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Major Research Project

Exploring the process of attending a reflective practice group during training: A preliminary grounded theory study of qualified clinical psychologists' experiences

Section A: A critical review of the literature: Reflective practice and the empirical evidence for reflective practice groups in training.

Word Count: 5500 (plus 714 additional words)

Section B: Exploring the process of attending a reflective practice group during training: A preliminary grounded theory study of qualified clinical psychologists' experiences

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Summary of Major Research Portfolio

Section A: A critical review of the literature: Reflective practice and the empirical evidence for reflective practice groups in training.

This section critically considers reflective practice definitions, conceptualisations and implementation within dominant theoretical models. The value and limitations of the favoured method for developing reflective capacities in clinical psychology training, the reflective practice group (RPG), are described. Group theory and the current empirical evidence base for RPGs within counsellor and clinical psychology training are critically considered and future research is suggested.

Section B: Exploring the process of attending a reflective practice group during training: A preliminary grounded theory study of qualified clinical psychologists' experiences

This section briefly introduces reflection and RPGs, a paucity of literature and research is highlighted. The rationale, aim and methodology in undertaking a preliminary grounded theory study interviewing 11 clinical psychologists about their experience of RPGs during training, is outlined. The subsequent analysis and results are described with participant quotes to demonstrate sub-categories. A critical discussion including study limitations and implications is presented.

Section C: Critical Appraisal

This section presents a critical appraisal of the study undertaken in relation to 4 stipulated questions. Learning outcomes and future research skill development needs are considered, limitations of the study and proposed retrospective changes are highlighted and the impact on practice is considered. Finally suggestions for future research are elaborated upon.

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Section A: Literature Review Paper

A critical review of the literature: Reflective practice and the empirical evidence for reflective practice groups in training.

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Abstract

The concept of reflection to critically analyse practice and increase self-awareness emerged from the education literature and has since become synonymous with good practice within a variety of professions. This review critically discusses reflection and reflective practice theoretically, empirically and within a policy context. Consideration is given to how reflective practice has been conceptualised broadly and within clinical psychology, including briefly, how reflection is incorporated into the practice of the dominant theoretical models adopted by UK clinical psychology training programmes.

Despite a variety of potential methods, the reviewed literature indicates that the reflective practice group (RPG) is the favoured method for developing reflective capacity during clinical psychology training. The historical use and perceived efficacy of the RPG is considered and the absence of theoretical understanding of these groups is noted. Given this, existing learning, emotion and group theory is reviewed for its potential contribution in understanding RPG processes, as is the extant empirical evidence for RPGs within clinical psychology and counsellor training.

Within this research, qualitative and mixed methodology studies are largely from counsellor training, making generalisations problematic. The only systematic review of RPGs within clinical psychology training indicates that previous experience, group size and facilitation style are important in predicting attendees perceived levels of value and distress from the experience. Recommendations for future research in the area are proposed, specifically research aiming to understand the processes through which RPGs are experienced as valuable and the processes that may inhibit this.

Reflective practice

Definition

Reflection in professional practice emerged from education pedagogy and has been defined as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9) and the “intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understanding” (Boud, Keough & Walker, 1985, p. 23). Reflective practice requires practitioners to achieve greater self-awareness and identify the experiences and associated assumptions underlying their practice (Imel, 1992). Beyond education, reflective practice has gained considerable attention within varied professions including: nursing, medicine, management and applied psychology and psychotherapy (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009).

Reflective practice in clinical psychology

Within clinical psychology reflective practice has been considered a “successive process of analysing and re-analysing important episodes of activity, drawing out multiple levels of representation” (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009, p. 4). Self-reflection is considered to be an obligatory, non-optional activity for ethical clinical psychology practice (Lavender, 2003). Its importance has become irrefutable (Lavender, 2003) and it is considered synonymous with continuing personal and professional development (PPD) (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003; Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007). Over half the UK training courses consider themselves as subscribing to a reflective model within a PPD component of the course (Stedmon, Mitchell, Johnstone & Staite, 2003).

Conceptualisation of reflective practice

Given the expansion of reflective practice within various professions, it is unsurprising that the concept remains poorly defined (Moon, 1999). Reflective practice is considered to be “atheoretical” and intangible (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003, p.23; Cushway & Gatherer, 2003). There is little consensus of the key components (Carroll et al., 2002), yet the benefits of reflective practice continued to be assumed and espoused by professional bodies, with little empirical weight to support its position (Bennet-Levy, 2003).

The notion of the ‘reflective-practitioner’ was introduced by Schön (1987), who emphasised that those who considered themselves ‘scientist-practitioners’ needed to reconsider the role of technical knowledge. Schön (1983, 1987) encouraged thinking beyond what can be understood in purely scientific terms, with the aim of obtaining professional excellence. He later made the distinction between ‘reflection-in-action’, ‘reflection-on-action’ and ‘knowing-in-action’. Reflection-in-action, refers to emotional and cognitive reflection on what one is doing in the moment and has immediate implications; reflection-on-action, involves consideration and thought in retrospect alone or with others; and knowing-in-action is a set of procedures for skilful and routine practice. These conceptualisations have been criticised for failing to acknowledge the importance of unconscious processes, the value of reflecting ‘before-action’ (Greenwood, 1998) and prospective reflection (Wilson, 2008).

Reflection facilitated an evolution within clinical psychology, from working within a primarily ‘scientist-practitioner’ model toward a ‘reflective-scientist-practitioner’ model (Lavender, 2003). However, in light of the limitations of Schön’s (1987) ideas, conceptualisations of reflection were expanded within clinical psychology by Lavender (2003), who proposed ‘reflection-about-impact-on-others’ (developing awareness about interpersonal style, including obtaining feedback from others about how we impact on them)

and ‘reflection-about-self’ (awareness of clinician vulnerabilities, deepening understanding in practice) as competencies of a ‘reflective-scientist-practitioner’.

Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory is aligned to Schön’s (1983) ‘reflection-on-action’ and is considered by some to be implicit within clinical psychology training curriculums (Sheikh et al., 2007). Kolb (1984) considers reflection as a central principle of learning itself and defines it as, “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p.1). The four-stage experiential learning cycle explains how reflection transforms prior experience. Meaning is then given to what is experienced through conceptualisations. These concepts are in turn used as guides for active experimentation, resulting in choices and/or change. The theory is criticised for its linearity (Garner, 2000) and prioritisation of ‘reflection-on-action’ (Jeffs & Smith, 2005) over other types of reflective practice including ‘in-action’ reflections (Schön, 1983) and for neglecting context, social factors, values, beliefs and personality of the learner (Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe, 1997; Sheikh et al., 2007).

Sheikh et al. (2007) expanded upon Kolb’s ideas in proposing a circumplex model of PPD. Here reflection needs to be supplemented by different learning modes (conceptualising, planning, doing) and methods (teaching, reflective diary) to foster conceptualisations, within the context of support systems (teachers, managers, supervisors, peers). It is acknowledged that the model fails to consider inevitable prior experiences and starts from a position of trainee deficit (Sheikh et al., 2007).

Whilst these conceptualisations provide some understanding of reflection and reflective practice, they offer incomplete understanding of the processes involved and methods for

developing reflexivity. Within clinical psychology, despite the ostensible importance of reflective practice, it is inadequately understood and remains a conceptual and empirical “blind-spot” (Bennet-Levy, 2003, p.16).

Why reflect?

Policy

Despite disparity in understanding, reflection has become embedded within training accreditation criteria (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2008), proficiency standards, and Department of Health [DOH] policy. The National Service Framework (DOH, 1999) highlights that staff development should promote ‘lifelong learning and reflective practice’ (p. 27). Personal development (including reflective practice), is one of the 10 Essential Shared Capabilities (DOH, 2004). These are the explicit core competencies that should be included in all pre-and-post-qualification training. For NHS funded and appropriately accredited (Health Professions Council [HPC], 2009) courses, this policy context will require institutes to continually review and validate their methods for developing the reflective capabilities of trainees (Sheikh et al., 2007).

Perceived value

In considering the imperative of self-reflection, it has been suggested that professionals working with the distress of others should be able to engage with their own distress (Gardner, 2001). Reflective practice may develop higher-order, though less tangible competencies (Roth & Pilling, 2007) and make “personal knowledge and interaction as important as command of technical skill” (Clegg, 1998, p. 7). It is suggested that the capacity for reflective practice aids practitioners in dealing with uncertainties, complexities and continuously

evolving problems (Schön, 1987). It was presumed that reflection was primarily reactive in the face of oversights or mistakes (Clegg, 1998; Ruth-Sahd, 2003), but is now considered to be precipitated by the practitioner, seeking challenging experiences for learning (Youngson & Hughes, 2009).

The additional presumed benefits, as well as increased self-awareness, include: theory-practice integration (Klenowski & Lunt, 2008), greater learning from challenging experiences (Bolton, 2001), building practitioner resilience, prevention of 'burn out', prevention of harm-to-others, enhanced client care and "practising what we preach" (Hughes, 2009, p. 35). The capacity for reflection may set apart expert therapists from average therapists, regardless of the number of years of experience (Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997).

These claims are not supported by research (Izzard & Wheeler, 1995). There is little evidence to substantiate that reflection increases practice efficacy (Payne, 1999) and it has been suggested that increased self-awareness leads to an element of feeling subjectively deskilled (Conner, 1980). Emphasis has however, been placed more recently on reflection as distinct from rumination and deprecating self-focus (Bennet-Levy, 2003). It has been suggested that whilst reflective practice offers 'safeguards' against unhelpful practice it may be perceived as scrutinising practitioners work and a form of "social control", given its expanding centrality in policy and competency models (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009, p. 178).

Reflective practice-in-practice

Despite the importance of reflective practice within clinical psychology (Lavender, 2003), difficulties in conceptualisation at its base level may prevent adequate operationalisation in practice. Theoretical model and the perceived value of developing reflective capabilities in training, may impact upon its utilisation (Stedmon & Dallos, 2009). The next section of this review briefly considers reflective practice within the main broad theoretical orientations adopted by the majority of UK clinical psychology courses: psychodynamic, systemic and social constructionist, and cognitive behavioural approaches (Clearing House for Post Graduate Courses in Clinical Psychology, 2010).

Psychodynamic

Reflective practice may be grounded in psychodynamic theories (Steadmon & Dallos, 2009) as Freud (1922) developed the concept of counter-transference based on his reflections on self and clients in psychotherapy. Reflection has become a fundamental premise of psychodynamic practice, as reflected in the requirement to engage in long-term therapy as a requisite of training (Clark, 1986; Rustin, 2003). Through therapy and psychodynamic observations (Mackenzie & Beecraft, 2004), clinicians are expected to be able to identify their clients and their own reactions (transference, counter-transference) and defences (Lemma, 2003), therefore developing reflexivity in, as well as on-action.

Systemic and social constructionism

In systemic theory and therapy reflective practice is explicitly central, in the form of the 'reflecting team' (Anderson, 1991). Reflection is an interpersonal 'in action' process, ultimately interwoven with the practice of therapy (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009). Despite the

centrality of reflection there is no requisite for those in training to have experience of family therapy, or to engage in reflective thought about their own family, though many training institutions advocate reflective practices implicitly (Dallos & Draper, 2000).

Social constructionist thinking is thought to be consistent with the development of critical 'reflective-practitioners'. Social constructionist ideas promoted during training are thought to develop flexibility in trainees' thinking, allowing them to think about their practice beyond "tangible notions of truth" (Harper, 2004 p. 157).

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) did not historically give credence to reflective practice (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009). More recently however Bennet-Levy (2003) established that self-practice of CBT techniques and self-reflection led to a "deeper sense of knowing" (p. 13) in practice for trainee clinicians and is a key CBT training tool (Bennet-Levy 2006; Bennet-Levy, Thwaites, Chaddock, & Davis, 2009). CBT is now seen to encourage development of reflective practice, although perhaps with greater emphasis on 'reflection-on-action' than 'in-action' (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009).

Developing reflective capacity in clinical psychology

As a multi-model profession it is unclear where clinical psychology positions itself regarding development methods for reflective practice. It is acknowledged that opportunities should be provided for trainees to explore themselves and obtain feedback (Gardner, 2001) in the hopes of engendering "emotionally robust, psychologically healthy" psychologists (Youngson, 2009, p.7). However within mental health and psychotherapeutic fields different professional and theoretical models favour different methods for developing reflexivity including:

teaching, journals (Chirmea, 2007), personal therapy (Wigg, Cushway & Neal, 2011), self-directed therapy (Bennett-Levy et al., 2009) and reflective practice groups (RPG) (Smith, Youngson & Brownbridge, 2009).

Within clinical psychology, there has been minimal exploration as to which of these methods best develops reflective capacities and the processes involved (Bennett-Levy, 2003). The limits of this review prevent a full exploration of different methods, which are explored elsewhere (see Hughes & Youngson, 2009). The focus will be the RPG, currently the dominant method utilised in clinical psychology training (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003; Horner, Youngson & Hughes, 2009).

Reflective practice groups

The RPG has gone by multiple names including personal development group, ‘as if’ therapy group and experiential group (for ease of reading RPG will be utilised from this point to refer to any of the above). They are perhaps the most viable alternative to enforced personal therapy (Lennie, 2007), yet the constituent elements of RPGs are varied across training courses, including aim, duration and frequency, as well as mandatory or not (Horner et al., 2009).

Despite this variability they are considered the favoured method for developing reflective practice as a component of wider PPD (Horner et al., 2009). RPGs are obviously not limited to clinical psychology training; they have a strong history in counselling, group psychotherapy, psychoanalytic training and health care (Pistole & Filer, 1991; Yalom, 1995; Lennie, 2007; Newton, 2011).

Aims and value of the RPG

Despite its varied utilisation, name and theoretical orientation, the commonality of the RPG is the belief that interpersonal reciprocity and feedback are as important in the development of self-awareness as intrapersonal deliberations (Johns, 1996; O'Leary & Sheedy, 2006).

The early forms of these groups were interested in trainee therapist's attitudes and clinical approach (Rogers, 1957). Later, these groups were considered to offer incomparable learning to those who come into contact with groups (Yalom, 1995); personal experience was thought to be integral in learning group process (Fiener, 1998). Yalom (1995) additionally identified feedback about interpersonal style and enriching the educational experience of training through improved peer relationships, as benefits of attendance. This type of trainee group is thought to reduce stress through a general supportive element (Munich, 1993) and improve trainees' tolerance of difference (Lyons, 1997).

Within clinical psychology, participation in RPGs provides an opportunity to reflect on the training experience. It is additionally suggested that the changing roles of a clinical psychologist and increasing involvement in groups (as a therapist, teacher, team leader or consultant) may necessitate learning about self and group dynamics (Smith et al., 2009). With the resultant in-depth knowledge of their personal patterns of relating, clinical psychologists' are expected to be effective in managing these group contexts in practice (Smith et al., 2009).

Barriers and concerns in the RPG

Despite the presumed benefits of the RPG there is concern that the aim and theoretical basis for such groups remain insufficient and obscure within clinical psychology (Gillmer &

Marckus, 2003). A lack of clear or conflicting aims can lead to students struggling to meet vague expectations or being 'scapegoated', if they do not conform to group norms (Feiner, 1998).

It has been suggested that trainee motivation and commitment to participate and share experiences will determine the reflective capacities developed within RPGs (Walker and Williams, 2003; Binks, 2010); however competitiveness within a training context may serve to prevent sharing of experiences and conceal feelings of incompetence (Mearns, 1997).

Research has also suggested that the style and consistency of the facilitator impacts on learning experience of trainees (Binks, 2010; Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby, 2010). The facilitator should have adequate training and experience to ensure an environment that is conducive to group/individual development (Noack, 2002; Brown, Lutte-Elliot & Vidalaki, 2009). Dual roles of facilitator and course tutor, although once common (Merta & Sisson, 1991), are increasingly acknowledged to be ethically incompatible with the RPG ethos (Noack, 2002).

Unlike therapy groups, RPG membership is often not selected based on factors such as personality balance or participant homogeneity (Rose, 2003). Attendance is likely to be mandatory and consent assumed on acceptance to the course (Noack, 2002; Rose, 2008). Despite this, some suggest it is possible for trainees to 'opt out', remaining disengaged from the process, although this may prevent the group being an effective developmental space (Rose, 2003). Some perceive mandatory group experiences as coercing trainees to acquiesce with theoretical preferences advocated by their training programme (Dexter, 1996). It also remains unclear whether reflective development in these groups would be distinguishable

from personal and professional development that would be expected from attending the course in itself (Izzard, & Wheeler, 1995).

Smith, et al. (2009) attempted to summarise factors influencing engagement in RPGs including: individual (preferred learning style, interpersonal style, family background), group (aims, facilitator) and environment (interrelationships with cohort, appraisal of personal and professional development, wider course context). Smith et al. (2009) noted that it was not possible to elaborate on these factors further in light of the paucity of relevant research within the clinical psychology literature.

Emotion, learning and the RPG

It has been suggested that emotional distress may be a requisite of learning from group experiences, if the group is to develop beyond a “superficial level of communication” (Nichol, 1997 p. 104). Recent research has highlighted emotion as an important aspect of the RPG experience specifically within a clinical psychology training context (Knight et al, 2010). Given the learning/education context of the RPG, the role of emotion in learning may need to be considered in understanding how they can be a valuable experience for trainee development.

Historically the facilitative role of emotion in learning was neglected against the focus on cognitive rationality, in which emotion was seen as interfering with learning (Dirkx, 2001). Cognitive processing research has previously highlighted the potentially inhibiting impact of ‘negative’ emotion (anger, anxiety, sadness) on learning and the facilitative role of ‘positive’ emotions (Bower, 1992). More recent research developments acknowledge the complex interplay between learning and emotion in which both positive and negative emotional experiences can be facilitative of learning, self-discovery and change (Dirkx, 2001).

Within adult education pedagogy it is suggested that without challenges to a learner's usual frame of reference in the learning environment, there is little scope for 'transformative learning' (Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning is that which results in significant change and greater inclusivity in the persons self and world perception, affecting future experiences and enabling integration of experience into more holistic perspectives of the self and the world (Clark, 1993 as cited in Dirkx, 1998). It is suggested that transformative learning occurs through rational and critical self-reflection and discourse with peers and facilitators about self and world perspective (Mezirow, 1997). Whilst others have suggest that emotional expression and experience, where the unknown parts of the self come into conscious awareness, is fundamental for this deeper level of learning to occur (Boyd, 1991).

The RPG, as an unstructured non-instrumental (Dirkx, 1998) learning environment, may allow for both rational critical self-reflection and emotionality to contribute to transformative learning in trainees. However, deeper levels of learning are dependent upon the quality of the learning context (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Within the RPG, transformative learning may depend on the facilitator creating an environment of trust, offering guidance, modelling self-reflection and assisting trainees to consider alternative perspectives to their own (Taylor, 2007). Equally trainees transformative learning is suggested to be dependent upon their readiness to alter their view/understanding, sufficient maturity to consider perspectives other than their own and the ability to consider material from both affective and rational positions (Daloz, 1986; Taylor, 2007).

Theories of therapeutic change also highlight the centrality of emotional experience in personal development (Burum & Goldfried, 2007). Intellectual understanding of self is not considered sufficient for change without the additional depth of emotional experience (Leiper & Maltby, 2004). Increasing emotional experiencing through therapeutic endeavours is

argued to effect lasting personal development and change (Borum & Goldfried, 2007), although different theoretical orientations may take different perspectives on whether increasing emotional experience, particularly 'negative' emotions, can facilitate positive change (Borum & Goldfried, 2007). Crudely, cognitive behavioural therapies may be primarily concerned with reducing (distressing) emotions (Wiser & Goldfried, 1993), solution-focused therapies with positive emotional climates to achieve change (Lipchick, 1999) and psychodynamic (or experiential) therapies with increasing emotional experience (distressing or otherwise), in therapy (Wiser & Goldfried, 1993). This distinction may have implications for how trainees approach and make use of RPGs that are conducted with multi-model training programmes, such as clinical psychology; for example trainees may be inclined towards a particular theoretical orientation that is in opposition, in relation to the centrality of emotional experience within learning, with the theoretical underpinning of the RPG. Preliminary retrospective accounts suggest theoretical orientation does not impact on perceived value of the RPG (Knight et al, 2010), but this does not account for changes in favoured orientation from trainee to post qualification.

Within the framework of therapeutic change, it is also suggested that verbalisation of emotional experience can enable it to become more visible to the person and in a group context, to others. This may facilitate self-reflection and inter-personal feedback (Lieper & Maltby, 2004). This may have particular relevance for the RPG experience in which 'non-participation' (choosing not to participate or maintaining silence) or 'opting out' of the group experience, could potentially limit valuable self-learning. If distress is a requisite of the RPG (Nichol, 1997) then fully informed consent (Merta & Sisson, 1991), and participant readiness

and commitment to engage with potentially distressing experiences would be crucial (Taylor, 2007; Binks, 2010).

Therapy or not therapy?

Given the seeming centrality of emotional experience in the RPG, including potentially distressing emotions (Nichol, 1997; Knight et al, 2010; Binks, 2010), it is unsurprising that parallels between RPGs and group therapy have been made (Rose, 2008). The distinction between 'therapy' group and RPG remains debatable (Rose, 2008). Although the setting, selection process and initial aim of RPGs is qualitatively different to therapy groups (Noack, 2002), RPGs can be considered therapeutic in that they offer the opportunity to do therapeutic work (Rose, 2008). Trainees may not be able to engage with thinking about the self and getting feedback about their interpersonal style, without some 'therapeutic' gain. The likelihood of the RPG being used as a 'therapy' group is thought to increase with the inevitable ambiguity and dynamic processes played out between the members (Munich, 1993). The probability that some therapeutic gains may occur suggests that existing group theory could aid in developing a theoretical understanding of the processes in RPGs.

Group theory and the RPG

The majority of RPGs are thought to be theoretically underpinned by group psychoanalytic principals (Noack, 2002). It is acknowledged that the continued use of 'therapy group' theories in attempting to understand professional groups like RPGs may prevent specific training-group theory from being developed (Noack, 2002). However, the critical consideration of existing group theory can be seen as illuminating the processes occurring within the RPG, in a step toward developing more suitable theory.

There are a number of applicable group theories that could be useful in understanding group process within RPGs including Foulkes (1964) and Tuckman, (1965); within the limits of this review the influences of Bion (1961), Yalom & Leszcz (2005) and Nitsun (1996) are considered.

Basic assumptions

Bion's (1961) 'work group' tendency is characterised by a group engaging with primary task completion, in a sophisticated, rational manner. Bion's (1961) 'basic assumptions' represent primitive stages of group functioning (Nitsun, 1996); they are the unconscious and implicit tendencies in groups to avoid the primary task (Bion, 1961). Three basic assumptions levels were posited: dependence, in which a counterpart or leader is sought as the solution to problems; flight-flight, in which problems (or those representing them) are attacked or fled from; and pairing, where solutions emerge through the coming together of two members. Both physical and psychological distress is seen as emanating from groups functioning at a basic assumption level and "true group inter-relatedness" is prevented (Nitsun 1996, p. 67).

Within the RPG trainees may avoid work on the 'primary' task of reflecting by attempting to minimise conflict and maintain relationships within the group and external cohort, resulting in group functioning at basic assumption levels. Although basic assumption functioning is useful for considering RPG dynamics, it may neglect effective functioning in groups (Brown, 2000), and so provides an incomplete understanding of the process of deriving value from a group in the context of professional training course.

Therapeutic factors

Yalom (1995) and Yalom and Leszcz (2005) contributed to long-standing hypothesising about the therapeutic factors of group psychotherapy (e.g. Berzon, Pious & Farson, 1963 cited in Yalom, 1995). Interpersonal learning, as a key therapeutic group factor, was centralised along with: instillation of hope, universality, guidance, altruism, catharsis, imitative-behaviours, social skill development and 'recapitulation' of primary family experience, as the mechanisms through which groups become valuable endeavours. Later, group cohesiveness was considered a necessary condition for successful group therapy, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) also emphasised the centrality of the group facilitator in creating a group culture conducive to effective interaction.

Yalom's (1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) purportedly pan-theoretical factors illuminate the processes in positive group functioning and may aid understanding of how RPGs (regardless of theoretical basis) are experienced as valuable. However, there is an absence of theorising about the potential negative impact of groups, in the absence of some or all of these factors, and the process through which distress is a feature of group experiences. It provides a limited understanding of the RPG as a trainee group, in the absence of members explicitly pursuing therapeutic change.

The Anti-group

Anti-group theory acknowledges the destructive forces that can arise in groups. Nitsun (1996) identified several key areas of group tension and disagreement that could threaten group cohesion and destroy the group itself. These manifest as angry attacks within the group, scapegoating, psychological and emotional withdrawal from participating and irregular attendance. These phenomena are thought to occur in a cyclical way, so that initial resistance would lead to negatively perceived experiences of the group in turn reinforcing avoidance.

This may be particularly pertinent in understanding RPG experiences in light of compulsory attendance.

The reasons for the anti-group phenomena are thought to be numerous (Nitsun, 1996), including: anxiety, due to lack of aim/structure; feelings of responsibility for group progress; within-group heterogeneity; fears of exposure through self-disclosure; interpersonal conflict; and envy and competition. This can occur at an individual, sub-group or whole-group level, and is thought to be heightened within work-colleague groups where potential for conflict is greater (Nitsun, 1996), making anti-group theory particularly relevant in understanding group process during training.

This anti-group dynamic is thought to be the prevailing impediment to the development of professional groups that are containing enough for PPD (Rose, 2003). Nitsun, (1996) believed that the group facilitator's ability to notice and address negative group processes would enable the group to reach its potential and reduce destructive anti-group phenomena. Anti-group phenomena provide a particular perspective for understanding ambivalence around RPGs and the potential for distressing/challenging experiences, though it is perhaps an incomplete understanding given the concentration on negative group process (Nitsun, 1996).

Empirical evidence of reflective practice group efficacy

To here, the historical and theoretical grounding for the RPG has been explored along with the relevant group theories which aid understanding of the processes. Here the extant empirical literature for the impact of RPGs during training is critically reviewed.

Given the paucity of literature within the area, particularly within clinical psychology (Smith et al., 2009), the search for relevant literature (see Appendix 1 for search terms and sources), was broadened beyond the clinical psychology field to studies of unstructured facilitated groups and with participants from a psychology or counselling training context. Studies conducted in the last 20 years were considered to ensure the most contemporary literature was reviewed. Relevant unpublished studies were also included as an additional source of evidence (see Appendix 2 for a table overview of included studies).

Critical overview of counselling/counsellor studies

Kline, Flabaum, Pope, Hargraves, and Hundley (1997) conducted a qualitative study with the aim of developing an understanding of 23 counselling trainees' experiences of an RPG. The theoretical orientation of this group was not reported. Questionnaires (open questions) designed by the authors were completed at the 8th (of 15) and final session.

Grounded theory (GT) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilised to analyse two phases of data, initial questionnaires and follow-up. The authors noted an overarching positive reaction to the group experience, despite reported anxiety. Emergent categories from the initial questionnaire indicated that participants valued the group in helping to develop self-awareness and relational dynamics. Categories from the follow-up questionnaire highlighted the value of experimentation with group role, reciprocal interpersonal-feedback with others, and greater self-awareness about impact-on-others. Whilst researcher assumptions were discussed, the ethical dilemmas arising from the dual role of researcher and group leader were not acknowledged. Despite this, the study made some positive attempts at validating their analysis through researcher triangulation.

Hall et al. (1999) retrospectively surveyed 92 graduate counsellors' experiences of a compulsory small group based on Rogerian principals (Rogers, 1969 cited in Hall et al., 1999) using a researcher-designed questionnaire. Respondents from across a 21-year-cohort attributed multiple current counselling skills to the group including; tolerance of ambiguity and recognising incongruence in the self. Distress, short and long term, as a result of attendance was reportedly negligible. Interestingly those furthest from the experience attributed greater professional value to it; the researchers assumed that the counsellors needed to take perspective from the experience before making meaning of it. Despite the large sample size and time-span of data collected and suggestions regarding the impact of time, the method raises questions about the participants' ability to accurately recall the experience. Low response rates may indicate response bias, with those with less favourable experiences not participating. Notable is the omission of a description and subsequent validity and reliability information on the utilised questionnaire, limiting generalisability and robustness of the study.

Lennie (2007) utilised a mixed methodology approach to understand the factors contributing to self-awareness after 88 trainee counsellors attended a RPG in training. Focus groups identified the 3 key factors associated with developing self-awareness: intrapersonal, including trainee courage and confidence; interpersonal, including group cohesion and conflict; and environmental factors, including facilitator personality. A questionnaire was developed from these and completed by 67% of trainees at various training stages, to examine the extent to which these factors were present and beneficial in the group (referred to as "comfort fit"). As the perceived presence of the factors (comfort fit) increased, so did the perceived benefits from attending in relation to the development of self-awareness,

although this was found to be the case more so at the beginning than the end of training. This relationship should be treated with caution however, as correlation does not necessarily infer causality. Response bias favouring positive views of the group also needed to be acknowledged. The omission of validity, reliability and power data reported for the questionnaire, limited the explanatory power further. A reflective journal was used however to 'bracket off' the researcher's beliefs and expectations.

Robson and Robson (2008) used thematic analysis to explore the experience of a RPG for 11 student counsellors. Although groups were ongoing, data was collected over a 3-month period where students documented their experiences in a journal. Only the major theme of 'safety' was described in the results, out of a possible 12 themes identified. Within this, safety was seen by participants as a requisite for learning about self and others. Establishing safety was reportedly achieved through contracting, shared aims and self-and-other sharing (self-disclosure). The potential for the group to cause distress was linked to a loss of trust in self and group, being judged, and not being heard. The researchers attempted to validate their analysis through researcher triangulation and identified potential ethical issues; however they failed to report their own assumptions and bias in relation to personal development group experiences. The explanatory power of the study was also reduced by only reporting the results of 1 of 12 major themes.

Ieva, Orht, Swank and Young (2009) investigated 15 student counsellors' experiences of a ten-session RPG, using semi-structured interviews. GT analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) revealed three key themes; personal (increased self-awareness and growth through taking risks in sharing, despite anxiety), professional growth (knowledge about group dynamic and increased empathy for future client) and programme requirements. Additionally participants remarked that learning from the experience was a crucial element of their development as

counsellors and should remain a requirement in training, regardless of whether their experience was perceived as positive or negative. A key strength of this study was the rigorous validation process throughout including, independent validation of transcribed interviews, researcher triangulation and participant validation. The limited generalisability of the results was acknowledged.

Critical overview of clinical and undergraduate psychology studies

Nathan and Poulsen (2004) conducted qualitative interviews with 22 undergraduate student psychologists, who had attended one of three analytic RPGs for 25-30 weeks. They analysed the data using GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which showed students were largely satisfied with the group. Awareness of group boundaries and recognising the position of client were seen as important and the challenge of being a group and cohort member was identified, which reportedly impacted on the level of openness in the group. Those in a group where aims were felt to be coherent reported the experience as more personally and professionally enriching. No reported attempts were made to bracket off researcher bias and assumptions in relation to the groups and so it is unclear how this may have influenced the results.

Knight et al. (2010) developed a reflective practice group questionnaire (RPGQ). Using an analytic survey design, 124 qualified clinical psychologists across a 21-year-cohort completed the RPGQ in order to investigate the personal and professional impact of a RPG attended fortnightly over 3 years. Factor analysis revealed underlying constructs of 'value' and 'distress'. Group size and potency of facilitation significantly predicted perceived levels of value and distress. Larger groups (over 14) were rated as more distressing, as were those with facilitators perceived as remote. Additionally, those who had previous experiences of these groups were more likely to find the RPG experience valuable. Overall 44% of

respondents reported the groups experience to be personally and professionally valuable, with little distress, 27% found it highly valuable and highly distressing, and 16% reported low value and high distress. The validity and reliability of the RPGQ was rigorously assessed and reported, but the theoretical underpinning of the groups was not. Statistical power was not achieved, although the study presents the only systematic evaluation of RPGs in clinical psychology training programmes in the UK.

Wigg (2010) utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) with aspects of GT to explore the impact of RPGs during clinical psychology training. Twelve participants across a 10-year post-qualification cohort were interviewed. Four super-ordinate themes emerged: the group vs. the individual; sense-making or emerging from the darkness; developing a professional self; and thinking about reflective practice. A number of stages that occurred within these groups were described. Initial stages were for orientation to tasks and boundary testing, later stages were characterised by developing reflective skills through experimentation with roles. The rationale and method for integrating GT and IPA was unclear (Willig, 2001). However, the researcher did consider the impact of their own experience, biases and assumptions on the findings.

Summary of empirical research evidence for the RPG

Within the five counselling studies key factors pertinent to the development of reflective practice through the group experience were identified including: trainee's confidence in risk taking, safety, group cohesion and facilitator style (Kline et al., 1997, Lennie, 2007, Robson & Robson 2008, Ieva et al., 2009). Whilst qualitative studies were largely descriptive, a minority (Kline et al., 1997; Ieva et al., 2009) reported participants valuing the RPG

experience despite the potential for negative feelings, but failed to consider the process and potentially facilitative role of distress in learning (Nichol, 1997).

The mixed methodology and quantitative studies did not provide adequate validity data for utilised questionnaires (Hall et al., 1999; Lennie, 2007). Despite methodological issues, most studies made attempts at validation utilising a variety of methods (Kline et al., 1997), some studies (Lennie, 2007; Ieva et al., 2009) acknowledged and ‘bracketed’ their own assumptions and biases in relation to RPGs, an important methodological feature in qualitative research (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). Across the studies there was heterogeneity in aim and purpose, theoretical underpinning was widely unreported and the duration of RPGs was varied.

Of the three studies in the field of undergraduate and clinical psychology, Knight et al. (2010) was the most methodologically robust, with extensive sample size and inclusivity of opinion across a large cohort. Aside from Nathan and Poulsen (2004), the studies failed to adequately identify the theoretical underpinnings of the groups, limiting generalisability. The studies attempted to offer more explanatory than descriptive accounts of RPGs, though it seemed Knight et al. (2010) were closest to achieving this. Despite the methodological issues, Knight et al.’s (2010) and Wigg’s (2010) studies represent the only current research contributions to understanding the RPG in clinical psychology training in the UK. Overall the wider transferability of these studies is limited and caution should be employed in extrapolation to training contexts outside of those studied.

Summary of review and research implications

Despite the centrality of reflective practice in PPD within clinical psychology training (BPS, 2008) adequate empirical evidence to substantiate its elevated position is surprisingly sparse

(Bennet-Levy, 2003). Historically, literature on reflective practice has engaged in definitional debate across professions (Moon, 1999), with less emphasis on establishing theoretical understanding and evidencing methods for developing reflective capacities (Bennet-Levy-2003; Smith et al., 2009).

The RPG emerged as the favoured method for developing reflective practice within UK clinical psychology training (Horner et al., 2009) and was the focus of this review. As indicated, current research efforts have largely been limited to counselling/counsellor training and utilised variable methodologies in establishing the benefits of attending RPGs. The only (published) evaluation of unstructured RPGs attended by UK clinical psychology trainees, made attempts to systematically evaluate the factors under which RPGs are valuable (Knight et al., 2010). Questions remain about the mechanisms through which this is achieved and the role of inhibitory and distressing group experiences (Knight et al., 2010), given the learning context of the RPG (Boyd, 1991).

In reviewing the current literature, it is suggested that future research should look at the processes through which valuable learning and reflective practice is developed within these groups, as well as the processes that serve to impede this. Knight et al. (2010) highlighted a need for exploratory qualitative research in attempting to develop a substantive theoretical understanding of mechanisms through which the RPG's are perceived as valuable and the inhibitory or facilitative role of distress (Nichol, 1997) in this process. Additionally research should attempt to establish whether the RPG, currently favoured by clinical psychology training institutes, results in more "useful and effective" clinical psychologists (Smith et al., 2009, p.144) compared to other forms of PPD.

Research focusing on trainee motivation, attitudes and learning styles in relation to reflective practice methods, may help training organisations to offer learning opportunities utilising alternative or adjunctive methods to the RPG. By matching learning styles with reflective practice methods, the most suitable and efficacious reflective development space for trainees can be offered, whilst minimising possibly distressing and harmful practices (Sheikh, et al., 2007).

Clinical psychology more broadly should look to develop models of the reflective process including: identifying anticipated key outcomes, differential learning methods and mechanisms and establishing a context for maximum utility (Bennett-Levy, 2003). Future research could subsequently aim to ascertain how participating in RPGs and other reflective practice activities improves clinical practice.

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Section B: Empirical Paper

Exploring the experience of attending a reflective practice group during training: A preliminary grounded theory study of qualified clinical psychologists' retrospective accounts.

Word Count: 8000 (8509 with additional words)

This report protects the confidentiality of participants by omitting identifying characteristics and information throughout, including in the method, results and appendices. Pseudonyms are used to protect anonymity, although they coincide with participant gender. Direct quotes from participants are presented, but changes are made where necessary to protect the confidentiality of participants, their group members, the facilitators and the course.

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Abstract

Reflective practice has become implicit within the clinical psychology profession; there is a lack however of empirical research on the methods through which reflective capacities are developed in trainees. This study aimed to build upon earlier research by Knight et al. (2010), which investigated the impact of reflective practice groups (RPG) whilst training, through further qualitative exploration of the mechanisms of experience related to participants perceiving the RPG as valuable and the role of distressing experiences. Eleven qualified clinical psychologists from a UK training programme who had previously (Knight et al. 2010) been categorised into 1 of 4 factor groups based on level of perceived value and distress (e.g. high value-low distress), took part in semi-structured interviews. Grounded theory methodology informed the data collection and analysis. A preliminary interactional map of experience was constructed from the data and five categories were important in understanding how the groups were perceived as valuable in the context of varying distress levels: ‘negotiating the unknown’; ‘managing emotion’; ‘negotiating the development of self-awareness’; ‘negotiating the reciprocal impact of ‘others’; and ‘reflection-on-reflection’. It was recommended that training programmes should consider: trainee expectations; approach and motivation; the dual-relationships within groups/cohort; and facilitator style in offering RPGs. Recommendations were made for future research to attempt to match trainee personal learning style with appropriate reflective development methods, to build an evidence base for reflective practice methods generally and to establish the benefits of reflection for clinical practice.

Keywords: Reflective practice, reflective practice groups, personal and professional development, clinical psychology training

Introduction

Reflective practice is an approach that encourages practitioners to critically consider and analyse their work, so that practice becomes an opportunity for the continued learning and development of the clinician (Jarvis, 1992). Reflective practice is thought to move clinicians' thinking beyond the 'scientist-practitioner' (Schön, 1983) and what can be understood with technical knowledge and the scientific realm, toward the open, uncertain and questioning (Bolton, 2003) 'reflective-practitioner' (Schön, 1987). Schön (1987) conceptualised three modes of reflection that contribute to achieving clinical excellence: 'reflection-in-action', takes place during the event; 'reflection-on-action', after the event and; 'knowing-in-action' are the procedures acquired in performing skilful activities in practice.

Despite debates regarding definition and utility (Carroll et al., 2002; Bennet-Levy, 2003) reflective practice is considered to be a central component of the continual personal and professional development (PPD) of clinical psychologists (Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007; British Psychological Society [BPS], 2008). However, the method through which this capacity is developed varies across programmes (Youngson & Hughes, 2009). Lavender (2003) has suggested that whilst reflection should be mandatory, the methods through which this is achieved, should not. Historically personal therapy has been favoured for developing self-awareness in therapeutic professions (Wigg, Cushway, & Neal, 2011), as well as 'experiential' groups in group-psychotherapy training (Yalom, 1995). Recently the reflective practice group (RPG) has emerged as the favoured method for developing reflective capacities in clinical psychology training in the UK (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003; Horner, Youngson, & Hughes, 2009).

Reflective practice groups (RPG)

The RPG is thought to offer a unique opportunity to explore the professional and personal self in relation to others, learn about group dynamics, consider/reflect on the experience of training and to increase empathy with the position of the client (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Rose, 2003; Youngson, 2009; Kiff, Holmes, & Cushway, 2010). Through the groups, clinical psychologists are expected to gain in-depth knowledge about their personal patterns of relating and subsequently be effective in managing process and interpersonal dynamics in practice (Smith, Youngson, & Brownbridge, 2009).

There is a lack of theoretical understanding of the learning process in RPGs (Bennett-Levy, 2003). Adult education pedagogy highlights the potentially facilitative impact of emotional experience in learning, particularly discovering previously unknown aspects of the self and critical self-reflection for 'transformative learning' (Boyd, 1991; Mezirow, 1997). Transformative or 'deep learning' is internalised and related to the learners real life, (Brockbank & McGill 2007); it results in significant change and greater inclusivity in the learners self and world perspective (Mezirow, 1997). This deep learning is expected only to occur if current self and world perspectives are challenged (Mezirow, 1991); negative affect could reasonably be a consequence of such challenge. Negative affect is considered by some to be an inevitable part of the RPG experience (Nichol, 1997). Therefore the trainee must be motivated to work with distress, if they want to access deeper learning and develop reflective capacities (Taylor, 2007; Chambers, Burchell & Gully, 2009).

Theories of therapeutic change suggest verbalisation of emotional experience can enable it become more visible to the person and in a group context, to others which may facilitate self-reflection and inter-personal feedback (Lieper & Maltby, 2004). Given this and the key role

of trainee motivation, the ethical nature of mandatory participation would need to be considered for those who choose not to verbalise experience, 'opt out' or lack motivation for the RPG (Hobbs, 2007; Lavender, 2003).

After reviewing the limited literature, Smith et al. (2009) summarised the factors they felt impact on the efficacy of RPGs, including: individual (interpersonal style, family dynamic, learning style); group (clear purpose and aims, facilitator style); and environment (interrelationship with peers, appraisal of personal development, wider course context). Given the paucity of literature they were unable to elaborate on this further (Smith et al., 2009).

Group theory

In light of the deficiency of theory specific to RPGs, existing group theory may illuminate the processes through which learning is facilitated or hindered within the RPG. Bion's (1961) basic assumption functioning states of dependency, fight-flight and pairing represent primitive stages of groups avoiding work on the primary task. Within the RPG trainees may avoid work on the 'primary task' of self-reflection with attempts to minimise conflict and maintain relationships within the group and external cohort, resulting in basic-assumption levels of group functioning.

Nitsun's (1996) anti-group factors such as within-group heterogeneity, lack of structure and competitiveness, are thought to threaten group cohesion resulting in defensive strategies and withdrawal. Anti-group phenomena are expected to be heightened within work-colleague groups (Nitsun, 1996) and may therefore be more prevalent within the competitive training context of the RPG. Group cohesion has been identified as key for effective group

functioning (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), although the defensive maintenance of cohesion may impede interpersonal learning. The ability of the facilitator to create a conducive group environment and manage anti-group threats may be crucial in successful group functioning (Yalom, 1995; Nitsun, 1996).

Evidence base

Previous research on the RPG is largely restricted to counsellor/counselling training contexts, six studies (Kline, Flabaum, Pope, Hargraves, & Hundley, 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Nathan & Poulsen, 2004; Lennie, 2007; Robson & Robson, 2008; Ieva, Ohrt, Swank, & Young, 2009) have investigated the experience of attending an unstructured, facilitated RPG from a trainee perspective. These studies suggest that trainees benefit from experiencing a client position, enhanced understanding of group process, awareness of impact-on-others and (a perceived) improvement in practice (Kline et al., 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Nathan & Poulsen, 2004; Ieva et al., 2009). Regarding inhibitory group processes, studies highlighted ambiguous aim and purpose (Nathan & Pouslen, 2004) and a lack of safety (Robson & Robson, 2008) as important factors. Overall it is difficult to generalise these studies to clinical psychology training contexts, given the variability in participants, aim, theoretical-underpinning, format and duration of the RPG, as well as the varied methodological rigour of these studies (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

Knight, Sperlinger & Maltby (2010) conducted an analytic survey, the only systematic investigation of the impact of RPGs within UK clinical psychology training. A Reflective Practice Group Questionnaire (RPGQ, Knight et al., 2010) was designed and completed by former trainees. The RPGQ indicated that participants ascribed differing levels of value and distress to the RPG experience. Trainees were allocated to one of four groups based on these

attributions, high value-high distress, high value-low distress, low value-high distress or low value-low distress. Results indicated that 27% of the former trainees found the groups to be highly distressing but highly valuable, whilst 16% found the groups to be highly distressing but low in value. Previous experience, directive facilitation and smaller group size were significantly related to the groups being perceived as more valuable.

A linked qualitative study (Binks, 2010) with facilitators of these RPGs suggested the presence of anti-group sentiment and a rebellion against mandatory attendance. Facilitators reported that the level of trainee commitment and motivation to engage with distressing feelings impacted on the level of emotional learning and development.

Study rationale

Whilst Knight et al.'s (2010) survey adds to the paucity of research on RPGs within clinical psychology in the UK, there are unanswered questions about the processes which enable value to be derived from these groups and the role of distressing experiences. Knight et al. (2010) suggested future qualitative research could explore this. The distinct absence of research on the learning mechanisms of RPGs in clinical psychology is surprising given that they are the favoured format for developing reflective practice in UK trainees (Gillmer & Marckus, 2003). As such a research priority should be to develop a more coherent understanding of how the RPG is experienced as valuable, in the context of distressing experiences within these groups.

Aims of the study

The aim was to develop a preliminary, yet substantive understanding of the mechanisms through which experiences are valuable or distressing for participants who previously

attended RPGs during a clinical psychology training programme in the UK. This research followed on directly from Knight et al.'s (2010) analytic survey, accessing the same participants to explore the questions raised by their research.

An exploratory qualitative method aimed to explore, firstly, how do participants of the reflective practice group derive value from the experience? How do participants experience and understand distress in the reflective practice groups? How does distress influence valuable experiences in reflective practice groups?

Method

Design Overview

This study was qualitative, utilising grounded theory (GT) (Glasser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Charmaz, 2006), within a social constructionist (Charmaz, 2006) epistemological position (Willig, 2001). GT is considered a particularly beneficial approach when the topic of interest is under-researched and where the researcher intends to develop a 'preliminary yet substantive theoretical understanding' from semi-structured interviews (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003).

Participants

Eligibility criteria

Participants had attended RPGs as part of their training on course X. They were selected from a sample of those who participated in Knight et al.'s (2010) research and identified themselves as being willing to be contacted at a future date for interview-based research. Participants were not excluded based on the duration since leaving training in keeping with Knight et al.'s (2010) research. Participants would have been excluded if they were known to

the researcher in a personal or professional capacity. Participants residing in the UK were given precedence, due to the preference for face-to-face interviews.

Sampling

Of the 89 clinical psychologists who met eligibility criteria, a total of 11 participants were interviewed over the recruitment period. Seven women and four men took part. The time since qualifying ranged from 2 to 21 years. Further demographic information will not be included to protect anonymity. Participants were allocated by Knight et al. (2010) to one of four value/distress factor groups (Table 1.). Whilst participants were sent a brief summary of the results at the time, they were not made aware of the factor groups they had been allocated to. This was a decision taken by Knight et al. (2010) and was upheld to avoid potential impact on the interview and data. The RPGs were facilitated by staff independent from the programme, were mandatory on a fortnightly basis for 1 hour 30 minutes and were considered to be informed by a group analytic perspective.

Table 1. Breakdown of number of participants by factor group and total number in factor group who consented to be invited for future research

Factor Group	Number of participants	Total number in group
High value – High distress	4	25
High value – Low distress	6	38
Low value – Low distress	1	8
Low value – High distress	0	12

Procedure

Ethical considerations

This research study was approved by the University Ethics committee (Appendix 3) and all procedures conformed to the BPS Code of Conduct (2009). The potentially sensitive nature of the topic was highlighted to participants and they were reminded of the boundaries that may have been established within their own RPG in the context of protecting other member's confidentiality during the interviews. Participants were assured that the researcher would omit any responses from transcripts, analysis and results that would identify them, a facilitator or group member.

Participants, as well as consenting to take part in the research, were able to exclude themselves and remain anonymous to the researcher by indicating that they did not wish to take part. Participants were debriefed at the end of interviews and able to ask questions, at that time or later. Participants were offered a summary of the results upon completion of the study (also sent to the University Ethics Panel) (Appendix 4) or to discuss the results with the researcher on the telephone.

Interview schedule

The two research supervisors were consulted in the development of an open-ended semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 5). This was chosen to increase rapport and gather rich data (Willig, 2001). The interview schedule was piloted (to ensure areas covered were comprehensive), on a former trainee from course X who had attended an RPG but who had not taken part in Knight et al.'s (2010) research. As the study progressed modifications to the interview schedule were made in line with GT principles (Charmaz, 2006).

Data collection

Participants were sent the Research Invitation (Appendix 6) by a research administrator, this included the participant information and written consent form, via email and/or postal addresses to ensure maximum respondent rate.

The interviews were carried out over a 9-month period in a number of stages based on responses to research invitations and theoretical sampling (see below). Initially six participants were randomly selected from across the four factor groups, weighted to have 2 participants from each of the larger factor groups. A low response necessitated two rounds of six invitations (with reminder letters see Appendix 6) resulting in three participants consenting to take part initially.

Throughout, theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006) was utilised, for example in attempting to recruit participants in the low value-high distress and low distress-low value groups, with the intention of furthering emerging codes and adding to theoretical saturation (“when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights nor new properties of core categories”, Charmaz, 2006 p. 113). Interviewing participants with varied experiences, valuable and distressing, was hoped to contribute to a rich data and expand potential theoretical understanding of the RPGs. Low response rates made this problematic, resulting in the final stage of recruitment in which all of those who had not already responded (by either consenting or declining), were sent the Research Invite, from across all four factor groups.

Interviews were held at a place convenient to the participant. They lasted between 35 and 65 minutes, were recorded using 2 digital recording devices and were transcribed (Appendix 7 for excerpts) manually by the researcher (n=8) or externally (n=3, with participant consent)

and thoroughly checked by the researcher. Following the interview participants were debriefed and had an opportunity to ask questions.

Quality and validity

Position of the researcher

It is acknowledged that as a current attendee of a RPG I needed to remain aware of how my experiences and assumptions could impact on the research process. To promote the credibility and integrity of the study findings I aimed for epistemological and personal reflexivity throughout. Regular supervision, taking part in a reflective interview (conducted by one supervisor, see Appendix 8) and a reflective research diary (Rolfe, 2006) aided this process. The reflective diary pertains (Appendix 9) to my thoughts, experiences, theory-research links and potential biases during the research process.

Further credibility measures

Several other methods were considered useful in promoting the quality of the results from the data analysis including discussions about emerging codes/categories with the research supervisors and a GT peer-supervision group, who were consulted about emerging codes, categories and the resultant model. Additionally a peer reviewed a random small selection of data; through which similar codes were found. Given that the research links with two existing studies (as discussed), the results were further compared with Binks (2010) results. In addition results were also be compared with anecdotal accounts of RPGs by former-trainees (from different courses) (Appendix 10) within the published literature (Smith et al., 2009, with author permission).

Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed using social constructionist GT informed by Charmaz (2006). The analysis began with initial line-by-line coding (Appendix 11) of the first 3 interviews. Codes were kept closely to the participants words ('in vivo') to conserve participant meaning (Charmaz, 2006), whilst also attempting to avoid imposing my own theoretical or experiential ideas on the data. Further data was collected and analysed according to constructed codes which were developed and expanded upon. In the next phase; focused coding, the most significant/frequent earlier codes were used to synthesise large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2006). Emerging focused codes and categories necessitated reviewing earlier data through a process of constant comparative analysis (Willig, 2001; Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical coding followed on from the codes selected during focused coding and worked to identify and assimilate relationships between categories, again through constant comparative methods, emerging categories were dismantled and/or re-synthesised to form categories and sub-categories. Memo-writing (Appendix 12) was maintained throughout the process in line with GT methodology (Charmaz, 2006), to highlight emerging relationships between codes and categories and to track progressive integration toward sub-category and category generation. A theoretical approach to sampling was adopted throughout to attempt to reach saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In interview 11 no new categories could be identified, although it is noted that theoretical saturation should be striven for, there is always likelihood that modification to categories or changes in perspective can be made (Charmaz, 2006).

Results

In the initial coding 218 codes were generated, through focused and theoretical coding, 15 subcategories were constructed which were later condensed to form five main categories (Appendix 13). These are summarised in Table 2, and illustrated further with quotations from transcripts throughout to demonstrate the sub-categories (Appendix 14 contains a table of coding process and further text-examples).

Table 2. Grounded theory categories and sub-categories.

Group stage	Category	Sub-categories
Pre & During	Negotiating the unknown	Expectations
		Negotiating aims and purpose
		Approach and motivation
During	Managing emotion	Protection-of-self
		Tolerating distress
During	Negotiating the development of self-awareness	Value of safety
		Realisations of self-in-group(s).
		Reflective stress and fatigue
During	Negotiating the reciprocal impact of 'others'	Duality of relationships
		Developing awareness of group process and experience
		Composition and conflict
		Reflection facilitated
Post & During	Reflection-on-reflection	Continued process of meaning making
		Beliefs about reflective practice and attendance
		Experience-practice links

The preliminary model in Figure 1. (below) depicts a systematic map of qualified clinical psychologists' (retrospectively recounted) experiences of attending a RPG during training; specifically in relation to understanding the group as a valuable experience and the role of distress. Given that all participants reported some valuable group experience or learning and that the groups are intended to be valuable (Knight et al., 2010), value is at the centre of the model and set within the context of varying degrees of distress (or discomfort); also reported by all participants.

The proposed model is dynamic in that it assumes that each component (category) interacts fluidly with others. The model is not temporal, some sub-categories were found through the analysis to be more prominent at certain group junctures (i.e. 'expectations' at pre-group). Each component does not represent a stage that has to be passed through or experienced by all trainees; it is a map that illustrates interrelated, mutually influencing interpersonal (group) and intrapersonal (individual) phenomena in deriving value and experiencing distress in the group. The experiences are generalised within the model, so whilst these factors may be consistent across ex-trainees, processes will vary for individuals depending on characteristics, personality and external life factors. The model categories should therefore be considered within the idiosyncratic context of the individual and also within the wider training context which includes the impact of other PPD methods identified by participants (e.g. teaching, supervision, placements, and personal therapy).

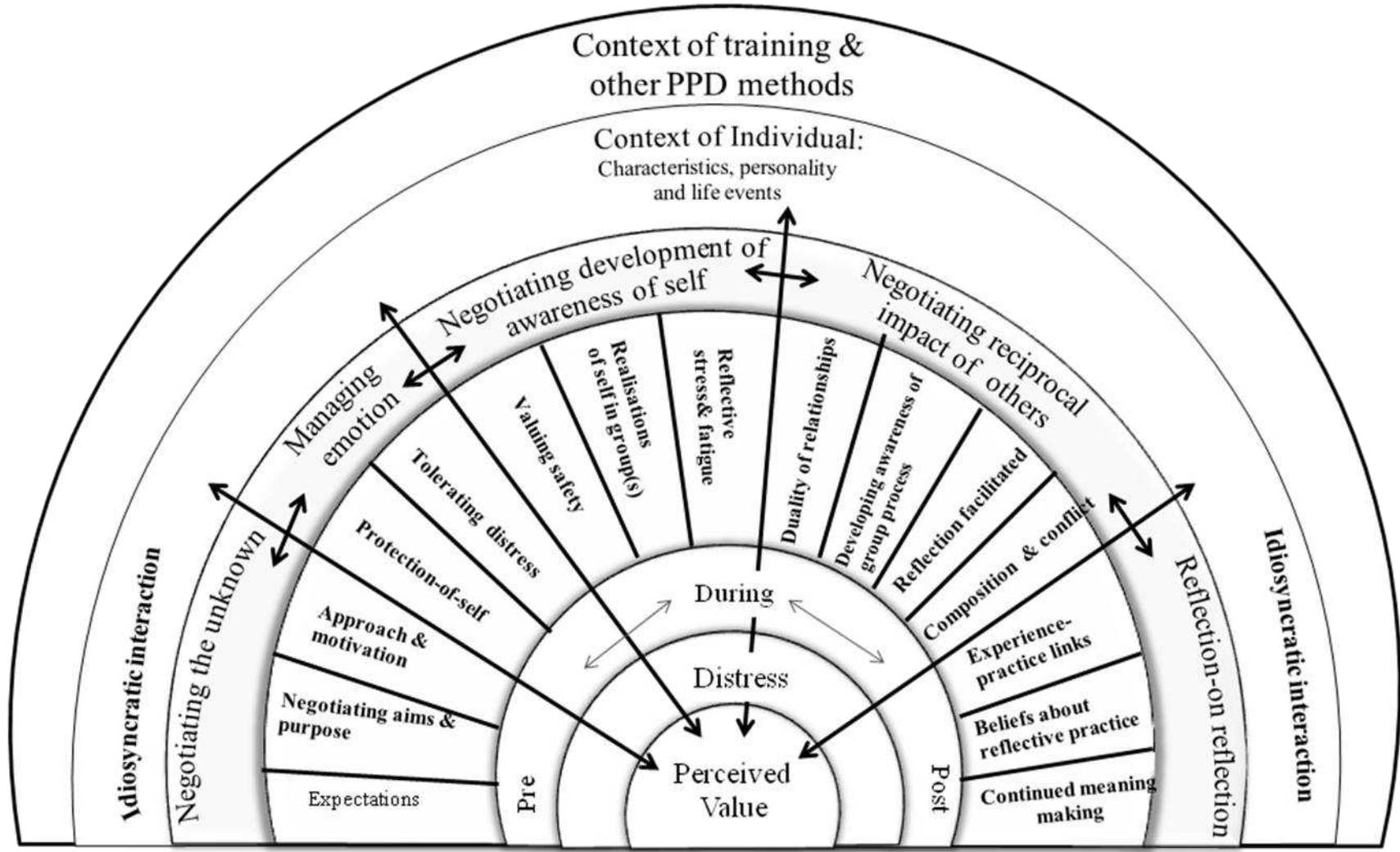


Figure 1. Preliminary conceptual map of participant categories contributing to the RPG being a valuable experience in the context of distress. (Double headed arrows indicate reciprocally interacting components within and between the different contexts indicated by semi-circle.

Negotiating the unknown

This category reflected the complexities of participants' described search for, and negotiation of, the aim of the group. It seemed that a degree of interaction between trainee expectations prior to attending, the clarity of aims and their motivation for the group, was important in understanding how value was derived from the experience.

'Expectations' was a sub-category where participants formed ideas about what the group might be like before attending. These expectations were influenced by the reputation of the groups from interactions with other trainees, rumours, or their knowledge of the course ethos. This often led to participants feeling apprehensive and unsure about the process.

There are a lot of rumours that go around the [course] about the group and I think you know the kind of group itself is a strange vacuum when you start training. (Peter)

They come with a reputation the groups at [course] kind of something you hear is associated with [the course], particularly that course. I guess the legend of the reflective practice group was always around, there was always questions from other years, 'had your first group yet?' So you knew they came laden with something. (James)

For some participants their expectations were influenced by their previous experiences of groups, where these matched the group experience this seemed to result in clearer expectations.

I'd been in group situations before so kind of had some understanding of what I was getting myself into in terms of... I think I was expecting to think about and explore my professional development. (Laura)

‘Negotiating aims and purpose’ was the sub-category where participants described feeling frustrated that the aims of the RPG were unclear and described a process of the group seeking clarification. Attempts were made at clarification through comparison with group therapy and by the group negotiating its own aim. It was acknowledged that this happened throughout the group and unclear aims were eventually accepted by some as part of the group process (either at time or in retrospect).

They could have had a clearer boundary around it and a list of aims.... they hadn't been clear...in the beginning we were left wondering how much it was therapy...we don't know what the purpose of the group is... I suppose we should have got to a point where we could answer that questions for ourselves or decide what our aims were. (Laura)

We spent most of the group trying to figure out what the aim was...I think the whole time we were in the group itself there was a constant discussion, was it to map group process? To think about the work that we're doing on placement? On the course? Or is it to think about ourselves as individuals? (Shirley)

‘Approach and motivation’ was a sub-category where participants described the need for a certain way of engaging with the process for it to be a useful experience. Participants seemed to make sense of their own approach through comparison to group members' opposing positions, or what they perceived as more generally unhelpful positions.

How much you want to allow yourself to be involved in the process.... if ones stays pissed off....you don't learn anything from that position. (James)

I think [group was useful] partly it was the kind of ethos I was carrying. ...that you can't be good at this unless you explore yourself...I was quite motivated...I was conscientious

about trying to work with my own internal conflicts and things... that belief pushed me forward to make use of the group. (Duncan)

The approach to the group seemed to be considered by participants as an important factor in their ability to make use of the group and derive value from it.

If you could remain open there was a lot to get from it...but if you've been primed in a different way, stuck in this different position.... how open minded you are about the group how you see it as an opportunity rather than something to dread, was really important. (Peter)

Managing emotion

This category describes participants managing the group experience and the associated (or anticipated) emotional response. This encompassed the processes of attempting to avoid or defend the self against negative experience and emotion and the process of being able to accept and tolerate difficult feelings.

'Protection-of-self' was a sub-category where participants, in response to feeling attacked or vulnerable from aspects of the experience e.g. other members, (see 'negotiating the reciprocal impact of others') and their own feelings of ('negotiating emerging awareness-of-self'), led them to engage in strategies to protect the 'self'. For some, this self-defence was closely linked with their perceptions of their level of participation in the group at those times.

Some pretty much stopped coming, I pretty much withdrew....a lot of people started to shut down and started talking about very normal mundane, and not really going there anymore as it felt too threatening.(James)

Some participants' feelings were described using the 'language' of defences from psychodynamic theory. For some this was a retrospective process with increased knowledge and for others this was available within awareness during the group.

I felt anxious, and a bit defended against using it in a rather more personal way... anxieties are very common. I attempted to use it intellectually...and academically rather than allowing it to have a more personal dimension. (Eleanor)

I think making people giggle and laugh, trying to say something witty was as much an avoidance of what was going on as anything else. I remember trying to think of something smart or funny to say....that's a very defended position to be in. (Peter)

'Tolerating distress' was a sub-category where participants described their experiences of noticing and accepting uncomfortable and distressing feelings, as a part of the process without using defences or withdrawing.

At the same time as feeling those difficulties, that's the group process. This is what we're doing. It's hard. I don't expect it to be, you know, expect it to be nice, or easy, or comfortable. (Kate)

When you get more involved at an emotional level, it inevitable that you're going to get a bit stung, you know there would be moments where its an emotionally slightly painful experience the group...you learn about that and realise that there are ways of managing yourself. (Peter)

The ability to tolerate distressing experiences was linked to being able to derive value in the group through increased self-awareness (linked to ‘negotiating development of self-awareness’).

The things I learned [about self] were challenging things, so I value them, but it’s with value in quotes in the sense that it was difficult. (Laura)

There were sort of painful realisations, but were really quite important. It might have been that that particular group of meetings was painful because of finding out something personal about myself. (Eleanor)

Negotiating development of self-awareness

This category related to the process of experiencing realisations about self through the group process and factors that may have impacted on this. Participants described beginning to notice their group positions and roles in a process of becoming more self-aware. Lack of safety and the immediate impacts of the group seemed to be factors that needed to be negotiated in this process.

‘Value of safety’ was a sub-category in which participants identified the desire for the group to feel like a safe space; this seemed to fluctuate in relation to other aspects (i.e. ‘reflection facilitated’, ‘composition and conflict’) of the RPG experience. When this was not felt, participants described increased avoidance (‘managing emotion’).

There was a lack of it feeling like a safe space...I don’t think it was ever resolved which evolved into an increasing lack of safety in a room of conflict avoidant people. (James)

I don't think I ever felt it was a safe enough place to talk in depth about those things [personal life relationships] in the group, I don't think I did. (Duncan)

'Realisations of self within group(s)' was a sub-category where participants described intrapersonal learning in the group and made parallels with their roles in other group contexts. Through these realisations participants were able to take different positions. Some participants made sense their group role through recognising links/patterns within their roles in family/friendship groups.

I think at first I was quite vocal, that did change over time...it probably did relate to my role in the family as the youngest and a bit of a peace maker. I wanted to keep things running smoothly...in the group I felt less compelled to take up those group roles. (Beth)

My particular family and the rows...made me think this doesn't happen in other families. Why is it happening in mine? ...that group gave me...deeper understanding of that...really big opportunities to think differently and to really reflect on it, not only think about it but do something different. (Kate)

For some there was increasing awareness of roles and aspects of self previously unknown.

I became much more forward...I found a new role for myself where I...kind of challenged that image of myself as being quietly on the outside of things, more...I had an experience of myself as being able to take part in the group. (Duncan)

'Reflective stress and fatigue' was a sub-category where participants described feeling the short-term negative emotional and physical consequences of the group experience and how these were managed. Many linked this to the practicalities and timing of the group

The positioning of it, even if you're observing conflict it can be a very difficult way to end a week, Friday afternoon...just completely ruined my weekend. I don't think it would take many experiences of that ...for people to say I'm not going. (James)

Some participants recognised this as part of a process that they needed to overcome in the group context.

I didn't need to be leaving the group so tired and worn down because of the effort I was putting in to just paying attention... also the challenge of how I was managing those things and what I was doing with it so I guess I had to learn to put something back to try to affect the group...so I wasn't left with anything. (Laura)

(Negative case) The timing of the group was quite good...Because we all wanted to be in the library or wanted to go off...collapse for the weekend, but it gave you the drive home and your reaction would always be more apparent. (Shirley)

Negotiating the reciprocal impact of 'others'

This category reflected ongoing processes throughout the group of negotiating relationships and the impact of 'others' on the self and of the self on 'others'. In relation to the group experience these 'others' were group members, cohort members and the 'facilitators' (here this is used to mean group facilitators and the organisers i.e. course X).

'Duality of relationships' was a sub-category where participants described the process of negotiating issues of the group-within-a-group. This was felt to be inherent part of the RPG experience. Some participants reported that the relationships with peers outside the group

(either group members or friends within cohort) offered an opportunity to reflect on group process and were considered integral to finding the group a valuable experience.

I became friends with two people in my group and we began talking quite a lot afterwards and outside of that experience. ...and we were able to talk about the group the process and the dynamics of it...I think having those conversations alongside that group itself were...factors in helping me gain what I gained from it. (Laura)

Two people were in my reflective group I shared a lift with. So we would immediately leave and all go home together and lots of feedback happened in that drive home, we knew each other well and so could push it a little bit further...I carried that into the next group...it was quite a good monitoring and feedback process. (Peter)

For some participants it was inherent that the group was not a contained discrete entity, but affected and was affected by the larger group and course context.

It's very delicate thing for trainees to balance I think. I think its one of the difficulties of the groups...It's an inherent issue that things can't just stay in the room because you are naturally with each other in so many other spheres. (Amanda)

You know the real strength of it being a training context also becomes a real weakness....because you have to kind of repair relationships what happens in the group never stays in the group. (Peter)

‘Developing awareness of group process and group experiences’ was a sub-category where participants described their increasing awareness of processes occurring in the group and of the experience itself, as a parallel to client experience.

I did think....this is why its important to have this experience because when you’re put in the role of receiving the group, it did make me think about what it must be like for patients in groups I ran...it wasn’t until I started training that I had an experience that kind of linked in that way. (Amanda)

The factors that contributing to this developing awareness, for example, teaching and facilitators (‘reflection facilitated’) were also described as important in understanding and naming what was experienced and as highlighting what was felt to be missing from the RPG experience.

Three years of the group really did push forward my understanding of what happens in groups and there were all sorts of connections, even before I knew the theory behind it. I could really see patterns in the reflective practice group, patterns of interaction...that were also happening on placement. (Peter)

I learned more about [group process] from a final placement...I don’t think there was enough teaching about group process alongside the group experience...but in my final placement I did have that and then was able to learn more about what was happening in the group at that time. (Laura)

(Negative case) I suppose I don’t think the group increased my understanding of groups more than any other aspect...I’m sorry to say. (Duncan)

‘Composition and conflict’ was the sub-category where participants described their experiences of conflict in the group and described how they attributed this e.g. to a group member or process (using group theory) and how this affected participation, valued learning and distress in the group (this sub-category was closely connected to ‘developing awareness of group process and group experience’).

There was a girl...she was quite aggressive to one person in particular and it just went on and on it felt like the whole three years...it just seemed to get worse...I found it really challenging...she was so attacking and hostile, with us looking on as spectators. (Beth)

I felt some people were being quite withholding in the group....my response to that was resentment... some kind of attack and counter-attack. ...I’d become some kind of scapegoat. So it evolved in quite a conflictive way...part of the process was trying to get out of that really. (Stuart)

‘Reflection facilitated’ was a sub-category that described the participants’ experiences of the group facilitators; again here this refers not only to the individual facilitators in the room but also the ‘broader’ course-as-facilitator context. A minority of participants described the role and style of the facilitator as enabling them to derive value and meaning from the group.

I’m sure the facilitator helped the group, he shifted from someone I hated to, in the end, someone I really liked...seemed to be attuned to the group. He definitely became less analytical for a while and that allowed me to use the group better that helped with it being valuable. (Michelle)

However, the majority of participants felt that facilitators were not proactive in offering guidance, support and addressing conflict.

I felt quite angry...that the facilitator hadn't been a lot more available, a lot more hands on, a lot more containing of people's anxieties, because her approach was very much very boundaried, but offering very little.(Stuart)

The facilitator...I think she should have been more active something's were just allowed to go on but you know, there were probably good reasons why she did what she did.
(Amanda)

I don't think it was appreciated by the staff at the time how important it was to have people trained in group analysis when we kept on raising it was very much dismissed. (Beth)

Reflection-on-reflection

This category encompassed a number of processes described by participants relating to making meaning of their experience, as well as making use of their group experience. These processes were described by participants as occurring both during the group and in retrospect (where indicated).

'Beliefs about reflective practice and attendance' was a sub-category where participants described their beliefs and feelings about the mandatory attendance of the group and more generally, their beliefs about reflective practice within clinical psychology. Again

participants seemed to make sense of their views by making comparisons with views and positions contradictory to their own.

If you can't stop to think about what it is that you're doing or what it is that your assumptions...your therapy is absolutely compromised...you need to be able to reflect on your practice and you need to be able to bring yourself, and all your good bits, and all your shit bits...be able to look at it... .If you're not that kind of person who wants to do that...you wouldn't have gone to the group [unless it was mandatory]. (Kate)

(Negative case) It's the same as therapy. You wouldn't put a client into therapy that didn't want to be there...would be no point... .Whether it's a therapy group or any other kind of group, it's the same thing. I think it's a pointless exercise if people don't want to be there.

(Duncan)

'Experience-practice links' was a sub-category characterised by participants describing if/how the group influenced or was thought about in the context of their past and current practice. Although most participants reported some impact on practice, it was difficult to define in the context of other PPD influences.

It [group] has function for various clinical work that I did.... Just being in a group of people trying to do a task together or having different ideas about what the task is. ...I don't think that came as such a revelation to me [after attending the RPG]. (Eleanor)

I felt able to immediately start facilitating group supervision... .if I hadn't had three years of the reflective group... .I'd been in a group and understood a little bit about what forces were pushing and pulling so that really allowed me to have the confidence to straight away

run those sessions. ...I don't think I'd have done any of that if I hadn't had that experience.

(Peter)

'Continued process of meaning making' was a sub-category where participants described a continued search for meaning and understanding of their experience after the group had ended. Participants described different ways of trying to make meaning of their experience, for some the RPG seemed to continue through further discussion with group members.

For a period of time...after qualifying we would keep going back to it almost like a trauma response. ...I think we were still trying to make sense of what we'd gone through in terms of an experience that was muddled...incoherent,...we were still trying to fit puzzle pieces together...work out various different aspects of the different experiences. (Laura)

There was quite a lot of reflection that went on...other people in the group...we did stay in contact for quite some time afterwards so it was possible to do some further reflection and you know...the process didn't just sort of stop. (Eleanor)

For other participants there seemed to be a more general sense that the process of reflection was continuing: time and distance; having a space to reflect on the experience, including the interview itself; and having a language for understanding were important.

I think after leaving the course...being able to assimilate it...it's hard I think at the time to be reflective because you're so immersed in all the things you have to do....Where as once you leave you have all this space to reflect. I think a lot of it is time and space. (Beth)

I'm just really intrigued at how good it's been to reflect on this, even though it's now [amount of time]... it can sit with you for a long time in some kind of unmetabolised way

and just really thinking through how it could have been different, has been just really helpful. (Stuart)

Discussion

A preliminary model of 11 qualified clinical psychologist's experiences of RPGs during training at a UK clinical psychology training course has been presented. The constructed model proposes a number of reciprocally interacting processes at different group junctures that influence the perceived value of the group and the experiences of distress, within the context of individual personality/characteristics and wider training and PPD factors. These processes were: negotiating the unknown, managing emotion, negotiating self-awareness, negotiating reciprocal impact of 'others' and reflection-on-reflection.

The model could be seen as substantiating and expanding upon Smith et al.'s (2009) proposed factors for effective engagement in RPGs, as the preliminary model also considers the combined interrelated influence of internal factors (e.g. approach and motivation, expectations, ability to tolerate distress), group factors (e.g. negotiating purpose and aim, facilitator style) and environmental factors (e.g. dual relationships, reflective stress and fatigue), although with greater emphasis on understanding the process through which the groups are valuable learning experience and the role of distress.

Within the model, the category 'negotiating the unknown' indicated that unclear aims were a challenging group process. Many participants felt that clearer aims and purpose would have been beneficial, this is in-keeping with Fiener (1998) and Nitsun (1996), who suggested that ambiguity of purpose, if not managed, can increase anti-group sentiment and withdrawal.

However, being open to uncertainty may be inherent to being a 'reflective-practitioner' (Bolton, 2003).

Results indicated that trainee approach to engaging in the group was a key mechanism in participants finding their experience valuable. Participants faced a challenge in negotiating other members opposing approach and/or lack of motivation to participate. Previous research has highlighted trainee motivation as essential to development of reflective capacity (Chambers et al., 2009). Additionally, motivation to consider perspectives alternative to their own is thought to be integral for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) in adult education environments.

Within the category 'managing emotion', as echoed in previous anecdotal accounts (Smith et al., 2009), participants recognised their use of defences and avoidance variably during the group. Withdrawal and use of defences have been associated with anti-group phenomena (Nitsun, 1996) in response to uncertainty and group conflict, as mirrored in this study. The ability of participants to tolerate distressing emotions as an aspect of the experience was a key factor in finding their experience valuable, echoing adult learning theories which suggest increased emotional experiencing leads to deeper learning (Boyd, 1991). The motivation of participants to work with distress may be essential to in-depth learning in the educational context of the RPG (Taylor, 1998).

Increasing self-awareness within the group emerged as participants made links with family and friendship roles, as highlighted in previous trainee accounts (Smith et al., 2009). Participants reported feeling able to take different positions as a result of these realisations, which is thought to be a key outcome of transformative learning experiences (Mezirow,

1997). The ability, to identify and change roles typically taken in their family supports Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) "recapitulation of primary family group" (p. 15) as a key process in effective group work.

In 'negotiating reciprocal impact of others', group composition was highlighted as being an important factor in group conflict and distress; this may have led to a lack of group cohesiveness which may impact on effective group functioning (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The difficulties relating to composition highlight the complications in randomly allocating trainees to RPGs (unlike therapy groups), which is suspected to increase conflict (Rose, 2003).

The inherent dual-relationships of a group-within-a-group (Aveline, 1986) have been queried previously in research as a potential challenge and cause of distress for trainees (Nathan & Pouslen, 2004). However, whilst it was acknowledged by some participants as a challenging dynamic to balance, the results largely revealed the beneficial and facilitative aspects of these relationships in continuing the reflective process both during ('duality-of-relationships') and post-group ('continued process of meaning making'). Dual-relationships provided an external space to reflect on group experiences and subsequently make better use of the group space. Whilst some have suggested that a RPG offers trainees' opportunities to explore their pre-existing relationships with one another (Lyons, 1997), there have been no previous reports of external trainee relationships as facilitative of the reflective experience.

The results also indicated a need for the group to be adequately facilitated, many participants, regardless of their levels of distress, felt facilitators could have been more proactive, enabling them to make better use of the reflective space. This supports previous

findings (Knight et al., 2010; Brown, Lutte-Elliot, & Vidalaki, 2009) and group theory (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Nitsun, 1996), in highlighting the centrality of the facilitators' role and the need for them to be adequately trained (Noack, 2002).

'Reflection-on-reflection' highlighted the important ongoing process of meaning making beyond the end of the group, as well the potential impact on practice. The positive effects of retrospection and distance have been highlighted elsewhere (Hall et al., 1999; Knight et al., 2010). Previous literature has not supported improvements in practice (Izzard & Wheeler, 1995), but the results here, as previously (Hall et al., 1999), indicate that many attendees subjectively perceived positive practice effects. Participants largely (negative case given) felt that attendance should be mandatory, contrary to previous suggestions (Binks, 2010). Without mandatory attendance it was perceived that some trainees would avoid potentially distressing experiences and lose a valuable learning opportunity; which was also raised by Youngson and Hughes (2009). However, this needs to be considered in the context of the majority of participants valuing the group, to some extent, the absence of those in low value-high distress group and the influence of hindsight, in finding value in the experience.

Limitations

This study initially aimed to develop a preliminary yet substantive theoretical framework of the mechanisms through which value is derived and the experience of distress in the RPG. However, through the process of conducting the research and analysis, the original research questions evolved somewhat to consider more specifically the experience of participants in the context of finding the RPG a valuable and at times, distressing experience.

Whilst initial research questions typically evolve, narrow and transform through the course of GT (Willig, 2001), this research perhaps moved away from its original aim. The categories resulting from the analysis could be better understood as a ‘systematic map’ (Willig, 2001, p.46) of participant experiences (categories, sub-categories) in deriving value from the RPG in the context of varying degrees of distress/discomfort. Whilst this ‘map’ can be thought of as increasing understanding of the composition of clinical psychologists experiences’ of RPGs during training, it does not constitute an explanatory theory.

A number of factors may have contributed to a lack of explanatory ‘process’ model of RPG experience being constructed from the data. The results are necessarily a product of the analysis; my approach to the analysis was considered to be in keeping with GT principles (Charmaz, 2006) and was reviewed in GT peer-supervision and with the research supervisors. Social constructionist GT highlights the researcher as ‘constructing’ the categories as opposed to categories ‘emerging’ from the data (Charmaz, 2006). The categories constructed from the data may have, despite extensive supervision and personal reflexivity, been influenced by the context of being immersed in my own RPG ‘*experience*’, as opposed to a context of having distance from my RPG experience (and the RPG experience as mirrored in participant accounts), to have adequately constructed ‘*process*’ from within the data. Alternatively, the semi-structured interview may not have adequately captured participant ‘processes’ in deriving value from the group and the experience of distress; although it was developed in conjunction with the research supervisors and was piloted appropriately.

More broadly it has been suggested that applying GT, a sociological research method, to psychological research questions inevitably results in a more descriptive, as opposed to explanatory understanding of experience (Willig, 2001). A descriptive ‘map’ of experience may not have been the originally intended outcome, but nevertheless the research contributes to understanding participant experiences of deriving value and distress in RPGs during training and offers a conceptual model of the nature and negotiation of these experiences at different stages of the group.

Additionally, results are necessarily a product of retrospection; many participants may have found recognising the value of the RPG in the context of challenges easier in hindsight (Knight et al., 2010). Given this, the theoretical and ecological explanatory power of the preliminary model in relation to current trainee experiences is unclear. The transferability of the study is limited further by sampling from one UK clinical training programme, as there is reported heterogeneity in group characteristics across programmes (Smith et al., 2009).

There was potential for self-selection bias, since those who participated felt more positively about the RPG experience (Smith et al., 2009) and targeted recruitment of participants from the low value-high distress factor group was unsuccessful. Thus the proposed model is inevitably of the processes of a majority of people who found the group valuable in some way, further limiting transferability. The data can only contribute to inference about the processes related to distressing (non-valuable) experiences, although these should be made cautiously. It may be that those who found the group distressing,

without any perceived benefit, felt unwilling and/or unable to tolerate discussing their distressing experiences or were reluctant to present negative views of the course.

Implications for training

It would be beneficial for training course X to consider the factors presented here in planning reflective elements of the course, although given the limited generalisability of the study the following implications are tentative. The results indicate a need for training institutes to clarify the aims, dispel the mythology and facilitate appropriate expectations about the group before attendance (or at least prepare trainees for the aims to be diffuse and therefore negotiated within the group itself). This, along with a communication of the imperative of self-reflection for PPD, may consequently facilitate an 'open' approach to the group. In relation to this, courses may want to consider how, or if, they assess applicant commitment at selection to reflective practice and their level of motivation to reflect in an RPG. Despite the majority of participants here favouring mandatory attendance, some did not, and those who did not participate may agree, creating an ethical dilemma which training courses need to address (Driesson, van Tartwijk, & Dornan, 2008).

Additionally trainees could be offered preparatory sessions to explore the dual-relationships of the group and cohort; enabling them to utilise the group whilst negotiating the inherent complexities of the group-within-a-group boundaries. These sessions should not only acknowledge the challenges dual-relationships may present, but also the potential value of these for learning (reflection-on-action, Schön, 1987), in the context of individual RPG ground rules. The allocation of explicit protected time for trainees to reflect on the group with each other, their manager and/or supervisors or through individual sessions with an external

clinician (where necessary) may enable trainees who experience distress to explore this further and make better use of the group; however the possibility of these external sessions encouraging splitting within the group (Bion, 1961) and general anti-group sentiment (Nitsun, 1996) would need to be considered. Finally, proactive facilitation seemed to be favoured by participants. Training courses may need to ensure that facilitators are clear in their approach and adequately trained and supported.

Implications for research

Whilst this study suggests subjective positive impact of RPG attendance on practice, previous research has not corroborated this (Izzard & Wheeler, 1995). Future research should focus on determining objective operationalised outcomes of attending for clinical practice and establish more widely whether investing training time in reflective practices is ultimately of benefit to clinical work.

Whilst this research highlighted the role of distress in deriving value from the groups, further research is needed to develop theoretical understandings of the factors that act to inhibit interpersonal learning and those for whom distress is not tolerable or used beneficially in a group context. It is acknowledged that, as with this study, it may be difficult to recruit participants who have had distressing experiences in the absence of valued learning.

Finally, it may be that particular reflective practice methods are more suitable for particular individual learning styles (Binks, 2010; Knight et al., 2010). Future research should

aim to match learning styles with the most suitable and effective reflective practice methods for trainees. This will enable training programmes to offer the most effective methods tailored to individual needs, with the least potential to cause harm (Sheikh et al., 2007).

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Section C: Critical Appraisal

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Critical Appraisal

What research skills have you learned and what research abilities have you developed from undertaking this project and what do you think you need to learn further?

In completing the project I have learnt to manage the time constraints of undertaking qualitative research. I had to plan, organise and consider what would realistically be achieved in terms of participant numbers, transcribing and analysis, in the context of time-limited doctoral research. I imagine the same organisational skills would be required in balancing time constraints and demands of clinical practice for research in an NHS context.

The process of obtaining University Ethical approval was rigorous and I learnt a great deal from the process, particularly the need for transparency in rationale, a solid theoretical underpinning and continual consideration of ethical issues. I would benefit from further experiential learning opportunities in applying for approval from NHS ethics committees. Having witnessed many colleagues undergoing the process and participated in relevant teaching, there seem to be crucial differences that I will need to consider and negotiate in undertaking research in the NHS in the future.

Through utilising a qualitative methodology, I have learnt considerably about different epistemological positions both within different 'types' of grounded theory (GT) (Willig, 2001) and other qualitative methods through comparison. Through the process I have come to recognise the need to be clear about the objectives of the research and what it is possible to discover through the study. Therefore, I have learnt more about the need to clarify the

epistemological position adopted by the researcher, regardless of qualitative methodologies utilised. The position social constructionist GT takes in considering the contextual, social and linguistic construction of knowledge, along with my position as a current attendee of a RPG, necessitated development of my reflexivity skills. I have had to continually strive to consider the ways in which my values, experiences and beliefs shaped the research and also how the research impacted upon me (see below). Reflexivity is a skill I will continue to develop in undertaking research, particularly in continuing to aim for quality in qualitative studies (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999).

The qualitative research skills I have developed are varied and idiosyncratic. Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) describe qualitative analysis as a “creative” “interpretative” process by the researcher, who has to simultaneously remain aware that the results should “fit the data” (p. 139). Whilst I initially felt overwhelmed by the number of codes, valuable learning came through explaining and sharing the data with my supervisors and peer researchers (also doing GT); this helped clarify my thinking and manage my feelings of uncertainty about the analysis. Managing this uncertainty enabled me to balance creative and interpretative skills whilst keeping the results ‘grounded’ in participant accounts. Whilst I learnt a considerable amount about qualitative analysis through conducting the project, I wonder if confidence with GT comes with continued experience and practice.

If you were able to do this project again, what would you do differently and why?

Willig (2001) questions the suitability of GT as a qualitative method for psychological research, as it was designed (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Charmaz, 2006) as a method to identify and explain social process and answer sociological research questions. Willig (2001) has argued that the application of GT to questions regarding the nature of experience in psychological research reduces it “to a technique for systematic categorisation” (p. 46). What emerges does not constitute a ‘theory’ or explanatory framework (as when used in sociological research), but does perhaps increase understanding through a descriptive configuration of participant experience (Willig, 2001). Throughout the process of the research I have found it hard to reconcile this dilemma. Through the analysis of the data I noticed an internal discrepancy between my search for an explanatory ‘theory’ and/or a descriptive understanding. I struggled with wanting to take the data beyond the descriptive, which left me feeling uncertain and that I was not doing GT ‘right’. The results from my perspective seemed to be more of a structured descriptive understanding (though nonetheless useful), than a theoretical explanation and so moved away from the original intention of the study. I am left wondering if in retrospect, as Willig (2001) suggests, the experience of the RPGs could also have been illuminated by a phenomenological approach, such as IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

This project could be seen as a triangulation of qualitative data to Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby’s (2010) quantitative data (accessing the same participants). Although further validity checks within this study may have been useful, triangulation and objectivity measures may not have been in keeping with social constructionist GT. The credibility of this project was sought instead through epistemological and personal reflexivity, extensive documentation and

inclusion of negative cases (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). However even with reflexivity, it was difficult at times to separate the influence of my group experience on the data, for example as I became more aware of the roles I take up in my family within the group, I became more alert to examples of this in the data, necessitating my going back through earlier transcripts (constant comparative analysis) to ensure the results were 'grounded' in the data.

Additionally, whether the data truly reached theoretical saturation is unclear, the process of data collection and analysis in GT is meant to continue until saturation is reached. How realistic this was within this time-limited study is debatable, theoretical saturation could be seen more as a "goal than a reality" (Willig, 2001, p.35).

The participant response rate was lower than I had expected; perhaps I had not given sufficient consideration to the effects of time-lapse since Knight et al. (2010) research in having the most current contact details for participants, although it is unclear how these participants could have been recruited/contacted more efficiently given the specific inclusion criteria. I also had not considered adequately the possibility that I would not recruit anyone from the low value-high distress factor group. If I did the project again I could target recruitment efforts in sending tailored research invites, further acknowledging the study as looking for those who had both positive and negative experiences and attempting to address the possible concerns of these participants. In considering beforehand the likelihood and reasons why these people may have not wanted to participate (recounting distressing experiences, presenting negative view of course) I could have modified what I expected to be

able to answer about the role of distress in the RPG experience and therefore honed my research questions accordingly.

Utilising qualified clinical psychologists and retrospective accounts limits the generalisability of the study to current training contexts, given the role of hindsight. Whilst it would have been useful to conduct this research (and Knight et al., 2010) with current trainees', the methodological and ethical dilemmas of a trainee conducting research with trainees' from within the same (3-year) cohort, would not be easily reconciled. Participants from another course may be a viable alternative.

Clinically, as a consequence of doing this study, would you do anything differently and why?

It will be interesting to see if the results of this study, once disseminated to the university, will have an impact on the design/structure of the RPGs; I anticipate that it will at least stimulate debate about how the course offers opportunities for reflective practice. Undertaking this project developed my awareness of the importance of reflective practice. My feelings about the group changed throughout the project duration and were influenced by the research. The categories relating to the need to tolerate pain, make the most of an opportunity and consider family roles within the group motivated me to engage more with the process. The opportunity in hearing other peoples' reflections in hindsight has been extremely valuable in making use of my own group experience. I realise my cohort members were not as fortunate.

As my group evolved we took risks in sharing difficult experiences and feelings within the group, I became more aware of just how important this is. I wonder how we as clinicians can possibly remain defended and unaware of our styles and patterns of relating, when we expect our clients to engage in a process of self-discovering/understanding.

In practice, I hope to remain a practitioner who will not shy away from continually thinking about themselves and their practice, not being caught up in navel-gazing (Bennet-Levy, 2003) but seeking out ideas, practices and client groups that challenge me and make me re-consider what I assume to know. Equally I have become more aware of the importance of listening to my own emotional internal world, tolerating and accepting my own stress/distress as an indication that something needs reflecting upon as opposed to avoided or concealed for fear of being judged.

In considering how to take this forward in practice, within the context of coming to the end of training and without the allocated space of the RPG, I am left wondering if it will be difficult to maintain a space for reflection within the constraints of an NHS undergoing major reform, cuts and increased pressures of time and performance. It seems that in this time of uncertainty for many clinicians, having space to reflect on the impact of this on practice will become increasingly important. Both intrapersonal (e.g. journals, reading, personal therapy), and interpersonal (e.g. supervision, training, and increasing the space for reflexivity within multidisciplinary and psychology meetings), are options for maintaining and modelling reflexivity in my practice. Later, I hope to utilise the knowledge about reflective practice and groups accumulated here, to encourage supervisees to be reflective and to utilise the

multitude of opportunities to consider the self that are on offer during training, including the RPG, by providing them with a space to reflect on their group experience (identified in the study as valuable). I am aware that like the participants, the value of these opportunities may be more apparent to me in retrospect, as I come to the end of training and my RPG.

If you were to undertake further research in this area what would that research project seek to answer and how would you go about doing it?

This project's strength lay in the fact that it continued from, and built upon, previous research (Binks, 2010; Knight et al. 2010) on the RPG. Although it is acknowledged that these three studies were conducted within one UK training context, and may have limited transferability, they contribute to an evidence base for understanding and assessing the use of RPGs in clinical psychology training, a deficient research area. Courses offering RPGs across the UK should continue to evaluate and research the groups to develop a broader, transferable evidence base.

More specifically, I would be interested in conducting further research attempting to 'map' responses to the RPGQ (Knight et al. 2010), from a recent cohort, with participants' preferred learning style (perhaps using multiple regression). Since it has been suggested that Kolb's (1984) learning theory is implicit in clinical psychology training (Sheikh, Milne & Macgregor, 2007), the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (KLSI) (Kolb, 2005) may be an appropriate measure of trainee learning style. This may allow the course to establish if the level of perceived value or distress for a trainee is related to their preferred learning style. Depending on the relationships that emerge, courses may need to consider offering

alternative methods (e.g. journals), which could also be mapped to specific learning styles, or offer additional support to enable trainees to maximise use of the learning opportunities of the RPG, even if it does not entirely suit their learning style.

I feel further research in this area could contribute to establishing the most effective and acceptable reflective practice development opportunities (e.g. personal therapy, journal, RPG) for trainee clinical psychologists. Initially this may need to focus on the trainees' experience/opinion of a particular method (e.g. Knight et al. 2010). How effectiveness is determined will depend upon the operationalisation of reflective practice, desired outcomes, acceptability and time/cost efficacy of these methods. Qualitative methods, as employed here, may be suitably used alongside survey questionnaires such as the RPGQ (Knight et al., 2010), developed for other reflective practice methods.

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APPENDIX 1: Search Methodology and Review Approach

The following databases were searched for relevant empirical articles: PsychINFO, Medline, Cochrane, Sage Online, Pubmed and Web of knowledge and because of the limited research in the area the Reflective Practice (journal) and Clinical Psychology Forum, were also searched. Combinations of these key search terms were used, *'reflective practice group(s)'* *'personal development'* or *'growth group'*, *'experiential groups'*, and *'counselling'*, *'counsellor'* *'psychotherapy'* *'psychology'*, *'training'*, *'students'* and *'personal'* and *'professional development'*.

A manual search of articles identified in the databases yielded 5 studies that met the specified criteria; manual search of their references yielded 1 study. An additional search on Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.co.uk>) revealed 1 additional (unpublished) study. In combination with Knight et al. (2010, identified through undertaking the project), 8 research articles met the stated criteria. A final search conducted in March 2011 revealed no additional studies.

The literature search along with reference list searches, yielded 8 studies (including 1 unpublished, Wigg, 2009) to be reviewed. These are grouped by profession (counselling/counsellor & clinical and undergraduate psychology) and described including a brief overview of the study, with main findings, a consideration of the relevant conceptual and theoretical issues, methodological issues and ethical considerations.

**APPENDIX 2: Table Overview of
Reviewed Studies**

Author (s)	Methodology	Participants	RPG	Analysis method/ measures	Results/Themes
Kline et al., 1997	Qualitative: Interviews	23 counselling trainees	15 x unstructured group sessions facilitated by 2 doctoral students	Questionnaires completed at 8 th and final session (15 th). Grounded theory used to analyse data	Initial questionnaire: Three categories, interpersonal awareness, relational insight. Follow-up: Three additional categories emerged, interpersonal attitudes, emotional awareness and behavioural learning.
Hall et al., 1999	Mixed method: Questionnaire interview/ survey	92 former masters level counselling or human relation students (21 yr cohort)	Mandatory small groups based in Rogerian principals. 10x 3 hour sessions	Researcher designed questionnaire	Participants ascribed current counselling ability to group experience: Most frequently attributed skill was handling silence (77%). Specific feeling attributed to the group, 82% 'challenging'. 12.4.% reported short term distress, 2.2% long term damage from participating.
Nathan & Poulsen, 2004	Qualitative: Semi-structured interviews	22 psychology students	Group-analytic groups, weekly for 25-30 x 1 hour 3 mins sessions.	Grounded theory analysis by both authors	Three categories (sub-categories): The aims of the group; groups at the university, professional experiences (professional outcomes, relevance of group as a

					study element.)
Lennie, 2007	Mixed methods: Focus group and questionnaire	88 trainee counsellors	Personal development groups throughout training for 30 hour intro courses; year long part time certificate; or diploma level counselling course Insufficient detail given as to duration, length of groups and facilitation.	Initial focus group with selection of 88 trainees. Questionnaire designed by researcher with 88 trainees.	Trainees were more comfortable with group at start of training, less comfortable at the end. No relationship between comfort and perceived self-awareness. 73% preferred groups size 6-8.
Robson & Robson, 2008	Qualitative: Written accounts	11 student counsellors	Mandatory personal development group x 1 hour weekly, random allocation of trainees, facilitated by tutors.	Thematic analysis of written accounts. Analysed by both authors	Twelve major themes: safety, congruence, quiet members, connections, facilitation, awareness of process, power of sharing detachment, search for who to be, anger in groups, response to one member, experiencing empathy. Only

					safety described in detail.
Ieva et al, 2009	Qualitative: Semi-structured interview	15 masters level trainee counsellors	Mandatory personal growth group co-led by doctoral students. 10 x 90 min groups	Grounded theory. Analysed by the four person research team, whom had previously facilitated these groups.	Three themes (sub-categories): Personal awareness (Process, relationships); personal development (process empathy, modelling); programming (requirement, personal growth, group facilitators, journaling).
Knight et al, 2010	Quantitative: Analytic survey	297 (pilot questionnaire) & 124 qualified clinical psychologists former trainee group experience (graduated between 1986-2007).	Mandatory Reflective practice groups fortnightly x 1 hour and 30 mins, 3 years duration. Facilitated by external psychologists	RPG Questionnaire designed and validity and reliability reported. Factor analysis and thematic analysis of questionnaire data	Factor analysis: Two underlying constructs, 'value' and 'distress'. 71% =high value, 43% high distress. Just below half participants (n=46) reported high value low distress, n= 28 high value-high distress n=17 high distress-low value.
Wigg, 2010 (unpublished doctoral research)	Qualitative: Semi-structured interview	12 qualified clinical psychologists, former trainees (across 10 yr cohort)	Mandatory personal development groups during training. Insufficient information on duration, and facilitation	Interpretative phenomenological analysis plus components of grounded theory	Four super-ordinate themes (master themes): The group vs. individual (being together, being an individual); sense-making (stages of a journey, holding up a mirror, role of facilitator);

					developing a professional self (professional learning, managing personal and professional self); thinking about reflective practice (developing RP, tasks of RP).
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**APPENDIX 3:
Ethics Research Letter**

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APPENDIX 4: Summary of Research Findings (chair of ethics panel and study participants)

Research Summary

Thank your for taking time to participate in this study. The study has now been and submitted in partial fulfilment of the Salomons Canterbury Christ Church doctorate in clinical psychology. This summary has also been submitted to the Salomons Research Ethics Panel who approved the study.

Exploring the process of attending a reflective practice group during training: A preliminary grounded theory study of qualified clinical psychologists experiences

Context

This study aimed to build upon the earlier study of Knight et al. (2010)* investigating the personal and professional impact of reflective practice groups (RPG's) for former trainee clinical psychologists. Grounded theory methodology was used to explore the means through which value is derived from the groups and the experience of distress.

Participants

Eleven qualified clinical psychologists took part in semi-structured interviews. Participants had previously (Knight el al. 2010) been categorised into 1 of 4 factor groups based on level of perceived value and distress (e.g. high value-low distress, high value-high distress). Sampling aimed to recruit people with a range of experiences, though no one within the low value-high distress category participated.

Results (table & figure)

A preliminary interactional model was constructed from the data; five categories (and sub-categories) (see table) were important in understanding how the groups come to be perceived as valuable in the context of varying distress levels. The model (figure) illustrates interrelated, mutually influencing group and individual processes in deriving value and experiencing distress in the group. The experiences are generalised within the model, so whilst these factors may be consistent across ex-trainees, processes will vary for individuals depending on characteristics, personality and external life factors. The categories should therefore be considered within the idiosyncratic context of the individual and also within the wider training context which includes the impact of other PPD methods identified by participants (e.g. teaching, supervision, placements, and personal therapy).

Table		
Group stage	Category	Sub-categories
Pre & During	Negotiating the unknown	Expectations
		Negotiating aims and purpose
		Approach and motivation
During	Managing emotion	Protection-of-self
		Tolerating distress
During	Negotiating the development of self-awareness	Value of safety
		Realisations of self-in-group(s).
		Reflective stress and fatigue
During	Negotiating the reciprocal impact of 'others'	Duality of relationships
		Developing awareness of group process and experience
		Composition and conflict
		Reflection facilitated
Post & During	Reflection-on-reflection	Continued process of meaning making
		Beliefs about reflective practice and attendance
		Experience-practice links

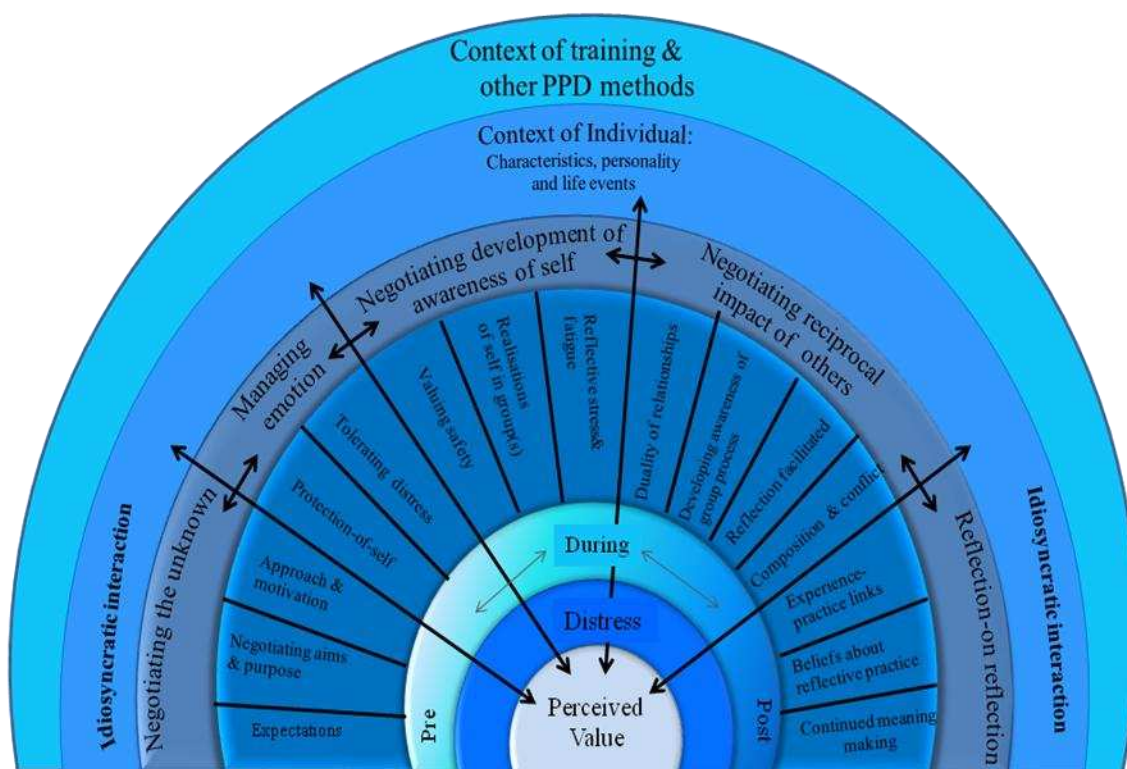


Figure 1. Preliminary model: Double headed arrows indicate mutually influencing relationships between categories and contexts (half circles).

Conclusions and recommendations

It was recommended that training programmes should consider trainee expectations, approach and motivation, the dual-relationship of the group within the cohort group and facilitator style in impacting on the experience of RPG's. Despite recruited no participants from the low value-high distress factor group, the possibility of distressing experiences in the absence of valued learning needs to be considered within the context of mandatory participation. Recommendations were made for future research to match trainees' personal learning style with suitable reflective method, build an evidence base for alternative reflective practice methods and establish the benefits of reflection for clinical practice.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the results of the study further please contact me (details below). Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this study.

Alicia Fairhurst

aliciafairhurst@hotmail.com 01892507666 (Department of Applied Psychology-Salomons).

APPENDIX 5: Semi-structured interview schedule

Semi-structured Interview Schedule-Reflective Practice Groups

The researcher introduces themselves and the research and clarify format of interview, breaks and termination, recording and use of recorded data. Ask participants to be mindful of their own and others rights to confidentiality and my responsibility as the researcher to omit any identifying information.

Questions & Possible prompts (denoted by -)

Previous experiences and expectations

What do you think the aims of the groups were?

-How do you think it met those aims?

Can you tell me about any expectations you had of the RPG's?

-How do you think it met your expectations?

Can you tell me about any previous experiences of being in a group?

How did you feel about attending initially?

- Can you tell me a bit more about your feelings in relation to your previous experiences and/or expectations?

Valued experiences in the groups

Could you describe the most valuable experience (s) you had attending the reflective practice groups?

-At the time?

-Now/ retrospect?

-What contributed to this?

-(If prompts needed – was there anything internal to you or external about the group that influenced this?)

-Who, if anyone influenced this? How?

How did this influence how you engaged in the group subsequently?-

- Thoughts are now looking back on this?

Difficult experiences in the groups

Can you describe any difficult or challenging experiences of reflective practice groups/something that was distressing about the experience?

-Either at the time/ looking back in retrospect

-What was reaction to this experience?

-Thoughts, feelings, actions.

-What do you think contributed to this experience?

-Who if anyone influenced this experience?

How did this influence engagement in the group subsequently?

-How did your view of the RPG's change after this experience?

-Have you thought about them differently since realising this was a difficult experience?

-Can you tell me what your thoughts are now looking back on this experience?

-What do you think could have changed how you felt about this experience?

Personal and professional development

How do you think (if at all) taking part in the RPG's influenced your personal development?

-In what ways ?

What other experiences influenced your personal development during training?

How do you think (if at all) taking part in the RPG's influenced your professional development?

-In what ways?

What other experiences influenced your professional development during training?

Group processes

How do you think (if at all) taking part in RPG's aided your understanding of group processes?

-Other influences on understanding of group process?

How, if at all, has this influenced your current understanding of group processes?

How if at all has it influenced your practice?

What are your thoughts on the mandatory nature of the groups?

APPENDIX 6: Research Invitation sheet and Reminder Letter

Researcher name

Contact details

Invitation to Participate in Research & Consent form

Dear participant,

In 2008 Katherine Knight* undertook research looking into Clinical Psychologists experiences of reflective practice groups (RPGs) during training, which you contributed to. At the time Katherine enquired whether you were willing to take part in future research in this area possibly involving interviews. I am now conducting this follow-up research and would be grateful if you would be willing to participate.

What will it involve?

I would like to meet with you in person to conduct an interview which will last approximately 30-50 minutes about your experiences of reflective practice groups (RPGs) during training. I'm interested particularly in the processes that people go through in deriving value and meaning from the groups and how difficulties are experienced and processed in the groups. The interview would be recorded on digital dictaphone.

Consent

You can give your consent to take part **or** inform us that you do not wish to take part by ticking the relevant box on the below reply slip. Alternatively you can email me on the below address indicating your consent.

This consent can be withdrawn at any time until publication of the report. This letter has been sent to you by a research administrator so you will remain anonymous to me until you decide to take part in the research. If you choose not to take part I will not have access to your name or contact details.

If you agree to take part you may choose how you will be contacted by me to arrange the interview (phone or email). I will then contact you to arrange the interview.

You will be asked at the end of the interview if there is anything you would like to have altered or omitted from your responses. You have the right to withdraw yourself, all, or part of your data up until the point of publication.

Costs and benefits of taking part

Obviously taking part in this research will mean you having to give up some of your personal time. Whilst we expect that some people may have had difficult and challenging experiences in the groups which may cause some distress during the interviews, we also anticipate that some people will find taking part and having a chance to discuss the group a cathartic experience.

If you were to become distressed as a result of taking part the researcher will pause the interview and check if you would like to continue, have a break or terminate. You will be offered a follow up telephone call with the researcher.

Confidentiality

As you are aware respecting the confidentiality of the RPGs and the people in them was at the time, and still is, very important. As such I would ask that if you decide to take part in the interviews that you respect the confidentiality of the other members of your groups by not using names or directly quoting others.

Equally, your confidentiality is important, your data will be anonymised and as the researcher I will check all transcripts and will omit any material where I feel a fragment of the interview breaches yours or another's right to confidentiality.

In order to ensure my safety whilst conducting the research the name and address (of interview location) will be given in a sealed envelope to a colleague associated with Salomon's on the day of the interview and destroyed by me after I have notified them that I have completed the interview safely.

Location

Although the study has been approved by the Canterbury Christ Church University's research ethics board, I have not obtained NHS ethical approval for this study as participants will not be recruited via the NHS and it is not a requisite that they will be employed by the NHS. It is anticipated that participants will be working in a variety of NHS trusts, private and voluntary sectors or currently not employed.

As such I can conduct the interviews on NHS property outside of your working hours, so before or after working hours (as long as line managers do not object to the space being

used). I am also happy to meet with you at a location of your convenience (I would be happy to book a room in a location that you identify as appropriate e.g. voluntary organisation) or you could travel to Salomons for the interview if you are relatively local (although unfortunately I can not reimburse travel costs). An alternative would be to conduct the interview over the phone if this is most convenient for you.

The results

You may choose to receive the feedback in writing in the form of a short summary article or over the telephone with the researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this research, if you have any questions you would like to ask before returning the enclosed slip please contact me on the above number.

Yours sincerely

Alicia Fairhurst

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

aliciafairhurst@hotmail.com

*Knight, K. M., Sperlinger, D. J., & Maltby, M. (in press). Exploring the personal and professional impact of reflective practice groups: A survey of 18 cohort from a UK clinical psychology training course. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*.

Please return the reply slip in the pre-paid envelope (or email me) either consenting or declining to take part within 2 weeks of the sent date. If we do not hear from you a reminder letter will be sent to you.

Reply slip / Consent form

I wish to take part in this research

- In ticking this box, giving my contact details, and signing the slip below I am agreeing to take part in this research.
- I am aware that Alicia Fairhurst will be contacting me to arrange an interview about my experiences of reflective practice groups during training.
- I am aware that I have the right to withdraw myself and my data at any point up until publication.

I would like to be contacted by the researcher to arrange the interview by:

Telephone Number:

Email Email address:

Signed _____

Name (please print) _____

I do not wish to take part in this research

- If you decline to take part in this research you will remain anonymous to the researcher and will not be sent a reminder letter.

Alicia Fairhurst
Contact details
xxxxxx

Research Reminder Letter

Dear participant,

In 2008 Katherine Knight undertook research looking into Clinical Psychologists experiences of Reflective Practice Groups (RPG's) during training, which you contributed to. At the time you agreed to be contacted to consider taking part in future research.

I recently contacted you asking if you would be willing to participate in my research project involving interviews about your experiences of reflective practice groups (RPGs) during training. You have not, as yet, sent back the reply slip indicating that you do not wish to take part.

As you may be aware that Katherine's research process allowed categorisation of the participants into different groups based on how valuable and how distressing their experience of RPGs was. Understanding more about the category to which your responses were (anonymously) assigned would be extremely useful for my research, I would appreciate if you would consider taking part.

I have enclosed another copy of the information sheet and a pre-paid envelope. If you would like to participate please return the consent slip in the pre-paid envelope or email me at: aliciafairhurst@hotmail.com

Thank you again for taking the time to consider taking part in this research

Yours sincerely

Alicia Fairhurst

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

**APPENDIX 7:
Uncoded Transcript Excerpts**

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APPENDIX 8:

Excerpts of Reflective Interview: Researcher Interviewed by Supervisor

Supervisor: Okay, so I've got some questions here to ask you to help you think about your reflections on the project. I hope they're alright. My first question is what aspects of your life or experiences that you've had do you think might affect the way that you look at the questions or the analysis.

Researcher: I guess my ... I don't know. I'm really not sure. I guess it's just thinking about my experiences of being in the groups is probably the biggest thing that influenced how I see the questions about it, thinking about how other people talk about the groups in my year as well, and kind of people are still watching what they say about the groups around me since I started the project, which has been interesting. They're kind of saying "God, reflective group on Friday" and you go "Oh, well, you know, they're not that bad" like I have some kind of vested interest, like my research I'm trying to say how brilliant they are, that I have this idea of them, when I don't really feel like I've been doing that, I've been putting that across. But it seems to be an assumption that other people are making about why I'm doing the research.

Supervisor: Because you're very pro the groups and reflective practice.

Researcher: Yes. That seems to be the impression I'm getting from other people and I guess it's something to bear in mind.

Supervisor: What sorts of things were they saying and how has that changed now? Can you see a shift in the way that they've been talking about the groups? Do you think they were more open to being critical and saying what they really felt, and now they've closed more, closed up, feel like they have to be more positive about the groups with you?

Researcher: Yeah, a little bit I do think that

Supervisor: Because in a sense it's somehow you're going to be upset if they trash the group.

Researcher: Yes, yeah something like that. So they're being mindful of your feelings, thinking that you're married to it somehow.

Supervisor: Yeah?

Researcher: There's this idea that the groups are useless which comes up quite a lot and they're pointless, that people I think the week before last, the first year and then we had a weekend and then you were a second year – strange – but people are saying "I still don't know why I'm here. What's this for? That did frustrate me a little bit and then I kind of did feel a bit defensive. It's kind of like they started to put me in that role and I was starting to take that on. I don't think they're absolutely wonderful. I'm not really clear myself of the value of the groups, but I think ... I didn't

feel that taking on the research that I really wanted to prove how wonderful they are, but I think about people 'hating them. I do kind of think, well, you know, what's going on that you can't think positively about them, that you can't think about their value, but then I don't say that. Don't say that out loud in that group. I was kind of wondering ... maybe it's changed how I think about the value of them because I do think about them.

Supervisor: Yes, I guess that's the interesting thing, isn't it? Can you think back to before you thought about reading anything about reflective practice? What was your position prior to [0:04:33.2]? Do you think that's changed as a result of your reading? Do you think you have become more open and thinking about what the challenges are? Do you feel like you understand a lot more?

Researcher: Yes, I think so. I think it has changed ... I did kind of think ... I don't know actually. Before going to the RPG and hearing about the reflective practice groups, I think there was something a little bit glamorised about them for me actually. I knew they weren't for therapy but there is a therapy element to the groups and it's just very free and there's a kind of mystery to them, which is a bit kind of enticing, and for a person trying to get on the course a bit intriguing. What goes on in there? And then there was really difficult first groups and I'd kind of found out who was going to be in my group and there was someone in there I really, really didn't ... not like, that's a very strong choice of words, strong negative feelings towards. It was somebody I knew before going on training, so it wasn't kind of just based on the first couple of weeks. It was an idea I'd built up over a couple of years of contact with them, kind of thing, and they were as bad as I thought. I'd seen this person's name and been to the group and god, it was awful. It was really painful. I was quite upset, and quite distressed and angry with what was being said in them, and then kind of died down and the research came up and I thought actually, they are quite interesting. And then the more I thought about it and this particular person in the groups and how they were in lectures, I kind of actually came to the conclusion that they're probably really, really unreflective as a practitioner. I thought, actually, I haven't really thought about how valuable that is as a trait, that kind of self-awareness until I figured or thought that's what was lacking in this particular person, to me I felt that's what they were lacking, kind of bull in a China shop, not really recognising that they're ... not having any self-awareness or capacity for reflective practice, so that's really changed my idea of how important groups were, and I guess doing the reading and things I ... I still didn't want to be put in that place where people weren't saying things, weren't saying how they felt about the groups in front of me as if I'm this kind of champion of the groups because I still don't feel like that, but when people kind of say "I don't understand what the point of them is" I think, well, you probably should, but I don't know my own feeling about their value either.

Supervisor: Do you think there's a difference between an intellectual understanding about what reflective practice is and an experiential understanding?

Researcher: Yes. Yes, I think so. I guess ...

Supervisor: Do you feel in a way that although you're going through an experiential understanding they're still putting you in the position of ... because you've got somehow more of an academic understanding because you've been reading the literature, they're sort of putting you in a certain position that you should have understood, and somehow you're ahead of them in the experiential bit and that that's quite threatening in some ways.

Researcher: Yes, potentially. I guess I wondered how ... I mean most of this has been going on outside of groups, but yes I kind of thought about how people would think about me in the group and whether it will change how people think and respond to me in the group. I don't know if they don't understand research but they think that ... Someone asked me the other day whether I'd be interviewing them, I was like of course not that would be really inappropriate. I wonder if lots of people have that idea that kind of picking that up and going to be taking notes or doing some kind of covert observations of them

and the process that happens in the group, and I guess that changes [0:09:06.5]. Well, for them I think that changes that perception of me for them.

Supervisor: Do you think it's having an impact on the way you are using the group now because before you decided to go into the research you were experiencing it, as was everybody else, on the same level, and now you have got this extra something, so do you think it is changing the way you're now using the group and you're holding back more, or giving more, or defending it more. Do you think it's had an impact?

Researcher: No, I don't think it's had an impact on how I am in the group, maybe the kind of things I'm thinking about in the group, but I'm not a huge talker in the group. I will if it's something I'm really passionate about or angry, I won't enter into talking to fill silences. I don't really feel the need to do that, but I don't think it's changed the way I'm thinking about the groups. It's difficult to tell at this stage.

APPENDIX 9: Research Diary Excerpts

Typed excerpts from handwritten notes for clarity of reading

Date	Diary Entry
May 2009	Decided to go ahead with this research over art based project with people with schizophrenia. It seemed the sensible option as I was equally interested in each potential project, but this seemed to have many positive factors as well as ability to hold my interest, including that it expands on an existing project, and will have other off-shoot projects (with facilitators), participants have identified themselves as willing to be contacted. Have read Katherine's research, really interesting. Made links to own experience of RPG's, wonder what I'll find in my research.
June 2009	Initial thoughts in undertaking the research. Peoples contempt for the groups and my own initial difficult experiences, how will this impact on the research, what leads I choose to follow, questions I ask? Discussed in supervision, decided to have an 'interview' with my external supervisor to think about what assumptions, biases, experiences of my own I need to remain aware of. How will my group members react to me? Even though they know I'm not interviewing them, will they feel I'm an intruder, watching analysing our group instead of participating?
June 2009	I've been contacted by a third year trainee (C) whose project has recently fallen through, so she's decided to take up a very similar project to mine, except she will interview facilitators of the groups ! It could be useful to meet up and think about themes, she will be submitting/carrying out the research way a head of me as she plans to submit in April next year. I must try not to let her results influence how I engaged with my analysis.
June-July 2009	Difficult experiences with one member of my group, dominating whole group, questioning his place on the course. Makes me wonder if there is a natural reflective ability that can't be 'taught' or developed. Is it just that people who choose this profession are typically more reflective? Need to consider this in interview and analysis later on. Meeting with MM, what are my questions? Value and distress are key factors from Katherine's, why are some people able to draw value, despite distressing experiences and some not?
August 2009	I have started personal therapy, given me a space to think about dominating person in group. Although its frustrating he is also helping us avoid our own difficult stuff by dominating group with his.
Oct 2009	Meeting with Michael M need to think about interview schedule, what do I want to ask, what am I trying to glean? What about people's memory? Is this going to be an issue, is it inherently an issue that views will change with passing of time or should we put a cap on number of years since training? Katherine didn't, perhaps we should follow in line with her. Leave decision of whether they feel strongly

	enough/remember enough to take part to the participants themselves. Decision made not to exclude based on number of years since qualifying.
Nov 2009	Had my independent research review meeting at Salomons today with XX and XX. It wasn't as scary as I had anticipated, they made some useful comments and highlighted things I need to keep in mind in doing the research. I need to link more to theory in my proposal and then in write up, is this group theory? Reflective practice? I need to decide on focus of review. Why, what is the need to do research, needs to be clear in mind. Long overdue task of CP? of Salomons? Does PPD necessarily invite deconstruction of self in training? – Conflicts with super competent practitioner? In a profession that works with other peoples distress need to be able to confront and work with our own. Methodology, why GT and not IPA- need to justify this. I had concerns about need to triangulate, PC said wasn't necessary if data was rich enough, but could consider it.
November 2009	Meeting MM recommended books to read, Dallos & Steadmon. Discussed, models, how do different models we use in CP think about reflective practice and how might this be an influence on how people think back on their experience. Need to submit ethics form to Salomon's Ethics Committee.
November 2009	I have approval from Salomon's Ethics Committee, must have done an OK job on proposal after all as I don't need to made any changes. Great now I need to start thinking about recruitment! This is the part that feels overwhelming. I have an anxiety about being judged on my interview 'skills' by the participants! I need to remain mindful of this and the impact it may have on the style, pace and ease of the interviews, and then obviously the data that is gathered.
December 2009	Conducted pilot interview! Was really nervous but seemed to go well, got some good feedback, adapted some of questions. Need to give people time to answer fully, aware of wanting to get all questions on schedule answered but cant cut people too short.
April 2010	Meeting with MM feedback how pilot went, need to be more explicit about change over time. Will be hard for people to think about, but just asking them to think whether what they are discussing was how they felt at the time or in retrospect,. Even then this won't be accurate but gives people option to think about it. Discussed sampling again, agreed on randomly to begin with, even spread across 4 factors and then selective sample depending on initial analysis i.e. theoretical sampling in line with GT. Discussed triangulation and my concerns that I do need to triangulate in some way, we actually realised that my data could be triangulated against CB's research with facilitators! This seems like a good additional source of data to match against mine. I'll look through her results after I've already completed some of my analysis and codes/categories are emerging, in case I'm inadvertently influenced by her results.
April 2010	Meeting with KK, she's as unsure as me about grounded theory! Agreed I'd send a couple of GT papers that I've been reading to her to get a sense of the methodology. We agreed a timeline of the research. Part A draft by June! The whole things seems quite overwhelming, sometimes it feels so far off I cant imagine the actual doing of

	<p>it. We agree that I need to get going with interviews as it will be staged process depending on initial analysis. Where am I at in my own group? Well its been tough contending with the dominant member, he is central in the cohort never mind the group, but I'm managing to make use of it, actually his ability to share all the difficulties on his placement opens up for other people to do the same. I've shared some difficult experiences and gotten support, I've discussed my role, why I tend to stay quiet and we talked about how that effects people in the group. It's not always been comfortable; I've left some Fridays just feeling awful.</p>
May 2010	<p>Meeting MM discussed what research/theory says about distress in groups. I've been reading up on some group theory. We talked about the anti-group theory of Nitsun in relation to RPG, role of facilitator in managing anti-group sentiment etc. Need to be mindful of not absorbing self in too much theory prior to analysis, keeping in mind what has been read and what emerges from data.</p>
Jun 2010	<p>Meeting MM, agreed need to send out letters to recruit ASAP. Discussed the debate on personal therapy within CP, whether it should be a requirement as in counselling psych and psychotherapy training. How relevant is this to the project. Its mandatory attendance of groups the same. How will peoples view of mandatory group attendance vs. mandatory personal therapy differ?</p>
June 2010	<p>I've asked Xxxx to send out the research invites to a random selection of people. She asked another administrator to randomly pick some numbers that correlated to potential participants and sent them off today by post and emailed, in case people have moved etc. I hadn't actually thought of that, it's almost 2 years ago that Katherine started her research Salomon's periodically updates their contact info for ex-trainees, but XX X says that was last done just before Katherine's project and there are no plans to do it soon. What if I can't contact people! It would mean needing to recruit through a different method and mean making major revisions with regards to ethics etc. Guess I'll just have to wait and see what the response is like.</p>
August 2010	<p>Conducted my first interview today! I was quite nervous and feeling a little off and upset after receiving the 3rd year placement allocation letters and again not getting what I'd asked for! Even so the interview went well. The participant expressed concerns initially that they wouldn't remember enough, but at the end commented on how much they had remembered and surprised themselves with. Some interesting things came up, particularly ideas around previous experiences, the boundary of the group, and group in context of cohort group. I'm interested to think about the impact of attending RPG on existing/developing cohort relationships and vice versa.</p>
August 2010	<p>Meeting MM fed back initial interview. Made timetable plans, discussed sending out second round of invites. Do further amendments need to be made to interview schedule? Something about expectations before attending, maybe need to be explicit in asking more about this? Asking people about PPD more generally than profession and personal, then prompt to make distinction if not made? Concerns that interview could run over time, said an hour to participants obviously very busy, and can't go over this really. Need to keep succinct but access relevant data.</p>

August 2010	Decided to send out second round of invites, plus reminders to those who did not respond initially. Have agreed a draft of methodology by Sept with MM! We agreed that writing it now will formalise what I'm doing and I'll be better able to keep track of what I'm doing and why.
September 2010	Meeting MM. Hanging head in shame as haven't completed a draft of methodology yet, but we discussed the Part A outline that I send him previously. He reminds me that I need to be critical in part a, it's not enough to present the current research have to identify the gaps and open up the debates. Thinking about the influence of group theory from part A on data, Yalom's work suggesting group cohesion is necessary, but the Nichol suggesting pain is a part of learning, in my mind pain may come through intrapersonal realisation and interpersonal through conflicts disagreements. Would a group where conflict and disagreements were rife be considered cohesive, or does cohesiveness mean being able to work through conflict and remain as a group?
September 2010	Interview 2 & 3 completed, now comes the really tricky part for me the analysis. I started on participant 1 early Sept, the transcribing is time consuming but does immerse you in the interview. Participant mentioned talking to her friends outside the group context was a key component in them being able to make sense of an experience. I find this really interesting and not sure if it's come up in the literature before. I've not read Katherine's or C's IRP in a long long time even then I skim read it. I can't remember much of it so am hoping it will have a minimal impact on my date analysis. I remember something about facilitators wanting supervision and feeling that group members avoided distressing subjects, which are things I'd already thought about and experienced in the group!
September 2010	God the analysis is so time consuming you really have to just immerse yourself in it, or you get distracted easily! I'm finding it interesting though, keeping track of my initial thoughts with memos. Participants 2 and 3 mentioned things along the same lines as participant 1 so I went back look over participant 1 again, from my first read through, but I need to be careful about what I'm paying attention to and what lines of further thinking/coding I find myself going down. I think some of the things about noticing family/social roles is mirroring some of my personal experience, but I need to make sure that my emerging ideas stay grounded in what the participants talked about in the interviews. Participant 3 said something about the group being a petri dish a microcosm of your life, this was a nice analogy and speaks to that experience. I think just keeping track of all this and sharing with MM and KK will ensure the data stays grounded in what was said.
October 2010	Hoping that recruitment might pick up now post school holidays etc. We talked with KK about why it is slow. Is it about not having correct up to date contact details or just pressures of time. I convey my frustration that these are the people who should remember what its like to do research and need participants! I hope that I'm not too far removed from the experience that I will volunteer for research in the future! The ones analysing now are all are in High Value-high distress, whilst this will hopefully tell us something about distress and the processes of valuable learning, these

	<p>participants won't tell us anything about the experience of distress when the group is not found to be valuable. Need to try to recruit from this group! Agree to send reminder letters to just those in this group, will speak to X about getting these sent. Spoke to X decided to send a few more reminders to those who have not responded either way in other factor groups too. Feeling anxious about number of participants!</p>
November 2011	<p>Meeting KK. Have 4 more participants! Some before Christmas then a few booked after. It will be good to check the codes I have already against these, I want to try to elaborate on some of the ideas around expectations linked to previous experience or lack of and effects of cohort relationships, also on composition of group which seems to have come up. I need to be mindful though that issues within my own group aren't over influencing this line of thinking. Very dominant member is taking up so much time, I feel exhausted by his presence and constant talking it is getting in the way of my using the group.</p>
Dec 2011	<p>Something about expectations is still coming out of the data, I'm aware that I asked about expectations so have led the data in some way, but it also seems that participants have responded to this question spontaneously at times as well as giving taking time to consider the impact of any expectations when explicitly asked. I've gone back to my pilot and my first interview to think about this. I need to ask myself how has the questions defined and limited what can be found? I explicitly wanted to think about the processes and factors associated with distress and value, rather than get an in depth description of the overall experience per se, so it does feel founded to be asking these questions. The interview schedule itself was piloted and there was not feedback that the questions were leading or asked things people didn't feel were relevant. I asked my first participant more generally what her feeling was about the prospect of attending, I was asking tentatively about expectations without saying expectations! I think as I've become more confident in the interview process, I became more explicit is asking about expectations subsequently.</p>
Dec/Jan 2011	<p>I'm struggling with the analysis, can't believe how many codes there are already not sure if there are meant to be this many. I discussed it with MM before break, but I'm feeling a bit alone with to be honest as KK doesn't know much about GT either. I've decided to re-vive the GT support group which flopped slightly last year as we were all at different stages and no one was analysing. Hoping I can get some credibility checks of codes and eventually the main results and model from peers. Hopefully it won't turn into a big panic fest.</p>
January 2011	<p>The GT support group met today, it was useful though did induce some panic. It was useful to hear about other peoples projects and we discussed the different epistemological positions of social constructionist GT and Glaser and Strauss 's realist version and the merits and down sides of both. It is very clear to me that I need to be using social constructionist GT guided by Charmaz. This was always the case but having these discussions really affirmed my understanding of the positions and the role of the researcher. Considering my continued attendance of RPG's the level of reflexivity recommended with constructionist GT seems to make sense. In keeping this diary I'm hoping to document any potential bias etc and how my</p>

	assumptions and experiences of my own RPG may shape the data.
January 2011	Feel like some theory or model is starting to emerge now, I've been doodling a lot, using diagrams as memos of my thoughts about the links between the codes and concepts. I've shown these to MM he seems to think I'm on the right track though they are such a mess I'm not sure if anyone can understand them! I'm still collecting data and adding ideas and codes as well as finding some interesting things that challenge it.
February 2011	7 interviews completed, some are in High value-low distress, still none from low value-high distress, and participants seem to have run dry! Discussed with MM and KK and decided that as targeted recruitment hasn't worked need to focus on getting enough participants, data isn't saturated at this point, need to keep collecting. Decide to send letters to everyone regardless of factor group who hasn't been invited so far.
March 2011	10 Interviews completed data seems to be reaching saturation for the things categories and codes that I've been following up on. KK gave me a GT paper by Abba and Chadwick that highlights that codes that do not relate meaningfully to other categories, I wonder if they're talking more about focused coding, I'm continuing to take note of negative cases. Part A is looking OK, I've tried to leave it alone whilst in midst of analysis to prevent too much contamination of theory on the data. Right now what I'm coming up with seems very grounded in the data. Although I think it's useful to consider therapy group theory there are fundamental differences, perhaps the emerging sub-category about dual relationships was highlighted to me partly through thinking about these differences. Some of the research reviewed in Part A highlights the group within a group as an inhibitory factor, but actually what seems to be emerging here is something about it being valuable, even those who identified it as an inherent 'issue' of the groups gave examples of resolving things/greater learning outside the group. Again I need to be careful here about the impact of my own experience, though breaking the 'ground rules' we came up with in my group we do all talk about the group outside, not with people from different groups but with each other. I hadn't really thought about this as something that helps me make use of the groups, but I'm wondering now if it does have an element of that. I wouldn't have said this before so for me this seems more like the group is influencing me, not the other way round! But now that I've thought about it I'll need to remain mindful that I'm not just leaning my analysis toward this.
April 2011	Today is provisionally my last interview! As long as my categories seem saturated, though is some ways this may be more of a hope than a reality. Willig points this out in her book, so given the time limits I think I'm OK with thinking about this more flexibly. I've used the earlier data and theoretical sampling to develop my sub-categories. I sent some of my data to C (peer) today and she gave me some great feedback, mainly how much sense it made to her, in her experience of her RPG. This validation really helps, although it makes sense to me as well in relation to my experience I want to know that the data hasn't just emerged from my experience! I have no idea what happens in her group so that it makes sense to her is great.

April 2011	Analysing the last interview, is such a relief especially in seeing the same categories coming up I'm feeling more confident about the model that has emerged from the data. I've discussed how to best represent this in a diagram to display the complexity and interactional process. I can across the child assessment framework on my placement and really liked how it's presented as a windscreen model. I'm thinking something like this could work for my mine. In writing this up I'm also starting to make connections back to the previous research and theory, which makes me feel like the data makes sense! Yalom's recapitulation of primary family group fits with participants increasing awareness of their own role in their families through participating.
June 2011	Someone today in the grounded theory meeting pointed out that my acronym for the groups RPG is actually the acronym of an explosives device! A rocket propelled grenade! We all laughed as he said how appropriate that was about the groups. This doesn't surprise me, the accounts contributing to subcategory of tolerating distress has really highlighted that some people accept the uncomfortable aspects as a part of the process. The previous literature, Nichol, 1997 I think suggests that this is necessary for deep emotional learning, but is it? Is it that we only feel we've grown as individuals through challenging experiences? When life is going well for someone no one says well you'll come out a stronger person. There does seem an inherent culture of 'no pain, no gain', is this the case or is it just that we have to find some value, we desperately want to find something good to come out of our pain or what's the point? Is being able to 'tolerate distress' for learning actually just another defensive strategy against unbearable pain? I don't know but it definitely got me thinking, and about my own and my groups experience.

**APPENDIX 10:
Comparison Data**

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**APPENDIX 11:
Coded Transcript**

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APPENDIX 12: Example Memos

Memo

Participant 1; Line 9: pg. 1

How clear was the distinction, was it being told not therapy, but not believing? What expectation did this set up, I'm wondering if there was a sense of apprehension or disappointment that it isn't group therapy.

Codes: [Unclear if this is therapy]

Subcategory []

Category []

'One of the difficulties with a group like that because it isn't therapy and the notion of it wasn't something that was very clear.'

Memo

Participant 1; Line: 172, pg. 5

Need for a list of aims, it felt like a reasonable request to have a more specific remit to group, how much is this also a defensive position. People being unable to tolerate the uncertainty of it, why was specific aims a key focus for this participant? Wondering if this will come up again in later interviews.

Codes: [Group should have clear aims]

Subcategory []

Category []

I think that by setting up a professional practice group they could have had a clearer boundary around it and a list of aims

Memo

Participant 2; Line: 37, pg.1

Difference between being told and experiencing. Being told doesn't prepare you for group experience. Is having expectations preparing in some way, what type would these be.

Codes: [Gap between expectation and experience]

Subcategory []

Category []

'It's was just I guess that sort of gap between knowing that, and understanding that intellectually, and what that experience would actually be like, would it look like, what would it be experienced like.'

Memo

Participant 3; Line 327: pg.9

How much does value placed on understanding groups in practice impact on approach taken to group and value derived from it. It makes sense that those who invest the most gain the most from the group, but what does 'investment' mean? Is this related to accepting or tolerating pain in being 'touched' by something.

Codes: [Depends on how much one invests in something] [An open approach to group]

Subcategory []

Category []

How much you want to allow yourself to be involved in the process, I think it depends on how much one invests oneself in something, the whole process of training can be a very powerful touching, semi-transformative process if you allow the process of training to touch you that's where I believe the much deeper learning lies.

Memo

Participant 4; Line 257: pg. 7

What were the 'confidentiality' agreements of the group here. I'm wondering if this effects how people are able to use it. Agreement not to take things from inside group outside is typical (based on my experience), but it does happen. Is in an inevitability that the having group member + cohort member+ friend = things cant stay just in the group and vice versa. It seemed helpful here to have the space outside of the group to discuss it, is it space or distance from the emotional 'heat' of the moment. I wonder if any valuable learning is for the rest of the group was lost in taking this outside.

Codes: [Dealing with conflict outside of group]

Subcategory []

Category []

'saying 'no one spoke and you especially didn't speak' and blew at me, and it was all a bit shocking but I spoke to her after and I think I resolved it and we had a conversation outside of the group and

I said look you know if you think back on that group I actually spoke more than anyone I reacted more than anyone'

Memo

Participant 5; Line 142: pg. 4

Role as spectator what function is this fulfilling for group members, avoidance of own conflict?

Codes: []

'It would just be a massive clash and us looking on as spectators'

Memo

Participant 6; Line 176: pg.6

What happens in group doesn't stay in group. How does this impact on group experience. Is this implicit or explicit within group, this could be important in understanding distress. Linked to previous memo- confidentiality agreements. If this is an inherent issue, that group is not contained, is this discussed with trainees explicitly? (implications for training?). Is the difference in level of distress in group related to this, those who recognise and to some extent use this inherent boundary blur, whilst others remain under the expectation that the group is contained (safe?), distressed when the boundary is 'broken'.

Code: [what happens in group doesn't stay in group]

Subcategory []

Category []

at that point because you have to kind of repair relationships what happens in the group never stays in the group and it heads out

Memo

Participant 5; Line 250: pg. 7

Sense that this occurred spontaneously. The notion of reflection on action as opposed to in, are both possible within RPG? What factors facilitated this. There is a feeling here that distance and time enable greater reflection on experience, this participants seems to be indicating that it was difficult to reflect on the experience at the time due to being immersed in training and the stressors of that, but

then perhaps the aim of the group is to aid people in thinking about the impact of training on them. How can this balance be achieved.

Codes: [Assimilation of experience after qualifying]

Subcategory []

Category []

'I think after leaving the course as well and being able to assimilate it, because it's hard I think at the time to be reflective because you're so immersed in all the things you have to do.'

Memo

Participant 6; Line: 52, pg. 2 (and others).

How much of what is thought about a test of memory. Is value mainly derived with passing of time, distance from painful experiences? Being able to have distance to think about the group now, how does this change the feeling associate with it. It seems for some that despite time and distance some of the challenging aspects that caused distress are still quite raw, for others it seems easier to now to say they learnt something despite it being distressing, perhaps because the affect is diminished. Also need to think about inherent issue of the results, they are necessarily a product of hindsight, in itself reflection on reflection.

Codes: [Test of memory in recounting the experience]

Subcategory []

Category []

OK, wow that's testing the memory as much as anything else.

Memo

Participant –X (anonymity possibly identifying info); Line 3: pg. 1

Aims seemed clear to this participant, perhaps the first to say this. Query negative case. Possible that the clarity in retrospect is in context of their roles since training, this participant has since done group analytic training and facilitated RPG's. Or is it about being prepared? Was this participant prepared in knowing what was in the handbook, did it set up an expectation that they then understood the group function and was able to make use of it?

Codes: [Course providing aims]

Subcategory []

Category []

There's something (about aims) in the handbook isn't there? I agree with that. It's a place to process a number of things that happen during training, help with your development and understanding what goes on in groups

Memo

Participant 3; Line 109: pg.3

Noticing others defences, favourable comparison to others, as a way of justifying or making positive own positions?

Code: [defensive avoidance by other members]

Subcategory []

Category []

that one person use the group like that erm and couldn't respond to other people using it in that way. It was a bit defensive and it felt I don't know uncomfortable that person being there, yeah so there was definitely an element of other people using the group as well

Memo

Participant 8; Line 131: pg. 4

Link between role taken in group and beliefs about being a good clinical psychologist, not taking up time in group with own problems. The beliefs about being what a good psychologist is within a group role i.e. not being 'selfish' in taking own problems is counter to an early comment about the importance of self-reflection, using group to aid self-awareness.

Code:[wanting to be a worthy psychologist]

Subcategory []

Category []

'I wanted to be on the course someone worthy of being on the course. I think that really influenced the whole first year.'

Memo

Participant 9; Line: 122 pg.4 . and other participants.

This has come up a number of times previously. An idea about a way of approaching the group, an attitude towards it perhaps. This seems to be more than the motivation to get something from the group, but a way of approaching it a mindset perhaps. Participants have described how they approached the group in relation to how others did i.e. what was wrong with other peoples approach, defended, not wanting to be there, scientific approach. Often their approach is implied as being the opposite of this. Some participants have described that their approach as open. Here someone is talking about an ethos, which coincides with the idea of an attitude. This seems like an important aspect/process in making use of (and therefore deriving value from) the group. This should be a subcategory, perhaps something about attitude, approach motivation? Not sure what encompasses this best at this stage. How people come to approach the group in a certain way may be beyond this research, although it may link with sub-category Expectations?

Code: [Ethos carried about value of self-awareness increased participation] [Driven by motivation to think about own conflicts]

Subcategory [Approach and motivation]

Category [

I think partly it was the kind of ethos I was carrying a bit from the course but probably more from psychotherapy courses and jobs I'd done before the course that you can't be good at this unless you explore yourself

Memo

Participant(s) multiple; Line XX, pg.

Participants have been talking about utilising friendships / relationships outside of the group to aid learning and participation. This is seen as largely positive to their learning though they seem to recognise that it is an inherent issue in the group not being a discrete closed entity. The usefulness of this and the tensions it creates with reports from some (though fewer) participants about conflict from outside the group coming into group, has been highlighted. One participant talked about balancing, that these relationships were difficult for trainees to balance. What came to my mind is a negotiation. It seemed that participants need to negotiate interpersonal relationships as well as something intrapersonal. The world dual came to mind, that there is a duality to the relationships. I think this may be a subcategory, duality of relationships, under a larger category about the impact of others, or trainees having to negotiate obstacles.

Code: []

Subcategory [duality of relationships]

Category:[]

Memo

Participant(s) multiple; Line XX, pg.

Participants have been talking about utilising friendships / relationships outside of the group to aid learning and participation during the group but have also talked about continuing to make sense of the group using this process after the group has finished. Someone described like a trauma response, having to go over it to make sense of the experience. Maybe this could link here with duality of relationships.

Second Memo- There is something else here though, not just using outside (cohort) relationships to make sense 'post hoc' but also just having perspective, using the distance from the group to be able to make better sense of an experience. Reflecting 'on' as opposed to 'in. Maybe this is easier. Knight et al highlighted people being able to see value more easily in retrospect, away from the emotional heat of it. This seems like something separate to duality of relationships, though part of that. Thinking of linking discussions post group an space to reflect post group, coming together with aim of making meaning from the experience perhaps?

Code: []

Subcategory [continued process of meaning making]

Category:[]

Memo

Participant(s) multiple; Line p.g. various

Thinking about sub-categories and theoretical codes around experience, expectations, uncertainty and aims of groups. Sub-category about expectations, it seemed that even when people had expectations set up from previous group experiences and so felt they knew what to expect, there was a mismatch between these expectations and the experience. Expectations seems to link closely to something about the aims being unknown or if they were felt to be known there was something about not knowing what the experience would be like (links to above).

Code[]

Subcategory [Expectations, aims and purpose]

Category []

Second Memo: Considering these subcategories expectations and aims and purpose and making links to how then the group is approached, given these expectations and beliefs about aims etc. Participants have been talking about a certain way of engaging or approaching the group, being 'open' to it has come up a number of times. These seem to relate closely to each other, there is something here about a negotiation of the experience and the links between own experience, expectations beliefs about purpose and then corresponding approach. There is something unknown about the experience overall that warrants these processes. These should come under category of 'Negotiating the unknown'

Code []

Subcategory [Expectations, negotiating aims and purpose, approach and motivation]

Category [Negotiating the unknown]

Memo

Participant(s) multiple; Line XX, p.g.

There is something key in the data about needing to protect the self at certain times during the group, and through different mechanisms. Participants have been talking about withdrawing (mentally, emotionally) when things felt too much, too much conflict etc, and some have specifically names defences, intellectualising, humour, but it is unclear (for me and them) whether they noticed this at the time or now in retrospect. Besides this, there is definitely something in this it has come up early on with participants and continues to arise with participant 10, has talked about a time when they were unable to attend the group, they made excuses not to attend after a difficult encounter with another member. Whether these descriptions by participants can be thought about in the analytic language of defences or in terms of coping strategies for unmanageable feelings the connection here is about protecting the self. I think this could be a good sub-category or a category, but obviously the need to protect self in this context is very much related to the experience of distress that we're interested in. Other sub-categories need to be developed to think about where this fits.

Code[]

Subcategory [?protection of self]

Category [Protecting self? query Obstacles to self reflection?]

I just, I didn't consciously plan not to go to the group, but it just became incredibly convenient that certain things popped up that meant I didn't have to go to the group

Memo

Participant; Line: pg. Various

Since earlier thoughts about subcategory 'Protection of self', I've been thinking about it in relation to other emerging categories, there is something about developing an awareness of self, or negotiating self awareness, that includes the ability to tolerate distress (subcategory). Does 'Protection of self' fit here? It seemed to naturally progress into its own category, but does it warrant this, in becoming more self-aware or in having realisations about self there is a need to tolerate distress perhaps, but when this can't be tolerated is this when various forms of self-defence come into play? Should this be condensed as a subcategory within something else? Reluctant? Obviously it is related but there is also something here about people being able to move beyond this position or not in relation to distress. It seems to that there is something more broad that is about managing emotions, so managing them through

defensive and avoidance and managing to 'stay with them'. Protection of self renamed to 'Managing emotions', protection of self and tolerating distress as subcategories.

Code[]

Subcategory [?protection of self, tolerating distress]

Category [Managing emotion]

APPENDIX 13: Category Development Process

Initial Provisional Codes: 218 codes were generated in the first stages of coding

Group questioning why they were there professional	Realising aim to think about personal and professional
Different notions of group aim	
Group should have clear aims	
Lack of clear aim	Purpose in course handbook
Unclear aim-wondering if this is group therapy	
Aim to process experience of training	
Group should answer question of aim	
As if group therapy, but know it's not	Questioning is this therapy
Responsibility of course to provide aims	
No aim, lets get on with it	Caught off guard by lack of clarity
If no aim that needs to be clear	
Challenge of managing uncertainty of aim	Gap between knowing aim and experiencing it
Enough of an experience of uncertainty without unclear aim	
Unclear aims create unsafe space	Part of process to figure out aims
Unknown, but curious	

The course's reflective element expected

Chose course on reflective emphasis

Facilitator should be responsible for group aims but didn't provide

Thinking it may be peer support

Feeling excited about attending

Lack of clarity not in keeping with course

Moving on from clarifying aims to wanting to use group

Wondering if lack of clarity helped or hindered process

Working out what facilitator's role as a group

Previous experience of being in groups No previous experience to fall back on

Previous experience running groups

Drawing expectations from previous teaching

Legend of groups was around

Groups come with a reputation

Groups talked about my 2nd years

Linked to reputation of the course

Not expecting psychodynamic principals

Not meeting expectations

Expectation of therapy group

Previous trainees gave expectation that it is tough

Knew it would be challenging

Didn't know what to expect wasn't clear

Expecting group teaching

Other peoples expectations different to own

Don't know what expectations were

Comfortable with analytic position could use it

Having natural reflective capacities

Allowing self to be aware and touched by process

Depends on how much one invests in something

Benefit is dependent on someone being able to 'use' group

Have to apply theory to self, need to use group

Driven by motivation to think about own conflicts

Ethos carried about value of self-awareness increased participation

Dreading going

People should know what they're letting self in for
up for

People don't know what they're signing

Need to sign up to the group

Lot to gain, only if open to it

Have to fill the space with something

There were people who disengaged, not me (Using other members opposing positions to consider own).

Not good therapists if we remain unaware and defended

Would expect that anyone going through that process would reach a level of insight and self-reflection

Learning to let go a bit more

Using group in intellectual way Eventually letting go of intellectualising

Pain as signal to self something to look at Aware of defences, doing them anyway

Caught up being pissed off or angry stops you being able to use it

Attacking facilitator

Becoming aware of defences participating less

Talking about life, dating

Talking about the mundane, not going there too threatening

Humour-playing the joker

Feeling fraudulent and afraid staying quiet

Can't stay withdrawn for whole group Placing pain in context not avoiding it

Withdrawal because of conflict

Defensive avoidance of distress by others members

Remain defended learning is closed down Allowing self to experience group

Group conflict halting own participation

Not going there anymore after conflict

Chance that opportunity will be lost if defences stay

Need to remain aware of processes at time

Being involved at emotional level will be painful

Going to get stung

Staying silent because of feelings of vulnerability

Unsafe place

Safe environment vs. Discussions with managers

Unsafe because of lack of aim

Lack of safe space, reflective of position in training.

Not supportive environment.

Not safe to bring personal stuff

Realising distress isn't inappropriate

Value in challenging experiences

Pain of self- realisations

Not shying away from painful experiences

Pain as indication that something needs attention

Need to be able to tolerate uncertainty

Not knowing as a good learning experience

Changes in group (own) role over time

Wanting to be worthy psychologist

Learning internal processes

Recognising own nature in group role

Family role played out in group

Same as with friendship groups

Helped to develop a voice different role

Learning negative things about self was positive

Learning about positive aspects of self

Knowing introverted nature

Linking self in group to self in family

Sharing of self is inevitable

Revelation of different perspective to own

Group used to check/modify things out

Knowing different perspectives to own

Self change linked with group change, course change

Being present/non present varies linked with group process

Group as petri dish of your life

Experience of client position

Awareness of roles so less likely to take them up

Realising how you are in groups most valuable

Other peoples comments on you and own reflections

Being able to separate own stuff from clients

Exhausting Friday afternoon

Worn out

Tired from remaining aware antenna out

Effort of paying attention

Trying to affect group rather than being effected

Leaving every Friday with headache

Ruined Fridays

Ruined weekends

Having partner to discuss with on bad Fridays

How to people deal when they go home on Friday with what other put on them and vice versa

Friends from group talking outside enabling reflection

What happens in group doesn't stay in group

Feedback happening on journey home with group members

Learning from discussions outside of group

Space to reflect on group with others outside

Talking about 'things inside and outside group

Dealing with conflict outside of group Conflict outside of group resolved in group

Gossip vs talking about group process

Difficulty within year group in played out in group

Cliques from outside, in the group

Fearing dominant member of cohort ruining group experience

Helped form solid relationships in year

Learnt about difficult group process

Group training in final year changed group thinking

Group training at T resulting in disappointment with S group

Lack of teaching on group process at time Using theory from teaching to understand group

Theory practice links

Group aids understanding of group process

Jealous of 'other' group

Difficulty shared by 'other' group

Group as microcosm of training

Experience of something gives you awareness of it

Teaching impact on group understanding and vice versa

Break in group-recognised value

Effort to interact with difference

Different relationships in groups

Depended on who was in group

Realising response to competitiveness

Everybody contributed something

Fed up of dominant group members

Absence of friends in group affects participation

Following others examples disclosing

People being bullied/aggression

Aggressive members of group challenging

Spectator to conflict

Challenge of people not sharing

Frustration at others withholding

Facilitator confronting group with process

Facilitator not handling conflict

Facilitator commenting on what is not said.

Facilitator not doing enough

Facilitator aided self-awareness

Frustrated and confused by facilitator style

Not trained properly

Facilitator could have been more proactive

Wanting to be reflected to through someone else's (facilitators) eyes

Complaints to course unheard

Course not thinking group composition through

Good supervisors on placement were critical

Supervisor as secure base

The reflective ethos of course generally helpful

Supervisor/manager allowing space to reflect on group

Personal therapy was most valued form of PPD

Thinking back on group post qualification meaning making

Repeatedly looking back like trauma response

Trying to fit muddled experience together talking with members post-group

Process didn't stop at end of group

Having a language now to explain it

Using supervision to reflect on impact of experience

Being able to assimilate experience after training more time to think

Negotiating feeling critical of group vs. it being valued

Feeling able to reflect at time vs. purely in retrospect

Interesting that most painful yet valuable experiences stand out most

Reflecting back reflective account, personal therapy

Test of memory in recounting experience

Not feeling able to reflect at time, use of hindsight

Missing group in hindsight

Groups should be mandatory Group therapy isn't forced group shouldn't be either

Reflection and group shouldn't be optional Can't force people to go

Temptation would be to not go if not mandatory

People who need it most wouldn't if not mandatory

Have to look at self to be good at this

People would want to avoid painful experience if they could

Value of experience in practice

Helped to tolerate difficult experiences post qualification

Group feed curiosity in groups

Pushed forward understanding of group process Didn't learn anymore about group process

Personal interest in group process enhanced

Better equipped to deal with being attacked in groups post qualification

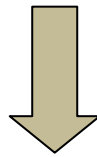
Understating the anxiety of groups in relation to current practice

Group process means equipped for life for groups

Initiated interest in groups carried forward now to further training

Using current group awareness to think about the experience

Holding awareness of what it's like to be in a group in group practice now



Focused Codes: Following focused coding of further interview data the initial codes were synthesised into the following:

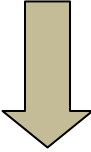
Conflict	Competitiveness
Balancing relationships	Unclear aims
Facilitator style important	Difference between members aims
Easier to think in hindsight	Expectations
Expectations linked with reputation	Influence of group relationships on cohort
Influences of cohort relationships on group	Group teaching impacts learning from group

Group experience being thought about in practice	Being able to stay with pain
Using defences in group	Being aware of defences
Open attitude to group	Noticing roles in family in group
Becoming aware of roles	Other peoples roles/ approach impacts own experience
Talking about life to avoid talking about group process	Choice of course
Value placed on reflection	Coping with distress
Realising aspects of personality	Negative expectations
Value in shared experience	No previous experience guiding expectation
Sense of containment in mandatory attendance	Previous experience sets up expectation
Unclear aims part of process	Group develops own purpose
Is this therapy	Withdrawing from group
An open approach to group	Motivated to engage in self-reflection
Avoidance/withdrawal in talking about mundane life	Not a safe space
Need for safety to be considered	Awareness that group might not be pain free

Able to use group as safe space	Developing awareness of group roles and positions
Emotional pain as part of personal growth	Realising family role played out in group
Social/familial roles magnified in group	Difficulty in groups carried outside of group
Timing of group can mean ruined weekend	Relationships outside of allow reflecting on reflection.
Negative impacts of group on life	Experience of clients perspective
Learning through experience	In-group conflict resolved out of group
Theory-experience links	Wanting more from facilitator
Using relationships outside of group for further learning	Making sense of group post-hoc through further discussions
Feeling frustrated with facilitator	Continuing discussion about group after group ended
Mandatory nature includes everyone	Making useful links from group to practice
Stimulated interest in group	

Subcategories: A cyclical process of further focussed coding and theoretical coding condensed and synthesised the data and generated the following 17 subcategories

Expectations	Realisations of self in group(s).
Negotiating purpose and aims	Reflective stress and fatigue
Approach and motivation	Duality of relationships
Protection of self	Developing awareness of group process and group experience
Value of safety	Group composition and conflict
Tolerating distress	Reflection facilitated
Continued process of meaning making	Beliefs about reflection and group attendance
Experience-practice links	



Categories: The above refined sub-categories led to the following final categories (number of sub categories)

Negotiating the unknown	Negotiating development of self-awareness
Managing the emotion	Negotiating the reciprocal impact of 'others'
Reflection-on-reflection	

APPENDIX 14: Table of categories, sub-categories, example focused codes, example open codes and associated example quotes.

Examples quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical codes	Sub-categories	Category
<p>“They come with a reputation the groups at XXX kind of something you hear is associated with the course I guess the legend was always around there was always the question from other years , ‘had your first group yet?’ So you knew they came laden with something”</p> <p>“ I can remember absolutely dreading them, not being too sure of what they would be like, not having had any kind of group type stuff before but that sounded quite horrific, and really didn’t want to go”</p> <p>“I’d been in group situations before so kind of had some understanding of what I was getting into but...”</p>	<p>Reputation of groups, associated with the course.</p> <p>Talked about by others years, groups laden with something.</p> <p>Dreading group no previous experience of groups</p> <p>Being in situation before, knowing what to expect</p>	<p>Expectations linked with reputation</p> <p>Negative expectations</p> <p>No previous experience guiding expectation</p> <p>Previous experience sets up expectation</p>	<p>Experience</p> <p>Expectations</p> <p>Not knowing</p> <p>Uncertainty</p>	<p>Expectations</p>	<p>Negotiating the unknown</p>
<p>“..it wasn’t clear what the aim was for..the notion of it wasn’t very clear, but I was comfortable with idea attending”</p>	<p>Aims seemed unclear but comfortable about attending</p>	<p>Unclear aims</p>	<p>Uncertainty</p> <p>Similarities to group therapy</p>	<p>Negotiating purpose and aims</p>	

Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>“whether it would be like therapy what sort of process it might be”</p> <p>But over time we...and we really struggled with that for quite a while actually but over time I think we all kind of came to the conclusion that it was to think about work”</p> <p>“The course never made clear really what the group is for...people were struggling ...trying to create some kind of purpose out of the group. So some clarity...might have been useful but... that might have pre-empted how we would have experienced the process”</p> <p>“We spent a year and year and a half saying we don’t know what the purpose of these groups are”</p>	<p>Wondering if it would be like therapy</p> <p>Group struggling with unclear aim</p> <p>Group came to conclusion using group to think about work</p> <p>Course didn’t make aim clear wanting clarity</p> <p>Struggling with aim as part of process</p> <p>Time spent figuring out purpose</p>	<p>Is this therapy</p> <p>Group develops own purpose</p> <p>Unclear aims part of process</p>	<p>Group agency</p> <p>Purpose as task of group</p>		
<p>“.. how open minded you are about the group how you see it as an opportunity rather than something to dread, was really important”</p> <p>“For me XX was a course I really wanted to be on cause its known for being reflective and more</p>	<p>Level of open mindedness to opportunity Not dreading it is important</p> <p>Wanting a course with reflective component</p>	<p>An open approach to group</p> <p>Value placed on reflection</p>	<p>Values</p> <p>Constructive positions</p> <p>Levels of commitment</p>	<p>Approach and motivation</p>	

Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>psychodynamically weighted than the other local courses that was probably influencing it “[motivation for group].</p> <p>“I was quite motivated...I was conscientious about trying to work with my own internal conflicts and things... that belief pushed me forward to make use of the group</p> <p>“It depends on how much someone invests in something..if you allow yourself to be aware and touched by things.</p>	<p>Being motivated to work through internal conflicts</p> <p>Beliefs pushing to make use of group</p> <p>Level of investment in something (group)</p> <p>Allowing self to be open being aware and touched</p>	<p>Motivated to engage in self-reflection</p>			
<p>“Some pretty much stopped coming, I pretty much withdrew....a lot of people started to shut down and started talking about very normal mundane, and not really going there anymore as it felt too threatening”</p> <p>“I think we gave up and just started talking about all sorts of things like dating life, and sometimes it was just an outstanding waste of time”</p> <p>“... defended against using it in a rather more personal way... I</p>	<p>People withdrawing because group felt threatening</p> <p>Talking about mundane things</p> <p>Giving up on group talking about dating life</p>	<p>Withdrawing from group</p> <p>Avoidance/withdrawal in talking about mundane life</p>	<p>Vulnerability</p> <p>Defences</p> <p>Retreating</p>	<p>Protection of self</p>	<p>Managing the emotion</p>

Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

<p>attempted to use it intellectually...and academically”</p>	<p>Defended against using group using it intellectually</p>	<p>Using ‘defences’ in group</p>			
<p>“...like sport, it’s hard work, you’ve got to reach beyond your comfort level, you’re gonna...bruise...hurt through the way your muscles are growing, and I think it’s the same for emotional process, you can’t get growth without some aches and pains being part of the process”</p> <p>“I think it’s about being able to set pain in a particular context, that maybe it was more a signal...something needed looking at, rather than something that was avoided”</p>	<p>Pain discomfort and growth of sport same for emotional growth in group.</p> <p>Aches and pains as part of process of growth</p> <p>Acknowledging pain as part of process</p> <p>Pain indicating something</p>	<p>Emotional pain as part of personal growth</p> <p>Awareness that group might not be pain free</p> <p>Pain as a signal to address something</p>	<p>Accepting emotional distress</p> <p>Understanding emotional distress</p>	<p>Tolerating distress</p>	
<p>“ There was a lack of it feeling like a safe space, naturally the group is reflective of your position in training”</p>	<p>Group not feeling like a safe space</p>	<p>Not a safe space</p>	<p>Safety</p> <p>Uncertainty</p> <p>Maintaining</p>	<p>Value of safety</p>	<p>Negotiating development of self-awareness</p>

Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

<p>“if...normalised and thought about in a safe way, in other words no one puts an athlete through a training regime with the idea that they’re going to damage them for life, you know it’s managed, it’s monitored and I think that’s again where the course could pick up on the feedback”</p> <p>“It was a place that felt safe..where as speaking to managers might not have felt safe. I did use group for that purpose.</p>	<p>Group experience should be thought about in terms of safety and long term effects.</p> <p>Need to manage and monitor safety</p> <p>Group as safe space in relation to sharing with manager</p> <p>Using group as safe space</p>	<p>Need for safety to be considered</p> <p>Able to use group as safe space</p>	<p>wellbeing</p>		
<p>“ So you know you I might still be more inclined to go back to working hard and intellectualising things, but at least now I know that I’m doing that even if its not the best thing to do”</p> <p>“I learnt the negative things about myself in the group... I can be a rescuer, I suppose it reinforced the things that I think make me popular in a group...my ability to ease situations and things like that”</p> <p>“when I think about my role in my</p>	<p>Aware of positions/roles in group even if they are returned to</p> <p>Learning negative and positive roles in the group</p> <p>Realising role in family as problem solver and</p>	<p>Developing awareness of group roles and positions</p> <p>Realising family role played out in group</p>	<p>Personal development</p> <p>Group transference</p> <p>Becoming known</p>	<p>Realisations of self in group(s).</p>	

Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>family, I am someone who is quite proactive and problem solving...a growing realisation at the time in the group. You... realise how your role in your family...does get played out”</p> <p>“I’m kind of aware of from friendship groups as well...in the family and extends outside of that...group puts a magnifying glass over things and I think it was quite clear...this is kind of what I do...sort of problem solving role”</p> <p>“it is a petri dish of your life and how you act within social situations there’s immense learning from that. I didn’t realise I was so deeply conflict avoidant until that”</p>	<p>proactive was played out in group</p> <p>Awareness of role in friendships and family groups magnified by group</p> <p>Group as ‘petri dish’ of social life can learn from it</p> <p>Realising conflict avoidant</p>	<p>Social/familial roles magnified in group</p>			
<p>“ Even if you’re observing conflict it can be very difficult way to end a week, Friday afternoon, you’d regularly hear people say it just completely ruined weekends”</p> <p>“ I remember leaving every Friday and just having an enormous</p>	<p>Weekend could be ruined through observing conflict</p> <p>Going home after</p>	<p>Timing of group can mean ruined weekend</p> <p>Negative impacts of group on life</p>	<p>Being affected</p> <p>Group boundary overflow</p>	<p>Reflective stress and fatigue</p>	

Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

<p>headache”</p>	<p>group with headache</p>				
<p>“Two people in my RPG, we began talking quite a lot afterwards and outside of that experience and that process ended up motivating me to participate more again”</p> <p>“It was a strange situation that two people were in my reflective group I shared a lift with. So we would immediately leave and all go home together and lots of feedback happened in that drive home, we knew each other well and so could push it a little bit further”</p> <p>“but I spoke to her afterwards and I think I resolved it and we had a conversation outside of the group . If this were a therapy group and there were no relationships then this would have happened inside the group”</p> <p>“It’s very delicate thing for trainees to balance I think. It’s an</p>	<p>Talking outside group motivating and increased participation</p> <p>Feedback happening outside of group with group members</p> <p>Knowing people well allowed to take things further</p> <p>Conversations about conflict outside of the group</p> <p>Acknowledging the issues of relationships inside and outside of the group different to therapy</p> <p>Delicate for trainees to balance inherent</p>	<p>Relationships outside of allow reflecting on reflection.</p> <p>Using relationships outside of group for further learning</p> <p>In-group conflict resolved out of group</p> <p>Balancing relationship</p>	<p>External relationships</p> <p>Group boundary overflow</p> <p>Boundary compromises</p> <p>Relational balance</p>	<p>Duality of relationships</p>	<p>Negotiating reciprocal impact of ‘others’</p>

Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

inherent issue that things can't just stay in the room because you are naturally with each other in so many other spheres"

group issues in outside relationships

Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>“make me think about what it must be like for patients in groups I ran...it wasn’t until I started training that I had an experience that kind of linked in that way”</p>	<p>Made to think about client experience of groups</p>	<p>Experience of clients perspective</p>	<p>Client experience</p>	<p>Developing awareness of group process and group experience</p>	
<p>“..drawing on awareness of what it was like to be sat there the whole kind of being a client, or being a participant as an element of learning is true, but its much more sophisticated than that”</p>	<p>Awareness of being in client position as valued learning</p>	<p>Learning through experience</p>	<p>Theoretical links</p>		
<p>“group really did push forward my understanding of what happens in groups”</p>	<p>Learning goes beyond learning about client position</p>	<p>Making group theory-group experience links</p>	<p>Experiential learning</p>		
<p>“as you learn more about the theory and stuff, you kind of have a bit more of a clear idea of almost why it’s interesting and what the processes are that you’re observing”</p>	<p>Group experience enhanced understanding groups</p>				
	<p>Learning theory gives clearer idea of processes observed</p>				

Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

<p>.. this person a vocal member of the year and he became very dominant in that first group “</p> <p>“we had a more vocal member of the year in our group...I did shut down for varying reasons mainly about this very vocal person....throughout I got fed up with the dominance really”</p> <p>“There was a girl...she was quite aggressive to one person in particular and it just went on and on it felt like the whole three years...it just seemed to get worse”</p>	<p>Vocal member of the group dominating</p> <p>Fed up with vocal member dominating group</p> <p>Conflict and aggression between group members increasing over group</p>	<p>Group composition setting up group</p> <p>Dominance impacts on participation</p> <p>Evolving conflicts</p>	<p>Conflictive</p> <p>Incompatible membership</p>	<p>Group composition and conflict</p>	
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Example Quotes

Open codes

Focused codes

Theoretical

Sub- categories

Categories

<p>“our group facilitator because he was quite silent and unexplanatory and was very kind of vague about what it was and I remember having quite frustrated sort of reactions”</p> <p>“the facilitator would help, I think she should have been more active something’s were just allowed to go on but you know, there were probably good reasons why she did what she did.”</p> <p>“one of the frustrations was that out facilitator hadn’t said as much and people wanted to be reflected to through someone else’s eyes”</p> <p>“I’m sure the facilitator helped...he shifted from someone I hated to in the end someone I really liked and respected. ...he changed his style how he facilitated not on direct feedback...seemed to be attuned to the group...became less analytical for a while and that allowed me to use the group better”</p>	<p>Feeling frustrated group facilitator with lack of explanation</p> <p>Feeling facilitator was helpful but could have been more active</p> <p>Thinking about facilitators actions</p> <p>Frustrated that facilitator hadn’t contributed more aided reflection</p> <p>Facilitator helped</p> <p>Feeling more positive toward facilitator after change in style</p> <p>Less analytical facilitator enabled better use of group</p>	<p>Wanting more from facilitator</p> <p>Feeling frustrated with facilitator</p> <p>Facilitator style important</p>	<p>Facilitator power</p> <p>Facilitator responsibility</p>	<p>Reflection facilitated</p>	
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Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>“[talking after group ended] I think we were still trying to fit puzzle pieces together and work out various different aspects of the different experiences”</p> <p>“ I’m in touch with...more the people who were in my group, with the people you’re closest to and the people you shared conversations..You’re going to spend time talking about that its a cyclical evolving processes”</p>	<p>Making sense of a muddled and incoherent experience by continuing to discuss it after group ended</p> <p>In touch with people from group spending time talking about group cyclical process</p>	<p>Making sense of group post-hoc through further discussions</p> <p>Continuing discussion about group after group ended</p>	<p>Using perspective</p> <p>Extending experience</p> <p>Group boundary overflow</p>	<p>Continued process of meaning making</p>	<p>Reflecting-on reflection</p>
<p>“I don’t think they would have worked unless you know you could follow conversations through and come back to them, or there’d always be something better to do...knowing you’re going to be on an emotional rollercoaster or something like that”</p> <p>“it should be mandatory because otherwise things start to fragment...someone to contain it.... makes sure everybody gets involved”.</p>	<p>Needing to know you can come back to conversations within group and not avoid by doing something better to do.</p> <p>Mandatory to prevent fragmenting</p> <p>Makes sure everyone is involved</p> <p>Divide between belief</p>	<p>Sense of containment in mandatory attendance</p> <p>Mandatory nature includes everyone</p>	<p>Containment</p> <p>Avoiding avoidance</p> <p>Choice</p>	<p>Beliefs about reflection and group attendance</p>	

Example Quotes	Open codes	Focused codes	Theoretical	Sub- categories	Categories
<p>“The group was roughly split between those of us who believed in the importance of looking at ourselves as a prerequisite for doing the therapy, and the other half of the group that were resentful of having to attend and who believed I think...more of a technician”</p>	<p>in self-awareness and different belief</p> <p>Believing others don't want to attend</p> <p>Beliefs about role of CP</p>	<p>Value placed on reflection</p>			
<p>“it definitely does..come into various things like...discussions with trainees..so we supervise XXX trainees and I don't think any of them have anything like the reflective practice group so we've sort of talked about that...I suppose in group supervision with XX when we're talking about our work and reflecting on it, obviously things that came from the group come to mind in that.”</p> <p>“...just started at the end of training to piece together how you make use of all of that in your clinical work. You know what kind of things to look for in group process when you're working with patients and clients”</p>	<p>Using group experience in practice discussions with trainees</p> <p>Aspects of group experience come to mind in group supervision</p> <p>Beginning to make use of group in clinical work at end of training</p> <p>Using experience of group when running different group in clinical practice</p>	<p>Group experience being thought about in practice</p> <p>Making useful links from group to practice</p> <p>Stimulated interest in groups</p>	<p>Applying experience</p> <p>Utility of groups</p> <p>Practicality</p>	<p>Experience-practice links</p>	