The Experiences of Reflective Practice Groups as Part of Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training: an IPA Study

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Abstract

Despite many Clinical Psychology training programmes utilizing reflective practice groups as part of clinical training, there remains little research examining the experiences of such groups from a trainee perspective. However, it remains the preferred method of developing reflective practice skills during training. This research used interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore the experiences of attending reflective practice groups as part of doctoral Clinical Psychology training. A purposive sample of eight participants were recruited for a single, semi-structured interview. The interviews were audio-recoded, transcribed and analysed by the researcher. Five superordinate themes were constructed: '*the process: there were so many layers'*, '*the impact: an ongoing process', 'the facilitator: a presence who was not always present', 'commitment: I hated it, but I still went'* and '*getting through it: finding ways to cope'.* Nineteen corresponding subordinate themes were constructed from the data. The research findings illustrate the varied and complex experiences of the participants. Whilst the experience was often difficult, participants appeared committed to attending and sought out ways in which to navigate the experience. The results are conceptualised in terms of existing psychological theory and literature. A critique of the research and suggestions for future studies are offered, which include exploring the views of the facilitators of such groups and comparing how groups are utilized within different training institutions. Recommendations are made related to the development of future reflective practice groups, which include recommendations related to the style of facilitation and the frequency and size of the group.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research aims to explore the experiences of reflective practice groups (RPGs) within Clinical Psychology (CP) training.

In this introductory chapter, I will introduce my reader to the rationale for my chosen topic, my epistemological position and a brief account of my journey to this project. An overview of current research and literature pertinent to this area will be considered.

1.2 Language

This thesis is written in the first person. This fits with my epistemological position; I cannot deny that my own views and experiences have influenced the process from its inception to its completion. Writing in the first person for the majority will hopefully prevent me from distancing myself from the process (Crotty, 1998) and enable me to offer my reflections as a researcher throughout.

As I will discuss, RPGs are referred to in the literature in many different ways, such as personal development groups, experiential groups or reflective groups. Though I acknowledge we will all have our preferred language, I will use the term 'reflective practice group' (RPG) throughout, unless otherwise specified.

All the participants in the study were trained at the same university, which is the same course I am part of. I will refer to this as Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) throughout.

1.3 My position

Knowledge is derived from looking at the world through one perspective or another (Burr, 2003). I believe that my perspective will be influential to every aspect of this research process, from the reasons I was interested in researching the topic to the ways in which I analyse my data.

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) highlight not only the importance of acknowledging one's own position, but in addition the importance of self-reflexivity, in order to enhance the validity of the findings of the research. Furthermore, it is necessary for the researcher to be open about their interest and stance (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). It is important to be open and transparent about my own position at the outset and state where my interest in this area stemmed from. I hope this will enable the reader to make their own decisions about the impact my beliefs and position had on my constructions.

1.3.1 Epistemology

Prior to beginning my doctoral training, I had not spent much time considering my epistemological position, or made any attempt to define it. When I look back now, I wonder whether, if I had the language, I would have defined my view as positivist; that

'reality' as I knew it was 'true' and static. I took what I read as truth and rather uncritically took scientific research as gospel.

Initially I found the concept of epistemology a challenge; there appeared myriad positions I could take, and as a result I felt overwhelmed. The ideas of truths, reality and fact in relation to knowledge felt too tricky a concept for me to grasp.

However, through my own personal and professional development, I came to realise that I did hold a position, one that is informed from a social constructionist viewpoint (Burr, 2003). Whilst I acknowledge that there is no single way to identify a social constructionist position (Burr, 2003), I hold the view that there is no objective reality; rather, knowledge is both culturally and historically bound. I think that meaning is constructed between people through a series of complex social and psychological interactions, and that language is the mechanism through which we make sense of life (Gergen, 1985; Burr, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010).

I connected with the idea that my own world, your world and our worlds are personal and social inventions (Speed, 1991). Related to my research, I do not believe that there can be one 'truth' about what it is like to be part of a RPG during CP training. I was interested in carrying out research that gave a voice to multiple perspectives and multiple ways of making meaning, which placed value on social constructs (Gergen, 2009).

1.3.2. Personal significance

After completing my BSc and MSc degrees in psychology, I was drawn to pursuing a career in CP. I embarked on a life in London, full of hope that I would quickly gain employment with an Assistant Psychologist job. When I did, I think reality sunk in: I would have to get on 'the course' if I was to pursue my dream.

For the next few years, 'the course' became my focus. I contended with the uncertainty, the daydreams about being accepted, and the worries that I might never be good enough. With time, I gained a place. In the months leading up to training, I grew curious: what would this experience be like? Which components of the course would be suited to my learning needs? How would I cope with the academic pressures?

My curiosity and interest grew further as I began my training. I was fascinated by it, and how would the clinical, academic and personal development aspects come together to push me forward. I have found it a challenging yet hugely satisfying and enriching journey.

The RPG captured my imagination. Prior to my training, I had not participated in such a group over an extended period of time. At the DTP, trainees meet as a whole group with an external facilitator, who was with us throughout the course of our training. I was quickly drawn into the sessions, noticing the different experiences I was having, such as sadness, connection and curiosity. The groups had a different tone to my other experiences of training; they were quiet, more thoughtful and we explored a range of topics personal to our group.

When the time came for me to consider topics for my research project, there didn't seem any other option for me but to take advantage of my natural curiosity regarding CP training. A tutor introduced me to some research concerning the RPGs, and from that, this project was born. It made sense to me that after dedicating years of my life to a career in CP, I should dedicate my research project to it. I was keen to 'give something back' and hopefully shape the experiences of trainee CPs in years to come.

1.4 Literature review

Within this brief background summary, I aim to introduce my reader to CP training within the United Kingdom (UK), and the recognition of not only the scientist-practitioner model, but also the reflective-scientist practitioner model of training. A brief consideration of personal and professional development is considered, followed by some comments about reflection. I will discuss RPGs with a specific focus on CP training. It is beyond the scope of this research to offer an extensive presentation and critique of all the available research. However I hope to provide my reader with a broad overview of pertinent literature, in order to orientate them to the rationale for the current research.

1.4.1 Historical context

In the UK there are 30 CP doctoral programmes; in 2016 there were 595 places nationally. Competition is fierce; in 2016 the success rate for entry onto a programme was 16% (Clearing House for Post Graduate Courses in Clinical Psychology, 2016).

The governing body of the profession, the British Psychological Society (BPS), has 44,594 UK members, with the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) having almost 9,000 members. This has grown from 966 in 1980, to 8,000 in 2010 (Nel, Pezzolesi & Stott, 2012). CPs are employed within a broad range of services across the NHS, working across the lifespan. Services include intellectual disabilities, clinical health and neurological rehabilitation. The rise in the numbers of CPs being trained in the UK illustrates their value across a range of contexts, providing services via hugely versatile methods and techniques (Khan, 2008).

1.4.2 Current UK context for UK CPs

Within UK CP training, individuals are required to undertake a combination of academic, research and clinical activities, which constitute the three year professional doctorate course. The course aims to equip trainee CPs with skills to meet core competencies set out by the BPS (Woodward, 2014), including skills, knowledge and values relevant to working with clients, psychological assessments, formulations and interventions and to work within a reflective scientist-practitioner model (BPS Committee on Training in Clinical Psychology, 2015). Whilst the training programmes within each institution vary, at their core is the teaching of academic, research and clinical skills via university-based learning, clinical work within the NHS and an applied research project (Nel, Pezzolesi & Stott, 2012).

Teaching and development methods are varied, including both didactic lectures (Nel, Pezzolesi & Stott, 2012) and Problem Based Learning (e.g. Keville et al., 2009; Nel et al., 2008; Stedmon, Wood, Curle & Haslam, 2005). Experiential learning and small

group discussions (e.g., Brown, Lutte-Elliott, & Vidalaki, 2009) are facilitated, in addition to self-directed study, in line with the adult learner model (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

1.4.3 Personal and Professional Development

Personal and Professional Development (PPD) is arguably central to CP training (Goodbody & Burns, 2011); the BPS suggests it is a core competency within training programmes (BPS, 2006; Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007). CP training programmes are required to demonstrate that they promote PPD (BPS, 2015; Keville et al., 2017) in order to be accredited by the Health and Care Professions Council.

It seems that there are myriad attempts to define PPD within the CP context. For instance, it has been defined as the aspect of personal development "about knowing yourself and understanding how your experience shapes your subsequent encounters with the world. It is of critical importance for counsellors and therapists" (Cross & Papadopoulos, 2003, pg. 1). It has also been argued to relate to aspects of CP training that are "dedicated to developing in trainees the capability to reflect critically and systematically on the work-self interface... fostering a personal awareness and resilience" (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003, pg. 23).

There are a variety of ways in which PPD is facilitated including teaching, written assignments and support for personal therapy (Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007). Over half of UK CP training courses consider themselves as subscribing to a reflective practice model (Stedmon, Mitchell, Johnstone & Staite, 2003; Fairhurst, 2011). PPD has been argued to be central to the concept of reflective practice and the reflective-practitioner model of training (Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010).

1.4.4 Towards a reflective-scientist practitioner model

Embedded within the BPS standards for training is not only the drive towards a scientist-practitioner model, but with the addition of a reflective-practitioner model, with an overarching goal for trainees to have: "Clinical and research skills that demonstrate work with clients and based on a scientist-practitioner and reflective-practitioner model that incorporates a cycle of assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation" (BPS, 2014, pg. 8-9).

Traditionally, CP training focussed predominantly on the scientist-practitioner model. Alignment to this model proposed an empirical approach to clinical work, that CPs would not only be consumers and evaluators of research, but also actively adding to the scientific evidence base (Youngson, 2009). A critique of this model (Long & Hollin, 1997), suggests that it is incompatible with the demands of a modern CP working in the NHS. In fact, aside from work published during their training, the majority of CPs do not go on to publish research for the rest of their careers (Pilgrim & Treacher, 1992).

This marked a shift towards a reflective-practitioner model (Lavender, 2003). The model was initially founded within the fields of education and teaching (Schön, 1983), and is arguably more in line with phenomenological approaches to understanding experiences (Youngson, 2009). Schön (1987) offered a critique of a scientific approach and aimed to develop alternative ways of educating professionals through

their practice. Schön (1987) argues that within earlier stages of their careers, professionals attempt to establish themselves with credibility by claiming that their knowledge base is supported by positivist science (Schön, 1983; 1987). However, central to professional maturity is said to be an acknowledgement that clinical practice illustrates the limitations of a purely scientific approach, revealing the complexities of real-life clinical practice.

1.4.5 Reflective practice

Reflection and RP are poorly defined (Moon, 1999). This is somewhat surprising given these terms are arguably a feature of CPs' everyday language. One may assume reflection is a concept that belongs to the psychology and psychotherapy professions, however there has been both historical and current interest and application from a range of health care professions, including nursing (Taylor, 2006), medicine (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1998) and social work (Gould & Taylor 1996; Fook 1999).

The difficulties related to defining RP may be due its conceptual nature (Mann, Gordon, & Macleod, 2009). RP has been argued to be "atheoretical" and intangible (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003, pg. 23; Cushway & Gatherer, 2003; Brown, Lutte-Elliott & Vidalaki, 2009). Within the literature, there is little consensus regarding its key components (Carroll et al., 2002). However, the benefits continue to be assumed, with relatively little research to support this assertion (Bennett-Levy, 2003).

RP has its roots within the field of education (Dewey, 1938). It was conceptualised as a process through which "we learn by doing and realising what came of what we did" (Dewey, 1938, pg. 367). Dewey suggests human experience is central to the process of reflection, with reflection being essential to learning and development (Kiemle, 2008). Dewey regarded reflection as operating within two processes. Lower ordered process relate to trial and error learning, with higher ordered processes relating to reflection. It is argued that in the absence of this higher order process of reflection, any activity would be undertaken under impulse.

Mezirow (1997) proposed a model of transformative learning encompassing three themes: centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. It is argued that learning cannot occur if individuals are unable to think critically about their assumptions and beliefs. These early ideas from education were expanded upon by Kolb (1984), who presented a cycle of 'experiential learning', which included a process of four stages: observation, reflection, concept development/theorising and action. Central to this theory is the idea that learning is a process which is enhanced by resolution of conflicts, adaptation and the creation of knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Schön's (1983) definition of RP attempted to explain the process by which professionals make difficult decisions based on more than just technical, rational or academic knowledge. The ways in which reflection was described here in relation to professional action enabled the concept to be applicable to any professional practice, which was not limited solely to education (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The definition suggested that when making decisions, professionals engage in two processes: reflection-*in*-action (during the event) and reflection-*on*-action (after the event). Schön (1983) argued that the concept of RP was important because professionals often need

to quickly make complex decisions in difficult situations without access to all available information. Therefore, technical knowledge (for example, cognitive behavioural theory) is not enough to enable professionals to make sound decisions (Fisher, Chew & Leow, 2015). As such, RP can be seen as a reaction against professionals becoming overly simplistic and technique driven in their application of knowledge (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Lavender (2003) developed Schön's early ideas by adding two additional themes to RP: *reflection about one's impact on others* and *reflections about the self.*

Although the four themes identified by Lavender (2003) might be useful to conceptualise how reflection might be encouraged, there is no consideration given to the conditions in which enable these aspects of reflection to be fostered (Wigg, 2009).

Incidents which led to both barriers and facilitators of RP were examined by Wong-Wylie (2007), who interviewed doctoral level counselling students about their experiences of RP. Various conditions were found to facilitate RP, including trusting relationships and risk-taking. Several conditions appeared to serve as a barrier, including untrusting relationships, receiving unsupportive feedback and interacting with students who weren't engaging with the reflective process.

1.4.6 Potential benefits of reflective practice

RP can facilitate higher order competencies (Roth & Pilling, 2007). Although less tangible, result in personal knowledges and interactions as important as the application of technical skills (Clegg, 1998). As Schön (1987) posits, engagement with RP may facilitate in professionals the ability to cope with the uncertainties and complexities of therapeutic practice (Schön, 1987), theory-practice integration (Klenowski & Lunt, 2008) and building therapist resilience (Hughes, 2009).

Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) asked 5,000 therapists their views on RP. RP appeared to enable them to continue to develop professionally throughout their careers. Arguably this supports the idea that self-awareness and RP are both linked to the ongoing development of therapists (Woodward, 2014).

Fisher, Chew and Leow (2015) suggest there is a lack of research related to how CPs use RP post-qualification and as such investigated how this was experienced in their day to day roles. Reflection was valued as it helped better understand themselves and how they impacted upon their work. In addition, it helped with cases that felt 'stuck' and for developing the therapeutic relationship. However, it seems that the CPs were unable to give a clear definition of RP and to describe their own process of reflection. This echoes the finding from previous research; that there is much uncertainty about the definition of RP.

Related back to CP training, Gardner (2001), suggests that trainees should be provided with opportunities to develop their RP skills. There are myriad potential methods through which this development may be facilitated, for instance through reflective writing or case discussion groups (Brown, Lutte-Elliott, & Vidalaki, 2009). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the most effective ways of nurturing this development, along with the processes involved (Bennett-Levy, 2003).

However, the dominant model within CP training appears to be via RPGs (Gilmer & Marckus, 2003; Horner, Youngson & Hughes, 2009; Fairhurst, 2011).

Arguably RP encourages individuals to connect with and consider a broad range of experiences and emotions. CPs routinely work in emotionally challenging contexts, with individuals and families who have often experienced trauma and difficult life events. As such there is an argument to suggest that when working with the distress of others, professionals should be able to engage with their own personal distress (Gardner, 2001).

1.5 Group processes

Group development and processes have been widely described in the literature over many decades (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Wheelen, 1990; 1994a; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

The focus is often on developing an understanding of group processes, as opposed to the spoken content. Successful groups are able to recognise the different processes and work through them if they become a source of conflict (Wigg, 2009). There are many theories of group development, such as the seminal work of Tuckman (1965), who suggested that groups go through four stages: 'forming', 'storming', 'norming' and 'performing'.

Group development is often conceptualised in terms of the stages that a group goes through. Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) theory suggests groups will navigate three stages as they evolve and develop. The first stage relates to participants' experience of orientation, hesitation, searching for meaning and dependency. It seems that if group members are not well orientated about the aims, this can lead to confusion about the rationale and relevance of the group. Members may become stuck in a stage of asking questions which reflect their confusion, which, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) illustrate, can last many months into the group experience.

The second stage of development is related to "conflict, dominance and rebellion" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, pg. 314). Much like the 'storming' stage within Tuckman's (1965) theory, this stage describes the groups' preoccupation with control, power and dominance. Conflict may arise between members, or between the group and the leader. A struggle for power may emerge, and hostility towards the leader is argued to be an inevitable feature in this stage of development.

The third stage of group development described by Yalom and Leszcz (2005) relates to the development of cohesion. This stage is characterised by safety (Thorpe & Smith, 1953), mutual support (Shellow, Ward & Rubenfeld, 1958) and group spirit (Taylor, 1950). Though there might be more freedom for members to discuss personal details, the group also runs the risk of suppressing expression of negative emotions as it may threaten the felt sense of cohesion.

The Integrated Model of Group Development was proposed by Wheelan (1990; 1994a) and posits five stages development. The first stage is focussed around dependency upon the facilitator and concerns about safety and inclusion, followed by an agreed set of goals and procedures. Conflict is seen to be an inevitable part of this

stage. If the group is able to work through this stage, what follows is a period of trust and structure, where further negotiations regarding the roles and organisation of the group is worked through. The fourth stage involves the group working together effectively. The final stage relates to groups who have an agreed end point, which may lead to disruption and conflict if not managed well.

1.5.1 Reflective practice groups

RPGs are facilitated groups in which trainees have an opportunity to explore and discuss their experiences of training, their clinical work and themselves (Binks, Jones, & Knight, 2013). RPGs are regarded as the most favoured and beneficial learning method for addressing trainees CP's PPD needs (e.g. Horner, Youngson, & Hughes, 2009; Gillmer & Marckus, 2003), despite the variability in how they are facilitated (Horner, Youngson, & Hughes, 2009; Fairhurst, 2011).

RPGs are argued to be an alternative to personal therapy (Lennie, 2007), which is particularly pertinent considering some training institutions neither fund nor actively encourage personal therapy (BPS, 2013; Wilson, Weatherhead & Davies, 2015). That said, the ways in which RPGs are utilized across different training institutions varies, including differences in aims, frequencies, durations and whether or not attendance is mandatory (Horner et al, 2009).

The role of the CPs is varied, and includes the facilitation of therapeutic groups with both professionals and clients. As such, it is arguably important for the trainee CP to learn about the individual self, the self in a group and group dynamics (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Through this process, RPGs facilitate the development of an awareness of personal patterns of relating, which will arguably provide sound experience for managing group contexts within clinical practice (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

RPGs have also been argued to help bridge the gap between personal and professional roles; this discrepancy has been suggested to cause stress amongst individuals within health professions (Crane, 1982; Williams, 2002). Therefore it is possible that attending a RPG would be a way for trainees to manage these potential difficulties (Wigg, 2009).

Despite RPGs being a favoured method for PPD, there has been little research focussed on trainee's perspectives in relation to their experiences (Glaze, 2002; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). The value or effect of RPGs, how it is most useful or the learning mechanisms for trainees has not been researched (Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010). Of the published research available, many studies have focussed on the experiences of student nurses and other medical professionals, whereas there has been little focussed on CP (Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010).

Although there is a lack of literature related to the experience of RPGs within CP training, there is some evidence that attending groups is beneficial for PPD. For instance, whilst RPGs can be perceived as challenging, groups that are rated as the most challenging can also be perceived as most valuable (Powell & Howard, 2006). This was further illustrated by Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby (2010), who investigated the impact of RPGs amongst 18 cohorts of a UK CP training course. Two main themes

were revealed; personal and professional 'value' of the groups, and personal 'distress'. It appears that whilst trainees rated the groups as a valuable experience, they also reported distress as a result.

Furthermore, Yalom (1995) has argued that groups offer an incomparable learning experience. The personal nature of RPGs and the sharing of experiences is said to be integral to the development of learning linked to group processes (Feiner, 1998). This process may improve trainees' tolerance of difference (Lyons, 1997) and reduce stress via peer support (Munich, 1993). In addition, experiences of anxiety that are often an experience associated with unstructured groups have been suggested to provide an environment where learning can take place (Hebb, 1966).

It is important to note that there are many different therapeutic orientations that RPGs can be based upon. For instance Gestalt psychotherapy (Feder & Cole, 2013) or Humanistic approaches (Page, Weiss & Lietaer, 2002). In addition, groups may be based upon a model of Group Analytic Psychotherapy (Behr & Hearst, 2005; Foulkes, 1975).

Whilst somewhat limited, existing research does highlight the potential benefits of attending RPGs. However, there are conflicting narratives, which suggest that there are factors which may contribute to these potential benefits not being fulfilled.

Moller and Rance (2013) explored the beliefs, perceptions and expectations of trainee counsellors in relation to attending a group as part of their training. It appeared that there were several areas in which trainees appeared 'anxiously uncertain' about the group (Moller & Rance, 2013, pg. 286). For instance, not having a clear sense of the purpose of the group, what was required of them and the nature of the group itself.

The style of the facilitation has been shown to impact upon the experiences of trainees (Binks, 2010; Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010). A RPG questionnaire was developed to investigate the perceived impact of a RPG during training. The trainees appeared to value the group less and were more distressed when the facilitation style was perceived as remote. Furthermore, high value was attributed to the facilitator taking an active role and offering commentary about group processes.

Group size has also been illustrated to impact upon experiences of RPGs. Additional analysis from Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby (2010) illustrated that participants in groups of 10-13 rated their group experience as having more positive value and significantly less distress than those in groups of 14 or more participants.

An additional factor that may influence the benefits and development of reflective skills within RPGs is the commitment shown by participants to not only participate, but to share their experiences (Williams & Walker, 2003; Binks, 2010). However, there are factors that might prevent this, such as the competitiveness of the training process and unwillingness to share feelings of perceived incompetence (Mearns, 1997). How safe the group feels may also inhibit trainee's level of participation (Robson & Robson, 2008).

1.6 The context for PPD at the DTP

The DTP in question holds a largely constructivist and social constructionist perspective. Woven within the course philosophy is an emphasis on the personal and social constructions of the world. In addition, there is a focus on self-reflexivity and reflective practice, which involves trainees engaging in a self-monitoring process. Trainees are encouraged to critically self-evaluate their constructions through a variety of mediums, including small group discussions, workshops and didactic teaching. As such, there is an emphasis on the reflective-practitioner perspective.

There are various methods of reflective practice (RP) through which the PPD of trainees is facilitated and developed.

One of these methods is via Problem Based Learning (PBL), which is a dynamic and constructivist approach to learning (Conlan, 2013), aiming to bridge the gap between academic learning and clinical contexts (Curle et al., 2006; Eraut, 2000). Trainees are required to engage in five PBL exercises across the first two years of their training, which are mapped onto the four core clinical placements (working aged adults, older adults, child and adolescent mental health and intellectual disabilities).

Other methods of developing PPD are through whole group reflection sessions, which are offered after experiential learning exercises, such as simulation exercises and debate sessions, which are usually facilitated by a member of the course team.

Trainees are required to attend a RPG, which is facilitated by an external facilitator, who joins the trainees throughout the span of their training. Whilst each year group has the same facilitator throughout their training, the DTP employs various different facilitators who are trained in group analysis. The groups are held on an approximately monthly basis across the first two years, with around four facilitated groups within the final year. The facilitators employed by the DTP are trained and experienced group analysts. As such, they work within a group analytic model (Schlapobersky, 2016).

Though the group is not assessed, attendance is expected. Confidentiality is protected, with the group designed to be a safe space within which to reflect upon the different aspects of training, and how these might be influenced by the personal history and experiences of the trainees. It is not surprising that there is a focus on developing trainees' skills in RP, given the shift within the profession away from a scientist-practitioner model, towards a reflective-scientist practitioner model (Duncan, 2012).

Chapter 2: Systematic Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter will present a systematic literature review of literature pertinent to this research. The chapter will conclude with the rationale for this research, the aims and the research question.

The search took place over approximately a 12 month period, ending in March 2017. The search began with potentially relevant books and resources held at the DTP's Learning Resource Centre, together with materials available through the inter-library loan service of the British Library.

Considering the lack of literature within CP training, (Smith et al, 2009; Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010), the search was broadened to include counselling and Counselling Psychologists. This enabled the search to capture relevant research pertaining to groups within both professions.

The following databases were utilized: Scopus, PubMed and APA PsycArticles. Combinations of the following search terms were used: "clinical psychology", "trainee Clinical Psychologist", "psychology student", "Clinical Psychologist", "counselling", "Counselling Psychologist", "reflective group", "reflective practice group", "personal development group", "experiential group" and "reflective practice". The search was based upon particular inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix A).

The search yielded 422 articles. Excluded were those that did not meet the inclusion criteria, as well as duplicates. This left 48 articles. The full texts were screened, leaving eight relevant articles (see Appendix B for flow chart depicting the search and Appendix C for an overview of the eight relevant articles).

Guidelines set out by Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) were used to assess the quality of the research. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed commentary of each of the guidelines set out above in relation to the eight papers discussed within the systematic review (see Appendix D). However, I will now offer a brief overview of the papers. For ease of read, I will review papers that are concerned with counselling and counsellor training. I will then go on to provide a brief summary of papers related to psychology or CP training, in relation to RPGs.

2.2 Overview of counselling/counsellor literature

Hall et al (1999) conducted a retrospective study exploring graduate counsellors' experiences of a small Rogerian (Rogers, 1969 cited in Hall et al., 1999) group. The authors designed a questionnaire which comprised of a number of scales used to rate statements about the group (for instance how useful the group was perceived to be), in addition to a list of specific skills perceived to be developed as a result of the group. Positive experiences were reported; the group was regarded as useful in terms of both personal and professional development, and in the quality of relationships with colleagues.

The strengths of this research lie within its relatively large sample size across a large number of cohorts from the same training institution. However, the research included graduates up to 21 years previously, as such one might question the ability of participants to accurately recall their experiences. The authors clearly set out the intended purpose of their research, alongside an adequate summary of pertinent literature. Arguably the questionnaire method was appropriate to gather data from the large sample of participants. However, there was no mention of any ethical considerations, for instance whether participants were asked for consent. There was no mention of how potential distress would be handled, despite the questionnaire enquiring about potentially distressing topics.

In contrast, Lennie (2007) provided a clear description of how ethical issues were considered, for instance the methods through which consent was gained and ensuring that participants knew they had a right to withdraw. A mixed methodology was utilized to investigate factors that contributed to the self-awareness of 88 trainee counsellors who attended a group during training. A Grounded Theory (GT) analysis was performed on transcribed interviews from four focus groups, after which resulting themes were incorporated into a Likert style questionnaire. Trainees were asked to rate each theme for whether it was present during the group they attended and whether the theme was helpful in their development. The overall themes included intrapersonal (confidence), interpersonal (group cohesion) and environmental (physical surroundings) factors.

The majority of participants preferred the group to occur at the end of the day. Smaller groups of between six and eight members were preferred, which is in line with previous research (Thomas, 2001). Trainees felt more comfortable in the group at the start of their training and less comfortable at the end. A possible explanation for this was that as their course progressed, trainees became more critical and questioning of their self-awareness, which is reflected in a lower perception of their own self-awareness and thus resulting in a lower score related to comfort.

A further strength of this research lay in the consideration of factors that may have impacted upon the reliability and validity of the findings. The researcher is mindful to 'bracket off' their beliefs and expectations, particularly so as they were once a member of a group during their training.

A similar population of participants was recruited by Robson and Robson (2008), who invited student counsellors to record their perceptions of a weekly personal development group during their training. In total, eleven students provided anonymous reflective diaries which were subjected to Thematic Analysis (TA). Twelve major themes were identified from the analysis, which included safety, congruence/realness, facilitation, awareness of process: self and others, detachment/withdrawal from group and experiencing empathy.

Only one major theme was explored within the results, that of safety, which was divided into two sub-themes; the establishment of safety and safety being lost or missing. It appeared that safety was a necessity for risk taking and learning, both about the self and others. There were various ways in which safety was created, for instance via contracting, sharing about oneself and witnessing others sharing.

In contrast, issues related to the loss of safety were discussed, with safety being threatened by factors such as not being perceived to be heard, a lack of a sense of purpose and by the physical environment of the group. Recommendations related to the facilitation of further groups included having a shared purpose, establishing trust and the importance of the physical environment.

In an attempt to validate their results, a process of triangulation was utilized, whereby some data items were analysed by both researchers. Comparisons were made regarding identified themes and any discrepancies were negotiated. Although the dual role of one of the researchers was acknowledged, the potential impact of their biases was not elaborated upon, nor were their assumptions in relation to the group.

A similar means of data collection was employed by Luke and Kiweewa (2010), who explored the experiences of 14 master's level counsellor trainees who attended an experiential group. GT methodology was employed to analyse weekly reflective journals relating to participants' experiences of personal growth and awareness. A thorough consideration of the analytic process was presented, with both researchers taking equal responsibility for the data analysis. The journals were independently coded, and themes were rigorously reviewed throughout the process.

There were 30 factors reported to be significant to personal growth and awareness, including nine intrapersonal and nine interpersonal. This was consistent with existing group theory, namely Group Systems Theory (Agazarian, 1997, 2001). In addition, journaling was viewed as a tool to foster personal growth and reflection.

The results of this study support existing literature related to successful group experiences, such as the work of Yalom (1995). Findings from Luke and Kiweewa's (2010) study suggest factors participants viewed as important included cohesion, safety, group norms and vicarious learning.

The authors offer various critiques of their work, including a reflection regarding the evaluative nature of the journals. Despite the journals not being officially graded, the trainees' tutors had access to their writing, and as such, this may have influenced the experiences trainees were willing to share.

Moller and Rance (2013) explored the beliefs of trainee counsellors and trainee counselling psychologists in relation to a RPG. The group was weekly with an open-agenda and external facilitator. In contrast to the data collection methods by Luke and Kiweewa (2010), data within this study was collected via open-ended questions in an anonymous survey. The survey aimed to capture beliefs and perceptions about the purpose of the RPG.

Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA). The authors illustrate the steps taken to ensure credibility and rigour during analysis, as illustrated by themes being reviewed and re-worked to reach a consensus by both researchers.

Three themes emerged from the analysis: 'The good', 'The bad' and 'The Uncertainty'. The groups had been positively perceived by participants, in that they provided an opportunity to learn, amongst other things, about the self and the development of counselling skills. However there were also fears that the group would be a distressing

experience, and would lead to members being negatively judged by their peers. The authors interpret this as a potential lack of trust between members, and highlight the need for training institutions to assist in reducing trainee anxiety in order to eliminate barriers in engagement.

Ieva et al., (2009) interviewed 15 trainee counsellors who participated in a RPG. Unlike the other studies within this review, this group was conceptualised as a personal growth group. This study also differed as trainees were required to attend as if they were clients attending a counselling group. Though the group was not mandatory, there had been no drop outs for an extended period of time. Trainees were interviewed and data analysis revealed three themes: 'self-awareness and development', 'professional development' and 'program requirements'.

Greater self-awareness was developed as a result of participating. Other benefits included improved communication skills and greater cohesiveness. Participants developed a realisation that in order to grow, they would need to take risks in sharing personal experiences. Whilst for many this was an uncomfortable experience, the benefits were also realised. Trainees consistently reported that despite a positive or negative experience, the group should be a mandatory part of their course, suggesting the perceived benefits were seen to outweigh the challenge of attending.

The limitations of the study are discussed, for instance the lack of diversity of the sample of trainees. All were from the same training institution, were primarily female and mostly of Caucasian decent. The results should be taken with caution in light of the small sample size, which limits the generalisability of the findings. The authors offer no consideration to self-selection bias, which may have also impacted upon the experiences reported within this study.

2.3 Overview of undergraduate psychology and clinical psychology research

Nathan and Poulsen (2004) conducted qualitative interviews with 22 psychology students who had attended a RPG. The group enabled students to experience an ongoing process, which was argued to mirror clinical practice, and to explore aspects about the self and interactions with others (Nathan, 2003).

The groups comprised of six to eight members, who met for 25-30 weekly sessions. All participants were interviewed within a month of the group ending. After transcription, both authors initially analysed the data for themes relevant to the aims of the study. After this, the authors compared their analysis and a consensus on themes was reached. The first author then analysed the transcripts using GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). Three themes were identified; 'the aims of the group', 'groups at the university' and 'professional experiences' (Nathan & Poulsen, 2004, pg. 166). Ambiguity related to the aims of the group was a difficult experience for participants. In contrast, when the aims of the group were perceived to be coherent, participants reported their experience to be more enriching both personally and professionally.

The composition of the group potentially limited the utility. For instance, it was difficult for participants to discuss personal issues with their peers and friends within the cohort, with worries that this would be shared with others not in that particular group.

Although this research is important as it adds to the limited literature relating to psychology students or trainees in relation to RPGs, it does have methodological concerns. For instance, the authors do not make reference to their own epistemological position, nor their theoretical position. Willig (2013) suggests that analysis that is not positioned like this may not contribute an in-depth enough analysis of data, rather merely representing the researcher's opinions. There is no consideration of how the researchers bracketed off their own assumptions, which makes it difficult for the reader to assess how this may have influenced the results (Fairhurst, 2011). In addition, there is no information regarding the demographic details of participants. This limits the capacity of the reader to assess how the findings relate to the range of characteristic the participants potentially bring with them (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 2010).

Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby (2010) clearly detail demographic details relevant to participants. At the time this research was published, there were no published studies investigating trainees' experiences of RPGs within CP training. Participants were now qualified CPs, across 18 different cohorts from the same training institution.

This research aimed to investigate the personal and professional impact of RPGs for former trainee CPs. Additional aims included gaining an insight into whether the former trainees viewed the RPG as a useful forum for developing RP within clinical training, the potential benefits of the group and when they were realised, and attitudes towards the group after training was completed. One hundred and twenty four qualified CPs who had trained at the course in question participated in the study.

The authors adequately detail the methods through which data was collected, which was via the RPGQ. SPSS was used to analysis the survey data, whilst the qualitative data was analysed using TA. Analysis revealed that 71% of the participants rated the group as valuable, with 43% of participants rating the groups to have resulted in high distress (Knight et al., 2010). More than half of participants rated the group to be high value and low in distress, with approximately one third of participants rating the group as high in value and high in distress.

It seemed that just under half of participants understood the purpose of the group was to reflect upon their experiences of clinical training, with experiencing group dynamics and providing support in relation to clinical training also cited. There were two themes: personal and professional 'value' of the groups, and personal 'distress'. Whilst trainees thought the groups were a valuable experience, they also reported distress as a result. The size and facilitation style of the groups predicted the levels of value and distress.

2.4 Summary

Throughout both the introduction and systematic literature review chapters I have provided my reader with an overview of the ways in which RP is developed and facilitated within UK CP training courses. I have orientated my reader to the challenges that are faced regarding defining RP (Moon, 1999) and the lack of evidence for how RP is developed (Bennet-Levy, 2003; Smith et al., 2009).

The RPG is viewed as the most favoured method for developing RP within CP training (Horner et al., 2009). As presented, the vast majority of research has focussed on

trainee counsellors or Counselling Psychology training. To the best of my knowledge, the only published research examining the RPG within the context of CP training is by Knight et al., (2010). It is fairly striking that given the focus of RP within the training of CPs, there have been no published studies related to RPG since this work by Knight et al., (2010).

2.5 Rational and relevance for the current research

Given the distinct paucity of research, there is a clear gap in our understanding of the experiences of trainee CPs in relation to RPG during training. If the RPG continues to be utilized as a method of developing RP, opportunities to construct an understanding of how this might be better developed is arguably important. As such, the current research aims to explore the experiences of now qualified CPs, in relation to RPGs during their clinical training.

2.6 Research question

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of RPGs within CP training.

Therefore, the main research question was:

What are the experiences of reflective practice groups as part of doctoral clinical psychology training?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 A qualitative approach

A qualitative design was employed using eight semi-structured interviews. A qualitative methodology was chosen as it would allow for the in-depth study of personal experiences (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002), which I believed would be appropriate for the context of this research. Qualitative methodologies aim to deepen our understandings in areas where there is little current knowledge (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 2009). This is particularly appropriate in this context given the distinct lack of research related to RPGs within CP training.

3.2 Consideration of other methodologies

Other methods of analysis could be suited to this research. Narrative Analysis (NA) was considered as it shares IPA's commitment to the sense making process (Smith et al., 2009). In considering NA, I noted that this methodology is concerned with the stories that are told over time, and how these stories are constructed, organised and presented, with consideration for broader societal discourses (Riessman, 2008). Whist I accept that the temporal aspect of NA may have been useful in considering how participants made sense of their experiences over time, I believed that IPA would afford me a much deeper exploration of lived experiences, which is more in line with my research question.

Furthermore, I understand that NA is primarily concerned with the content and structure of stories that individuals tell (Woodward, 2014) as opposed to the meaning-making attached to their experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), which I believed would be lost had I chosen this methodology.

Discourse Analysis (DA) was considered due to its interest in language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), with language constructing versions of social worlds (Burck, 2005). DA can provide a method through which to scrutinize the ways in which one makes sense of themselves and the world around them (Shotter, 1993). Despite its interest in language, this methodology was not deemed appropriate as the focus of this research was more concerned with using participants' language to understand how they made sense of their experiences through a process of meaning making.

Grounded theory (GT) (Charmaz, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) was considered. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) also illustrate, GT shares a number of similarities with other qualitative methodologies, such as utilizing similar sources of data and using interpretations. However, this approach differs in that a theory is developed via a bottom-up process whereby theory is grounded in the analysed data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In addition, a large, heterogeneous sample is favoured within GT (McLeod, 2011). Due to the nature of this study, and the small, homogenous sample, this was not considered the most appropriate methodology.

Finally, Thematic Analysis (TA) (Clarke & Braun, 2014) was considered. TA aims to identify and interpret patterns of meaning across a given data source. Whilst often considered simply to describe and summarize patterns within data, Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that it endeavours to tell an interpretative story in relation to a given set of data. TA is said to be atheoretical and has epistemological flexibility (Aina, 2015). I believed IPA would provide a richer analysis of the data, due to the idiographic focus and use of hermeneutics to understand lived experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

3.3. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I considered IPA the most suitable and appropriate methodology to adopt during this research process, considering the focus was on participants' experience of RPGs. IPA afforded me the opportunity to learn from the participants (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). As Smith (2011) explains, IPA is primarily concerned with a detailed examination of an individual's subjective lived experience, and how this experience is made sense of (Smith, 2011). I will now present a brief account of IPA's theoretical roots, which are based in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, to further orientate my reader to the rationale for selecting this methodology.

3.3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an approach that aims to study experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), specifically aiming to capture lived experience (Finlay, 2011). It seeks a detailed exploration of how we make sense of our personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The focus is on gaining an *insider perspective* of an individual's experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003), with the acknowledgement from the researcher that it is impossible to fully gain access to the inner worlds of our participants.

Smith et al., (2009) refer to influential contribution of four phenomenological philosophers, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. The contributions of these scholars help to conceptualise the theoretical underpinnings of IPA. For instance, Husserl refers to how one might come to understand their own experience, and how one might begin to understand "the *essential* qualities of that experience" (Smith et al., 2009, pg. 12). There is a focus on experiences that are significant to an individual; which in the context of this research is the experience of RPGs during CP training.

3.3.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is related to the "theory of interpretation" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, pg. 21). The contributions of three theorists, Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer are considered by Smith et al., (2009) in the development of their understanding of hermeneutics. Here the focus is on the way meaning is developed and construed through experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Hermeneutics is said to consider how a phenomenon or experience appears, and how the researcher influences and facilitates the sense making process related to this experience. IPA involves a "double hermeneutic" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, pg. 3).

Related to the current research, this involved me as a researcher making sense of participants' experiences, who are making sense of their experience of RPGs.

Arguably I can only access participants' experience through their own account and their "experientially informed lens" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, pg. 36). Participants meaning making is considered to be first order, whilst my sense making is regarded as second order (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

3.3.3 Idiography

Individuals can hold multiple perspectives about the same phenomenon (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002). Contrasted with other approaches, which are regarded as 'nomothetic', and making claims at a group level, idiography is concerned with "the particular" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, pg. 29). That said, IPA does not abstain from making generalisations, but rather employs differing ways of establishing them (Harrè, 1979), in a much more cautious manner (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Idiography's concern with "the particular" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, pg. 29) is set out in two particular ways. Firstly in the context of detail, which is brought about through an in-depth, detailed analysis of an experience. Secondly, via a commitment to understanding how a particular phenomenon has been understood and experienced by a particular person, in a particular context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As a consequence, IPA is more suited to a small sample size with a purposively selected group of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007), as is utilized in this study.

3.4 Design

A qualitative design was employed, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

3.4.1 Service-user consultation

This research project was developed and completed over a period of two years. I informally discussed my initial ideas with my peer group and gained their perspectives on how the research was developing. To assist with the development of the interview schedule, I met with a trainee CP to conduct a pilot interview. I was able to reflect with this participant about their experience of the questions, how they were received and which additional questions might be useful to include. I believe the process of discussion with peers and carrying out a practice interview was necessary to the development of a sound, meaningful and valid research project.

3.4.2 Sampling strategy

A purposive sampling procedure was adopted, which involved recruiting participants who were able to share their experience of the particular phenomenon in question (Smith et al., 2009). All participants were trained at the same DTP. I believed eight participants was a sufficient number to give justice to the detailed stories, without me as the researcher becoming overwhelmed by the data (Josselson & Lieblich, 2002).

3.5 Ethics

It is vital to protect the safety and wellbeing of participants. As such, applying for ethical approval was important (Madill & Gough, 2008). Full ethical approval was sought and

approved by the University of Hertfordshire's Health and Human Sciences Ethics Committee. This was granted on 28th July 2016. The protocol number was: LMS/PGR/UH/02451. Various areas were given particular consideration:

3.5.1 Confidentiality and consent

The detailed information sheet enabled participants to make an informed decision about whether they would like to participate in the study. Before beginning their interview, each participant was required to sign a consent form (see Appendix H). Participants were required to give their permission for the interviews to be audio recorded and transcribed by myself or a professional transcription service. The transcription service in question was required to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix K). The data was transferred between myself and the transcription service via secure means. The transcription service transcribed three interviews, whilst I transcribed the remaining five. Participants were informed that their anonymity and confidentiality would be preserved by removing any identifiable information, anonymising quotations and a pseudonym would be used in the write up of the research.

The data (which included audio files and transcriptions) were secured as password protected files on my laptop, which was also password protected. Hard copies of the data was stored in a locked drawer, and any identifying information from hard copies were removed. All hard copies of participants' data were stored under their pseudonym.

3.5.2 Potential distress

I considered whether any distress might be caused to participants. I wondered about self-selection bias, and whether those who had volunteered for the study may have done so as a result of having a particularly distressing or negative experience. As such, I reminded participants that they could have a break or terminate the interview at any point. At the end of each interview, participants were given an opportunity to discuss their experience of the interview, to ask questions and to voice any concerns they had. They were provided with a debrief sheet (Appendix J), with further information and contact details for relevant support organisations.

3.6. Procedure

3.6.1 Recruitment

Emails were sent out by the administration team, to former trainees from the DTP who had taken part in a RPG within their CP training. As is routine at the DTP, former trainees can give their consent to be contacted in the future, and as such, had provided their contact details to be held by the administration team.

I worked with the course team to pinpoint when the RPG were first introduced within the course structure. Emails were sent out to all individuals who participated. I was explicit about the aims and nature of the research in this initial email (Appendix F), therefore an information sheet was attached with my contact details. Within this were details of what would be required of the potential participants, and information on their right to withdraw (Appendix G). The potential participants could contact me directly, or

via the administration team. It was important to for the administration team to send out the initial contact emails to avoid any potential coercion.

3.7 Participants

I recruited CPs trained at one DTP. The intention was to create a homogenous sample, which is in line with IPA's idiographic approach, which is concerned with understanding a particular phenomenon, in particular contexts (Finlay, 2011).

IPA research is predominantly conducted on small sample sizes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This allows the researcher to explore in detail the perceptions, experiences and sense-making of participants. As Smith and Osborn comment, there are no fixed rules regarding sample size, with previous published IPA studies containing sample of one, three, nine and fifteen (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

3.7.1 Inclusion criteria

To be eligible, participants were required to have undertaken their Doctoral CP training at the DTP. In addition, they were required to be at least two years post-qualification, and to be practicing as a CP at the time of participating in the study.

3.7.2 Exclusion criteria

Participants were unable to participate if they did not undertake their Doctoral CP training at the DTP. In addition, those who had not participated in RPGs as part of their training were unable to participate. Those who had recently qualified (less than two year post-qualification) were also excluded from the research.

3.7.3 The sample

The final sample of participants included seven females and one male. All were practicing CPs working in London or the East of England. Participants had between three and eight years post qualification experience. They were all in their 30s. Pseudonyms are outline in Table 3.

Table 3: Participants' Pseudonym

Participant number	Participant pseudonym
1	Sharon
2	Kate
3	Amanda
4	Janette
5	Jessica
6	Ewan
7	Isla
8	Gracie

3.8 Interview structure

Qualitative research utilizes language as its raw material (Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2002). As such, consideration was given to the development of the semi-structured

interview schedule. This was developed collaboratively with my research supervisors, drawing on relevant IPA guidance (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

As discussed, a pilot interview was conducted. This was a useful exercise in terms of reflecting on my style of questioning, how it felt to ask the questions, and how the pilot participant experienced hearing and answering the questions. Relatively inexperienced qualitative researchers have been said to use inflexible questions within their early interviews (McNair, Taft & Hegarty, 2008) and as such reflexivity is important here.

From the pilot interview, slight amendments to the wording of some questions were made, although the original interview schedule remained largely unchanged (see Appendix I).

3.8.1 Interviewing

The interviews took place in an environment of the participants' choice. Riessman (2008) highlights the importance of ensuring an environment that will enable sharing experiences, hence the rationale for giving the participants freedom to choose.

Following each interview, I reflected upon my experience, which included how I was feeling prior to the interview and how this may have influenced how it had progressed and that were questions asked.

3.9 Analysis

3.9.1 Transcription

The interviews were transcribed verbatim via an audio recording. Three of the interviews were transcribed via a professional transcription service, whilst I transcribed the remaining five. All pauses, utterances, laughter, and other noises were recorded to ensure that the entire process of the interview was captured. Prior to further analysis, all transcriptions of the interviews were checked for accuracy.

3.9.2 Data analysis

The data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009).

3.9.3 Analysis with larger samples

When contending with larger data sets, such as more than six in-depth interviews, Smith et al., (2009) suggests the analytic process can be inhibited, for instance ensuring adequate time for reflection and dialogue. They reference that this can be the case "amongst less experienced qualitative researchers" (pg. 52), as is the case in the current research. Therefore, analysis need not be as detailed in larger samples, with a recommendation that the emphasis "may shift more to assessing what were the key emergent themes for the whole group" (Smith et al., 2009, pg. 106).

The total duration of the eight interviews was seven hours and 55 minutes. As per Smith et al., (2009) this was considered to be a large sample. As such, I attempted to ensure the analytic process was manageable, whilst maintaining an in-depth level of

analysis. Recommendations have been made that indicate themes from one single case can be used to guide subsequent analysis, with findings from subsequent analysis being compared to this (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This is in keeping with the idiographic approach at the heart of IPA.

I used these recommendations to guide my analytic approach. I chose to analyse two transcripts, rather than one, and then used constructed themes to guide the analysis of the remaining six transcripts. As such, a thorough analysis of the data from Sharon and Jessica were analysed using a case-by-case approach. I ensured I remained mindful of convergence and divergences within the whole data set (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

3.9.4 Individual case analysis

Each interview was then analysed using IPA, following the procedure described by Smith et al., (2009). Due to the idiographic nature of IPA, the first stage of the analysis involved analysing each transcript individually. Each transcript was transferred onto a table consisting of several columns, including reflective and exploratory comments and developing themes (see Appendix L). Smith et al., (2009) suggest the first step in analysis is to 'immerse' myself in the data through a process of active engagement with the participant's life world. Following this, I noted my initial thoughts and reflections; much like a free associative process. I achieved this by engaging in a long process of listening, re-listening, reading and re-reading of the interview data.

The next step involved a focus on constructed themes, similarities, differences, contradictions, use of language and preliminary interpretations (see Appendix M). As Smith (2011) posits, the subsequent stage of analysis involved moving towards a higher level of interpretation by transforming initial notes into emerging themes (see Appendix N). Smith (2011) comments that this process involves a fine balance of both capturing the essential quality of the data whilst staying close enough to it that themes can be linked back to the words used by participants. In line with IPA's phenomenological stance, as much as possible, I endeavoured to use participants' own language to name emerging themes (see Appendix O).

I analysed themes for their connections and drew them together to give an overview of participants' accounts. The process was not wholly prescriptive, but was influenced and guided by Smith's suggestion of abstraction and polarization (Smith et al., 2009). I drew themes together into 'clusters' which were defined as 'superordinate themes'. Extracts from the data were chosen to represent each theme in order to ensure they were grounded within the text.

3.9.5 Group level analysis

The themes were then employed to guide the analysis of the remaining six transcripts. The process involved listening to, reading and re-reading these transcripts. I identified any convergences and divergences, alongside being mindful of any new themes. Once this process was completed, a list of master themes for the whole data set was compiled (see Appendix P).

3.10 Credibility and rigour

It is important to acknowledge that the standards employed in quantitative research, including objectivity, validity and reliability cannot be applied to qualitative methodologies as they are grounded in the concepts of standardisation, neutrality, and the identification of an objective truth (Mason, 2002; Barker et al., 2002). In other words, due to fundamental epistemological differences. However, validity, reliability and objectivity remain important issues to consider (Wells, 2001). In line with my epistemological stance, I would make the assumption that different individuals would have different but equally valid interpretations. That said, it is important to ensure that qualitative research is both rigorous and credible (Yardley, 2014).

A number of guidelines and alternative criteria have been developed to ensure the quality of qualitative research (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Yardley, 2000; 2008; Tracy, 2010). The strength of the current research was evaluated based on credibility, rigour and pragmatic usefulness (Yardley, 2008; Riessman, 2008).

3.10.1 Transparency

Transparency affords my reader the opportunity to establish why and how the research was conducted, and whether it is plausible, credible, and rigorous (Kirkman, 2002; Riessman, 1993). Steps were taken to ensure the transparency of the project. I have made my reader aware of my epistemological position and the reasons for my interest in the research. I have clearly detailed the analytic process and the ways in which interpretations and themes have developed (Appendix L removed for final submission). Furthermore, within the results chapter I have included quotes throughout my analysis, demonstrating how the links between the data and my conclusions were drawn.

3.10.2 Pragmatic use of the research

I did not share any of the transcripts, analysis or interpretations of the interviews with participants. This was in-line with my epistemological position, that stories are co-created and the interpretations I made were a reflection of my understanding. Burr (2015) comments the notion of what might be 'true' can only be situated within time, place and in the individual. However, participants were asked whether they would like to receive a summary of the research once it was completed, which they all requested.

I intend to submit article/s to relevant peer reviewed journals over the coming months. Each participant will be informed of any subsequent publications and will be sent copies upon their request.

3.10.3 Reflexivity

I acknowledge that I am a trainee CP her third year of training, who is participating in a RPG. As such, 'insider researcher' questions of reflexivity, objectivity and authenticity are important to consider (Kanuha, 2000). One might argue that I am too close to or too similar to the participants.

I have endeavoured to remain aware of my 'insider researcher' position and have attempted to bracket my experiences through the use of a reflective diary and formal supervision with my supervisory team and informal supervision with peers. Though there may be conceived disadvantages to my position, I think that it is a valuable one

which has afforded me the opportunity to step into participants shoes, to get close to their lived experiences.

Epistemologically I think I approached and conducted this research with an acknowledgement that the interviews I conducted with participants were co-constructed. I had an awareness that my own experiences, beliefs and context may have influenced the questions that I asked and the ways in which the interviews evolved. I reflected that the interviews captured one moment in time for participants, and thus differences in time, day and location may have resulted in differences within the data. However, I afforded participants a space which allowed them to freely explore and discuss their unique stories, which were filled with rich examples and reflections.

My reflexive journal included reflections on the stages of the journey, from recruitment to analysis. Also included were reflections about supervision sessions and meetings with the peer-based IPA research group where ideas were shared about the analytic journey. Supervision played an important role throughout the process of this research. I was fortunate to have three qualified CPs within my supervisory team who were able to reflect with me about my journey and analytic process. We were able to explore how my position may have impacted upon the co-construction of the accounts shared within the interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Summary of Themes

This chapter presents the findings of an IPA of CPs' experiences of RPGs during clinical training.

The themes detailed within this chapter should be regarded as one possible construction of attending RPGs during clinical training. This is due to the double hermeneutic nature of IPA, in that this is my attempt to make sense of participants' experiences, who are in turn making sense of their own experiences. The presented results are undoubtedly influenced by me as the researcher, and my own meaning making. As a consequence, and linked to my epistemological position, the results are "socially-constructed, partial and incomplete" (Nel, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008). I accept that there may be differing interpretations that can be made. Also linked to the hermeneutic nature of IPA, I am mindful that you as my reader will also be constructing meaning via your own interpretations of the data, which adds an additional layer to this hermeneutic process (Smith et al., 2009).

However, as detailed in the previous chapter, measures were taken to ensure a thorough analysis of the data, and to ensure rigour. I would hope that the measures I have taken would allow my reader to make their own credibility checks (Elliot et al., 1999). I am satisfied as a researcher that it is likely that a consensus would be reached with others who analysed my data.

The aim therefore of this chapter is to present an interpretation of the participants' experiences. Pseudonyms have been provided to protect confidentiality. All identifiable information, including dates and names, have been removed. I have signified omitted data by closed square brackets [] and any additional information inserted into the text to enhance readability has been indicated by curved brackets (). Pauses are illustrated by dotted lines.

A consistent pattern of themes were constructed, however there was variability within participant's experiences. This section aims to illustrate similarities and differences across and between participant's experiences, together with verbatim extracts. Due to the scope of this thesis, it will not be possible to include all aspects of each participants' experiences. However, Appendix P will detail an overview of themes for all participants.

Five superordinate themes were constructed from the analysis. The five superordinate themes and their corresponding subordinate themes are detailed in the table below:

Table 4: Superordinate and corresponding subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes
The process: There were so many layers	The emotional baggage of life
	Being negatively judged by peers
	The where and when
	You've got so much going on
The impact: An ongoing process	It was part of a bigger process
	I couldn't make sense of it at the time
	Continuing to question the use
	Personal and professional development
The facilitator: A presence who was not always present	We struggled to connect
	It felt like we were in the dark
	The kids were running the asylum
Commitment: I hated it, but I still went	The magnifying glass on difficulties
	Seeing the value despite the distress: I always turned up
	It's not safe here: throwing myself into the lion's den
	What could have been
Getting through it: Finding ways to cope	That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through
	Finding an ally
	The use of personal therapy
	The spoken v unspoken

4.2 The process: there were so many layers

4.2.1. Overview

This superordinate theme referred to different layers that impacted upon participants' experience of the RPG. These layers comprised of personal and relational experiences, logistical issues and the impact of the wider demands of the course. These layers make up the four subordinate themes.

The level of personal life experiences referred to the different experiences that participants contended with alongside the group, like illness or major life events such as having a child. For some participants, going through these life experiences impacted upon their ability to engage within the group. However, other participants were able to use the group to reflect upon the potential impact of these life experiences. On a relational level, the theme of being negatively judged by peers referred to the concerns participants had regarding overwhelming or being negatively perceived by their peers.

Participants often referred to their experience of the other demands that were placed upon them during their training, and how that impacted on their ability to engage, make sense of and contribute to the group. Participants commented on some form of logistics of the group, for instance the timing, location or the size. It seemed that these factors appeared to influence how able they felt to engage with the group.

4.2.2 The emotional baggage of life

This subordinate theme refers to the other 'life' experiences that participants went through over the course of their training, and thus attending the group. All but one commented on the impact of such experiences on their engagement within the group. As mentioned, some participants were able to use the group to think with their peers about the impact of these experiences. Janette viewed the group as an opportunity to reflect both individually and with her peers about the difficulties she faced. This was similar to Isla's experience, who valued thinking with others about the challenges she was facing:

> *Training brings up some of your own, erm, you know issues, and things that might be stressful for you, or things that have happened in your life that have been difficult and I think a reflective space is about being able to work through things with a group rather than just you as an individual (Janette)*

> *I mean I found it useful to have a space where I could think with others about things that I might have been struggling with or something I would be thinking about (Isla)*

This was similar to Jessica, who reflected on the difficult experiences she was having with a family member who was ill, and used the group to explore the uncertainty that she was experiencing in her personal life:

> *I was finding the group quite helpful to bring the emotional impact of all this uncertainty I had in sort of my person life and then all this uncertainty that comes up with training (Jessica)*

Gracie also used the group to share her experiences, however this was not perceived as positively as Janette's experience. I interpreted Gracie's account of sharing her personal experiences as leaving herself open to vulnerability, and as such the group not feeling safe:

> *Yeah, I mean, for me, when I think about the group, I think a lot about what was happening for me at the time, in my personal life. And there were times in the group where I really felt like I made myself completely vulnerable (Gracie)*

In contrast, Ewan discussed how his life events influenced his engagement within the group; he became a lot quieter and perhaps more withdrawn from the group process:

> *I was one of the more vocal ones in our cohort, I think that changed after I had a child, and I became a lot more knackered, sitting quietly in the corner (Ewan)*

This was similar to Kate's experience, when she was ill she found it more challenging to engage with the group. Sharon also commented on the impact of being ill, alongside other difficulties she was facing, and how distressing these experiences were:

But because I was a bit sick sometimes I couldn't engage with it. And that impacted on the way I related to that group. I was like 'oh please leave me alone'! (Kate)

There were things happening in my relationship and I was living at home with my parents and sometimes that was easier and more difficult and I lost [ ] in first year and that was really distressing and sometimes I was ill (Sharon)

4.2.3 Being negatively judged by peers

This subordinate theme refers to the concerns that seven of the eight participants had regarding being negatively judged or perceived badly by their peers for sharing emotional experiences. As Gracie commented, it was akin to putting herself 'in the firing line'. I think Gracie's language captures the sense of how for her, it was risky and potentially unsafe for her to share:

I kind of felt like I was the one who would say something. But in doing so I would kind of do the opposite that what I would normally do, and put myself kind of in the firing line as it were (Gracie)

There was a strong sense of fear of irritating, annoying or overwhelming the other group members, which appeared to inhibit the extent to which participants felt able to share their experiences. Ewan illustrated this when he commented on his fear of being judged in a negative way by his peers:

I think there was a lot of fear in the room, I think people were scared to say things for fear of either irritating other people or being judged badly for being thought about not using the group as it should be (Ewan)

There's a subtle sense in Amanda's account of feeling judged by others. She viewed the three safe people in her cohort as those who weren't a source of irritation. I wonder whether this implies an underlying sense of resentment that she perceived herself to be one of the group that might irritate others:

The only things that did get referred to were there was erm…probably three I guess we'd call safe people within the group and everyone would joke about it. There was three people who got on with everyone who didn't irritate anyone. They were very erm… passive but sociable people (Amanda)

Both Jessica and Sharon shared their fears about overwhelming or dominating the space, which for Jessica, led her to begin to question herself and how she was using the group:

I worried about overwhelming other people (Sharon)

I'm someone that quite often speaks in this group and I started to question and judge myself of I don't want to be seen to be dominating, I don't want to be seen to be taking over or using the space that other people would otherwise get something from (Jessica)

Janette appeared worried about the labels that might have been placed upon her from the other group members, and reflected upon her experience of feeling shamed for showing emotions. I think this represents perhaps a perceived underlying rule within her group that becoming tearful would be something to be ashamed of:

> *It was almost like being shamed in the beginning, talking about something that then made you feel, that made me tearful, that for me, kind of left me feeling almost a little bit shamed for being, it sounds ridiculous but that idea of the emotional woman, you know (Janette)*

These worries were echoed by both Kate and Isla, who shared their concerns about how they might be perceived. I think this could be interpreted as these concerns acting as a barrier to sharing experiences of an emotional and personal nature:

> *Maybe it's because of my attitude, maybe this was not perceived very nicely for others, who I felt were very much like this, and this was great, but I'm not like this (Kate)*

> *Thinking should I say something, should I bring it up, erm, what will people think if I bring it up (Isla)*

4.2.4 The where and when

This subordinate theme referred to seven of the eight participants' comments related to logistical factors that influenced their experience of the group. This included reflections on the timing and the location of the group, with some comments regarding the size.

There were mixed experiences related to the timing of the group. For instance, for Isla, the group being in the middle of day suited her as it meant she was not preoccupied with getting home:

> *I'm pretty sure it was in the middle of the day which actually for me was perfect. I'm not wanting to rush off and go home, it's not the end of the day (Isla)*

In contrast, the timing for Gracie added to the challenge. She reflected about the difficulties she experienced of attending a whole day of teaching, which began with the RPG. It seems spending time with her cohort in a different format was a 'weird' experience:

> *It was really odd, coz we'd always have the reflective group right at the start of the day, and then we'd have a whole day of teaching until about 5 o'clock, and that was really tough. To do that in the morning and then have to spend all that time with the same people, but in a different sort of format, was a bit weird (Gracie)*

This was a similar experience to Janette, who found it difficult to engage with teaching if she had had an emotional experience at the start of the day:

> *Because you know, we wouldn't be in a position to learn the rest of the day if we'd been upset in the morning (Janette)*

Ewan and Jessica referred to the size of the group, with Ewan thinking that having the whole cohort in the same group added to the challenge of the experience. Ewan reflected back on previous groups he had been a part of in other training environments, where the group had been smaller, and more frequent, which was his preference. Similarly, Jessica reflected that the size made it difficult to meet all of the group member's needs:

> *Yeah it was all 17 of us in the room, there were 17 of us in the cohort at the time, and I think that made it challenging because the numbers were really high (Ewan)*

> *If we're going to do it, let's do it properly. You know, whereas, every two months, it felt a bit piecemeal (Ewan)*

> *I think it just became apparent that it was really difficult to meet 17 people's needs in one forum (Jessica)*

Amanda spoke about the impact the group had on how able she and others felt in being able to be in the room that the RPG took place in; describing the uncomfortable feelings that were left behind in that space, which impacted on how it was used at other times. She described the space having a 'hangover effect', in which the uncomfortable feelings were difficult to shift:

> *I guess that was the one classroom people wouldn't hang out in between or for me, or maybe I'm making it up. But it feels like that's the one place we didn't hang out at lunches and breaks because it felt so uncomfortable, that was the space that felt most uncomfortable for most people (Amanda)*

I interpreted Amanda's reference to the 'hangover effect' to reflect how difficult it was for her to move from feeling uncomfortable back to a space that felt healthier and less toxic. I think this highlighted how challenging the group was for her. Kate also referenced how unhelpful she found it to have the group in the same space that teaching took place in:

> *So I definitely think that the fact that it was in our building and our place, where we used to have the lectures and everything else, wasn't helpful (Kate)*

Added to this, there was a sense from Gracie that moving the group's location was almost 'anti-therapeutic', adding to the difficulties she faced in attending. I think Gracie's use of the phrase 'another thing that annoyed me' illustrates the multifaceted challenges for her, in that there was more than one reason why she found it difficult to participate.

> *That was another thing that annoyed me, was that it was always in different rooms. I dunno if it changed termly, we were all over the university, so, and that was the same for reflective group. But I don't think that changed weekly but it was, certainly anti-therapeutic, that we had to move around and stuff like that (Gracie)*

4.2.5 You've got so much going on

This subordinate theme refers to the impact of the wider demands of the course upon how able participants felt in engaging in the RPG. Gracie found the group less helpful the more stressed she felt; there was a sense that she felt begrudgingly obligated to attend. This was similar for Jessica, who experienced the group as less important when there were demands from assignments and other tasks to do:

> *The impact of stress is a big thing. You've got so much going on and reflective group was another thing you've got to do. And I think the more stressed people were, the less helpful the group was (Gracie)*

> *[] you have those really busy periods where you've got endless assignments due in [] and all of that so everything around those times felt more difficult and I do remember, kind of a sense of when there was a lot on, the reflective group at that time felt like much lower on the priority of, you know, we could be spending this time doing something getting our work done (Jessica)*

However, for Ewan, there was a sense that he used the group as an opportunity to stop and take stock of what was going on, amongst the busyness of the course:

> *It does give that space, just for you, for that hour or so to just sit back and think 'where the bloody hell are we and what's going on now', and 'Jesus Christ how stressed are we by X, Y and Z', you know, all this teaching and 'what do we make of that' (Ewan)*

This was a similar experience for Sharon and Isla, who shared that when the demands of the wider course were high, the group was a way for them to be with their peers without additional demands placed upon them. I think this illustrates how demanding they experienced the rest of their training:

> *[] a way for us to be together without having to do anything or say anything (Sharon)*

> *I thought it was sort of a breath of fresh air sometimes it was a bit of time out from the busyness of everything else coz it was a very busy time (Isla)*

Amanda reflected upon her changing experience of her PBL group in relation to the challenges of the RPG. I think Amanda's account highlighted her strong desire to engage in a reflective process, which is illustrated by her use of the word 'hungry'. In addition, I think the use of the word 'necessity' revealed a sense for her that engaging in a reflective process was a crucial part of her training experience. Whilst it seemed that Amanda did not feel able to engage in this process within the RPG, she was able to find this within PBL:

> *Just as things got worse in the reflective group things got better in PBL because I think we were hungry for a space, a reflective space and so we, we maybe it was out of necessity, but we were able to do that (Amanda)*

Kate discussed the impact of having to travel to a placement that was far away from her home. Her account reflected her level of exhaustion and how this impacted upon her ability to engage with the reflective process:

> *There was a moment that I wonder whether it was related to my journey through training coz in second year, I was exhausted, I think I had a placement in Bedford…I was exhausted (Kate)*

4.3 The impact: An ongoing process

4.3.1 Overview

This superordinate theme captured the ongoing process participants underwent throughout the group, and beyond into their careers post-qualification.

Participants often referenced their realisation that the RPG was part of a much wider process of development, within their wider experiences of training, including clinical placements, PBL tasks and the use of their own personal therapy. It appeared that participants often found it difficult to disentangle their experience of the RPG from these broader experiences.

A theme of finding it difficult to make sense of the process of attending the RPG was constructed, which is something that participants felt they did not have an opportunity to do during their training. This led to the theme of 'continuing to question the use'. It seemed that without a space to process the experience, there were still many unanswered questions about the purpose and process of the group.

4.3.2 It was part of a bigger process

This subordinate theme aims to capture the participants' reflections that the RPG was part of a much bigger process related to their experience of training and that it was difficult to disentangle the impact the group had on their wider development. However there was a narrative that the group did impact upon them in some way.

Kate reflected about the shift that occurred within the RPG towards the end of her training, towards a deeper level of connection, which is related to the journey her cohort took together. I interpreted Kate's account as reflecting a bond she developed with her cohort, which impacted upon her experience of coming the end of her training:

> *I had difficulty processing the ending of the course and yeah, there was a real shift a bit more, it was deeper and emotional as well. Our cohort also took a journey together (Kate)*

Ewan recognised his development throughout his training, and whilst the RPG may have influenced this change, he appeared to believe that this was part of the whole process:

> *I suppose I did change a fair bit really throughout training I think coz I'm a lot less, I was certainly a lot more reflective and a lot less vocal by the end of training. Whether that was in part because of reflective group, maybe, but I think it was the whole process (Ewan)*

This was a similar experience for Gracie, who recognised her own development through training, though again found it difficult to differentiate the experience of the group from a wider process of development:

> *It's difficult to fathom out the group with the rest of it, because training is such an amazing time, because you have this time to really develop yourself and the group is part of that (Gracie)*

As Janette and Sharon both allude to, there was a clear sense that attending the RPG contributed to a much bigger process, alongside other aspects of training that impacted upon this process of development:

> *I think the reflective practice groups contributed to that process, I don't think on their own, it wouldn't have been the only thing that was beneficial, but it contributed (Janette)*

> *I think the whole point of the group was that it was part of something bigger that was happening, and, and there were so many kinds of impacts at different times and in different ways, and I was at different times, more or less able to engage with it (Sharon)*

Amanda had a different experience to the other participants. She commented that regarding developments in relationships for example, she did not take much away from the group. Amanda's reflection appeared to be laced with a sense of sadness; she wishes she could have taken more away from the group:

> *I can't say I got anything from it in terms of insights or breakthroughs or it changed relationships or dynamics or anything like that and I wish I could, but I can't (Amanda)*

4.3.3 I couldn't make sense of it at the time

Participants spoke of not being able to make sense of their experiences of the RPG at the time of attending. It appeared that for many, the experience remained largely unprocessed. There was a sense that there had been little opportunity to reflect upon the experience, which is something that Kate, Amanda, Grace and Jessica felt, and as such appeared to get a lot out of reflecting about the group during the research interview. As Kate, reflected:

> *And unfortunately I never had the opportunity to talk about this (Kate)*

For Gracie, reflecting about the group helped her to realise that for her, the RPG was such an important part of her training experience:

> *It's been nice to have that space to think about the particular experience, because we haven't, I haven't had to do that before. It's made me realise how important that part of training is (Gracie)*

> *I'm very happy I had the chance to talk about it actually, like I was telling you, I'm still hungry about not talking about, about processing it by myself, but then I never really have shared it with anyone (Kate)*

Ewan appeared to be unable to make sense of the group at the time and as such there was a slight regret that he didn't use the group in a way that he would have liked:

> *The space, I really didn't embrace it to be honest, I think maybe a bit of a missed opportunity in some ways (Ewan)*

During the research interview, Amanda commented on how it felt strange not to have a space to reflect about the experience, and hoped that the conversation during the interview would enable her to finally make sense of the experience:

> *It felt strange that we didn't really think about those spaces or take those conversations elsewhere and I just felt quite curious about it and I thought rather than thinking about it on my own, it tends to emerge in a narrative dialogue with another person so there was a nice space to make sense of that (Amanda)*

There was a sense from Gracie that the perceived value of the group could not be realised at the time of attending. This was not something that she was able to engage with when she was part of the group, however when looking back now, she realised how critical it was in helping her to think about herself in relation to groups:

> *Actually it was one of the parts of my training that was, looking back on it now, it didn't feel like this at the time, it was one of the parts of training that was actually quite crucial in helping me think about myself in relation to groups (Gracie)*

The theme of not having a space to make sense of the group at the time was echoed by more participants, who referenced that it wasn't something they could process at the time, and how useful it was to have a space to reflect upon the experience:

> *I think often, often you just experience something in that moment and then you don't reflect on that, like you don't reflect on the reflective group necessarily (Isla)*

> *I think there's something really comforting about having a space now to really think about that and think about what I took from it and how helpful it was…there wasn't a space while we were training to do that sense making (Jessica)*

> *So yeah, I'm not sure my views on it have changed but I probably wouldn't have quite as much erm, perspective on it, or might not see it as a whole journey before…(Janette)*

4.3.4 Continuing to question the use

There was a sense from participants of questioning the usefulness of the group. It appeared that many unanswered questions remained about what the group was supposed to be used for, with participants asking why they were there, and why they were participating in the group.

Interestingly, it seemed that participants continued to remain unsure about the use of the group, which could be understood in terms of how they continued to ask questions about the group.

> *But yeah it's just even [ ] years later, you still sort of think about…'what was that'? 'What was that', you know? (Sharon)*

For Kate, it seemed that being unsure about the purpose of the group took something away from the group's ability to move on from these questions, to talking about more than what the use was:

> *We never really spoke, we tried, about what was the meaning and the point of it. But it never really went more than that, because we were questioning the use of this group, what is was bringing (Kate)*

For Ewan, the lack of clarity regarding the use and the function of the group added to the challenge of attending:

> *I mean certainly my experience of it was, well, 'what are we doing here', 'what's the function of this'? And I think you know, that's what I think was a real challenge (Ewan)*

The uncertainty about the usefulness and purpose was also echoed by Isla and Janette:

> *I wasn't really sure if it would be useful, how I would use it, how others would use it. It was the uncertainty really (Isla)*

> *This whole question of what is our purpose, why are we here, why are we doing this? (Janette)*

4.3.5 Personal and professional development

This subordinate theme aims to reflect the development of both personal and professional aspects of the self through of attending the RPG.

Whist some of the participants reflect on their observations regarding their PPD throughout the group, Gracie acknowledged that aspects of her PPD could only be realised after training, once she had gained more experience:

> *It's about knowing, having that sense of, I'm ok as a person, I'm ok, I'm actually quite good as a psychologist, I'm ok at what I do, and therefore my opinion is my opinion, and, there's that confidence in that, if that makes sense. And I didn't have that on training at all really. I don't think you can have that on training, I think that comes with experience (Gracie)*

In contrast, although Amanda reflected that there were other aspects of her training that she found personally and professionally enriching, she did not find the RPG to be something that her develop skills in either of these areas:

> *I don't know if I'm being unkind to the memory of the reflective group, but I'd say diddly squat (Amanda)*

For Ewan, it seemed that perhaps the group left him feeling rather professionally deskilled. He reflected that within his current clinical practice, he prioritises therapy work over team work, and wonders whether attending the RPG deskilled him in some respects:

> *I prioritise a lot more direct therapy work and I find that really interesting as I think it through, is it because I think I'm more inadequate in teams maybe, perhaps because of the reflective practice group….I think actually maybe that's deskilled me in some ways in teams (Ewan)*

Isla reflected that the RPG was beneficial in terms of helping her to conceptualise the importance she places on supervision, as a result of her experiences within the RPG:

> *I value supervision you know I wouldn't cancel my supervision for a lot of the, anything really like unless I was unwell or was taking annual leave. I wouldn't cancel my supervision, I would prioritise it (Isla)*

For Janette, attending the RPG impacted upon both her personal and professional development:

> *Yeah, development I think, and kind of knowing who you are as a person, as well as a psychologist (Janette)*

> *By the end of that journey, I was able to stand firmer about what I believe in, I guess stand up for the things that I believe in with more assurance and more confidence (Janette)*

For Sharon, she developed her professional skills over the course of the group to a place where she felt able to support her peers to speak up and share their own experiences:

> *Trying to support others to speak, someone would say something and know it taps into something that someone else you know, might have had an experience of and so I might say something and then say 'what do you think?' so and so try and invite people to talk (Sharon)*

Jessica seemed to develop in a way where she was firstly more able to realise her own needs, and once realised, how to go about getting those needs met. Her reflection illustrated a confidence being able to put her own needs first within the group:

> *I reached a point where I just thought 'do you know fuck it, if no-one else, if we're gonna spend all this time moaning and bitching about what it's about I actually found it really helpful I'm gonna go back to meeting my needs with this group because I've reached the decision of it's impossible to meet all 17 needs' (Jessica)*

Gracie had a similar experience of developing confidence regarding her opinions during the course of the group:

I think for me that was what reflective group enabled me to do, was to kind of be a bit more confident I guess about my own opinions, and I, what I thought was going on (Gracie)

4.4 The facilitator: A presence who was not always present

4.4.1 Overview

This superordinate theme refers to participants' experiences of the facilitation style of their RPG. There was a sense of disconnection from the facilitator, which appeared to impact upon their engagement within the group. Linked to this, there was a sense that participants would have liked something more from their facilitator, finding that it was an unusual experience to share personal experiences in the presence of a person who did not feel part of their group. The absence of a clear rationale shared at the start of the group was mentioned as something that was missing from their experience, often adding a sense of confusion as to how to use the group.

4.4.2 We struggled to connect

Seven participants experienced feelings of disconnection from the facilitator.

Kate reflected about the difficulties relating to the facilitator because they felt unfamiliar, which impacted upon the relationship that could be developed. She compared this to the relationship she felt able to develop with the course team:

Maybe we knew their relationship or the way they were a little bit, so more comfortable sharing, rather than someone who is external, which is a good idea somehow, but we didn't, we couldn't relate, or we couldn't create a relationship (Kate)

This was similar to Jessica's experience, who felt she knew her tutors well. The lack of a felt sense of who the facilitator was created an unusual experience for her. I interpreted this as a desire to feel more connected to the facilitator, in a way that was similar to her tutors:

There was no getting to know her and again being in a relatively small cohort you got to know each of your tutors relatively well. You kind of had a sense of people, so it was unusual to be in an environment where you'd be expected to speak so freely to this woman that actually we had very little idea of who she was (Jessica)

This was mirrored by Amanda, who reflected that it was an unusual experience:

I guess there was a shared view that she was quite brash or abrupt or that we struggled to connect with her or we didn't know what she made of us and it felt there wasn't, erm, I don't know it felt a bit stifled and unusual for what was intended to be a reflective space (Amanda)

Kate recalled the impact of experiencing warmth from the facilitator, after she had returned from sick leave. It seems that the facilitator checking in with her and showing warmth positively impacted upon Kate's experience:

I remember the group after I was sick she checked-in with me, I remember the facilitator being so lovely, I thought, oh she's lovely, she was very different, you know what I mean? There was something about her being warmer (Kate)

Isla and Sharon shared a similar experience in the sense that they felt so disconnected from the facilitator that at times they forgot she was there:

There were times I forgot she was there (Sharon)

Yes and I guess because she was on that side I mean we'd often just be talking and forget that she was there. She didn't get particularly involved (Isla)

Gosh I don't remember feeling at all connected to the facilitator like I remember that she's female and where she say, but I couldn't tell you who she was…I think I always felt disconnected from her (Isla)

These experiences were echoed by Janette, who experienced the facilitator as someone who rarely contributed to the group's discussion:

I felt disconnected from the facilitator for the majority of the group, but she never really said anything, except at the beginning and at the end in my general experience (Janette)

4.4.3 It felt like we were in the dark

This subordinate theme refers to the sense that participants wanted something more their facilitator. Often this referred to the facilitator taking a more active role in facilitating the group, for instance offering reflections or comments. I wonder whether there was an underlying sense that group members wanted guidance and reassurance from the facilitator about to the aims and purpose of the group. Gracie reflected that the experience of sitting with a facilitator who didn't say too much was painful:

It kind of felt like we were in the dark, not knowing who she was and that kind of thing, where she was from, and it just felt very painful sitting there every week with a facilitator that didn't say that much (Gracie)

Participants appeared to want the facilitator to share more with them, or take a more active role. For instance Jessica and Ewan shared their thoughts about wanting their facilitator to take a more active approach:

I do feel at one point that actually we as a group probably did need a bit of problem-solving from the facilitator (Jessica)

And I think perhaps the style, it would have engaged me a bit more, maybe more questions thrown out there, maybe, some interventions from the group facilitator (Ewan)

This was mirrored by Kate's experience that she felt her group needed help and containment:

> *I think we were not helped, and we needed help, because particularly in the first year when you start you're a bit lost and you know, a bit of containment would be helpful (Kate)*

Isla and Amanda both commented upon the sense of detachment they felt towards the facilitator. I wondered whether there was a sense of resentment towards the facilitation style of the group, in that they were seeking a deeper sense of connection, which never materialised as a result of the style of facilitation.

> *And even at the end it was just quickly grab her bag and leave, there was, you know there was a real sort…I'm not kind of part of this group (Isla)*

> *Someone who felt quite detached from our experience and perhaps didn't show up sometimes or when she was there she seemed to have her own agendas rather than connecting with us at where we were at (Amanda)*

> *To me she didn't feel skilled or warm or able to connect with us where we were at or able to allow us to connect with each other or help us to think about what's preventing that (Amanda)*

Sharon appeared to want her group facilitator to rescue her from uncomfortable feelings:

> *Maybe there was a desire for her to rescue us from that feeling (Sharon)*

There was some variability within Janette's reflections of the facilitator of her group. At times Janette reflected that she felt a sense of disconnection, and was left wondering what their experience might have been:

> *I think at times I felt a bit disconnected from her, didn't really feel like I knew who she was, what she was making of anything that was going on, like what her stance was, sometimes, whether she was going to say anything (Janette)*

However, she had the experience of the facilitator again not saying much, but how powerful the contribution that the facilitator had made was:

> *With all the silence, she'd really, understood the group and what we were working through, which was fascinating. Erm, she didn't have to say a lot to kind of get that message across (Janette)*

4.4.4 The kids were running the asylum

Participants' appeared to experience of a lack of expectations, aims and ideas about how to use the group, which may have helped set the frame. This was a common theme across participants. It seemed participants would have preferred more orientation and contracting within the group.

There was a sense that little heed had been paid to how the group was set up. Gracie reflected about how that experience felt:

> It was actually quite uncontaining and there were points when I felt very angry towards the facilitator for not having contained what was going on in the room (Gracie)

Janette recalled that her group spent a long time talking about what they were supposed to use the group for, as a consequence of this not being set up initially. I interpreted this absence as taking away the opportunity to talk about more meaningful material:

> The consequence of that was we then spent an awfully long time talking about nothing of any substance and a lot about what the group was for (Janette)

Amanda's powerful quote about the kids running the asylum really highlights her sense of the space being uncontaining:

> But it was almost like the kids were running the asylum because no boundaries or walls have been put in place (Amanda)

It appeared having a space at the beginning of the group to orientate them as to how they might use the group and what it might look like might have been useful. For Sharon, it seemed she would have liked to have some direction about what she might notice about the group process:

> If you're starting from scratch it's useful to have a sense of these are the things you might think about or things that you might notice (Sharon)

Isla, Kate and Ewan did not seem to recall conversations at the beginning of the group to help them conceptualise how the group might have been of use to them:

> I certainly don't remember at the sort of beginning of the reflective space, I don't remember the facilitator making any suggestion or hinting as to what might be spoken about (Isla)

> But maybe there was something about it, not preparing enough for how it may be useful or how it may be, not useful but what it may look like, I dunno, it was just a weird thing (Kate)

> I don't remember anything about what the space was for, sort of boundaries being set down at all (Ewan)

Jessica's reflection relates to her experiences of other groups, and how the absence of agreed goals and structure can impact upon a group's sense of cohesion:

> It does make me think around how much of a team's cohesion is in its sense of having a shared goal and having a structure and having

boundaries and you take a lot of that away when you open a reflective group (Jessica)

4.5 Commitment to learning: I hated it, but I still went

4.5.1 Overview

This superordinate theme encapsulates the difficult experiences that many participants described. However there was a sense that despite the difficulties, and for some, distressing experiences, they could appreciate the value. For some, the RPG served as a magnifying glass on the difficult experiences they were facing, alongside a lack of perceived safety. However, there appeared to be a commitment to attending the group.

4.5.2 The magnifying glass on difficulties

This subordinate theme refers to the RPG acting as a metaphorical magnifying glass for other difficult experiences that the group members were going through alongside the group. Amanda highlighted this by using the analogy of orange squash:

It was a microcosm of what would happen in the wider cohort outside of the group so there's almost intensified, or erm, like, orange squash you know, outside the group it's diluted but inside it was orange squash concentrate (Amanda)

For Ewan and Sharon, it appeared that they were feeling a sense of disconnection from their cohort. It seemed that the RPG highlighted this sense of isolation, and in particular gave Ewan a chance to share his experience:

I think it was in one of the reflective groups actually, I think, we were just checking where we are and I was like I feel as though I'm on my own little island over here, I'm really quite detached from the rest of you lot (Ewan)

I think reflective practice group at times magnified that sense of isolation (Sharon)

There was some variability within the experiences of participants related to the ways in which the group magnified potential difficulties:

It was like the magnifying glass on all those kind of you know the difficult things that were coming out and yeah it was somewhere to really magnify what was unsaid or what was bubbling underneath (Jessica)

Isla appeared to find attending the group a positive experience in terms of having a shared space in which to think about the things she was struggling with:

I mean I found it useful, to have a space where I could think with others about things that I might have been struggling with (Isla)

This however is in contract to Janette, who found that the group amplified feelings of weakness, which in turn made it a difficult experience:

[]…was quite negative for me as a person. It made me question myself, this idea of being tearful and that being a weakness, it kind of brought up a lot of those feelings, and so, yeah, the group itself was emotionally quite difficult (Janette)

4.5.3 Seeing the value despite the distress: I always turned up

Participants commented that despite the experience being uncomfortable, and often dreading attending, they continued to participate in the group.

Amanda commented that although it was an "incredibly frustrating" experience, there was an underlying value of wanting to be part of a conversation, and a sense that she was denying others the opportunity to talk if she wasn't there:

Yeah I always attended because coz I feel if you want to be part of a group or whatever conversation anyone wants to bring you are denying them the opportunity to talk about it if you're not there (Amanda)

There was a similar sense from Isla, Sharon and Gracie; they could appreciate that despite it being at times an uncomfortable and not necessarily easy option, there was a value in going through a difficult experience:

Which path to go down and one's easy and one's harder but the one that's easy isn't necessarily going to be the one that's better for you (Isla)

I sometimes feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable but it's not the end of the world and like no one's going to die from sitting in a room in silence for an hour feeling uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure no one's ever died from that! (Sharon)

If it felt really positive every week, I don't think that would have been as helpful as the experience that I had (Gracie)

There was a felt sense of dread prior to attending the group. However, this did not appear to stop participants attending. For Janette, attending the group was a priority, despite the dread:

But certainly at the time, I would dread going every week (Gracie)

I think it's incredibly hard, but those feelings of dread, and of heart beating rapidly, doesn't mean I don't think those thing aren't, weren't good for me, you know, to work through stuff, can be a valuable thing (Janette)

So much as I remember the dread of having to attend, and then, but also feeling like it was a priority to be there. Not everything in life that is bad is, or feels uncomfortable is bad for you (Janette)

> *I did not have the, a bit motivation to come to the group, I did come
> but it was like phewww, I was already, I felt like I had to drag myself
> there (Kate)*

Jessica reflected upon her experience of initially being excited about the prospect of the group, and commented on how this developed throughout the group process. It seems she reached a position of seeing the value of the group aside from feeling excited that it was a new experience for her:

> *Kind of seeing, seeing the value of it in, in any circumstances and not
> yeah just something that was new and exciting to do (Jessica)*

Whilst Amanda initially reflected that she always attended the group, her account was in contrast to the other participants in that although she attended the group, she found it difficult to draw out any benefit. The anger she felt I think represents that she valued the prospect of the group, and that it was disappointing to her that this wasn't realised:

> *I think I am someone who values different aspects of the course and
> can say what I really enjoyed or what needs maybe to be a bit better
> but I am struggling to think of a benefit of the group and I almost
> feeling angry about that (Amanda)*

4.5.4 It's not safe here: throwing myself into the lion's den

Participants commented that the group didn't feel like a safe space, and that it didn't feel as though there was much heed paid to ensuring the group was a safe space from the offset:

> *Reflective practice group didn't always feel safe (Sharon)*

Amanda commented that the group was used more for admin tasks, which was a result of the group not feeling safe:

> *But I think that was a cover because the group didn't feel safe; I think
> that's what we ended up using it for (Amanda)*

Amanda also reflected that she did not share anything personal as she didn't view the space as safe enough to do so:

> *I don't think I ever shared anything personal within that setting
> because it wasn't safe to do so (Amanda)*

It seemed that whilst Jessica had experimented with using the group to share her experiences, it became akin to throwing herself in the lion's den, which I think represents the risky and potentially dangerous nature of sharing within the group:

> *It wasn't this safe space anymore it was somewhere you could be
> potentially throwing yourselves into the lion's den (Jessica)*

This was similar to Ewan's experience; he had been motivated to share experiences within the group, but learned quickly that it was not safe enough for him to pursue this, leading to a process of retreating to a more safe position.

It's like well, yeah, how safe was it really, erm, and, I didn't think it was so much, and I think for some people it really wasn't that safe (Ewan)

Erm, and it's like, ok it's best not to invest into this, let's withdraw a bit, this is not safe for me to go down this route (Ewan)

Gracie and Amanda also reflected about safety. For Gracie, it seemed that this was something that was often discussed within the group, which I interpreted as a sign that this was something that the group really wanted to address, signifying it to be an important factor related to their group experience:

And then there's the thing about, the safety of the group, that came up a lot, which was around is this a safe space and actually I think a lot of us felt like it wasn't (Gracie)

Related to safety, Amanda reflected upon the lack of trust within the RPG. This is related to the group not being a safe space, which shut down potentially useful conversations as the group quickly learnt not to 'go there':

You need to have enough people you trust in the group [] in order for those conversations to happen and to be useful. And I think if you venture down that alley it's not safe and people get burned people as a group learn not to do that again and almost there's an unwritten rule about we don't go there, because we can't (Amanda)

4.5.5 What could have been

This subordinate theme refers to the participants' hopes and expectations for the group not being realised, or the group not being used in the way in which they would have liked. This often led to a sense of frustration and for some, anger. There was a sense of regret that some participants felt in relation to how they used the group. For instance not taking the opportunity to share as much as they would have liked, which was only to be realised after time and space away from the group.

Gracie used the powerful metaphor of ending a relationship to capture her sense of sadness that the group wasn't used in the way she would have liked, to go through an experience together, and come out the other side:

We'd actually gone through a lot as a group, and, it's a bit like, when you're like, when you've got a boyfriend who you've gone through something really traumatic together, and actually that means you have to break up because it's just, just so much has changed between you, that you can't get back to where you were. It's a bit like that, it's such a shame (Gracie)

In contrast, Amanda wondered on group level, if difficulties within the cohort had been addressed within the RPG, how this may have impacted upon her training experience.

I really wonder how my training experience and my peers' training experience would have been different had erm, cohort issues been

> *able to be addressed or thought about within that context. Coz I do think it would be markedly different (Amanda)*

For Sharon, it seemed that she had hopes that the RPG would be a space where she would experiment with taking a different position:

> *I'm a talker, I'm a talker, everywhere, that's, that's not a new thing for me. And I didn't want to just be the talker in that group coz it also felt like a space where I could try different things (Sharon)*

Sharon also spoke of her enthusiasm and feelings of excitement. I interpreted her account to be tinged with disappointment, that her hopes for a cohesive cohort weren't realised:

> *But I was so happy, and so relieved to be on the course and so enthusiastic and excited and nervous and my cohort, bless us, we were, you know, trying so hard to be cohesive that we just bled our emotions into each other (Sharon)*

Janette spoke of her initial hopes that the group would be a place where she would be able to consider the emotional impact of training. However, this is not something that the group was used for, which she felt negatively impacted upon her as a person:

> *The group felt initially like it could be a valuable space to talk about and think about some of the emotions that are brought up in training, very quickly it was, for whatever reason, that didn't happen so much, erm, and for me, that's something that I really, or I thought I was going to really value, and the consequence of that, was also quite negative for me as a person (Janette)*

For many of the participants, there was a real sense that their hopes for the group did not match the experience they had within the group. Both Jessica and Kate reflected that their expectations weren't met:

> *I spent most of the time thinking this is a brilliant idea this is a brilliant space this is something that is really useful and really valuable, but lots of the time I'd go there and that expectation wasn't necessarily met because other people who were more resistant to it (Jessica)*

> *I thought it would be a space to reflect upon our group dynamics and eventually at placement and within the course, but that didn't seem to come out (Kate)*

Amanda's reflections paint a picture of someone who held on to hope about how useful the group could have been for her. There was an overarching sense of disappointment in her account, in that she wished she was able to take more away from the experience:

> *I guess the feeling is disappointment. Not that I wish I'd done anything differently but ah, but it's just I wished for more from the experience….Erm, but I think over time I realised that actually there was a lot of people who struggled with that setting, that experience in*

terms of how it was set up and what we did or didn't get from it (Amanda)

Gracie's account of her group experience differed from other participants. It seemed that Gracie's expectations and hopes for the group were more in-line with her experience of it; she was faced with a facilitator who didn't say too much. Gracie herself reflected that whilst she might have been prepared for how this might feel, others in her group were not:

I was quite into psychodynamic ways of thinking erm, so I came kind of prepared for, someone who was going to sit there and not say very much. Erm, and I think other people in the group weren't really prepared for that (Gracie)

4.6 Getting through it: Finding ways to cope

4.6.1 Overview

This superordinate theme describes the ways participants found to navigate the challenging process of attending the RPG. Many referred to the stories about cohesion that the cohort told about themselves; with Sharon suggesting that this was a way of coping to help them get through.

Finding an ally referred to participants seeking out people within their cohort that they felt able to share their experiences with. For some, this involved discussing their experience of the RPG outside of the group, and offering each other encouragement to speak up. Participants discussed the use of their own personal therapy (PT) in relation to the group. For Jessica, her experience of the group helped her to realise the potential benefits of seeking her own PT, which she began as a result of her experiences.

4.6.2 That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through

Participants discussed their experience of the stories that their cohort told about themselves, or the stories that were told about their cohort. This appeared to potentially impact upon the experience within the RPG.

Kate appeared to tell a story of her cohort being avoidant; that it was a challenge for them to talk about difficult things within the group:

I always said that my cohort was avoiding, I always said that we were the avoidant cohort, it was really hard to talk about difficult things (Kate)

Janette had a contrasting experience. She spoke of the narrative that she was part of a cohesive cohort who spoke of themselves as being reflective. I interpreted her account to be illustrating that this was the story that they told themselves, though this may have served as a protective factor which prevented the group from speaking about difficulties:

You know we've got this lovely group and we're doing ok and we, we all like to think that because we're psychology trainees that we were

> *talking about all the issues as they were coming up and we thought oh we're so reflective and we're like the best cohort ever we don't need this reflective group because we're so open about what's going on (Janette)*

This is similar to Sharon's perspective, who acknowledged that whilst on the one hand she was part of a cohesive cohort, on the other hand they weren't. However I took this to mean that the story they told themselves was an important factor in maintaining this narrative, as it served to keep them safe:

> *On some levels, yes we were a very cohesive cohort and on another level no we weren't. That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through. Erm, the story we told each other (Sharon)*

Sharon's later reflection highlighted the important function the cohesive narrative played for her within her cohort. She reflected that her peers were 'the only other people who understood', and as such:

> *You don't destroy that, you don't say things that might destroy that. You don't even talk about the fear, that you could say something that could destroy that (Sharon)*

Gracie and Ewan had differing experiences regarding the stories that were told about their cohort. Gracie felt that she was part of a cohort who were viewed as being difficult, whereas Ewan felt his cohort were labelled as cohesive. Although the labels that were placed upon their cohorts were contrasting, both Ewan and Gracie reflected that these were unhelpful when it came to the RPG. It seems that for Gracie, this narrative was perpetuated by the difficult experiences she and her cohort had within the group. For Ewan, it appeared that this cohesive story paralysed his cohort from exploring potentially challenging themes:

> *There was kind of a running joke almost, that we were one of those cohorts that was really difficult for the course team, and I don't think reflective group helped that at all (Gracie)*

> *We were branded the cohesive lot, so I think people struggled with the labels that were put upon us, but also how that was brought into the room in the reflective group, it was like well what do we do here? (Ewan)*

> *People didn't want to be perceived as rejecting so also what I think is that it paralysed that group at some stage because we couldn't, erm, you know, we couldn't form closer bonds at times (Ewan)*

Kate had the experience of her cohort being labelled as superficial, which related to the content of some RPG sessions. However, in contrast to paralysing the group, this superficiality was seen as a way for the group to bond together, which was an important part of the group development:

> *Actually the facilitator told us that we were pretty superficial but that it actually meant something. That behind this what shall I wear, should we do a party, there was something about bonding together (Kate)*

Amanda's experience of not being in a cohort that was perceived to be cohesive had negative consequences. There's something in here about the contrast between the group identity of cohesion, and how that served a function, but also the individual story that she told. She told a story of herself as someone who didn't get upset, when actually it seems that she didn't let herself get upset publicly, but would do so privately:

> *…[] really struggled as a group [] even the tutors would acknowledge that but every now and again they have a cohort that just doesn't work and mine was one of those and I think that's why we were crying out by the third year like meet with us, like help us (Amanda)*

> *I think at university for the people who might want to press my buttons or even if they press my buttons I might you know get upset about that silently or separately but I think it was frustration to them (Amanda)*

Interestingly, whilst participants reflected upon their experience of their cohort's identity, Isla did not feel a strong sense of group identity with her cohort. I interpreted this to mean that in contrast to the other participants, the story she told about herself in relation to her cohort and the RPG was not something she relied on to help her navigate her experience of the group:

> *I never really thought of it as, I never kind of spoke about it as I'm in whatever cohort. I know everyone knows their cohort but I don't know whether earlier on in the days people didn't really talk about the cohort so much (Isla)*

4.6.3 Finding an ally

It appeared useful to find an ally, or safe people in which to seek support or validation. For instance, Jessica searched for others that were aligned to her way of thinking, to have discussions about who might bring things up in the next group. I interpreted this as a way to cope with the demands and difficult experiences that occurred during the group:

> *I started talking more to other people who were more aligned to my way of thinking outside of the group and we would kind of, we would have debates of gosh it's getting really awkward like can you bring it up next week (Jessica)*

Similarly, Sharon sought out others to check-in with, perhaps in an effort to seek validation regarding her experience:

> *I remember again talking to somebody else in my cohort and do you ever do that thing, and she was like, all the time (Sharon)*

Ewan used powerful language to illustrate that he clung on to another 'for dear life' during the group, which I interpreted as an illustration of the power of seeking out others that felt safe:

> *I think just picking and choosing some key people in the cohort that you get on well with, and I think that's what happened in the first year you know [] there was only us two blokes so your strength in numbers… you just go to the other guy in the group and cling on for dear life (Ewan)*

Whilst Janette did not appear to directly seek out an ally, she at times placed herself in the position of the ally to others, feeling able to speak out on behalf of others that she felt were being treated badly:

> *Sometimes if I believe people are being treated badly, or, well no always if I believe people are being treated badly, but at times in that group if I felt people were being treated badly, erm, then I would speak out about those things, about the effect I felt the group was having on people (Janette)*

I think Amanda talked from a position of not finding an ally or safe people. She spoke from a place of isolation, of being left behind when others did not attend the group, and discussed her sense that she and others were left accountable for those who weren't there:

> *…[] And we tried to raise in terms of actually we're not accountable for what other people decided to do. And so for those of us who were left behind, I felt I think a bit resentful towards those who hadn't been there because we were having to answer for them (Amanda)*

4.6.4 The use of personal therapy

This subordinate theme refers to the participants using their own PT in relation to their experiences within the RPG.

Sharon reflected that whilst she found many aspects of her training experience a challenge, she had a 'proper second year slump'. It seemed that attending the RPG was not sufficient for her to work through these difficult experiences, and as such she sought PT:

> *I was in my own personal therapy by then, erm, and I found the second year difficult (Sharon)*

Differently, Jessica discussed that her experience with the RPG enabled her to seek her own PT, something which she had been ambivalent about for some time. It seems she had a positive experience of thinking through some of the challenging situations she was facing, which appeared to be a catalyst for seeking her own PT:

> *Actually off the back of what was discussed in reflective group I did then make the decision to start personal therapy (Jessica)*

Kate reflected upon how she wanted to use the group, and what she wanted to get out of it. She questions the nature of the group, and reflects that she did not perceived the group to be a therapy space. As such, I wonder whether Kate did not want to cross a boundary, thus using her own therapy space to think through matters she did not feel able to voice within the RPG:

I think the silence was just helping me, it was a protective thing to not, maybe it would have good, but because it was not a group therapy space, it's still training, it's a professional space, I didn't feel that it was a space for that I think. My own psychotherapy was better for that! (Kate)

Gracie's experience related to taking her experience of the group and thinking about it in her own therapy:

So it was something about, erm, when there's something clearly going on but nobody's able to say what it is, I kind of felt like I was the one who would say something. []…erm, and again I used a lot of my therapy time, my personal therapy time to think about why I felt the need to do that (Gracie)

4.6.5 The spoken v the unspoken

This subordinate theme relates to participants' experiences of what they felt able to talk about in the group, and the things that were often left unspoken.

There were things that we found really easy to say and things that people did not find easy to say (Sharon)

There was a sense that the more 'real', emotional and difficult topics were much more of a challenge for members to talk about, which, for Amanda, led to a sense that her group were in an immobile position of not being able to move forward:

It just emphasises the absolute stuckness of that group in terms of we weren't able to work through any issues we had or allow ourselves to talk about them (Amanda)

When these emotional experiences were able to be explored within the group, these were perceived as much more 'real' and useful groups. This appeared to be the case for Janette:

I think they were groups where there was a….. there was more emotion, they were more emotionally expressive, if that makes sense (Janette)

Sharon reflected that it was easier for her group to use the space to discuss practical issues, which was similar to Amanda's experience of her group talking about 'life admin' as it was perceived as easier to talk about these topics:

When it came to practical thing and doing stuff and saying things, oh yes, we could do that (Sharon)

I think there was quite a few people who'd go to the life admin because it served a purpose of us not having to think too much about what we might be feeling, or think about what was going on in the group (Amanda)

Kate's reflection about her inner world illustrated the perhaps unspoken rule that may have existed that only positive experiences were able to be voiced. I interpreted Kate feeling unable to discuss anything in the group to mean that unless she had something positive to contribute, she felt she didn't have anything of value to share:

> *I didn't feel, that I, I feel like I didn't have anything to bring in, maybe because I was so crap inside, I don't know (Kate)*

Kate's later comments reflected this; she found voicing difficulties to be quite hard, as she felt it wasn't what her peers would have wanted to hear:

> *Voicing things which were quite hard, or just voicing things that people didn't want to hear, because it's just easier if you don't hear them (Kate)*

This was echoed in Jessica's experience, in that difficult experiences were almost intolerable to hear:

> *I think people just had such different ideas about it and I think it just made some people just feel so uncomfortable that it was intolerable and talking about that then was difficult to tolerate (Jessica)*

Gracie reflected that there were various 'massive' things her group experienced, including a member having health difficulties and another experiencing the loss of a family member. In Gracie's experience, the group were not able to talk about these emotionally charged experiences, which for her almost created a sense that difficult conversations were hidden away:

> *There was always stuff under the carpet that we never got out and really looked at. I think that was my frustration with it, was that we couldn't as a group use that space to go ok, there's this issue that we actually need to think about (Gracie)*

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview

The benefit of employing IPA within this study was that it allowed an in-depth exploration of participants' meaning making of a personal and lived experience (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). This process enabled me to gain an understanding of participants' experiences of the RPG. For this reason participants' experiences will be at the heart of this discussion. Consistent with the previous chapter, the five superordinate themes constructed from the results will be presented, with summaries and a consideration of how they relate to existing psychological theory and research. In line with the methodology, I have considered new literature within this chapter, allowing for potentially new findings to emerge. Clinical implications, a critique of the methodology and potential directions for future research are provided. The chapter will conclude with personal reflections and a concluding statement.

I endeavoured to present my research with a thorough and rich account of participants' experiences. I am however mindful that these experiences may not be generalizable. The research can be understood as an attempt to add to the paucity of literature exploring what it is like for individuals who attended a RPG as part of their CP training.

5.2 Returning to the research question

The study aimed to address the research question:

What are the experiences of reflective practice groups as part of doctoral clinical psychology training?

5.3 Summary of results

Five superordinate themes were constructed, which comprised of nineteen subordinate themes. Participants spoke of a wide range of experiences, which included the challenges they faced within the group, reflections related to the facilitation style, and the ways in which they navigated the experience. It is beyond the confines of this thesis to conceptualise each of the subordinate themes individually. As such, where possible, themes will be summarised and synthesised.

5.3.1 The process: there were so many layers

The variety and complexity of participants' experiences is somewhat unsurprising, given the high numbers of members within each group. The RPG attended during training may have included up to 17 people. As Jessica reflected, "…it was really difficult to meet 17 people's needs in one forum" (see **4.2.4**). Research on group dynamics helps in understanding these findings. Yalom and Lesczc (2005) suggest that an ideal size for a group is seven or eight members, with larger groups allowing less time and space for each individual members' experience. Similarly, Lennie (2007) demonstrated participants' preferred size of group was between six and eight members. When larger groups exist, group members may form cliques and subgroups

as a result of feeling disenfranchised (Ma & Teasdale, 2004). Furthermore, larger groups have been shown to experience more dissatisfaction (Leung, Waller & Thomas, 2000) and higher levels of distress (Knight et al., 2010).

There were some comments about the frequency of the sessions, with Ewan reflecting that "it felt a bit piecemeal" (see **4.2.4**). Yalom and Leszcz (2005) highlight the importance of groups not meeting too infrequently. They reflect that groups meeting infrequently, as is the case for the RPG, often have "considerable difficulty maintaining an interactional focus" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, pg. 283). The potential impact of this may be that the focus is then shifted to the life events of the members, as opposed to a focus on process.

The physical environment appeared to add to the challenge of attending the RPG. Kate reflected that using the same room for both the RPG and lectures was an unhelpful experience: "So I definitely think that the fact that it was in our building and our place, where we used to have the lectures and everything else, wasn't helpful" (see **4.2.4**). This is echoed in research from Robson and Robson (2008) and Luke and Kiweewa (2010) who comment upon the contribution the physical environment of groups can make in terms of enabling members to feel safer and more relaxed.

Given these results it might therefore be useful for course organisers, when planning the provision of groups, to be mindful that the size, frequency and location of the group may impede upon the potential for valuable experiential learning to take place.

A further theme related to participants' concerns about being negatively perceived by their peers. Mathur and Rutherford (1996) discuss the importance of socially acceptable behaviour. Socially acceptable behaviour is argued to enable individuals to gain reinforcement and acceptance from their peers. I think within this research, there was a fear of expressing 'unacceptable' emotional experiences, such as getting upset and crying. This is illustrated in Janette's reflection about becoming emotional in the group: "It was almost like being shamed in the beginning, talking about something that then made you feel, that made me tearful, that for me, kind of left me feeling almost a little bit shamed for being, it sounds ridiculous but that idea of the emotional woman, you know" (see **4.2.3**). I wonder whether the fear participants felt was related to a fear of jeopardising their felt sense of membership not only with the RPG, but also outside of the group. Ewan's reflection seems to illustrate a sense that if a negative perception is taken within the group, it might be held for the rest of training: "it's difficult coz you've only got an hour, and you've got to see these people for the next two years!" (see **4.2.3**). The theory of 'groupthink' (Janus, 1982; Yalom, 2005) is relevant to consider here. 'Groupthink' relates to the idea that one must conform to intra-group norms in order to maintain group membership. In this case, the intra-group norm may relate to not openly expressing emotion.

Ieva and colleagues (2009) described the experiences of 15 trainee counsellors. The findings highlighted that participants were also concerned about being negatively judged by their peers. However despite this, they also reported that the group experience was beneficial to their overall development. One might wonder whether the competitive nature of gaining a place on a CP training course might serve to

prevent the sharing of emotional experiences if they are perceived to be associated with feelings of incompetence (Mearns, 1997).

I think this is made more relevant given that participants reflected that there were many other demands that were placed upon them during training, which seemed to impact upon how able they felt to engage with the RPG. This is illustrated within the theme of 'you've got so much going on'. I wonder whether feeling unable to make sense of the experience because of the wider demands made group membership all the more important, particularly if there was an underlying sense that openly expressing emotion within the group wasn't safe. This is illustrated by Amanda, who reflected: "I don't think I ever shared anything personal within that setting because it wasn't safe to do so" (see **5.3.1**).

A novel finding from the research relates to participants' reflections about the personal life experiences that they contended with alongside the group, such as illness or major life events. There were mixed experiences related to this, with some participants using the group to think about their experience, whereas others felt these experiences impacted upon the extent to which they were able to engage with the group.

5.3.2 The impact: an ongoing process

This superordinate theme related to participants' realisation that the RPG was part of a bigger process of development that occurred throughout their training, and that it was difficult to disentangle how the RPG fitted within this process. It appeared difficult for participants to make sense of, or find opportunities to make sense of attending the group. There were still many unanswered questions as to the usefulness, aims and purpose of the group. I wondered if taking part in this research offered a space for the sense making that many seemed to be seeking.

Interestingly, research by Hall et al., (1999) revealed contrasting results to this research. In the long term, participants reported the most important source of learning from the whole course came from the small group experience. As discussed, within the current study, participants reflected that the RPG was difficult to disentangle from the rest of their training experience. This is in line with Lennie (2007), who comments that groups during training are not experienced in isolation; they are part of a much wider process which undoubtedly impacts upon the extent to which group members feel able to engage with the group.

It seemed being unsure about the aims and purpose of the group resulted in continued uncertainty about its usefulness. Similarly, Fairhurst (2011), found that when aims were unclear, challenges within the group process became apparent. The aims and purpose of the group being set out in a clearer fashion may have been beneficial for group process. This is echoed in the current research; Kate shared a sense that continuing to ask questions about the purpose impeded somehow on the group moving forwards: "We never really spoke, we tried, about what was the meaning and the point of it. But it never really went more than that, because we were questioning the use of this group, what is was bringing" (see **4.3.4**). These findings support previous research, suggesting that if the ambiguity about the purpose of the group is not managed well, an increase in anti-group sentiment and withdrawal may occur

(Nitsun, 1996; Fiener, 1998). As I will go on to discuss, it might be that the therapeutic model of the group, (based on Group Analysis), where aims are less defined (Foulkes, 1983), was not the best fit for trainees.

Tuckman's (1965) seminal work on groups postulates five stages of development: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Within this theory, heed is paid to the importance that group development is *epigenetic*, meaning that in order for development through the stages to occur, each preceding stage must be successfully worked through. As Yalom and Leszcz (2005) discuss, failure to work through each stage may be evident throughout the life of the group.

More recently, the theory of group development put forward by Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggests that groups will navigate three stages as they evolve and develop. The first stage relates to participants' experience of orientation, searching for meaning and dependency. It seems that if members are not well orientated about the aims and use of the group, this can lead to confusion about the rationale and relevance. Group members may become stuck in a stage of asking questions which reflect their confusion, which, as Yalom and Leszcz illustrate, can last many months into the experience. This appeared to be the case in this research. For Sharon, she appeared to be continuing the question to the use of the group many years post-qualification: "But yeah it's just even [ ] years later, you still sort of think about…'what was that'? 'What was that', you know?" (see **4.3.4**). I think this illustrates that she was unable to successfully work through this first stage of group development, and as such, continued to question the use.

Reconceptualising experiences into a coherent narrative can help shape a sense of identity and well-adjusted sense of connection to lived experience (Conlon, 2013; Crossley, 2000b). There appeared to be a lack of a sense-making opportunity for participants during the RPG, so it is understandable that there were still many unanswered questions related to the experience. This is echoed by Wigg (2009) and Fairhurst (2011), who also found that participants continued to search for meaning and understanding of the group experience after it had ended.

It is unsurprising then that many participants used the research interview as an opportunity to help process and make sense of their experience. There is a wealth of research suggesting that the process of engaging in reflection within a research interview context was a therapeutic experience (Birch & Miller, 2000; Colbourne & Sque, 2005; Murray, 2003; Nel, 2006). This is illustrated within this research, for instance by Gracie's reflection: "It's been nice to have that space to think about the particular experience, because…I haven't had to do that before" (see **4.3.3**) This is echoed by Kate, whose account demonstrates her feelings about discussing the experience in a relational sense: "I'm very happy I had the chance to talk about it actually, like I was telling you, I'm still hungry about not talking about, about processing it by myself, but then I never really have shared it with anyone" (see **4.3.3**).

Participants reflected about the ways in which they developed personally and professionally as a result of the RPG. This was characterised by a recognition of one's own needs and how to go about getting those needs met, self-belief and supporting or enabling other group members to speak. This is reflected in a wealth of existing

literature illustrating the wide ranging personal and professional benefits of attending a group during both Clinical and Counselling Psychology training (e.g. Hall et al., 1999; Ieva et al., 2009).

5.3.3 The facilitator: a presence who was not always present

This superordinate theme conceptualises experiences related to the facilitation of the group. I think it is important to remind my reader that the DTP employs various different facilitators, who are trained and experienced within a group analysis model.

For many participants, there was a sense of disconnection from the facilitator; they would have liked something more, such as a more active facilitation style. There appeared to be a lack of orientation as to how to use the group, which was mentioned as something that was missing, adding a sense of confusion regarding the aims of the group.

I wonder whether these challenges are inherent to the model of facilitation of the group. Within the theory of group analysis, the leader aims to provide minimum instructions to group members and 'a maximum of freedom in self-expression, a maximum of active participation in what is going on' (Foulkes, 1984, pg. 71). Arguably the group members working through this sense of confusion is part of the process that may contribute to therapeutic gains. The facilitators employed by the DTP are all well trained and experienced within the model of group analysis. It might be that although the facilitators are skilled in working within this model, this model might not be the best fit for trainee CPs. That said, as existing literature highlights, despite trainees often finding RPGs a somewhat distressing experience, there is still a perceived value in attending (Powell & Howard, 2006; Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010). The results of this research support this; participants appeared committed and motivated to attending the groups, despite the style or model of facilitation not necessarily meeting their expectations. It might be that in the context of the DTP, where there appeared to be many potential challenges and layers to process, a more containing facilitation style might be more suited to the needs of trainees.

These findings are mirrored in previous research. Fairhurst (2011) found that participants felt the facilitator of a RPG during CP training could have been more proactive, which was perceived as enabling them to make better use of the space. Within this research, this is echoed by Ewan, who reflected his desire for a more proactive style. This finding is consistent with the work of Nathan and Poulsen (2004), who found that participants would have liked facilitators to be more directive. This also supports previous research literature (Brown, Lutt-Elliot & Vidalaki, 2009; Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010) and theories of group development (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Nitsun, 1996). I think these findings illustrate the significance of the facilitators' role (Noack, 2002) within RPGs in a CP training context.

The theory of group development suggested by Yalom & Leszcz (2005) posits that if the early stages of the group experience is confusing or unclear, members will look to the facilitator for structure and guidance. I think this is captured within the subordinate theme of 'it felt like we were in the dark'. As Kate's comments suggest, the group were looking to the facilitator to provide this guidance, particularly early on in their training:

"I think we were not helped, and we needed help, because particularly in the first year when you start you're a bit lost and you know, a bit of containment would be helpful" (see **4.4.3**).

Participants' experiences within this study appear to supplement the findings presented by Knight et al., (2010). It seemed that having a facilitation style which was viewed as more remote was linked to participants perceiving the group to be less valuable. Participants attributed high value to having a facilitator who was more active, and who commented on group processes more often. This adds further weight to the research by Fairhurst (2011), who found that only a minority of participants described the role and style of the group facilitator as enabling them to derive value from the group.

Theories of group development suggest that the role of the facilitator is important and wide ranging, such as providing containment (Bion, 1961; Ringer, 2002), fostering acceptance (Kohut, 1984) and nurturance and security (Golding, 2008). Kate's experience of feeling nurtured by her facilitator appeared to shift the way she related to them: "I remember the group after I was sick she checked-in with me, I remember the facilitator being so lovely, I thought, 'oh she's lovely, she was very different', you know what I mean? There was something about her being warmer" (see **4.4.2**). The findings of the present study therefore add further to the evidence base regarding the importance of a containing facilitator.

Tuckman (1965) describes the second stage of group development as the 'storming stage', characterised by disagreements and conflict. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) note during this stage of group development, hostility towards the facilitator is common and almost inevitable. Members' expectations are high, and the group must go through a process of recognising the limitations of the group leader in order for hostility to diminish. The findings of this research can therefore potentially be understood in terms of an expected developmental stage of the group, although I believed there was little sense that this had been worked through.

5.3.4 Commitment to learning: I hated it, but I still went

An underlying theme across participants' experience was related to the perceived value of the group, and the commitment to attending, despite it at times being an uncomfortable experience as illustrated within the subordinate theme 'seeing the value despite the distress: I always turned up'. The subordinate theme of 'finding ways to cope' also illustrates participants' commitment to attending, and as such highlights that the RPG was a valued part of their training. In addition, there was a sense that for some participants, their hopes and expectations for the group were not realised.

A theme of safety was construed from the analysis, whereby participants often felt that the RPG was not a safe space in which to share personal experiences. This is mirrored in research by Wigg (2009), who found that in order for group development and conflict resolution to be achieved, a perceived sense of safety needed to be present. Corey and Corey (2006) comment on the importance of the presence of safety and its contribution to "constructive change" within groups (pg. 239). Lennie (2007) reflects about the importance of safety within personal development processes, which is also

illustrated by Luke and Kiweewa (2010), who found that group members were more likely to share when they felt safe.

It seems that the lack of perceived safety experienced by participants in this study was related to many of the discussed themes within this chapter, for instance fear of being negatively judged by peers, unclear aims and contracting, and disconnection from the facilitator.

Robson and Robson (2008) explored participants' experiences of a personal development group as part of Counselling Psychology training. Safety was found to be a dominant theme, with seven subthemes related to the establishment of safety. These included contracting and the group having a shared focus. The lack of a sense of safety that participants reported in the current study can therefore be understood in terms of not having a sense of the aims of the group, particularly at the start of the group when it seemed an unusual experience. Given this, it is unsurprising that participants may not have felt safe enough to share their personal experiences.

A theme of 'what could have been' was constructed from the analysis. This was related to participants' hopes and expectations for the group not being realised, or the group not being used in the way in which they would have liked. I wonder whether this is a reflection that members weren't able to voice how they would have liked the group to run differently, which resulted in underling feelings of anger and resentment. According to Yalom and Leszcz (2005), the second stage of group development is related to dominance and control, with each member attempting to establish their preferred amount of initiative. This did not appear to occur in this study; it seemed the participants felt unable to voice their frustration about how the group was being run. As discussed, group development is *epigenetic*; for development to occur, the preceding stage must be worked through. I wonder whether the findings of this study are a reflection that the groups were unable to successfully work through the first stage of development.

5.3.5 Getting through it: finding ways to cope

Participants appeared to find ways to navigate the challenges of participating in the RPG. Related to the subordinate theme of 'the spoken v the unspoken', there was a sense that there were topics participants felt more able to talk about. For instance both Sharon and Amanda commented upon the 'practical things' and the 'life admin' that was a feature of their group. There was a sense that these discussions were at the expense of the emotional experiences or group process.

Within their three stages of group development theory, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) comment that in the early stages of group development, the communication style of the group "tends to be relatively stereotyped and restricted, resembling the interaction occurring at a cocktail party" (pg. 313). However this was conceptualised as serving an important function related to process, whereby members are orientating themselves to their peers and observing how others respond to what is discussed. This might help to understand the findings of this study, in that the discussions that the participants felt able to have served the purpose of allowing members to weigh each other up and whether it is safe enough or not to speak up. However, as discussed,

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggest that groups are *epigenetic*; if this stage was not successfully worked through then the group would not be able to move forward and progress.

The second stage of Yalom and Leszcz's theory is related to power, dominance and control. Group members often have high expectations of the facilitator, and are inevitably disappointed regardless of how competent they might be. It is argued that the group reaches a point of a reality check; where they realise the limitations of the leader and hostility lessens. One might argue that this superordinate theme reflects this stage of group development. Instead of the group directing hostility towards the facilitator, the reality of the group sets in and as such participants began searching for other means to help them navigate the experience, such as finding an ally or using their own personal therapy to help them make sense of their experience.

The third stage of group development suggested by Yalom and Leszcz (2005) is characterised by the development of cohesion, where the group is observed to develop into a cohesive unit, illustrated by mutual support, intimacy and trust.

Although there is the potential for greater self-disclosure during this stage, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggest, there may also be the presence of communicational restrictions: "often the group suppresses all expression of negative affect in the service of cohesion" (pg. 319), where the group "basks in the glow of its newly discovered unity" (Hodson & Sorrentino, 1997, cited in Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, pg. 319).

Many participants discussed their experience of the stories of cohesion that were told in relation to their group. Janette's account reflected the story of cohesion that her group held onto, though I wonder whether this narrative served as a protective factor which prevented them from speaking about difficulties: "You know we've got this lovely group and we're doing ok and we, we all like to think that because we're psychology trainees that we were talking about all the issues as they were coming up and we thought oh we're so reflective and we're like the best cohort ever we don't need this reflective group because we're so open about what's going on" (see **4.6.2**). This was mirrored in Sharon's experience; the narrative of cohesion the group told about themselves served the function of keeping them safe: "On some levels, yes we were a very cohesive cohort and on another level no we weren't. That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through. Erm, the story we told each other" (see **4.6.2**).

Kate's experience differed to that of Janette and Sharon's, with her group being labelled as superficial. However this was conceptualised as a positive, in that superficiality served to help them bond together through the process of group development: "we were pretty superficial but that it actually meant something. That behind this 'what shall I wear, should we do a party', there was something about bonding together" (see **4.6.2**). Linked to group theory, this perceived superficiality may serve as an important function in terms of allowing members to gain a sense of each other, how they respond to each other, and who has similar views (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Conlon (2013) speculated that trainees are not only training together, they are forming friendships and allegiances; there is a personal element to their training experience. I

think the subordinate theme of 'finding an ally' is related to this observation. Within the current study, participants often sought an ally, or safe people in which to seek support or validation. For instance, Jessica sought out peers who were aligned with her way of thinking, who would offer encouragement to bring things up within the next group. Fairhurst (2011) observed a similar phenomenon occurring, whereby group members utilised relationships outside the group. This was seen as beneficial in that it provided an opportunity to reflect upon group processes, which contributed to finding the group a valuable experience.

In terms of the use of PT, it seemed that for Jessica, her experience within the RPG acted as a catalyst for seeking her own PT. For others, using their own therapy space was a more appropriate forum for thinking through group process and other difficulties they were facing. This can be conceptualised in terms of existing literature on personal development, including learning about the self (Moller & Rance, 2013). It seems that participants were able to identify their own needs and recognise that seeking or using existing PT might be the most appropriate forum to get these needs met.

5.4 Methodological considerations

5.4.1 Limitations and strengths

The recruitment process for this study was relatively fast, with the majority of participants responding within a few days of receiving the recruitment email. This was a pleasant surprise for me as the researcher. However I found myself curious about those who did not respond and what their experience of the RPG might have been. I wondered whether there was a self-selection bias in that only those who had strong feelings about the group had volunteered, and as such those who didn't may have had rather different experiences. Again for this reason, the findings of this study may not be generalizable and representative of all those who attended RPGs within their training.

All but one of the participants were female, all but one were British, and all were working within a small geographical area. As such, I do not consider the sample to be diverse, and found myself wondering how differently experiences would have been described had the sample been more varied.

A methodological consideration of this research related to protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of those who participated in RPGs as part of their clinical training, but who did not participate within this study. I reflected that part of the expected beginning stages of any group would be an agreement regarding confidentiality, in that the content of the group would not be shared with others outside the group. Through the process of participating in this research and through the presentation of quotes pertaining to the experience of the group there was a concern that the content or identity of other participants may be identifiable. I endeavoured to be sensitive to this, and ensured that within the quotes presented, neither the participants nor other group members or particular cohorts would be identifiable. I engaged in supervision to ensure that whilst the quotes presented were grounded in participants' experiences, they would not jeopardize confidentiality or anonymity.

IPA was employed within this research (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003). This was a strength of the study as it allowed a rich and detailed exploration of the experiences of RPGs within CP training, and was appropriate to the research question. The idiographic nature of IPA does not aim to provide definitive answers (Smith et al, 2009). Furthermore, in line with my epistemological position, this study aimed to provide constructions of participants' experiences of attending RPGs, grounded within how they described such experiences. As such, it is therefore not possible, nor was it an aim of this study to make claims about the generalisability of the findings. That said, it is hoped that it will be a contribution to the small body of literature examining the experiences of RPGs in CP training. It is hoped that it will inform and inspire future research in order for training institutions to consider further ways of developing RP competencies and experiences for future trainees.

As highlighted within this chapter, various themes that were constructed further added to the evidence base of RPG research; arguably then this could be considered to provide credibility to the findings. This study adds to the limited body of research that exists concerning the training of CPs in the UK in relation to RPGs.

To aid my reader in critiquing the methodology used within this research, I referred back to the previously discussed standards proposed by Elliot et al. (1999), an overview of which can be found in Appendix Q. Instead, I have chosen to include the first standard, *'Owning one's own perspective'*. Given the methodology of this research, I believe it would be appropriate here to reflect upon my own position, perspective and experiences and how I engaged in a process of self-reflexivity throughout.

5.4.2 Ownings one's own perspective

The first standard set out by Elliot et al. (1999) relates to me as a researcher owning my own perspective. I endeavoured to recognise my values and assumptions and how they might relate to my understanding of the data. I engaged in a process of self-reflexivity throughout this research process. The aim was to 'bracket' off my own beliefs and assumptions, in order to allow for an understanding and representation of participants' experiences.

As I have discussed, when the time came for me to choose an area to research, it seemed an obvious choice for me to focus my attention on aspects of how CPs are trained. I wonder now whether this stemmed from a lack of confidence within myself and my own abilities, and me being unable to conceptualise how I would develop into a qualified CP.

I found myself fascinated with my cohort and my experience of being in a RPG. I quickly felt a sense of belonging, and recall being open and honest with my peers about my difficulties and challenges. I would actively contribute in RPG, often feeling a sense of freedom; I felt able to reflect about my experiences of training. I began to notice the different positions my peers would take within the group. Some would remain in a silent position, whilst others (myself included) were able to show emotionally vulnerability by crying and discussing personal issues. I felt a sense of

connection to my facilitator; they illustrated to me that they were able to hold the group in mind when we were apart, and reflected common themes across our meetings.

As I approached this research, I anticipated that participants would also feel able to use the group to show emotional vulnerability. I also envisaged that they would speak favourably of their facilitators. Their experiences were different, there was a real sense of risk and unsafety in their groups, with real fear about how they would be perceived by their peers. Often participants described feeling disconnected from the facilitator, and that there was a lack of orientation as to how to be in the group.

I used both my research team and peer supervision to think about the possible impact of the different stories and experiences I witnessed. I was mindful about occasions when my experiences appeared congruent to the participants, and the times when there appeared to be differences. Participants shared there was a lack of a sense-making process in relation to their experience of the RPG, and thus a sense that there were still many unanswered questions in their minds about the usefulness and purpose of the group. I believe the interview process was allowing some of that sense-making to happen. I felt honoured to be able to join participants in conversations about their experiences, and as such, felt strongly about giving their voices justice, and not privileging the stories that connected most with me.

It is important to note here my position as a trainee CP. Whilst participants were no longer trainees, they had all been through the process of being trained at the same university, with many continuing to have ties with the course. As such, owning my position and perspective as a researcher was important, as I may have had many similar experiences. Understandably, potentially having similar experiences may have influenced the interview process and my interpretations of the data. However, I believe engaging in the process of self-reflexivity was useful in my ability to remain open to the perspectives of participants. I think the commonality of being trained at the same DTP had a positive impact upon the rapport that was established within the interview process; there was a sense of familiarity between myself and the participants. I think this reduced the potential power difference that can exist between researcher and participant, which was highlighted by Platt (1981). This is also discussed by Mercer (2007), who commented on the value of shared experiences and a shared frame of reference, and how this can harbour stronger rapport building.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

It would be useful for future research to consider the experiences of those who facilitate RPGs, where there is currently a lack of literature. Murrell (1998) conducted a phenomenological study of RPG facilitators, finding that facilitators viewed their role as managing group dynamics in order to foster an environment of trust and safety. Within CP, the only research examining the perspective of RPG facilitators is by Binks, Jones and Knight (2013), in relation to how facilitators made sense of their role, trainees' distress and how distress might have been related to outcome. Facilitators understood trainees' distress to be an inherent feature of groups, and exploring this distress was beneficial in their development. As Binks et al. (2013) suggest, because facilitators hold a differing position within a RPG, gaining an insight into their experiences may complement what is already known from a trainee perspective.

Participants in this research were all now qualified CPs, the most recent of whom had been qualified for three years, with some training around ten years prior to participating. It is my understanding that the provision of the RPG at the DTP is an evolving process; feedback is gained from trainees towards the end of their training which is used to think about how future aspects of the PPD module are developed. As such, there would be value in exploring the experiences of recently or newly qualified CPs at the DTP in order to gain an understanding of their experiences as the provision of the RPG has evolved.

A theme of safety was constructed from the results of the current study, with participants commenting that the space often did not feel safe, though little time was spent ensuring safety was developed. This mirrors previous research on the importance of establishing safety in the early stages of group development. It would therefore be useful for future research to consider the mechanisms through which safety is development and maintained within RPGs during CP training.

It would be important to replicate the findings from the present study, given the lack of literature specifically exploring the experiences of CP trainees within this area. As discussed, this research solely recruited participants from one DTP. It would therefore be useful and interesting to replicate not only with the current DTP, but also with other training courses. This would help to enhance the validity of the findings, and add to the small body of literature within this area. In addition, it might be useful for research to compare differing styles of facilitated groups during training, from a range of therapeutic models to gain an understanding of how these are experienced.

5.6 Implications and recommendations

In their recent report, the BPS outlined ten competencies that trainee CPs should develop throughout their training, which included reflection and self-awareness (BPS, 2015). Furthermore, embedded within the BPS (2015) standards for CP training is a drive towards both the scientist-practitioner models and reflective-practitioner model. The benefits of developing RP skills have been extensively explored in the research literature. It is therefore recommended for training courses to give careful consideration to how these skills are further nurtured and developed.

As discussed, RPGs are regarded as the most favoured and beneficial learning methods for addressing trainee CPs' PPD needs. This study, alongside prior research described that although the experience was at times difficult or challenging, there appeared to be a perceived value in attending such groups. Training courses across the UK should therefore consider the implementation of RPGs into their PPD curriculum if they do not already do so.

Course organisers should give consideration to the frequency, location and size of future RPGs. This study, alongside prior research points to the perceived benefits of smaller, more frequent groups, in environments that differ to the usual teaching environment.

Furthermore, in order for RPGs to be better conceptualised and made use of, organisers should consider how the groups are introduced to trainees, with a clear rationale which is in line with the therapeutic model of the group. Research has

consistently suggested that the absence of a clear sense of the aims and purpose of RPGs can impact upon how it is used.

A theme from the current study related to participants' experience of the facilitation style of the group. It might therefore be useful for course leaders to consider the style and theoretical background of the groups they offer, and should perhaps consult trainees as to their preferred style of facilitation in order for RP competencies to be developed. It might be useful for trainees, across the three years of the programme, to have the opportunity to be part of different styles of RPG, for instance Gestalt groups (Feder & Cole, 2013) or Humanistic approaches (Page, Weiss & Lietaer, 2002).

5.5. Personal reflections

As I began this thesis by offering some commentary on how it was personally significant for me, it makes sense to me to offer some additional reflections now the journey is coming to an end.

Completing this research on an aspect of how CPs are trained and developed, which is of great interest and personal significance to me, has been incredibly rewarding.

I began the research in what I would describe as an 'absolute novice' position. Never before had I undertaken such a large piece of research; my prior experience was centred on mixed-methodologies. As such, my relationship with a wholly qualitative design has grown rapidly and intensely. Approaching IPA was for me, a bit like sitting on a roller-coaster (I'll preface this by mentioning that I'm not the biggest fan of roller-coasters). At times I felt grateful for the safety which came from the structure and guidance that was offered by such authors at Jonathon Smith. I felt glad that some form of instruction was available, at times thinking that this is all I would need to get through.

However, and much like a roller-coaster, there were times during the ride that I despaired; feeling as if I was going to fall off the track that would lead me to something which might resemble some form of resolution. At other times I felt completely and utterly stuck, like the ride had come to a halt and I was trapped under the seat. For days I writhed around on the floor amongst a sea of giant pieces of sugar paper, completely consumed by the beautiful quotes of the participants. The roller-coaster soared as I began to 'pull my data up', then at once I went down the dipper, getting closer again to the participants' words.

The process was hugely challenging for me, though at times, just like little rays of sunshine, feelings of pride began to shine through. During the process, I began to realise just what a hugely complex and painstakingly detailed experience this was to be for me. I needed to handle my data with love and care, as the participants had been so generous to share their wonderful reflections with me.

At times breakthroughs occurred as subordinate themes sprung to life, and with it a feeling of exhilaration. At other times I felt panic and doom, not knowing which direction the ride would throw me in next.

When one visits a theme park, those people who have chosen to ride the roller-coaster bound off the ride with a sense of adrenaline, joy and of being alive. I invite my reader

to observe this when they next make a visit. I have to say, my feeling as I near the end of my ride is very similar. My adrenaline is flowing. I feel inspired by this experience and am full of hope that I can continue to be actively involved with research as both my personal and professional journeys continue.

At times, I am saddened to say, I lost my way. I began comparing my work to that of my peers, who were working with people who had experienced trauma, loss and an array of other difficult experiences. I was left feeling like my work and I were inadequate, redundant and not making much of a contribution.

I reflected back to a group task during my training, where my peers and I were faced with a sense of hopelessness about changing the world for the better. Together we co-constructed the idea of the psychology pebble. Each of us has a pebble, and have the power to throw it out there to the world. This pebble, regardless of its size, shape or speed, will create ripples which we may never witness. We may never find out who these ripples touch, or how significant they one day might be. I have to hold onto the hope that this is my psychology pebble. It may not be huge, but I hope it will create a ripple. I have to hold onto the hope that my ripple might contribute to even the smallest amount of positive change in the world.

5.7 Conclusion

This research presents the findings of qualitative research which adopted an IPA methodology. The research aimed to explore the experiences of RPGs during CP training. Whilst it is important to be mindful that the research does not speak for all now qualified CPs, it aimed to provide a rich, in-depth and meaningful account of what it was like to be part of a RPG during training. The experiences of participants were varied and complex; being part of the RPG was at times a challenging experience, which seemed to be linked to facilitation style, a lack of sense of safety and not being able to make sense of the group experience at the time. That said, participants appeared committed to attending the group despite these challenges. It is hoped this research will contribute to the evolving development of the RPG both at the DTP and wider training courses.

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Appendix A- Inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic review papers

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for systematic literature review

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Peer review	Non-peer reviewed
Literature relevant to current research	Literature not relevant to the current research
Available in English	Not available in English
Papers which provide an insight into reflective practice group experiences related to clinical psychology training or counselling training	Studies involving reflective practice groups in nursing, medicine or other professional groups

Appendix B- Systematic Literature Review flowchart

Records Identified and retrieved through database searching

(PsycArticles n = 49)
(Scopus n = 359)
(PubMed n = 34)

N = 442

Duplicates n = 3

Titles & abstracts screened following removal of duplicates

N = 439

Articles selected for full text review

N= 48

Excluded = 394
Reasons for exclusion
Non-peer reviewed original research articles
Research not focusing on clinical psychology training/counselling training
Not English

Articles selected for full text review

N= 8

Excluded: 40
Reasons for exclusion
Upon further reading the articles appeared not to be relevant to current research

Appendix C: Overview of papers within systematic literature review

Authors, year & Title	Type & Aim	Participants	Method	Results and Conclusions	Pros and Cons
Moller & Rance. (2013). The good, the bad and the uncertainty: Trainees' perceptions of the personal development group	Mixed methods. To explore the perceptions of trainee counsellors of a personal development group during training.	Twelve participants were enrolled on a counselling psychology doctorate, 13 were counselling diploma trainees. All participants were required to attend a year-long, weekly, open-agenda 90 minute personal development group.	Qualitative, open-ended questionnaires were developed, comprising of five questions: perceptions of the purpose of the group, anticipated difficulties, how the training programme would support them, scope of participation and demographic details. Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis.	Three main themes emerged from the data: 'The good', 'The bad' and 'The Uncertainty'. The participants held mixed and somewhat conflicting views about the group. Some participants experienced the group as positive; facilitating learning about the self and clients and the development of counselling skills. For other participants the group elicited negative emotions which may impact negatively upon learning.	Adds to the small body of research on groups during clinical training. No comments regarding the validity of the questionnaire. Small sample size. Trainees from only one training institution. Self-report bias.
Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby. (2010). Exploring the Personal and Professional Impact of Reflective Practice Groups: A Survey of 18	Quantitative-Analytic survey design. To investigate the personal and professional impact of reflective practice groups for former clinical psychology trainees.	One hundred and twenty four qualified clinical psychologists.	A reflective practice group questionnaire (RPGQ) was developed.	Factor analysis yielded two underlying constructs: 'value' and 'distress'. The majority rated the RPGs as valuable for PPD and learning about group process. Just under 50% reported the groups distressing. Some trainees were able to view the challenges positively though one-sixth were not. Potency of facilitation and group	Adding to limited body of research into RPG during DClinPsy training. Relatively large sample size. Trainees from only one training course. Self-selection bias.

cohorts from a UK Clinical Psychology Training Course.				size predicted levels of value and distress. Conclusions: keep group sizes within an average of 10–13, utilize facilitators with sufficient training, ensure additional methods of reflective practice development are available	
Luke & Kiweewa. (2010). Personal growth and awareness of counselling trainees in an experiential group	Qualitative. The aim was explore the experiences of counsellor trainees who participated in an experiential group as part of their training. To begin to bridge a gap in the literature regarding how trainees identify and develop personal growth.	Fourteen masters level counselling trainees. Thirteen female, one male. Participants' ages fell between 20 and 60. The groups were 13, 90 minute groups across one semester.	Data were collected through one to two page weekly reflective journals submitted by each trainee. Data was analysed using Grounded Theory. Journals were analysed across four phases (e.g., weeks 1–3, 4–6, 7–9, 10–13) to permit any developmental themes to emerge without presupposing when or how these might appear.	Thirty factors over four phases of the group emerged as significant to participants' personal growth as a result of attending the group. Factors were grouped as interpersonal, intrapersonal, group-as-a-whole and supra-group. Trainers of counsellors advised to attend to the complexity involved in processes related to experiential group and develop strategies to assist trainees in development of their personal growth and awareness	Adds to the small body of research regarding trainee experiences of experiential groups. Researchers did not impose a priori assumptions about the factors significant to personal growth and awareness and examined trainees' experiences over time. Results provided a much needed data-driven framework The research question and methods for data collection arguably methodologically incongruent. Relatively small sample size for grounded theory through

					which processes within groups can be considered.
Ieva, Ohrt, Swank & Young (2009). The impact of personal growth groups on master students' counsellor and personal development.	Qualitative. To explore the experiences of trainees who attending a group as part of their training course.	Fifteen masters level trainee counsellors, attending 13, 90-minute group sessions over the course of one semester.	Demographic information was collected prior to interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first two authors. Data was analysed using open coding, axial coding, and process coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).	Three main themes were identified: personal self-awareness and development, professional development, and program requirements. Eight sub categories were identified, which included relationships, personal growth and group facilitators. All participants reported some personal or professional progress as a result of attending, for instance development of communication skills and development of own personal style.	Small sample size. Sample was not diverse (e.g. from one training course, mainly Caucasian women). The authors question how generalizable the findings are to other groups. The authors comment that they could have included a measure to investigate how trainees developed over the course of the group.
Robson & Robson. (2008). Explorations of participants' experiences of a Personal Development Group held as part of a	Qualitative. To extend understanding of student counsellors' perceptions of participation in personal development (PD)	Eleven trainee counsellors attending weekly, one hour groups (the groups did not have a defined task).	Participants in two counselling training programmes were asked to keep an anonymous reflective journal about their experiences of a personal development group for a period of around five months.	Twelve major themes emerged from the data, including safety, connections/awareness of other group members, detachment/withdrawal from group, search for who to be, anger in group, and response of group to one member dominating.	Adds to the small body of literature pertaining to groups as part of therapist training. One of the authors had the dual role of researcher and tutor. The results were limited to the theme of safety only, without

counselling psychology training group: Is it safe in here?	groups during their training.		The data was analysed by both authors using Thematic Analysis.	The theme of safety was focussed upon. Safety appeared to be integral- participants needed safety before they felt able to learn about themselves or others. Having a shared purpose for the group and the physical environment were also important factors.	further exploration of the other themes. The impact of the dual role may have influenced the way in which the data was analysed.
Lennie. (2007). The role of personal development groups in counsellor training: Understanding factors contributing to self-awareness in the personal development group.	Mixed methods approach. To understand the use of groups within counsellor training, which factors contribute to self-awareness, and perceptions of self-awareness.	Eighty eight trainee counsellors who attended personal development groups throughout their training. Thirty hour intro courses; year-long part time certificate; or diploma level counselling courses.	Focus groups were held with a selection of trainees, which were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were analysed using Grounded Theory analysis. A questionnaire was used to measure both trainees' perceptions of their own self-awareness and the extent to which the contributory factors were felt to be both present and helpful in their current PD group.	Trainees were more comfortable in the group at the start of their training and less comfortable at the end, although there was no clear relationship between there being a better 'comfort fit' and increased self-awareness.	Social desirability of questionnaire methods. Using focus groups to investigate the experience of the group resulted in parallel processes emerging; thus restricting the depth and quantity of data that was shared The researcher acknowledges the limited validity and reliability of the questionnaire used. The research design was cross-sectional and data collection methods used a structured, closed ended

					format, potentially confounding findings
Nathan & Poulsen. (2004). Group-analytic training groups for psychology students: A qualitative study.	Qualitative. To explore the experiences of an analytic group, including expectations, positive and negative experiences, relationship to the group leader and other participants.	12 psychology students who attended 25-30 weekly, 90 minute group-analytic groups.	The participants were interviewed twice, one week apart, within one month of the group's termination. The first interview lasting around one hour, the second was shorter for follow up questions. The transcribed interviews were analysed using Grounded Theory analysis.	Three categories emerged from the data: The aims of the group; groups at the university, professional experiences (professional outcomes, relevance of group as study element.	Due to a lack of resources, not all interviews were transcribed (detailed notes of interviews were reviewed alongside recordings). Small sample size. No mention of credibility checks. No mention of the authors theoretical assumptions.
Hall, Hall, Harris, Hay, Biddulph & Duffy. (1999). An evaluation of the long-term outcomes of small-group work for counsellor development.	Quantitative. To investigate what skills had been enhanced by the group, feelings generated within the group, perceived casualties of the group and whether the group was perceived as relevant over time.	92 graduates of either masters degree or diploma in human relations or counselling studies. Either one year or two year course over a 21 year period. The groups were mandatory, based in Rogerian principals. Ten, three hour sessions.	A questionnaire was developed asking for experiences of the group. It was sent out to 334 graduates, with 92 respondents. The questionnaire included scaled responses (e.g. answering from a Likert type scale), or responses chosen from a list (e.g. a list of general counselling skills).	There appeared to be positive outcomes from attending the group. Participants rated their experience as positive, which was regarded as useful both personally and professionally. Skills which counsellors found difficult, such as challenging, sitting with silence and giving feedback were said to be developed during the group.	Fairly large sample size over a lengthy period of time.

Appendix D- Table evaluating papers for systematic review

Evaluation of qualitative research papers found in systematic literature review

Guideline > Paper	Owning one's perspective	Situating the sample	Grounding in examples	Providing credibility checks	Coherence	Accomplishing general vs specific research tasks	Resonating with reader
Moller & Rance, 2013. The good, the bad and the uncertainty: Trainees' perceptions of the personal development group.	The authors describe their philosophical assumptions. Also they acknowledge their different positions: one author was a counsellor trainer, whilst the other was a counselling psychology trainee.	Basic demographic details about the participants provided: age, gender, and ethnicity and whether a counselling psychology or counselling diploma trainee.	The authors provide numerous specific examples to highlight each theme from the thematic analysis	Coding of themes was initially done separately, then both by researchers to enhance credibility and dependability of findings	The research is well constructed and follows a temporal flow throughout. The results are in three distinct sections, followed by the discussion.	The authors aimed to explore the beliefs and perceptions of trainees, without hoping to achieve a specific goal or aim.	The paper is well written and brings to life the experiences of the participants through the use of examples throughout the results section.
Luke & Kiweewa. (2010). Personal growth and awareness of counselling trainees in an experiential group.	The authors do not provide information regarding their own assumptions or theoretical	Basic demographic details about the participants were provided,	Throughout the results the authors provide specific quotes to	Triangulation and peer debriefing used for credibility of findings. Authors wrote	Emergent themes from four stages of analysis are well set out and reflected upon in results.	The experiences of trainees were captured through interviews with trainees.	The paper created resonance with the reader. The authors showed care had been taken to consider strengths and limitations of the study.

	orientation. No evidence of experiences or training relevant to the research.	including age, gender and ethnicity. Also previous experience of groups noted.	highlight each factor.	independent field notes and memos.	Discussion and implications are well set out.	Limitations of extending the findings have been considered.	
Ieva, Ohrt, Swank & Young (2009). The impact of personal growth groups on master students' counsellor and personal development.	The authors acknowledge their position and set out their assumptions related to the groups. The authors met throughout the research to discuss their assumptions and beliefs in an attempt to bracket prior assumptions.	Basic demographic information provided about participants (age, gender, and ethnicity) and stage of training.	Direct participant quotes are provided throughout the results section	Three authors transcribed the interviews, all four authors checked for accuracy. Member checking occurred with a focus group of 13 of the participants.	The research was set out in a clear, comprehensive manner. Themes in results were clearly illustrated. However some of the subcategories did overlap.	Limitations of extending the findings to other groups are well considered and acknowledged in the discussion section.	The paper was easy to read. Material was presented in a way the reader could make sense of it and judge credibility. Limitations are well considered.
Robson & Robson. (2008). Explorations of participants' experiences of a Personal Development Group held as part of a counselling psychology	The first author stipulates their profession and personal interest in the research. Readers are orientated to the second	No demographic information provided (age, gender, ethnicity). No comments on the stage of	Although 12 major themes were revealed, the paper focused on one of these, safety. Numerous	'Some' of the data was analysed by both researchers, who compared themes and discrepancies	The themes and subthemes are presented clearly in tables. The authors stipulate using thematic	Only eleven participants out of a possible 39. The aim was to explore participants' experiences of the group,	The reader has a limited understanding of the results as only one major theme was discussed. The discussion was theory heavy and intertwined with quotes which was confusing to read.

training group: Is it safe in here?	authors' position. The first authors' dual role of researcher and tutor was considered. Theoretical orientations were not discussed.	training the counsellors were at, or prior experiences of attending a group.	examples were provided, however all related to only one theme. All other themes were not discussed.	were negotiated.	analysis, but discuss IPA. The results section is sparse. Quotes are limited to the discussion.	and although 12 major themes were found, consideration only given to one.	
Nathan & Poulsen. (2004). Group-analytic training groups for psychology students: A qualitative study.	The authors do not state their theoretical orientations or assumptions. They do not provide details regarding personal interest or experience related to the groups.	The authors did not provide any demographic details about the participants.	There is a lack of direct examples provided throughout to support the emergent themes.	Coded interviews were member checked by both authors. However no other consideration given regarding measures of credibility.	The research was hard to follow without the use of sub-headings to orientate the reader.	The primary focus was the differences in participants' personal aims for the group, the impact of of the group process, and learning through the group experience.	The paper was difficult to read without the use of sub-headings, information about the participants and the theoretical orientation of the researchers.

Evaluation of quantitative research papers found in systematic literature review

Guideline / Paper	Explicit scientific context and purpose	Appropriate methods	Respect for participants	Specification of methods	Appropriate discussion	Clarity of presentation	Contribution to knowledge
Hall, Hall, Harris, Hay, Biddulph & Duffy. (1999). An evaluation of the long-term outcomes of small-group work for counsellor development.	Intended purposes were set out, for e.g. whether the group was perceived as relevant to clinical practice. Adequate summary of relevant literature given.	The questionnaire method was appropriate for the large set of participants for the study (graduates over a 21 year period).	No comment on ethics, i.e. informed consent, confidentiality. No mention of potential harm, despite asking about potential psychological damage as a result of attending the group	Specific questions from the survey were provided, however the methods through which participants were recruited were not (i.e. postal votes, how long respondents had, reminders sent etc.)	Results and discussion presented simultaneously. Limitations of the study are acknowledged.	Well organisation presentation for ease of read. Good use of tables to illustrate data. Subheadings used to clarify sections.	The research makes a contribution related to the ways PPD is developed with counsellors. Although methodological flaws, contributions are made for the inclusion of groups within this training.

Evaluation of mixed methods papers found in systematic literature review

Guideline Paper	Explicit scientific context and purpose	Appropriate methods	Respect for participants	Specification of methods	Appropriate discussion	Clarity of presentation	Contribution to knowledge
Lennie. (2007). The role of personal development groups in counsellor training: Understanding factors contributing to self-awareness in the personal development group.	The context for the research is well summarised, which leads into a clear rationale, including the three research questions.	Combination of focus group and questionnaires. Grounded theory analysis of focus group transcriptions. No mention of methods taken.	Consent was gained to participate in the study. Other ethical issues were considered and guidelines adhered to (e.g. right to withdraw, researcher contact details provided).	No mention of process of grounded theory analysis given. No mention of how questionnaire data was analysed. Examples of questions asked not provided.	Limitations considered in discussion and elsewhere in the paper. Challenges of the research were well considered.	Good use of major and minor subheadings, which creates ease of read. Tables well set out and labelled. The introduction orientates the reader to the rationale for the research.	Low response rate impacts how generalizable results are.
Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby. (2010). Exploring the Personal and Professional Impact of Reflective Practice Groups: A Survey of 18 cohorts from a UK	Aims and research objectives clearly stated. Lack of literature in the area	The methodology (development of a questionnaire) is appropriately related to the	Ethical approval is mentioned. Anonymity and confidentiality respected.	The methods through which data was gathered was clearly stated. Procedures	Limitations acknowledged, alongside clinical implications. Recommendations for future research provided.	The paper is well written, concise and easy to read. Good use of subheading	The lack of research in this area is clearly stated and this research makes a strong contribution to a sparse field.

Clinical Psychology Training Course.	considered and as such the context for the research is given.	objectives of the study.	Participants were asked consent to take part.	for analysis provided.		s. Tables clearly set out and compliment the text.	

Appendix E- Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Amy Lyons
CC	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
FROM	Dr Richard Southern, Health and Human Sciences ECDA Chairman
DATE	28/7/16

Protocol number: **LMS/PGR/UH/02451**

Title of study: The experiences of reflective practice groups as part of doctoral clinical psychology training: an IPA study

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your

School.

This approval is valid:

From: 28/7/16

To: 30/9/17

Please note:

Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1. Should you amend any aspect of your research, or wish to apply for an extension to your study, you will need your supervisor's approval and must complete and submit form EC2. In cases where the amendments to the original study are deemed to be substantial, a new Form EC1 may need to be completed prior to the study being undertaken.

Should adverse circumstances arise during this study such as physical reaction/harm, mental/emotional harm, intrusion of privacy or breach of confidentiality this must be reported to the approving Committee immediately. Failure to report adverse circumstance/s would be considered misconduct.

Ensure you quote the ▮▮ protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Appendix F- Recruitment email

Dear Clinical Psychologists,

My name is Amy Lyons and I'm a second year trainee at ███ .

My major research project is looking at the experiences of reflective practice groups during clinical psychology training. There is limited published research in this area; I am therefore hoping to expand upon the existing research literature.

I'm specifically interested in recruiting Clinical Psychologists who trained at █████████ , who took part in reflective practice groups as part of their clinical training.

I would therefore like to invite you to consider participating in my study, which would involve a face to face interview lasting approximately one hour, at a place and time that is convenient for you. I have attached a participant information sheet which provides further details of the study and what participation would involve.

The project has been awarded full ethical approval from the University of █████████ Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: LMS/PGR/UH/02451).

Thank you in advance for your support. Please feel free to contact me at ██████████████ if you have any questions, or indeed if you are interested in taking part.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With very best wishes,

Appendix G- Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study:

The experiences of Reflective Practice Groups as Part of Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training: an IPA Study.

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the research that is being done and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Do not hesitate to ask me anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being carried out by Amy Lyons, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, as part of a Doctoral qualification in Clinical Psychology. The study is supervised by ███ ██████████ (█████████████████ and Chartered Clinical Psychologist) and ███████████████ (Chartered Clinical Psychologist).

I, Amy Lyons, have both personal and professional interests in the topic of the study having engaged in reflective practice as part of my training.

The study has received full ethical approval by the University ███████████ Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number: LMS/PGR/UH/02451).

What is the purpose of this study?

There has been a limited amount of published research exploring clinical psychologists' experiences of attending reflective practice groups throughout their training. Of the limited research that has been conducted none has specifically addressed the experiences of those trained at the ██████████████████████.

The aim of the project is to explore how clinical psychologists narrate their experience of attending reflective practice groups during their clinical training. In

addition, it aims to explore the narratives that are held in relation to communication and relatedness, and personal and professional development.

Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?

You are eligible to take part in the research if you trained as a clinical psychologist at the ████████████████. You are required to be currently be working as a clinical psychologist for at least one year post qualification. There are no restrictions regarding the type of service you work in. There are no age restrictions regarding taking part.

What if I am interested in taking part?

If you are interested in taking part you can contact me by telephone/email (contact details below). We can then discuss any further questions you may have about the study. Once we have spoken you can decide whether you would like to take part in the study.

If you change your mind at any time during the study you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw from the study at a later time, your data will be destroyed. You can withdraw your data from the study up to 3 months after taking part in the study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

As a participant in the project once you have agreed to consent to take part in the study, the first thing to happen will be to arrange a face-to-face interview with me, the researcher. It is anticipated the interview will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you.

The interview will focus on your experience of communication and relatedness in relation to attending reflective practice groups during your clinical training. In addition, it will explore how this may have impacted upon your personal and professional development. Your interview will be audio recorded and then

transcribed by me. In the event that I use a transcription service I will ensure to use a reputable service that will have to sign a confidentiality agreement. The data will be stored on a password protected and secure computer.

I will then analyse the data. I will use a method of analysis which will involve using direct quotes from your interview, however all names will be changed and all identifiable information will be removed to ensure confidentiality.

At the end of the interview we can have a debrief to discuss your experience of the interview, and any questions you may have.

Where will the interview happen?

The interview will happen at a place and time convenient to you e.g. your home address, or a private room at ████████████████████████.

What happens if you change your mind about taking part?

If at any stage before or during the interview you decide you no longer wish to continue, you are free to withdraw. You do not have to give a reason for your decision. Moreover, you are free to withdraw your participation and use of data following the interview.

Is what I say in the interview confidential?

Yes, it is. If you agree to take part in the study your information will be stored in a safe locked location which will only be accessible by the researcher named above. All data information will be strictly confidential and anonymised, which means that no names or identifying features will be kept with any of the study information. A randomly assigned coded number and pseudonym will be given to each participant and stored on a password protected document on a secure computer.

The project may be published in a research paper and if your stories are used in the research your identity will be anonymised by changing your name and other details that would identify you.

The only time that information cannot remain confidential is if there are serious concerns that you or someone is at risk of harm.

What are the possible disadvantages, risks or side effects of taking part?

The possible disadvantages, risks or side effects to all participants have been considered. It is unlikely but it may be possible that you may find the interview process distressing, for example, talking about experiences of attending reflective practice groups. In order to protect your welfare, I will take all measures to ensure that you are in the same state as before the interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of taking part in the research are to help understand the experiences of clinical psychologists who trained at the ████████████████. Specifically, the experience of reflective practice groups and how these experiences may impact upon personal and professional development throughout training and once qualified. It is an opportunity to have your experience heard and understood and may be useful for the university in terms of thinking about the usefulness of this part of the training programme. This will be helpful for researchers, professionals of scientific and academic communities, and to the profession of clinical psychology.

What will happen to the data collected within this study?

After all the data is collected, it will be analysed and the study findings will be written in a thesis for doctoral-level research. An article will then be written and submitted to a relevant academic psychology journal for publication. There will be no identifying features or names written in the thesis or academic journal. There may be some direct quotes cited from the interview, however, anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by altering any identifying information.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the ████████████████ (School of Psychology) Research Ethics Committee. The ████ protocol number is LMS/PGR/UH/02451.

What happens next?

If you decide, after reading this information and asking any questions that you may have, that you would like to take part in the study we can arrange a convenient time to meet for the interview to take place. I will also ask you to read and sign a consent form and provide some basic demographic information.

If you would like further information or would like to discuss the details and specifics of the project personally please get in touch with me.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

For further information about this research please contact

Name: Amy Lyons

Email address: ███████████████

Telephone number: ██████████

Supervisor: ████████████

Email address: ███████████████

Address: ██

██████████████████████████████████

If you feel that you need some additional support after participating in this study, please contact your GP. The contact details for the Samaritans and MIND are included below:

- Samaritans: 116 123
- Mind 0300 123 3393

Although I hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University Secretary and Registrar.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix H: Participant consent form

CONSENT FORM EC3

Registration protocol number: LMS/PGR/UH/02451

Project title: The experiences Reflective Practice Groups as Part of Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training: an IPA study

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study

2. I understand what my involvement will entail and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction

3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw up to 3 months after the interview has been conducted

4. I understand that all information obtained will be confidential

5. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject

6. Contact information has been provided should I wish to seek further information from the investigator at any time for purposes of clarification

7. I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

Participant's Name ………………………….................

Participant's Signature ……………………………………….   Date …………………

Statement by Researcher

- I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this participant without bias and I believe that the consent is informed and that they understand the implications of participation.

Researcher's Name   ………………………….............

Researcher's Signature ……………………………….   Date …………………

Appendix I- Interview Guide

When you volunteered for this study, can you tell me about what you had in mind?

Can you tell me about the group you attended?

What was your experience of the group over the 3 years? Prompts: did it change, catalyst for change

Can you tell me about the benefits/challenges for you of attending the group?

Over the 3 years what emotional impact did being in the group have on you/others?

Over the 3 years what were your experiences of feeling connected or disconnected to others in your group? Prompts: Within yourself/others/facilitator?

Can you tell me about times when feelings of being connected or disconnected might have influenced your position in the group?

How did you and others communicate in the group? Prompts: facilitator

Over the 3 years what impact did your communication style have on others in your group (and theirs on you)? Prompt: facilitator

Can you tell me about your experiences of reflective practice in relation to your clinical work since you've qualified? How might this have changed over time?

What did you learn about being in a group that has helped you in your clinical work?

What metaphor comes to mind when you think of your group? Of yourself in the group

How did your earlier learning experiences with others influence your experiences of communication and relatedness in the group? Prompt: family, peers, teachers/employers

What was the interview like for you?

Is there anything you want to ask?

Appendix J- Participant Debrief Form

<u>Participant Debrief Sheet</u>

Thank you very much for taking part in this study. This sheet contains information about the study for you to take away and refer to.

Title of the Research
The experiences of Reflective Practice Groups as Part of Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training: an IPA study

DEBRIEFING INFORMATION:

Thank you very much for participating in my project. By sharing your own experiences, it is hoped that your story will help us gain insight into experiences of communication and relatedness within reflective practice groups during clinical training at the ████████████████████. It is hoped that an in depth insight will be gained that will help to inform future research and the development of the training programme.

The information you provided will be treated as confidential, and after analysis, the material will be destroyed. However, in case of publication, the material will be kept under strict confidentiality for 5 years (in line with ████████████████████ regulations). As a participant, you have the right to withdraw the information you have provided at any time.

If you require any further information or wish to be informed of the outcome of this study please do not hesitate to contact me:

Amy Lyons   ████████████████

Or my supervisor:

████████████   ████████████████

Department of Clinical Psychology, University of ████████████
████████████████████████████████, Tel: ████████████
Thank you for participating in this study.

Further support
It is hoped that you have not experienced any significant distress as a result of this interview but if you have it may be helpful to seek further support from family, friends, your supervisor, colleagues or an organization such as the Samaritans 08457 909090

Thank you very much for your participation, your contribution to this study is invaluable.

Amy Lyons
Trainee Clinical Psychologist, ████████████████████

Appendix K: Transcription Service Confidentiality Agreement
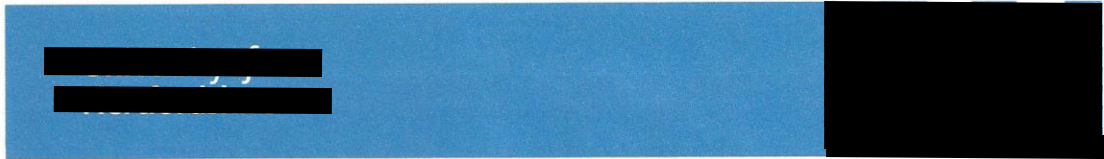
Transcription Agreement

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

[REDACTED]

Transcription confidentiality/ non-disclosure agreement

This non-disclosure agreement is in reference to the following parties:

Amy Lyons (Discloser)

And

[REDACTED]

The recipient agrees to not divulge any information to a third party with regards to the transcription of audio recordings, as recorded by the discloser. The information shared will therefore remain confidential.

The recipient also agrees to destroy the transcripts as soon as they have been provided to the discloser.

The recipient agrees to return and or destroy any copies of the recordings they were able to access provided by the discloser.

Signed:.......................

Name:.......................

Date:.....5/40/16............

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE   POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE

Major Research Proposal   Version 1

Appendix M: An example of how themes were developed from Sharon's transcript

Emergent themes for Sharon

Lack of sense making process, searching for this   Doesn't remember seeing the evidence base about it Really difficult

Impact of time   never really made sense of it   still searching for answers?   Questions! Why? How?

Seeing the value despite the uncertainty   Feeling overwhelmed   There's so much else going on

Ambivalence- would they have wanted things to be any different?   Silence   Feeling overwhelmed

Looking for more active facilitation   logistics- smaller groups   questioning the usefulness

'I had real dilemmas about is it useful to sit here in silence for an hour' (pg 4)   Uncertainty

Still feeling it after all this time 'I'm feeling it now, that sense of…frustration and uncertainty' (pg 4)   Frustration

Expectations- didn't have to do or say anything   Expectations- had to go   Such a range of emotions

Life stuff/other things impacting on engagement   Anger   Going despite it being difficult   PPD

Expectation of how to use the group from the facilitator   Feeling unsupported   seeking guidance   wanting something more

Ambivalence   The unspoken   groups within groups   So many dilemmas   Impact of facilitator

Seeking safety by contracting   Boundaries   Feeling overwhelmed   Being in a thousand other places

'wading through the pool of blood' questioning whether this is the right thing   training as a bloody mess

Developing ideas about own wants and needs   Being misinterpreted by others   Frustration that about how the group was used

Others not using the group in the way I would have liked   Excitement and enthusiasm

Hopes not being realised   cohesion   Trying so hard to be cohesive   recognising the enormity of it

RPG is part of a wider process   What is able to be said   Commitment to the RPG, despite the challenges

RPG was opaque   Narratives/stories of cohesion   Difficult to challenge dominant narratives

'that was the story we told ourselves to help us get through' No room for difference   Trying to be respectful

The raw, emotional stuff was not talked about   to talk would have been threatening   We're in this together

'you felt like they were the only other people who understood, were the people in the room. You don't destroy that, you don't say things that *might* destroy that. You don't even talk about the dear, that you could say something that could destroy that'.

Sense making when looking back   Wouldn't have been able to make sense of it at the time   frightening at the time

Seeing the value in it   Appreciating it   it was a struggle   groups within the group
          Isolation/alone

'it's like all of you are looking for your best friend there….and I was like, my best friend's not there. My best friend's somewhere else'

Supporting each other, wanting to help others   RPG was a magnifying glass   So uncomfortable, but necessary

Going despite not willing: 'I don't know whether I was genuinely willing or not, but I went every week, I went every time it was on'

Trying to learn to be ok with being uncomfortable   Space to learn to connect to feelings   Wanting something more from the facilitator

Pleading with the facilitator to break the silence   I'm always the one to speak

'I was like, somebody say something…..somebody! Anybody but me. It can't be me again. It can't be me again. It was always me. I can't be me again'

Wanting to be rescued by the facilitator   Things that were easy to say v things that weren't   LIFE STUFF

Being negatively perceived by others   cohesive narrative restricting   Hopes for the group- wanting to experiment

PPD   finding an ally   beginning to recognise own needs and wants   Professional impact of the RPG

Meeting when the facilitator was off   Being dedicated to it   Going despite hating it   connection v disconnection

'I thought I was drowning but actually I was never really drowning, I was learning to swim'   The RPG part of something bigger

Feeling the emotion still   Looking back and seeing the usefulness   SAFETY   Safety wasn't such a big deal for her

Needing it to be what I needed   Hopes and expectations   PPD   Thinking about how it could have been

Coming to understand what I needed   Emotional experiences within the group

What impacts engagement   Linked to life stuff

Appendix N: An example of the development of themes with quotes from Sharon's transcript

Unprocessed experience/Searching for something/meaning making

I thought it was a really interesting thing to explore more

I don't ever really remember us talking about erm, the experience of reflective practice

Questioning the use questioning the usefulness

I don't remember seeing very much about the evidence base behind reflective practice

It was a really difficult experience Difficult experience

I found RPG really difficult actually

Reflection after distance and time Can only make sense later

I guess it was an opportunity for me to have some time to reflect on it again after I'd had some distance from it

Looking for a sense making process Searching for meaning making

I feel like it was something I never really made sense of

Searching for meaning Searching for meaning making

I couldn't see a lot about yeah but why, and why would you do it like that and how

Looking for a sense making process Searching for meaning making

I had a lot of feelings about it but I never felt like those were fully processed

Lack of a sense making process No opportunity to make sense

There wasn't a space while we were training to do that sense making

Seeing the value despite the distress Seeing the value

I did learn a lot from that and at the same time, it left me a bit, sitting with uncertainty

Ambivalence Ambivalence

I was thinking, well what would I have wanted them to do and I don't know what the answer is

Training is overwhelming Feeling overwhelmed

There's so much else going on

You've got enough going on frankly

Still asking questions   Questioning the usefulness

But yeah it's just even X year later, you still sort of think about…what was that? What was that, you know?

Emphasising silence of the facilitator   Wanting something more from the fac

We had a facilitator who was external and extremely quiet. Like, extremely quiet

Silence   The unspoken

We would sit in a room and look at each other. And sometimes that would be all we did

It was a difficult experience

I didn't find it easy a lot of the time

Thinking how different it could have been   hopes not realised

I hear about other people that have trained in other places and I hear that they had smaller groups and it was a bit more actively facilitated

Questioning the usefulness   questioning the usefulness

I had real dilemmas about is it useful to sit here in silence for an hour

Still an emotional experience

I'm feeling it now, that sense of frustration and uncertainty

Such a range of emotions

And sometimes curiosity and sometimes, you know it felt like quite a peaceful space

So many expectations in other areas

A way for us to be together without having to do anything or say anything

Expectation to go

And there was this expectation that would you go, in fact it was mandatory

So much other stuff going on

There would be people that who at various stages throughout training would, would not be there. Because of whatever was happening for them

Going despite it being a difficult experience

No I went, erm, I always went. Erm, and sat there fuming, seething or whatever

The group wasn't useful

I don't think it helped that part of me, erm, it didn't help me, and it's only later that I've come, through other ways, through other ways of developing that you start to notice things about yourself

Lack of facilitation

That wasn't a space where there was any support or direction to notice your process

Expectations

There was just this expectation that you would just be reflecting and you would know what that was like and what was happening for you

Ambivalence   feeling ambivalent

Equally I really et that then directs the learning in a way that you don't necessarily want so there are real dilemmas

Wanting something more from the facilitator   wanting something more from the fac

If you're starting from scratch its' useful to have a sense of these are the things you might think about or things that you might notice

The unspoken   the unspoken

About groups within this group, which we never talked about

There was just so much that was unspoken

Groups within groups   the unspoken

Not being ready at the time   the developmental journey

That would be with you until you were ready to think about it

Questioning the use

Maybe the point was, to give you an embodied experience of something

Thinking to self but not sharing

I was like, oh maybe it's just me who's thinking about it in this way

Feeling overwhelmed

There were just so many layers to process

Not ready/able to process it at the time   the developmental journey

I didn't really have the equipment to process it

Wanting more from the facilitator/not getting what wanted

She didn't do masses of orientating in fact she, I don't think she did anything

I'm left with this sense of her as being this presence who was not always that present

Lack of setting up the boundaries   it's not safe here

There wasn't a lot of sense from her about, and there was, there was none of the contracting that you, or that I have come to expect as a psychologist

There was none of that at the beginning about what you like this to be, what would you, what would you expect, how would you know that this has been successful

Ambivalence   feeling ambivalent

Hopes for the group not realised

I wonder whether it would have run different if that had happened

Anger

Feeling overwhelmed

I don't really remember the first year, in the context of reflective practice. There was just so much else to take on

Using PT   finding a way to cope

It was a difficult experience

I found aspects of it all difficult

Beginning to question whether this is the right thing   the developmental journey

You know that real sense in th middle of questioning, is this the right things, if it's not how do I get out of this now

Training is a bloody mess

I'd quite often use the metaphor you get from MacBeth about wading through the pool of blood, you're half way there, you may as well just keep going

Coming out the other side

I'm glad I did, you know, I enjoy the other side, I have to say

Development through training   the developmental journey

I was starting to probably, starting to develop ideas about, about what I needed from training, what I needed for my learning, what I needed as a person

Gaining autonomy about own wants and needs   the developmental journey

Developing a sense of own wants and needs   the developmental journey

RPG was silent

Being misinterpreted by others   it's not safe here

The sense that you could never express yourself in a way that was interpreted in a way that was entirely how you meant it

Finding that you would say something that actually would be really hurtful to somebody and you would never notice until it was done and then you would have to find another way to repair it

The group not being used in the way they would have wanted hopes not realised

I became more frustrated with how the group was running and how it was being used

Impact of words on others   It's not safe here

Realisation about training   the developmental journey

Finding own way of developing   the developmental journey

I think there was a real sense of development through training and erm, in all aspects actually, but thinking about my ability to engage with an adult learning model and to make sense of what that actually meant for mme

Growing up   the developmental journey

Hopes not realised   hopes not realised

I was so happy, and so relieved to be on the course and so enthusiastic and excited and nervous and my cohort, bless us, we were, you know, trying so hard to be cohesive that we just bled our emotions into each other

It's a bloody mess!

Realising about training   the developmental journey

As time goes by, you start to recognise that you're going to be a qualified clinical psychologist and that means something

And you're going to need to know some stuff

Expectations not realised   hopes not realised

The more you accept the premise that the course is part of what gives you the stuff you need to know

Growing up, recognising own needs   the developmental journey

The more I started to think about what I needed

Commitment to learning

I don't think we were a cohort that just showed up

We gave feedback as if it meant something

RPG was unclear

That seemed, so much more opaque

RPG was part of a much bigger process   the developmental journey

So you have that sort of context, and then reflective group within that

The spoken

Story of cohesion served a purpose

On some levels, yes we were a very cohesive cohort and on another level no we weren't. That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through. Erm, the story we told each other.

The unspoken

In the reality of it, there were groups within groups

There were things that we didn't talk about all together

Some of the more raw, emotional, relationship stuff, was not talked about. And I don't mean, wasn't talked about, I mean was NOT talked about

Not feeling as though one had a voice/not able to speak up

It was quite difficult to challenge those narratives sometimes

The spoken stuff

When it came to practical thing and doing stuff and saying things, oh yes, we could do that

Seeking cohesion

We were all trying so hard to be respectful of each other

Talking is threatening

It would have been really threatening for us to do that actually

We're in this together

There were times where you felt like you only have each other

You felt like they were the only other people who understood

You don't destroy that, you don't say things that might destroy that. You don't even talk about the fear, that you could say something that could destroy that

The power of cohesion story

The purpose of cohesion

Going through a sense making process

Maybe this is the sense that you make looking back and isn't the sense that would have existed then

Unable to process the experience at the time   Searching for meaning making

It's based on the understandings that I've developed of different things and systems in the last X years

Couldn't make sense of it at the time

I don't remember it being processed enough for me to find words to explain it

Seeing the value

More than survived it actually. Really appreciated it. I got a lot from it

Couldn't make sense of it at the time

A different perspective, or a more removed perspective actually

I'm not there anymore, I can think about it now

It's the experience that you can't explain at the time or make sense of at the time, but it's always there for you to go back to so you learn more things later

It was a difficult experience

It feels less frightening

I think that was a pretty constant struggle for me

Groups within groups not spoken about

We were one group, but we weren't one group, we were lots of groups

Searching for a friend

I always felt like the person who was nobody's

I was like, my best friend's not there. My best friend's somewhere else

Feeling alone/isolated

Couldn't make sense of it at the time

Trying to make sense of my process around that, was quite a big deal for me through training

RPG as a magnifying glass

I think reflective practice group at times magnified that sense of isolation

Uncomfortable experience

Not feeling ready for an experience

Ambivalence

It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, it was an uncomfortable thing

Seeing the value despite the distress

Sometimes you do need things right in front of your face so you can, so you just have to look at them

You have to be brave enough to look at them

I sometimes feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable but it's not the end of the world and like no one's going to die from sitting in a room in silence for an hour feeling uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure no one's ever died from that!

Sitting with uncertainty

Going despite it being a difficult experience

I don't know whether I was genuinely willing or not, but I went every week. I went every time it was on

Trying to learn to be ok with being uncomfortable. And sometimes quite consciously trying. I'm trying to learn how to do this.

Trying despite it being uncomfortable

Development through training

That sense that you can be here, and as a therapist and as a psychologist, finding a way to notice and be with your feelings in a way that isn't overwhelming

Seeing the value

Maybe reflective practice had a real space in giving me an opportunity to learn to do that in a different way

Couldn't make sense of it at the time

I was trying to manage, different feelings I was trying to sit with. Make sense of

Seeking boundaries

Wanting more from the facilitator

Which isn't to say that I wouldn't have appreciated some contracting, coz I probably would.

This constant sense that she didn't wanna give too much of herself away, that she didn't want to be part of us

I don't think she facilitated very often in my mind

There were times I forgot she was there

I really wished she would have said something

Maybe there was a desire for her to rescue us from that feeling

Feeling disconnected from the facilitator

The silence was unbreakable

Wanting more from the facilitator

I'm always the one to speak

I was like, somebody say something, somebody!

Anybody but me. It can't be me again. It's can't be me again. It was always me. It can't be me again

It was a difficult experience

I'm finding this really difficult

The spoken v unspoken

There were things that we found really easy to say and things that people did not find easy to say

I find this hard was one of the things that we found difficult to say

When it related to emotional stuff I think we found it quite hard

The emotional stuff is hard to talk about

Letting others know the struggle

Exposing self

I find this hard was one of the things that we found difficult to say

Being overwhelmed

There were definitely times when I couldn't easily think about other people, it was just too…I was too wrapped up in what was going on for me

Being perceived negatively by peers

The life stuff

The course was demanding, and it's at a demanding time of your life you know

There were things happening in my relationship and I was living at home with my parents and sometimes that was easier and more difficult and I lost all my hair in first year and that was really distressing and sometimes I was ill

Carry on despite it being hard

Sometimes you're just like, head down, keep going. Pull in, focus, you can do it

Worries about sharing too much

I worried about overwhelming other people

The spoken v the unspoken

It sometimes felt like there were experiences that were really shared and then there were things that just weren't

The power of the cohesive narrative

When you exist within a narrative of we're so cohesive and we look after each other, it's quite difficult to say to somebody, you're not getting this

I'm always the one to speak

I'm a talker, I'm a talker, everywhere, that's, that's not a new thing for me

Hoping to use the space to experiment   hopes not realised

I didn't want to just be the talker in that group coz it also felt like a space where I could try different things

Taking a different position

There would be times when I would talk, and there would be times when I wouldn't and that might be erm, like a conscious effort on my part to take a different position to see what that felt like

The unspoken

I was irritated and I probably thought it was better to keep it zipped

Sense of development across training

My talking developed, as well actually, so I was like, you know that, the ability to resist just filling a silence grew

I was starting to notice that I was saying things in order to, not just to say what I thought but to create a space for somebody else

I remember thinking that was a really interesting session and we'd had a different conversations to the ones we'd had before. And maybe I was part of that in some way

Finding an ally

I remember again talking to somebody else in my cohort and do you ever do that thing, and she was like, all the time

Seeing the value

So yeah, in that way there was good learning as well

Developing own ideas about needs and wants

Depending on what you needed it to be and what you were willing engage with and what you were trying to achieve in your learning

Going despite it being challenging

I'm like, I hated it, and we still went.

Redundancy of the facilitator

I think there was a period when our facilitator was off sick and we just did it ourselves

And I think we met by ourselves

We still went. Even though the facilitator wasn't there! We went, or maybe there was that ever so slight thing of well she didn't do anything anyway so we may as well just carry on!

Use of metaphor

Learning to swim, not drowning

Connection is risky

The RPG was part of a much bigger process

I think the whole point of the group was that it was part of something bigger that was happening

There were so many kinds of impacts at different times and in different ways

I don't think I can articulate where reflective practice group fits within that.

The emotional impact of the group/Still an emotional experience

I've been surprised at how emotional I've felt at some points when we've been talking

Sense making process

More or less able to engage with it, I was more or less able to notice it, to make sense of it all

Development throughout the group

There is something about training that was really formative for me and really important in terms of my development

There were times when I said I noticed myself developing in the group and that was that was how I chose to engage with it

Sense making process

I would have found it really hard to be erm, be particularly warm about them at the time

Maybe it's one of those things that you look back on and is useful later

It's not safe here

You don't feel like it's particularly safe

I don't think there was a lot of talk about safety outside of the group in relation to reflective group

That was such a big issue within our group and we didn't talk masses abut it

Reflective practice group didn't always feel safe

Lack of boundaries

I do wonder about things like contracting and how you develop that space

I don't think that was explicitly done in reflective practice group

Overwhelming

There was so much else that went on that it didn't need it at the same time

Lack of boundaries leads to unsafety

Learning how to do it post-qual

It had a reflective practice element and again we spent a lot of time at the beginning thinking about how we might work together, usefully actually

Appendix O: Example of how initial themes were grouped together during the process of analysis

Grouped themes with quotes for pt 1

<u>Development throughout the group/it was part of a bigger process of development/experimenting</u>

<u>Ongoing journey</u>

There would be times when I would talk, and there would be times when I wouldn't and that might be erm, like a conscious effort on my part to take a different position to see what that felt like

I'd quite often use the metaphor you get from MacBeth about wading through the pool of blood, you're half way there, you may as well just keep going

Learning to swim, not drowning (metaphor)

Connection is risky (metaphor)

I'm glad I did you know, I enjoy the other side, I have to say

As time goes by, you start to recognise that you're going to be a qualified clinical psychologist and that means something

And you're going to need to know some stuff

I think there was a real sense of development through training and erm, in all aspects actually, but thinking about my ability to engage with an adult learning model and to make sense of what that actually meant for me

The more you accept the premise that the course is part of what gives you the stuff you need to know the more you, the more you start, the more I started to, I can't speak for other people, the more I started to think about what I needed

<u>Reflective practice group was part of a bigger process?</u>

I think the whole point of the group was that it was part of something bigger that was happening

There were so many kinds of impacts at different times and in different ways

I don't think I can articulate where reflective practice group fits within that

I don't think it helped that part of me, erm, it didn't help me, and it's only later that I've come, through other ways, through other ways of developing that you start to notice things about yourself

So you have that sort of context, and the reflective group within that

You know that real sense in the middle of questioning, is this the right thing, if it's not how do I get out of this now

I was starting to probably, starting to develop ideas about, about, what I needed from training, what I needed for my learning, what I needed as a person

That sense of you can be here, and as a therapist and as a psychologist, finding a way to notice and be with your feelings in a way that isn't overwhelming

Depending on what you needed it to be and what you were willing to engage with and what you were trying to achieve in your learning

Recognising own development?

My talking developed, as well actually, so I was like, you know that, the ability to resist just filling a silence grew

I was starting to notice that I was saying things in order to, not just to say what I thought but to create a space for somebody else

I remember thinking that was a really interesting session and we'd had a different conversation to the ones we'd had before. And maybe I was part of that in some way

There is something about training that was really formative for me and really important in terms of my development

There were times when I said I noticed myself developing in the group and that was how I chose to engage with it

It had a reflective practice element and again we spent a lot of time at the beginning thinking about how we might work together, usefully actually

I became more frustrated with how the group was running and how it was being used

I didn't want to just to be talked in that group coz it also felt like a space where I could try different things

Lack of active facilitation from the facilitator

There wasn't a lot of sense from her about, and there was, there was none of the contracting that you, or that I have come to expect as a psychologist

There was none of that at the beginning about what you like this to be, what would you, what would you expect, how would you know that this has been successful

I do wonder about things like contracting and how you develop that space

I don't think that was explicitly done in reflective practice group

We had a facilitator who was external and extremely quiet. Like, extremely quiet

There wasn't a space where there was any support or direction to notice your process

If you're starting from scratch it's useful to have a sense of these are the things you might think about or things that you might notice

She didn't do masses of orientating in fact she, I don't think she did anything

I'm left with this sense of her as being this presence who was not always that present

I think there was a period when our facilitator was off sick and we just did it ourselves

And I think we met by ourselves

We still went. Even though the facilitator wasn't there! We went, or maybe there was that ever so slight thing of well she didn't do anything anyway so we may as well just carry on!

Which isn't to say that I wouldn't have appreciated some contracting, coz I probably would

This constant sense that she didn't wanna give too much of herself away, that she didn't want to be part of us

I don't think she facilitated very often in my mind

There were times I forgot she was there

I really wished she'd said something

Maybe there was a desire for her to rescue us from that feeling

I hear about other people that have trained in other places and I hear that they had smaller groups and it was a bit more actively facilitated

Going through a sense making process/not being ready at the time/reflecting back now after distance and time/still searching- engaging in a sense making process/questioning the use

Could not make sense of it at the time?

I guess it was an opportunity to have some time to reflect on it again after I'd had some distance from it

That would be with you until you were ready to think about it

There wasn't a space while we were training to do that sense making

I had a lot of feelings about it but I never felt like those were fully processed

Still so many unanswered questions/continued search for meaning

I couldn't see a lot about yeah but why, and why would you do it like that and how

I feel like it was something I never really made sense of

But yeah it's just even X years later, you still sort of think about…what was that? What was that, you know?

I had real dilemmas about is it useful to sit here in silence for an hour

I don't remember seeing very much about the evidence base behind reflective practice

I would have found it really hard to be erm, be particularly warm about them at the time

Maybe it's one of those things that you look back on and is useful later

I was trying to manage, different feeling I was trying to sit with. Make sense of

More or less able to engage with it, I was more or less able to notice it, to make sense of it all

A different perspective, or a more removed perspective actually

I'm not there anymore, I can think about it now

It's the experience that you can't explain at the time or make sense of at the time, but it's always there for you to go back to so you learn more thing later

I don't remember it being processed enough for me to find words to explain it

It's based on the understanding that I've developed of different things and systems in the last X years

I don't really have the equipment to process it

Maybe this is the sense that you make looking back and isn't the sense that would have existed then

Trying to make sense of my process around that, and was quite a big deal for me through training

Maybe the point was, to give you an embodied experience of something

I thought it was a really interesting thing to explore more

I don't ever really remember us talking about erm, the experience of reflective practice

I'm feeling it now, that sense of frustration and uncertainty

I've been surprised at how emotional I've felt at some points when we've been talking

That seemed, so much more opaque

The relational stuff. Stories of cohesion, looking for a friend, feeling isolated, finding an ally, so much not wanting to be perceived negatively by her peers

Being perceived negatively by peers

We were all trying so hard to be respectful of each other

I remember again talking to somebody else in my cohort and do you ever do that thing, and she was like, all the time!

I was like, somebody say something, somebody! Anybody but me. It can't be me again. It was always me. It can't be me again

I find this hard was one of things that we found difficult to say

I'm a talker, I'm a talker, everywhere, that's, that's not a new thing for me

I worried about overwhelming other people

The sense that you could never express yourself in a way that was interpreted in a way that was entirely how meant it

Finding that you would say something that actually would be really hurtful to somebody and you would never notice until it was done and then you would have to find another way to repair it

That sense of isolation

There were times where you felt like you only have each other

You felt like they were the only other people who understood

I always felt like the person who was nobody's

I was like, my best friend's not there. My best friend's somewhere else

I think reflective practice group at times magnified that sense of isolation

I was like, oh maybe it's just me who's thinking about it in this way

I was so happy, and so relived to be on the course and so enthusiastic and excited and nervous and my cohort, bless us, we were, you know, trying so hard to be cohesive that we just bled our emotions into each other

<u>*The power of the cohesive narrative*</u>

It was quite difficult to challenge those narratives sometimes

When you exist within a narrative of we're so cohesive and we look after each other, it's quite difficult to say to somebody, you're not getting this

On some levels, yes we were a very cohesive cohort and on another level no we weren't. That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through. Erm, the story we told each other

You don't destroy that, you don't say things that might destroy that. You don't even talk about the fear, that you could say something that could destroy that

<u>It's all so overwhelming/the life stuff/the expectations</u>

There was so much else that went on that it didn't need it at the same time

There were definitely times when I couldn't easily think about other people, it was just too…I was too wrapped up in what was going on for me

There would be people that who at various stages throughout training would, would not be there. Because of whatever was happening for them

There was just this expectation that you would just be reflecting and you would know what that was like and what was happening for you

And there was this expectation that would you go, in fact it was mandatory

A way for us to be together without having to do anything or say anything

There's so much else going on

You've got enough going on frankly

There were just so many layers to process

The course was demanding, and it's at a demanding time of your life you know

There were things happening in my relationship and I was living at home with my parents and sometimes that was easier and more difficult and I lost X in first year and that was really distressing and sometimes I was ill

I don't really remember the first year, in the context of reflective practice. There was just so much else to take on.

Seeing the value despite the distress

Sometimes you do need things right in front of your face so you can, so you just have to look at them

You have to be brave enough to look at them

I sometimes feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable but it's not the end of the world and like no one's going to die from sitting in a room in silence for an hour feeling uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure no one's ever died from that!

I wonder whether it would have run differently if that had happened

I was thinking, well what would I have wanted them to do and I don't know what the answer is

I don't think we were a cohort that just showed up

We gave our feedback as it if meant something

It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, it was an uncomfortable thing

Equally I really get that then directs the learning in a way that you don't necessarily want so there are real dilemmas

I found reflective practice group really difficult actually

I did learn a lot from that and at the same time, it left me a bit, sitting with uncertainty

I didn't find it easy a lot of the time

I found aspects of it all difficult

No I went, erm, I always went. Erm, and sat there fuming, seething or whatever

More than survived it actually. Really appreciated it. I got a lot from it

It feels less frightening

I think that a was a pretty constant struggle for me

I don't know whether I was genuinely willing or not, but I went every week. I went every time it was on

Trying to learn to be ok with being uncomfortable. And sometimes quite consciously trying. I'm trying to learn how to do this.

Maybe reflective practice group had a real space in giving me an opportunity to do that in a different way

I'm finding this really difficult

Sometimes you're just like, head down, keep going. Pull in, focus, you can do it

So yeah, in that way there was good learning as well

I'm like, I hated it, and we still went

And sometimes curiosity and sometimes, you know it felt like quite a peaceful space

The spoken v the unspoken

When it came to practical things and doing stuff and saying things, oh yes, we could do that

We were one group, but we weren't one group, we were lots of groups

I was irritated and I probably thought it was better to keep it zipped

There were things that we found really easy to say and things that people did not find easy to say

I find this hard was one of the things that we found difficult to say

When it related to emotional stuff I think we found it quite hard

It would have been really threatening for us to do that actually

It sometimes felt like there were experiences that were really shared and then there were things that just weren't

We would sit in a room and look at each other. And sometimes that would be all we did

About groups within this group, which we never talked about

There was just so much that was unspoken

You don't feel like it's particularly safe

I don't think there was a lot of talk about safety outside of the group in relation to reflective group

That was such a big issue within our group and we didn't talk masses about it

Reflective practice group didn't always feel safe

In the reality of it, there were groups within groups

There were things that we didn't talk about all together

Some of the more raw, emotional, relationship stuff, was not talked about. And I don't mean, wasn't talked about, I mean was NOT talked about

Appendix P: Table of themes for each participant

Superordinate	Subordinate	Sharon	Kate	Amanda	Janette	Jessica	Ewan	Isla	Gracie
The process: there were so many layers	The emotional baggage of life	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Being negatively judged by peers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	The where and when	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	You've got so much going on		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The impact: an ongoing process	It was part of a bigger process	X	X	X	X		X		X
	I couldn't make sense of it at the time	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Continuing to question the use	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
	Personal and professional development			X	X	X	X	X	X
The facilitator: A presence who was not always present	We struggled to connect	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
	It felt like we were in the dark	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	The kids were running the asylum	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Commitment: I hated it, but I still went	The magnifying glass on difficulties	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Seeing the value despite the distress: I always turned up	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
	It's not safe here: throwing myself into the lion's den	X		X		X	X		X
	What could have been	X	X	X	X	X			X
Getting through it: Finding ways to cope	That was the story we told ourselves to help us get through	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Finding an ally	X		X	X	X	X		X
	The use of personal therapy	X	X			X			X
	The spoken v unspoken	X	X	X	X	X			X

Appendix Q: Table evaluating the current study

Criteria (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1998)	Evidence for meeting criteria
Explicit scientific context and purpose. The manuscript specifies where the study fits within relevant literature and states the intended purposes or questions of the study.	The introduction chapter clearly provided a context for the current research and how it fits within the field. The systematic literature review demonstrated the paucity of research in this field. The research question and rationale were clearly stated.
Appropriate methods. The methods and procedures used are appropriate or responsive to the intended purposes or questions of the study.	The chosen methodology (IPA) was felt to be appropriate for the research as the purpose was to explore participants' experiences. This methodology would allow for a rich, in-depth exploration of participants' accounts.
Respect for participants. Informed consent, confidentiality, welfare of the participants, social responsibility, and other ethical principles are fulfilled. Researchers creatively adapt their procedures and reports to respect both their participants' lives, and the complexity and ambiguity of the subject matter.	The Methodology chapter clearly outlines how informed consent was obtained. Ethical considerations were given and confidentiality was maintained. The Appendix chapter includes copies of the participant information sheet and debrief, consent form. Potential distress was considered and participants received contact details of relevant support organisations.
Specification of methods. Authors report all procedures for gathering data, including specific questions posed to participants. Ways of organizing the data and methods of analysis are also specified. This allows readers to see how to conduct a similar study themselves, and to judge for themselves how well the reported study was carried out.	The Methodology chapter clearly illustrates how data was gathered. Included in the appendices is a copy of example interview questions. The analytic process was specified, along with examples of analytic procedure within the Appendices.
Appropriate discussion. The research data and the understandings derived from them are discussed in terms of their contribution to theory, content, method, and} or practical domains, and are presented in appropriately tentative and contextualized terms, with limitations acknowledged.	The Discussion chapter discussed how the findings of the research fit with psychological theory, and existing research. Clinical implications are provided, and the limitations of the project are discussed.
Clarity of presentation. The manuscript is well-organized and clearly written, with technical terms defined.	Terms and abbreviations are clearly stated throughout. The use of sub-headings is hoped to assist the reader.
Contribution to knowledge. The manuscript contributes to an elaboration of a discipline's body of description and understanding.	The research is unique and is hoped to add to the small body of literature related to Reflective Practice Groups during Clinical Psychology training.

1. *Owning one's perspective.* Authors specify their theoretical orientations and personal anticipations, both as known in advance and as they became apparent during the research. In developing and communicating their understanding of the phenomenon under study, authors attempt to recognize their values, interests and assumptions and the role these play in the understanding. This disclosure of values and assumptions helps readers to interpret the researchers' data and understanding of them, and to consider possible alternatives.	The personal significance of the research is discussed at the beginning, alongside my epistemology position. During the process I was aware of the importance of self-reflexivity and took steps to ensure I was reflecting with both my supervisory team and peers. Further reflections are included towards the end of the research.
Situating the sample. Authors describe the research participants and their life circumstances to aid the reader in judging the range of people and situations to which the findings might be relevant.	I believe I provided adequate information regarding the participants within the Methodology chapter.
3. *Grounding in examples.* Authors provide examples of the data to illustrate both the analytic procedures used in the study and the understanding developed in the light of them. The examples allow appraisal of the fit between the data and the authors' understanding of them; they also allow readers to conceptualize possible alternative meanings and understandings.	Direct quotes were provided throughout the Results chapter to highlight participants' experiences. An excerpt of an annotated transcript was provided with the Appendices to assist the reader in appraising the analytic process.
Providing credibility checks. Researchers may use any one of several methods for checking the credibility of their categories, themes or accounts. Where relevant, these may include (a) checking these understandings with the original informants or others similar to them; (b) using multiple qualitative analysts, an additional analytic `auditor ', or the original analyst for a ` verification step ' of reviewing the data for discrepancies, overstatements or errors; (c) comparing two or more varied qualitative perspectives, or (d) where appropriate, ` triangulation' with external factors (e.g. outcome or recovery) or quantitative data.	A number of methods were employed to ensure credibility. Firstly, I attended an IPA workshop to discuss the analytic process. I regularly met with my supervisory team to discuss and reflect upon my analysis to check the credibility of my analytic process. I also used peer supervision on a regular basis to explore the challenges I faced and to gain different perspectives on the process. Due to the nature of the research, my peers were similar to the original participants.
Coherence. The understanding is represented in a way that achieves coherence and integration while preserving nuances in the data. The understanding fits together to form a data-based story} narrative, `map', framework, or underlying structure for the phenomenon or domain.	Within the Results chapter, a table is provided which clearly outlines the five superordinate themes and corresponding subordinate themes. Subheadings are used to ensure coherence for the reader. Direct quotes from participants are provided throughout so nuances are not lost.

Accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks. Where a *general* understanding of a phenomenon is intended, it is based on an appropriate range of instances (informants or situations). Limitations of extending the findings to other contexts and informants are specified. Where understanding a *specific* instance or case is the goal, it has been studied and described systematically and comprehensively enough to provide the reader a basis for attaining that understanding. Such case studies also address limitations of extending the findings to other instances	The limitations of generalising the findings of the current research are discussion in the Discussion chapter. Generalizable findings were not the aim of this research, which was clearly discussed. The Methodology chapter provides a justification for the number of participants recruited.
Resonating with readers. The manuscript stimulates resonance in readers or reviewers, meaning that the material is presented in such a way that readers or reviewers, taking all other guidelines into account, judge it to have represented accurately the subject matter or to have clarified or expanded their appreciation and understanding of it.	It is hoped that the current research has been thought provoking and enjoyable to read. I also hope that it is presented in such a way that it has challenged or expanded the readers existing knowledge of the subject, and extended their appreciation of Reflective Practice Groups during Clinical Psychology training.