

A Place for Sadness: messages for nursing practice in the ontology of melancholy

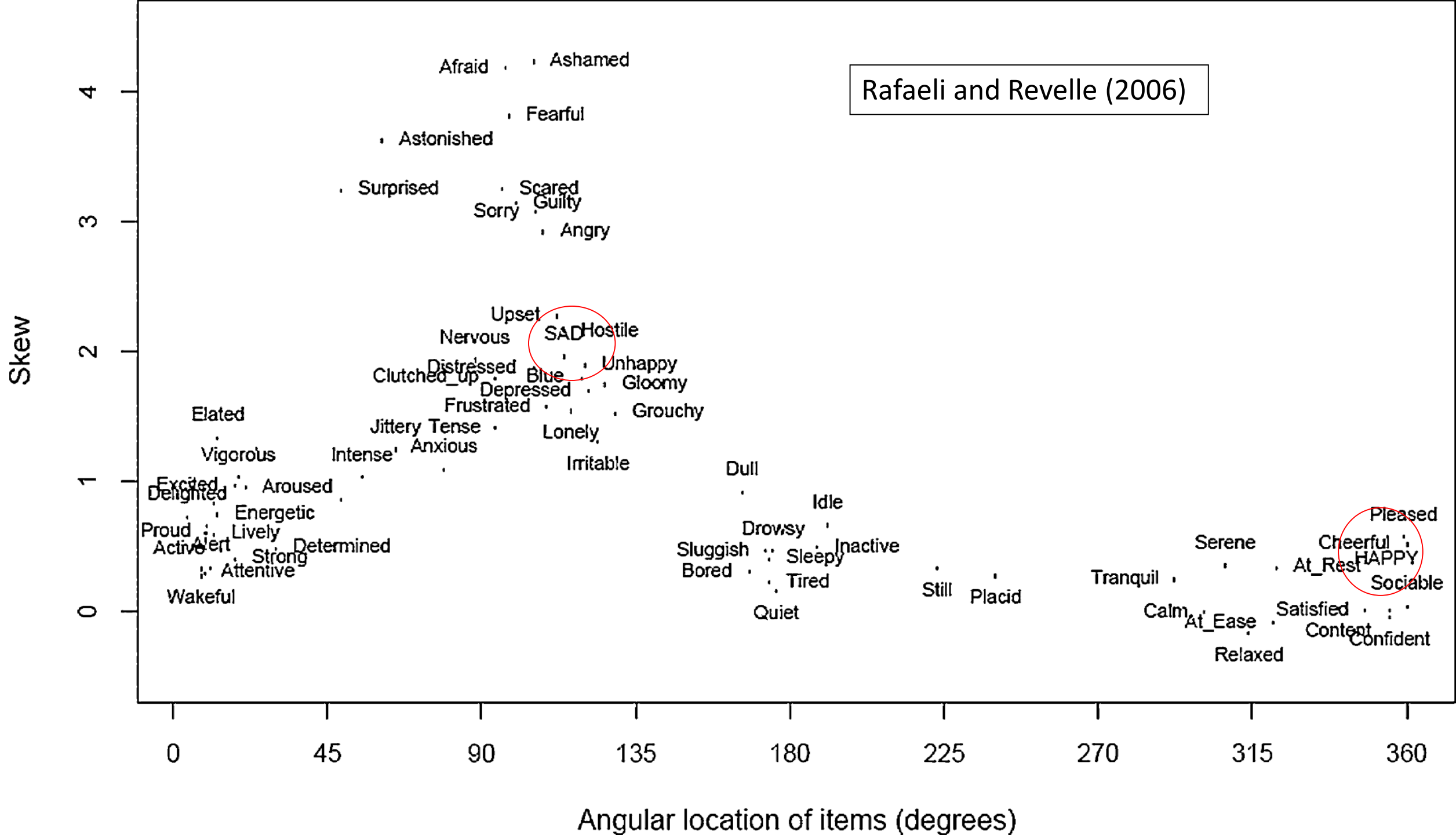
Dr John McKinnon

University of Lincoln

UK

Background

- Affective state associated with loss sorrow or regret (Rivers et al, 2007)
- Results from a fruitless search for a source of blame and accountability
(Rochman and Diamond,2008)
- Accompanied by deceleration in physiological and cognitive processes, and facilitates a period of recovery (Bower, 2013)
- Distinguished from depression by its 'background' role and shortened time window (Bower, 2013)
- Notion of a lack of agency recently challenged (Bower,2013 ; Zawakski et al. 2012)
- Scrupulousness, fairness, emotional competence and empathy
(Bower,2013 ; Zawakski et al. 2012)
- Testimony in folklore
- Not the polar opposite of happiness (Rafaeli and Revelle,2006)



Research Question

- How does the ontology of sadness find purpose and value in nursing practice?

Methodology

- Part of a larger study into the commonality of emotion in nursing practice
- A purposive sample of 33 nurses talked exhaustively about the emotions they experienced in practice and the roots of those emotions.
- Ten service user narratives
- Interviews audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and anonymised
- Data was analysed using a grounded theory approach until saturation was reached
- Study undertaken at the time immediately following publication of the Francis Report

Sadness

```
graph TD; A[Sadness] --- B[Sadness, Fairness and Empathy]; A --- C[Sadness Regulated]; A --- D[Compensating Sadness]; A --- E[Sadness and the Nurse Patient Relationship];
```

Sadness, Fairness
and Empathy

Sadness
Regulated

Compensating
Sadness

Sadness and
the
Nurse Patient
Relationship

Defining Sadness

Sadness to me is, when I feel sad, I feel, it's a weird thing to say but I always feel smaller than I am, when I feel sad, almost as if I have shrunk a bit – a bit of me missing. To me, when I feel sad, whether it is something to do with work or sad that something that has happened in my personal life, I always feel as if I am smaller; that I have shrunk a bit.

A Children's Nurse

Defining Sadness

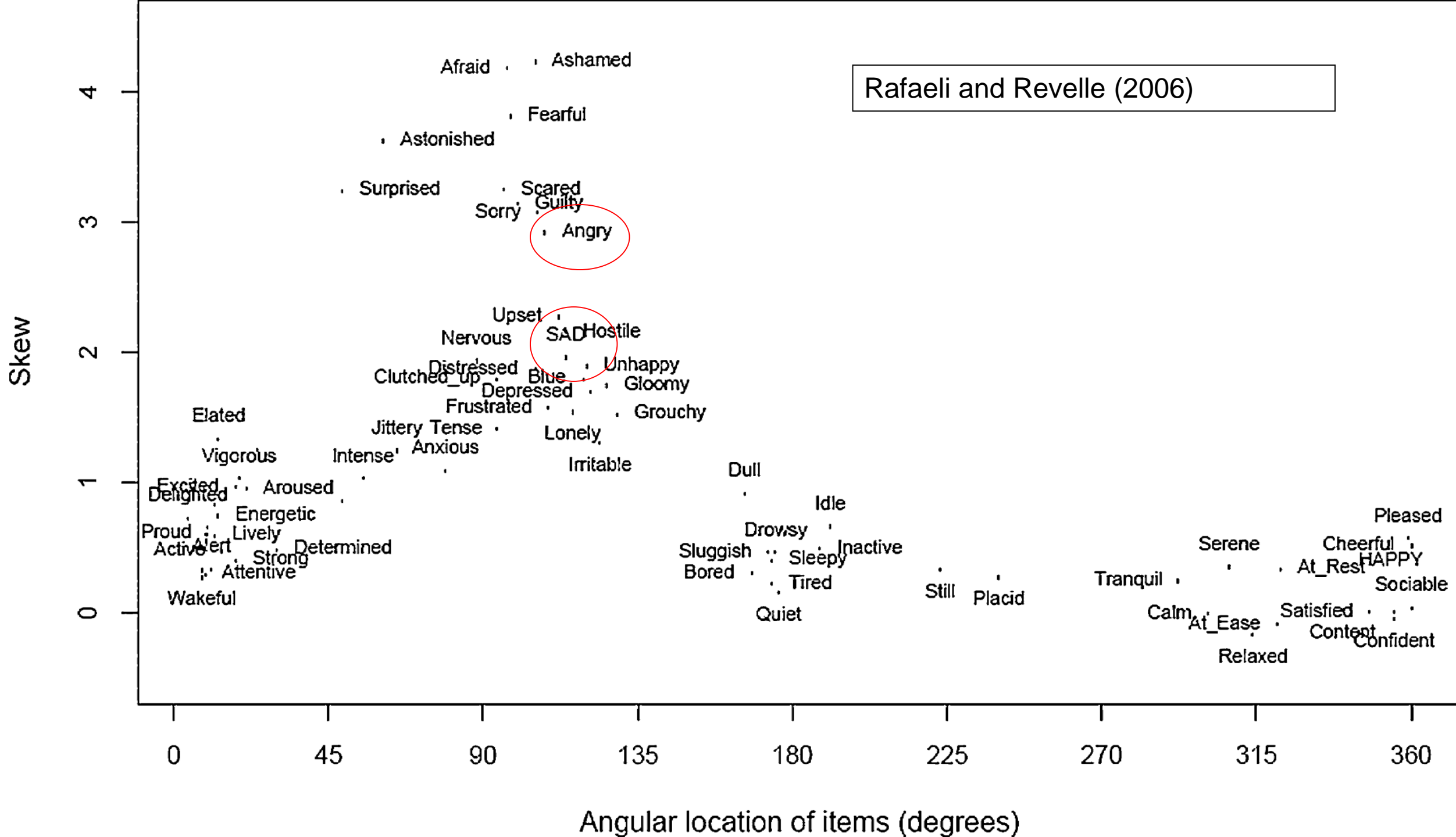
You have a heavy heart... that is the only physical way I can say it and just, that feeling of sadness, the heavy heart, the pit in the bottom of your stomach

Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse

Defining Sadness

It (*sadness*) is more of a quieter emotion really, a sort of sense of resignation....I guess sadness feels quite heavy doesn't it, and quite, it can make you feel quite tearful

Mental Health Nurse



Defining Sadness

It's different from feeling down and depressed to me, sad is really more of the moment, for me I think...It's more happening quickly, whereas depression is more of a long term thing. Sadness would be more of a thing that you would feel for a short amount of time

A District Nurse

Sadness Regulated

.. you're sitting down with the parents telling them that you know, their child is brain dead and that there is no way they're going to come back from this. And I think that's a time to be sad, and you need to show the parents that you are also sad without obviously not sitting there blubbering away, but that you are upset with the outcome as well, and I think that's very important for them to then allow you into what their thinking and discussing about, that you were there when their child was awake, and so I think you need to show that you are sad that they aren't going to survive this, so the parents can discuss things with you. I think if you've got a shared emotion, with the parent, then they're much more likely to be open about it it comes out as controlled. Because you need to show that you are sad that this event has happened, but you also need to be controlled so that they can rely on you, if they think you're a mess their not going to start relying on you, and that's the role of the nurse, I think if you're too sad you're not actually fill that role that that parent needs you to fill.

Children's Nurse

Sadness and the Nurse Patient Relationship

You know I do feel sad, and I'll probably go to his funeral if his wife wants me to. I think she will. And I will feel a sense of loss because he's gone because I care about him.

District Nurse

Sadness and the Nurse Patient Relationship

I guess, it is not being able to say or speak to the person who has gone any more, if you wanted to say anything and them respond you have feedback you know, a conversation. There is no longer the opportunity. Especially if you were to leave, if you saw someone and they died and the way you left it, you can't change the way you left it. You couldn't say, you wouldn't be able to say 'goodbye' that last time and really mean it. I think it was difficult because I wanted to go and see him and lots of different people did, so I never got to say goodbye to him, I only saw him once he had died – once he had passed away.

Young Male Nurse in Paediatric Intensive Care

Sadness, Fairness and Empathy

...sadness really, for whatever reason the parents can't adequately care for their children so if they have to be removed, and I suppose its sadness as well if they've been a lot of work but actually it hasn't achieved anything, through whatever reason and the children then have to be removed and put into care... For the children because they, for some parents its not that they don't love their children they just don't have the parenting capacity.

A Health Visitor

Compensating Sadness

We did lots of different things , we did psychologist things, lots of reflective things. It has recently been the anniversary of those two children so the staff have been reliving, there has been lots of conversations about what had happened a year ago.

Senior Sister in a Children's Ward

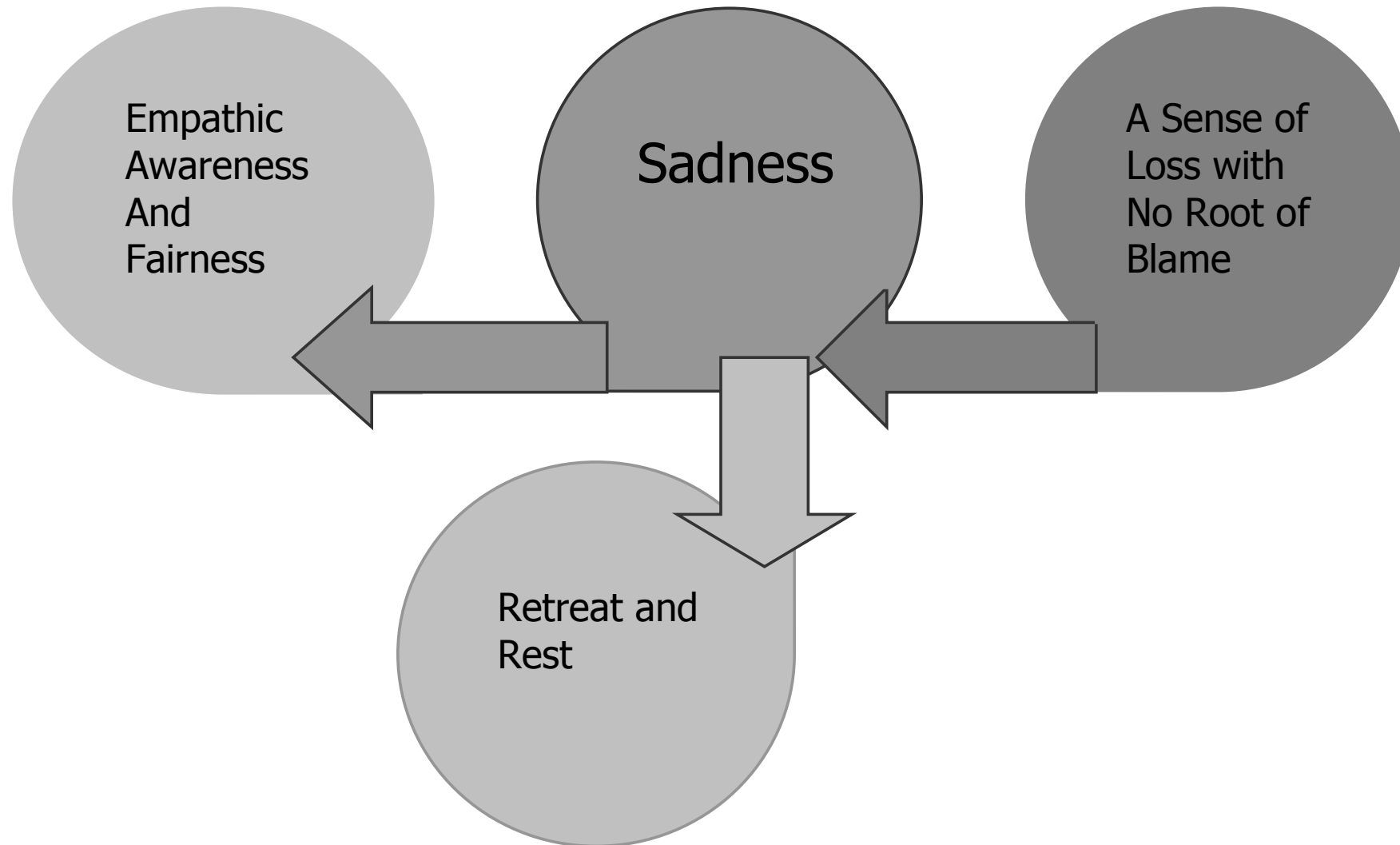
Compensating Sadness

I suppose, my way of dealing with things is to talk about it so erm, so if I was feeling sad about something I would then usually talk to somebody about it, anybody who would listen.... because that is how I would come out of that sort of feeling, to talk about it or have a big glass of wine (Laughs)

District Nurse

Sadness Dynamic

(Rivers et al, 2007; Zawadzki et al, 2012; Bower, 2013)



Conclusion

- Sadness as a lived experience in nursing accurately reflects the portrayal of the emotion in contemporary literature
- Sadness is experienced as a sense of loss in practice indicative of the need for restoration.
- Sadness used as a tool of emotional labour
- Sadness fuels fairness, clarity of thought and empathy.
- The sadness experience among service users may hold opportunities for negotiating care and after care
- As a reflection point sadness has potential for improving emotional intelligence and situational awareness in practice

