. Interviewees reported that the personal growth they believed contributed to their psychological freedom primarily came from therapy, study, innerwork, meditation, and learning to follow nature.

Ignorance is God’s prison.
Knowing is God’s palace.
We sleep in God’s unconsciousness.
We wake in God’s hand.

(Rūmī and Barks 2004, pg. 28)
Psychological freedom comes from an inner work discipline – a regular practice of contacting what is inside, and ‘working’ on oneself. It is paradox but the more disciplined you are, the more freedom you have.

Contemplative traditions also refer to the necessity of personal growth in developing one’s relationship with God (just as Processwork connects it to our relationship with the Processmind).

*The importance, the indispensable necessity, of self-knowledge has been stressed by the saints and doctors of every one of the great religious traditions.*

(Huxley 1947, pg. 185)

In the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the author expounds that to know God as he is (the Tao that cannot be named), not as he does (the 10,000 creatures that can be named), one must know ourselves as we are, not as what we do. We must have self-knowledge:

*True, the will alone, however ardent and industrious, cannot of itself set up communion with the supernal world: this is “the work of only God, specially wrought in what soul that Him liketh.” But man can and must do his part. First, there are the virtues to be acquired: those “ornaments of the Spiritual Marriage” with which no mystic can dispense. Since we can but behold that which we are, his character must be set in order, his mind and heart made beautiful and pure, before he can look on the triple star of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, which is God.*

(Underhill 1922, pg. 5)

Modern contemplatives like Thomas Merton also emphasises the necessity of self-discovery if we are to be free;

*...this freedom must consist first of all in the capacity to choose their own lives, to find themselves on the deepest possible level. A superficial freedom to wander aimlessly here and there, to taste this or that, to make a choice of distractions...is simply a sham. It claims to be a freedom of “choice” when it has evaded the basic task of discovering who it is that chooses. It is not free because it is unwilling to face the risk of self-discovery.*

(Merton, Stone and Hart 1979, pg. 3)
In Processwork personal growth is inherent in all training but most evident in the requirement for trainees to undergo extensive personal therapy.

Dying

...without self-knowledge, there can be no true humility, therefore no effective self-naughting, therefore no unitive knowledge of the divine Ground underlying the self...

(Huxley 1947, pg. 185)

Another kind of growing that seems essential to psychological freedom is dying. Death in the sense of an intended release from one’s identity – self-naughting – is considered essential by contemplatives trying to know the divine Spirit:

The last end of man, the ultimate reason for human existence, is unitive knowledge of the divine Ground—the knowledge that can come only to those who are prepared to ‘die to self’ and so make room, as it were, for God.

Mortification or deliberately dying to self is inculcated with an uncompromising firmness in the canonical writings of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and most of the other major religions of the world...

(Huxley 1947, pg. 29, 113)

To live in the realm of Buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment to moment.

(Suzuki 1970, pg. 31)

Wilber makes a similar point in his essay A Spirituality that Transforms, at one point referring to the self as ‘toast’:

Transformative spirituality, authentic spirituality, is revolutionary. It does not legitimate the world, it breaks the world; it does not console the world, it shatters it. And it does not render the self content, it renders it undone.

The self is not made content; the self is made toast.

(Wilber 2015, pg. 4, 6)
It is also a potent theme in Shamanic practices. To see and enter into the spirit worlds, the Shaman must shed the layers of identity gathered in the everyday world through death rituals:

...all the ecstatic experiences that determine the future shaman's vocation involve the traditional schema of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death, resurrection.

The presence of a helping spirit in animal form, dialogue with it in a secret language, or incarnation of such an animal spirit by the shaman (masks, actions, dances, etc.) is another way of showing that the shaman can forsake his human condition, is able, in a word, to "die."

(Eliade 1972, pg. 33, 98)

Mindell also refers to the need for death:

_Becoming aware of all of our parts, so we can die, so to speak, before we are killed, and protect ourselves from attack._

(Mindell 1992, pg. 65)

_Relationships and public work put you in the line of fire; these dojos are places of extreme tension, and death and rebirth as well. After you have been attacked and shot at enough, you seem to get a few holes in you. Then things go through you better, and your identity gets lighter._

(Mindell 1995, pg. 208)

Dying is the path to detachment and is achieved through the process of burning ones wood; to feed the fires of your own rage until they are done (Mindell, 1992, pg. 65, and 1995, pg. 208).

**Forgiveness and acceptance**

Forgiveness was not mentioned in any of the interviews but I propose it is an essential requirement for authentic personal growth and learning.
To develop our capacity to learn (and therefore to grow), we must find a way to embrace and hold ourselves in not knowing, in feeling stupid, lacking, or failing. Even more so, we eventually have to redefine concepts like failure. This in itself requires growing and dying, but also forgiveness.

Several years ago I experienced a numinous moment of what I later came to understand as self-forgiveness, in the middle of a Processwork group process. I had purposely stepped into a role that was well outside my everyday identity, a role that I judged to the point of despising, but knew that somehow it must also be me. It’s hard to say exactly what happened, but after fully representing this role, I experienced a brief moment, perhaps three minutes, of what might be called congruence, maybe wholeness. It wasn’t until much later, querying the deeper machinations of my psyche in that process that I realised I had experienced an act of self-forgiveness and absolute acceptance. This experience taught me that embracing inner (and outer) diversity isn’t just about knowing yourself or being accepting of different opinions, but a deep forgiveness of self and others for the ways in which we are less likeable to the everyday identity and the dominant culture.

Jung understood that to truly help someone as a therapist, you have to be able to accept all of who they are, and to do this you have to accept all of who you are:

*That I feed the beggar – that I forgive an insult – that I love my enemy in the name of Christ – all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least amongst them all – the poorest of all beggars – the most impudent of all offenders – yea the very fiend himself – that these are within me? And that I myself stand in need of the arms of my own kindness. That I myself am the enemy that must be loved. What then?*

(Jung cited in Watts 2015, online)
These acts of forgiveness and acceptance toward oneself support psychological freedom by enabling a friendly curiosity to phenomena that we would otherwise marginalise or turn against. They also give us a positive experience of growing our identity that hopefully encourages future growth.

**Community**

Developing psychological freedom is in part developing resilience to the normative pressures of mainstream cultures and becoming aware of how this pressure has been internalised. So while developing psychological freedom is foremost an internal process of liberation, it is made more difficult if you have no respite from an external culture of imposition and no external models of psychological freedom.

Don’t forget love; it will bring all the madness you need to unfurl yourself across the universe.

Mira in (Ladinsky 2002, pg. 251)

This theme emerged frequently in the interviews; the need for modelling by others, and for safe spaces to grow awareness. Of course if we cocoon ourselves in friendly environments we will stunt the development of psychological freedom through a decreased diversity and intensity of challenges to awareness, but psychological freedom does not diminish one’s humanity and sensitivity, both of which need care.
Acts of grace

"What is grace?" I asked God.
And he said, "All that happens."
Then He added, when I looked perplexed,
"Could not lovers say that every moment in their Beloved’s arms was grace?
Existence is my arms, though I well understand how one can turn away from me
until the heart has wisdom."

St. John of the Cross in (Ladinsky 2002, pg. 321)

While there are many things we can do to develop aspects of psychological freedom,
I believe the full extent to which we might experience it is not in our control.

It is a question of how do we learn anything? We think learning is something we
do, but really we only ever learn through grace. It is not about the teacher or the
student, but about the moment. The locus of personal development is not within
personal initiative, but within the Tao, the stars, the dreaming, however you like to
call it. We are not beings in which to build capacities, we are receivers of grace.

Most people who have had transcendent experiences where they are free from the
concept of identity, (that were not drug induced) will tell you that they didn’t know
they were coming, how or why they happened when they did, or how to make them
happen again. We can call it one’s Tao to have such experiences, or we can call them
acts of grace. Either way, psychological freedom is not completely subject to our will
or diligence.
Developing psychological freedom is an evolutionary process. In the first few months of life we are still connected to the source of life, but necessarily lose this over time as we build a Self. Departing from this source and questing to return to it is the journey of the mystical traditions. Building psychological freedom is expanding our sense of self and moving beyond our everyday identity, not just to grow our identity, but to deepen it and loosen it, until we rediscover the source of life again.

Once upon a time there was an old frog who had lived all his life in a dank well. One day a frog from the sea paid him a visit.

“Where do you come from?” asked the frog in the well.

“From the great ocean,” he replied.

“How big is your ocean?”

“It’s gigantic.”

“You mean about a quarter of the size of my well here?”

“Bigger.”

“Bigger? You mean half as big?”

“No, even bigger.”

“Is it…as big as this well?”

“There’s no comparison.”

“That’s impossible! I’ve got to see this for myself.”

They set off together. When the frog from the well saw the ocean, it was such a shock that his head just exploded into pieces.

(Sogyal, Gaffney and Harvey 1992, pg. 41)
Chapter Nine: Freedom as action

The view of psychological freedom and action as an amalgam emerged in both groups of interviewees, thus I add additional criteria to the definitions of psychological freedom explored in Part II - psychological freedom is an internal experience as perceived by the individual that finds external expression in the world.

It’s the freedom to ‘show’ different parts of myself, not just ‘know’ them.

In Between Past and Future, political theorist Hannah Arendt (2006, pg. 150-151) makes the case at length that freedom only appears through the performing act (as part of making her case that the concept of freedom is political, not philosophical):

Action insofar as it is free is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will – although it needs both for the execution of any particular goal – but springs from something altogether different…a principle. Principles do not operate from within the self as motives do…but inspire, as it were, from without.

Such principles are honor or glory, love of equality,…excellence, but also fear or distrust or hatred.

...[U]nlike the judgement of the intellect which precedes action, and unlike the command of the will which initiates it, the inspiring principle becomes fully manifest only in the performing act itself.

Freedom or its opposite appears in the world whenever such principles are actualized; the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act.

I employ her assertion to this exploration of psychological freedom - there is no psychological freedom unless the inner experience informs an outer (and therefore political) expression.

Men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same.

(Arendt 2006, pg. 150-151)
The psychological freedom developed at the consensus reality level, an awareness of how our identity has been shaped by the culture must be followed by actions that bring to life those parts of us that do not align to the culture, giving them space to be witnessed in the world.

Similarly, as discussed in Chapter Three, the critical consciousness that we develop by becoming aware of the oppressive dynamics in society must also lead to action lest we become cynical. Just being aware of how you are oppressed does nothing in and of itself to progress liberation.

*What I want to achieve – what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years – is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha (Liberation). I live and move and have my being in pursuit of that goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.*

(Gandhi, cited by Naess in Seed 1988, pg. 24)

At the dreamland level it would be an illusion to think that one could be open to inner diversity without also seeing the evidence of openness to outer diversity. Psychological freedom at the dreamland level also finds significant expression in our relationships, whereby we have a deeper understanding of the spirit in the background of conflict and misunderstandings, and increased skills to explore and facilitate these. Additionally, as we expand our identity and reclaim our more marginalised aspects, we get closer to living a life that follows our deepest dreaming on every level.

*Psychological freedom is not about freedom of choice, but about being able to divine your path of heart in the world and live it.*

To act from the psychological freedom of the essence level is somewhat paradoxical. Access to an unbound identity state can only be experienced from within each individual even though it is an experience of transcending being an individual. It must then go on to be expressed in the world by the individual in a dualistic construct, even though it is an experience of the world and the individual being one.
Often the wisdom that comes from working at the essence level is that of non-doing, or trusting in the flow of nature such that the everyday self need not respond so actively. When we connect directly to the wisdom of the essence level we intercept its path to becoming unconsciously manifest and must therefore make it consciously manifest.

It can’t stay in your head, because there is no such place as in your head, and the transcendent experience is, by definition, not in your head. It is experienced and communicated by way of your head, but it occurs in and of the world and must therefore live in and of the world.

Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor and originator of Logotherapy, proposes that self-actualisation (which might serve as a synonym for psychological freedom) comes not through development within one’s psyche but through action, in and for, the world:

By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. I have termed this constitutive characteristic “the self-transcendence of human existence.” It denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself--be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself--by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love--the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

(Frankl 1984, pg. 133)

In his essay A Spirituality that Transforms, Wilber (2015, pg. 13) is insistent that transcendent insights must be acted upon, but from a sense of responsibility and morality:
Those for whom authentic transformation has deeply unseated their souls must, I believe, wrestle with the profound moral obligation to shout from the heart...authenticity always and absolutely carries a demand and duty; you must speak out, to the best of your ability, and shake the spiritual tree, and shine your headlights into the eyes of the complacent. You must let that radical realisation rumble through your veins and rattle those around you.

Any realisation of depth carries a terrible burden: Those who are allowed to see are simultaneously saddled with the obligation to communicate that vision in no uncertain terms: that is the bargain. If you have seen you must speak out. Speak out with compassion, or speak out with angry wisdom, or speak out with skilful means, but you must speak out.

I would argue that the connection between freedom and action goes beyond any sense of morality. However, morality, in terms of using the rank of psychological freedom, is important (and discussed in Chapter Ten). I propose that awareness is the initiator of action. Unlike Wilber, I don’t think that it is necessarily about “rattling those around you”, but that the insight of psychological freedom and transcendent experiences must find a grounding, big or small, public or intimate, in the manifest world, because that is the flow of emergence.

To embody the transcendent is why we are here.

(Sogyal, Gaffney and Harvey 1992, pg. 81)
PART IV:
DRAWING DOWN THE MOON

Liberation is not something that is in the gift of one professional group or another, or something to be defined by one professional discourse or another.

(Cohen and Timimi 2008, pg. 4)

In this section I attempt to explore some of the practical issues and implications of psychological freedom as identified in the research, plus how Processwork therapy and group facilitation practices might be viewed through the lens of psychological freedom.

In Chapter Ten: A cautionary tale I discuss the idea that developing psychological freedom is not for everyone and drawing on the work of Erich Fromm and Søren Kierkegaard, make some precautionary comments. In addition, the issue of spiritual arrogance emerged repeatedly in the research interviews so I will also briefly comment on the potential relationship issues encountered by developing psychological freedom and what the capacity for psychological freedom might imply morally.

In Chapter Eleven: Psychological freedom and clients I propose that every therapy client and every group in conflict is in need of more psychological freedom at one level or another.

Finally, in Chapter Twelve: Freedom in Processwork, I explore how in trying to learn to follow nature we inadvertently grow our psychological freedom. I also attempt to demonstrate how Processwork is a liberation psychology.
Chapter Ten: A cautionary tale

The development of psychological freedom is apparently not without cost. In this chapter I briefly cover some of the main issues with psychological freedom that emerged in the interviews. While all interviewees reported that a path of developing psychological freedom, despite the benefits, was in no way an easy path, it wasn’t an optional path either. In fact several reported that their only other option had been a literal death.

Psychological freedom and choice

To the extent that psychological freedom creates increased choice (this may or may not be the case), it seems a cursed gift. Several non-Processwork interviewees perceived psychological freedom as creating more choices in life, and that this was at times overwhelming and time consuming for decision-making.

There can be too much choice and this can be overwhelming when you are used to just doing what you “should” do.

In wealthy Western cultures many people suffer from analysis paralysis, whereby too much choice leads to an inability to make a choice, or at least spending an inordinate amount of time analysing the options. On more than one occasion I have gone to the supermarket to buy a new toothbrush and walked away with nothing, not because they were out of stock, but because there were over 20 brushes to choose from!

A perhaps more meaningful modern context is career choice; whereby the world presents us with many options and we think that having some degree of psychological freedom means we are free to choose any of them. I would suggest that being overwhelmed in the face of choice is not a side effect of psychological
freedom as described in this thesis, but a lack of the connection to one’s deeper nature that psychological freedom, when accessed across all levels, gives us. In this way, psychological freedom reduces choice as the Tao, one’s path of heart, is actually very rigid.

Insofar that freedom is equated with spontaneity (unpredictable choices), it might well be argued that if everyone is too psychologically free, we might never get anything done. The saying trying to herd cats comes to mind when considering the challenges in organising groups of people with high levels of psychological freedom.

But hopefully this thesis has shown that psychological freedom is more than just spontaneity, so I think it too glib to make such statements. If psychological freedom is more or less the capacity to discern and follow one’s own deepest nature, and if more people were more psychologically free, social structures may indeed change, but I find it hard to conceive that this would result in ongoing chaos.

On an individual level however, someone with high levels of psychological freedom may appear less reliable to others simply because they are able to change their minds relative to commitments they have made to others, rather than meeting those commitments through guilt or a notion of loyalty.

It is interesting to note that this was one area that Processworker and non-Processworker interviewees repeatedly conflicted in opinion; the former viewing psychological freedom as ultimately leading to less decision making, the latter to more.
Psychological freedom and anxiety

*I know what you’re thinking, ’cause right now I’m thinking the same thing. Actually, I’ve been thinking it ever since I got here: Why oh why didn’t I take the blue pill?*

(The Matrix 1999, film)

In his book *The Fear of Freedom*, Erich Fromm argues that, while man has obtained many biological and political freedoms, this does not equate to the realisation of positive freedoms, which are in fact a terrifying prospect for humans:

> Freedom, though it has brought him independence and rationality, has made him isolated and, thereby, anxious and powerless. This isolation is unbearable and the alternatives he is confronted with are either to escape from the burden of this freedom into new dependencies and submission, or to advance to the full realization of positive freedom which is based upon the uniqueness and individuality of man.

(Fromm 1942, pg. 4)

It is not only the condition of isolation that he contends is problematic (and inevitable) it is the capacity of thought and therefore choice, removing one from causal chains and thereby transcending nature:

> It dawns upon him that his is a tragic fate: to be part of nature, and yet to transcend it.

(Fromm 1942, pg. 30)

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard also viewed human freedom as inevitably anxiety-inducing:

> ...anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which occurs because...freedom...stares down into its own possibility and then grips finitude to hold onto. In this dizziness freedom faints.

(Kierkegaard 1957, pg. 55)

Neither in the interviews nor subsequent readings did I come across a suggestion that psychological freedom itself was dizzying or anxiety inducing (except relative to choice as mentioned previously), but the same could not be said for the idea of freedom, or the journey to develop it.
In his later works, psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion made significant contributions to psychoanalytic theory regarding the role of meta-physical states of unity, akin to Huxley’s Divine Ground of Being (1947) and Mindell’s Processmind (2010). Bion termed this experience O, and as with those before him, knew it was impossible to describe in words:

\[O\] stands for the absolute truth in and of any object; it is assumed that this cannot be known by any human being; it can be known about, its presence can be recognised and felt, but it cannot be known. It is possible to be at one with it. That it exists is an essential postulate of science but it cannot be scientifically discovered.

(Bion 1970, pg. 30)

Bion also emphasised the threatening nature of this state, that access to it involved what he called a catastrophic change, whereby “any new thought is felt by the psyche as potentially disruptive and shattering. The ability to tolerate this upheaval will result in growth, but it is a painful process that is dependent on the individual's capacity to withstand fragmentation, anxiety and doubt…” (Glover 2015, sec. 2).

He described a process of disintegration where previous ideas about the self and world were dismantled such that a new construct could be built, but that the intervening space could be extremely anxiety inducing for many people:

The temporary suspension of the senses as one connects with a dream-like metaphysical state in waking life can give rise to terrifying feelings of loss of control, since our senses help ground us in the familiar identities of our physical lives.

(Reiner 2012, pg. 3)

In Processwork terms, we might say that from the perspective of the primary process, the everyday self, psychological freedom (at any of the levels) can look terrifying. The everyday identity imagines all kinds of disastrous scenarios befalling us in an attempt to stop us heading in that direction, but not because it knows something about freedom. The everyday self knows little about that which it is not, but it instinctively tries to maintain a sense of identity stability, which is threatened by anything unknown.
Like Kierkegaard’s abyss, when we stand on the edge and look into it, it looks terrifying from the perspective of one standing on solid ground; but not because we know anything about the experience of being in the abyss.

That is not to say that everyone can or should jump over the edge as it were. As Wilber (2015, pg. 4) warns, without sufficient psychological structures in place, transformative spiritual experiences can result in “severe neurosis of even psychosis: the world ceases to make sense – the boundaries between the self and the world are not transcended but instead begin to crumble. This is not breakthrough but breakdown; not transcendence but disaster.”

Bion also reinforced the need for extensive training to be able to confront the reality of O. What for some might merely be anxiety inducing, may be psychologically destructive for others, depending on the strength of their identity structures and connection to consensus reality. Again, ironically, freedom is best facilitated by boundaries.

Psychological freedom as a rank issue

Psychological freedom is not a measurable thing or fixed state you can get and keep. It is experienced on a continuum where we have more or less access to it over the course of our lives, dependent on innumerable factors.

For some people, the development of psychological freedom is not central to their life journey, nor even peripheral and they will develop little of it over their lifetime. For others it drives their every choice and they suffer greatly when refusing its’ will.

In Wilber’s essay A Spirituality that Transforms (2015) the author estimates the numbers of people through the ages that have “engaged in authentic transformative
Psychological freedom can make you develop an arrogant superiority – you feel like you are better than other people who don’t seem so free, who are conforming.

An appreciation of this diversity can really only be obtained by those with highly developed psychological freedom when they acknowledge, celebrate and use the personal power they get from this freedom.

In reference to Mindell’s work on power and rank (see Mindell 1992, 1995) psychological freedom is variously a structural, psychological and spiritual rank. Like any rank, when those with high levels of access to psychological freedom do not fully acknowledge and appreciate the privileges that come with it (either through being unaware of it, or siding only with the ways in which it is challenging), they risk misusing this rank relative to others and/or judging the psychological development and choices of others. This immediately reduces psychological freedom, so I would suggest that unlike many other ranks, awareness of the rank of psychological freedom is inherent in accessing and using it beyond its most basic measure.

This judgement of others comes not from having too much psychological freedom, but not enough. When we find ourselves feeling superior to others by way of our self-perceived psychological freedom we need to not only develop greater awareness and gratitude for the privileges it brings us, but we also need to expand
our identity even further and befriend the parts in ourselves that are inclined to judge and compare; that suffer from being on a path of awareness; our exhausted bones that just want life to feel easy sometimes; and befriend the universe that insists on wild diversity and conflict to achieve its goal of becoming aware.

Some of the privileges of psychological freedom identified in the interviews were a deep sense of wellness; a confidence in one’s ability to handle most things in life; perceiving the world as a friendly place full of opportunity and adventure; feeling like life is meaningful; ease with communication and relationships; and, making one kinder and more open to others.

\[\text{If you’re free, you can lift others up.}\]

We also see in Mindell’s work (and in Wilber (2015), as cited in Chapter Nine) the suggestion of a natural tendency (or a moral imperative in Wilber’s case) to “share or use your privileges to make others proud of theirs” (Mindell 1995, pg. 73) when one fully acknowledges and celebrates them. In the interviews some reported that their own ability to access high levels of psychological freedom meant that they were more effective in their work supporting others; that because of the permeating wellness psychological freedom gave them, others felt more well around them; and that some aspects of psychological freedom gave them Shamanic capacities that enabled them to process and contribute to healing issues in their broader communities and indeed the world.

It is also necessary to comment on the privileges that often enable psychological freedom. While it is true that suffering can be a great teacher, there are also just a lot of people suffering in the world, in situations of extreme poverty and oppression, with little opportunity to transform this suffering into growth.

\[\text{I’m upper middle class, raised with social, financial and familial comforts. My positionality affords me the liberty of having psychological freedom. Being hungry, afraid or poor makes it hard to access psychological freedom.}\]
There is no there

Can you become conscious of freedom? If you say ‘I am free’, then you are not free. It is like a man saying ‘I am happy’. The moment he says ‘I am happy’ he is living in a memory of something that has gone. Freedom can only come about naturally, not through wishing, wanting, longing. Nor will you find it by creating an image of what you think it is.

(Krishnamurti 2010, pg. 71)

Another brief cautionary comment is to contextualise all this talk of psychological freedom in the understanding that you probably can’t ever actually get it, or get there. There is no point at which your awareness of the culture will be absolute; your inner diversity probably doesn’t have a maximum capacity, fluidity certainly doesn’t; and, access to essence level experiences is mostly fleeting and often difficult to achieve. As soon as we think we know something about psychological freedom we have lost our beginners mind and therefore lost our freedom.

Thinking you’ve got it is one of the barriers to having it.
Chapter Eleven: Psychological freedom and clients

In this chapter I look at a small selection of process-oriented therapy and facilitation practices that enhance psychological freedom across the three levels of awareness. As I come to the end of this project I can’t help thinking that every client who comes to therapy essentially just needs more psychological freedom and that every group in conflict or underperforming team just needs more psychological freedom.

Psychological freedom and the individual client

Every client is unique in the what, why and how of the issues they bring to therapy, so the following is not meant to be instructional, merely reflective. While I continue to use the levels of awareness as the discussion framework, the best therapy often traverses all levels.

The goal of process-oriented psychotherapy can paradoxically never be to gain more psychological freedom; it happens as a beneficial (mostly) side-effect. In its most basic modelling, psychological freedom is achieved through the dissolution of oppressive boundaries that keep clients stuck in a limited and frustrated identity, and/or the building of boundaries or structures that enable the growth of identity in the direction of the client’s deeper dreaming processes.

One way in which process-oriented therapists support the development of psychological freedom in clients at the consensus reality level is through educational processes that elucidate the social dynamics of oppression at work in the client’s life. Supporting clients who are members of marginalised social groups to become aware of the external social dynamics of oppression through education builds their critical consciousness. They can then begin to shift their view of their own symptoms from
being personal pathologies and failings, to representing a normal response to homogenising and oppressive cultural processes.

...human emancipation entails not only overcoming the constraints of nature such as scarcity and disease, but also recognising those unconscious processes that contribute to ideological distortions and social repression.

(Cohen 2008, pg. 10)

For people with long careers as mainstream mental health service consumers, concepts like Processwork’s city shadows offer new perspectives through which to view their symptoms that can serve to partially de-institutionalise their self-image.

Even healthy, tall, white men from loving families of origin – perhaps the epitome of privilege in Western cultures – will suffer from the normative pressures in society even though they hold the most privileged position in it. Education about interpersonal and social power dynamics helps everyone.

Additionally, the psychological edges we see at the dreamland level can manifest in the consensus reality level as real life obstacles; things like time, money, carer responsibilities etc. “If this is the case, clients needs help to make changes. They need information, education, steps, or concrete support.” (Diamond and Jones 2004, pg. 140).

Supporting the development of psychological freedom at the dreamland level results from supporting the growth of a larger identity, which is an inherent aspect of process-oriented therapy:

Process Work’s underlying philosophy assumes that there is an implicit drive in nature towards wholeness: unintentional or secondary material wants to be noticed and lived.

(Camastral 1995, pg. 32)

This is not say that therapy work at this level is inherently about getting people over their edge. Often this is the case, but sometimes the work is just to explore the edge, or even to congruently refuse to grow or change – all of which expand identity. This
work also serves to develop a more skilled metacommunicator, which is the seat of fluidity at the dreamland level.

Psychological freedom is developed at the essence level in therapy when a client’s signals lead them to transcending the notion of having an identity separate from the world. Facilitating this in the therapeutic space involves not just unfolding the client’s signals but also helping the client use the transcended state to help solve the issues they brought to therapy.

Although not distinctly in any one of the levels of awareness, process-oriented therapy supports people to find meaning in their experiences and divine the larger background pattern that gives purpose to their existence. A connection to this pattern and meaning was included in the definition of psychological freedom by many Processwork interviewees and several non-Processwork interviewees and is also elucidated in Logotherapy:

*What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.*

(Frankl 1984, pg. 127)

Interestingly, another central tenet of Logotherapy is that people have one essential freedom at all times, rooted in their spiritual self, and that is to choose their attitude or response to the situations they find themselves in:

*This freedom derives from the spiritual dimension of the person, which is understood as the essentially human realm, over and above the dimensions of body and of psyche. As spiritual persons, humans are not just reacting organisms but autonomous beings capable of actively shaping their lives.*

(Batthyany 2015, online)

As clients develop more psychological freedom in therapy, it would be remiss of the therapist to not also support the development of rank awareness relative to this
psychological freedom – partly because they are interwoven and partly from the ethic of *do no harm*. We can be at risk of arming clients with new skills but no insight into how these may be received by others in their lives.

The therapist’s psychological freedom

The degree to which clients can develop psychological freedom can sometimes be limited by the psychological freedom of the therapist, as there is no question that the therapist’s values inform the way they respond to the issues and emerging identities of clients. The diversity that the therapist cannot welcome in themselves, they will struggle to welcome in their clients. Examples include clients in polyamorous relationships being told the reason for their relationship issues is that they are not monogamous; or the belief that gender dysphoria is inherent in being transgender, rather than perhaps a normal response to being incredibly *unwelcome* in the world.

That doesn’t mean that a therapist must have worked on every possible aspect of social diversity within themselves but a therapist with significant psychological freedom will often be able to notice when their own edges are reached in therapy work and be able to use them in service of the client’s process. Even the most experienced therapists will have edges to diversity, blind spots and mythic life-edges. Sometimes experienced therapists can be most vulnerable to these issues as a result of complacency, inflation and burnout.

Psychological freedom and group facilitation

Liberation psychologies and Processwork’s group facilitation and *Worldwork* models both speak to the need for collective experiences of liberation and conflict transformation.
The consensus reality level of psychological freedom is supporting in group conflicts when facilitators support each side to acknowledge, appreciate and defend their uniqueness relative to pressures from the other side to change. This serves to polarise a conflict further which, rather than being bad for conflict, this reinforcement of identity and polarisation helps each side speak their truth more fully which is essential for getting to the deepest core of the conflict.

Educational input about the dynamics of rank, power and social marginalisation can help both sides understand how the conflict they are in is bigger than egos and personalities, but a larger socio-cultural process patterned in their conflict. It can also foster new insights in each group about the struggles of the other, whether they are in the dominant or subordinate social group, and also the awareness of the privileges each side has that they may not be aware of. Additionally, it can help depathologise those who have been made crazy by the conflict and provide a framework for understanding how marginalisation is happening in the momentary conflict.

Facilitators support the development of psychological freedom at the dreamland level when they work with the identity edges on each side of the conflict. When a subordinated group learns it is not only a powerless victim but also has significant spiritual rank relative to the dominant group, they can begin to access more fluidity between the roles in the conflict. Vice versa, when a dominant group is given the opportunity to connect to their vulnerability and is seen as something other than dominant, they are freed from a rigid sense of self and can explore the diversity of roles present.

I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else’s freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

(Mandela 1995, pg. 646)
Although conflict is deeply uncomfortable for most people, recognising that conflict is a condition for awareness; that we are dancing to the same song even though we are treading on each other’s toes, can also aid transformation. An invitation to psychological freedom at the essence level of awareness, to experience the conflict field from an object-subject-less perspective helps polarised sides connect to the unitive process underlying the conflict and realise the deeper meaning within it. However, it is of course not reasonable to expect a group who is systemically oppressed to appreciate the unity in conflict before their suffering is appropriately heard. Nor the suffering experienced in a more dominant group.

The sophisticated tools Processwork brings to group facilitation creates a range of structures, boundaries by another name, that enable the unfolding of conflicts that are otherwise too threatening and painful to work with. A well held container is essential for the freedom that emerges from transforming conflict.

The facilitator’s psychological freedom

The same issues are present for group facilitators as for individual therapists concerning the impact of their own psychological freedom on their clients. I would also add however that there is a greater need and luckily opportunity, for group facilitators to develop their psychological freedom.

Often facilitators of group conflicts know the general nature of the conflict before they facilitate it. This gives the facilitator time to work within themselves on the diversity and power issues presented by the conflict. They can notice their own preferences and tendencies to marginalise, predict the different roles and issues that will emerge and burn their own wood relative to the ways this particular conflict is personal to them.
I say that there is a greater need for psychological freedom in the facilitator compared to the therapist because the workplace is often hotter and more complex and puts many people at risk of sustaining burns if the conflict fire is not held well. For the majority of individual therapy sessions, this is just not the case – there is basically less risk and less pressure. Group facilitation also contains a public performance element which can constellate complexes in facilitators, whereby this is uncommon in individual process-oriented therapy work.

From the Ocean I heard a million fish say,
"Give me a beer - quick."
I replied, "Dears, how can that be? How can a fish in the water want a drink?"
Well, that's how wacky things have gotten.
Who else but Maya could pull a fast one like that and get away with it?
Seriously speaking though:
The fish in the water that is thirsty needs
serious professional counselling.

Kabir in (Ladinsky 2002, pg. 223)
Chapter Twelve: Psychological freedom and Processwork

In this chapter I explain my early introductory statement that psychological freedom is a central teaching and gift of Processwork and attempt to answer a lingering question as to whether Processwork aligns as a liberation psychology.

Processwork and psychological freedom

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, over the course of this research I have come to believe that psychological freedom, as defined here, is the central and essential gift of Processwork.

If we were to presuppose that the goal of Processwork is to follow nature, I would argue that in learning to follow nature, we develop the capacities that enable access to psychological freedom. It is a paradox that learning to follow nature (a deep kind of not-free) could lead us to more freedom.

The Processwork model currently divides its training paradigm into two broad categories, the first and second training. The first training is variously defined as:

…a disciplined training to notice facts, figures, signals roles, flirts and feedback

…the first training focuses upon what we might call the “hard skills” such as facilitating signal exchanges in communications

In the first training you develop the skills needed for a profession and become aware of your experience as a fact and a role, as well as other ghost roles and vectors.

(Mindell 2010, pg. 147, 220, 273)

While the first training teaches skills that come in handy for working at the essence level, it is primarily concerned with work at both the consensus reality and
dreamland levels. Supporting the consensus reality level definition of psychological freedom, the first training teaches a sophisticated understanding of social rank and marginality that informs critical consciousness. At the dreamland level, it’s an interactive and experiential tour of the psychological field, whereby one develops the skills to work with people at the edges of their known identity (the limits of their psychological freedom) such that they can grow their identity.

Being able to access and work at the essence state is what Processworkers train in when they are engaged in the second training:

*The second training is paradoxical. It happens. Producing processmind experiences both is and is not “learnable” – at least, in the cognitive sense.*

...[T]he second training gives us the “soft skills” or emotional intelligence needed to get along with others and the universe.

*In the second training, you learn to shape-shift at least briefly into the processmind and facilitate the relationship between parts of systems. In other words, you are half in the realm of dreaming while half out in reality, facilitating the flow of experiences.*

(Mindell 2010, pg. 148, 220, 273)

The second training essentially teaches us how to transcend our sense of separateness from the world and to work with the unmanifest world.

The difference between the first and second training is the difference between the development of skills and the development of eldership:

*Eldership...emerges from your deepest self. [It] manifests as a deeply democratic attitude that interweaves the equal importance of individual viewpoints, the world as your child, and the grand mystery behind it all.*

(Mindell 2010, pg. 272)

It is indisputable that a skilled Processworker requires detachment; curiosity and the beginners mind, and that the path is forged significantly in growth from suffering; metaphoric deaths; the support and challenges of community; and many acts of grace along the way, not least the act that brings one to Processwork training in the
Processwork conflicts with mainstream psychology in that our goal is not to help people regain ‘functionality’ and be able to rejoin the mainstream, but to follow their own authentic path.

Is Processwork a psychology of liberation?

When the question about what psychological freedom might be first fell into my head, it was in the context of an analysis of the liberation versus social control agendas of psychiatry/psychology. Understandably, it was quickly followed by a query about where the Processwork agenda was on this spectrum of liberation and control. One could devote an entire thesis to an in-depth assessment of Processwork as a psychology of liberation, but here I will be bold and brief and state that Processwork can unquestionably claim the title as a liberatory psychology, for a range of reasons.

Tolman (2008, pg. 91) in his article on emancipator psychology, states “…a psychology serving the interests of ordinary people would have to be based on a sound theoretical understanding of the relation of the individual to society.” Processwork has a strong focus on the intersectionary space between the individual and society, including and most importantly, a sophisticated analysis of power, rank, privilege (see Mindell 1992, 1995), social marginality and oppression (see Goodbread
2011), and offers dynamic tools for individual and social transformation relative to power, oppression and marginality. This is seen most evidently in Processwork’s concept of deep democracy:

Deep Democracy is based upon those perennial psychologies and philosophies that include global, egalitarian approaches to personal problems.

(Mindell 1992, pg. 14)

[Deep democracy is] an awareness of how power can be used against individuals and how this power can be transformed.

(Mindell 1995, pg. 39)

The concept of deep democracy represents a profound valuing of diversity. All roles and voices within a context/issue etc are not just welcome or tolerated, but seen as necessary to resolve or transform conflicts and dynamics of oppression.

Watkins and Schulman (2010, pg. 5) “recognise [liberation psychology] practices when they focus on the well-being and self-organisation of people and their communities, when they promote critical reflection and transformation in local arenas, and when their goal is not the imposition of a prescribed yardstick of development but an opening toward greater freedom in imaging the goals of life.” If Processwork could be said to have any goals, they would be the awareness and unfolding of nature, rather than the imposition of agendas or hierarchical structures for development. Processwork is not against power imbalances per se, but does not explicitly or complicitly support the abuse and mis-use of power. An awareness of social and interpersonal power dynamics is central to Processwork and in this way it is also a psychology of liberation.

In liberation psychologies, “the strands of individual, community, cultural and ecological wellbeing are held tightly together, and are seen to be necessary to one another” (Watkins and Schulman 2008, pg. 10). Processwork also recognises the interconnection of all life, perhaps to an even further degree than stated by
liberation psychologies, through its heritage in quantum physics and Taoist philosophy.

Processwork, like liberation psychologies, doesn’t assume an expert position by professionals, but instead a facilitative position that supports the unfolding of awareness and existing wisdoms and the accessing of personal and collective agency. Processwork views the individual and community subjective experiences as valid and containing the seeds for transformation. Processworkers support the growth of these seeds but do not presume to plant them.

The Processwork concept of city shadows also aligns with one of the central concepts in liberation psychologies whereby “environments of injustice, violence, and repression have powerful psychological effects on everyone, whether they are registered consciously or unconsciously. When there is no public language or space to discuss these effects, they may turn into painful somatic symptoms of seemingly unknown origin that are misattributed to other factors.” (Watkins and Shulman 2010, pg. 53).

City Shadow theory (Mindell 2008) sees a psychotic client as the identified client of the community; their symptoms an expression of marginalisation in the community. The individual client highlights marginalisation in the society, with the normal community disturbed by it because they are against awareness of this disavowed part of themselves, and their role in the social marginalisation of others.

...the schizophrenic patient...is the collective’s dream, their compensation, secondary process and irritation.

(Mindell 2008, pg. 125)

It is with these reasons that I provoke the debate, if there really is any to be had, that Processwork can unequivocally claim to be a psychology for liberation.
CLOSING REMARKS

*Exploration and unfolding are the sign of knowledge in operation, while conclusions are grounds to suspect that freely available knowledge is being manipulated for purposes unrelated to knowing.*

(Tarthang Tulku 1990, pg. 277)

I didn’t anticipate this thesis would be so personally transformative. Before starting to write it I thought the hard work and the steep learning curves of the Diplomate program were long since over: I’ve never been more fabulously wrong. While it all started with what I thought was an intellectual query and is ostensibly presented like that, in the background it has been an extended exploration of my central life edge – that of spirituality. I didn’t see that coming, but had I been a better dream interpreter, I might have.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this journey has been the impact the question has had on others. Whenever I mentioned the topic of my thesis to others I witnessed a visible shift in facial expression and gaze as people searched for an answer they didn’t have yet. It is uncommon in everyday life to not have a ready answer or opinion for most questions posed, so this question frequently triggered an unfamiliar cognitive spaciousness in people that took them pleasantly by surprise. It was a question that not many had ever considered, but that people enjoyed thinking about. It made me realize how rarely we get to explore deep questions in our busy lives, and that we are the poorer for it. But also what a privilege it is to have the time and space in one’s life, practically and psychologically, for such explorations.

This thesis asks a question and finds two answers. One is a momentary and inevitably flawed definition, the other the knowledge that there is no answer (but that through exploration I am the richer for it). It demonstrates that one can find personally meaningful answers to unanswerable questions, if one is able to both hold and push
through such a paradox; and that the answers are also secondary to the process of searching for them.

At the heart of the definition arrived at in this thesis is the concept of identity. Psychological freedom entails three interwoven identity processes whereby (in no linear order) we fully recognize and celebrate our individual uniqueness in the world; we explore and celebrate our sameness with others (human and non-human); and finally experience our oneness with the universe. Each of these processes, individually experienced, offers us unique insights about the world and our subjective experience of it, encouraging us to continually explore and adventure into the unknown, asking questions that lead us perhaps not to definitive answers, but on wild and surprising journeys.

This work also identified several paths to developing psychological freedom, the most prominent being the role of suffering. It seems that only in battling with, learning from, and healing after oppression of one kind or another, do we find ourselves unexpectedly and unintentionally, more psychologically free. In this I am continually reminded that the majority of the world doesn’t have the good fortune to escape from situations of suffering long enough to transform them.

To arrive where you are,
   to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
   In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
   In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
   In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know,
   And what you own is what you do not own
   And where you are is where you are not.

The Four Quartets, East Coker (Eliot 2000, online)
Beyond the definition of psychological freedom as I have given it in this thesis, the crux of this exploration is that freedom and boundaries more than need each other, they are somehow one and the same thing. If I am yearning for freedom, I will find it by way of boundaries. That freedom cannot be directly obtained, it is only ever a by-product of something else.

But perhaps the dearest learning in this work for me personally though, is experiencing how a good question can set the depths of the soul on fire.

Maybe we should all ask a few more.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.

The Four Quartets, Little Gidding (Eliot 2000, online)
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