

**An exploration of trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a  
group relations conference using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

### **Aim**

The aim of this research has been to explore trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a group relations conference and their perception of any influence on their behaviour.

### **Design**

Four participants were recruited through purposive sampling and interviewed on two occasions. Interview data was analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis.

### **Findings**

Themes that emerged through analysis indicated that participants' described their experience, of attending a group relations conference, as involving chaos, confusion, conflict and coping. Participants also indicated that they gained an enhanced awareness of behaviours within groups and engaged in significant levels of self-reflection, exploring concepts of identity and the self in role. These findings were related to the literature and it is proposed that psychosocial theory can help in offering a coherent understanding of the intersubjectivity influencing the interrelated internal and external experiences. The influence of anxiety, defences and splitting in particular are discussed. Limitations of the research are considered.

## Impact

It is argued that group relations conferences can support the development of knowledge and understanding of groups, relationships and interpersonal skills, which are included in the requirements of professional training in educational psychology. More broadly, it is argued that attending a group relations conference can support self-reflection and exploring issues of identity and the self in role. It is suggested that this learning can support trainees in understanding the complex contexts in which they work. It is also suggested that this approach to experiential learning may be of interest to more experienced professionals and to trainees and practitioners from a range of professions. This research may also be of interest to those designing and delivering group relations conferences in terms of theory and practice. A range of possible future directions for research are considered.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **A pub conversation**

There is a pub near Euston station, The Doric Arch. Approximately ten years ago, I enjoyed a cramped group discussion there one evening. Memorably, a number of trainee educational psychologists (engaged in MSc training in educational psychology at the Tavistock) spoke about their experience of having recently attended a group relations conference. This had been part of their training. The stories were full of drama and intrigue. Since that time, I have attended two group relations conferences and developed an interest in the area, which has stimulated this research.

### **Outline**

In this chapter, an overview of the object of study is offered. Group relations conferences will be described in terms of historical development, the general structure of the conference, and consideration of underpinning theory. In the final part of the chapter, consideration will be given to the links between this approach to learning and the training of educational psychologists.

#### **1.1. What is a Group Relations Conference?**

‘Eric Miller headed the Tavistock Institute’s Group Relations Programme for over 30 years and came to symbolize both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical design and structure of the Leicester model.’ (Nutkevich and Sher, 2004, p11)

In a chapter entitled 'Experiential Learning in Groups I: The development of the Leicester Model', Miller (1990a) comments:

'The Tavistock/Leicester Conference – or as it is now more often called, the Leicester Conference – is an intensive two-week residential event devoted to experiential learning about group and organizational behaviour, with a particular emphasis on the nature of authority and leadership. Its purpose is educational.' (p165)

There are a number of points being made in this quotation. The name of the conference, duration, method, focus and purpose. Here, it is the focus: *learning about group and organizational behaviour*, that is key in helping to understand the object of study. Other aspects of this description will be considered later in this chapter, as more refined definitions emerge.

### **How did this approach develop?**

Fraher (2004) published a paper entitled 'Systems Psychodynamics: The Formative Years of an Interdisciplinary Field at the Tavistock Institute', providing a valuable synthesis of the 'history and focuses, in particular, on the intellectual foundations' (p65) of the Tavistock method of exploring groups and organizations through experiential learning. It is this paper that has been used as the primary source for the following narrative. This narrative is offered in order to provide the reader with a chronology of events, in theory and practice, with the aim of placing group relations conferences (GRCs) in a meaningful context. The account is not intended to be definitive, rather, to help situate the object of study.



## **1.2. GRCs: a developmental history**

### **Psychoanalytic foundations**

Object Relations Theory (Klein, 1959) can be viewed as the theoretical foundation of GRCs, developing from Freud's work in the late 1800's.

### **Early sociological perspective on groups**

Le Bon (1896) published 'The Crowd' describing unorganised large groups, where individuality was seen as being sacrificed and group members as susceptible to influence. McDougall (1920), described unorganised groups as emotional, susceptible and potentially volatile. McDougall also described how organised groups can become task focused.

### **The influence of World War I**

Fraher (2004) describes how the Tavistock Clinic was founded (1920), as a result of learning that had occurred in psychological terms during the course of World War I.

### **Psychology in the workplace**

Fraher (2004) acknowledges the work of Mayo (1927 – 1932) as recognising relationships between groups of individuals and their work environment, motivation and productivity. Follet (1941), is also recognised in relation to staff-management communication and hierarchy.

### **The influence of World War II**

Bion (1939) wrote a document known as the Wharnclyffe Memorandum, describing his intention to devise a therapeutic community and environment in a military hospital. His associated work at Northfield Hospital would influence his seminal text 'Experiences in Groups and other papers' (1961).

### **Influences Post-World War II**

In 1945, Bion, Rickman and Sutherland held the first civilian training group, exploring Bion's theories (heavily influenced by object relations theory) of group behaviour. Rice was one of the group members.

### **Developments in the United States**

In the United States, an experiential method of studying group behaviour evolved from the work of Kurt Lewin, known as the National Training Laboratory (NTL), 1947.

### **Open Systems Theory**

von Bertalanffy (1950) developed the thinking of open-systems theory which became of interest to social scientists at the Tavistock.

### **The sociotechnical perspective**

Fraher (2004), comments that during the 1940's – 1960's: 'studies in coal mines, textile mills, and hospitals conducted by Tavistock members Jacques, Rice, Miller, Trist, Bridger, and Menzies Lyth, among others, proved influential to the development of another important concept, the *sociotechnical perspective*. '(p79), an approach to optimising productivity through consideration of technological and social aspects of an organization.

### **The first 'Leicester' conference**

Miller (2004) describes the first 'Leicester' conference, as a collaborative venture between the Tavistock Institute and Leicester University, involving an experiential 'study group', of approximately 12 members and a consultant. There were also lectures, seminars and visits to organizations. The 'Leicester' conference was to become an annual (or bi-annual) event.

### **Social systems as a defense**

Jacques (1952) and Menzies (1960) developed research exploring social defences in organisations which were seen as being operationalized in response to anxieties within systems.

### **Open Systems Theory, primary task and the individual**

Rice (1958; 1963) developed the concept of the *primary task*. The task a human system must perform to survive at any given time.

Miller (1990a) also describes 'Individual, Group and Inter-Group Processes' (Rice, 1969) as a seminal paper, introducing the concept of individual as an open-system, interacting with groups.

Rice's contributions are manifold, including taking the role of Director for the majority of The Tavistock Institute Sponsored Group Relations Conferences 1962-1969.

### **Phenomenology within large groups**

Miller (1990a) acknowledges the influence of Turquet (1975), following his work in the late 1960's exploring individuals' experience of membership of large groups in the development of the Tavistock method.

### **Developments and remnants**

In the 2012 text 'Group Relations Conferences: Tradition, Creativity, and Succession in the Global Group Relations Network', there is recognition of the ongoing dissemination of the approach. In a tri-annual conference (the 'Belgirate' Conferences), designed for members who have been on the staff at other group relations conferences, an increasing diversity of countries are reported to attend over time. It is also noted that in 2009, the World Event instead of the Institutional Event was introduced (described below). In the opening chapter of this book, Aram (2012) describes the experience of taking up the Director role of the 'Leicester' conference from

2007. Developments of the conference approach are described, including an emphasis on spirituality, creativity and body.

### **1.3. A structural view of GRCs**

It is acknowledged that as Obholzer (1994) points out, duration and design of conferences have varied in different locations. However, the aim of this section is to help in clarifying understanding of what constitutes a GRC.

The following descriptions of components of a GRC are drawn in the first instance from work carried out by Fraher (2002) in surveying 32 Leicester Conference brochures and thus identifying the following commonalities:

#### **1. Small Study Groups**

All conference group members are allocated to a small study group. The small study group generally has between 9 – 12 members. The task is to study the behavior of the group as it develops (commonly referred to as in the 'here-and-now'). A consultant is assigned to each small study group to support the group in its task.

#### **2. Large Study Groups**

All members of the conference meet in (commonly in a spiral seating arrangement). The task is to study the behavior of the group as it develops. A number of consultants join the event to support the group in its task. Fraher (2004) notes that this experience involves exploration of interactions where members cannot easily communicate face-to-face and that sub-groups, myths and fantasies often emerge in the large study groups.

### 3. Intergroup event

In this event, members are given the opportunity to form their own groups. The task is to study the behavior within groups and between groups. Fraher (2004) also notes the common inclusion of an 'institutional event', where the task is to study the 'relationships and relatedness between all subgroups of the conference as an institution' (p77). Consultants are available to support the groups in their task(s) in both events.

### 4. Review and application groups

Members are assigned to groups with commonalities in their work outside of the conference (usually 5 – 10 members per group). The task is to explore how any conference learning may be related to members' work roles. A consultant is available to support members in considering any application of learning to their workplace.

Fraher (2004) makes the salient point that, while there are structural commonalities between conferences, 'the experience of a group relations conference is never the same. The dynamics among member and staff groups vary; consequently, no two conference experiences are ever alike.' (p77).

Finally a description will be offered of the World Event, first introduced in 2009 instead of the institutional event (at the 'Leicester' conference). The following extended quotation is offered to help clarify the nature of this event and is drawn from a chapter entitled 'A world of difference: Lessons and innovations on the study of race, authority and identity' (McRae and Green, 2009, p117):

Primary task of the World Event (WE)

Akin to the traditional Institutional Event in group relations conferences, the primary task of the World Event remains to study the relationships between and among groups...

The difference comes in how the World Event invites members to study issues of leadership and representation through the formation of the World Forum. This designated body, composed of ambassadors from each group or constituent community, works as a complimentary and / or parallel structure with the conference management. While conference management retains authority and responsibility for the overall conference boundary, the World Forum once formed assumes primary authority for the World Event.

Conceptually, the World Event sets out to stimulate the opportunities and tensions present in the nested authority relationships commonplace in the post-modern world. Parallels may be seen in how individual governments of sovereign nations relate to entities such as a United Nations or European Union.

It is recognised that there are a range of other variations and descriptions of events and groupings within GRCs. The purpose of this section has been to provide the reader with an overall understanding of common structures and events.

#### **1.4.1 Local context of Tavistock GRCs**

In this section, a description of the types of GRCs offered by the Tavistock will be offered. Details of the GRC which relates to this research will also be given. This information is drawn from communications with staff running the conferences and associated marketing materials.

Tavistock GRCs are authorized by the Group Relations Committee of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. Four conferences are held annually, with different focuses. These focuses have included: exploring multi-agency and multidisciplinary contexts, exploring different identities and discovering leadership. These conferences are non-residential and range between three days and five days.

Conferences are temporary organisations which offer opportunities to learn about relatedness in organizational life. The structure and types of group activities vary within the different conferences. Different activities are structured to explore experiences of authority, roles, tasks and associated management of boundaries.

In December, 2013, eighty-nine Tavistock students took part in the annual December GRC at the Tavistock, entitled 'being professional ... exploring the challenges of working in contemporary organisations'. The conference was non-residential and lasted five days. Participants in this research attended this conference.

Marketing materials describe December GRCs as involving activities outlined in the preceding section. Activities include small study groups, large study groups, an inter-group event and review and application groups.

The December conference also offers an organizational event, providing the opportunity for members to consider the overall conference as a developing institution, including dynamics between groups and members and staff. The implicit and explicit organisational culture can be explored and groups may request consultation from staff. The staff management group works in open session. The event concludes with a plenary review.

The December conference also offers conference plenaries at the start and close of the conference, where there is opportunity for members to share expectations, reflect on learning and explore beginnings and endings.

In the December 2013 GRC, a training group was also included. This group was made up of members who had previous experience of attending a GRC and who were invited to express an interest in developing their skills in consulting to GRC's. Members of this group participate in some events as members and in others events they take up different roles. They also have their

own events, to learn about their own experience within a subsystem of the conference and the conference as a whole.



## **1.4. Theoretical underpinnings**

The aims of this section are modest. As Obholzer (1994) and Fraher (2004) note, the theoretical underpinnings of GRCs may be broadly described as tripartite, combining psychoanalytic theory, group relations theory and open systems theory. Individual components of each of these theories could constitute the main plank of a thesis. Accordingly, the aim of this section is to offer a broad outline of the conceptual framework of GRCs.

### **1.4.1. Psychoanalytic theory**

Miller (1990a), describes the psychoanalytic components of the framework underpinning the Leicester Model as involving the contributions from Klein (1959) and Bion (1961). Miller notes that Klein 'profoundly influenced Bion' (p171).

#### **Object relations theory**

##### ***Objects and part-objects***

Klein (1959) provides a conceptual account of the infant experience. Fundamental to this account is an understanding of what is meant by an 'object' and 'part-object'. Gomez (1997) provides a helpful description (p1):

The term 'object' does not refer to an inanimate thing, but is a carry-over from the Freudian idea of the target, or object, of the instinct.

'Part object' means a part or aspect of a person.

Segal (1973) helps in elucidating these concepts (p19-20):

Freud described the ego as 'precipitate of abandoned object cathexes.' This precipitate consists of introjected objects ... The analysis of early projective and introjective object relationships revealed phantasies of objects introjected into the ego from earliest infancy, starting with the introjection of the ideal and the persecutory breasts. To begin with, part objects are introjected, like the breast and later, the penis; then whole objects like the mother, the father, the parental couple. The earlier the introjection, the more fantastic are the objects introjected and the more distorted by what has been projected into them. As development proceeds, and the reality-sense operates more fully, the internal objects approximate more closely to real people in the external world.

With some of these objects, the ego identifies – introjective identification. They become assimilated into the ego and they contribute to its growth and characteristics. Others remain as separate internal objects and the ego maintains a relationship with them ... The internal objects are also felt to be in relationship with one another; for instance, the internal persecutors are experienced as attacking the ideal object as well as the ego. Thus, a complex internal world is built up. The structure of the personality is largely determined by the more permanent of the phantasies which the ego has about itself and the objects that it contain.

This extended quotation has been included here as Segal (1973) provides a succinct, yet complex account of the foundations of object relations theory. Core concepts such as the ego, introjection and projection will be described in the following outline. Furthermore, the descriptions here of part-objects will be seen as fundamental to later developments of group relations theory, described by Bion (1961). It is also important to note that Segal (1973) has introduced the idea of introjective identification, a notion involving incorporation of 'objects', which, it is suggested may be distorted. It is also important to note that Segal has introduced the

idea of a complex internal world, evolving from earliest infancy and encompassing relationships between objects. There is a sense here of a dynamic (or psychodynamic) internal world.

### ***Ego, libido and morbid***

Objects relations theory, described by de Board (1978), includes fundamental concepts of the ego, 'the central part of the self which is the 'manager' of the ego' (p28), the libido, 'the life force which includes all those feelings usually associated with the word 'love'' (p29) and the morbid 'the death instinct' (p29).

### ***Projection and introjection***

The concepts of projection and introjection are also drawn on. Waddell (1998) describes these 'psychological mechanisms' (p253) as involving occasions where bad feelings are 'projected' (or expelled) and good feelings are 'introjected' (or taken in).

### ***The good and the bad breast***

Early mental processes are described as being very basic, consisting of one object; the mothers breast (de Board, 1978).

de Board (1978) describes an early stage in objects relations theory as follows. At times when the death instinct is in sway, the infant experiences anxiety at the persecutory feelings and fear of annihilation. The infant then projects these bad feelings onto the mothers breast (in order to expel the unpleasant feelings). The breast is then perceived as an uncontrollable, persecutory object. This object is then introjected, or taken back in, by the infant, becoming an internal persecutor, thus, reinforcing the feelings of anxiety and persecution.

de Board (1978) goes on to explain that in objects relation theory, the mothers breast is also experienced as intensely satisfying during feeding. The infant therefore experiences a conflict

involving both the 'good breast' – providing, comfort - and the 'bad breast' – uncontrollable, persecutory.

The 'good' breast is described as 'the first internal good object' (p29). However, the 'bad' breast, perceived as frustrating and persecutory, becomes a threatening object, both externally and internally. Subsequently, 'Here then is the earliest experience of love and hate and of good and bad' (p29).

This conflict is seen to lead to the process of splitting.

### ***Splitting***

Splitting, a core Kleinian concept, is described by de Board (1978) in relation to the early infant experience. Splitting is described as a process where 'the ego 'splits' the object, getting rid of the 'bad' breast by projecting it outwards and keeping the 'good' breast by introjecting it into the ego' (p29).

de Board (1978) also describes how the processes of idealization and denial are related to the process of splitting, where the good object becomes exaggerated in a sense of 'goodness' and the bad object denied along with the associated painful emotions (de Board goes on to note that this denial also involves denial or annihilation of part of the ego).

In object relations theory, this concept of splitting extends into later life to include separating people or events 'as unrealistically wonderful (good) or as unrealistically terrible (bad)' (Waddell, p6).

### ***Projective identification***

Armstrong (2005) notes that the concept of projective identification was first described by Klein (1946) and was further developed by colleagues (including Bion). Armstrong offers the following description (2005, p72-72):

At the simplest level, it refers to the splitting off and projection of a part of the self into an object. 'The object relationship which results is then not with a person truly seen as separate, but with the self projected into another person and related to as if it were someone else' (Steiner, 1993, p6)

### ***Paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions***

Klein's (1959) terms paranoid-schizoid and depressive 'positions' may be thought of as mental states or attitudes, or positions from which an individual may view themselves and their relationships with the world (Waddell, 1998).

The Paranoid-schizoid position may be thought of in terms of the dual components. 'Paranoid' relating to the predominance of fearful and persecutory feelings (de Board, 1978). 'Schizoid', relating to the process of splitting (described above).

The depressive position is described by de Board (1978) in relation to the developing sense an infant gains of an integrated perspective. The mother is viewed as a whole person rather than 'part-objects such as the breast, face, and so forth.' (p32). This sense of external integration is accompanied by a recognition that the good *and* bad experiences can come from the same source.

Accompanying this integration of the mother as a whole object, 'so the ego develops as an integrated whole, with diminution of splitting and projection' (p32). It is recognised that this description refers to healthy development. The 'depressive' term relates to the infant's perception that they may have caused damage or destruction to the loved object, thus bringing about characteristic feelings of guilt and despair (de Board, 1978). The depressive position may consequently lead to 'the drive for reparation' (de Board, 1978).

Miller (1990a), comments that the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive positions, 'to some extent persist through life' (p171). Waddell (1998), elaborates on this point, in a description of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, noting that Bion (1963) conceptualized an oscillation between the two positions, 'a continuous movement between the two poles' (p8).

The final words of this section were written by Bion (1961), and underline Miller's (1990a) comment about the 'profound' influence that Klein had on this thinking. Armstrong (2005) introduces the quotation (p78):

Bion states that his 'present work' (by which I take it he is referring to his individual analytic practice), 'convinces me of the central importance of the Kleinian theories of projective identification and the interplay between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions ... Without the aid of these two sets of theories I doubt the possibility of any advance in the study of group phenomena' (Bion, 1961, p8).

#### **1.4.2. Group relations theory**

'most of us in the Tavistock circle would assign pride of place to Wilfred Bion's massive conceptual contribution to the theory and practice of group relations.'

Dicks (1970, cited in Armstrong, 2005, p36).

## **Context**

As noted in the developmental history of the GRC, Bion (1961) had developed experience in instigating a therapeutic community approach at the Northfield Hospital during the World War II.

In 'Experiences in Groups', Bion comments (1961, p29):

Early in 1948 the Professional Committee of the Tavistock Clinic asked me to take therapeutic groups, employing my own technique. Now I have no means of knowing what the Committee meant by this, but it was evident that in their view I had 'taken' therapeutic groups before.

Later, when describing his approach, Bion writes (p77):

In the groups in which I am psychiatrist I am the most obvious person, by virtue of my position, in whom to vest a right to establish rules of procedure. I take advantage of this position to establish no rules of procedure and to put forward no agenda.

## **Approach**

Bion (1961) appears to have used this *carte blanche* to innovate practice, which has subsequently become central to the approach described by Miller (1990a), in terms of the 'Leicester' model. Armstrong (1978) describes Bion's approach as involving the psychoanalytic method of offering interpretations, aimed at making the unconscious, conscious. 'However, the unique and innovative difference was that he treated the whole group as the patient' (p37).

Fraher (2004) offers an understanding of the impact of this distinctive approach (p74):

In Kleinian terms, Bion seemed to be inviting, whether consciously or not, the group's projective identification with him. That is, he made himself available for the group to disown their uncomfortable feelings and project them onto him as a means to understand the group's unconscious behavior (Gabriel, 1999). As Trist (1985) put it, 'He made it safe for the group to dramatize its unconscious situation'.

It is perhaps worth noting that the implication that Bion (1961) used himself in the service of understanding the group is evidenced by his own reflections, 'in group treatment many interpretations, and amongst them the most important, have to be made on the strength of the analyst's own emotional reactions' (p149).

It is this approach, of treating the group as a whole, and in using projective identification, that enabled Bion (1961) to develop his theoretical understanding of behaviour within groups.

### **Bion, groups and object relations theory**

Perhaps the most widely known aspects of Bion's (1961) theoretical contribution to understanding groups relates to the 'basic assumptions'. Basic assumptions (and the sophisticated work group) will be discussed in the next section. However, firstly, it is important to recognise the theoretical grounding of Bion's thinking. In 'Experiences in groups' (1961), Bion comments, 'We are now in a better position to consider whether the basic assumptions are capable of resolution into something more fundamental ... or reactions against, some state more worthy of being regarded as primary'. (p162-163):

The influence of Klein is central to Bion's thinking (p141):



I hope to show that in his contact with the complexities of life in a group the adult resorts, in what may be a massive regression, to the mechanisms described by Melanie Klein (1931, 1946) as typical of the earliest phases of mental life.

And later, when discussing exploring group behavior (with group members), (p162):

My impression is that the group approximates too closely, in the minds of the individuals composing it, to very primitive phantasies about the contents of the mothers body ... the dynamics of the group is therefore perturbed by fears, and mechanisms for dealing with them, that are characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position.

Bion (1961) goes on to link his thinking with earlier psychoanalytic theory, commenting that 'Freud sees the group as a repetition of part-object relationships' (p181). And goes on to argue that 'there is ample evidence for Freud's idea that the family group provides the basic pattern for all groups' (p187), yet, 'I would go further; I think that the central position in group dynamics is occupied by the more primitive mechanisms that Melanie Klein has described as peculiar to the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions' (p188).

It can be seen that the underpinning, or primary theoretical constructs that Bion (1961) articulates in relation to understanding group behavior are drawn directly from objects relations theory. Bion's experiences in groups are viewed in terms of regression to a paranoid-schizoid mental state involving part-objects and primitive phantasies of the contents of the mothers body.

Fraher (2004) captures this sense in the following quotation (p74):

Through Bion's lens, Klein's object relations theory explained how experiences in groups trigger 'primitive phantasies [sic] whose origins lie in the earliest years of life (Gabriel, 1999, p118). For example, one unconscious desire is for the individual to join with others

in an undifferentiated entity, like the infant fusing with the breast. Although comforting, this desire also creates resultant fears, such as the fear of becoming overwhelmed or consumed by the undifferentiated mass of the group or the fear of being rejected or abandoned by the group.

### **The sophisticated group and basic assumptions**

In Bion's (1961) formulation, the *sophisticated group*, more commonly called the *work group*, is characterised by group behavior which maintains a focus on the group task and with reality.

Bion saw this as one mode of group operation. A second mode of group operation, he called the *basic assumption*.

Armstrong (1978) explains the term, 'basic assumption' in relation to Bion's observations of a group acting 'as if' a particular unspoken assumption was influencing the behavior of the group (hence 'basic assumption'). Armstrong offers an active framing of group behavior in terms of 'mobilization of basic-assumption activity' (p23).

Bion (1961) identified three types of basic assumption: dependency, pairing and fight-flight.

Miller (1990a) adds that group members contribute anonymously to the basic assumption and that the function of the basic assumption is to keep at bay the primitive emotional states associated with the other two basic assumptions.

#### *Basic assumption of dependency (baD)*

Bion (1961) wrote:

One person is always felt to be in a position to supply the needs of the group, and the rest in a position to which their needs are supplied ... having thrown all their cares on

the leader, they sit back and wait for him to solve all their problems ... the dependent group soon shows that an integral part of its structure is a belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of some one member of the group. (p74, p82, p99, quoted in Fraher, 2004, p74)

de Board (1978) describes Bion's concept of baD as defending the group against reality. de Board also highlights Bion's recognition that any leader will be unable to live up to the expectation inherent in this basic assumption, leading to disappointment, rejection and further searching for an omniscient, omnipotent leader.

*Basic assumption of pairing (baP)*

de Board (1978) offers the following description of Bion's notion of baP: 'When a group is working on the basic assumption of pairing, it behaves 'as if' the members have met together in order that two people can pair off and create a new, and as yet unborn, leader.' (p40).

de Board (1978) goes on to describe Bion's notion of baP as also serving to help avoid reality, 'allowing phantasies of what may happen to obscure what is actually happening' (p41), including any associated fears and anxieties. de Board adds that hope only remains so, when the creation is unrealised – thus avoiding disappointment from the group - as any 'Messiah or idea' (p40) would inevitably fail to meet expectations.

*Basic assumption of fight-flight (baF)*

Fraher (2004) captures Bion's (1961) description of BaF, as follows:

The group seems to know only two techniques of self-preservation, fight or flight ... the kind of leadership that is recognised as appropriate is the leadership of the man who

mobilizes the group to attack somebody, or alternatively to lead it in flight ... leaders who neither fight nor run away are not easily understood. (p63, p65, quoted in Fraher, 2004, p75).

These brief descriptions are provided to orient the reader to the constructs, and it is recognised that a large body of literature expands on each of the basic assumptions.

### **Valency**

In closing this section, Bion's (1961) concept of valency is offered, as it should be recognised that while the main part of this section relates to the group, Bion recognised the role of the individual within the group. He took the term valency from the study of physics and defined his usage thus (Bion, 1961, p116):

I mean to indicate, by its use, the individual's readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on the basic assumptions; if his capacity for combination is great, I shall speak of a high valency, if small, of a low valency; he can have, in my view, *no* valency only by ceasing to be, as far as mental functioning is concerned, human.

This definition is later elaborated on as 'a capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption' (p153).

#### **1.4.3. Open systems theory**

Miller (1990a) recognises that the influence of open systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950) was most evident through the contributions of Rice in the early 1960s. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of this theory in the context of GRCs.

Open systems theory can help in understanding organizations as open systems, involving and import-conversion-export processes (Zagier-Roberts, 1994, Fraher, 2004).

### ***Boundaries***

Miller (1990a) recognises the contribution from Lewin (1935; 1936) in helping to understand the importance of boundaries. Boundaries in this sense relate to what may be thought of in terms of separations between different aspects of a system. This includes sub-systems within an organisation devoted to particular activities and the separation between the system and its external environment. 'It marks a discontinuity between the task of that particular system and the tasks of the related systems with which it transacts' (Miller, 1990a, p172). It is also important to recognise that these aspects of a system are not viewed as static and that 'the behavior and identity of the system are subject to continual renegotiation and redefinition, the system boundary is best conceived not as a line but as a region (Lewin, 1935; 1936, in Miller (1990a))'.

Miller and Rice (1967) add to this concept of the boundary as a region, by emphasizing that the leadership role in organizations involves protecting the system from the various demands from the external environment, while also responding and adapting to external changes. 'The health and ultimately the survival of a system therefore depends on an appropriate mix of insulation and permeability in the boundary region' (Miller and Rice, 1967, in Miller, 1990a, p172).

### ***Primary task, task systems and role***

Miller (1990a) notes that Rice (1958, 1963) and colleagues developed the notion of the *primary task*, in conjunction with open systems thinking. 'It was postulated that a purposeful human system at any given time has a primary task, in the sense of the task that it must perform if it is to survive' (p172). *Task systems* are seen as being defined by particular activities, that may be

demarcated by organisational boundaries (Miller, 1990a). The human dimension of the system is referred to in terms of *role*: 'Finally people – the human resources of the enterprise - carry *roles* through which they contribute the requisite activities to the task of the organization' (p172).

### ***The individual as an open system***

As stated at the beginning of this section, Miller (1990a) recognised the significant contribution Rice made to the development of the Leicester model in drawing on open systems theory. Miller (1990a) acknowledges the emphasis on boundaries, in relation to time and territory within the conferences. Particular recognition is given to Rice's contribution to the notion of role boundaries in relation to staff and conference members, and in terms of the different roles individuals may take at different times. This notion is further extended to 'the boundaries between person and role, between inner world of the individual and the external environment' (Miller, 1990a, p172). There is a sense here of an intersection in thinking, drawing on open systems theory and psychoanalytic theory.

Miller (1990a) concludes his commentary on the conceptual framework underpinning the Leicester Model thus:

This notion that the individual too can be conceptualized as an open system developed in the mid-1960s and perhaps took us one small step closer to the ultimate goal of a unified theory of human behavior.

Miller, describes Rice's paper 'Individual, Group and Inter-Group Process' (1969) as seminal in terms of the concept of the individual as an open system. Core concepts will be discussed further in the following section.

### **Leadership, ego, boundaries and object relations**

As previously noted, there is a clear intersection emerging between open systems theory and psychoanalytic theory, as indicated by Miller (1990a) when discussing boundaries: 'That region is the location of those roles and activities that are concerned with mediating relations between inside and outside. In organizations and groups this is the function of leadership; in individuals it is the ego' (p172).

Fraher (2004), expands on this intersection (between open systems and psychoanalytic thinking), in quoting Rice (1965), where there is a sense of the movement towards a unified theory described by Miller (1990a) and the individual as an open system:

In the mature individual, the ego – the concept of the self as a unique individual – mediates the relationship between the internal world of good and bad objects and the external world of reality, and thus takes in relations to the personality, a 'leadership role' (Rice, 1965, p11 in Fraher, 2004, p80).

It is evident in this quote, that object relations theory (the internal world of good and bad relationships) is being linked with open systems theory; the ego and the leader being compared in terms of their role in managing the boundary region.

#### **1.4.4. Further conceptual approaches**

In discussing 'the so-called Tavistock paradigm in organizational consultancy' Palmer (2002, cited in Armstrong, 2005, p82), comments: 'I say "so-called", because I do not think there is one such paradigm but, rather, a variety of rather loosely linked conceptual approaches'.

This comment resonates with the experience of writing this overview of the theoretical underpinnings of GRCs. In the following discussion three broad areas of influence will be acknowledged in an attempt to gather together some outstanding parts of the picture.

Firstly consideration will be given to the influence of the work of Jacques (1952) and Menzies (1960) regarding social systems as defenses, before considering later developments regarding basic assumptions, field theory and experiential learning.

It is recognised that links have been made between psychoanalytic theory (and object relations theory in particular) with both group relations theory and open-systems theory. While any further connections in the following discussion will be sought, it is recognised that the reader may identify alternative links or reject any connections offered, as they choose.

### **Social systems as defenses**

When discussing Klein's (1959) concepts of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, Miller (1990a) refers to the work of Jacques (1953) and Menzies (1960) in helping to recognise 'the manifestations of these processes in group and organizational life, particularly through the defenses of splitting, denial and projective identification' (p171).

Fraher (2004) refers to Menzies' (1960) concept of defenses mechanisms as 'methods of helping organization's members deal with "disturbing emotional experiences" – methods that are built into the way the organization works' (Menzies, 1960, cited in Fraher, 2004, p79).

There is a clear suggestion here of aspects of objects relations theory operating at the organization level.



### **Additional basic assumptions**

A fourth basic assumption was introduced by Turquet (1975). This was the basic assumption of oneness (or baO), which relates to an individual's experience of membership in a large group and 'group members' eagerness to join with an omnipotent force for passive participation in order to feel safe and whole' (Fraher, 2004, p37). It is further noted that this concept was related to Turquet's work with large groups (which Turquet was responsible for introducing to the Leicester Conference design in 1964, as described by Fraher, 2004).

Fraher goes on to link this basic assumption to psychoanalytic roots: 'Following Freud, Klein also frequently mentioned the term "one-ness" when describing the infant's sense of fusing with the breast/mother in its early years of life' (p37).

Fraher (2004) goes on to describe a fifth basic assumption: 'W. Gordon Lawrence, Alistair Bain and Laurence Gould explored a fifth basic assumption that they called *me-ness* or *baM*' (p37). This is described as an opposite to baO, where group members resist the notion of 'we' and strive to remain separate from the group (Fraher, 2004).

### **Field theory and experiential learning**

Miller (1990a) comments that the 'intellectual inheritance from Lewin lies particularly in his insistence from the late 1930s onwards, on the importance of studying the 'gestalt' properties of groups as wholes' (p170).

Fraher (2004), notes how field theory (Lewin, 1936, 1950) was influential on Tavistock staff including Miller, with an emphasis 'characteristics of interdependence' (Fraher, 2004, p71):

There is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of their subgroups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties, which are different from properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed. (Lewin, 1947, cited in Fraher, 2004, p71).

Miller (1985), describes the influence of open systems thinking to GRCs, 'derived from von Bertalanffy (1950a, 1950b)' (p247), in reference to the work of Lewin.

It is also recognised that Lewin made a further contribution to the development of GRCs through his experimentation during a 1946 workshop with an approach involving adult learning through 'interactive experiences shared in experimental learning environments' (Fraher, 2004, p69).

Stein (2004) describes the experiential learning approach in group relations conferences (discussed in the next section). Included in this description are the theoretical constructs described by Bion (1962) in relation to beta-elements, alpha-function and containment.

In short, beta-elements are described by Stein (2004), and as hypothesized by Bion (1962), as 'confusing and often unintelligible bits of sensory information that pierce the protective psychic boundary ... and are thus experienced as threatening its very existence' (Stein, 2004, p23). This description relates to the hypothesized experience of an infant. Stein (2004) continues a description of the consequences of this experience as follows. The infant is hypothesized to respond to beta-elements by trying to rid themselves of the experience through projective identification (for example by screaming to expel the associated anxiety). Bion highlights that this behavior is perceived as quite normal in infancy and more problematically later on in development, particularly as they remain 'unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual' (Stein, 2004, p24).

Stein (2004) goes on to describe Bion's (1962) formulation is involving an alpha-function, 'the capacity to contain and process beta-elements without resorting to projective identification' (p24). This involves 'processing within ourselves the feelings and thoughts that are evoked by the beta-elements' (p24).

Stein (2004), goes on to note that in Bion's (1962) formulation, a further aspect of coping with beta-elements may require a different response: 'In many cases the recipient will need to find some way of transforming these beta-elements into something more benign and communicating them back from whence they came' (p24).

Waddell (1998), describes the concept of the container/contained relationship (Bion, 1962) in terms of the mother as 'container' for the fragmentary impulses and emotions of the infant (the 'contained'), and goes on to comment that 'Bion's model for the thinking of thoughts, a model for processing emotional experience ... is repeatedly reproduced in the infinite flux of life thereafter' (p35). This description may be seen in relation to Miller (1990a) when discussing uncertainty and anxiety 'it is an important part of the consultant role to serve as a container' (Miller, 1990a, p171).

In summary, it is recognised that Bion's theories of beta-elements, alpha function and containment are recognised in relation to experiential learning.

## **Summary**

In summary, an historical overview of the development of GRCs has been offered, along with a structural description and consideration of underpinning theory. In the next chapter literature describing the experience of attending GRCs and attempts of evaluation will be discussed. In the next section, the GRC approach will be considered in relation to the training of educational psychologists.

### **1.5. GRCs and training educational psychologists**

In the first part of this section, a brief overview of the role of an educational psychologist and training route will be offered in order to help orientate the reader to this dimension of the research.

In the 'Standards for the accreditation of educational psychology training in England, Northern Ireland and Wales' (British Psychological Society, 2016) document, the following extended quotation is drawn from the statement of intent for the core training of the educational psychologist (p16-17):

'Educational Psychology is both a profession and a scientific activity. Educational psychology transcends the psychology of children's development and education: It is centrally concerned with the psychology of education and making use of psychological methods that are themselves educational ...

EPs work with children and young people from 0–25 years of age. To do this successfully involves working with adults, teachers, other professionals, parents and carers, families and groups, and with organisations and communities. EPs work in specialist and generic services, with a wide range of education, health, and social care providers (e.g. local authorities, schools, preschool settings, social care, third sector and independent providers), and in a variety of settings. EPs have statutory duties in relation to individuals with special educational needs and disability ...

The key foundations for all services provided by EPs are therefore:

- to develop and apply psychological theories and research that relate to practice;
- to promote improved outcomes for all service users taking account of their context

and needs

- to share understanding of diversity in development and learning; and
- to adhere to professional practices that are legal, ethical and conform to the best standards of evidence available at the time.

Educational psychology training in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is, accordingly, configured as a postgraduate, doctoral, three year, full-time training programme. Accredited and approved training promotes transferable knowledge and competencies relevant to working across a very wide range of educational, social care, health and other community settings. In their training, EPs learn how to reduce educational disadvantage and psychological distress, and to enhance and promote positive development, learning and psychological well-being through the systematic application of psychological theory and research. Interventions are developed that aim to promote autonomy, educational and social inclusion and well-being, and to empower and enable those in educational setting, thus minimising exclusion and inequality. The available evidence suggests that different interventions work for different individuals or groups. It also highlights the central importance of high quality inter-personal skills for successful educational psychology practice. EPs are trained to work with and support others – parents, teachers and other professionals whose involvement is crucial in effecting change for children and young people. Defining features of the EP are, therefore:

- the capacity to provide consultation (oriented towards increasing understanding and solutions); and
- the ability to gather information, synthesise, select and address different ways of intervening, as appropriate to the needs and choices of the service user. EPs have an important preventative function, for example in protecting and improving quality of service provision. There are huge social and financial costs for society when children and young people encounter difficulties with learning, communication, behaviour or well

being/mental health. It is, therefore, important to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of qualified educational psychologists to contribute to developing and improving early intervention for potentially vulnerable groups in society, and that the standards of training are continuously reviewed and revised in light of changing circumstances.'

This overview has been offered in relation to accredited training in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, as this most closely relates to the context in which the research is conducted.

It may also be helpful for the reader to know that in order to be eligible for the Funded Training Scheme in Educational Psychology, in England ("Guidance, Educational Psychology Funded Training Scheme", 2016), which relates to training most closely associated with this research, candidates must demonstrate that they have completed: a psychology degree (preferably 2:1 or above), a conversion course or a psychology-based Master's degree. Candidates must also be eligible for the British Psychological Society Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC).

Candidates must also demonstrate that they have experience of working for a minimum of one year full-time, with at least 9 months' full-time paid employment (37 hours a week, or the equivalent if part time) with children and young people within: education, health, social care, youth justice or a childcare or community setting.

In the remaining part of this section, a definition of group relations conferences will be revisited, before links are made to the British Psychological Society (BPS) required competencies for accreditation as an educational psychologist. Links will then be made with the Health and Care Professionals Council's (HCPC) standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2012).

Miller (1990a) described the key aspects of group relations conferences as experiential learning events, with a focus on group and organisational behavior, with an emphasis on authority and leadership. Miller (1990a) is explicit in highlighting that the purpose of such conferences are educational.

These key aspects of GRCs will be considered firstly in relation to the BPS Standards for the accreditation of educational psychology training in England, Northern Ireland & Wales October (2014), which include the following descriptions of learning outcomes, core professional skills and requirements for practice of applied educational psychologists:

- Develop partnerships and effective collaboration with the interacting systems of families, schools, communities and other agencies, to bring about positive change (p16)
- Demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills across a range of settings and activities. (p17)
- Bring about change for individuals, children, young people and their families by working at different levels (e.g. individuals, families, groups, communities, organisations, local authorities and national priorities). (p18)
- Contribute a distinct psychological perspective within multi-disciplinary teams. (p18)

Each of these descriptions can be seen to make direct reference to the performance of educational psychologists working collaboratively in group situations. These competencies may be seen to correspond to the key aspects of GRCs as described by Miller (1990a), particularly in relation to an educational experience with a focus on learning about groups and organisations.

Health and Care Professionals Council, standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2012), include the following requirements:

- be able to work, where appropriate, in partnership with other professionals, support staff, service users and their relatives and carers
- understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships as both an independent practitioner and collaboratively as member of a team
- be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary team
- recognise the need to use interpersonal skills to encourage the active participation of service users
- understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different groups ...
- ... to assist multi-professional communication ...
- understand psychological models related to ... organisations and systems
- know how professional principles are expressed and translated into action through a number of different approaches to practice, and how to select or modify approaches to meet the needs of an individual, groups or communities

Similarly to the BPS requirements, these standards can be seen to make direct reference to the performance of educational psychologists working collaboratively in group situations. There is an emphasis on relationships, interpersonal skills and understanding of groups and organisations, which are seen as linking to Miller's (1990a) description of the key aspects of GRCs. It may also be argued that skills required to demonstrate competencies in these areas requires individuals to take-up their own authority in role and at to recognise the influence of leadership on groups and organisations.

In summary, the educational emphasis of GRCs involving a primary focus on learning about group and organizational behavior, is seen to related directly to the core competencies (BPS) and professional standards (HCPC) required for accreditation as an educational psychologist (and more broadly practitioner psychologist).



This linkage between GRCs and the training requirements of educational psychologists has relevance to the development of research questions and decision-making regarding choice of participants for the research.

### **1.7. My position as a researcher**

In this section my own interest and knowledge will be considered regarding GRCs. The intention is to provide the reader with an understanding of my own position as a researcher.

As stated at the beginning of the introduction, I first became interested in GRCs through discussion with trainee educational psychologists who had attended a conference at the Tavistock. Their stories involved drama and intrigue. It was approximately ten years later that I attended a GRC conference myself at the Tavistock (during September, 2013), as part of my professional doctorate training in educational psychology. By that time I had already decided to conduct this research into the area and had decided to attend a GRC during February 2013, run by OPUS (Organisation for Promoting Understanding in Society) as part of my orientation to the area. This first experience was somewhat differently structured, in so much as attendance was required on four consecutive weeks for a single day each week. During these experiences I became interested in how groups behaved under conditions where there was limited structure and direction. I was also interested in my own behavior in relation to the group and the tasks presented (a broad overview of GRCs is offered in the following chapter).

These experiential learning events had further stimulated my curiosity. I became dimly aware in subsequent weeks and months that I held onto experiences within these conferences in relation to my experiences in groups both within and beyond my experience at work. There was an overriding sense of 'something' else going on within the group I experienced. During the process of a preliminary (or brief) literature review, when developing a research and ethics proposal, my interest in Bion (1961) strengthened, and I began to consider group behavior in

relation to his basic assumptions; I became interested in how groups might be involved in dependency, fight or flight or pairing behaviours (described in the next chapter).

Through a combination of studying and attending GRCs, my curiosity grew in terms of how these events might help myself and others to make sense of complex group situations. This interest related to my experience at work, where I frequently became a member of different groups with varying tasks and roles. There was also a sense that GRCs related to experiences outside of work. This growing sense of curiosity fuelled my engagement with the research activity. My position is that of curiosity. I have been unable to articulate what the experiential learning has offered me in relation to my work (or beyond), and it is this, perhaps, that is the motivating force driving this research activity. I have been wondering what might be taken from the experience of attending a GRC, and how this might relate to the training and the work of an educational psychologist.

Uncertainty and curiosity seem the best descriptions of my position as a researcher.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The aim of this literature review is to describe a systematic and purposeful approach to exploring the literature associated with GRCs. The purpose is threefold. Firstly, to gain an overview of what a GRCs involves. Secondly, to establish a rationale for research questions. Thirdly, to inform the choice of research design. This literature review is seen in these terms, rather than as an exhaustive account of GRCs.

A systematic approach to gathering information has been taken. In terms of searches related to GRCs, some decisions needed to be carefully considered. Namely, what was the purpose, scope and limitations of the search. As described, the purpose has been to gain an overview of GRCs and seek rationale for research questions and research design. The scope of the search needed careful consideration, as there is a limit to the extent to which the many books and papers on GRCs can be described. Furthermore, this area of study has many allied bodies of literature regarding theory and practice. The aim here is to describe what has and what has not been included.

### **2.2. Inclusion**

Electronic searches have been conducted (until the end of May 2015). Electronic databases searched have included: SocINDEX, PsychINFO, PEP Archive, Psychology and Behavioural Science Collection, eBooks collection (EBSCOhost), PsychARTICLES, psychBOOKS, MEDLINE, Health Business Elite, and CINAHL.

These databases were chosen as they have relevance to the area of research (GRCs) either in terms of development of theory or in practical application. It is recognised that additional

databases could have been searched. However, as stated previously, that aim has not been to be exhaustive, but purposeful.

The search terms used were 'group relations conference/s' and combinations including 'educational psychology', 'educational psychologist/s' and 'trainee educational psychologist/s'. Of the 147 references that were identified through the broad search term 'group relations conference/s' only four related to 'educational psychology' and none to 'educational psychologist/s' or 'trainee educational psychologist/s'. Of the four references related to 'educational psychology' and 'group relations conference/s', two were dissertations (related to school leadership in the first instance and the use of metaphor in group relations conferences in the second). These unpublished references did not relate to educational psychology explicitly and were not included in the literature review. The two books identified in the search including both 'educational psychology' *and* 'group relations conference/s' have been referenced in the literature review. It is noted, however, that neither text makes reference to the training of educational psychologists or educational psychology practice. In summary, the inclusion criteria used in the electronic literature search involved attempts to identify published literature that included a focus on both educational psychology *and* group relations conferences.

It was also recognised that electronic searches are not in themselves exhaustive. For example Greenhalgh and Peacock (2005) found that electronic searches accounted for 30% of the literature identified for a particular research question. They use the term 'snowball sampling' to describe a more dynamic process of searching. This approach was used in widening the search by identifying references from reading in a cumulative manner.

As previously stated, this literature search is not intended to be exhaustive, rather the aims have been to provide an overview of what a GRC involves and to establish a rationale for the research questions and design. These may be seen as the criteria by which relevant literature has been included and excluded from the review that follows. The fundamental aim has been to

synthesise sufficient evidence to outline the object of study rather than chronicle all writing that has been published in relation to GRCs. It can be seen that the electronic searches provide evidence to suggest that, through the process described, there has been no evidence of publications which explicitly connect GRCs with the practice of educational psychology or the training of educational psychologists.

### **2.3. Exclusion**

It is recognised that terms including 'leaderships' and 'authority', 'organisation / organisational theory', 'groups / group theory', 'systems theory', 'psychoanalytic theory' amongst others have relevance to the area of study. These terms were excluded from electronic searches as the scope of this writing is limited and the aim of the literature search was purposeful rather than exhaustive.

### **Structure of the literature review**

The structure of this literature review narrows in focus as it progresses. Initially a broad contextual overview will be offered, including limitations of the literature review. Consideration will then be given to the literature describing experiences of attending GRCs and evaluative commentary.

### **2.4. Exploring the experience**

The aim here is to introduce the reader to key dimensions of the literature describing the experience of GRCs.

This section has been structured, firstly in relation to the literature describing the nature of learning at GRCs. This will be followed by description of evaluative literature.

Miller (1990a) describes the purpose of GRCs as educational. Furthermore (p169):

Our central theoretical and practical interest was and remains what we later came to term 'relatedness': the processes of mutual influence between individual and group, group and group, and organization, and, beyond that, the relatedness of organization and community to wider social systems, to society itself. In all these forms of relatedness there is a potential tension.

This description is offered to help to contextualise the following literature describing the experience of GRCs.

The structure of GRCs have been described in the preceding chapter. However, it is helpful to recognise the rationale underpinning the structure. This rationale relates to the conference aims, outlined here, in terms of an educational experience, with a focus on 'relatedness' and the associated tensions: 'It is, of course, by removing the familiar structures and conventions ... that the conference setting makes the defenses and underlying anxieties more accessible' (Miller, 1990a, p178).

Miller (1990a) describes his impression of learning at the Leicester conference. He acknowledges that as a result of limitations in resources to conduct in-depth evaluation of outcomes, the reflections on learning 'remain reliant on impressionistic and anecdotal evidence ... and from our own observations' (p182). Whilst recognizing these limitations, it is seen as valuable to note the impressions of this formative figure in the history of GRCs.

Miller (1990a) states that: 'It seems likely that three different kinds, or levels, of learning are likely to occur.' (p182). Firstly Miller suggests that group members are likely to become able to identify and label behaviours that they observe.

A second level of learning is described which 'goes beyond observation to insight ... the experience adds to the ways in which the individual classifies the world and relates to it – particularly involvement in unconscious processes. There is an awareness of phenomena previously unnoticed or dismissed as irrelevant.' (p182). This level of learning is described in terms of group members developing a new understanding of human behavior which includes insight into behaviours of the members themselves.

It is evident in this description, that Miller is referring to different 'depths' of learning. The third level of learning is described as implying 'some degree of personality re-structuring' (p182), or 'not an *additional* perspective, but a *different* perspective' (p182).

Beyond these reflections on different levels of learning, Miller (1990a) suggests that gathering statements made by members at the end of a conference provide a poor indication of outcome. Furthermore, Miller suggests that some conference members may have experiences which are indigestible, and that: 'If some people are too defended to learn, all we can do is to respect their defenses' (p183).

### **A note of caution**

It is salient that Miller (1990a) described his reflections on the impact of GRCs as impressionistic, arising from anecdotes and observations. The majority of the following literature may be described in the same terms. The anecdotal and observational nature of the majority of literature may be seen as a limitation. Shafer (2006) comments, 'the lack of formal assessment

of and learning about the efficacy of Group Relations methodologies has been a limitation' (p130).

It is also important to consider the sources from which the following writing is drawn.

Predominantly, writers describe experiences of GRCs with explicit recognition of their personal involvement (and investment) in GRCs. Therefore, it should be recognised that there is the potential for a bias towards favourable accounts, given the writers interests in the object of study.

This criticism could of course also be leveled at the researcher, and it will be for the reader to decide how reasonable an account is offered in this writing.

## **2.5. Descriptions of attending GRC's**

### ***Pain and uncertainty***

It is worth noting that Bion (1961) wrote about the hatred of learning in his seminal text 'Experiences in Groups', (cited in Bahat, 2012, p182):

There is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all, and lack of faith in the worth of such a kind of learning ... In the group it becomes very clear that this longed-for alternative to the group procedure is really something like arriving fully equipped as an adult fitted by instinct to know without training or development exactly how to live and move and have his being in a group.

Bahat (2012) goes on to emphasise the importance of learners being able to tolerate not knowing: 'There cannot be real thinking when people are stuck in pre-know positions or roles'. Reference is made to Bion (1961), who discusses the importance of a group struggling with the



tension of bringing together the primitive with the sophisticated – ‘the essence of developmental conflict’ (Bion, 1961, p128).

Aram (2012) also emphasizes the concept of ‘not knowing’, when referring to the concept of ‘negative capability’ – a term that Bion (1984) drew from the writing of Keats (1817): ‘that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’ (cited in Aram, 2012, p21).

### ***Identity and anxiety***

In a chapter discussing the experience of learning in a GRC, Khaleelee (2006), describes the specific mobilization of anxiety during conferences and how this is central to the experiential learning. Khaleelee suggests that this can be a painful learning experience involving resistance. An emphasis is placed on the group members’ ability to manage (or contain) anxiety and uncertainty, and to move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position.

Aram (2012) adds to this sense of tension and struggle in member learning in GRCs, stating that members have to ‘grapple with finding their own authority in role ... and with developing projections and phantasies that are then worked with and worked through’ (p16). Aram (2012) adds that ‘shame and panic are inevitable aspects of any learning process which is challenging to one’s sense of identity’ (p16).

Tagore (2012) appears to bring together these notions of the individual and group struggle with the concept of a ‘churning’ process within the individual and the group.

Izod (2006) also describes tensions and struggle when discussing the interplay between the individual and the organization in the context of GRCs. Experiential learning is seen to provide opportunity to consider the issues of dependence and autonomy. It is however highlighted that

during GRCs, 'participants and staff are thrown into, the struggle to manage one's senses and emotions in the presence of the unfamiliar, and the struggle to access one's cognitive resources to be able to think' (p81). In this context, Izod (2006) describes feedback from GRC members as frequently expressing 'that much of the learning from conference work is about one's self and one's own capacity to manage anxiety' (p91).

In summary, the experiential approach in group relations conference is described here as involving the potentially painful developmental conflict within individuals and groups; tolerating not knowing, 'churning' and facing primitive states. It is further suggested that this type of learning experience may be hated and unvalued and relate to coping with anxiety.

### ***Difficulty in describing***

Within the literature discussing the experience of GRCs, there is a recurrent theme that emerges in terms of the difficulty that individuals can encounter when describing their experience and learning.

Ginor (2009), comments that 'it is hard to describe this kind of experiential process in a publication' (p70). Dartington (2012), comments: 'The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word' (pxxiii). Tagore (2012) comments, 'Experiences around group relations conferences do not lend themselves to conclusions very easily' (p257).

These comments may be viewed in relation to the previous sub-section, where the 'churning' within individuals and within groups during group relations conferences was described. The reader may connect the earlier discussion of Bion's formulation (1962) of learning involving beta-elements and alpha-function with the commentary described here. The difficulty in articulating the experience may be seen within the context of the 'undigested' pieces of

information (Miller, 1990a), or the beta-elements, 'unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual' (Stein, 2004, p24).

## **2.5. Evaluative activities and critique**

Having considered the literature describing the learning that may occur during GRCs, an emphasis has been noted in relation to pain, uncertainty, anxiety and identity. It has also been suggested that these types of experience may be connected with the recurring theme, that experiences of GRCs are difficult to describe. Shafer's (2006) recognition of the limitation of formal assessment and learning about the efficacy of GRCs may also be considered in this light.

This limitation of evaluative material regarding GRCs has been evident in the current literature search. In this section two pieces of research have been identified for discussion.

Bryson and Asher (2008), explored the experience of a one-day group relations conference (based on the model described by Miller, 1990a) for trainee psychiatrists using structured questionnaires, involving a five-point Likert scale regarding various structured elements of the conference. Immediate evaluation feedback is reported to have indicated 'a high level of satisfaction with the training' (p193).

At a nine month follow-up, 'median scores were 4, indicating that the conference had a moderate to high impact on participants' learning in four key dimensions' (p189). The four dimensions key dimensions were (p189):

- effective communication
- taking up a leadership role

- dealing with task and role-related anxiety
- containing others' psychological projections

Bryson and Asher (2008) concluded that a facilitated experiential learning environment (GRC) can make a significant contribution to the development of future consultant psychiatrists and that this training model may facilitate the achievement of core and general competencies. It was noted that the value of this approach to training for other professions remains to be explored. It was also noted that consideration should be given regarding the timing of the training event, suggestions included the potential for one event early in the training and a further event in the final year of training.

It was also noted that some participants reported (through free-text feedback) that the experience had 'shaken their confidence' (Bryson and Asher, 2004, p194) and that follow-up work regarding personal strengths and weaknesses may be valued.

It is recognised that this study involved the follow-up data being gathered from ten participants after attending a one-day conference, in the context of their ongoing training as psychiatrists (and that most participants had been in personal therapy in relation to their training). It was also noted that Likert scales may have biased findings. The findings of this study are accordingly treated with caution.

Jern (2002), discusses possible strategies or conditions for evaluating the effects of group relations training and includes the suggestion that researchers should 'take into account anecdotal narratives from participants and staff' (p233).

Hupkins (2006) describes a study of GRCs in relation to application in the business world. Five participants were interviewed, with the aims of exploring 'what their experiences had been like, what they had learnt there and how they applied this new knowledge in their daily work' (p139).

The interviewees were from different management and consultant backgrounds and had attended different conferences in different countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom). Participants had attended between one and six conferences, in up to three different countries. It is also reported that two participants had attended as members; four as members and staff on different occasions.

Hupkins comments that this diversity of experience 'could imply that the learning was not limited to one type of conference only, but could be generalized to group relations conferences in general' (p139).

A counter argument could be to state that any claims of generalization are highly suspect. It is perhaps more reasonable to claim that the learning described relates to the particular experiences of this limited sample of individuals with differing backgrounds, who had attended a variety of different GRCs in differing roles.

Hupkins (2006) offers a loose description of the interview approach involving asking participants to recall the 'most striking experiences' (p140), what had been learned and how knowledge had been applied in daily work. Interviews are described as intensive, requiring more than one appointment (as the interviews extended beyond the 2-3 hours planned).

The analysis of data is loosely described, as involving making notes in the interview and writing associations (from the researcher) after the interviews 'in order to make sure I could distinguish between what was 'theirs' and what was 'mine', to prevent contamination' (p140). Following this claim, this statement is made: 'As all that material percolated in my mind, it resulted in a list of observations and conclusions' (p140). The conclusions and observations regarded applications of learning, nature of the learning and reasons leading people to attend GRCs.

A number of questions emerge in relation to the approach to data gathering and analysis. These questions include wondering about the type of notes that were made during and after the interviews. Furthermore, the claim of separating the reflections of the interviewer and the interviewee appears to be complicated by the subsequent description of ideas 'percolating' in the mind.

In light of the critical discussion thus far, the following conclusions (and observations) are offered for consideration, framed in the sense that Miller (1990a) described as impressionistic, anecdotal and observational.

In a summary of conclusions, Hupkins (2006), includes the following points:

- group members attend GRCs in following 'some kind of developmental track that prepares them for this experience' (p150) or as a consequence of others they engage with having attended a GRC
- a striking recollection does not necessarily correspond to 'their largest learning point' (p150)
- many learning points are described (not necessarily in relation to striking learning points)
- the managers and consultants described applying learning in a variety of ways, such as when working with clients and colleagues; in interpreting group behaviours and in planning group activities

It is evident when considering the literature describing GRCs as identified through this literature search, that Shafer's (2006) point maintains salience (in 2014-2015); namely, that there remains a limitation of formal assessment and learning about the efficacy of GRCs.

## 2.6. Critical reflections

In the final part of this section a philosophical critique which relates to dialogues concerning GRCs and the embedded theories and practice will be offered.

Eishold (2005) argues that there are two broad sets of limitations relating to Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumptions (described above as central to Bion's understanding of group relations).

Eishold (2005) argues that basic assumptions theory is, in essence, simplistic in a categorical sense, offering 'the implication of a highly restricted range of motives animating group behaviour' (p359). Furthermore, Eishold (2005) questions whether basic assumptions are readily observable, suggesting that basic assumption theory 'extends to an unwarranted presumption of our ability to see such patterns clearly and objectively' (p359).

Eishold (2005) goes on to describe a second broad criticism of basic assumption theory, 'to do with the neglect of social and interpersonal factors influencing the behaviours of members in the group' (p359). Again, the potential for simplification is highlighted in relation to an underpinning concept of basic assumption theory, where the group is seen as a whole. There is a tension highlighted here between the individual and concept of the group as a whole.

It should be noted that these criticisms may be most relevant to those interested in using basic assumption theory, for as Eishold (2005) and others have noted, those working directly with Bion reported a sense that he was reluctant to emphasise the importance of the basic assumptions (regardless of the interest that these ideas stimulated in those around him).

Criticism of basic assumption theory has so far been highlighted in terms the potential for simplification and neglect of factors related to individual and group differences. Palmer (2001),

draws attention to possibility of external factors being overlooked when thinking in terms of basic assumptions, quoting Bridger (1990b), who stated 'Bion, in my view, was not at ease with the group as an open system.' (Cited in Palmer, 2001, p171).

In summary, Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumptions, with a focus on the group-as-a-whole, has been criticized for failing to acknowledge the influence of the individual, the interpersonal, and factors outside of the group. It has also been argued that basic assumption theory involves an oversimplified set of assumptions, which are in themselves difficult to observe.

## **2.7. A broader philosophical critique**

It is argued that a critique of systems, theory, psychoanalytic theory and group relations theory is beyond the scope of this writing and purpose of this review.

The following reflection is offered, partly to acknowledge the limitation of this approach to reviewing the literature relating to GRCs. In addition, this reflection from a philosophical perspective offers a point of view which may be seen in relation to an epistemological stance, which helps to inform the research design.

In a paper entitled 'In Which the Tavistock Paradigm is Considered as a Discursive Practice', Palmer (2000) offers an extended quotation from the philosopher Farrell (1979), who had analysed a collection of accounts of work groups described by Palmer and others, as follows:

*... they each organise their groups somewhat differently in order to realise their various aims. Naturally, therefore, these groups produce different sorts of material – which has been put in order. Now each operator proceeds to do this – to put his material in order – by picking out a pattern of features that he judges his material exhibits. He embodies the*



*upshot of this ordering in a set of concepts and generalisations. These jointly constitute what can be called his Way of Talking, or WOT for short; and he uses it to train the new group member, Smith, to spot the features that his WOT picks out ... When Smith has acquired these skills, it is natural for the operator to talk about Smith by saying that he has now acquired some insight and understanding'*

(Babington, Smith and Farrell, 1979, cited in Palmer, 2000, p12).

This analysis relates in particular to the group work undertaken by particular practitioners, but resonates much more widely. The Way of Talking (or WOT), may be seen to relate to object relations theory, open systems theory, basic assumption theory and to the body of literature describing GRCs as a whole.

It is helpful to recognise that the theories described throughout this literature review may be seen as a WOT. A way of talking which implies insight and understanding, but which in essence reflects a pattern of features which have been selected by individuals aiming to make sense of particular material. There is a circular dimension to this argument, suggesting the potential of reification of a pattern which was judged as helping to make sense of particular material at a particular time. Ultimately, the claims made in relation to the different theoretical perspectives described in this review can be seen, simply, as a way of talking.

This awareness is helpful, firstly in recognising the limitations of the theory described and in guarding against the risk of more lofty claims. Secondly, and significantly, this analysis and subsequent awareness of the concept of a WOT, helps to inform the research design, particularly from an epistemological perspective and the decisions which follow in relation to information gathering and analysis.

The concept of a WOT can be linked to the concept of social constructionism. Burr (2003) comments that 'Social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality' (p6) and that (p4-5):

*... what we regard as truth, which of course varies historically and cross culturally, may be thought of as our currently accepted ways of understanding the world. These are a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions ...*

This description of a social constructionist stance fits well with the concept of a WOT described by Farrell (in Babington, Smith and Farrell, 1979). Links between GRC's and social constructionism will be considered in greater detail in the methodology section which follows.

## **2.8. Reflections**

The primary aim of the introduction and literature review has been to introduce the reader to the literature describing group relations conferences. A brief overview will be offered in this section, before implications for research questions and design are described.

A brief history of the development of group relations has been offered, along with a description of the potential structure of such events. Theoretical underpinnings have been described. The core triad of object relations theory, open systems theory and group relations theory have been discussed, along with some less central yet noteworthy influences. A review has also been offered of commentary describing experiences of GRCs, including critical reflections of theory. A broader critique of GRCs has been offered from a philosophical perspective, where it is recognised that an orientation to GRCs can be seen as adopting a particular Way of Talking (Babington, Smith and Farrell, 1979).

It is also recognised that the literature surveyed did not indicate that research has been carried out exploring the experience of trainee educational psychologists who have attended GRCs as part of their professional training.

## **2.9. Emergent research questions**

The preceding discussion has influenced the development of the following research questions:

**How do participants describe their experience of attending a group relations conference?**

**What perceived influence has attending a group relations conference had on the members behavior in role?**

In the following chapter, links will be drawn from the introduction and literature review, to the particular choices made in terms of research design.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter the research design is outlined. The research context is described, and within this context the object of enquiry has been delineated. Ontological and epistemological considerations are offered, in order provide an explicit rationale for methodological decisions, including sampling, data gathering and data analysis. Finally, consideration is given to trustworthiness and ethics.

#### **3.1. Research context**

For the purpose of this chapter, this brief section is aimed at summarising the context from which the research questions emerged.

As outlined in the introduction, this enquiry was initially stimulated by discussions (around 2005) with trainee educational psychologists at the Tavistock who spoke about their attendance of a group relations conference. Subsequently, my interest has been strengthened following attendance of two group relations conferences (run by different organisations). These experiences have also influenced the way in which I make sense of complexity in my own roles as a practitioner psychologist, field-work supervisor and tutor at Cardiff University (a role taken up for one year at the time of writing). I have also begun working as a tutor at the Tavistock during the final month of this writing. These experiences will be considered further in the reflexive section of the discussion.

## Defining the object of study

‘At the core of all group relations training models is the idea of the individual participant learning from here-and-now-experience. Conferences are designed to be temporary learning institutions, giving participants the opportunity to learn from their own experience about group and organizational processes, and their own part in these’ (Obholzer, 1994, p46).

We gain a sense here of the part and the whole. As this chapter progresses, this concept will be explored further. The above quotation is offered as a helpful definition outlining the focus of enquiry in this research.

‘It is important for the individuals to know the nature of their own valency, a group and organizational version of the need to know oneself, in order to be prepared for both the resultant personal strengths and weaknesses as manifested in group situations.’ (Obholzer, 1994, p46).

Furthermore:

‘The hope is that, as a result of their greater awareness of unconscious processes and their own part in them, members will return to their ‘back-home’ work-settings better able to exercise their own authority and to manage themselves in role (Miller, 1990)’ (Cited in Obholzer, 1994, p47).

It may be seen that a focus for this research emerged from the literature.

## **Research questions**

When considering the literature describing group relations conferences (GRC), the following research questions have been identified:

**How do participants describe their experience of attending a GRC?**

**What perceived influence has attending a group relations conference had on the members behavior in role?**

Jern, (2002), discusses possible strategies or conditions for evaluating the effects of group relations conferences and includes the suggestion that researchers should 'take into account anecdotal narratives from participants and staff' (p233).

The focus of this research was placed on participants rather than staff experience as there is a limit to the scope of this exploration. The rationale for exploring the views of trainee educational psychologists as participants in the group relations conference has been discussed in the literature review and will be revisited in the sample / participants section. A brief explanation for this choice is that trainee educational psychologists are required to demonstrate competencies in group situations. It is also recognised that educational psychology training at the Tavistock includes attendance of a group relations conference. These factors are seen as influential to the sampling approach, described below. Furthermore, the linkage between the aims of GRCs and the requirements for training educational psychologists (BPS, 2014, HCPC, 2012), may be seen in relation to the potential relevance and impact of the research. Namely, that findings may be of interest to those designing training courses for educational psychologists at the Tavistock and more widely. There may also be relevance to more experienced educational psychologists and allied professions. In addition, interest has been expressed in the findings of this research from organisations running group relations conferences.

In summary, consideration of the literature describing group relations conferences has helped to define the aims of this research, which has been to explore the personal experience of trainee educational psychologists who have attended a group relations conference and their perception of the influence of this training on their behavior in role.

### **3.2. The object of enquiry: back to the things themselves**

‘Famously, Husserl argued that we should ‘go back to the things themselves’. The ‘thing’ he is referring to, then, is the experiential content of consciousness...’ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p12).

Husserl’s directive was taken as a starting point for this exploration. The participants’ experiential learning was viewed as central. As Smith *et al* (2009) go on to note:

‘...Husserl was very interested in the array of mental processes involved in human life. Much of what is important to us involves bigger concerns with life goals, relationships, personal and professional projects, and with factors that facilitate or inhibit them. And when it comes to these areas, we naturally engage in considerable mental activity’ (p188).

This description may be seen to align with those describing the aims of a group relations conference, where an emphasis is placed on members understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in group situations and the impact of this awareness on personal authority and behavior in role (Miller 1990). To extend this point, Smith *et al* (2009) comment:

'If one embarks on an in-depth inductive qualitative study of a topic which has considerable existential moment ... then it is quite likely that the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self/identity' (p163).

Smith *et al* (2009) describe this in terms of 'major life transitions' (p163) and in the context of the research participants' learning experience during a group relations conference, as an element of their professional training, the following quote in relation to existential phenomenology is of relevance:

'Satre stresses the developmental, processual aspect of human being. His famous expression 'existence comes before essence' (1948:26) indicates that we are always becoming ourselves, and that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled. As Kierkegaard (1974: 79) puts it: 'An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming' (p19).

It is this 'process of becoming' that may be seen as relevant to this research. Particularly in relation to the trainee educational psychologists' experience.

Furthermore, Heidegger's (1962, 1967) concept of Dasein, links with Sartre's concept that 'existence comes before essence'. Smith *et al* (2009) describe Dasein as 'literally, "there-being"' (p16) and note: 'For Heidegger, Dasein is 'always already' *thrown* into this pre-existing world of people and objects, language and culture, and cannot be meaningfully detached from it'. (p17).

This concept may be linked to the experience of attending a group relations conference which members are 'thrown' into and which requires engagement with the people, objects, language and culture. Therefore, the following phenomenological framing of research activity is seen as relevant:



‘Participants are experts on their own experiences and can offer researchers an understanding of their thought, commitments and feelings through telling their own stories, in their own words, and in as much detail as possible. Participants are recruited because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored’ (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005).

This recognition of the participants as experts on their own experiences is seen as commensurate with the concepts outlined here of Dasein (there-being) and Satre’s concept of the ‘process of becoming’. It is, however, acknowledged that the researcher is unable to experience the participants’ ‘there-being’. This recognition will be revisited through discussion of hermeneutics and phenomenology later in this chapter.

### **3.3. Acknowledging the interpretive aspect**

This research aimed to explore the experience of attending a group relations conference from the participants perspective. Conrad (1987) uses the term ‘insider’s perspective’ and this is seen as relevant to this research which may be described as phenomenological. This concept will be considered in relation to hermeneutics later in this chapter.

Findings are offered as an interpretation of the participants ‘insider perspective’. Crotty (1998) offers the following reflection in relation to findings as interpretation:

‘It is a certain spin we have put on the data. In that case we are inviting people to weigh our interpretation, judge whether it has been soundly arrived at and is plausible (convincing, even?), and decide whether it has application to their interests and concerns’ (p41).

### **3.4. Ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations**

‘Inherent in the methodologies guiding research efforts are a number of theoretical perspectives... there is a range of epistemological positions informing the theoretical perspectives. Each epistemological stance is an attempt to explain how we know what we know and to determine the status to be ascribed to the understanding we reach’ (Crotty,1998, p18).

The purpose of this section is to consider a number of theoretical perspectives and to link these with the research questions, while offering the reader the chance to determine the status to be ascribed to the understanding that will emerge during this research.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) offer the following reflections:

‘Quantitative research tends to try to explain associations between events ... qualitative research has a different subject, and it tends to focus on meaning, sense-making and communicative action’. (p44-45).

It is helpful to return to the research questions at this point:

**How do participants describe their experience of attending a GRC?**

**What perceived influence has attending a group relations conference had on the members behavior in role?**

It may be seen that the focus of this research fits with the qualitative description provided by Smith *et al* (2009). The emphasis is on sense-making in both questions. Smith *et al* (2009),

comment 'How the particular question is formulated leads to a suggestion for what is probably the appropriate qualitative approach to use.' (p45).

This notion is given prominence as this discussion develops, outlining the rationale for the particular ontological and epistemological stance and consequent research methodology.

Burr (2003) offers the following definitions, which are helpful in clarifying terms.

Ontology is defined as 'the study of being and existence. The attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exist.' (p203).

Epistemology is defined as 'The philosophy of knowledge. The study of the nature of knowledge and the methods of obtaining it.' (p202).

In discussing research of the objective world, the socially constructed world and the individually constructed world, Fox, Martin and Green (2007), comment:

'There are, however, some grey areas between them. No knowledge is completely individually constructed. Usually there is some shared meaning between people and therefore in this way it is socially constructed' (p16).

This recognition is seen as in-line with the 'complexity of lived experience' (Smith *et al* 2009), and particularly in relation to the individual participant's experience of attending a *group relations* conference.

Therefore, in the remainder of this section, the aim is to clarify the underpinning ontological and epistemological context. Firstly positivism and objectivism are considered before attention is turned to relativism, realism, and idealism. Finally a constructivist and constructionist

perspective are considered alongside the social constructionist stance and a symbolic interactionist perspective.

In discussing positivism, Crotty (1998), asks what kind of world is the positivist world and describes principles associated with Galileo, where:

‘The primary properties of things - ‘real’ properties, therefore - and those that can be measured and counted and thereby quantified. Size, shape, position, number-only properties like these make the grade scientifically.’ (p28).

Following this epistemological position is likely to promote a nomothetic methodology, where:

‘data are collected, transformed and analysed in a manner which prevents the retrieval or analysis of the individuals who provided the data in the first place. This is typically achieved by measurements (transforming psychological phenomena into numbers), aggregation and inferential statistics.’ (Smith *et al*, 2009, p30).

Furthermore, Smith *et al* (2009) quote Kastenbaum (cited in Datan, Rodenheaver, & Hughes, 1987: 156), describing the outcomes of a nomothetic approach as:

‘indeterministic statistical zones that construct people who never were and never could be’ (1987, p90-91).

This epistemological stance is not seen as congruent with the research questions described above where an emphasis is placed on individual participant’s experience.

Crotty (1998), describes objectivism as:

'The epistemological view that things exist as *meaningful* entities independently of consciousness and experience, but they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects ('objective' truth and meaning, therefore), and that careful (scientific?) research can attain that objective truth and meaning. This is the epistemology underpinning the positivist stance.' (p5).

This epistemological position is seen as being incongruent with the research questions as it is the participants' experience of attending a group relations conference that is the focus of enquiry.

Eatough and Smith (2008), offer a definition of social constructionism claiming:

'That sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives, including the stories we tell about these lives. It agrees that language is important to this enterprise and that our sense of self (at least in part) emerges from the never-ending flow of intersubjective communication.' (p184).

This description of a social constructionist position may be seen to be more closely aligned with the research questions aimed at exploring the experience of attending a group relations conference from an individual perspective. The use of language and 'the stories we tell', lead on to consideration of a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Smith *et al* (2009), also speak about accounts of 'intersubjectivity' and a consistency with a symbolic interactionist position. Burr (2003), offers the following description:

'Symbolic interactionism emphasises the construction of the social world and meaning through the human use of symbols in communication, most importantly language.'  
(p205).

Is helpful to hold the centrality of language in mind, particularly when thinking about the construction of the social world, in relation to the research focus on group relations.

Crotty (1998), offers clarification of the distinction between constructionism and constructivism:

'It would seem important to distinguish accounts of constructionism when this social dimension of meaning is at centre stage from those where it is not. Using 'constructionism' for the former and 'constructivism' for the latter has echoes in the literature, even if the terminology is far from consistent.' (p57).

Furthermore:

'It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* but targeting for methodological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning-banking activity of the individual mind' and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes 'the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning.' (p58).

In the context of the research questions, the term constructionism is seen as more relevant when using this definition and considering the focus of exploration, namely, group relations. The co-construction of meaning may be seen in relation to the experience in groups, the interaction between researcher and participants (including transcript analysis) and the reader and this writing.

Crotty (1998) argues that 'social constructionism is at once realist and relativist' (p63). Burr, (2003), describes a realism as:

‘Ontological theory which states that the external world exist independently of being thought of or perceived.’ (p204).

Burr (2003), describes relativism as ‘the view that there can be no ultimate truth, and that therefore all perspectives are equally valid’ (p204).

Crotty, (1998) argues that ‘to say that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real ... Constructionism in epistemology is perfectly compatible with the realism in ontology’ (p63). Furthermore, Crotty argues that:

‘Those who contrast ‘constructionism’ and ‘realism’ are wide of the mark. Realism it should be set, instead, against idealism. Idealism... Is the philosophical view that what is real is somehow confined to what is in the mind... Social constructionism does not confine reality in this way’ (p64).

In relation to the research questions, which focus on participants’ personal experience and perception of attending a group relations conference, a relativist position has been taken, as the research is seen as exploratory and not in pursuit of an ultimate truth. It is recognised however that this relativist position is not incompatible with realism, and that the existence of an external world is not therefore denied.

In summary, a range of ontological and epistemological positions have been considered and careful consideration of the research questions enables identification of those positions most relevant to the object of study. This research therefore is described as positioned within relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, where the influence of symbolic interaction is recognised.

These considerations, in turn, informed the methodological considerations described in the next section.

### **3.5. Methodological considerations**

Crotty (1998) suggests that considerable effort is put into consideration of the following:

‘First, what methodologies and methods will we be employing in research we propose to do? Second, how do we justify this choice and use of methodologies and methods?’ (p2)

It is helpful to clarify that Crotty (1998) describes the methodology as:

‘The strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.’ (p3).

Furthermore, methods are described as ‘the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis.’ (p3).

#### **Grounded theory**

Smith *et al* (2009), explain that grounded theory researchers ‘generally set out to generate the theoretical-level account of particular phenomenon. This often requires sampling on a relatively large scale...’ (p201). This approach was not seen as commensurate with the research questions, where an exploration of participants experience is central, rather than any attempt to generate theory.



## **Narrative psychology**

Burr (2003), describes narrative psychology as ‘the study of the storied nature of human experience and human accounts.’ (p203).

Smith *et al* (2009), describe key features of narrative psychology as including a ‘focus on how narrative relates to sense-making (e.g. via genres or structure).’ (p45).

When returning to the research questions, it was recognised that while the sense making aspect of this approach has relevance, the focus on genre or structure appeared less pertinent.

## **Discourse analysis**

Burr (2003) describes discourse analysis as ‘the analysis of the piece of text in order to reveal either the discourses operating within it or the linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used in its construction.’ (p202).

Burr (2003) describes Foucauldian discourse analysis as: ‘the analysis of texts of all kinds to reveal the discourses operating within them. This often entails an attention to implicit subject positions and power relations.’ (p202).

Smith *et al* (2009) comment that these discursive approaches have ‘a stronger and more singular commitment to social constructionism’ (p195), in comparison to Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, where the focus ‘will be hermeneutic, ideographic and contextual (an interpretation of the meaning for a particular person in a particular context).’ (p195). These principles were seen to relate more closely to the research questions and are described in more detail in the following section.

## **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Smith *et al* (2009), describe the core elements of IPA as concerned with ‘...lived experience, hermeneutic inquiry, ideographic focus’ (p204).

These aspects of the approach are explored in the following section. However, it is helpful to note the link between the research focus of attending a group relations conference from a participant perspective and this description of an analysis underpinned by experiential and idiographic perspectives.

Eatough and Smith (2008), comment:

‘Typically, IPA studies explore existential issues of considerable importance for the participant. These matters are often transformative, including change and demanding reflection and (re) interpretation from the individuals concerned.’

(p186, in Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

This description was seen as commensurate with the research questions, which promote reflection on the experience of attending a GRC and any perceived influence on subsequent behavior.

Furthermore, Eatough and Smith (2008), comment:

‘... if participants open up a novel and interesting areas of enquiry these are pursued. In this sense, participants are viewed as experiential experts of the topic under investigation (Smith and Osborn, 2003).’ (p188).

This description can be seen as in-line with the exploratory aims of the research. Eatough and Smith (2008) also describe the potential for a researcher to 'bring to light the unexpected' (p188). Furthermore, the concept of 'experiential experts' can be seen as congruent with the ideographic focus of the research and the underpinning principles of group relations conferences, which includes learning from personal experience.

In summary, a range of methodological approaches have been considered, which may be used, from a qualitative stance, to explore trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a group relations conference. It has been argued that IPA best fits with the idiographic and phenomenological emphasis identified in the research questions, arising from the literature.

### **3.5.1. Strategy**

A qualitative strategy is viewed as appropriate for exploration of participants experience.

Coolican (2004), describes a qualitative approach as a:

'Methodological stance gathering qualitative data and which usually holds the information about human events and experience, when produced in numerical form, loses most of its important meaning for research' (p50).

This view may be seen as commensurate with that expressed by Jern (2002), who suggests that a strategy appropriate for exploring participants views of group relations training should 'take into account anecdotal narratives' (p233).

### **3.5.2. Technique**

Robson (2002), describes the circumstances in which a qualitative research interview is most appropriate as including:

- Where a study focuses on the meaning of a particular phenomenon to the participant...
- Where individual perceptions of processes within a social unit-such as a work-group, department whole group organization – are to be studied prospectively, using a series of interviews (Robson, 2002, p271)

Both of these points can be seen as directly relevant to the exploration of trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a group relations conference.

### **3.5.3. Analysis**

As described above, data has been analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), emphasise the importance of the theoretical underpinnings phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. In the following section these theoretical underpinnings will be considered in relation to the object of enquiry in order to make explicit the rationale for choosing this particular approach to data analysis.

## **3.6. Theoretical underpinnings**

### **3.6.1. Phenomenology**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe phenomenology as 'the philosophical approach to the study of experience... In thinking about what the experience of being human is *like*' and later commented that 'one key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience' (p12).

This perspective may be seen as relevant to the exploration of individual trainee educational psychologist's experience of attending a group relations conference.

### **3.6.2. Hermeneutics**

Coolican (2002), describes Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as an approach:

'That attempts to describe an individual's experience from their own perspective as closely as possible, but recognises the interpreted influence of the researcher on the research product' (p241).

It can be seen here that Coolican makes reference to hermeneutics, (the theory of interpretation) as a central concept for data analysis when using interpretative phenomenological analysis. This issue has been raised earlier in relation to the researchers engagement with participant's views and will be explored further in the data analysis section (below).

### **3.6.3. Idiography**

Idiography has also informed the analysis of data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), describe idiography as 'concerned with the particular' (p29) and as operating at two levels. Firstly in terms of '*detail*, and therefore the depth of the analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context' (p29).

These concepts of hermeneutics and idiography are relevant to issues of validity, which are considered below, particularly in relation to Yardley's (2000) first and second principle for assessing the quality of qualitative research - sensitivity to context and commitment to rigour.

In conclusion, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography are seen to be commensurate with broader framing of the research design, including a relativist stance, social constructionist perspective, exploratory purpose and qualitative strategy.

### **3.7. Sample and participants**

In this section, a rationale will be offered for the choice of sample, along with acknowledgement of the limitations inherent in this aspect of methodology.

‘Ideographic methods explicitly address the subjective and interpersonal involvedness of human emotion, thought and action, and the messy and chaotic aspects of human life, in the hope of getting a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation.’

(Eatough and Smith, p183, cited in Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2008)

In inviting participation in this research, the aim has been to ‘go back to the things themselves’ (Husserl, 1927). The ‘things’ were the experiences of attending a group relations conference. Eatough and Smith (2008), describe ideographic methods as appropriate for subjective and ‘interpersonal involteness’ of emotion, thought and action. Furthermore, they are explicit in acknowledging ‘messy and chaotic’ aspects of human life. This recognition is commensurate with a description Rice (1965) offers when writing of his experience of Directorship of early Group Relations Conferences:

'... the techniques of conference learning include the removal of some of the common and expected social defences, the lowering of barriers to the expression of feeling, and an examination of the values that are placed on externally accepted modes of behaviour' (p45).

The potential for 'messy and chaotic' experience is plausible when considering Rice's description of techniques of conference learning. An ideographic approach, therefore is seen as justifiable.

Smith *et al* (2009), explain that 'Ideography is concerned with the particular' (p29). To extend an earlier point in relation to sampling:

'IPA's commitment to the particular operates at two levels. Firstly, there is a commitment to the particular, in the sense of *detail*, and therefore the depth of analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context. As a consequence, IPA utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated samples...' (p29).

This comment is helpful recognizing that IPA is an appropriate tool for analyzing particular phenomena, where the 'event' in this research relates to a GRC. As this section unfolds, the issues of 'particular people' in a 'particular context' will be considered further, along with the issues of 'a small' and 'purposefully selected' sample.

### **3.7.1. Particular people in a particular context**

Smith *et al* (2009) state that:

‘IPA reseachers usually try to find a fairly homogeneous sample, for whom the research question will be meaningful .... In some cases, the topic under investigation may itself be very rare, and thus define the boundaries of the relevant sample’ (p49).

The participants invited to engage with this research were trainee educational psychologists at the Tavistock, following their involvement in a GRC. The rationale for choosing trainee educational psychologists relates to their endeavor to achieve the required competencies for professional accreditation which has been seen to include components related to working in groups. Furthermore, it is recognised that Tavistock trainee’s are expected to attend a group relations conference as part of their training, which is not the case for trainees in other institutions.

The requirements for training educational psychologists which relate to working with groups (BPS, 2014 and HCPC, 2012, described in the introduction chapter) may be seen to correspond with the aims of group relations conferences, as described by Obholzer (1994), including the recognition that it is for participants to return to the ‘back-home’ work-setting ‘better able to exercise their own authority and to manage themselves in role’ (Miller, 1990, in Obholzer, 1994, p47).

### **3.7.2. Situating the sample**

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) developed ‘evolving guidelines’ which ‘are intended to characterize the appropriate considerations involved in the conduct and publishability of all



forms of qualitative research' (p220). Included in the guidelines is the following recommendation for situating the sample:

'Authors describe the research participants and their life circumstances to aid the reader in judging the range of persons and situations to which findings might be relevant' (p221).

This recommendation is needed to be balanced with the ethical standards described by the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2010), which includes the statement:

'Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs' (p22).

In order to provide the reader with helpful details of participants and ensure anonymity, the following description of participants is offered:

Four women were interviewed. All were in their first year of training as an educational psychologist at the Tavistock. Participants were asked how they would describe their ethnicity. Descriptions included heritage from minority and majority ethnicities within the United Kingdom. The participants had a range of work experience and training before undertaking their current doctoral training, including roles with educational and health settings. Participants described their qualifications as including academic and vocational disciplines.

### 3.7.3. Defining the boundaries of the relevant sample

As described in the literature review section, the experience of trainee educational psychologists' attendance of a group relations conference does not appear in the literature. Finally, as noted in the introduction chapter – the aims of the group relations conference may be seen as aligned with particular core competencies which trainee educational psychologists' are required to demonstrate in order to achieve professional accreditation.

Smith *et al* (2009) comment:

'Sampling must be theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm in general, and with IPA's orientation in particular. This means that samples are selected purposively (rather than through probability methods) because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience.' (p48).

The purposive sample used in this research was that of trainee educational psychologists who were training at the Tavistock. This limited the scope of sampling as other training courses do not include attendance of a GRC as part of their training. Furthermore, the cohort invited for participation was limited by virtue of the timeframe of the research. A particular cohort was the only group attending the GRC run by the Tavistock Consultancy Service, during December 2013. This narrowing of a potential sample may be seen to help with the consideration of homogeneity.

Smith *et al* (2009), comment:

'How homogeneity is defined depends on the study ... Sometimes the total population will be smaller and so one can be more selective about factors to consider for homogeneity and which are likely to be most important' (p50).

The important factors which have been considered in selecting a sample were to invite participants who attended the same GRC. An additional factor which was seen as important was that participants were at the same stage in their training as an educational psychologist and were training at the same institution. These factors were seen as important in defining a 'fairly homogenous sample' (Smith *et al*, 2009, p49).

### **Less is more**

This sub-heading comes from an article written by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), and they comment:

'IPA challenges the traditional linear relationship between 'number of participants' and value of research ... the exploration of one phenomenon from multiple perspectives can help the IPA analyst to develop a more detailed and multifaceted account of the phenomena' (p22).

Yardley (2000) supports this view, stating:

'A sample size sufficiently large to be statistically representative cannot be analysed in depth ... For qualitative research it is therefore often preferable to employ 'theoretical' sampling of small numbers of people chosen for their special attributes' (p218).

The special attributes have been described in the previous section relating to the aim of achieving a 'fairly homogeneous' sample.

Eatough and Smith (2008) comment:

'IPA is deeply committed to the ideographic method and this inevitably has consequences for sample size ... a clearer articulation for smaller sample sizes is emerging. For example, keeping sample size small and homogeneous and interviewing participants several times ... is a strategy that retains IPA's ideographic emphasis whilst embedding any emerging patterns in a rich and detailed context.' (p186).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain:

'Because IPA is an ideographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts, IPA studies are conducted on small samples sizes' p49.

Furthermore, in relation to professional doctorates:

'Typically, numbers of interviews (rather than participants) of between four and ten are adopted in such circumstances, and that range seems about right. Note we have said numbers of interviews rather than participants, as we have in mind, for example, a study with four participants interviewed twice ... successful analysis requires time, reflection and dialogue, and larger data sets tend to inhibit all of these things ...' (p52).

This recommendation is relevant to the context of this research. The research questions have influenced the methodological design, which includes interviewing participants twice, in relation to the different research questions. This is discussed in more detail in the 'data capture' section.

### **A cautious note**

Smith et al (2009) comment:

‘The logic behind sample-specificity is related to the inductive logic of IPA and has consequences for the applicability of findings’ (p50).

Furthermore:

‘The reader makes the links between the analysis in an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience, and the claims in the extant literature. The analyst should provide a rich, transparent and contextualized analysis of the accounts of the participants. This should enable readers to evaluate its transferability to persons in contexts which are more, or less, similar’. (p51).

It is important to note that while care and consideration has been given to the sample, the ideographic underpinning of this research ensures that claims can only be made from the detailed analysis of the particular experiences described by participants. The research does not aim to make claims beyond this.

### **3.8. Data capture**

Data gathering took the form of unstructured interviews. This principle of participant agency in highlighting the meaning of attending a GRC, from their perspective, is viewed as in-line with the phenomenological and ideographic orientation of the proposed research.

Robson (2002), describes the unstructured interview as follows:

‘The interviewer has a general idea of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area.’ (p270)

Through consultation with staff members at the Tavistock (child, community and educational psychology course), it was agreed that all members of the relevant cohort of trainees who attended the group relations conference in December 2013 would be given the opportunity of involvement.

The researcher joined a session where trainees who had attended the relevant GRC were present and invited all trainees to consider if they would like to volunteer to be involved in interviews aimed at exploring the experience of attending a GRC. Two options were offered. Firstly trainees could indicate an interest in becoming a participant in the research, involving two unstructured interviews. Secondly, participants were offered the opportunity to be involved in a group interview, which would serve as a pilot for the individual interviews and to offer time for reflection to those involved – it was stated that data gathered during the group interviews would not be used in the research analysis. This process was made explicit and an opportunity for asking any questions at that stage was offered. Four trainee educational psychologists indicated that they were interested in joining a group discussion and a further four participants were selected who indicated that they were interested in one-to-one interviews.

The research questions are as follows:

**How do participants describe their experience of attending a GRC?**

**What perceived influence has attending a group relations conference had on the members behavior in role?**

It is these questions which informed the choice of interview questions. As stated previously, Robson (2002) describes unstructured interviews as involving the interviewer having ‘a general idea of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area.’ (p270)

Participants were interviewed twice. During the first interview, the interview questions – or ideas of interest to explore – were twofold, firstly with a focus on exploring participants experience of attending a group relations conference. In-keeping with the unstructured interview approach, the first interview began by asking participants to ‘talk to me about what it was like to attend a group relations conference’. A follow-up question was also held in mind, with a focus on describing any personal learning that participants might have noticed during the group relations conference. These areas of focus were aimed at exploring the first research question. Prompts and probes were used to further explore participants’ reflections.

The second interview focused on the second research question - participants’ perceptions of how the experience of attending a group relations conference may have influenced their behaviour in role. In-keeping with the unstructured interview approach, the second interview began with an idea of interest and conversational style: ‘It’s been approximately seven months since you attended the group relations conference, since then, have you made any links to that experience?’ Prompt and probes were used to further explore any reflections.

Participants were interviewed at the Tavistock, at a time which was convenient to them. Private rooms were booked which were seen to be appropriate for the purposes of making audio recordings. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews. Interview data was then transcribed by the author. Data gathered from the individual interviews formed the research data to be analysed. Information gathered during the group interviews was not included in the data analysis.

### **3.9. Data analysis process**

The purpose of this section is to describe the approach that was taken in analysing the data.

It is worthwhile noting that Smith *et al* (2009), explain that there is not a single 'method' for analysing data using IPA. They encourage the framing of analysis as a flexible process with guiding principles. These principles are described as follows:

'... the essence of IPA lies in its analytic *focus* ... that focus directs our analytic attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences.' (p79).

Furthermore, principles are described as including:

'a commitment to understanding of the participant's point of view, and a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts' (p79).

A more detailed discussion of the underpinning principles of IPA can be found in the methodological considerations section (above). Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), provide an overview of the processes involved in analysis:

'... underpinned by a process of coding, organising, integrating and interpreting of data, which is detailed and labour-intensive.' (p22).

Smith *et al* (2009) offer a summary of the strategies which have been typically used in IPA and which build on the description offered by Reid *et al* (2005):

- The close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant...
- The identification of the emergent patterns (i.e. themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance ... usually first for single cases, and then subsequently across multiple cases.



- The development of a 'dialogue' between the researchers, their coded data, and their psychological knowledge, about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns, in this context ... leading in turn to the development of a more interpretative account.
- The development of a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates relationships between themes.
- The organization of all this material in a format which allows for analysed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes.
- The use of supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation.
- The development of a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, which takes the reader through this interpretation, usually theme-by-theme, and is often supported by some form of visual guide (a simple structure, diagram or table).
- Reflection on one's own perceptions, conceptions and processes...  
(Smith *et al*, 2009, p79-80).

Smith *et al* (2009) point out that this is not a linear process and that an iterative approach is required, involving moving 'back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data, rather than completing each step, one after the other' (p28).

In the final part of this section, six steps will be described in relation to analysing data. These steps are drawn from Smith *et al* (2009):

1. Reading and re-reading

2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases

### **Reading and re-reading**

Smith *et al* (2009), encourage a 'slowing-down' and immersion with the data. This involves reading and re-reading and listening to the recording of the interviews. It is also noted, that the author undertook transcription, which also contributed to the immersion with the data. The aim was to place the participant as central in the process of becoming familiar with their narrative. This also provided opportunity to become familiar with the overall structure of the interview. At this stage of the analysis, initial notes were made in the research diary, with the aim of both capturing any initial impressions and helping to bracket off (or set aside) the researcher perspective and reduce this 'noise', thus allowing the participant perspective to be central.

### **Initial noting**

Smith *et al* (2009), explain that the aim of this step in the analysis is to create a comprehensive commentary of the interview data. These were detailed, and open ended, where anything of interest was noted. The ideographic focus required careful attention to the ways in which participants talked and expressed their ideas with the aim of staying close to the participants meaning-making.

As this stage of analysis developed, a curious stance was taken, where the language and the context of the participant was wondered about, along with more abstract concepts evident in the text. This was intended to support understanding of the participant's sense-making.

Smith *et al* (2009) describe three discrete processes to be used to demonstrate a systematic approach to initial noting:

- *Descriptive comments* focused on describing the context of what the participant has said
- *Linguistic* comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant
- *Conceptual* comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level

Smith *et al* (2009) note that their suggestions of strategies which may be used are not prescriptive. The iterative process involved using the strategies described above, alongside the additional strategies of 'deconstructing' and 'free association'.

Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that strategies aimed at deconstructing the text can help 'bring into detailed focus the participant's words and meanings' (p90). Strategies used included reading parts of the transcript backwards.

Free association – writing down what comes to mind in connection with particular extracts – was used as part of the process in 'exploring the different avenues of meaning which arise, and pushing the analyses to a more interpretive level' (p91).

### **Developing emergent themes**

Smith *et al* (2009) recognise that the initial noting stage will have led to a large data set and that the phase of developing emergent themes aims to reduce the volume, while maintaining the complexity. The task is to map interrelationships and patterns in the data.

Smith *et al* (2009) note that this stage of analysis involves working primarily with the initial notes, while it is also recognised that these notes will be closely tied to the transcripts and the participant's comments. This stage is seen in the context of collaboration between the researcher and participant: 'a synergistic process of description and interpretation' (p92) in order to develop emerging themes.

Smith *et al* (2009) describe the aim of developing themes, which are 'usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual' (p92).

It is also recognised that this stage of the analysis 'involves a focus, at the local level, on discrete chunks of transcript' (Smith *et al*, 2009, p91), while acknowledging that the 'whole' of the transcript should be held in mind.

The word 'developing' is key here, and as Smith *et al* (2009) comment:

'Whilst initial notes feel very loose, open and contingent, emergent themes should feel like they have captured and reflect an understanding' (p92).

### **Searching for connections across emergent themes**

Smith *et al* (2009), explain that the task here is to move from the chronologically ordered themes (for example, where they appeared in the transcripts), to 'charting or mapping how the analyst thinks the themes fit together' (p96).

It is also helpful to recognise that not all emergent themes must be placed in the evolving structure. However, the process is iterative and the use of a research diary for commentary provided evidence of rationale, rigor and reflection.

Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that themes should then be clustered and connections sought. This process involved writing themes on cards which were moved around, allowing also for a sense of any spatial relationships to emerge.

Further specific strategies used at this stage of analysis were drawn from Smith *et al* (2009), with the aim of promoting a creative and comprehensive analysis:

- abstraction: matching like-with-like themes and giving a new name
- subsumption: using an existing emergent themes as a super-ordinate theme to then cluster other emergent themes under that name
- polarization: focusing on difference and oppositional relationships
- contextualization: checking for any temporal, cultural or narrative elements which may help to make sense of the text
- numeration: considering the frequency of themes within the text, although it is noted that this is not necessarily seen as a way of identifying importance
- function: to ask what the function of the theme may serve for participants

These strategies were used to explore the data and a commentary was recorded in a research diary.

The final step in this phase was to produce a graphic representation of how the themes are seen to fit together.

### **Moving to the next case**

This research involved four participants. Smith *et al* (2009) emphasise the importance of following a systematic approach to each transcript (as described above). Smith *et al* (2009) note that:

‘Here it is important to treat the next case on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality. This means, as far as is possible, bracketing the ideas emerging from analysis of the first case while working on the second. This is, of course, in keeping with IPA’s idiographic commitment’ (p100).

Smith *et al* (2009), argue that the systematic approach will help the researcher in being open to new themes. It is on this basis that each transcript was analysed in turn and that continued use of the research diary was undertaken in order to maintain an openness and bracketing of ideas drawn from other participants.

### **Looking for patterns across cases**

Smith *et al* (2009), explain that the next phase of analysis involves setting the graphic representations of each transcript alongside each other and carefully considering the themes, asking:

‘What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are most potent? Sometimes this will lead to a reconfiguring and relabeling of themes’ (p101).

The end product of this stage of analysis was to provide a graphic which represents connections across the group as a whole. Tables of themes for each individual participant were also recorded.

It is also recognised that this was not the end of the analytic process. Smith *et al* (2009) illustrate this point when commenting:

'It is also the case that analysis continues into the writing phase so that as one begins to write up a particular theme, one's interpretation of it can develop' (p108).

### **Closing comment**

Participants were interviewed twice. Firstly with an emphasis on the experience of attending a GRC and secondly with an emphasis on any perceived influence on the participant's practice in a professional role. The analysis was carried out in two parts and connecting themes were considered following the second phase of analysis.

### **3.10. Trustworthiness**

When discussing validity, quality and qualitative research, Smith *et al* (2009), note 'growing dissatisfaction with qualitative research being evaluated according to the criteria for validity and reliability which are applied to quantitative research' (p179), and later 'that qualitative research should be evaluated in relation to criteria recognised as appropriate to it' (p179).

Yardley (2000) outlines four principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research in this regard.

### **3.10.1. Sensitivity to context**

The first principle relates to sensitivity to context. The sensitivity to context relates to the socio-cultural context of the study, the existing literature associated with the topic and the data provided by the participants. Furthermore this sensitivity relates to the interaction nature of data collection, analysis of data and how meaning making is shared - including how claims and interpretation are framed.

### **3.10.2. Commitment and rigour**

The second principle relates to commitment and rigour. Commitment relates to attentiveness to participants during data gathering and the stage of analysing data. Rigour refers to 'the thoroughness of the study, for example in terms of the appropriateness of the sample to the question in hand, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis undertaken' (Smith *et al*, 2009, p181).

### **3.10.3. Transparency and coherence**

The third principle relates to transparency and coherence. These elements of the research relate to the written account of the process, in terms of providing a clear step-by-step approach to each stage of the research, including how the analysis was undertaken.



#### 3.10.4. Impact and importance

The fourth principle relates to the impact and importance of the research. Smith *et al* (2009) refer to the 'test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful' (p183).

In this regard, consideration has been given to any interest that findings may have to those running GRCs, educational psychology training courses and a range of potential participants of GRCs within the profession of educational psychology and beyond.

Included in their discussion of assessment of quality and validity of qualitative research, Smith *et al* (2009), comment on the power of an independent audit:

'... The research of files that date in such a way that someone else *could* check through the 'paper trail' ... the aim of the independent audit is not to produce a single report that which claims to represent 'the truth', nor necessarily to reach a consensus. Instead the independent audit allows for the possibility of a number of legitimate accounts and the concern therefore is with how systematically and transparently this particular account has been produced' (p183).

Smith *et al* (2009), note that this audit could be hypothetical or virtual. They also note that researchers could go further and provide the material for an actual independent audit. In the context of this research, the latter is viewed in relation to the expectation for assessment.

In summary, the issues of validity and quality of the research have been considered in relation to Yardley's (2000) principles of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

### 3.11. Ethical considerations

In the seminal text 'Learning for Leadership' (1965), Rice, describes the experience of his directorship of group relations conferences commenting:

'... The techniques of conference learning include the removal of some of the common and expected social defences, the lowering of barriers to the expression of feeling, and an examination of the values that are placed on externally accepted modes of behaviour' (p45).

It may be seen that the design of the conference is aimed at providing an experience which involves lowering members defences and exploring this experience. In consequence, in relation to potential hazards, it is recognised that members 'toleration of uncertainty is bound to be severely tested' (p109).

In building on this point, Rice (1965) notes:

'Even at the end of the conference, many members still appear to be in difficulties, and are sometimes distressed about getting an intellectual grasp of what the conference has been about' (p118).

It should be noted that Rice is commenting about two-week residential courses and the conference to be studied was not residential and lasted five days. However, it is recognised that there is potential for distress for conference members. Rice acknowledges this as an integral part of the learning experience:

'Any form of education entails risk, not only with regard to what it teaches, but with regard to what it leaves untaught' (p158).

And:

'No institution that aims to provide opportunities to learn about the stresses of interpersonal and intergroup relationships can achieve its aim without being stressful, however protected the environment' (p158).

Rice goes on to normalise this point, suggesting that:

'... stress, and coming to terms with it, are an inevitable part of our way of living. Conferences to learn about ways of coming to terms with stress are not only the cause of stress; they provide opportunities to explore ways of dealing with what already exists' (p159).

In the next part of this section, further consideration will be given to the nature of potential hazards to participants, along with a five stage approach to support.

### **What precautions will be taken?**

The BPS Code of Human Research's Ethics (2010) identifies a range of research that would normally be considered as involving more than minimal risk. This research is not seen as falling within these categories 'Normally, the risk of harm must be no greater than that encountered in ordinary life' (p11).

This concept is viewed as in-line with this research, where participants were invited to engage in a reflective discussion about their experience of attending a group relations conference. This opportunity was seen as similar to that provided in supervision and indeed outside of supervision, in less formal discussions. In this sense the proposed interviews were seen as

compliant with a reasoned balance ‘... between protecting participants and recognising their agency and capacity’ (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010, p9).

Should, however, there have been any unexpected outcomes such as distress, the researcher planned to adhere to the advice included in the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010, ‘if the issue is serious and the investigator is not competent to offer assistance, the appropriate source of professional advice should be recommended’ (p23).

Whilst any hazard was not viewed as out of the ordinary challenges of the role of the trainee educational psychologist, on the Tavistock training course, the following five levels of support were offered.

Firstly, participants had the right to withdraw their involvement from the research.

Secondly, a fifteen-minute period was scheduled following the interview, which offered a space for personal reflection.

Thirdly, participants were to be offered consultation with myself should they have wished to take this opportunity. This was seen as appropriate as I had no existing relationships with the participants. Furthermore, I routinely consult with psychologists as part of my role as a practicing educational psychologist.

Fourthly, Laverne Antrobus (Consultant Child and Educational Psychologist and Year 1 training programme lead) also offered to be available for discussion about any concerns participants may have had.

Fifthly, the possibility of accessing the student support service at the Tavistock was considered. It was also made clear that a duty of care judgment would have superseded consent for sharing of significant concerns.

This process was outlined in the information sheet (appendix 1) and at the outset of all interviews.

### **Informed consent**

The aim to provide informed consent came primarily through the information sheet (appendix 1), which was intended to provide transparency to participants. Opportunity for discussion of informed consent was also highlighted in that document. A consent form (appendix 1) was also used.

### **Personal data**

‘Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs’ (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010, p22).

These procedures were followed in line with the ethical standards described by the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2010), which includes consideration of secure storage of data.

Data was stored securely within Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service.

Once the research has been completed and the results written up, identifiable electronic data will be deleted / erased and hardcopies will be shredded.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

This research aims to explore trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a GRC and any perceived influence on behavior following the event.

In this part of the analysis the initial interview data will be explored. The initial interview related to the first research question (how do participants describe their experience of attending a GRC?). As described in the methodology chapter, an unstructured interview approach was taken, in-keeping with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The aim was to explore participants' experiences, where prompts and probes were used to reflect on the predetermined questions asking participants to talk about what it was like to attend a GRC and to consider any personal learning that may have been noticed.

In the follow-up interviews a focused on the second research question (what perceived influence has attending a GRC had on the members behavior in role?). Again, an unstructured interview approach was used, and prompts and probes were used to explore participants' reflections about any links they might have made to the GRC since attending (approximately seven more previously).

During both the initial and follow-up interviews, while the area of focus was pre-determined (in relation to the interview questions), the interview questions were deliberately open-ended and used flexibly in the unstructured interview approach, as the underpinning aims of the interviews were to explore participants personal experiences and reflections.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), note the significance of the 'I' and 'P' during analysis. The phenomenological aspect of the exploration comes primarily from the direct quotations. The interpretative aspect comes in the commentary accompanying these quotations.

The following analysis will focus on the initial interview. Subsequently, this approach will be used to explore data gathered during the follow-up interviews.

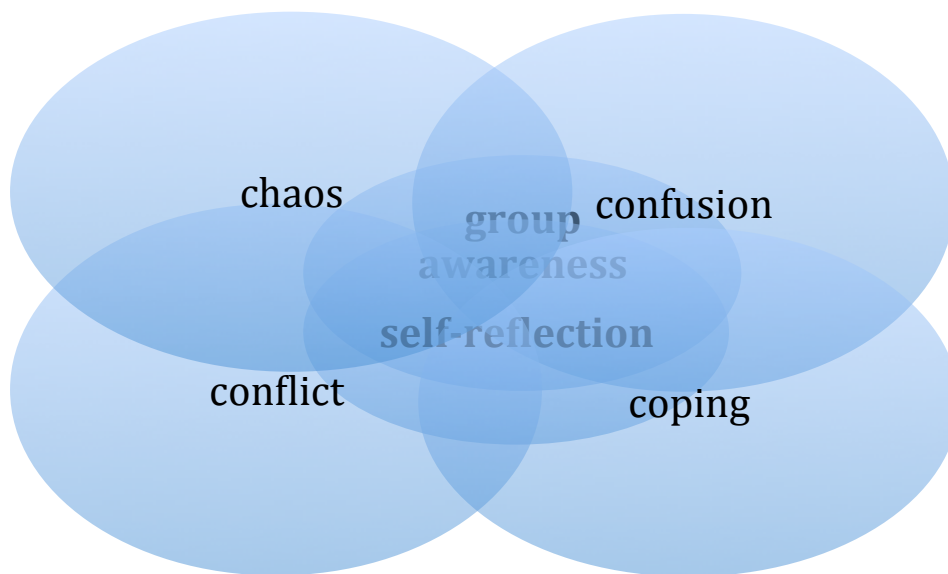
### **Transparency**

The analysis process has been described in the previous chapter. It is worth noting that the reader may gain a sense of how the analysis developed by turning to the appendices. Appendix 4 includes all transcripts from the eight interviews conducted. Appendix 3 offers four illustrations of coding, with the aim of providing the reader with an insight into this step in the process. Appendix 2 includes tables of themes identifies for each participant for the initial and follow-up interview (including illustrative quotes), along with tables drawing together the analysis across cases for the initial interview and follow-up interview. It is noted that themes were written onto cards and sorted using the techniques described in the research design chapter (see data analysis process). The final step in bringing together the analysis of the initial interview is presented in the graphic below.

### **Thematic overview**

A conceptual map is offered (below) which summarises the overall findings of the analysis. Interpretation of the material is further developed in the discussion section. Reflections on the process of analysis will also be offered.

Through a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts (as described in the methodology section), the following themes have been identified:



#### 4.0. Figure 1 Graphic representation of thematic overview

##### A note on presentation of extracts

Participants names and other identifying information have been removed to protect anonymity.

The following notation has been used in transcript extracts:

... significant pause

[ ] material omitted



#### 4.1. Chaos

There is a sense of powerful external forces and a lack of control, that pervades the narratives participants describe when recalling their experience of attending the group relations conference.

Participant one, (line 306) comments:

There was so much going on, there were so many people, that it was very easy to be swept up in that.

This description, offers a sense of pace, movement and lack of control. There is a similar sense described by participant four (line 275):

It became chaotic so quickly.

Participant three appears to describes a similar themes (line 566):

It was so, for example being in, being in an ocean or something ... so it really did feel like we just had a few seconds to gasp that air before you were underneath again, fully immersed, erm within this ocean of group relations and it literally felt like that ... so it literally was just like being dumped in the ocean (laughs) and just coming up for air.

Alongside the sense of pace, movement and being out of control ('being dumped in the ocean'), there is a powerful sense here of the oceanic enormity of the experience and the dangerous forces which are imagined as threatening to drown the participant.

Participant three also appears to describe a sense of magnitude and how powerful the experience of being in the environment was (line 35):

The intensity of that kind of atmosphere ... the size of it perhaps...

This theme of chaos, appears to be shared between participants. There is a sense of pace, movement, magnitude, loss of control and threat.

#### **4.2. Confusion**

Participants' experience of chaos has been described. The focus now shifts to the experience of confusion. Divergence will also be explored under this theme.

It stirred up a lot in me which I didn't realize was there... (line 5)

Participant one offers this reflection at the beginning of the interview. This may indicate the significance of this dimension of the experience. There is a sense that participant one is alluding to an emotional experience. This emotional experience appears to be described in terms of being powerful and unanticipated.

Participant three offers a different perspective. The following quotation provides a vivid account of a physical experience, which again is provided at an early stage in the interview (line 36):

My heart started beating really quickly and I remember looking down and I could see my top moving so quickly and I thought why am I ... why is this happening to me? why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why. Erm, and so I was thinking is it other people's

anxiety that I'm picking up on, erm, because I didn't feel like in my mind, I didn't feel you know, uneasy or concerned, but physically I was reacting like that. Erm, so that that was one of the occasions where I thought, okay, there's something that is happening here which is quite unconscious but I'm reacting, erm, quite physically, erm and this is all in the first day.

In this powerful description of a personal physical experience, participant three offers an explicit interpretation of the phenomena. They connect their physical experience to emotion with the emotions of others. The unconscious is offered as explanation of a connection between the personal, physical experience and the emotional state of other members of the conference.

Participant four expresses a different type of struggle, again, early in the interview (line 8):

I find that it's quite difficult to talk about it, erm, and because I think talking about it, it's, there was so much, it was so rich and diverse that it is quite hard to take, it's hard to talk about without jumping from one section to another.

There is a sense here that the experience is so complex and perhaps fragmented that there is a real struggle to find words to articulate the experience. Furthermore, participant three comments (line 239):

I didn't really know what was going on.

Indicating perhaps that not only putting words to the experience can be difficult, but that sense making in the moment appears to have been difficult.

In this part, the theme of confusion has been considered. One of the participants explicitly makes a link between the external (group) experience and internal (personal) experience of attending the group relations conference.

When considering the internal experience, it is noticed that there is an emphasis on physical and emotional experiences, difficulty in putting words to the experience and difficulty in making sense of the experience at the time.

### **4.3. Conflict**

In this section, the theme of conflict will be explored and further links will be made with themes of difference, namely, gender and ethnicity. A further connecting theme of power and territory will be related to conflict and difference. Finally, vulnerability, coping and questioning will be considered.

#### **4.3.1. Conflict and territory**

Participant one comments:

‘it was er, the saying that dog eat dog world, that everyone was in for themselves. And that seemed to snowball...’ (line 147-149)

This comment relates to a time when groups were forming, and participant one goes on to comment (in relation to communication between groups):

‘They felt the sense that we were going to infiltrate them and they kept people in the room just in case some of us tried to take over’ (line 165 – 167).

There is a clear sense here of the significance of territory and vulnerability. Participant three offers further comment on this theme, speaking as a member of a large group, that did not have a territory during an activity:

‘some of the suggestions that we came up with was how we would take over a room because we had the opportunity to invite other groups to meetings in the main conference hall. So we had ideas that we would invite them to a meeting and take over the room, because it was a territory’ (line 123 – 126).

There is a clear sense of the importance of territory and potential for conflict. This is emphasized in a subsequent comment, which highlights the intensity of the situation:

‘being in that experience became very real, erm, and survival meant being part of the system. So my suggestion was well, we do what it takes to get to regardless of what it meant for other people’ (line 169 – 171).

In this open reflection, there is a sense of a ‘fight’ response in terms of survival, and how intense and ‘in-the-moment’ such a response was.

This gives a sense of the different responses that the participant experienced in relation to conflict.

Participant two also reflected on conflict as the following interaction demonstrates:

‘... this conclusion (laughs), I quote, that seems to be there has to be conflict somewhere in a group and in an, which was quite a revelation to me, perhaps, that erm,

if you don't see the conflict, then you need to, then you're not seeing it, it has to be somewhere (laughs), and, erm ...

DB: what do you think about that?

P2: Erm, I think it shattered my idealisations a little bit, but I think it, erm, when I started to think about it, reflecting on all kinds of groups that I've been in, I was quite, it's quite easy to identify the conflict in every single group that I've (laughs), that comes to mind, so it was proving itself very quickly with each of my reflections' (line 258 – 272).

It is apparent that participant two was given stimulus to reflect on conflict and that they related their learning to experiences beyond the conference. The point being drawn out here is that reflections on the experiential learning at the conference appear to have stimulated thinking in relation to conflict.

#### **4.3.2. Difference, power and leadership**

Participant four brings up the themes of difference and conflict:

'There was also a group of people who were of ethnic minorities and they considered themselves, they perceived that they had asked for other people to come and join them and no one wanted to and that had really kind of, erm, hit a nerve for them and they were wondering about what it was about that, they felt really rejected and dejected' (line 307 – 312).

There is a sense of difference, separation, rejection and dejection, which is picked up on later and extended to include gender:

‘And then I think, just seeing it played out like that, where people from ethnic minorities felt disempowered, erm, and women saying, oh I think that that man is the reason that we’ve elect, we’ve think about him as a leadership qualities is because he’s got them, it’s not because we’ve put them, put these qualities into him. I was thinking, how can you say that as a, erm, sort of, thoughtful person in 2012.’ (line 646 – 652)

Here, participant four adopts a questioning stance around difference, power and leadership, which were stimulated by the experiential learning in the group relations conference. It is also possible that these considerations may have caused some sense of confusion, as the year 2012, rather than 2013 is stated.

This questioning relating to difference and leadership is also expressed by participant one:

‘It was interesting the group relations, because there were so few men, but there was this whole idea that there needed to be one super man or, I can’t remember now, and the white male supremacy or something, and it just kind of felt, erm, I don’t know, it didn’t sit well with me’ (line 788 – 793).

There are questions raised here by participant one about leadership, power, gender and ethnicity. Participant one is challenging the concept of the perception of a ‘need’ for a white male leader. There is also a sense of oppression and ‘supremacy’. An aspect of conflict in relation to power and ethnicity. Subsequently, the following reflections are offered:

‘I suppose before group relations, I never really thought a lot about, erm, my ethnicity as such, erm, unconsciously more than you know is very visible (laughs), but I think what that means and what that brings, erm, and what that means to the person I’m speaking to, erm, and I suppose being aware of, of that, of my role as a woman’ (line 931 – 936).

This subsequent reflection explicitly exploring roles, ethnicity and gender also indicates a shift in awareness and perspective at a personal and interpersonal level.

Participant four also reflected on the issue of leadership, gender and ethnicity:

‘the group had taken it upon themselves to allocate them as leaders. And I was saying, erm, that actually we were kind of mirroring society where we, we expect to see m, le, men as leaders and so we, we kind of put that into the men. Erm, and by white men, it was white men who took this, they had kind of self-appointed or they thought that the group had appointed them as leaders [ ] that didn’t sit very comfortably.’ (line 30 – 42)

Similar to participant four, participant one here emphasises questions about leadership, gender and ethnicity. There is also an explicit link being made here in relation to society beyond the conference, with a focus on how leaders are appointed, and the influence of gender and ethnicity in this process. It seems that there is an inference here relating to an unthinking process of electing a leader, based on expectation.

A further reflection was offered by participant two in relation to gender and leadership:

‘the group got stuck at this issue of leadership, why is this man leading group and how did that get decided and, erm, do we all want this? Erm, and so the group was stuck in this position for a while, erm, a facilitator was invited in to help think about it and, erm, in a quite perhaps unusually directed way they said something along the lines of, erm, this, er, all these women are attacking the male leader, erm, because they want to be leaders and it’s a way of dealing with the competition amongst themselves as women and taking it out on this male (laughs), erm, so that’s something that I wouldn’t of even thought about before, erm



[ ]

this potential for when there is a system with lots of women and one man, that, or more women than men (laughs), then the women, erm, and where there seems to be like kind an attack on the, on the current leader. Although there were lots of other potential reasons for attacking a leader in any kind of system, or, or projecting (laughs), things onto them, erm, that one of... part of it might be, erm, women managing competition amongst themselves.'

(line 358 – 397)

In this extended extract, it is apparent that the experiential learning within the conference raised questions, potentially contentious questions, which participant two appears to be open to considering, while maintaining a critical stance. It is apparent when considering this quote that a significant level of reflection has been stimulated, here in relation to leadership, gender and conflict.

#### **4.3.3. Confusion and upset**

Vulnerability and insecurity are also described as part of the experience of attending a group relations conference. These concepts have not been offered as separate in thematic terms, as they are viewed in relation to broader themes.

Participant four explained that:

'I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset' (line 697)

having earlier commented:

‘There is a personal part of you and, I think, erm, that’s a lot more vulnerable and if someone is negative towards me for my being, that’s er, I would take that a lot more personally, you feel a lot more vulnerable to that, erm, I think the first day I took things, erm, as if they were, I, I, I was too sensitive to thinking it was about me as a person’ (line 492 – 497).

The purpose of including this quote here is to recognise the sense of personal vulnerability that was experienced during the conference, which was later returned to with moving openness:

‘I had been really upset on the first day and I’d cried’ (line 692-693).

It is possible that this quote explains the hesitation and repetition of ‘I’ in the previous quote.

Participant two appears to also recognise the potential for personal vulnerability during the group relations conference:

‘I felt I could get carried away in the process [ ] being taken up with a current of thought. Erm, and that I’m actually making a choice at times, it was staying in control of ... of, erm, how much one might let these feelings affect me and my being.’ (line 159 – 169).

The reason for including this quote is to recognise the sense of risk that is being expressed in terms of the emotional experience of attending the conference. There is also a sense of the chaos in this statement – in being ‘carried away’ and ‘taken up with a current of thought’, where the turbulence described is responded to with thoughts of control. This may be seen to imply that the participant is reflecting on an experience of their personal lack of control. It may also be seen that participant one and participant two refer to the impact on their ‘being’, which seems to

emphasise the significance of the threat, confusion and the concept of identity. It is worthwhile noting that existential questions of identity will be explored later.

Participant one offered a description of being left out and reflects:

‘I suppose feeling very vulnerable as well as being left out’ (line 260).

This is a clear articulation of the personal, emotional experience of vulnerability, which appears common to all participants.

Participant three spoke about a time when a consultant (member of staff) had not responded to her question and commented:

‘I felt insecure, I felt angry at the consultant’ (line 451).

In this brief statement, there is a sense of feeling unsafe and how rapidly this engendered a feeling of hostility.

There is indication that each participant experienced a sense of personal vulnerability during the conference. This seems to be a powerful part of the experience, involving a sense of threat, genuine upset, rejection and consideration of coping strategies. Furthermore, two participants alluded to a more existential level of questioning. Further discussion of these themes will follow, and it is recognized that there is an overlap between themes.

In summary, all participants reflected on their experience of conflict during the group relations conference. Themes of territory, gender and ethnicity are emphasised, particularly in relation to leadership and power. Underpinning these themes there appears to be undertones of vulnerability and fighting for survival, which are expressed in ways that emphasise the intensity of

the learning experience. A fundamental point which emerges is that the experiential learning approach has stimulated significant levels of reflection.

#### **4.4. Coping**

Chaos, confusion, and conflict. In the previous sections of this chapter, these themes have been drawn from participants' descriptions of attending a group relations conference. Consideration has also been given to upset, vulnerability and self-reflection in relation to these themes. In this section, the focus shifts to how participants spoke about coping. Participant four captures the essence of this theme:

'I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect myself' (line 476 – 478).

##### **4.4.1. Fight, flight and freeze**

Participant two indicates a sense of 'freezing', when groupings were being established:

'I was almost, erm, what's the word? Erm, I don't know what the word is, but kind of stuck or frozen by this, erm, process and to the point of not being able to do anything about it' (line 680 – 683).

A 'flight' type of response was also implied by participant two:

'avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and warming more towards calmer individuals. So personal preferences and avoidance of conflict (laughs)' (line 739 – 742)

Participant three offers further evidence of thoughts associated with 'flight' as they spoke of the difficult they experienced in response to receiving minimal feedback:

'it made me not want to be in that place, made me not want to speak' (line 388).

And later:

'we were just trapped in a room basically, that's how it felt' (line 421).

Furthermore:

'there was a part of me that was frustrated and wanted to walk out' (line 452-453).

In addition, participant three also seems to express a 'fight' response when describing their experience as a member of a group needing to find a territory:

'we need to find a space, let's displace them and so it was in ... I was watching how I was reacting and for kind of that playfulness came out of me but which also w'ich ... it's quite, erm, aggressive in a sense as well' (line 131 – 133).

And later participant three reflects on the experience in terms of survival:

'it was almost very primitive [ ] those survival techniques that were being drawn out of me being in that group' (line 166 – 167)

There is evidence in the interview data that a range of responses to situations arising during the GRC may be viewed in terms of strategies for coping with threats, involving considerations associated with fight, flight or freeze.

#### 4.4.2. Polarities and contrasts

'A lot of reflections at the end of the group relations were there seemed to be loads of polarities and loads of contrasts, it was one way or another, erm, and for me I think I felt there wasn't much of a middle ground. The middle ground seemed to have got lost' (line 292 – 297).

Participant one articulates a sense of contrasts (or conflict) in their perception, and alludes to a 'middle ground' which seemed lost. There is a sense here of the loss of a more moderate perspective or position.

Participant two also focuses on contrasts (and conflict):

'this conclusion (laughs), I quote, that seems to be there has to be conflict somewhere in a group [ ] which was quite a revelation to me' (line 258 – 261)

and later, when prompted to elaborate:

'Erm, I think it shattered my idealisations a little bit' (line 267)

These comments appear to suggest contrasting views of groups that *must* involve conflicts and an 'idealisation' of conflict-free groups.

Participant three also appears to place an emphasis on contrasts (or separateness), commenting:

'I guess in a professional context its not the right forum to talk about feelings as well'  
(427 – 428).

The implication is that feelings are to be kept separate from professional activities.

Participant four also uses the professional role in terms of separation:

'I think professionally you've got yourself in role and personally, you've got yourself' (line 483 – 484).

This separation is then described in managing difficult experiences, and it may be seen that a further contrast is articulated in the explanation:

'I suppose I use a quite cognitive part of my brain that thinks, I see they are cross at me as a professional because they feel that I'm not doing enough. Erm, then there is a personal part of you, and I think, erm, that's a lot more vulnerable' (line 489 – 493).

The participant seems to separate 'the brain' here into a cognitive part and something else (more emotional?). It is also possible that the use of 'you' here is also a separating function – when exploring an uncomfortable thought about 'I', or the self.

In summary, participants provided comments which indicated that part of the experience of attending the group relations conference involved coping strategies. Participants described attempts to protect themselves and survive. In relation to survival, there was consideration of control, flight, flight and freeze. Furthermore, in relation to coping, there is a reoccurring theme

that appears manifest in different form related to the propensity to emphasise the concept of contrasts (or separateness). There is also a sense of coping being described in terms of role and self-reflection, which will be explored further in the next section.

#### **4.5. Self reflection**

Participant three reflects on the experience of others:

‘and I sat there feeling like a real loss of identity, like they didn’t know who they were, but then I almost felt like I didn’t know who I was and why I was there?’ (line 241 – 243).

And:

‘they didn’t mean to be a loss of identity, but it just come across like, had really thrown a lot of us into that place as well, into that confusing state’ (line 247 – 249)

It is evident that confusion is also linked to the theme of self-reflection and extends to consideration of the personal within a professional role:

‘its an ongoing process of discovering who I am in the role of an educational psychologist, as a trainee, erm, and what I bring to that individually, like my unique characteristics [ ] but I wouldn’t say I’m there yet’ (line 282 – 285).

There is a recognition of the ongoing, professional development, but also the significance of the unique individual.

Participant two appears to make a similar point in stating:



‘so the erm, inseparability (laughs) of professional and personal.’ (line 603 – 604).

In contrast, participant four appears to separate the professional and the personal:

‘professionally, you’ve got yourself in role, and personally, you’ve got yourself’ line 483 – 484.

This separation may be seen in terms of the aforementioned sense of contrasts and the linked to coping strategies:

‘from Tuesday onwards was able to or decided to think of myself as a role in it as a professional and how they saw me (line 498).

#### **4.5.1. Self reflection and the group context**

‘it hel ... increase my awareness of, was my kind of positioning in groups’ (Participant two, line 200 – 201)

and later:

‘I was described as, erm, I think I was described as someone who wouldn’t take a side, but sitting on the fence [ ] which almost affirmed something about me that I already knew but it actually, erm, made me even more aware of it’ (line 218 – 223).

In these quotes, participant two indicates a self-awareness in relation to groups (not taking a side), which they became more aware of during the conference. Participant three appears to explore a similar theme:

'I learnt that I ha, I can actually be more assertive, I can take m, initiate the direction of things, erm, which I don't typically do so I think, yeah, that's what I learned but I can do it so possibly I should do it a bit more often' (638 – 641).

Here participant three, gives the impression of being aware of a tendency to be passive in groups and a growing awareness of their capacity to be more assertive, through the experiential learning experience, and:

'it just kind of showed me that if I do take a more proactive approach within a group, erm, it can actually benefit the group' (642 – 644).

Participant four offered the following open reflections:

'I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups' (line 561)

and:

'I was just sort of being quite ambivalent you could see it, or difficult you could see it as. I wondered if I did it in by, in other things as well, I think it bought to my attention that this is something that I do' (line 577 – 580).

This quote appears to demonstrate that participant four was able to recognise a self-awareness in relation to groups that was present in the conference and beyond.

In summary, when reflecting on the group relations conference, participants reflected on their identity and behavior in groups, which included making connections with experiences beyond the conference. It is also recognised that reflections about identity have been considered under the theme of conflict, and could also have been placed here, for example in relation to a description of conflict, participant one went on to consider her identity:

‘I suppose before group relations, I never really thought a lot about, erm, my ethnicity as such, erm, unconsciously more than you know is very visible (laughs), but I think what that means and what that brings, erm, and what that means to the person I’m speaking to, erm, and I suppose being aware of, of that, of my role as a woman’ (line 931 – 936).

As stated previously, themes of self-reflection and identity are not seen as separate or exclusive to any particular thematic category. This quotation is offered again here to illustrate the interconnected aspect of the themes and analysis.

#### **4.6. Returning to the research question**

The focus of the initial interview was to explore how participants described their experience of attending a group relations conference.

Analysis of the initial interview data indicates that the experience was a turbulent one, involving chaos and confusion. The experience of conflict has also been highlighted, with associated themes of power, gender, ethnicity. Vulnerability has also been considered in relation to these themes.

Descriptions of different coping strategies have been explored, before the final theme of self reflection has been introduced. This has included questioning of identity, including role, gender

and ethnicity and consideration of the self within a group. It has also been recognized that themes are interconnected and attempts have been made to acknowledge this rather than to provide an impression of discrete categorisation.

Further reflection and connections to relevant literature will be offered in the discussion section.

#### **4.7. Follow-up interview**

In this part of the data analysis the follow-up interviews will be explored. The focus of these interviews was to reflect on any perceived influence attending a group relations conference had on the members behavior in role 'back-home'.

It transpires that any reflections relating to this question are relatively limited. Possible reasons for this finding will be considered in due course.

An overview of emergent themes can be conceptualized in two broad categories (or super-ordinate themes):

- Self reflection
- Group awareness

##### **4.7.1. Self reflection**

The theme of identity was raised during the initial interviews. At times this theme took on an existential dimension:

'affect me and my being'

(participant two, line 169)

'for my being'

(participant four, line 493)

'I almost felt like I didn't know who I was'

(participant three, line 242)

This deep level of reflection appears to have maintained a resonance during the follow-up interviews (seven months later):

I am who I am, I am myself and I am a psychologist (participant three, line 205)

There is a sense here, almost of a response, to the earlier struggle described in terms of knowing who they are. At this later stage, there seems to be an attempt to make a statement about who they are. It may also be seen that there appears to be an inner-conflict. The self and the psychologist, seemingly separated in this quotation. This could be seen to indicate an ongoing exploration about a sense of identity, and professional role as, perhaps not yet integrated, but thought of in terms of defining the self. There appears to be some support for this interpretation later in the interview, where the theme re-emerges (line 442):

navigating that personal-professional interface I guess. Actually I like that phrase  
(laughs) yeah.

DB: the personal-professional interface?

P3: yeah, just where they meet. Erm, which is in meetings like this where there's, you know, it's a professional context but you're very much present and you're experiencing it and you're involved in it and it's running through you, and you're running through it. Erm, but then there are aspects of say your personality or your character which is inappropriate to bring into the context because it just is not effective, so, but that's, that's where things are playing out, and so it's at those times that, erm, you're actively managing almost both worlds if you like...

The theme of identity and the personal and the professional is initially described in terms of an 'interface', implying a sort of connection. This is thought about in a complex, dynamic and interactive way. There is an evocative line 'it's running through you and you're running through it'. Implying perhaps a sense of fluidity and dynamism. The preceding line, 'it's a professional context but you're very much present', seems to provide a clue which may suggest the professional context is 'running through' (or influencing) the personal self and the personal is running through (or influencing) the professional context. This interpretation is further supported by the connecting idea of 'you're experiencing it and you're involved in it' - the personal self experiencing the professional context and the personal self being part of the professional context.

However, this sense of fluid interconnection, between the personal and the professional is given a different sense towards the end of the extract. There emerges a sense of attempt at controlling ('actively managing') separate entities. These entities are also given a sense of significance, magnitude and grand separateness as the personal and the professional are conjured as two 'worlds'. It seems at some level that there may be contradictions and struggle being expressed here, in terms of the integration and separating-out of these themes of personal and professional.

Participant two appears to reflect on a similar theme:

I think in group relations, brought up a lot of discussion about being a professional (laughs) and, erm, our separate or in intertwinednesses with your personal development, erm, and so taking up a role of a profession, erm, I think it brought to the surface a lot of thinking about, an awareness of how much of that is personal (laughs), erm, and how much, erm, it's hard to separate as being professional and your personal, (laughs), your personal kind of being...

There is explicit reference here to the theme of identity and the separation or 'intertwinednesses' of the personal and the professional, stimulated during the group relations conference. It is also seen that the sense of identity and 'being' is raised once more.

Participant four also reflects on this theme (line 184):

And I think there's a lot of sort of, what's professional, what's personal? Erm, and how to keep the two separate? Erm, where the boundaries are and how you as a person want to work those boundaries. Erm, so all of that's definitely come into play as I'm, as I'm kind of going through the training to become a psychologist, because I suppose it's can you switch it off? Erm, and,

DB: what do you think?

P4: what, can you switch off being a psychologist? Erm, I think that you can definitely, erm, go into, I'm out of role now...

And later:

DB: And you mentioned that kind of boundary between the personal and the professional, could you say any more about that?

P4: yeah and I mean I suppose that was one of the hardest things of the group relations conference, because I think that it muddied up that boundary, erm and meeting people professionally now that I had initially met whilst in the group relations is tricky, erm, because group relations kind of ... you were out of role, as in out of professional role, you were in a different role.

In the first part of this extract, participant four appears curious in exploring their thinking about the personal and the professional. There is also a sense that there ought to be a separation ('how to keep the two separate'), yet the certainty of this notion is questioned ('where the boundaries are') and a sense that the individual may have some control over this ('how you as a person want to work those boundaries'). When this line of thought is probed, participant four appears to state with some certainty that a separation can be achieved ('I'm out of role now').

As this theme is returned to in the conversation, this certainty seems to have been challenged in the group relations conference, and that this was 'one of the hardest things', insomuch as the experience of the conference 'muddied up that boundary'. This gives a sense that the separation, which the participant appears to hold conceptually, between the personal and the professional, was perhaps put into doubt.

The participant seems to describe an experience of having a belief or construct challenged. And yet, in the closing lines of the extract, seems to return to the idea of the separateness of a professional role (or self).

This sense of separation is also evoked by participant three when speaking about the personal and professional, questioning (line 359):



### How to manage those two faces really

In summary, participants have shared an interest in exploring the concept of identity in terms of the personal and the professional. There appear to be differences in views about how separate these aspects of identity can be. It is evident when considering this theme that the group relations conference has stimulating thinking about this.

It is important to recognise a broader context, which includes the fact that these participants are involved in training to become applied psychologists. A participant four comments, 'as I'm kind of going through the training to become a psychologist' (line 188). Such broader contextual factors must also be considered when attempting to explore the sense that participants have made of their experience during, and subsequent to attending the group relations conference.

#### **4.7.2. Group awareness**

Participants expressed an increased awareness and attention to group processes since attending the group relations conference. In particular the theme of conflict emerged.

Participant one spoke about experiences following attending the group relations conference and comments about 'seeing the group dynamics' (line 42) in relation to their work in bringing together a parent and school staff:

mum was such a powerful figure, erm she was quite passive aggressive, erm, but I could see that she just wanted the best for her child really, so she was pushing that forward and I think school were put into a position where they weren't quite sure what to do and they though it was best to align with mum so it was, erm, yeah (laughs) ...

so in term of being pushed so, being in a group setting where there's different professionals and being that one that was pushed out and feeling sigh, and feeling basically incompetent...

In this extract, themes of power and alliances are highlighted. There is also a sense of force and movement, with the terms 'pushing' and 'pushed' recurring throughout. Within this dynamic description there is a sense of aggression and, lack of control and the emotional impact of this experience in relation to disempowerment. The general impression gained is that participant one is reflecting on group processes and conflict.

This theme is also reflected on by participant three (line 471):

I go into schools, erm, and I see the conflict amongst staff...

This is further reflected on (line 480):

This school has actually become stagnant, erm, it's got a high level of need, erm, advice has been given, nothing has been done because of the conflict...

There is a sense here that participant three is making sense of a school system through reflecting on the group relations within that system.

Participant two spoke about their perception of hierarchies and conflict within a multiagency team (line 198):

erm, I noticed that in group relations you could almost distinguish their professions from the way they were reflecting on the topic of discussion, erm, and, erm, yeah and just

kind of a more awareness of, er, maybe members that are quieter. Again I, I keep thinking about hierarchies for some reason (laughs), I don't know why but professional hierarchies, erm, and members of staff that were quieter, erm, it prompted thinking in me and why that was. Erm, what else was you know, going on behind this, erm, where this is a massive team, where is the conflict? (laughs) but I guess within group relations one of the kind of realise, well realisations or, I almost felt that a conclusion was drawn that there, there was conflict in the systems somewhere, and almost had to be, erm, but I couldn't really see it the whole time (laughs) I was there. Erm, but then I thinking that, in those two meetings I started noticing from the way staff interacting with each other, there might have been some issues there, er. Might have been some conflict of there, but quite healthy conflict that helped, you know, enriching the discussion, er in their teams.

Participant two speaks about their experience of the group relations conference and how they have transferred the concept of conflict in particular to their experiences of a multi-agency team. It can be seen that the sense of conflict is positively framed, where there is the suggestion that this can be 'healthy' and 'enriching'. It is also noticeable that there is a tentative tone to the interpretations offered.

In summary, participants have reflected on their experiences of groups following attending the group relations conference, and on conflict in particular. It may be recognised that the theme of conflict emerged in the initial interviews, as participants reflected on their experience of attending the group relations conference.

#### **4.8. Behaviour back home**

During the follow-up interview, attempts were made to explore the research question, focusing on any perceived influence that attending a group relations conference had on the participants behavior in role 'back-home'.

It is argued that participants' have provided accounts of change following their attendance of the GRC. There is an emphasis on this change relating to a shift in awareness and sense making. Reflections on why this type of change, rather than explicit links to changes in behaviours or actions are offered in the next section. It is argued here that each participant offered accounts of their experience in role, following attending the GRC, indicating changes in perception.

This change is described in two dimensions: self-reflection and group awareness. Firstly, in relation to self-reflection, it is seen that participants have indicated that they have an enhanced awareness of, and curiosity about, their identity and role. This is not to suggest that this awareness is a unified awareness, within or between participants.

In relation to group awareness, following attending a GRC, interpretation of findings indicates that participants reported an increased awareness and understanding of group behaviours. This awareness is also seen as diverse, while holding a commonality in terms of the theme of conflict.

Participants' accounts of change, following attending a GRC are seen as important findings from this research. In short, participants described a shift in terms of self-reflection and group-awareness related to their experiences in role.

## **Reflections**

Analysis of findings indicated varied responses to questions focusing on any perceived changes in behavior following attending the GRC. This finding should be placed in context. Participants were in the first year of a three-year training course. This may have implications for this research question. It should be recognised that participants are required to dedicate their attention to demonstrating a raft of competencies, which may have influenced their capacity to reflect on and embed any learning from attending the group relations conference.

It is also reasonable to recognise that trainees have an increasingly active role in their fieldwork placements as the year (and years) progress, therefore this may be viewed as a limiting factor in terms of participants opportunity to 'act' on any learning from the GRC. Changes are described primarily in relation to a shift in awareness and sense-making.

Further consideration of research questions and findings will be explored in the discussion section, where connections will also be made with theory.

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the interpretive phenomenological analysis will be discussed. The discussion will be broadly divided into two parts. Firstly, analysis of data will be considered with reference to the literature associated with group relations conferences. In the second part, reflections will be offered on the research process, including consideration of potential future directions.

In-line with the suggestions offered by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), the aim of the discussion is to relate the findings to a broader context, through dialogue with the existing literature. They note that it is likely that new literature will need to be sought as a result of the new material that has emerged during the analysis process. Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that 'as with the introduction, this engagement with the literature should be selective and not exhaustive ... You need to select some of that which is particularly resonant' (p113).

It should be noted that as the discussion develops, the reader will notice a shift. Through dialogue with the literature, a psychoanalytic perspective is offered. This perspective relates both to the content of the interviews and the literature related to GRCs. It is acknowledged that at this stage in the analysis, there is a greater distance from the source material – the interview data. This is seen as commensurate with the approach to analysis described (above) by Smith *et al* (2009) and attempts are made during the discussion to recognize this 'shift' or 'second layer' of analysis. In particular the reader will notice this layering of interpretation in relation to the psychoanalytic concepts of defences (and splitting in particular), concepts drawn from object relations theory, including the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, and of a psychosocial framing. The reader will choose what they accept or reject – the aim of this chapter is to offer a clear articulation of when and why the analysis develops, from the dialogue with the interview data, to a dialogue between the findings and the relevant literature.

Smith *et al* (2009) also suggest that the discussion should incorporate an evaluative aspect, including reference to the research questions, strengths and limitations, trustworthiness, implications for practice and potential future directions for associated research.

In the following section, the themes of chaos, confusion, conflict, coping will be explored.

### **5.1. Chaos**

In this section, participants' description of attending the GRC, involving a sense of chaos, will be related to the exiting literature.

When describing the experience of attending the group relations conference, participants described 'the intensity of that kind of atmosphere' (Participant 2, line 35), 'all those emotions' (Participant 1, line 649), 'it felt really intense' (Participant 3, line 604) and 'it became chaotic so quickly' (Participant 4, line 275).

There is a sense of commonality here which resonates with the literature. Izod (2006) describes the experience of attending a GRC in terms of 'the struggle to manage one's senses and emotions in the presence of the unfamiliar...' (p81). Similarly, Tagore (2012) uses the terms 'churning' to describe the experience within individuals and the group during GRCs. Khaleelee (2006) describes this experience in relation to the mobilization of anxiety during GRCs, which they view as central to experiential learning. Rice (1965) offers support for this view, stating that 'The techniques of conference learning include the removal of some of the common and expected social defences, the lowering of social barriers to the expression of feeling, and an examination of the values that are placed on externally accepted modes of behavior' (p45). This view is supported by Miller (1990a), who states that 'It is, of course, by removing the familiar structures and conventions ... that the conference setting makes the defences and underlying anxieties more accessible' (p178).

It may therefore be seen that the intense experience and chaotic sense that participants described is commensurate with the literature describing a similar phenomenological account of attending GRCs and can be understood in terms of the overall design of the GRCs.

### **5.1.1. Shame and panic**

Participant four described their observation of a facilitator at a particular moment during the GRC as follows: 'she seemed to panic, it seemed like she was panicking' (line 274), and later, 'it kind of sparked panic amongst the group that – oh God I'm not going to have anywhere to go'(line 293).

There is a clear sense in these descriptions of a sense of panic described in the group.

Participant three also reflects on experiences of conference members, and extends this reflection to a more personal observation (line 32):

'quite a few of, erm, the other participants were describing their anxiety and then having physical reactions to, erm, what was happening within the group and I noticed that I was starting to have physical reactions as well. Erm, so I was aware of them (unclear), I was monitoring myself, erm, and I think the first one I had was my heart started beating really quickly and I remember looking down and I could see my top moving so quickly and I thought why am I ... why is this happening to me, why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why.'



Participant three offers a powerful description of a physical response to a group situation which may be seen in terms of panic. This description of the personal is also related to an experience which is described as being in common with other group members.

Participant one also makes a connection between their personal experience and that of the group when reflecting on an experience of being in a group that was 'left out':

'how vulnerable I was left feeling erm, and upset and angry erm and frustrated, I suppose frustrated with the system, frustrated with myself, because it was, and everyone else's fault, it was my fault too' (line 698).

And later:

'so everybody failed including us. So it was coming to that sense as well that its very easy to blame everyone else and it was very easy to blame ... but everyone had a responsible part to play in that and including us and including me' (line 724).

There is a sense in this description, involving a range of powerful emotions, including blame (and shame?) being alluded to.

Participant four also appears to allude to a sense of shame, when commenting (line 517):

'I could see that it was a week that could potentially open a can of worms and I didn't want any worms (laughs) released, erm, I can see how upset I got on the first day, I got, I did get really upset. When I got home I was very upset and it brought up things from my personal life that I was struggling with that I was, that hadn't entered the Tavistock building and then I, then, but then I was able to kind of think to myself they don't know any of that, they were annoyed at me because I said something that they found

annoying, and so then I thought, then I was able to think about right, well, they perceive me as someone who is gonna say annoying things, that's fine, I, and I can kind of take, I can take that'.

In this reflection, there is a real sense of the participant struggling with difficult and distressing feelings evoked during the GRC. The metaphor of worms which were unwanted may be seen as an allusion to an experience of shame. This is reinforced when personal experiences (and struggle) are being described in terms of being 'kept out of the building'. Furthermore, there is a sense of the potential for shame in the description of being perceived as someone who can say annoying things – which may also relate to a sense of identity ('they were annoyed at me').

Final reflections in relation to this quote are twofold. Firstly, this reflection appears to be a courageous attempt to face difficult feelings and experiences. Secondly, this struggle also appears to involve defending the self against the pain (and shame?) of the reflection, by omitting some detail and in striving to offer some resolution. The concept of defences will be explored in a subsequent section.

In summary, interpretation of participants descriptions of attending a GRC appear to support the view offered by Aram (2012), that, a learning process involving challenging one's own sense of identity is likely to involve aspects of panic and shame.

### **5.1.2. Regression**

'... in his complexities of life in a group the adult resorts, in what may be a massive regression, to the mechanisms described by Melanie Klein (1931, 1946) as typical of the earliest phases of mental life' (Bion, 1961, p141).

Participant three appears to be considering this notion, when commenting 'it conjured up kind of almost angry childish feelings towards the consultant for no reason' (line 389).

Similarly, participant one refers to a sense of childishness: 'it felt so childish!' (line 168) and 'I can't believe how childish it is' (line 734).

There is a clear articulation by these participants that the experience of attending the GRC has evoked a sense of regression to earlier phases of mental life. Connections are also articulated in relation to emotional experiences in this regard. Participant three spoke of 'almost angry childish feelings' (line 389) and participant one comments 'I mean it stirred a lot up in me which I didn't realise was there I suppose' (line 5), and 'I think a lot of group relations brought up quite a few anxieties I had but I didn't realise I had I suppose' (line 444).

There is a sense here of how earlier (or childish) experiences have been evoked through attending the GRC. There is also a sense of earlier experiences involving an emotional dimension being 'stirred' or 'brought up'. This experience is described with some discomfort, for example, when participant four describes observing other conference members who appeared to have 're-engaged with something, so painful memories of whatever it is' (line 467).

Participants' quotations here appear to offer evidence which supports Klein's (1931, 1946) notion of the potential for regression within groups.

## **5.2. Confusion**

In this section, participants' descriptions of attending the GRC, involving a sense of confusion, will be related to the literature. Initially, links will be made between the existing literature and the participant experience of the difficulty in articulating the experience. In closing the section, links

will be made with Bion's (1961) concepts of beta elements and alpha function as a way of understanding the difficulty in articulating the experience.

It is recognised that concepts such as regression, shame and panic could be described under different themes, such as chaos or confusion. The distinction seems perhaps arbitrary, as the aim of the analysis and discussion is to explore the participant experience in depth and in a dialogue with the literature. The aim is not to arrive at a point of incontestable clarity or *truth*. The reader will make links and associations of their own.

### **5.2.1. Difficulty in articulating the experience**

'I find that it's quite difficult to talk about it ... it's hard to talk about without jumping from one section to another'.

Participant four comments (line 8).

'Its hard to summarise'.

Participant two comments (line 504).

"I can't fully describe it'.

Participant 3 comments (line 702).

There is a shared sense here of the difficulty that participants find in attempting to describe their experience. Ginor (2009), comments that 'it is hard to describe this kind of experiential process in a publication' (p70). Dartington (2012), comments: 'The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word' (pxxiii). Tagore (2012) comments: Experiences around group relations conferences do not lend themselves to

conclusions very easily' (p257). There may be seen to be some support for these notions, in terms of participants' expression of the struggle in attempting to articulate their experience.

In the remaining parts of this section, theoretical considerations will be offered as a tentative explanation of what might underpin this difficulty.

### **5.2.2. Beta elements and alpha function**

Stein (2004) describes experiential learning in terms of beta elements and alpha function, as hypothesized by Bion (1962). Beta elements are described as 'confusing and often unintelligible bits of sensory information that pierce the protective psychic boundary ... and are thus experienced as threatening its very existence' (Stein, 2004, p23). This is seen as normal in infancy and more problematic later as beta elements remain 'unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual' (Stein, 2004, p24).

Stein describes Bion's (1962) formulation as involving alpha function, 'the capacity to contain and process beta elements' (p24), which involves 'processing within ourselves the feelings and thoughts that are evoked by the beta elements' (p24).

It is acknowledged that there are different conceptualizations of the experience of taking in information and making sense or, conversely, struggling to gather information and understand. However, the purpose of this discussion is to engage in a dialogue between the interpretive analysis of participants' accounts and the literature relating to GRCs. Therefore, it is Bion's formulation of beta elements and alpha function that will be considered here. It is also recognised that the earlier descriptions of difficulties in articulating the experience at the beginning of this section may also be considered in relation to beta elements in particular. For example, in returning to the description offered by Izod (2006) of the experience of attending a

GRC in terms of 'the struggle to manage one's senses and emotions in the presence of the unfamiliar...' (p81).

Participant three comments 'I haven't had the chance to process it yet so it was still, still going through it really.' (Line 591).

There is a sense here of a reference to beta elements, remaining unprocessed. Consideration may also be given to the process of engaging in the interviews for this research – which could be seen as an alpha function – where participants are given time and the containment to process the beta elements.

Similarly, participant two comments 'I'm not sure how much was processed in that time' (line 20) and 'I felt like I've made a lot of the pertinent points, I feel like there are lots more, erm, and probably more to come' (line 748).

There is a sense here, particularly in the comment 'I feel like there are lots more', that links with the descriptions of beta elements as unintelligible or unavailable for thought or use by the individual (Stein, 2004).

Participant two also comments (line 178), 'I think that there were lots of areas that I was unaware of and I have had glimpses towards that were made quite explicit over the week and, erm, and it was, it was kind of food for thought'.

There is a sense here of the potential alpha function of the GRC, where 'areas' which the participant says that they were previously unaware of, were made 'quite explicit'. This may be viewed in terms of a containing function of the GRC, where beta elements could be processed. However, there is a sense that there is an ongoing process of making sense or of digesting the experience. This metaphor of food for thought, resonates with Miller's (1990a) description of

'indigestible "lumps" of experience' (p183) which he suggests can be difficult to process, following attendance at a GRC.

This sense of indigestible 'lumps' of experience and beta elements may also be considered in relation to participant one's comments 'And there was hostility, and I don't understand where it came from, and I don't understand why it was there' (line 462).

Beta elements have been described as threatening the existence of a protective psychic boundary (Stein, 2004), and this may be seen in relation to participant four's comments (line 475), 'I made a decision to protect myself and see it more as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect myself'.

In summary, Bion's (1962) concepts of beta elements and alpha function have been considered in relation to participants' accounts of attending the GRC. It is argued that these concepts can be helpful in understanding and describing experiences in groups.

### **5.3. Conflict**

It is acknowledged that the participants are in the process of training to become psychologists. It is argued that this transition relates to a sense of identity, which will be explored in greater detail as this chapter progresses.

Bion (1961) discusses group behavior as involving a struggle between the primitive and sophisticated as 'the essence of developmental conflict' (p128). Earlier in this chapter, primitive states involving regression, shame and panic have been described in relation to the experiences within groups. There are also however, illustrations within the accounts of attending

a GRC, of participants experiencing the developmental conflict and transition in thinking between the earlier mental states, and of thinking related to the self as a professional.

Participant three comments 'so for me think it's an ongoing process of discovering who I am in the role of an educational psychologist, as a trainee, erm, and what I bring to that individually, like my unique characteristics' (line 282).

There is a clear sense here of participant three articulating the developmental conflict that they are experiencing, in relation to their identity, as they train as a psychologist. This level of reflection appears to have been stimulated by the attending the GRC and reflecting on the experience.

Participant one appears to be reflecting on a similar theme in relation to their experience of attending the GRC: 'Erm, I found myself grappling with the title of erm, being a student, but then being a trainee educational psychologist. So finding the difference between the student and professional...' (line 82).

There is a different nuance here in exploring the difference between being a student and a trainee. However, the overarching theme of exploring a transition involving identity and role is evident and appears to have been brought into focus during the GRC.

This consideration of developmental conflict and identity may be thought of in relation to Kierkegaard's (1974) notion that 'An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming' (p19). There is a sense that participants are actively exploring this notion ('an ongoing process of discovering who I am', participant 3, line 282) in relation to their experience of attending the GRC. Further consideration of issues of identity, including gender and ethnicity will be explored in the next part.



Smith *et al* (2009) describe 'in-depth inductive qualitative analysis study of a topic which has considerable existential moment ... then it is quite likely that the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self / identity' (p163). This prediction appears to be borne out of the analysis here. It should however, be recognised that tentative links have been made between the experience of attending a GRC and questioning, or, exploring identity. It is also recognised that the participants were engaged in professional training, of which the GRC is a part, and any claims of the influence of the GRC should not be overstated.

#### **5.4. Identity**

Consideration has been given to a sense of developmental conflict, that appears to be linked to the experience of attending the GRC, which some participants related to a sense of identity associated with their role as a trainee educational psychologist. In this part, consideration will be given to concepts that were described in relation to identity and the GRC; namely gender and ethnicity.

##### **5.4.1. Gender and ethnicity**

Following attending the GRC, participant one commented that she is 'being aware of ... of my role as a woman' (line 936).

Participant four commented 'I got really interested in gender roles' (line 20) and participant two said 'I would hear different things about gender, erm, and about roles, erm ... the male, the white male wanting to take control of the situation' (line 334).

It is evident that participants one reflected on gender as a result attending the GRC. It is also recognised that participant two includes reference to ethnicity and control alongside gender.

Consideration of ethnicity will be given greater focus in the following section, however, it is recognised that identity is a multi-dimensional construct and that attempts to separate out particular aspects can lead to an unhelpfully reductionist perspective.

Noumair (2004) describes a group relations conference as follows:

‘There was a wish to preserve white male authority at all costs; the system attempted to impose a familiar lens on a new experience. Through maintaining the familiar stance in relation to white male authority, both reverence for and blaming of, the conference as a whole did not have to face the anxieties inherent in giving up the oppressed position and discovering new ways of exercising authority. The old and familiar, even if oppressive, is safer and far less disruptive than the new and unfamiliar.’ (p73).

This description resonates with the writer, in relation to the comments from participants.

Participant one comments, ‘there was so few men, but there was this whole idea that there needed to be the one superman or, I can’t remember now, and the white male supremacy or something...’ (line 789).

This reflection appears to share some commonality in the reflections offered by Noumair (2004). There is a sense that participant one recognises that despite being a minority in the conference, the group sought an old and familiar structure involving a white male authority. There is a clear sense of oppression within this experience as the term white male supremacy is used.

There is a similar sense evident in the reflections offered by participant four who comments (line 20):

‘I got really interested in gender roles, erm, and it was pred ... it was predominantly female, erm, group, erm, of, the inter, of the group like, taken as a whole. Erm, But I, I,

perceived it as the men in the group taking, erm, dominant roles and I, I raised it as an issue and I raised it as a comment, I commented on it in the group and, erm, some people, one woman in particular said oh, no it's not just, it's not that the ... she thought, she said that the men had been nominated as leaders of this group and she said that was because they were the best people for the job, that they were good leaders, they had good qualities in them of leadership. So they were, erm, they had been, the group had taken it upon themselves to allocate them as leaders. And I was saying, erm, that actually we were kind of mirroring society where we, we expect to see m, le, men as leaders and so we, we kind of put that into the men. Erm, and by white men, it was white men who took this, they had kind of self appointed them as leaders or they thought that the group had appointed them leaders, or they were, they were, I think if you had measured the time they were speaking, they had dominated the conversation ... for me I was thinking there's lots of psychotherapists and psychologists and, erm, psychiatrists and people I considered to be very thoughtful, people who were very aware of society and, erm, are very aware of their roles, their gender and their racial roles but yet would still allocate the white men as leaders. So that was something that stuck out for me.

DB: What sense did you make of that?

P4: erm, I found it quite, in some ways quite depressing that even the most, the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London, kind of thing, erm, still, erm, were not, I didn't see them to be as reflective as I hoped they would be. Erm, I'm prepared to, erm, erm, concede that these men were the bes, you know I'm prepared to, to take that as a hypothesis, oh these white men were the best leadership, have the best leadership qualities, erm, but I think we needed to think about what that was about when there's only sort of six men, six white men in the room and we've allocated five of them as leaders or something. You know, what does that mean out of 88 people, what, what's that about? And just thinking about that and, are we, were the women doing

themselves a disservice, because I saw two women who I considered to be very le, not myself, but other people who I considered to be very, erm, holding leadership qualities, but they weren't named by the group's leaders. And that neither of those were white, they were of different racial backgrounds and I just wondered what, what, what the group was doing and whether we were reflecting society in that small little microcosm.'

In this extended quote, it can be seen that participant four appears to echo Noumair's (2004) interpretation involving a sense of oppression and blame toward the group, which is being voiced when a white male leadership is chosen. Participant four actively challenged this group behavior and was disappointed at their perception of the mirroring of society, where the familiar was seemingly preferred over alternative and unfamiliar ways of exercising authority.

Noumair (2004) comments 'If we were to uncover the irrational and unconscious aspects of diversity and authority in organizational life, as group relations methods invite us to, we may have to face the consequences of disrupted authority relations and knowing truths that we do not wish to know' (p64).

This suggestion, may offer a response to participant four's clear questioning, in relation to the maintenance of a familiar white male authority – *what's that about?*

In writing this part, consideration was given to separating out themes of gender and ethnicity. The decision to present this section in this form is informed by the GRC focused writing of McRae, Green and Irvine (2009) and the resonance that their views have with the interpretation of participants' accounts:

'working with differences in groups and organisations involves recognising the existence of multiple social identities held by individuals, some being more salient than others given the context. For example, women belong to a number of identity groups: gender,

racialethnic, social class, sexual identity and religious groups. Based on context one identity may become more salient than another ... the ability to embrace the complexity of the coexistence of multiple identities and differences *and* the ways in which they impact the functioning of the group and / or organization is primary in today's world' (p3).

McRae, Green and Irvine have developed a World Event which has been incorporated in some GRCs in order to explore this area of study. This is described in more detail in the introduction.

It appears that participants quoted above in this section may have welcomed a specifically designed forum to explore issues of multiple social identities.

### **5.5. Coping**

This section may have been entitled 'defences', as the theme broadly refers to strategies that participants appear to have used to help them to manage the disturbing experiences of chaos, confusion and conflict described in previous sections.

Other themes of projection, projective-identification and containment were also considered in relation to coping. However, these themes were seen to have had a less dominant presence in the interpretation of participant accounts. A concept which was identified with greater frequency and intensity was that of splitting. This concept, throughout the analytic process has come to hold prominence.

de Board (1978) describes splitting as a core Kleinian concept, explaining how idealization and denial are related to the process of splitting, where the good object becomes exaggerated in its sense of goodness and the bad object denied (along with the associated painful emotions).

Waddell (2002) explains that in object relations theory, splitting extends into later life and includes separating people or events 'as unrealistically wonderful (good) or as unrealistically terrible (bad)' (p6).

This process appears to be evident at times in the interviews. For example the splitting of the personal and the professional, and in particular comments, such as '... even the most, the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London' (Participant four, line 53), where it may be seen that there appears to be idolization in sway.

The purpose of this section is not to detail each and every occasion which instances of splitting were identified in the analysis (as stated at the outset, this chapter aims to describe a dialogue between the analysis and the literature, using illustrations that are resonant, not exhaustive). The aim here is to provide illustrations that offer the reader the opportunity to consider the trustworthiness of the interpretation.

Illustrations of splitting come in differing forms, at times in individual phrases, for example 'so everybody failed' (Participant one, line, 723). Examples of splitting were also related to experiences outside of the GRC, for example when participant two discusses their heritage involving one side of the family, described as 'fiery' and the other side as a 'complete opposite' (line 736), 'so I'd have this (laughs) lifelong dilemma (laughs) of where I sit (laughs) and erm, dipping into each one, but, erm, an interesting thought about avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and warming more towards calmer individuals' (line 736).

These reflections were offered by the participant as an illustration of how they had become more aware of their 'personal preferences and avoidance of conflict' (line 742) when reflecting on their experience of attending the GRC. Self-awareness and group awareness will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.

Participant four comments 'so that became the theme of the doers and the thinkers' (line 288).

Here it appears that participant four is reflecting on a group behavior which may be seen as separating out (or splitting) 'doers' and 'thinkers'. Participant four also commented 'I suppose I use quite a cognitive part of my brain...' (line 489), implying a separate 'part' for thinking rationally.

Participant three comments 'I guess in the professional context it's not the right forum to talk about feelings...' (line 427). Offering a sense of a split between the emotional and the professional. And later participant four reflects on the training process suggesting that this 'isn't about creating good clones, it's about, you know, creat, or developing the individual...' (line 677). Where there is an implication of 'bad' clones and contrasted with 'individuals'.

Later, participant three describes being part of an out-group (their term) and says 'I wouldn't have seen how the system which is supposed to be perfect, if I'm talking about society, perfect, it's not perfect, but how it's supposed to enable people to grow and to develop, it's supposed to support' (line 717). There is a sense of a struggle and some awareness of the splitting, yet there is also a suggestion here of an idealized 'society' – not perfect, but there to support.

In the second interview, participant three describes a 'personal–professional interface' (line 443) and 'actively managing both worlds if you like...' (line 455). This vivid example offers an illustration of the splitting that is being described in relation to role and identity issues of the personal and professional in terms of different worlds.

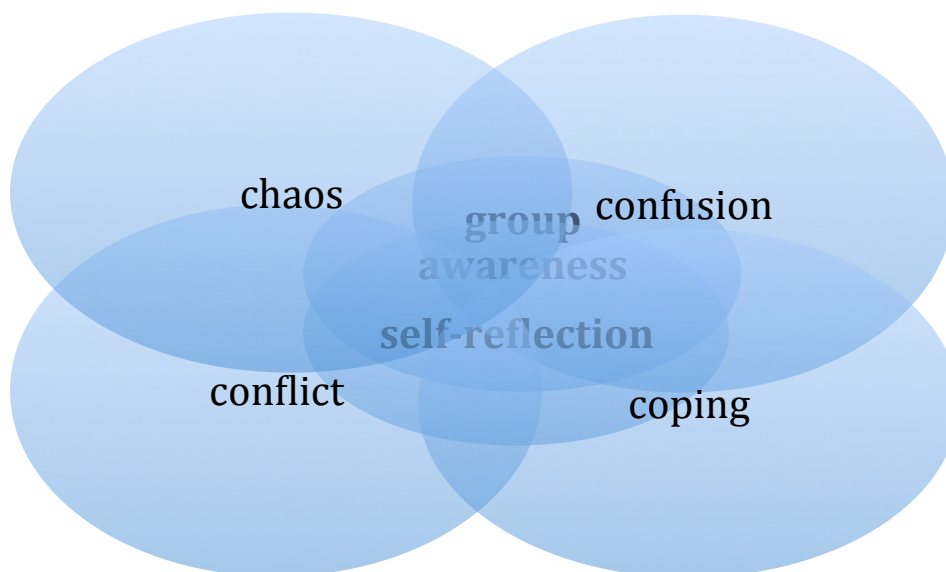
This experience of splitting, associated with the GRC is summed up by participant one, stating 'the middle ground seemed to have got lost' (line 298).

## 5.6. Theoretical coherence

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that analysis continues in the writing phase of the research activity. In this section, a further layer of analysis and interpretation is offered, which lends support to the notion of the ongoing nature of the enquiry.

In this section, the aim is to locate the data analysis in a wider context where, through engaging with the literature, a more coherent framing of the research findings will be proposed.

At the end of the systematic approach to analysis, the following graphic of thematic overview was offered, where the super-ordinate themes were presented as follows:



**Figure 2** Graphic representation of thematic overview



Throughout the analysis, there was a sense of a missing link, noted in the research diary in terms of a 'bridge' or a symmetry, between the intrapersonal and interpersonal which was tentatively referred to in the data analysis section.

Participant three offers a clear description which highlights the difficulty in separating internal and external experiences, when commenting:

'erm, and so I was thinking is it other people's anxiety that I'm picking up on ... Erm, so that that was one of the occasions where I thought, okay, there's something happening here which is quite unconscious but I'm reacting...' (line 36).

There is an explicit association being made here between the internal and external experience during the GRC. This appears to be evident in the previously quoted extract from discussion with participant three (line 442):

navigating that personal-professional interface I guess. Actually I like that phrase  
(laughs) yeah.

DB: the personal-professional interface?

P3: yeah, just where they meet. Erm, which is in meetings like this where there's, you know, it's a professional context but you're very much present and you're experiencing it and you're involved in it and it's running through you, and you're running through it. Erm, but then there are aspects of say your personality or your character which is inappropriate to bring into the context because it just is not effective, so, but that's, that's where things are playing out, and so it's at those times that, erm, you're actively managing almost both worlds if you like...

Participant three creates a phrase, which seems to offer some satisfaction in articulating the association between what may be seen as an aspect of the internal and external experience – ‘the personal-professional interface’.

### **5.6.1. A psychosocial framing**

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe the term psychosocial as ‘simultaneously psychic and social’ (p12). They elaborate on this framing as follows:

‘We use the theories of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1998a, 1988b) about how the self is forged out of unconscious defences against anxiety’ (p17).

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) connect this premise with the concept of splitting as a defence, which appears aligned with the analysis outlined in this chapter.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) offer further conceptual framing, which resonates with the analysis describing themes of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping:

‘... threats to the self create anxiety, and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition’ (p17).

Furthermore:

‘The shared starting point of all different schools of psychoanalytic thought is the idea of a dynamic unconscious that defends against anxiety and significantly influences people’s actions, lives and relations’ (p17).

This framing may be seen as congruent with underpinning theory described in the introduction and literature review, and coherent in relation to the themes which emerged from the analysis of findings. It is also noted that the influence of anxiety is described in terms of the relational. It is this aspect of the relational that is fundamental to the psychosocial framing:

‘In this notion of unconscious defences against anxiety, Klein departs radically from the assumption that the self is a single unit, with unproblematic boundaries separating it from the external world of objects (both people and things). Her proposition (based on clinical work) is that these defences against anxiety are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people.’ (p18).

And later:

‘Thus experience, being constituted from both external and internal reality, is simultaneously social and psychological (psychosocial), like the warp and weft of a piece of cloth.’ (p127).

It is argued that this framing, grounded in object relations theory, with an emphasis on the intersubjective nature of experience, simultaneously social and psychological, both external and internal, offers an explanation of the missing link (or ‘bridge’, between the internal and the external) sought for during the analysis of participants’ descriptions of attending the GRC.

Furthermore, the theme of self-reflection and questioning of an existential sense of self, being and identity is congruent with the psychosocial framing:

‘A person’s (largely unconscious) ways of coping with external threats to safety goes a long way in understanding who they are’. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p128).

Therefore, it is argued that the psychosocial framing helps to make sense of the data analysis from a theoretical perspective. It is beyond the scope of this research to develop the argument further and it is suggested that this would further abstract the discussion from the IPA principles, placing the participant experience as central to the enquiry.

However, it is argued that the psychosocial framing appears to have some commonality with Rice's (1965) attempt to synthesise open systems theory and psychoanalytic thinking (described by Miller, 1990a as a move towards a unified theory). Rice (1965) wrote:

In the mature individual, the ego – the concept of the self as a unique individual – mediates the relationship between the internal world of good and bad objects and the external world of reality, and thus takes in relations to the personality' (Rice, 1965, p11 in Fraher, 2004, p80).

There appears a point of contact between Rice's conceptualization and that offered by the psychosocial framing. It is also noted that in an earlier psychosocial description of intersubjectivity, the language used included the concept of boundaries, which resonates strongly with the conceptual framing within open systems theory.

In summary, a reframing of the themes emerging from the interpretative phenomenological analysis, when viewed through a psychosocial lens, appears to provide a more unified account of findings. Central to this reframe is the concept of intersubjectivity. The rejection of an arbitrary separation (or splitting?) of internal and external experience and an acceptance of the interrelationship.

Therefore, the initial presentation of findings, may be viewed through a psychosocial lens, where intersubjectivity is manifest in the overlapping sections.

It is argued that there is a symmetry between the external experiences of chaos and confusion; of conflict and coping; of group awareness and self-reflection. The mirroring may be viewed using the psychosocial concept of intersubjectivity. It is also important to note that the claims been made here are not absolute. It is recognised that the associations (or symmetries) between the themes are not intended to be viewed as rigid or discrete. They have arisen from the interpretive analysis and dialogue with the literature. It is likely that other interrelationships between the themes may be made (and, conceivably, interrelationships with themes which are not described here). The key point is that of interrelationships and intersubjectivity. The core argument here is that, through a psychosocial lens, this framing offers a more coherent interpretation of findings, where the notion of intersubjectivity enables an understanding which connects rather than separates the internal and external world.

This use of psychosocial theory may be viewed as a development, building on the theoretical foundations of GRCs (object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory) which appear to share commonalities.

### **5.6.2. Development, oscillation and fear**

It is recognised that the following interpretation becomes increasingly abstracted as it develops. This is important to acknowledge, in terms of the greater distance from the interview data, through dialogue with the literature. However, it is also acknowledged that Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that IPA can be too cautious and remain at a descriptive level. They encourage researchers to 'dig deeper' (p103).

It is argued here that a developmental framing may be used to conceptualise the experience of attending a GRC. Early phases appear to involve the intersubjective experiences of chaos and

confusion, middle-phases may be thought of as involving conflict and coping, before a reflective phase involving group awareness and self-reflection. As described above, it is argued that an interrelationship between the inner and outer worlds are involved (using a psycho-social lens).

Further consideration of this developmental trajectory associated with GRC's, enables a potential link to be made with the earlier phases, characterised by the paranoid-schizoid state of mind and the more reflective stages being associated with a depressive state of mind. This appears to hold theoretical consistency with the Kleinian framing, involving regression within groups. It is also noted that within this theoretical framing there is likely to be oscillation, rather than a uni-directional trajectory. It is argued here that group relations conferences appear to offer a developmental microcosm, where the struggle for survival and growth is experienced with relative intensity.

The reader will note a tentative tone in this framing. And it is again with caution that further digging in the interpretive sense will follow.

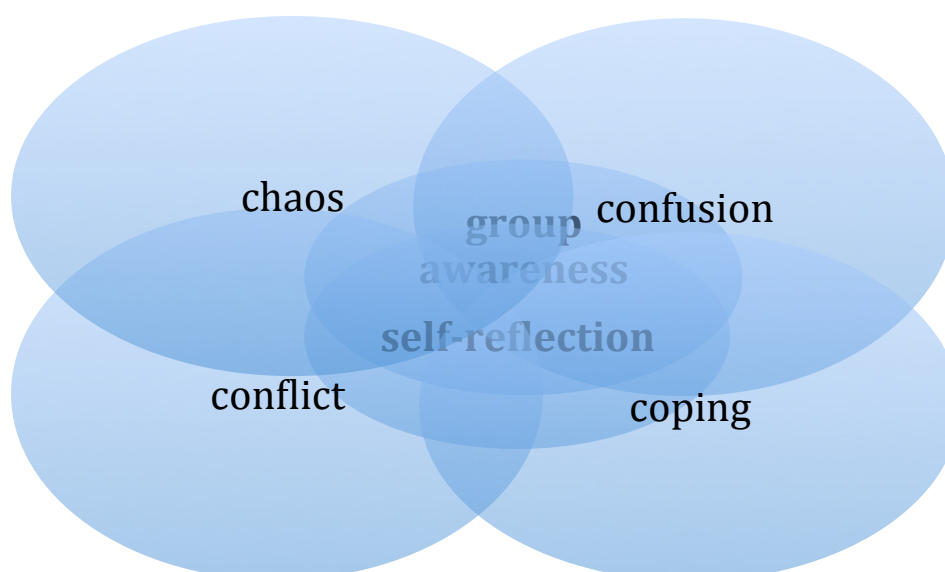
## **Fear**

During the process of data analysis, descriptions of vulnerability have been alluded to in relation to the themes of chaos, confusion and conflict. However, this did not seem quite satisfactory, and I had noted in my research diary: where is fear?

It is argued here that the dissatisfaction in locating this aspect of the experience may be understood as follows. Fear is not a discrete theme, but a unifying concept. A connecting tissue. Manifest in the processes of projection and introjection occurring in the here-and-now of a group relations conference. Fear (or anxiety) as the intersubjective glue binding the psycho-social.

This framing appears to be congruent with theory and interview data. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe the threat to the self as fundamental and inherent to the human condition, and comment: 'defences against anxiety are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people.' (p18). Participant three described a personal physical response, which was associated (by the participant) as follows: 'so I was thinking is it other people's anxiety that I'm picking up on' (line 40) and 'I literally, in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack' (line 38). Kierkegaard's (1974) concept that 'An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming' (p19) may be re-cast as: an existing individual is constantly in the process of defending.

In returning to the graphic of thematic overview, the shaded parts may be viewed as illustrating emotional states of fear and anxiety. It is also recognised that inadvertently, the generation of this graphic offers a sense of group awareness and self-reflection being obscured by the foregrounding of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping. This unintended outcome is however accepted as offering a sense of the initial 'noise' of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping as dominant, while also recognising that the themes of group awareness and self-reflection, may be obscured but are central.



**Figure 3** Graphic representation of thematic overview

The particular structure and purpose of the GRC must be acknowledged. However, one may wonder how different these structures are to the office environment; the school environment; the playground?

### **5.6.3. What has been found?**

As the interpretative digging is curtailed, this section offers reflections on what has been found.

Participants offered various descriptions of conflict and embedded within these descriptions was a sense of the fight for survival. Participant three, 'it was almost very primitive [ ] those survival techniques that were being drawn out of me being in that group' (line 166).

The obverse of this fight for survival may be thought about in terms of death and the death instinct. de Board (1978) acknowledges that the death instinct is a controversial concept, 'this idea had appeared in Freud's later writings and although it was (and still is) a bone of contention among analysts, Klein was convinced of its existence' (p29).

Symington (1986) describes the concept as follows, 'I want to explain what Freud understood by the death drive: it is that all organisms tend towards the inanimate state ... the paradox, however, is that the self-preservative drive is a component of the death drive' (p130).

The varying terms 'drive' and 'instinct' result from different translations of Freud's writing.

Segal (1973) writes:



‘When faced with the anxiety produced by the death instinct, the ego deflects it. This deflection of the death instinct, described by Freud, in Melanie Klein’s view consists partly of projection, partly of the conversion of the death instinct into aggression.’ (p25).

This framing of the death instinct (Freud, 1930) and defences against anxiety, including mobilization of aggression, resonate with the analysis offered throughout this discussion; where the themes of chaos, confusion and conflict are described by participants in terms of primal experiences, a fight for survival, and articulation of projective processes within groups, involving a contagion of anxiety and aggressive impulses.

It is argued here that group relations conferences may be viewed in terms of the death instinct and associated psychosocial mobilization of defences. An existing individual, constantly in the process of defending.

## **5.7. Discussion of research process**

In this section, the research process will be reflected on. In particular, ethics, method of data analysis and trustworthiness will be discussed. The personal experience of conducting this research will also be considered.

### **5.7.1. Ethics**

As outlined in the research design chapter, the design of a GRC is intended to remove ‘some of the common and expected social defences’ (Rice, 1965, p45) and it was acknowledged that ‘Even at the end of the conference, many members still appear to be in difficulties, and are sometimes distressed about getting an intellectual grasp of what the conference has been about’ (Rice, p118).

As described in the data analysis chapter and discussion of findings, it was evident that participants did describe difficulties and distress which were experienced during the GRC. Participants offered explicit descriptions, including: 'I had been really upset on the first day and I'd cried' (participant four, line 692-693), 'feeling very vulnerable as well as being left out' (participant one, line 260), 'in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack' (participant three, line 36) and 'I was almost ... stuck or frozen by this, erm, process and to the point of not being able to do anything about it' (line 680).

From the perspective of those designing GRCs, it is argued that:

'No institution that aims to provide opportunities to learn about the stresses of interpersonal and intergroup relationships can achieve its aim without being stressful, however protected the environment' (p158).

Rice (1965) goes on to suggest that:

'... stress, and coming to terms with it, are an inevitable part of our way of living. Conferences to learn about ways of coming to terms with stress are not only the cause of stress; they provide opportunities to explore ways of dealing with what already exists' (p159).

From the research perspective, careful consideration was given to the protection of participants (which included gaining ethical approval for the research). A multi-layered approach to keeping participants safe was taken and made explicit to participants; involving opportunities for withdrawal, time for reflection following the interviews, the offer of consultation with the researcher, opportunity for reflection with the lead person for the year group and the option of accessing student support.

Following both the initial interview and the follow-up interview none of the participants chose to access these offers of support (or reported accessing these offers of support). This may be seen as an indication that the participants experienced the interviews as not out of the ordinary in terms of the challenges of engaging in the Tavistock training course.

In relation to the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2010) the participant experience is seen in terms of a balance 'between protecting participants and recognizing their agency and capacity' (p9).

In summary, it was recognised that an exploration of the experience of attending a GRC was likely to require participants to engage with difficult and potentially distressing emotional experiences. Analysis of data indicated that difficult and distressing experiences were recalled and thought about. It is argued that a reasonable balanced between protecting participants and valuing their agency and capacity was achieved.

It is acknowledged that care and consideration is required in order to decide on the potential costs and benefits of research involving exploration of difficult and potentially distressing experiences. This should include recourse to supervision and an ethics committee, which includes consideration of the purpose and potential value of the research activity. This issue of the purpose and implications of findings will be explored later in this section.

### **5.7.2. Method of data analysis**

Throughout the research process a range of choices have been made, accompanied by attempts to articulate the rationale for particular decisions. The research design chapter outlines this thinking. Through discussion at the Tavistock and supervision, a particular decision has

been reconsidered and is given special attention in this section. It would have been possible to focus on alternative aspects of the research design, however, with the limitations of this writing (and the underpinning rationale described in the research design chapter) this particular dimension is seen to be of priority for discussion. What follows is a critical reflection on the method of data analysis.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe a psychosocial approach to qualitative research, which is summarized by Roseneil, 2006, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, (2013, ix):

In attending to the social construction of intimacy and personal life, sociologists have neglected their equally important shaping and constitution from inner life, have failed to address the psychodynamics of biography. It is my argument that the investigation of the meanings of contemporary formations of personal life requires the theorisation of complex intertwining of the social and the psychic. Such an analysis seeks to transcend the dualism of the individual on the social, and take seriously the realm of the intra-psychic, 'the power of feelings' (Chodorow, 1999) and the dynamic unconscious, but does so without engaging in either psychological or sociological reductionism.

Consideration has been given to the relevance of this approach to the study of participant accounts of attending the GRC. In particular a connection has been made, at the theoretical level, in relation to the intertwining of the social and psychic. Furthermore, there may be seen to be theoretical congruency underpinning GRCs and this psychosocial approach to qualitative psychology. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe their approach and that outlined by Roseneil (1999) as resting on:

- psychoanalytic ontology of the non-unitary, defended subject
- the psychoanalytic insistence on the importance of the dynamic unconscious

- the idea the subjects are constituted relationally, and engage continuously in processes of identification, projection and introjection

These principles may be seen as closely aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of GRCs described in the introduction (object relations theory and group relations theory in particular).

There is therefore a reasonable line of argument to suggest that this approach may be seen as an appropriate choice for the object of study in this research.

It is, however, important to reflect on criticisms of the psychosocial approach in order to balance this argument. Thomson (2010) criticises the psychosocial approach as problematic in terms of the potential for over-interpretation of data. Thomson also raises questions about the ethics of the approach and of the potential influence of the defended researcher in the analysis.

These concerns resonate with the researcher and will be considered in relation to the chosen method of analysis, namely, IPA. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) discuss the potential for a psychodynamic interpretation of an interview as different to that espoused within their description of IPA. They argue that the difference is of an epistemological nature and discuss 'the difference between a grounded IPA reading and an imported psychoanalytic one' (p105). Their argument is summarized:

'Thus the IPA and the psychodynamic interpretations are coming from two different epistemological perspectives and each has its own explicit or implicit criteria for the validity of the reading. The direction looked to for authority for the reading is different - outside in the case of the psychoanalytic position, inside in the case of IPA.' (p105).

On the surface, this perspective and contrasting of epistemological positions, appears to cast some doubt on how appropriate the discussion of findings are, in terms of fidelity to the IPA approach.

However. Smith *et al* (2009) acknowledge that they have taken a strong position for clarity and that 'as ever, reality is fuzzier!' (p105). They acknowledge that 'Many psychodynamically inclined researchers do include an analysis based on close textual reading, foregrounding the presenting account itself.' (p105). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) also recognise that within an IPA approach 'occasionally one may wish to draw on a more specific theoretical account to assist the IPA analysis, this would be clearly marked by a difference in tone and as more speculative because of the distance between the text and the interpretation.' (p105).

Furthermore they comment:

'IPA does systematically make more formal theoretical connections, but this is more usually done after the close textual analysis and guided by that emerging analysis.'  
(p105).

It may be seen within this selection of quotations that there does indeed appear to be a 'fuzziness' within the IPA approach.

The phenomenological emphasis within IPA emphasizes a focus on a detailed and transparent interpretation from *within* the participant account. It is however suggested that a theoretically driven account – from without – has legitimacy within IPA, requiring a more speculative tone and at a later stage in the analysis.

It is this approach, that has been attempted in the writing of this chapter and in the structuring of this thesis. The data analysis chapter is boundaried at that point, as the purpose of that chapter was to attempt to articulate the findings of a more 'pure' IPA approach. It is recognised that

there is an interpretive dimension to this analysis, yet that chapter remains an attempt to describe the themes that emerged through a systematic and rigorous approach. The claim within that chapter is that those themes are the researcher's interpretation of the analysis of the descriptions each participant offered of attending a GRC. It is for the reader to decide how convincing or trustworthy the interpretation is (to be discussed in the next section).

As described at the outset of this chapter, the purpose of the discussion of findings is to relate the analysis of data to the extant literature. Thus involving the later stages of analysis in-line with the description provided by Smith *et al* (2009), where connections are made with theory (from *without*). During the writing of this chapter, a speculative tone has been used (or intended) in order to acknowledge the greater distance between the connections. The distance in the former involving the participant and the researcher, in the latter: the researcher's interpretation, of the participant's interpretation in relation to the extant literature.

In returning to the Thomson's critique of the psychosocial approach, firstly let us consider the concern of over-interpretation. The solution (albeit 'fuzzy') offered by IPA, of a secondary theoretical discussion, it is argued here, provides a defence to the accusation of over interpretation. It is for the reader to decide how this defence is interpreted. The first layer of analysis may be accepted or rejected, before consideration is given to the secondary layer of interpretation (in relation to theory). The reader may accept the former and not the latter; both; or indeed neither. There is nevertheless a layered approach which serves to guard against wild analysis.

An additional benefit from adopting the approach taken in the structuring (and layering) of this writing, relates to the ethical questions raised by Thomson (2010). In this sense, it is argued that the different layers (and tone) of analysis provide a buffer, serving to protect the participant from over interpretation, and subsequent claims beyond the scope of the research activity.

In conclusion. It has been argued that a psychosocial approach to analysis of data could be seen as theoretically congruent with the object of study. However, it has been argued that the IPA approach described here and in the research design chapter, with an emphasis on two layers of interpretation, and the recognition of the necessary caution with which the secondary (theory based) interpretation should be viewed offers a more ethical and nuanced approach which is transparent in enabling the reader to draw their own interpretations of the analysis.

### **5.7.3. Trustworthiness**

As described in the research design chapter, Smith *et al* (2009) argue that methods for assessing the validity and reliability of quantitative research are ill-fitting for the appraisal of qualitative research, and suggest that 'qualitative research should be evaluated in relation to criteria recognised as appropriate to it' (p179). It was therefore decided to use Yardley's (2000) principles for assessing the quality of this research, namely: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and, impact and importance. In this section, these principles will be reflected on as the research activity approaches conclusion.

#### *Sensitivity to context*

Yardley (2000) describes this principle for assessing quality in relation to sensitivity to the socio-cultural context; data provided by participants; the existing literature and how meaning making, claims and interpretation are framed.

The preceding sections of this chapter aim to relate the existing literature to the data findings and offer an explicit rationale for how the layered interpretation of findings are framed and related to the data. The emergent meaning making and claims are offered to the reader with



recognition that the secondary level of analysis (relating to theory) is of a more tentative nature, while also acknowledging that the initial analysis involves a double hermeneutic.

The socio-cultural context from which data is gathered is recognised in the data analysis and research design chapter. This influence may be viewed at three levels. Firstly, it is recognised that participants were experiencing their first year of training at the Tavistock, and at a particular stage of making the transition to becoming a psychologist. Associated themes of identity have been discussed.

The second influence that has been acknowledged relates to the placement dimension of the training course. A potential imitation of the research findings has been stated with regards the comparatively limited fieldwork experience that year one trainees have accessed to, and therefore have opportunity to reflect on.

The third influence focuses on a more individual level, relating to participants' reflections on difference. More specifically, consideration has been given to gender and ethnicity in relation to leadership and the individual participant experience.

These illustrations of sensitivity to context are offered as evidence of the commitment to this principle throughout the conduct of the research. It is not claimed that this description is exhaustive, however, explicit attempts have been made to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis and interpretation of findings.

### *Commitment and rigor*

Yardley (2000) describes this principle in terms of 'the thoroughness of the study, for example in terms of the appropriateness of the sample to the question in hand, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis undertaken' (Smith *et al*, 2009, p181).

The appropriateness of the sample is discussed in the research design chapter. It is argued that the decision to recruit participants at the same stage in their training, at the same institution, who attended the same GRC provides the reader with evidence of the attempt to select a 'fairly homogenous' sample (Smith *et al*, 2009) in relation to the research questions.

The quality of the interview and completeness of the analysis has been evidenced through the inclusion of each transcript in the appendices along with summative tables of themes at the different stages of the analysis and illustrative examples of coded transcripts. It is also recognised that the researcher was building on interview skills developed at masters level (in IPA research) and drew on consultation skills as a practitioner psychologist. It is not claimed that the interview process was faultless and the researcher would share the view expressed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), that 'the interview is a complex phenomenon' (p67).

However, care and consideration was given to the development of an interview schedule, which was trailed within a group context and reflected on through supervision. It is argued that these factors led to a satisfactory level of quality interviewing which enabled participants to explore their experience which achieved, at times, significant levels of insight and reflection. This recognition, of course, primarily rests on the commitment of the participants to engage in the research at such a level.

The completeness of the analysis is outlined in the research design chapter and evidenced throughout the data analysis and discussion of findings. It is also acknowledged that the research undertook the transcription of interviews personally and subsequently listened to the interviews multiple times with the aim of familiarization, immersion, commitment and rigour.

### *Transparency and coherence*

Yardley (2000) describes this principle in terms of providing a clear step-by-step approach to each stage of the research, including how the analysis was undertaken.

Evidence of this principle is threaded throughout the thesis. The research design chapter offers a detailed outline of the step-by-step approach to analysis. The data findings and discussion of findings provides explicit accounts of the interpretation of findings. In the next section, reflections on the process are offered, including consideration of the double hermeneutic. In addition, relevant sections of the appendices are offered to provide the reader with the opportunity to further scrutinize the approach taken in order to appraise the interpretation of findings.

### *Impact and importance*

Smith *et al* (2009) describe Yardley's principle as follows: 'test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful' (p183).

Consideration of this principle will be offered at the close of this writing, where future direction of research and the fundamental concern of what has been learned will be discussed. The appraisal of the importance, interest and use of the interpretation of findings will be for the reader to decide.

#### **5.7.4. The double hermeneutic**

'IPA involves a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith and Osborne, 2003). The researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p35).

In order to maintain a focus on the participant perspective, Smith *et al* (2009) describe the importance of bracketing - separating out or putting to one side one's preconceptions.

A range of strategies have been employed throughout the research process, with the aim of bracketing. While some references may be found in the preceding section describing attempts at demonstrating trustworthiness, an explicit summary of bracketing techniques are offered here. Namely, the sequencing of writing chapters, use of a research diary, supervision and structuring of the write-up.

The chapters in this thesis were not written in the order they appear in this final form. The literature review was completed after the initial analysis of data. This approach was taken in order to limit the influence that this knowledge and understanding may have during the interpretive phase. It is however acknowledged that references to literature were required in developing the research focus and therefore some influence is reasonable to assume. The point here is that an attempt was made to minimize this influence.

Throughout the research process a research diary was maintained. This had multiple purposes, which included the aims of capturing and clarifying thoughts and ideas about research design and activity over time. It was also recognised that this document may help to bracket some of the thinking that had the potential to influence the interpretation of data. An illustration comes when the theme of difference, gender and ethnicity emerged. In July 2014, comments included reference to myself as a white, male, and how this could influence my interpretation of the data. There are prompts to return to the data and to raise this in supervision. This particular theme will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Supervision was used throughout the research process, and served a range of purposes, including the opportunity to step back from the analysis and to consider issues of bracketing.

Reflective discussions were held with a focus, for example, on my multiple social identities and the potential influence of my biography on the interpretation of data.

The structure of the write up is also seen as an attempt to separate out the interpretation of the interviews from the influence of the literature. The aim has been to offer transparency in terms of a balance between maintaining a focus on the participant perspective and the subsequent dialogue with the literature.

#### **5.7.5. Reflecting on the struggle**

In this section, reflections on limitations of the research will be offered.

‘Question: is it realistic to write a coherent story about incoherent stories?’

This quote comes from the research diary (June, 2014). It is a theme that returns at various points in the diary, for example, in August 2014: ‘Struggle to capture the complexity’.

It is reasonable to link this experience of struggling with complexity to references described in the literature review. There appears a commonality here. Ginor (2009), comments that ‘it is hard to describe this kind of experiential process in a publication’ (p70). Dartington (2012), comments: ‘The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word’ (pxxiii). Tagore (2012) comments: Experiences around group relations conferences do not lend themselves to conclusions very easily’ (p257). These descriptions may be seen in relation to the participant descriptions (the theme of confusion has been discussed above) and this writing.

There is a further conceptualization, which comes from one of the underpinning theoretical bases (a psychoanalytic perspective). The concept of parallel process is described by McNeill and Worthen (1989) as 'an unconscious identification with the client' (p329). This is offered, not as a 'truth', but rather, a possible framing of what may have influenced the analysis of material. I, as the researcher had sat with participants, thought with them, transcribed the interviews, listened repeatedly to the recordings and spent a considerable amount of time analyzing the material. It is argued here that it is possible that this process involved an element of identification with their experience, which, through the parallel process may have influenced the analysis and writing. There is some evidence to support his argument in the research diary, where it is noted 'intense process re initial noting' (at the early stage of analysis, June, 2014).

In returning to Dartington's point (2012): 'The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word' (p xxiii), I would strongly agree. The argument made here is that the structural form required in writing is, in essence, inadequate. The lived experience of being in a chaotic social situation along with the 'churning' internal experience, simply does not lend itself to a neat linear narrative. Thoughts, feeling and sensations do not come in a calm and orderly sequence. Reference has been made to Bion's (1962) beta elements, 'unavailable for thought' (Stein, 2004, p24) and participants' experience of confusion and difficulty in articulating the experience. The point being made here is that the very act of attempting to write about an experiential learning event is in itself an inherent limitation. This may seem a poor excuse for poor writing. I would argue that there is more than my own limitations of expression at play.

#### **5.7.6. The defended subject**

Hollway and Jefferson (2014) describe 'defensive distortions ... in the service of psychological self-protection' (p139). Participants described experiences of chaos, confusion, conflict and

coping. Comments included 'I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset' (Participant four, line 697). Shame and panic emerged as themes. In this context, it is reasonable to recognise the possibility that, at times, participants may have withheld descriptions that may have been uncomfortable. There is also the possibility that recollections may have, in some ways, been distorted in order to protect the participant. It is not possible to make firm assertions in this regard, however, it is important to recognise that the potentially distressing and shameful experiences of attending a GRC may influence what is (and is not) included in the narratives which participants offer. This is seen as a potential limitation of the research activity, which further emphasises the importance of maintaining a tentative tone when discussing findings.

#### **5.7.7. The defended researcher**

Hollway and Jefferson (2014) argue for consideration of the 'researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects, whose mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned' (p42).

One illustration of the experience of anxiety within the researcher relates to the themes of gender and ethnicity. Included in the research diary are notes recognising that I, as a white male am offering an interpretation of participants' narratives involving their experience of attending a GRC in relation to their gender and ethnicity. The anxiety relates to a concern about how an interpretation may distort or minimize the experiential narrative. Participants discussed white, male supremacy and this led to reflections concerning my own role and identity as an IPA researcher. There was a fear of acting as an oppressor in creating a narrative which was not representative of the participants' experience.

How was this concern managed?

Through reflection, supervision, recourse to the literature and, fundamentally, through returning to the data and striving to offer a transparent interpretation. The intention of the analysis and interpretation of findings is aligned with the contention of McRae, Green and Irvine (2009):

‘working with differences in groups and organisations involves recognizing the existence of multiple social identities held by individuals ... the ability to embrace the complexity of the coexistence of multiple identities and differences *and* the ways in which they impact the functioning of the group and / or organization is primary in today's world’ (p3).

The emphasis here on engagement with the complexity and influence of multiple social identities within groups resonates with the analysis and interpretation of findings. It is further suggested that this aspect of experiential learning within GRCs is a valuable and powerful dimension which provides an opportunity for future research.

In summary, it is recognised that I, as the researcher have the responsibility to reflect on my own experience and attempt to ensure care, consideration, transparency and reflexivity are fundamental to this research. One particular dimension, involving our multiple social identities has been discussed here. I recognise that this is my interpretation of the material and that the double hermeneutic may be seen as limitations of the research. Potential sources of bias include my own experiences of attending two GRC's and my association with the Tavistock, firstly as a student and currently as a member of staff involved in training educational psychologists. The interest and intention throughout this research has been to critically explore the area. Attempts have been made to demonstrate trustworthiness, which the reader will appraise.



### **5.7.8. The interview as an influence**

It has been recognised that the process of engaging in the research interviews provided a space for thinking and reflection, which GRC attendees would not typically access. This should be recognized when interpreting findings.

### **5.8. The claims of the research**

It has been stated throughout this writing that the claims made by the research should be appropriately limited. The analysis is that of the researcher, through engagement with the interview data provided by four participants who attended one particular GRC. The claims are limited to this level of analysis and interpretation, and through dialogue with the existing literature.

Furthermore, it is recognised that the findings are offered by the researcher through careful consideration of the participants' narratives. Direct quotations have been used throughout the presentation of findings in order to maintain a focus on the participant perspective. It should however, be recognised that the identified themes, theoretical interpretation and subsequent conclusions are the considered views of the researcher and *not* a direct expression of any of the participants' own conclusions about their personal experience of attending a GRC.

Careful consideration has been given throughout the research process to Yardley's (2000) principles of trustworthiness. In turning to the conclusions of this research, it is salient to recognise comments from Smith *et al* (2009) in relation to Yardley's (2000) principle of impact and importance:

'test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful' (p183).

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This research aimed to explore trainee educational psychologists' experience of attending a group relations conference and any perceived influence on their behavior in role. In the first part of this section, a summary of the different levels of analysis and interpretation will be offered. Consideration will then be given to the potential implication of findings. Finally opportunities for future research will be discussed.

### **6.1. Summary of findings**

It is important to recognise that the conclusions drawn here are based on the interpretation of four participant's descriptions of attending a particular group relations conference. Yardley's (2000) principles of trustworthiness have been described and reflected on in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how they may appraise the findings.

Findings may be considered at two levels. The first level relates to the outcomes of the interpretative phenomenological analysis. The second level relates to the dialogue with the literature.

The conclusions of the interpretative phenomenological analysis suggest that a number of themes were identified. In relation to the first research question, exploring the experience of attending a group relations conference, participants are understood to have experienced chaos, confusion, conflict, coping, significant levels of self-reflection and enhanced group awareness. As evidenced by these themes, participants' range of experiences included elements of disorientation and distress.

When considering the second research question, exploring any perceived influences on behavior 'back home', it is argued that participants described an increased awareness and understanding of behaviours within groups. Furthermore, it is argued that participants engaged in significant levels of self-reflection, stimulated by their experiential learning.

As this analysis of findings was related to the literature, a number of theoretical connections were made. In broad terms these connections may be viewed in three parts. Firstly, the chaos and confusion has been related to Bion's (1961) formulation of learning, involving beta elements and alpha functioning. In response to this experience, the themes of conflict and coping have been related to the Kleinian (1959) concept of defensive splitting as a way of coping with the disturbing experiences, including a sense of regression. Finally, consideration has been given to existential questions of identity (Kierkegaard, 1974). These questions of identity included McRea, Green and Irvine's (2004) framing of multiple social identities, and included participants' reflections on ethnicity, gender and of the self in role. Self-reflection has also been discussed in relation to group-awareness and the participants' reflections on increased awareness of group behaviours following attending a group relations conference.

At a theoretical level, consideration was given to how a psychosocial model may be seen as building on the underpinning theories of group relations conferences (object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory). In particular it has been argued that a psychosocial lens enables a coherent understanding to emerge, where the internal and external experience are seen to be interrelated, rather than separated. It is argued that the concept of intersubjectivity is core to understanding the experience of attending a group relations conference.

A tentative exploration was offered through dialogue with the literature, where consideration was given to the struggle for survival and growth through a developmental framing of the group relations conference experience. This was linked to psychoanalytic theory and psychosocial

theory, where the concepts of fear, anxiety and defences were suggested to be central tenets of the group relations conference experience. This line of argument was extended to include the psychoanalytic concept of the death instinct, as underpinning the defensive mechanisms seen to be mobilized during a group relations conference.

## **6.2. Limitations of the research**

A range of limitations of this research have been considered during the discussion chapter and reflections on the research process. Limitations include, the nature of claims that can be made from an interpretative phenomenological analysis of data. Furthermore, consideration has been given to the defended subject and the defended researcher. In addition, the interview process itself was seen as potentially serving a function for the participants and as having an influence on findings. The broader training context has also been acknowledged as a factor which again is likely to have influenced findings. Furthermore, it has been argued that the attempt to describe experiential learning in prose form may be viewed as an inherent limitation of this research.

## **6.3. Potential implications of findings**

The focus of this research has been to explore trainee educational psychologists' experiences of attending GRCs. The implications of the findings are therefore most closely associated with that group and may be of interest to those involved in training educational psychologists.

In summary, the analysis and interpretation of findings indicates that experiential learning can be a turbulent process. Potentially distressing experiences of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping have been described. It has also been argued that participants described an enhanced awareness of group behavior in their working contexts following attending a group relations conference. A central theme that emerged through analysis was that participants engaged in an

existential level of questioning in relation to their identity, which included reflections on the self in role.

It is argued here that these that these difficult, messy and unsettling experiences may be seen as familiar to practicing psychologists, struggling to make sense of the complexity they meet in the context of their work. It is further argued that this learning experience could serve to better equip psychologists to work in the field. Readers must draw their own conclusions.

Reference has been made to the required competencies for accreditation as educational psychologist by the British Psychological Society and the Health and Care Professionals Council standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists. These competencies and standards can be seen to make direct reference to the performance of educational psychologists working group situations. There is an emphasis on relationships, interpersonal skills and understanding of groups and organisations. It is argued that the findings of this research suggest that attending a group relation conference can contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding associated with these aspects of professional training. It is also noted that the limitations of this research design must be recognized and that further research may help to establish a clear position.

While the discussion here has focused on those training educational psychologists, it is however reasonable to assume that those involved in training allied professionals may also be interested in these findings. In addition, more experienced professionals from different backgrounds may also gain insight into the experience of attending a group relations conference and draw their own conclusions.

Finally, in this part, consideration may be given to those involved in organizing and delivering group relations conferences. This research is offered to the reader to interpret as they choose. It is argued here that attention may be given to the theoretical underpinnings of the group

relations conference model, in particular, consideration may be given to psychosocial theory described in the discussion chapter. This framing is viewed as a theoretical development, building on the foundations of object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory. It is argued here that the psychosocial model is a theoretical articulation of what group relations conference offer in experiential terms.

#### **6.4. Future considerations**

It has been argued that group relations conferences could make a valuable contribution to the training of educational psychologists (and allied professions), in terms of developing knowledge and understanding of groups and organisations, relationships and interpersonal skills. It has also been argued that attending a group relations conference can provide members with a stimulus to reflect on their identity and the self in role.

Future research may focus on the learning experience and influence on practice, from a range of research paradigms. Researchers will define the focus of their enquiry and the strengths and limitations of their particular research design. It is suggested here that consideration may be given to a range of possible areas for future exploration associated with group relations conferences, including the accounts of more experienced professionals and the experience of allied professionals (and allied professionals in training).

In addition, the themes of existential questioning and multiple social identities, including ethnicity and gender was highlighted in the discussion of findings. There is scope for future research to explore such themes.

This research may be of interest to those designing and delivering group relations conferences. A particular emphasis that has emerged from this research focuses attention on how these

professionals might describe their activities in relation to psychosocial theory. Consideration may also be given to exploration of the group relations conference as a forum to explore the death instinct (Freud, 1930).



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## **8. APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Information sheet and consent form**

##### **Information sheet**

##### **An exploration of trainee educational psychologist's experience of attending a group relations conference using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

The following information is aimed at ensuring that you have a clear understanding of why this research is being undertaken and what it would involve from your point of view. The reason for sharing this information is to ensure that you would be in a position to give informed consent, should you agree to participate.

##### **What is the purpose of the research?**

Educational psychologists have a unique role in supporting children and families.

Practitioners use a wide range of skills which include regular involvement in a variety of groups to promote wellbeing, inclusion and access to the broad curriculum.

The Tavistock training course for educational psychologists includes attendance of an experiential group relations conference. This research aims to explore this aspect of training. More specifically, this research will focus on an exploration of how trainee educational psychologists view their attendance of an experiential group relations conference in relation to (i) individual learning and awareness (ii) perceived influence of behaviour in role.

This research may inform and generate questions for those designing courses for trainee educational psychologists. There may also be relevance to more experienced educational psychologists and allied professions.

### **Why ask trainee educational psychologists at the Tavistock?**

The British Psychological Society requires competencies which make direct reference to educational psychologists working collaboratively in group situations. These competencies may be seen to correspond to the aims of group relations conferences as described by Obholzer, where the intention is for participants to return to the 'back-home' work-settings 'better able to exercise their own authority and to manage themselves in role' (Miller 1990, p47).

The literature does not describe the experience or learning from group relations conferences for trainee educational psychologists.

It is for these reasons that you are invited to participate in this research.

### **Do I have to take part?**

The decision to participate or to choose not to participate is yours. This information is aimed at helping you to make an informed decision and to provide informed consent.

If you wished to withdraw, that option would remain available until the point at which the data is analysed. You would not need to provide a reason for withdrawal.

### **What would happen if I take part?**

Two interview times would be arranged at the Tavistock at your convenience. One shortly after attending the group relations conference and one approximately six months later. This would be likely to last between 45 minutes to 60 minutes and you would be able to stop the interview at any time.

In the first interview I would ask questions primarily about the experience of attending the group relations conference. The second interview would have a greater emphasis on how you perceive that this training has influenced your practice.

An audio recording of the interview would be made and transcribed. If you chose to withdraw from the research in the agreed timeframe, the information gathered would be destroyed.

### **What are the possible benefits and risks?**

In the 'what is the purpose of this research?' section above, the potential for broader benefits of participation in this research have been described. At a more personal level, it may be seen that participation will provide a forum for your own reflection.

In relation to risk of harm, it is considered that participation is no greater a risk than that encountered in ordinary life. The type of discussion that would occur may be seen as similar in nature to that which may occur within a supervisory relationship and indeed, less formal conversations.

Should, however, there be any unexpected outcomes such as personal distress viewed as beyond my own competency to support, the appropriate source of professional advice would be recommended.

### **What if I complain?**

Should you have concerns about how you have been approached or treated during the research, these may be shared with myself and / or my research supervisor and / or the course director. Processes for managing the concern would be made transparent to you and a satisfactory outcome, from your perspective, would be sought.

**What about confidentiality?**

In accordance with the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS 2010) I would ensure that every person from whom data are gathered for the purposes of research consents freely to the process on the basis of adequate information and would be able, during the data gathering phase, freely to withdraw their consent and to ask for the destruction of all or part of the data they have contributed.

Furthermore any information provided, if published, will not be identifiable as being provided by particular individuals.

In addition, all records of consent, including audio-recordings, will be stored in the same secure conditions as research data, with due regard to the confidentiality and anonymity and will involve the storage of personal identity data in a location separate from the linked data.

**What will happen to the findings of the research?**

A summary of findings will be sent to you and you will be invited to make any comments you may wish to. You will not be identified in any write-up or publication.

**Contact details for further information or discussion:**

Please contact Dale Bartle, Educational Psychologist at  
dalebartle@warwickshire.gov.uk or telephone 01926 418 284.

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

**CONSENT FORM**

Title of research:

An exploration of trainee educational psychologist's experience of attending a group relations conference using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Name of researcher:

Dale Bartle

Please initial on the dotted line below should you agree to the statement.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (----) for the research outlined above and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the data will be analysed (date -----), without giving any reason.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. I agree to take part in the research.

-----

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Name of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2

## Overview of themes from initial interview

Theme	Participant / line	Key words
CHAOS	P4, 275 P3, 138 P2, 159 P1, 308	It became chaotic so quickly There was a lot of confusion Get carried away in the process Swept up
CONFUSION	P3, 239 P2, 250 P1, 315 P4, 8	I didn't really know what was going on Overwhelmed by complexity Loads of thoughts Difficult to talk about it
CONFLICT	P1, 148 P3, 132 P4, 561 P2, 258	Dog eat dog Quite, erm, aggressive in a sense I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups Where the conflict lies
COPING	P4, 478 P3, 28 P2, 169	To change my plan and protect myself Within my group I felt safe How much one might let these feelings affect me
IDENTITY	P2, 169 P1, 838 P3, 240 P4, 501	Me and my being More self-aware A real loss of identity What they see when they see me

**Overview of themes from follow-up interview**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT / LINE</b>	<b>KEY WORDS</b>
GROUP AWARENES S	P4, 78  P2, 212  P1, 13  P3, 211	Speaking explicitly about group dynamics  I started noticing ... quite healthy conflict  Thinking more dynamically, so group dynamics  Thinking about groups now in a different way
SELF AWARENES S	P2, 316    P1, 65  P4, 417    P3, 205	My personal qualities ... enhance my professional  As a professional but also a trainee  I also have attachment relationships that ... play into group dynamics  I am who I am, I am myself and I and a psychologist

### Thematic overview P1 (initial interview)

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>CHAOTIC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pace</li> <li>- intensity</li> <li>- shock</li> <li>- confusion</li> <li>- complexity</li> <li>- loss autonomy</li> </ul>	324 649 161 315 / 463 558 308	how quickly all those emotions really shocked loads of thoughts / don't understand different levels swept up
<b>IDENTITY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- status</li> <li>- age</li> <li>- ethnicity</li> <li>- gender</li> <li>- role</li> <li>- self-awareness</li> </ul>	82 235 / 380 458 790 / 936 362 838	grappling with the title girl / lady the only [ethnicity described] girl one super man / role as a woman personal and professional more self aware
<b>FIGHT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- threat</li> <li>- exclusion</li> <li>- speaking out</li> <li>- conflict</li> </ul>	148 165 310 167	dog eat dog didn't want us being quite vocal tried to take over

### Thematic overview P2 (initial interview)

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>OVERWHELMING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- complexity</li> <li>-</li> <li>- carried away</li> <li>- difficult to articulate</li> <li>- intensity?</li> <li>- range of emotions</li> </ul>	250/ 55  159  504  35  79	Overwhelmed by the complexity / So many things could be said  Get carried away in the process  Its hard to summarise  The intensity of that kind of atmosphere  Such a wide range of emotions
<b>CONFLICT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identifying conflict</li> <li>- difference</li> <li>- inner conflict</li> <li>- freeze</li> </ul>	258  396  267  682	Where the conflict lies  Women managing competition  Shattered my idealisations  Stuck or frozen
<b>EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONNING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identity</li> <li>- valencies</li> <li>- personal / professional</li> </ul>	169  200  604	Me and my being / lost myself  My kind of positioning in groups  Inseparability of personal / professional
<b>COPING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- defenses</li> <li>- seeking meaning</li> <li>- ongoing process</li> </ul>	169  90  22	How much one might let these feelings affect me  Trying to kind of process and understand  Reassured by the possibility that processing continues

**Thematic overview P3 (initial interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>CHAOS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- intensity</li> <li>- lost</li> <li>- confusion</li> <li>- confusion</li> <li>- aggression</li> <li>- difficulty in articulating</li> </ul>	604 289 239 138 132 702	It felt really intense How easy it is to get lost when you're not sure I didn't really know what was going on There was a lot of confusion Erm, quite aggressive in a sense I can't fully describe it
<b>FIGHT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- displacement</li> <li>- shut out</li> <li>- fear</li> <li>- flight</li> <li>- fight</li> <li>- hatred</li> <li>- aggression</li> </ul>	118 201 62 453 124 189 132	My group that was displaced The door was shut in my face My hands were shaking Wanted to walk out We would take over a room I wanted to join the group that was hated Playfulness came out of me... quite erm aggressive in a sense as-well
<b>SURVIVAL and COPING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- security</li> <li>- personal authority</li> <li>- awareness</li> </ul>	28 638 710	Within my group I felt safe I can actually be more assertive I understand ... from a different perspective now

QUESTIONNING SELF		
- identity	240	A real loss of identity
- role	283	Who I am in the role
- difference	301	Race and gender
- development	676	It is about personal growth and development

**Thematic overview P4 (initial interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>CHAOS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chaos</li> <li>- Overwhelming</li> </ul>	275 8	It became chaotic so quickly Quite difficult to talk about it
<b>CONFLICT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- power</li> <li>- ethnicity</li> <li>- sabotage</li> <li>- vulnerability</li> </ul>	23 647 561 350	Taking, erm, dominant roles People from ethnic minorities felt disempowered I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups Vulnerable to getting hurt
<b>COPING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- protecting self</li> <li>- play</li> </ul>	478 395	to change my plan and protect myself to play around with how I acted
<b>SELF REFLECTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- awareness</li> <li>- identity</li> <li>- role</li> </ul>	580 501 483	It brought to my attention that this is something that I do What they see when they see me Yourself in role, and personally, you've got yourself



**Thematic overview P1 (follow-up interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>APPLYING LEARNING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group awareness</li> <li>- Leadership</li> <li>- Practice</li> </ul>	13 482 / 483 670	Thinking more dynamically, so group dynamics You need to have strong leadership / Clear Clearly define who is going to manage the meeting How many groups of professionals and systems ...
<b>SELF REFLECTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conflict</li> <li>- Status</li> <li>- Authority</li> <li>- Confidence</li> </ul>	25 65 762 82	I'd been trapped in a corner As a professional but also a trainee Taking up the authority to make a decision I wasn't so confident in my thought or may experience

**Thematic overview P2 (follow-up interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<p>TRANSFERRING LEARNING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Power</li> <li>- Systems</li> <li>- Conflict</li> <li>- Curiosity</li> </ul>	<p>101</p> <p>338</p> <p>212</p> <p>382</p>	<p>Top of that hierarchy</p> <p>It encouraged me to think about systems</p> <p>I started noticing ... quite healthy conflict</p> <p>Wondering why that happens and how that happens ... made me, erm, be more curious</p>
<p>SELF IN ROLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Taking authority</li> <li>- Personal qualities</li> <li>- Liberation</li> </ul>	<p>133</p> <p>316</p> <p>496</p>	<p>Manage ... voices that are perhaps too dominant</p> <p>My personal qualities ... enhance my professional</p> <p>Not bound by these group processes</p>

**Thematic overview P3 (follow-up interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<b>GROUP AWARENESS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding</li> <li>- conflict</li> </ul>	 211  471	Thinking about groups now in a different way  I see the conflict amongst staff
<b>SELF REFLECTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identity</li> <li>- personal and professional</li> <li>- self regulation</li> </ul>	 205  359  385	I am who I am, I am myself and I am a psychologist  How to manage those two faces really  Manage my own feelings

**Thematic overview P4 (follow-up interview)**

SO / themes	line	Key words
<p><b>GROUP AWARENESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group dynamics</li> <li>- Theoretical consideration</li> <li>- Regression</li> </ul>	<p>78</p> <p>133</p> <p>441</p>	<p>Speaking explicitly about group dynamics</p> <p>Where feelings are being projected into me</p> <p>It's not very long before we're acting like children</p>
<p><b>IDENTITY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role</li> <li>- Personal resources</li> <li>- Questioning</li> <li>- Biography</li> </ul>	<p>171</p> <p>155</p> <p>184</p> <p>417</p>	<p>That's the role that I often take</p> <p>Relying on a kind of internal skills</p> <p>What's professional, what's personal</p> <p>I also have attachment relationships that ... play into group dynamics</p>

### APPENDIX 3

#### Example of initial coding and emerging themes

##### Participant 3, interview 2 (191-216)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?

P3: ... No (laughs) I don't.

DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a trainee educational psychologist and the conference, **[trainee status]** erm, cos I think, like I said before, like developing on the course **[broader training context]** alongside the experience of group relations, it's been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am a psychologist in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a different way **[thinking differently about groups]**

#### **GROUP AWARENESS?**

that would be my personal development, my thinking, but then how that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role as a trainee educational psychologist **[trainee status]**

**IDENTITY?**

and so I think, yeah just every link that I've made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well...

## Example of initial coding and emerging themes

### Participant 3, interview 2 (188-216)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

think, and think to what's going on underneath [**what lies beneath?**] that, what is actually the reality, rather than just what is just presented to you.

DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?

P3: ... No (laughs) I don't.

DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a trainee educational psychologist [**trainee status**] and the conference, erm, cos I think, like I said before, like developing on the course alongside the experience of group relations, it's been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am a psychologist [**existential reflection**]

#### **IDENTITY?**

in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally [**the personal and the professional**] because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a different way [**shift in perception**]

**GROUP AWARENESS?**

, that would be my personal development, **[personal development through GRC?]** my thinking, but then how that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role as a trainee educational psychologist **[professional role and application]** and so I think, yeah just every link that I've made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well ...



## Example of initial coding and emerging themes

### Participant 1, interview 1 (125-149)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

P1: erm, and I don't really want to be a part of that and I thought, you know what, I'll leave you to it, you can have your, whatever you want (laughs) **[painful rejection?]**.  
And so they went off in a group.

And in the end was probably about 30 of us left. We didn't have a room, erm, **[lost, dislocated?]** we were... We went down to have a look, there were no rooms available, so it was a case of trying to find a room and negotiate with the other groups. Erm, how to work around the rest of the task. Erm, that was also interesting as well because everything happened so quickly, **[pace, intensity?]** that I sat there thinking what the hell is going on? How is everyone got together, what has happened, and how have we then left with 30 of us without a room? The group seemed to disperse a bit, so we ended up with about 20, five or six had gone off and, **[fragmenting?]** in the process of us trying to find a room, they'd obviously gone into other groups. Erm,

DB: what was that like?

P1: it was strange, because it seemed to be bigger and all of a sudden, it was like, where have they gone? **[rejection?]**

### **ABANDONMENT?**

And then, and then I got the sense that, erm, it was er, the saying that dog eat dog world, **[threat, conflict]**

### **CONFLICT?**

that everyone was in for themselves. And that seemed to snowball **[escalation?]**, I mean, I felt quite compelled to be ...

## Example of initial coding and emerging themes

### Participant 4, interview 1 (464-478)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

P4: and I was all happy to see it as a game [**play?**] until I saw people crying, then I thought this isn't a fun game, this is upsetting people, [**distress**] and I just

#### **DISTRESS?**

wondered what kind of support they had, once they'd re-engaged with something, so painful memories [**past experiences?**] of whatever it is. Erm, it doesn't have to be the example I gave, it can be loss or it can be feeling victimised or feeling, erm, you know, erm, excluded. [**rejection?**] And then you bring it all up, and then what happens?, Do you know what it was?, What happened? Christmas happened. [**anger, frustration?**]

#### **ANGER?**

So what's that, what's that about? [**anger?**] I think that, that's when I felt uncomfortable about it, and that's when I made a decision to protect myself [**self protection, vulnerability?**] and see it more as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect myself.

#### **SELF PROTECTION?**

**APPENDIX 4****Transcript of initial interview: participant one**

1 DB: okay, so my first question is to ask you if you could talk to me about what it was  
2 like to attend a group relations conference

3

4 P1: (laughs) erm, it was interesting it erm, I mean it stirred a lot up in me which I  
5 didn't realise was there I suppose and since being on group relations I've had quite a  
6 lot of time to reflect especially in my supervision in my CAMHS placement. Erm, we  
7 went into it with all these myths, all these things, about you know ,it's going to be like  
8 this, it's life changing, and you know, you just have to bear it. So it was kind of what  
9 on earth are we going into for a whole week, that's meant to be bad (laughs) but life  
10 changing at the same time. So I kind of just approach it like it will be what it will be,  
11 erm let's just go with it and let's see how it ends up.

12

13 Erm, so it first started with the big spiral in the middle and everyone sitting there. Oh  
14 no sorry they had a conference first, and I didn't mind so much of the big silences it  
15 kind of felt like our experiential groups, just on a larger scale and everyone sitting  
16 facing each other, and because we sat at the back it kind of, I felt okay with the  
17 silence. And although a lot of people didn't, and they started vocalising that which  
18 was interesting to see how human, how human behaviour... Like a domino effect  
19 basically it was silent for so long, as soon as one person spoke, it led to a whole load  
20 of other people, erm, it was Monday morning and I was tired, and so I just thought  
21 I'm going to let it be (laughs), I just couldn't be bothered to say much (laughs). So  
22 went with it, just sat back and watched. And then we have the big, erm, spiral, year,  
23 I'm sure it was the spiral... No, it was getting into groups. And that was interesting  
24 because they had all 100 or so of us in the big room.

25

26 DB: yep

27

28 P1: and they just asked us to walk around, and they asked us to gravitate towards  
29 whoever without talking, to form these groups that we would have mini experiential  
30 daily. Erm, I mean it was strange, but I thought let's go with it, let's see what  
31 happens. I kind of walked around for a bit, I wasn't sure what I was gravitating  
32 towards, or what I was looking for, erm our cohort of decided beforehand, erm, that it  
33 might be a good idea to split applications to see how we worked separately and if we  
34 end up coming together that might be a good thing as well. Erm, but none of this was  
35 planned in this group, so we kind of just went with it, I remember walking halfway  
36 across the room and just stood there, and all of a sudden all of these people started  
37 coming towards me. So I thought oh great don't have to do anything (laughs). Erm,  
38 but it was quite as well, nice coming together because it was such a mix of mix of  
39 genders, mix of ages, erm, mix of ethnicities. So I think it was a fairly even mix, there  
40 was about seven or eight of us in the end. Erm, which was really nice, and that  
41 worked well. Erm, and so those experiential groups were probably one of the best  
42 things that I really enjoyed about group relations. Probably because it was so  
43 consistent, that we knew that it would be the same group at that time daily. And, erm,  
44 it didn't seem to be a struggle in the experiential it was, all these different discussions  
45 coming about, but everyone was polite, in the sense that it wasn't, I didn't get the  
46 sense that anyone was there to challenge on purpose, to be difficult, to create that  
47 tension. I mean if something came up, it was brought up, but I felt that we dealt with it  
48 quite comfortably and professionally. It wasn't a case of, I personally didn't feel my  
49 personal emotions came into it as such. As compared to other situations, where I did  
50 find myself getting very emotionally charged.

51

52 DB: right

53

54 P1: yeah (laughs), erm, but it was probably, because it was such a relaxed  
55 environment. It was quite controlled, and it was in a circle, and it was well managed.  
56 Erm, and I did find it interesting with different ethnicities coming up. I was the only  
57 [ethnicity described] ... Sorry, the only [ethnicity described] girl in the group, there  
58 was another [ethnicity described] woman, erm and a few Caucasian people and a  
59 black man and a black woman as well. Erm, and so it was a great mix of people from  
60 completely different backgrounds and professionals as well which was nice.

61

62 Erm, I found myself grappling with the title of erm, being a student, but then being a  
63 trainee educational psychologist. So finding the difference between the student and  
64 professional and where that came into the mix in that particular group, erm, because  
65 there were a couple of other students on the course as well, but they, I mean there  
66 was a student social worker as well but she just, erm, stated herself as a student and  
67 that was it. But there was a trainee clinical psychologist, and she regarded herself as  
68 a trainee there as opposed to a student, so, so that was interesting dynamics.

69

70 DB: yeah

71

72 P1: (Pause)

73

74 DB: you mentioned some emotionally charged experiences?

75

76 P1: erm (laughs), yeah, so I mean, I suppose I started with the, the best thing of  
77 group relations, erm, I suppose it was more to do with, erm, one of the bigger events,  
78 where we have to get ourselves into groups, as a big group. Erm, and sitting and I  
79 took more of a passive role, and I sat back, just to kind of see, I, I found myself more  
80 as a logical thinker, so I thought, how will they do this logically, where is the logic in

81 trying to group everyone together. Erm, lots of people just couldn't really handle,  
82 being in that room and deciding how to get together. So quite a few ran out, they just  
83 decided to go off, erm, that seemed to then start the domino effect again and a lot of  
84 them people, erm, started grappling together forming quick groups, oh I'm in this  
85 group, who wants to be here, who wants to be there. Erm, and there was another  
86 Indian woman, I figure was about three or four of them on the course, on the whole  
87 group relations.

88

89 DB: yeah

90

91 P1: Erm, and then we got off into different groups, and she kind of stated, at the  
92 beginning, I want to work with men. And so all these men then gravitated towards  
93 her, and I kind of felt, well you said you wanted to work with men and seem to impl...  
94 like I suppose unconsciously imply, you don't really want to work with women?  
95 Thinking like unconsciously, erm, and I don't really want to be a part of that and I  
96 thought, you know what, I'll leave you to it, you can have your, whatever you want  
97 (laughs). And so they went off in a group.

98

99 And in the end was probably about 30 of us left. We didn't have a room, erm, we  
100 were... We went down to have a look, there were no rooms available, so it was a  
101 case of trying to find a room and negotiate with the other groups. Erm, how to work  
102 around the rest of the task. Erm, that was also interesting as well because everything  
103 happened so quickly, that I sat there thinking what the hell is going on? How is  
104 everyone got together, what has happened, and how have we then left with 30 of us  
105 without a room? The group seemed to disperse a bit, so we ended up with about 20,  
106 five or six had gone off and, in the process of us trying to find a room, they'd  
107 obviously gone into other groups. Erm,

108

109 DB: what was that like?

110

111 P1: it was strange, because it seemed to be bigger and all of a sudden, it was like,  
112 where have they gone? And then, and then I got the sense that, erm, it was er, the  
113 saying that dog eat dog world, that everyone was in for themselves. And that seemed  
114 to snowball, I mean, I felt quite compelled to be with the group and there was three of  
115 my cohort members, erm, in the group as well, just because we'd b... left there, so  
116 we kind of felt a sense of, okay, we're together this was us, this was how we ended  
117 up being formed, so we'll stay together. Erm, and then when discussing with the  
118 other groups how to negotiate the room and whether to smaller groups could join so  
119 we could have one of their rooms or if we could join a group, erm, two of the eight  
120 groups had only turned up and responded and I just thought how interesting that our  
121 society as a whole thinking systemically, erm, this is how people can be rejected and  
122 left out, but it was a horrible feeling. Like, and I was really shocked how people, we're  
123 working as a group, this was date to wall really and they all, there was like passion,  
124 there was no care, and then reflecting on it afterwards with a couple of my cohort  
125 members who were part of the group that didn't want us, I mean they felt the sense  
126 that we were going to infiltrate them and they kept people in the room just in case  
127 some of us tried to take over, and it felt so childish! And I thought, we're grown-ups  
128 and web professionals and and professionals at, and this is so weird, like who does  
129 this? It was really interesting (laughs), and I was just, yeah...

130

131 DB: how did you make sense of that?

132

133 P1: (laughs) erm, I didn't really, I was a bit, I was... That was the day, that was the  
134 afternoon that was very emotionally charged, because there was so much going on,  
135 so quickly, I didn't have any control over it, and I think that was the biggest being that  
136 lack of control and the lack of logical thinking in how we all go to work together, and



137 the whole sense of working together, that seem to have been completely lost in it,  
138 erm, I mean eventually one of the groups did agree for us to join them and those  
139 difficulties in that, just trying to emerge anyway and we spent quite a lot of the rest of  
140 the afternoon, trying to decide how that worked, how everybody felt about joining...  
141 erm, and how we felt grateful for them letting us in, but some of their members  
142 weren't so happy, they felt that we had come in and taken over and then that original,  
143 the Asia... the Indian girl with tha... with all the men around her in a group, erm, their  
144 group came in to observe and erm one of them had made a comment about, erm, we  
145 don't hardly have any people in our group and, erm, we're... they're struggling in our  
146 group, erm, and we felt that a lot of people didn't want to pick our group because it  
147 was black and Asian people (laughs). And it was a really strong statement, but I  
148 found myself thinking, hold on, that's, that's, so, like, I had to voice it, I just I think it  
149 ... There was so much going on and it all went that I did just ended up voicing it, and  
150 you know, I'd say, I did say that that was an unfair comment to state even though  
151 they might have felt like that, it was unfair then to put it on others to say it was  
152 because solely of race that we didn't pick them, when clearly there were other things  
153 going on,, everything happened so quickly and as a group who felt know what  
154 wanted to be with them because of that they didn't even respond to the to the 20 odd  
155 people who have been left behind. Erm, who didn't have you didn't have a gr... He  
156 didn't have a room, so those so many issues there, one of the issues was that we  
157 didn't have enough people, but yet there was 20 people who wanted to join and then  
158 the other issue was because with black and Asian. Yeah but, then the rest of the g...  
159 There's loads of other black and Asian is on this course as well and how can you say  
160 that because you're then discriminating against the ... yeah, it was like (laughs),  
161 woah. So that, was an emotionally charged afternoon, and we didn't, have a review  
162 at the end, so I was left with a lot of that that evening and trying to a lot of the pre... a  
163 lot of everything that had happened that particular day. (Pause), yeah,(Laughs).  
164

165 DB: and how did that go, that sort of making sense?

166

167 P1: difficult, it was really difficult, and I think I'm still kinda going through it Still,  
168 because it was ... I really it brought up a lot, it brought up the issues of being left as  
169 a group, and what that means wider, you know when people are left out in society  
170 and you get refugees and people get left without homes, and all that, and those  
171 feelings and how you perceive those people and how you perceive yourself in one  
172 way can be completely different to other people. The whole race and ethnicity thing.  
173 And that was a big one, it was, and I kind of felt, where does my place fitting with  
174 that, as an [ethnicity described] woman, erm, and how did that and and being the  
175 [ethnicity described] woman in our group at the time, I was the one that then spoke  
176 about that. But there was another [ethnicity described] girl in the group, who, she was  
177 all by cohort, when I reflection I thought, 'cause then I thought, oh my God, I  
178 sounded so unprofessional, 'cause in me I felt like I was getting them up and like  
179 shouting, well I was sitting in my seat, but for them, they were like, no, you  
180 articulated it well, it didn't feel like you were shouting, you just put your point across,  
181 But it wasn't in an aggressive manner, wearers, because I could feel the rage  
182 building up. And that was interesting as well, to then de-pick how I felt at the time and  
183 how I perceived myself. But wasn't necessarily how others may have perceived me,  
184 or how I appeared, as well. Erm, And tried to keep control of bit I suppose, and  
185 yeah, I think that was the other thing and then realizing that they'd all... 'cause I kept  
186 picking up my hand, like rubbing it, and then I realized that was my form of anxiety  
187 coming through and that was how I was trying to deal with it. As opposed to  
188 vocalizing it. So... yeah...

189

190 Cause I don't, I've found myself, but I'm not really put in a lot of challenging positions  
191 like that, especially, when I felt, I know it wasn't, like a bit of a personal attack as  
192 well. And haven't come across, haven't come across something like that for a long

193 time, and so it was very, okay, and I think because of the situation we were in and I  
194 suppose feeling very vulnerable as well being left out and, erm, only having just  
195 joined this group, and then there was anxiety from people saying oh we don't really  
196 want you to join (laughs), and, and then them coming in, (laughs), so, yeah, there  
197 was a lot going on.

198

199 DB: yeah

200

201 P1: yeah (laughs)

202

203 DB: I'm just wondering, what reflections around that, those themes that you've talked  
204 about, you might have had subsequently? Perhaps in discussion with others, or on  
205 your own reflections, to think about what might have been going on from your point of  
206 view in that situation?

207

208 P1: yeah... erm... I think it was more erm, I think it was the whole thing that it was, it  
209 was a strange situation to be put in, I think group relations as a whole was just  
210 strange (laughs). It was... it wasn't, it wasn't, reality I suppose, and I think that's how  
211 I've deconstructed it afterwards that, it wasn't reality it was this... what do they call it?  
212 ... Oh, temporary organisation, so we kind of... That T... That was whole tone, it was  
213 a temporary organisation. It wasn't real as such. Erm, and it kind of felt, I mean for  
214 me, it made me realise how how quickly I suppose I could get swept up in the whole,  
215 erm, in how quickly things can unfold I suppose.

216

217 DB: yeah

218

219 P1: I mean it hap ... Everything happened so quickly, thinking back to it, erm, and  
220 one thing led to another, led to another, and the whole domino thing. Erm, a lot of the

221 reflections at the end of the group relations were there seemed to be loads of  
222 polarities and and loads of contrasts, it was one way or another, erm, and for me I  
223 think I felt there wasn't much of a middle ground. The middle ground seemed to have  
224 got lost in all of that, erm, for a lot of the whole week, erm, and I thought I had that  
225 middle ground in the experiential group,

226

227 DB: yeah

228

229 P1: because it was that time then to reflect and think carefully, erm, about what was  
230 being discussed and how to respond and how my emotions were coming, whereas in  
231 that big kerfuffle of the big group, there was so much going on, there were so many  
232 people, that it was very easy to be swept up in that. And I noticed that especially in  
233 the spirals, erm, on the first few days, erm, I found myself commenting and being  
234 quite vocal, a few times, erm, and then one day I thought I'm going to sit back and  
235 stay silent and let's see what happens. Let's see what thoughts come up in my head,  
236 how I don't vocalise them, how that makes me feel, erm, and that was very  
237 interesting because, there were loads of thoughts arising in my head and I thought I  
238 could say this, and as I was about, I thought maybe I should, and then someone else  
239 would say it. Or something else would happen. And there didn't seem that space or  
240 that... Even those few seconds just for reflection and I think that was what was really  
241 significant as well for me, just having that time to reflect and, er, knowing how quickly  
242 it can be taken without being realized. Erm, and the consequent (laughs) the  
243 consequent actions that could happen from that, or your thoughts or feelings and  
244 emotions as well. How quickly they can be side swept.

245

246 DB: yeah

247

248 P1: yeah.

249

250 DB: and do you feel you've had opportunity to talk through, some of your, sort of,  
251 thoughts following those kind of events you've described?

252

253 P1: yeah, I mean it in my supervision with my CAMHS tutor we have spoken quite a  
254 lot about group relations and how I have... What I feel I've learned from it and how,  
255 some of the things I've learned from it, how I can apply it in my work, erm, and I think  
256 should be one of the biggest things as well came as, erm, my role as an [ethnicity  
257 described] woman and how that fits into the role of educational psychologist, or a  
258 psychol... Because she is a clinical psychologist, so we are always having those  
259 discussions, erm, and in a professional role and in a um, you know, in a world where,  
260 erm, there are multi-ethnicities, so you could find that in your profession, or when I  
261 did work in [names local authority], it wasn't very multi-ethnic, some of the schools  
262 especially, erm, and how I found that, erm, and I don't think I reflected much on it  
263 previously, before group relations, I kind of just went with, yeah, I'm an [ethnicity  
264 described] woman, you know, I'm here with a different colour to some of the other  
265 people, but this job is still the same, I'm still do the same thing, I'm no different. Erm,  
266 but that really highlighted that the resulted from this and it's quite a big difference and  
267 I think it was one of the big group tasks, erm, where I reflected, and then, a lot, the  
268 three other [ethnicity described] women were very vocal on all the big group tasks.  
269 And I found that very interesting, I thought so where does that leave me then as the  
270 fourth [ethnicity described] woman and the one who wasn't as vocal as them, found  
271 myself being more vocal than I probably would have done, but not as much as them.  
272 Erm, and how and how does that leave me in my role and in you know, personal and  
273 professional and thinking, erm, thinking about a case that we've been doing in su...  
274 in CAMHS, erm, with the Somalian family and the mum's not as vocal and I was  
275 thinking what does it mean, erm, perhaps for ethnic women, erm coming in, and do  
276 they feel, they have to speak up and say they have their voice and so they can be

277 heard, and that's how they have to be, all, can there be that middle ground, where  
278 they don't have to talk so much and what does it mean when they don't talk so much,  
279 because this mother that we are dealing with, she is not very vocal and, how is she  
280 expressing herself, and how are we able to extract that information and work with her  
281 as best we can, given those difficulties and understanding where she might be  
282 feeling. Erm, in relation to her being client and busy professionals I suppose, so, and  
283 I think that really resonated with me, thinking how, how to wind them when I go into  
284 these schools and I see these teachers and I see parents, erm, how am I then  
285 perceived, erm, as a young [describes ethnicity] lady. And, erm, how much of what I  
286 say, is, erm, taken into account or taken for granted, depending on how much I say.  
287 And I think it was when we did our final review, and I brought this up in the review,  
288 and I said I think this is one of the biggest things for me from group relations, is, erm,  
289 where does my role, me personally fit, erm given in this big conference, there were  
290 those three other [describes ethnicity] ladies, but they were so vocal. And a couple of  
291 the members, they were so sweet, and they, they did bring, because I was like, am I  
292 talking enough? And, it, when I talk, is it making sense? Or is it just talking for the  
293 sake of talking? Erm, and a lot of them did say that, no, when you do speak up, it  
294 makes sense what you're saying and then you leave it like that. So you're not just  
295 talking for the ... Yeah, not talking to have your voice heard because of your  
296 ethnicity, I suppose, or your gender... so yeah (laughs). Yeah. Quite a lot.

297

298 DB: yeah. And it sounds like something that you're continuing to be thoughtful about.

299

300 P1: mmm, mmm.

301

302 DB: okay, I think we've touched on some of these, erm, things, but I'm going to ask  
303 the question, in terms of, your personal learning, erm, and any thoughts you might

304 have, erm, and be happy to share, erm, in terms of what you might have learnt about  
305 yourself during the group relations conference.

306

307 P1: erm, I suppose learning how quickly I can get erm, swept up in a flurry of things,  
308 especially that incident, erm, with the whole group being left, erm, and the  
309 confrontation about ethnicity, erm, being brought up, erm, and for me I suppose, erm,  
310 learning to deal with that, and finding different ways of having to be very mindful of  
311 erm, how easy it can be to get swept up in these things, erm, and I think I had a, erm,  
312 I mean it was not similar, but I suppose, erm, I had one of my first meetings with a  
313 parent and a SENCO, erm, and I was doing a consultation with them, erm, and going  
314 on to do a developmental char... Checklist, erm, and I found, that the SENCO got  
315 very excited and, erm, she ended up, I suppose leading a lot of the meeting and a lot  
316 of my questions then it didn't get answered very well, but I got so swept up in all of  
317 that and losing track of where I wanted to go that I missed certain questions, certain  
318 answers, erm, then when I reflected back on it in supervision, it was a case of having  
319 to take charge in that, and I suppose there was a, a wide range of things there, in  
320 that, erm, being aware of the room, being aware erm, of the people I'm working with,  
321 erm, and their best interests, the child's interests, erm, my role as a trainee coming  
322 into, I know it was my first meeting, in, on my own, where I started the eps, erm, and  
323 my personal confidence in that, in my role, you know, I was the one that called that  
324 meeting there and I need to kind of just have that little bit more confidence in myself  
325 to take back chargeback and say, okay thank you, but I'm trying to stick to this  
326 (laughs), erm, and I suppose, yeah, so reflecting back on group relations, trying to,  
327 have that confidence, okay, in myself to take charge, and take a step back, and  
328 perhaps step up and say no okay wait let's, I need a minute, I suppose, erm

329 DB: yeah

330

331 P1: maybe not vocalising it but, just kind of having that there? Erm, yeah, and erm,  
332 yeah (pause). I mean being aware, I suppose of my, erm, own anxieties as well. I  
333 think a lot of group relations brought up quite a few anxieties I had but I didn't realise  
334 I had I suppose

335

336 DB: right

337

338 P1: erm, you know one was ----- my role erm, professionally, erm a student, a trainee  
339 (laughs), erm, one being, my ethniss... Ethnicity, you know it is a part of work (?), It's  
340 can I have a role some way in, in my profession and my personal life, and how that  
341 manifests itself, you know, may not be so obvious, but there will be subtle moments  
342 where you know, I just kind of need to be aware of the I suppose erm and how I also  
343 feel against, not against, how I feel mys... Because I suppose in this cohort I am the  
344 only [describes ethnicity] girl, [describes ethnicity] girl in the group, so that defines  
345 me, well not like the [describes ethnicity] girl, but I don't, on group relations because  
346 there was the three others I felt a kind of sen... Erm, like there was a sense of the  
347 challenge there with them. And there was hostility, and I don't understand where it  
348 came from, and I don't understand why it was there especially with, it was more with  
349 the one girl that said I want to be with the men and then came and made the  
350 comment. Erm, I mean the other two were fine they were friendly and and smiling,  
351 but she was quite hostile, and it, and it made me realise, that erm, in [describes  
352 ethnicity] culture girls can be quite hostile towards each other, I'm still trying to  
353 understand where that comes from, how, why that is erm, how to overcome that,  
354 especially professionally, erm, because I'm sure if I saw her in a professional meeting  
355 it wouldn't have been so, and I hope it wouldn't have been so hostile for no reason.  
356 So it was interesting to see dynamics of that and how that comes in itself and how I  
357 could erm then, how that will then work with me in my work as well, especially if I'm  
358 working with [describes ethnicity] family for instance, erm, or a young [describes



359 ethnicity] girl , or an [describes ethnicity] girl and how that may come out which is yet  
360 to show itself (laughs).

361

362 DB: sure. And you mentioned you became aware of a number of anxieties?

363

364 P1: yeah. Erm, I think it was, I think the anxieties were, erm, the loss, the lack of  
365 control and how much I feel I, pu... Personally and professionally, more probably  
366 personally, erm, how I really much like to be in control of a lot of things erm, I'm very  
367 much a planner, so you know, in five years I want to do this and this, and I su... And  
368 that's how I suppose I got to this goal, I made the plan to do this work, and, which is  
369 why there's been so much (laughs), erm, to get to this point

370

371 DB: yep

372

373 P1: erm, it hasn't, I'm not, I'm not a person to just kind of thing I mean let's just go  
374 with it and see what happens, I d... I, that doesn't feel comfortable for me at all. And I  
375 think that was the biggest, that was one of the anxieties that came up,

376

377 DB: mmm

378 P1: erm, probably before I would try to just let it simmer erm but whilst being in group  
379 relations there was no, there was a very minimal lack of control in that, erm, so,  
380 having to deal with that for a week, not knowing what was going to happen next and  
381 whether we'd be in a spiral again and what would happen in the spiral and, yeah...

382

383 DB: how did you deal with that?

384

385 P1: Erm, (laughs), I (pause), I suppose I erm, in the first group, in the first big group I  
386 kind of just thought, let's just see where this goes, let's see how it happens and I

387 found myself going with it, getting quite swept up in the discussion and being a bit  
388 vocal as well. Erm, and then when I chose not to be vocal, I did find it quite  
389 uncomfortable sitting there, erm, listening and, not... I don't know, it's difficult, it,  
390 because she didn't know the direction of the discussion and then when, where the  
391 discussion did kind of go in a particular way for whatever reason, or whatever  
392 subject to that came up, erm, yeah. I think, I think, I think I kind of, erm, I think in my  
393 mind there was so many thoughts going on I didn't feel like... I had control of myself.  
394 So I had control of my mind and my thoughts erm, and how much I would say and  
395 wouldn't say. So there was still at the level of control there I suppose to some extent,  
396 as opposed to no control. Yeah.

397

398 DB: mm hm

399

400 P1: it's like, I think that's how I dealt with it, that, if I can't control a situation I can kind  
401 of control myself a bit and where I can have some control over which group I'm in or  
402 what, or how it pans out because then when we got together as a group the second  
403 time, the second big group Erm, there was a lot more logical thinking in it, there was  
404 a lot more time taken to construct of the groups and I made the decision then I want  
405 to join this particular group erm, just to see how that works, it was multidisciplinary  
406 group, and erm, I was interested in working with different professions to see how it  
407 comes togeth... So I thought oh I will go there erm, and then having that control  
408 there, which worked quite nicely

409

410 DB: yeah?

411

412 P1: yeah (pause)

413

414 DB: thank you. Any other things that you noticed or would say that you learnt about  
415 yourself during the conference?

416

417 P1: I found myself saying 'interesting' a lot (laughs), to hear interesting, and trying  
418 (laughs), and trying to put meaning to the word interesting, what do, what did that  
419 mean for today how does, how does that, how does that manifest in itself, erm,  
420 because it was an interesting day but it was interesting on different levels, whether  
421 they were good or bad... I suppose not bad, erm, challenging, challenging would be  
422 the word and how I found myself dealing with that erm and I suppose also learning  
423 that you can be thrust into different situations w... erm, without knowing erm, going to  
424 a meeting and it could go completely different way or a different erm, concern could  
425 come from child that may not come through referral for instance erm, and how to  
426 erm, deal with my own emotions, and, and those challenges and erm using, that  
427 time to reflect I mean I've erm in by EPS placement we've started doing mindfulness,  
428 and I found that really helpful and I was reading one of the chapters this morning  
429 erm, about anxieties and Erm, having them and letting them sit with you and see how  
430 that feels for you. And I was thinking, oh I wish I had read this at group relations  
431 (laughs). It would have been very helpful then to have a three minute three things  
432 space (laughs). Erm, yeah so I suppose, and that's been very helpful as well just  
433 having that time those o... Given few moments, minutes, whatever, just to kind of  
434 stop and think

435

436 DB: yeah

437

438 P1: and see what's going on as opposed to being stuck on the auto pilot as they say

439

440 DB: yeah

441

442 P1: yeah, group relations felt at times a bit like auto pilot just being swept up into it  
443 and going with it

444

445 DB: could you say a bit more about that?

446

447 P1: yeah, erm, so I suppose with the autopilot erm, it's it's the sense that erm you go  
448 by your day without really noticing what's going on in the day erm you kind of wake-  
449 up do your work come home go to sleep and tha... and your days over, I came in,  
450 erm, didn't really know what was going on, but I went with it went with everything,  
451 didn't really stop to think I suppose, erm, I mean the review meetings at the end  
452 helped quite a bit to erm reflect on what had happened but I don't think there were  
453 long dinner, we were only given about 1015 minutes each so it was kind of a case of  
454 this really challenged me today or I really enjoyed this and that was it it was about as  
455 far as it went. Erm, and it, and because everything was erm the days, I f... I mean  
456 they were long days, but I felt that there went by very quickly and so it wasn't there  
457 wasn't really the space or time to stop and think, even at the lunch with get together  
458 with our cohort and be like oh this happened all that happened, you didn't...

459

460 DB: what was it like not having the space to stop and think?

461

462 P1: erm, difficult I think, I think that's why I found it challenging, it felt very  
463 overloaded, 'was very tired, it was very overloading, erm, mentally and physically I  
464 think. Lots of work going on, erm, and not, yeah and not really having the time to  
465 think, to reflect I suppose. It was like okay if I do this I need to do this or if I go in this  
466 group then we'll do this and this is our task and this is what we've got to do and there  
467 were so many different people with different things that they wanted to do with it, so it  
468 was, yeah... (Laughs).

469

470 DB: you also mentioned things were going on a number of levels, erm, I just  
471 wondered if you had any other thoughts in terms of things going on at other levels?  
472 From your point of view...

473

474 P1: erm...

475

476 DB: or different levels

477

478 P1: can't remember what I said (laughs), about levels, sorry. Erm, I suppose for me,  
479 erm, thinking back, there, erm I suppose were the highs and lows...

480

481 DB: right

482

483 P1: yeah, erm, yeah, I, with the highs and lows of the day and then the week as a  
484 whole erm and how much investment I suppose I put into a lot of it as well, I wanted  
485 to get the most out of it, so I wanted to invest myself in it as well, erm and with,  
486 although, investing myself fully, erm, I found that I was getting side swept with a lot of  
487 it so having erm I suppose the thing with the breathing space then was it the big  
488 spiral groups where erm, on the days that I chose not to be vocal where I could just  
489 sit and think and absorb and think about all of these things and how that worked erm  
490 and reflect that back in our experiential groups. We, because that was straight after,  
491 so that was helpful I think for me as opposed to investing fully into it getting side  
492 swept in the discussions and all those emotions which came with that, which is okay,  
493 erm...

494

495 DB: what do you mean by side swept?

496

497 P1: Erm I suppose erm, because the discussions were quite heated erm, those lots  
498 about gender erm professionals erm and just getting erm, I mean having my thoughts  
499 there but without having time to really think about them, suppose like you do in  
500 experiential, because you have that time to sit and think erm, as opposed to then  
501 just, just vocalising it there and then. You know the whole thing of saying without  
502 thinking in that really fell like what the spiral was, a lot of people were just saying  
503 without, and then you got the odd few who did really contemplate a lot and then  
504 spoke up erm, yeah.

505

506 DB: you mentioned highs and lows?

507

508 P1: (laughs) yeah, erm I, I suppose the highs being erm, the enjoyable parts of it, so  
509 you know meeting lots of different people which was really nice from lots of different  
510 professionals Erm, a lot of the social work students haven't heard of group relations,  
511 didn't really know what they were letting themselves in for erm so and a lot of them  
512 found difficulty in dealing with what it brought, erm, and having that sense of Erm,  
513 feeling quite nurtured by the tavi staff, erm, and we were given much information but  
514 we were given some which was very helpful erm, things like, erm, just remember to  
515 protect yourself and how much you choose to share, erm, is you know, your choice  
516 at the end of the day. And things like that I suppose, and times will get difficult and  
517 it's just how best you choose to deal with it. Erm, otherwise I suppose some of the  
518 other students there they didn't have any of that information, so they found it very  
519 difficult erm, and that in itself I suppose was difficult to see from our persp... From us  
520 because we wanted to help but they are in it now and how much more can you say  
521 and yeah...

522

523 DB: you said highs and lows...

524

525 P1: (laughs) erm, yes, so erm,

526

527 DB: it's your choice...

528

529 P1: yeah, I'm just trying to think I suppose the lows being erm, just being left I  
530 suppose especially of the day we were the group left out and all the other issues that  
531 came with erm, how vulnerable I was left feeling erm, and upset and angry erm and  
532 frustrated, I suppose frustrated with the system frustrated with myself, because it was  
533 and everyone else's fault, it was my fault too, you know I chose not to get into a  
534 group, I chose to sit passively, but within do it that I was left out, erm so it was a two-  
535 way situation

536

537 DB: yeah

538

539 P1: so that I suppose all those mix feelings, but it was mixed feelings towards myself  
540 and towards the rest of the, the rest of the group relations...

541

542 DB: how did you make sense of those mixed feelings?

543

544 P1: erm, Erm, upon Erm discussing it,, a week later in our experiential (laughs), in  
545 our tavi ten(?), experiential group

546

547 DB: yeah

548

549 P1: because I wasn't the only one with those feelings, there were the three others  
550 from the cohort in that group with me, who felt the same and through those  
551 discussions it was - yeah I felt like that to and yeah and, I made we'd had that  
552 discussion as a 20 of us, you know it wasn't, this was assistant as whole, we are part

553 of this system so everybody failed including us. So it was coming to that sentence as  
554 well that it's very easy to blame everyone else and it was very easy to blame, Erm,  
555 the first group that had just scattered off, but it wasn't all their fault, they had started  
556 something, but everyone else had a responsible part to play in that and including us  
557 and including me. Yeah, so I think through having those discussions, Erm, and then  
558 trying to make sense of all those feelings I was left with, because I think at the time  
559 the feelings were so strong, it was very difficult to make sense of. It was just very  
560 easy to say, oh my God I can't believe people are like this, I can't believe how  
561 childish it is, Erm, you know, it's been a rubbish ... Not rubbish day, it was a hard  
562 day. Erm, and being left with that, no review at the end erm, whereas the next day  
563 having those discussions, you know with my friends and reviewing back on the  
564 system as a whole, and those feelings, and those feelings can emerge in any one,  
565 and then having a review at the end of the second day and drinking that to light there  
566 as well...

567

568 DB: there's something about talking with other people?

569

570 P1: yeah, I think, I think it's very helpful to Erm, to have the discussions, so, as  
571 opposed to just thinking on my own by myself, Erm, because I felt like I had the  
572 support of my cohort there, erm, we never once got into a group together, we were  
573 all separated the whole time but it was so nice to know that I wasn't the only one  
574 going through it on my own. There were all 10 of us. We were all having completely  
575 different experiences (laughs), from each other, Erm, at different times, though, but it  
576 was nice that we had that support there from each other to go back to when we did  
577 and then to reflect on group relations, Erm, especially in our own personal  
578 experiential Erm, a week after

579

580 DB: yes



581

582 P1: so yes, that was very helpful

583

584 DB: and again, it's certainly your choice in terms of what you'd be happy to share, but

585 I'm just interested in that sort of reflections that you've had subsequent to the

586 conference. Erm, I think our biggest one was differences Erm, and what sort of stood

587 out to you, any kind of things that you took away from those kind of reflections

588 subsequently?

589

590 P1: yeah,, I think our biggest one was differences, that are, there are differences are,

591 obviously visible differences (laughs) erm, it's not just a group of 10 women Erm, with

592 very different 10 women and the differences that that brought. Erm, how we work

593 independently, erm, but that we can also come together as well. Erm, gender was

594 also a big one, erm, there weren't very many men on the group, but then they were

595 very vocal and gender was a massive thing that kept coming up throughout the

596 conference.

597

598 DB: right

599

600 P1: and us as an all-female cohort. How did that manifest with us with there being no

601 man on the group, Erm, and what does that mean. Yeah, I suppose what does that

602 mean for us erm...

603

604 DB: what thoughts have you got?

605

606 P1: yeah, I suppose Erm ... It was, it was interesting the group relations because

607 there was so few men, but there was this whole idea that there needed to be the one

608 super man or, I can't remember now, and the white male supremacy or something,

609 and it just kind of felt, Erm, I don't know, it didn't sit well with me. It, they, I felt that  
610 there was a lot more challenges between the men in the group, urban, than between  
611 women in the group, erm, and for me, as at 10, there hadn't been very many cha...  
612 They're probably hadn't been any challenges between us, erm, which has been nice,  
613 and we all get on really well. Erm, and I think if there were, if there were men in our  
614 group it'd be difficult to, I, dy... The dynamics would have changed, but it's hard to  
615 tell how. And I think, erm, yeah, I think it's hard to tell. Erm...

616

617 DB: any learning from the conference that might be relevant to that kind of question?

618

619 P1: yeah, I think... I think seeing where Erm, the male and female roles lie in the EP  
620 world and how, how you Erm, where, not defined, how, I suppose how easy, not  
621 even easy, Erm, I suppose what I'm trying to say is Erm, how many male principles  
622 you get many female principles you get and is it, as you, as you see in the business  
623 world, Erm, that men tend to do better in higher supreme of jobs Erm, than women  
624 Erm, but what is it about that, is that, is that something that seemed the, the  
625 educational psychology world? Erm, I don't yet know (laughs) urban, it's been quite a  
626 balance across the different EPS's I've worked in so far. Erm, but also there are a lot  
627 more females in the profession, and how does that then work by working with males  
628 and, erm, I think just being aware of that, that there is a big gender balance, sorry  
629 gender difference in the profession as it is. Erm, and me being a female being gone  
630 the majority (laughs), Erm, so yeah so seeing how that will come into play...

631

632 DB: I see

633

634 P1: yeah, I hadn't really thought about it, I suppose only now (laughs)

635

636 DB: okay, just going to offer, a last chance for any other reflections, any other things  
637 that have stood out to you or, sort of, been in your mind, subsequent to attending that  
638 relations conference?

639

640 And again I'm particularly interested in your, your personal learning and any learning  
641 about yourself that happened... could be any other thoughts that might, might be  
642 present?

643

644 P1: (pause) I suppose being , Erm, more self aware, so erm ... er, aware of, Erm, my  
645 presence and my role, in erm in, I suppose in my personal life, in Erm, in my families,  
646 so in my family and in my husband's family, erm, and we only got married last June  
647 so it's still a very new ish (laughs) and, Erm, and le... Learning that there are different  
648 dynamics, there are differences Erm, in different families and different people and so  
649 forth and how does my role, erm I suppose especially as the, the recently married,  
650 erm, you know new girl into the family, erm, how backstreets and how mindful I am of  
651 Erm, of where my, yeah of how mindful I am of how I see myself and how I wish  
652 others to perceive me as well. Yeah (laughs).

653

654 DB: could you say a bit more?

655

656 P1: yeah (laughs) Erm, I suppose Erm

657

658 DB: it's your choice though

659

660 P1: yeah, trying to think, Erm, so I suppose, how I was... How I want to see myself is  
661 Erm, I mean, being true to myself as the person I am Erm, being true to my family  
662 traditions, my personal family traditions, Erm and being brought up as a respectful  
663 girl. So being respectful of my husbands family Erm, not always agreeing with what

664 they say, but being respectful of that, erm, and the traditions that come with that  
665 (laughs) and I think, and I think from group relations that's probably something that  
666 did come up as well that being respectful of others. You may not always agree with  
667 what they have to say, all, erm, all their opinions, erm, and there are ways of putting  
668 your personal opinions across, but being respectful of theirs. And I think that's  
669 something massive in our, in the profession Erm, and also personally I suppose more  
670 now with being with a new family...

671

672 DB: yes

673

674 P1: so yeah, and how they perceive me in the sense, erm, whether or not they  
675 perceive that or whether they see something else, all if I do choose to challenge  
676 something Erm, because I don't sit comfortably with the thought of sitting quietly  
677 when I really don't agree with something and how I choose to betray that whether or  
678 not they see me as Erm, someone who is able to articulate themselves and also,  
679 Erm, I'm on a doctoral course, what that means for them, erm, a lot of my [family  
680 details] didn't go into further education so, this is different (laughs).

681

682 DB: yeah

683

684 P1: oh, and how ... Yeah. And the whole respect thing as well, whether they see me  
685 as respectful in that sense.

686

687 DB: and there's been some thinking that you've had that's been about your personal  
688 life as well. And self-awareness you've mentioned.

689

690 P1: mmm.

691

692 DB: any other thoughts around self-awareness?

693

694 P1: Erm, I think just, erm, being more aware, especially with doing mindfulness now

695

696 DB: yep

697

698 P1: of myself in a particular situation, erm, being mindful of all the things that I may

699 bring into the room, erm, by gender, my ethnicity, by profession, psychology (laughs),

700 erm, and Erm, and how others may perceive that, and how I wish to portray that

701 across, so yeah. So I suppose mindful in a sense, being aware of, erm, how I

702 articulate something, erm, depending on who I'm talking to, whether it's a parent or

703 child or a SENCO, or a fellow EP (laughs), how I, and how I also articulate not only

704 verbally, but also into words, because I've only just finished writing my first appendix

705 D, and erm, trying to put a lot of my findings into that in a specific way and quite, erm,

706 concisely,

707

708 DB: yeah

709

710 P1: erm, yeah, so being very aware and taking the time to think carefully around all

711 of those little processes

712

713 DB: yeah

714

715 P1: I gue... Especially the unconscious processes, erm, that can so easily just come,

716 come about suppose ... yeah

717

718 DB: the unconscious processes?

719

720 P1: Erm, I think unconsciously when you're not thinking about Erm, I suppose before  
721 group relations, I never really thought a lot about Erm, my ethnicity as such, erm,  
722 unconsciously more than you know is very visible (laughs), but I think what that  
723 means and what that brings Erm, and what that means to the person I'm speaking to,  
724 erm, and I suppose being aware of, of that, of my role as a woman, as a trainee, erm,  
725 and kind of as oppose to just thinking of it - oh it's just there, it's just a title or it's just  
726 whatever. Really trying to think how that might, erm, how that might come about in a  
727 meeting or in consultation, or wherever, or on the street, or in a shop or something,  
728 so

729

730 DB: yes

731

732 P1: yeah

733

734 DB: okay, erm, just before we stop erm, opportunity for any final reflections, any  
735 things that you haven't had the chance to mention...

736

737 P1: Erm, no, I think I've spoken about a lot...

738

739 DB: ok

740

741 P1: yeah

742

743 DB: okay Erm, well I'm going to stop there because we've got to stop somewhere.

744 Thank you.

745

**Transcript of initial interview: participant 2**

1

2 DB: okay, erm, I'm going to start by asking you, though, if you could talk to me about  
3 your experience of attending a group relations conference

4

5 P2: (laughs) gosh, that's a broad question (laughs), I wouldn't know where to start  
6 really...

7

8 DB: it's your choice

9

10 P2: Erm, (laughs), I think it was erm, a valuable experience - whiter consuming  
11 experience Barber, for that kind of week that it was in, it was quite Erm, taxing I think  
12 maybe is the word...

13

14 DB: mm hm

15

16 P2: both probably physically and mentally it was slightly....erm, that it's Erm, it's  
17 taxing to the point that I'm not sure how much was processed in that time and, I was  
18 quite reassured by the possibility that processing continues after that (laughs). Yeah.

19

20 DB: yeah

21

22 P2: a very rich week (laughs)...

23

24 DB: when you think about what comes to mind in terms of your experience of the  
25 group relations conference?

26

27 P2: I think the first kind of thought was the number of people (laughs), Erm, the large  
28 number of adults in a room, erm, just to the image of arm, when we were all gathered  
29 together in the lecture hall upstairs, erm, and the intensity of that kind of atmosphere.  
30 Erm, and I think that was the one kind of dimension of the kind of, the size of it  
31 perhaps erm, and the the kind of other dimen... the second thing that comes to mind,  
32 I don't know which comes first, but the second thing that comes to mind is (laughs), is  
33 the erm, the kind of personal intensity at the ends of these days when we had these  
34 kind of review and application groups. And yeah, so those kind of two...

35

36 DB: we take those in turn? Talk to me about the size...

37

38 P2: Erm, I couldn't tell you about the size, I guess it must have been about 70  
39 (laughs) people also about a dozen facilitators are, and different seating  
40 arrangements. Erm, that having one conversation as a large group like that which  
41 was I guess quite different from my experiences of those large group where there's  
42 all many maybe one or two people leading it and a lot of silent individuals (laughs)  
43 but, the firm, potential for everyone to participate over the time and erm, the kind of  
44 feeling that so many things could be said by each individual person and actually what  
45 does end up coming out and how it... what progresses into (laughs).

46

47 DB: what was it like?

48

49 P2: Erm, (pause), because it happened on a few occasions, I think the experiences  
50 were really, er, ranging, so you had, erm, moments of just kind of being overwhelmed  
51 by the intensity of it, moments of boredom and irritability of being sitting, Erm, for all  
52 those hours (laughs), Erm, a kind of, alarm, having, well not having but wanting  
53 maybe to concentrate and be present throughout the whole process and draw as



54 much as you can from it. Wanting to (sighs), to experience it perhaps (laughs) and  
55 make the most of it, erm, yeah, so... quite intensive...

56

57 DB: yeah

58

59 P2: and quite variable

60

61 DB: you mention intensity, can you help me to get a sense of what you're thinking  
62 there?

63

64 P2: I guess I'm thinking (pause) if I felt that I had such wide range of emotions over  
65 this. Multiply that by 70, and put them all in a room together, and I think the  
66 atmosphere holds it, and carries it, and picks it up and it's, it's there (laughs) and  
67 your kind of sitting in it (laughs)

68

69 DB: (laughs)

70

71 P2: so, erm, deciding, you know, how much to let in and how much to let out and  
72 how much to you know, managing your boundaries I guess and erm, just trying to  
73 understand a lot of the time what was being said and trying to kind of process and  
74 understand what other people were meaning by what they were saying and  
75 sometimes it going a bit over your head and sometimes being a bit irritated or  
76 aggravated by it or frustrated by it all bored by it (laughs), so yeah I think the intensity  
77 was more rollercoaster of all those experience encapsulated in this boundary of time,  
78 but repeated itself over the week (laughs) daily (laughs).

79

80 DB: you mentioned boundaries

81

82 P2: yeah I think deciding where you were going to, how you were going to position  
83 yourself, your level of participation, you're kind of, erm, your willingness to input and  
84 to, and to, I guess erm, get carried away by it perhaps or you're, you're kind of  
85 deciding erm, deciding your level of interest in it as well, and, erm, keeping it real  
86 (laughs), kind of almost forcing it to sit with you in a way that feels comfortable.  
87 Because, erm, I guess I'm assuming different people adopting different to different  
88 levels and to different erm, extents. And it's deciding wh, my opinion, you know,  
89 working out perhaps my opinion my stance and my... yeah (laughs)

90

91 DB: what did you mean 'keeping it real'?

92

93 P2: erm, I guess there were moments where things got quite, erm, perhaps abstract  
94 or I felt that the detail of thin... of things that were discussed by this whole group for  
95 example were not Erm, were all valid, but I'm kind of thinking, erm, but perhaps I, I,  
96 and this is deciding from me how much attention to pay to all this detail and erm,  
97 which detailed to pay attention to (laughs) to which extents, erm, and, erm, I guess  
98 keeping it real to, to me and to reality and I guess trying to almost merge it in with my  
99 personal stance in my (laughs), or trying to make that fitting. Erm, yeah I think  
100 (laughs), the abstractness in my language now is reflecting (laughs) how these  
101 conversations worked out at times from me. Yeah, I think that was kind of reflects my  
102 experience really.

103

104 DB: and you talked about sitting with it?

105

106 P2: yeah, mmm, so (pause), it feels a bit repetitive, but that, I think saying that, erm,  
107 so say, if there was a discussion about an unconscious process, and kind of me  
108 deciding how important I felt that is, and Erm, and how real that is to me. With my  
109 life, in my kind of perspective and attitude, so erm, yeah...

110

111 DB: could you say a bit more about that?

112

113 P2: so, erm, (pause), ok, so, I'm going to make it a concrete example now, I think  
114 that just bring it back down. Erm, so say, say if something was raised about kind of  
115 rivalry in-between individuals, and erm, you know hierarchies, er, but say a personal  
116 rivalry, and kind of, personal attacks that were potentially, there were potential  
117 feelings of. Erm, maybe me deciding, erm, okay that exists but if I had that feeling,  
118 how much attention do I want to pay to it, I want to keep it in perspective, I want to  
119 keep it, erm, (pause) I want to make the choice, t... For example to stay in control  
120 (laughs) to make the choice of, erm, how much attention I'm going to pay to that  
121 anger of that person and erm, (pause) managing it, I guess...

122

123 DB: you mentioned control?

124

125 P2: yeah, because I felt that (pause), erm, there is an element of, see, there was a  
126 kind of, there were times where I felt I could get carried away in the process and,  
127 erm, often it's very easy to just go with the flow of it all and I wanted to make sure  
128 that I'm, was always choosing to do that and it was always a choice and it feels a bit  
129 controlling, but I think it's a sense of keeping your boundaries and keeping your  
130 sense of, keeping your feet on the ground, and erm, making sure that I'm not blindly  
131 ta... Being taken up with a current of a thought. Erm, and that I'm actually making a  
132 choice, at times, it was staying in control of (pause), of, erm, (laughs), staying in  
133 control of, erm, how much one might let these feelings affected me and my being.  
134 Yeah. (Pause). Mmm. I've lost myself a bit too be honest.

135

136 DB: that's okay, erm, just going to kind of offer that question again, and it, it's any  
137 thoughts, erm, from your point of view, in terms of that experience of attending a  
138 group relations conference, what stood out to you from the experience?

139 P2: well I think what stood out was the erm, the awareness it raised in myself  
140 because I think there were lots of areas that I was unaware of and I have had  
141 glimpses towards that were made quite explicit over the week and, erm, and it was, it  
142 was kind of food for thought for the, so, I think there was erm, (pause), it felt like an  
143 awareness raising week. Erm, (unintelligible), and that continues (laughs) and I'm  
144 trying to kind of think about it... I've noticed it come to mind in, in situations, erm,  
145 personal situations, erm, I'm thinking because I spend more time at the moment in  
146 personal situations than I do in what feels like professional, sort of work placements  
147 situations, so, erm, facts, facts wearer feel the processing's happening (laughs).

148

149 DB: it's very much your choice, erm, as to what you would be happy to share, erm,  
150 I'm interested in what you say about that self-awareness, that personal awareness  
151 that you might have experienced during the conference. Any thoughts on that you  
152 would be happy to share on that front?

153

154 P2: Erm, yeah, I think, erm, just so kind of aware of the, one of the early kind of rea...  
155 erm, earliest things that I probably felt, it hel... Increase my awareness of, was my  
156 kind of positioning in groups so, over the course of the conference were in different  
157 size groups, erm for example when the whole conference was together that I've  
158 spoken about, And then over the course of the day we were in smaller groups of may  
159 be six, from six or eight, up to erm, their anxieties (laughs) way up to 30 or something  
160 in, erm, but I guess in the smaller groups, erm, and it was in these kind of review and  
161 application sessions at the end where this was becoming explicit, because, erm,  
162 there was feedback, erm, other people would comment on how they'd observed me,

163 the conference for example, and that's quite a direct way of, you know, making things  
164 quite explicit.

165

166 DB: yep

167

168 P2: so for example, erm, in our small group, the, I, I've forgotten the names of them,  
169 but the small group that we had every day, erm, I was described as, erm, I think I  
170 was described as, someone who wouldn't take a side, but, sitting on the fence  
171 perhaps chorus, as part of a chorus when there was this kind of conflicting situation  
172 in in the group, erm, in with almost affirmed something about me that I already knew  
173 but it actually, erm, made me even more aware of it. Erm, and...

174

175 DB: what's your thoughts on that?

176

177 P2: Erm, it's funny because initially it felt like a bit of an accusation of, yeah, you  
178 need to state your opinion or take a side, erm, when there's a conflict, erm, and then  
179 it made me think, well actually, one of the reasons I think I'm drawn to the profession  
180 I am is this, erm, is because of this mediation role and, erm, the kind of sense of  
181 neutrality that I feel I already carry (laughs) in a lot of situations, it kind of, it made,  
182 made more sense to me why I chose the career I did. Erm, on the other hand it made  
183 me think well actually perhaps I need to, erm, work more at forming an opinion  
184 because I know there are oftentimes when I sit on the fence when I kind of need to, I  
185 need to, take a side, and follow it through and, and, erm, sometimes it takes me  
186 longer to do that (laughs), but, erm, what else? Yeah, so I think those two aspects...

187

188 DB: thank you, any other reflections about that experience of attending a group  
189 relations conference?

190

191 P2: (laughs) Erm, (pause), I'm trying to think what next (laughs), erm, I think it's  
192 started me on a journey of understanding simply groups a bit more in something I've  
193 always slightly avoided, been a bit overwhelmed by the complexity of them. So, erm,  
194 it kind of forced me to think about it in this kind of managed way and, erm, I think it's  
195 got the ball rolling in in that sense, or example, erm, when for example in groups  
196 which person, what person, who holds what in a group so someone might be  
197 carrying the anger in a group, someone might be carrying the upset in a group,  
198 someone might be erm, yeah, who holds what in a group, erm, and where the conflict  
199 lies, at this, this, conclusion (laughs), I quote, that seems to be there has to be  
200 conflict somewhere in a group and in an, which was quite a revelation to me,  
201 perhaps, that, erm, if you don't see the conflict, then you need to, then you're not  
202 seeing it, it has to be somewhere (laughs), and, erm ...

203

204 DB: what do you think about that?

205

206 P2: Erm, I think it shattered my idealisations a little bit, but I think it, erm, when I start  
207 to think about it, reflecting on all kinds of groups that I've been in, I was quite, it's  
208 quite easy to identify the conflict in every single group that I've (laughs), that comes  
209 to mind, so it was proving itself very quickly with each of my reflections, erm, of the  
210 kind of issues such as, erm, erm, hierarchies and leaderships and domination and,  
211 er, (laughs), you know in, erm, again the kind of things that I felt were considered  
212 during the week when I, whenever I took it back and linked it to a system that I'd  
213 worked in, erm, I was starting to identify those same patterns, those same kind of  
214 maybe not patterns but realities which, erm, I feel are almost inevitable in groups  
215 now, (laughs), erm, so it's started raising a bit of my awareness of how (pause), how  
216 these things kind of established groups and where, that, they're there, (laughs), and  
217 start looking for them in a way, so, erm, that was kind of group level, systems level  
218 thinking...

219

220 DB: yeah, and that was kind of something that you thought less about previously?

221

222 P2: Yeah, I think, erm, for a kind of academically, I've avoided all kind of group  
223 psychology in my studies, I've just, I don't know if I've not been interested but, I've  
224 almost had a quite a negative reaction towards it, I think I've always found it a bit  
225 complicated and overwhelming (laughs), erm, so, erm, yeah and I found that this was  
226 a way to kind of get me to think about it by attending the conference, it forced me to  
227 think about it, or it almost, you're kind of sat in an environment where everyone else  
228 was thinking about it, so (laughs) erm, it, it, yeah, it, it work in that way (pause),  
229 maybe I've, I have been a bit blind to it, not aware of it, not wanting really to be aware  
230 of it kind of, maybe a bit egocentric and kind of wanting to focus on my work and my,  
231 or myself and, erm, just not really thinking about the system very much, which is,  
232 erm, which fits in with a kind of a tendency that I, I, became aware of my kind of  
233 attention t...to detail, which came about before the conference and, and my kind of  
234 wanting to start thinking of things in a more birds-eye view in a kind of the way  
235 perhaps managers see, you know in a more holistic perspective and so it was a  
236 really good exercise for doing that, erm, for me.

237

238 DB: what was it that was good about that?

239

240 P2: Erm, (pause), good about?

241

242 DB: it was a good exercise, you say to be able to perhaps notice some of those, the  
243 birds-eye view you mentioned as part of that. Just wondered what that, what that was  
244 like, sort of, from your point of view, that awareness?

245

246 P2: Yeah, it felt, because of the kind of (laughs) the number of people that were  
247 involved, it almost felt, like its something, it's perhaps like I, might call it a skill that I  
248 don't naturally do. And it's almost like, you were kind of, your hands were held and  
249 you were being pulled up to help see things, because people were making things  
250 explicit

251

252 DB: yeah

253

254 P2: people were naming thing that were there that I wouldn't pick up myself...

255

256 DB: and how did you find that?

257

258 P2: Erm, (pause) erm, I found it, I found it, interesting, I felt like I was learning a lot,  
259 er, I felt that there were times when I didn't understand it and I felt a bit, erm, like I  
260 wasn't grasping everything, erm, (pause), erm, but it felt that it was a bit of an eye-  
261 opener really, yeah, quite why opening, it's like, it's like a way of being taught that  
262 (laughs) doesn't doesn't come from, well it comes from within but it, it's like you're  
263 very supported in this realisations, erm, because it's spelled out to you, it's spelled  
264 out to you.

265

266 DB: how did that happen?

267

268 P2: Erm, (pause) I guess it's the naming of things, the continuous discussion and  
269 naming of, erm, things that I would see is implicit, making them explicit.

270

271 DB: ok. Could you think of an example?

272



273 P2: yeah, so for example, erm, (pause / laugh) class (?) example, one of the kind of  
274 tasks ended up in a group with, there was, a dozen women and one man who  
275 became the leader of the group partly because he kind of initiated the formation of  
276 this group, and, erm, erm, so was a group will kind of busy trying to get on with this  
277 stuck, a-a, with this ta...task and the group got stuck at this issue of leadership, why  
278 is this man leaving group and how did that get decided and, erm, do we all want  
279 this? Erm, and so the group was stuck in this position for a while, erm, a facilitator  
280 was invited in to help think about it and, erm, in a quite perhaps unusually directed  
281 way they said something along the lines of, erm, this, er, all these women are  
282 attacking the male leader, erm, because they want to be leaders and it's a way of  
283 dealing with the competition amongst themselves as women and taking it out on this  
284 male (laughs), erm, so that's something that I wouldn't of even thought about before,  
285 erm, and it was something that was named, erm, and it kind of proved itself in a way,  
286 erm, (pause)

287

288 DB: how so?

289

290 P2: well, yeah, but I'm not sure about that actually. I stopped because I almost not  
291 sure if I believe what I just said, erm, perhaps it was a bit, it was, so it was quite  
292 readily accepted by everyone, erm, and maybe not by me initially, I wasn't sure  
293 whether I like this theory (laughs) or whether, erm, that I kind of just went with it, erm,  
294 and it was something that stuck in my mind some reason and I started trying to think  
295 of other situations, well how's that happen before? And I kind of thought of instances  
296 in my personal life where I felt that actually that has happened and that sounds like  
297 quite a valid explanation for it (laughs) and I thought well okay, maybe that is true  
298 (laughs).

299

300 DB: maybe what's true?

301

302 P2: well this pro, well this potential for when there is a system with lots of women and  
303 one man, that, or more women than men (laughs), then the women, erm, and where  
304 there seems to be like kind an attack on the, on the current leader. Although there  
305 were lots of other potential reasons for attacking a leader in any kind of system, or, or  
306 projecting (laughs), things onto them, erm, that one of... part of it might be, erm,  
307 women managing competition amongst themselves.

308

309 DB: ok, what's your reflections on that?

310

311 P2: (laughs)

312

313 DB: sort of a hypothesis?

314

315 P2: (laughs) erm, I think, I think, it feels like part of an explanation, it doesn't feel like  
316 all of it, there's lots of other things to consider, erm, and I guess I wouldn't... I don't  
317 know if any of what feels like conclusions that came from the week I wouldn't say that  
318 any of them a hard facts it's just a hypothesis about a situation, erm, that kind of  
319 reflects a bit of what I was trying to say about deciding how much weighting to put  
320 things that come up so maybe deciding that whether that's going to take up 90% of  
321 my thinking and hypothesis or whether that's just going to take 10%, 10% of it. Yeah  
322 and deciding how much to allow, I suppose to allow it to take in a way (pause), which  
323 now just, you know, links into just things we've been taught about yesterday about  
324 baking hypotheses and not marrying them (laughs) and staying curious and staying  
325 neutral... It's starting to weave in directly to course taught elements.

326

327 DB: okay I think we've spoken to some extent about this this question, but I'm going  
328 to ask it, and it is the question of, is there anything that you'd be happy to talk about

329 that you have noticed during the group relations conference in terms of learning  
330 about yourself?

331

332 P2: Erm, yeah, erm, so I mentioned earlier, kind of my role in groups, erm, I could  
333 add to that kind of another thing that was made aware of was that in small groups I'm  
334 a lot more, perhaps, verbal and vocal and quite an active vocal.

335

336 DB: mm hm

337

338 P2: erm, I would say I am always, I like to always be present and not withdrawn  
339 things like that, erm, but that, for example in that large group I was very reluctant to  
340 verbally make a contribution even though I felt I was participating the whole time.  
341 And it was considered that, erm, was interesting I had a kind of mini debate going on  
342 it was almost, sometimes it was seen as a ... Problem or as a difficulty my (unclear)  
343 participating in a group, you know in a big group, erm, this was kind of interlinked  
344 with me holding a small space perhaps the first day to the point of not being noticed  
345 by others, but by the end of the week having more of a presence without making any  
346 change (laughs) with my verbal contributions shall we say, erm, erm, to another  
347 example of, erm, another hypothesis I guess was suggested was am I waiting  
348 (laughs), this was quite a p... thought-provoking one, am I waiting for someone to  
349 stumble across my needs? (laughs) in order to make a contribution or something,  
350 because I was, erm, almost felt like I needed to justify why I hadn't made a  
351 contribution to big group, erm, other kind of thoughts about, yeah, think made me  
352 think about why perhaps, why is that happening, why am I different in different size  
353 groups, and, erm, I've forgotten what your question was (laughs) but, erm...

354

355 DB: we were talking about, erm, that personal learning, what you might have learned  
356 about yourself, erm, you have spoken there about awareness of yourself in different  
357 groups perhaps you could go a little bit further with that?

358

359 P2: yep, yeah, I was just starting (laughs), so I was, erm, so another kind of ... So it  
360 was awareness of, erm, maybe not awareness but it was perhaps, er, I was offered  
361 suggestions of, that, that provoked thinking in me on why I take up different positions  
362 and what might one day make me have a kind of small presence the next day, erm,  
363 (pause), what might provoke me to have a bigger presence in groups, erm, there  
364 were other kind of conversations about erm, perhaps I didn't feel like I had something  
365 valuable to contribute at that time, erm, again that was seen as, quite a (pause) ,  
366 erm, (pause), it was seen as something quite negative, erm, and, I wasn't sure  
367 whether I agreed with that (laughs), er, and other incidents of, I kind of suggested  
368 another reason that I felt that if, if I was struck by something perhaps more then I  
369 would then respond verbally and that was when the kind of justification of well maybe  
370 it sounds like you're waiting for someone to stumble across your needs...

371

372 DB: how did you make sense of that one?

373

374 P2: well I didn't agree with it at first, I felt I had quite the kind of defensive reaction to  
375 it initially, erm, (pause), but then I kind of relaxed to it and considered it, erm, I think I  
376 fel... I felt like I opened my mind to it but I think I then ended up coming back to  
377 thinking no I don't think that's what I was doing, but, but it, it, probably struck a chord  
378 because ... I think I've done that, in other situations, erm, I didn't, it didn't feel very  
379 relevant to the group, but I thin... but I think, erm, there was an element of truth to it,  
380 erm, perhaps in other situations, so for example, erm, I might not always make a  
381 complaint about something that I dislike, erm, and I will perhaps wait for a situation to  
382 arise where there's a bit of an opening for me to raise it, so there was no kind of

383 choice to... So I accepted it kind of that form perhaps, but not in that kind of  
384 immediate initial form it was presented in. Erm...

385

386 DB: any other thoughts in terms of personal learning about yourself to read the  
387 conference?

388

389 P2: Erm, yeah I think there was ... It's hard to summarise, (laughs) I feel like I've got  
390 to summarise all of my learning now, but I think the points that are coming to mind  
391 perhaps other ones that have been most pertinent.

392

393 DB: yeah

394

395 P2: and so for example, er, (pause) erm, the men, the situation I mentioned earlier  
396 about these women (unclear) against themselves and attacking a male, I actually felt  
397 like I noticed myself doing it (laughs), which was one of the kind of examples of  
398 proving it right, so that was in my family, in a family system, erm, for me I kind of  
399 identified situations in the past where there was, erm, what felt like a repetition of  
400 that, which was quite, erm, a revelation perhaps, a more, erm, yeah so that raised by  
401 awareness to it. There was another (pause), kind of, er, what felt like a learning point  
402 was, erm, (pause) I don't know how to put this, something to do with recognising  
403 anger in myself (laughs) and accepting it. And, erm, expressing it, erm, (pause), in a  
404 interesting way it kind of came up, so, it, it came up, in a conversation right towards  
405 the end of the conference in this kind of what you'd think might the wrapping up  
406 session or, erm, ... and it was, it was, some kind of anger named not by myself but  
407 by others, so it was kind of, er, a sense of they are but seeing it in me perhaps and  
408 from me not naming it, but it being named for me

409

410 DB: right

411

412 P2: and, and then it actually coming out in a very strange way (laughs). Over the next  
413 week and I had like three or four consecutive dreams about being really angry  
414 (laughs) with people, so that was quite funny (laughs), erm, and then I kind of  
415 realised that that's kind of worms, erm, and, And that's something that's definitely, so  
416 it's an awareness of, erm, (unclear), not just emotions that I carry but, erm, how I  
417 manage them or not (laughs), erm, but I think that's kind of the journey that is  
418 continuing.

419

420 DB: yet, your choice again, erm, I'm just interested in any other thoughts you might  
421 have about the the experiences subsequent to it coming up in the conference, any  
422 reflections at all?

423

424 P2: Erm, (pause), yeah, so I could say, erm, (pause), it was, it was quite interesting  
425 how it came about, so kind of at the end of the conference we were asked to think  
426 about our professional roles, our professional situations and think about an issue that  
427 was bothering us that we would take back and deal with immediately (laughs), as  
428 soon as we got back. Erm, I kin... I raised a, erm, what I felt was a preoccupation of  
429 mine, erm, and apparently just that I raised it as a preoccupation and not as a  
430 problem was an issue (laughs), because, it was suggested that perhaps I don't, erm,  
431 ... (breathes out) I don't qualify things is a problem when they ought to be named as  
432 a problem (laughs), but perhaps I didn't have, erm, some kind of (pause), erm,  
433 (pause), some kind of (pause), inability to ... Think I have again something worse,  
434 erm, acting on (laughs), erm, so anyway, so I came, I presented, this, erm,  
435 preoccupation as we were asked about and, erm, er, I guess in a way it was, it, it  
436 was a space for it to be thought about under the people's interpretations of it, so kind  
437 of, come in, erm, and it was quite...

438

439 DB: what did you take from that?

440

441 P2: yeah it was quite (pause), it felt quite insightful because people in the group were  
442 naming things but perhaps I hadn't named before like I mentioned earlier kind of  
443 certain emotions that perhaps I didn't recognise with their or I was aware that they  
444 were there but not, erm, naming them for recognising them or acting on them. Er,  
445 and (pause), yeah it was interesting because I realised afterwards that the reas...  
446 well my hypothesis of why it was preoccupying me was related to kind of a recent  
447 family circumstance and, erm, but that wasn't shared in that kind of forum because it  
448 was, you know, this is a professional (laughs) issue, erm, so I suspect people were  
449 wondering where it was all coming from, you know, where, where, what is the route,  
450 what is behind this, but, erm, and it was kind of a personal issue manifes... manifesta  
451 ... manifesting itself? In my preoccupation in this professional issue. I just kind of,  
452 erm, make it a bit more concrete, it was in thinking about me within the group of  
453 trainees within the erm, within us a, a group so my, not my role... But it, it started,  
454 started me thinking about us as a group, of trainees, and how, and our, erm, group  
455 relations, which, you know, are partly addressed, in our fortnightly experiential  
456 groups (laughs), when they happen, erm, so it kind of made links for me, erm...

457

458 DB: what links did you make?

459

460 P2: (pause) I guess, the links that my preoccupation in this group context of that I'm  
461 in now with my colleagues, erm, I, I was linking with my personal, erm, kind of  
462 situation at the time, erm, and they were kind of (pause), erm, it was almost reflecting  
463 my personal circumstance, so the, erm, inseparability (laughs), of professional and  
464 personal, erm, (pause), I guess ... other links? I gu... yeah, it just, it made me think  
465 about us as a group of trainees, our relationships, our, our own group relations,  
466 which makes (unclear) think about that, so the conference linked to, like current

467 system (laughs). And the personal element, but obviously, that feeds in, that links to  
468 both of those things. (Laughs) imagine this venn diagram of three (laughs),  
469 overlapping... I'm a [describes previous work role], so (laughs), all used to be... I like  
470 venn diagrams (laughs).

471

472 DB: (laughs)

473

474 P2: (laughs)

475

476 DB: just wondering if we could circle back for any other thoughts you might have,  
477 we've mentioned gender as part of what it feels like there's considered, erm, in some  
478 of your group relations conference, erm, any other reflections from your point of view  
479 in terms of that?

480

481 P2: on gender...

482

483 DB: on how gender came into, the kind of experience, and any thoughts you might  
484 have on that front?

485

486 P2: Erm, now I think the general gender proportions in the conference weren't that far  
487 off those in educational psychology time circles, which seems to be dominated by  
488 women, and few men, erm, erm, so I guess I, I felt like I made a bit of a link in  
489 thinking, erm, in thinking about men's status in the system a lot. Especially when they  
490 are on their own (laughs), h... If they were, if they are the only male for example in  
491 the service and doing a placement in now, there's only one male in the whole  
492 educational psychology service, so it's, it's, kind of making me think I wonder if this  
493 is happening, erm, there is well, it's kind of my experience but this one group,  
494 actually this one smaller group which had a single mailing it if, if any of its, erm, if



495 any, erm, if there are any similarities there, erm, (pause), erm, I, I struggle to relate it  
496 to previous experiences because I actually felt I worked in more male dominated,  
497 erm, professional contexts, erm, (pause), it's, in terms of my group of trainees, we  
498 are all women, erm, and I almost felt slightly glad (laughs), that I 's, don't have to do  
499 that then (laughs), erm, but I'm sure I don't think that's valid (unclear), it's just a  
500 fantasy, an ideal, erm... I don't know I guess it...

501

502 DB: don't have to deal with what?

503

504 P2: Erm, (laughs) an attack of the single male (laughs) that I could, that could have  
505 been (pause), but, erm... Yeah I, I think I'm, I'm pretty certain that other things raised  
506 instead of, in place of, so, it's never less or more is it, it's just different, erm, but I  
507 guess I haven't really thought about it (unclear)

508

509 DB: okay, we're coming towards, erm, the close of this conversation, but I just want  
510 to offer any last chance, is there anything that we haven't mentioned, that hasn't  
511 come up that might be helpful just a share, all of interest from your point of view to  
512 share in relation to the group's relations conference?

513

514 P2: (pause), mmm,

515

516 DB: there doesn't have to be

517

518 P2: yeah I guess, erm, a th, th, I guess wh, another thought which sometimes  
519 creeps back (laughs) is, erm, during the conference where there were these tasks,  
520 erm, although was tasks set for the whole conference to divide themselves up into  
521 groups, smaller groups, and erm, how that was managed each time and, erm  
522 (pause), erm, how erm, again, what position I talk, erm, with er, how I kind of, er,

523 coped with that perhaps, erm, interestingly for example I was almost, erm, what's the  
524 word? Erm, I don't know what the word is, but kind of stuck or frozen by this, erm,  
525 process and to the point of not been able to do anything about it and again, s', erm,  
526 weighting (laughs) for it to happen to me rather than being an active participant in the  
527 process... Because a sense of, erm, not really knowing where to go, what to do with  
528 it, er, being in... Incapacitated, maybe that was the word I was thinking of, by  
529 something that feels quite overwhelming, erm, so an awareness of that happening to  
530 me, erm, in personal life as well, kind of realisation that if the situation is, is, feels too  
531 overwhelming, I would just kind of freeze (laughs), just let, let, let things organise  
532 themselves and I will slot in (laughs) somewhere at the end. Er, and then, erm, ...

533

534 DB: what was an experience like, at the conference?

535

536 P2: Erm, (pause), mm, it was interesting 'cause it was an experience that... So this  
537 small group that formed from that first time, for example was a group that we stayed  
538 with touring the whole week and it was not forgotten about. It kept coming up. Erm, it  
539 kept, erm, it was seen to affect our relationship as a group, kind of the sense that  
540 some of us were there by default and not by choice, hence to small groups ended up  
541 coming together, erm, and, erm, and then a... Perhaps a progress onto the next day  
542 when this was asked of us again, but in a slightly different way. Again what role did I  
543 take? I just stopped and waited and watched (laughs) and saw what was happening  
544 before deciding when to move and what to do, erm, and my tendency in the next two  
545 (laughs) days to do the same and wait till quite close to the end. Erm, again  
546 reflecting, erm, my tendency to kind of leave things quite late, watch and wait and not  
547 rush into decisions and work up to deadlines or, erm, my surname being 'w', so being  
548 quite comfortable with being at the end of a process (laughs), all being one of the  
549 people to enter (laughs) active participation (laughs), erm, and, erm, and again a little  
550 bit of a kind of awareness of how I was, when I was more active in my participation,

551 how I was making those choices, what I was drawn to, what, what perhaps were kind  
552 of people I was drawn to, or, what kind of groups I was drawn to, and which ones I  
553 was avoiding and...

554

555 DB: what did you notice in that sense?

556

557 P2: so, erm, (pause) I haven't really thought about that very much since, but, er,  
558 remember kind of noticing, t, certain types of personalities that I didn't feel that  
559 comfortable with and, erm, again a reflection in my tendency to avoid a lot of things  
560 that I don't like all people that I don't warm to perhaps. Erm, I noticing kind of the  
561 group that was quite, erm, maybe fiery, passionate and slightly, erm, an avoiding that  
562 group a bit. Which is quite interesting 'cause I have this kind of background other  
563 kind of fiery [describes ethnicity] family (laughs) and the complete opposite  
564 [describes ethnicity] family, so I'd have this (laughs) lifelong dilemma (laughs) of  
565 where I sit (laughs) and, erm, dipping into each one, but, erm, an interesting thought  
566 about avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and  
567 warming more towards calmer individuals. So personal preferences and avoidance of  
568 conflict (laughs). Yeah, er...

569

570 DB: okay, am, I'm just going to give your last chance for any further reflections on  
571 that thought or already others before we finish...

572

573 P2: Erm, (pause), I don't know, I think, I felt like I've made a lot of the pertinent  
574 points, I feel like there are lots more, erm, and probably more to come, erm, I  
575 (unclear) I feel like I've, erm, addressed a lot of the bigger things or maybe just the  
576 things that are currently now with me, erm, after, since the conference which feels  
577 like quite a while ago now actually, erm, yeah, so... (Laughs)

578

579 DB: okay, I'm going to stop there, we got to stop somewhere, so I'm going to stop  
580 recording.  
581

**Initial interview: participant 3**

1 DB: okay thank you, my first question,, is to ask you if you could tell me about your  
2 experience of attending the group relations conference?

3

4 P3: okay, I am, so as you know it's part of the course, so it wasn't something that I  
5 chose to do initially, and I think my experience of it started from when we first began  
6 in September. From hearing lots of conversations about it,, but never really gaining  
7 an insight into what it actually was and why we had to do it and I think from the  
8 second year is the third year it was always kind of address with kind of a smug look  
9 and a bit of a giggle so that kind of left me feeling with just a bit, bit I think a bit of  
10 apprehension as to what it was and why we had to do it. I am, there was no  
11 information around it, erm, and I think initially what I thought it was more like a  
12 teambuilding, Erm, week that which spend with the 10 of us growing together as a  
13 team. Erm, but from the conversations that we picked up along the way it just  
14 seemed that it wasn't that sort of thing at all. Erm, then we heard various horror  
15 stories about, erm, being in smaller groups and what members of staff would say to  
16 individuals, erm, so that added to the anxiety leading up to it. Erm, and then we  
17 partook in the experiential groups and we kind of felt as a team that maybe group  
18 relations would be similar to the kind of experiential group that we were having. Erm,  
19 so I think that as time went on leading up to the actual conference I kind of was more  
20 at ease about the whole process. Erm, and I think I kind of had an interest in what it  
21 would be, err, and always remembering that I had control over my responses to the  
22 event or how I acted within the event,, something that was being done to me. Erm, so  
23 I think coming into the actual week,, I think I felt safe because there were 10 of us  
24 there. So I think if I was on my own I think I'd feel a bit differently, but because I was  
25 within my group I felt safe to be there and, oh, I think the first morning when it began  
26 and there was just a complete group of silence I felt okay because I was used about

27 from starting the experiential groups we have. So I didn't feel, I am, as anxious first of  
28 all but then I heard different peoples comments because, erm, in the conference  
29 different people speak out and, I am, quite a few of, erm, the other participants were  
30 describing their anxiety and then having physical reactions to, erm, what was  
31 happening within the group and I noticed that I was starting to have physical  
32 reactions as well. Erm, so I was aware of them (unclear) I was monitoring myself,  
33 erm, and I think the first one I had was my heart started beating really quickly and I  
34 remember looking down and I could see my pop moving so quickly and I thought why  
35 am I ... Why is this happening to me, why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in  
36 my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why.  
37 Erm, and so I was thinking is it other people's anxiety that I'm picking up on, erm,  
38 because I didn't feel like in my mind, I didn't feel you know, uneasy all concerned, but  
39 physically I was reacting like that. Erm, and so that was one of the occasions where I  
40 thought, okay there's something that is happening here which is quite unconscious  
41 but I'm reacting, erm, quite physically, erm, and this is all in the first day. So...

42

43 DB: how did you make sense of that reaction?

44

45 P3: oh, I took it as in, erm, because we'd been learning about counter transference  
46 and all this other stuff, I was thinking, I took it as in other people's anxiety was, erm,  
47 because there's was so intense, I was feeling that as well, because I mean, one of  
48 the women spoke about nearly having a panic attack and she felt like she needed to  
49 leave the room. Erm, and so I think because of the distress that was being articulated  
50 from around the room I think a part of me that, you know, is connected with other  
51 people was reacting as well. Erm, but it was an experience, but I think it was more  
52 like an out of body experience because I was watching myself reacting in that way?  
53 Erm, and I wasn't scared that I was reacting in that way, but I was noticing it. Erm,  
54 and so it was, it was quite odd. Erm, but I also remember that a couple of days, I

55 think it might have been the next day, erm, in the group that everyone was speaking  
56 and I have something to say, erm, my heart was beating again because I wanted to  
57 say something. Erm, and then I said it, and after I've said it my hands were shaking  
58 completely and I, I was just looking at my hands and they were completely just  
59 shaking and I thought this is interesting, cus all I've done is expressed something I  
60 wanted to say, but physically I'm reacting again. Erm, and it wasn't a fear, or anything  
61 but I didn't, I don't know what it was physically but I saw that mismatch between what  
62 I was thinking and what I was feeling. Erm, and just I think, I think I made notes about  
63 these experiences because when I went into the group I thought I very much want to  
64 experience this conference and be aware of all the different things that I'm going  
65 through and different things I'm learning so I can get the most out of it rather than it  
66 just being something that I have to do is torture. So I wrote up, erm, those physical  
67 experiences and what was happening around the time just so I could look and see,  
68 cus, how my, may then apply it to then when I'm working outside of the group. Erm,  
69 er, other things that happened throughout the week...

70

71 DB: yeah

72

73 P3: so I, I got to experience quite a few different types of groups, erm, during the  
74 week and I think one of the things that stood out to me was when, erm, we had to  
75 choose groups and we had to find a room that was downstairs, we were on the top  
76 floor of the building, we all had to go downstairs erm, but the way they got us to  
77 choose groups was quite, erm, was left to us to decide and there were certain  
78 number of rooms so that to be technically a certain number of groups and I was in  
79 the group that was left, erm ... Well I hadn't gone for the group, we'd still a number,  
80 there was a number of us that was still upstairs deciding whether we wanted to be  
81 together and by the time we got downstairs realise weren't any rooms left. Erm, and  
82 that happened to be another group that was in the same position as us, so we joined

83 together and there was a group of us, 15 or 17 of us? Erm, without a room and then  
84 somehow we decided that we didn't want to be split up we wanted to stay together,  
85 so we went downstairs and we said, well we're a large group to the other groups, we  
86 need a room so we have some groups with only like five people taking up a whole  
87 room so we felt as if well they should move, um, you know, and I think the response  
88 that came back to us was that we'd have to split up if we wanted to be in part of a  
89 group and we refused. As, as, a team we said no we wanted to stay together and we  
90 found an empty room which wasn't part of the conference and we stayed there. Erm,  
91 but then the staff that were overseeing us told us that we can't stay there because we  
92 are not recognised as part of the system also from [names specific location] I started  
93 thinking about systems outside in society and how even when there is a group  
94 together if it's not recognised as part of the system you don't get the benefits that the  
95 system offers. So, because we were recognised and in a room we didn't have a voice  
96 in a sense, so I was thinking, you know to different cultures may be that don't have a  
97 voice, where they very much our group but because society is not recognised it  
98 disables, erm, them so I think I was, I kept thinking inside and outside the  
99 conference, erm, of the things that I was going through, erm, so that was an  
100 interesting experience. Erm, but just if we rewind a little bit, when we were choosing  
101 that group there was a group that was there that was very active, erm, and very  
102 outspoken in the beginning and they spoke to the group, said we don't need to spend  
103 all this time wasting time thinking about things, we just need to do certain things. So  
104 they formed a group quite quickly and left. Erm, but that resulted in the rest of the  
105 conference really looking, like looking down upon them and feeling quite angry  
106 towards that group because we thought it was quite selfish that, and it was  
107 interesting though because the majority of the people in the room that will quite vocal  
108 at the same way. But this group, was a group that didn't think about anybody else  
109 and just left. Erm, maybe we projected part of our wanting to do that into them and  
110 hated them for it, but that's how it happened. Erm, so within my group that was



111 displaced we were known as the refugees by the other groups, erm, but we didn't  
112 think of ourselves like that, we thought of ourselves is quite a solid group. We  
113 happened to be the largest group in the conference so we thought of ourselves is  
114 quite powerful. Erm, so I started thinking about gang culture as well and d'you know  
115 what it means for you, because I think some of the suggestions that we came up with  
116 was how we would take over a room because we had the opportunity to invite other  
117 groups two meetings in the main conference hall. So we had ideas that we would  
118 invite them to a meeting in takeover the room, because it was a territory. So we  
119 likened it to gang culture and trying to find that space and the extent to which you'd  
120 go to find a space to settle. Erm, and I was interested because I was the one that  
121 came up with that suggestion and it's not technically how one would think but in that  
122 situation I thought well we need to do something now, it doesn't matter about other  
123 people, we need to find a space, let's displace them and so it was in... I was  
124 watching how I was reacting and for kind of that playfulness came out of me but also  
125 w'ch... It's quite, erm, aggressive in a sense as well. Erm, so I was interested to see  
126 how I was behaving in that situation, erm, eventually ar, another group said that we  
127 could join them, erm, before we join them with "vocal group, we were discussing lots  
128 of things about group and how it would look like in society outside. But what I noticed  
129 when we join the other group was that we lost our voice completely, erm, there was a  
130 lot of confusion in that group wants with joined and no decisions were made from the  
131 other group or for us and we thought about how almost when you're forced to  
132 conform to something how you can lose your identity because I felt like in that  
133 moment that we didn't have our identity as a group any more, erm, we joined this  
134 other one because they kind of were really indecisive, we'd become part of that, erm,  
135 so we didn't, I didn't like it personally I felt that we should have stayed outside the  
136 system because we got much, we have a much richer experience being outside the  
137 system, in terms of discussions and conversations than we did as part of it. So and  
138 we weren't functional as part of the system so I thought that was quite interesting to

139 think about and to see. Erm, and then the following day, or I don't know if you want to  
140 say anything about that? Ask anything about that (laughs)

141

142 DB: yeah, erm, he said a few moments ago, erm, that you noticed yourself making  
143 perhaps some suggestions that was typical for you.

144

145 P3: mm, yeah

146

147 DB: could you say a bit more about that?

148

149 P3: yeah, I think like, because I'm someone who likes to go by the rules and you  
150 know, something, especially social rules or may be like probably, like the local I try to  
151 abide by the law, so in terms of that group my suggestion was, well let's be  
152 deceptive, let's tr, like lure out of their home take it over because we need a place so,  
153 erm, but it almost felt like again to me, as in the guide slotted it into that role where  
154 this group that had been ostracised, so it was within our rights take what we  
155 deserved. And so I think, but thinking it's very, it was almost very primitive, like I, ki,  
156 just the response that I think, erm, be something on a movie or something, survival  
157 technique, erm, if you like and I think that it was those survival techniques that were  
158 being drawn out of me being in that group, because it wasn't important it was just, we  
159 would just, you know it was a conference, but being in that experience became very  
160 real, erm, and survival meant being part of the system. So my suggestion was well  
161 we do what it takes to get to regardless of what it meant for other people so...

162

163 DB: what was it like?

164

165 P3: being on the outside?

166

167 DB: mm

168

169 P3: erm, wh, w, when I was on the outside in that group, erm, it was annoying  
170 because we were pitied by the other groups, we were looked at as refugees and oh  
171 we're sorry you didn't have a place. And, but we didn't feel like that, erm, and so  
172 that's why I think it was a bit frustrated because we had our identity, we kind of knew  
173 who we were, but other people looked down on us and sorrow and pity, so it felt like  
174 people had misunderstood us, erm, and we had no way to communicate that  
175 because how it looked at was that we were refugees and displaced and not part of  
176 the system, just on the outside, erm, even if we didn't feel that way and we tried to  
177 communicate that but it wasn't heard at all. Erm, but from that experience I think the  
178 following day we got to choose groups again and I decided that I wanted to join the  
179 group that was hated, because I decided I wanted to see what it was like from the  
180 inside, erm, to be a group that everyone's kind of turned their backs on, erm,  
181 because I mean when, so that group when they'd left everybody they decided to call  
182 a conference again and they'd invited all the other groups to come and meet them  
183 and I went, erm, to hear what they had to say but none of the other groups claim, so  
184 it showed that no one really wanted to converse with them. So the next day I wanted  
185 to join them to see what the experience was like from the inside even though I didn't  
186 agree with, or didn't, I felt I didn't think like them, I wanted to be a part of it, erm, and  
187 so I join their group and then I was on the outside again because what happened  
188 was when I was going around the different erm, groups to, to have meetings or  
189 conversations, because I was now identified with this particular group oftentimes the  
190 door was shut in my face. So I was on the outside again for a different reason and  
191 there were a few times when the door was shut on me from people that I was in the  
192 refugee group with. So it was almost, now it was a case of, now I'm labelled with a  
193 particular group and I'm shut off from them, not with pity, but almost with, erm, I don't  
194 know what word to use really, th, it was being shut off in a different way, erm, so then

195 I started thinking about how, I started thinking about cultural because that was a  
196 conversation that came up quite a bit, so I started thinking about, erm, belonging to a  
197 culture and how it can be perceived by other cultures when all you see is just a  
198 culture, because all they saw was me part of that particular group. So didn't see me  
199 for who I was and for the experiences that I'd had the day before with them. They  
200 saw me as part of that group so there was a closed door and so I was thinking about  
201 how then me going into work, what do people see and what closes a door when I'm  
202 presented to them and how it stops with, it stops just that like kind of the face value  
203 rather than, erm, experiences or qualifications or personality character and those  
204 type things, erm, ... Yeah, so that was my, that was kind of, so experiencing being on  
205 the outside was something that was one of the main things that I took from the  
206 conference. Erm, and just about identity as well, I think in terms of identity, one  
207 experience that I took away that meant a lot to me was, erm, there was, there was a  
208 training group there which were people that'd been to the conference before as  
209 participants and they wanted to take more of an active role in the leadership of the  
210 conference, erm, and one of the days, I mean they were just dispersed around the  
211 group and they took part just like the rest of us, but we knew that they were there,  
212 erm, and they did cause quite a few, quite a few questions so a one point, the s',  
213 members of the group wanted them to identify themselves and I remember I stood up  
214 and I said well why do they need to identify themselves, what does it mean to us for  
215 them to do that? And they didn't identify themselves after that. But, towards the end  
216 of the conference they did a presentation about themselves and the way they  
217 introduced it was they'd all written statement about themselves, fully in the middle,  
218 and someone else had read out their statement. So what it was, so for example, I'm  
219 reading out who you are will somebody else but you never know, knew, who was  
220 who. Erm, so we still didn't know, you know, whose statement was whose. And then,  
221 erm, one man, one of the training group members said that he, his having been read  
222 out, so I'm assuming that they wrote more than two statements so they found his and

223 they read it out and his one said something like he was glad to be somebody again.  
224 And I thought that was really awful because then he is government being read out,  
225 erm, so they did their presentation and I think no one really knew what was going on,  
226 I didn't really know what was going on, erm, we didn't really know who they were  
227 because they haven't identified themselves and, I think I sat there and I thought I  
228 don't know what's just happened, and I sat there feeling like a real loss of identity,  
229 like they didn't know who they were, but then almost I felt like I didn't know who I,  
230 who I was and why I was there? Erm, and I went home that day really frustrated,  
231 really like just really d, like headache, erm, questioning why am I in this conference?  
232 Like what am I doing here? Erm, and also heard the next morning that three people  
233 had gone on the wrong trains home as well, and I felt just their kind of presentation,  
234 oh what they didn't mean to be a loss of identity, but it just come across like, had  
235 really thrown a lot of us into that place as well, into that confusing state, erm,  
236 (unclear), and what I took away from that is about how easy is just to get consumed  
237 in the confusion of others and actually forget who you are in the midst of it. Or maybe  
238 it could have been I never knew, but it was highlighted to me, but it, I don't know it  
239 was one of, I think those were two things, you know being on the outside of the  
240 system and also having the concept of identity within a group were two things that  
241 are really took away, erm, and something that I think about still in my work. Like who  
242 am I as a psych... As a trainee psychologist amongst other professionals and  
243 oftentimes there's discussion about what is the unique role and I'm thinking, do I  
244 even know?  
245  
246 DB: yes  
247  
248 P3: and it was like that when I was in the group relations conference, erm, thinking  
249 they didn't seem to know, but did I know? Was what I went home that day thinking:  
250 actually what is, what is my identity here. So it, you know it just it does I think, it

251 highlighted things that, it brought out things that I would have liked to have  
252 questioned about myself, but I was never in a situation to do that.

253

254 DB: right

255

256 P3: Erm, yeah, so...

257

258 DB: and what was that like?, that questioning, about your own identity in the group?

259

260 P3: mm, I think, I think it's an ongoing thing really because, I mean as a first-year  
261 trainee as well you will put into another role and you while trying to work out where  
262 you fit and we've all been pla, I've been placed in a multidisciplinary team and it's  
263 about what, what is my contribution, who am I within the team?

264

265 DB: mm hm

266

267 P3: especially when the majority of the members of the team are established and  
268 they're fully qualified, so for me and think it's an ongoing process of discovering who I  
269 am in the role of an educational psychologist, as a trainee, erm, and what I bring to  
270 that individually, like my unique characteristics or insight all perspective that I bring to  
271 that role as well, erm, but I wouldn't say I'm there yet.

272

273 DB: sure, sure

274

275 P3: just, erm, I just think that the conference help to highlight how easily it is to get  
276 lost when you're not sure and when you ha, when you haven't spent time trying to  
277 define to yourself who you are and what you bring. Erm, you know, because I think  
278 most of the time I tried to explain to other people what my role is, erm, and you have,

279 I think you work up a blanket statement just to make it easier for everyone to  
280 understand, but that doesn't mean that you agree with it all that it fully encompasses  
281 what you think your role is, so...

282

283 DB: thank you. Any other reflections from your point of view in terms of what the  
284 experience was like of attending the relations conference?

285

286 P3: not sure, I think there were lots of other, erm, things I thought about from the  
287 experience in terms of race and gender, but they were just little ideas that kind of  
288 would come up, through a conversation or a comment. Erm, and I think those are  
289 things that all develop as I go along so maybe when you do the next interview I  
290 would have thought about it more, and I'd have some thoughts on it...

291

292 DB: mm hm, is there anything at the moment that you'd like to think out loud about?

293

294 P3: erm, I don't know, I think, I don't think I engaged in thinking about those areas. I  
295 know other people did so I was confronted with each from other people's  
296 discussions, for example a group, erm, that was primarily made up of Black and  
297 Asian participants, they said to the rest of the group that they had been ostracised  
298 and no one wanted to join them because they were black and Asian. They'd labeled  
299 it so th, that was the reason so that, I was faced with the situation like and that but I  
300 didn't really engage in discussion all thought about that. I just saw okay that that's  
301 your opinion but I was ca, consumed with thinking about other things like for example  
302 how groups of forming and how I was (?) a member of a group, so I think, I don't, I  
303 think, well I think in work generally I've had so many discussions about race and eth,  
304 and, eth, (?) and ethnicity already, so I'm already kind of developing my own  
305 thoughts about that, erm, so in the conference it wasn't so much something that I  
306 focused on, erm, or chose to but I think that's because it's something I'm exploring

307 elsewhere as well already and I think here at the conference I wanted to explore  
308 things I hadn't be in, or wouldn't have the chance to be in, erm, just to see things  
309 from different perspectives, so, yeah, I think yeah I think just what I've mentioned  
310 before was the things that really stick out in my mind about my experience.

311

312 DB: okay, I'm just mindful that you mentioned gender as well as part of that  
313 description, were there any thoughts there?

314

315 P3: yeah, I mean they ca, it came up, erm, in the conference just from other people's  
316 discussions so I would hear different things about gender, erm, and about roles, erm,  
317 I think one thing that came up a lot in the wider group was about, erm, the mail, the  
318 white male wanting to take control of the situation, or is it that we give control to the  
319 white male. So that was discussion that came up quite a bit, erm, I think it was  
320 interesting because I think, I don't know, I think in my mind there were a lot of white  
321 males that took control but the but we don't know if they took it all we gave it to them  
322 as a group collectively. Erm, ... So I don't, I didn't, I haven't really explored that really,  
323 erm, in terms of my own thinking, I know some of my other colleagues have but for  
324 me I didn't... There was a sense of, I guess security if the white male took leadership  
325 but I don't know if that would have been the same if somebody else have done as  
326 well because it just seemed that they were the only ones that did, so I am right about  
327 that same sense for security if somebody else had as well. Erm, but then I guess  
328 what compelled them to take that role or to walking into that role I don't know, so, or  
329 whether they were forced into it, so it's. something to think about but I haven't really  
330 as yet.

331

332 DB: and you mentioned those kind of themes about perhaps a sense of being an  
333 outsider? And something around identity, is that right?

334



335 P3: mm hm

336

337 DB: other any other reflections on any of those kind of themes that we talked about in  
338 terms of your experience of attending group relations that you've got any other  
339 thoughts about?

340

341 P3: erm ...

342

343 DB: there don't have to be

344

345 P3: no (laughs) I'm just trying to think, erm ... think links to identity, erm, we had  
346 small-group sessions where we had a consultant in there with us, erm, and I felt  
347 really uncomfortable, s'cus the consultant, erm, in the initial stages of the week often  
348 didn't speak at all and how I was just remembering how difficult that I found that, erm,  
349 that I wasn't getting a response back from another person, erm, and how it did make  
350 me feel quite angry and I think I became quite angry at, erm, the consultant because  
351 those that lack of respon, that lack of feedback. Erm, and then reflecting on that I  
352 then thought about how, erm, how much I look the feedback from people I am  
353 speaking to, so for example if I'm working in a school how much do I look for  
354 feedback from the adults there all working professionally you know, for example here  
355 at the Tavistock how much do I look the feedback, erm, and I think because I was  
356 met with kind of what I perceived to be a cold character if you like, erm, it, I limited  
357 myself in how much I gave. Erm, so I think thinking about being a trainee and I think,  
358 uh, because we're still learning, because I'm still learning, I sometimes offer things  
359 tentatively, erm, and look for the response, but how dangerous that is because in that  
360 situation, erm, I based all of my kind of output on what I was, or what I perceived is  
361 there being no input from somebody else. Erm, so that could come back to identity  
362 as well and the s' of knowing who I am role and what I can give. Erm, but just I think

363 in those moments I was aware, I think especially the first day I experience(d?), I was  
364 aware of us. I was aware of how much impact just somebody not saying anything  
365 and not giving any feedback, b, through body language or anything, how it made me  
366 feel so insecure in my role and what I was there to do. And I'm wondering whether if  
367 I... New exactly what was happening I would have felt more confident, erm, to sit  
368 there in silence or to receive that feedback. Erm, or whether it would have been the  
369 same, but I do remember that it was very uncomfortable, erm, and it made me not  
370 want to be in that place, made me not want to speak, erm, but it also, it conjured up  
371 kind of almost angry childish feelings towards the consultant for no reason, just  
372 because, erm, I felt I was being ignored, erm, but in the professional context you  
373 could be ignored or you could be, erm, attacked almost verbally, but you, I wouldn't  
374 necessarily respond in a childish way I'd(?) feel really angry at the person but I guess  
375 we, I guess we often do was well it, it I think our, you know our interactions with  
376 others especially if they're quite hostile all regressive do conjure up in us kind of  
377 feelings that not very professional and about how to manage their so, I think being in  
378 that group and being forced to stay there for the whole hour and having to manage  
379 those feelings, erm, was quite eye opening from me.

380

381 DB: in what way?

382

383 P3: because I think, I think because it, there was so much space where nothing was  
384 happening, or nothing was happening physically, erm, so we were, there was no  
385 conversation and so those feelings were there and having to keep them inside,  
386 where as if I was in a professional context, erm, there would be a focus, I could deal  
387 with the issue at hand, go (?) away and deal with my feelings but I'm not forced to  
388 stay there, there's no, erm, but there was nothing, I mean in a professional context I,  
389 at least if I get some aggression back there's some feedback, there's something that  
390 I can work with will respond to. But, I think throwing me into a place where there is no

391 response kind of was really uncomfortable and I stink (just think) there's no place for  
392 it to go, because I couldn't talk about it to anybody, I couldn't act on it or I couldn't, I  
393 didn't have anywhere to put it because it was all very much exposed within that  
394 circle?

395

396 DB: yeah

397

398 P3: erm, so I think it makes me think about when I do have heated conversations or  
399 discussions or if they arise in the workplace, where do I take those feelings and how  
400 do I manage them in that moment, continue at the service level with what needs to  
401 be done and then take them somewhere else. Erm, but there it was just, we were just  
402 trapped in a room basically, that's how it felt. Erm, and not being able to work with  
403 the feelings all talk about them, well I guess we could have talked about them but it  
404 wasn't, it didn't feel like a safe space to. Erm,

405

406 DB: right

407

408 P3: and I guess in a professional context it's not the right forum to talk about feelings  
409 as well, erm, in that sense. So, don't know...

410

411 DB: thank you. I think what you've spoken about links with by next question, erm,  
412 which is about any learning that you might have noticed about yourself during group  
413 relations conference. Any thoughts?

414

415 P3: Erm, I learnt that I can manage a lot better than (laughs) I thought I could, all all  
416 physical things as well, erm, and can still function professionally whilst managing  
417 what's going on internally, erm, but I think I also learned about kind of way things are  
418 placed, erm, and I s', I became aware that I would have say for example if I was

419 feeling angry I put it into a particular person, so I put it into the consultant or I put it  
420 into the group that didn't do what I thought they should do and I became more aware  
421 of maybe placing things in the wrong places, putting things in the wrong places, erm,  
422 and I think cus, because we had a reflection time at the end of the day I was able to  
423 explore why did I feel angry towards that person, what was it conjuring up in me that  
424 made me feel, so for example, erm, with the consultant I think I was angry at him  
425 because, erm, I think he'd ignored me because I'd asked a question, but technically I  
426 should have known the answer to the question and so what his, his lack of response,  
427 it just made me feel incompetent, but, erm, but then what it highlights to me was that  
428 then I don't feel competent in general because if I was, if I did feel competent then I  
429 thought well that's just a piece of information that I don't know right now he doesn't  
430 want to explain it to me, that's fine I'll have to find out another way rather than feeling  
431 really in, insecure and then because I felt insecure I felt angry at the consultant, put it  
432 all in here, it's all his fault, with the group that walked out maybe there was a part of  
433 me that was frustrated and wanted to walk out as well but because I couldn't, erm,  
434 and they had, I put all the anger on them, so that well I'm angry at them because they  
435 left but then also seeing the response that they had from the group so everyone else  
436 is angry at them, I thought well okay this is find them so it kind of peas to bit of me,  
437 so just seeing how things can be put in the wrong places and that when you don't  
438 have time to think about it you leave them in the wrong places, erm, so I think that  
439 was something that I learned throughout the week, erm, but also when like, as I  
440 described being in the outside groups I learned about I think I saw things from a  
441 different perspective and I think, I remember having a conversation about gang  
442 culture, erm, because I work with Young people outside of professional work as well,  
443 erm, and I just saw how easy it was to turn your back against the system and feel like  
444 you've been wronged and so I think being in the one of the outside groups and  
445 seeing things from that perspective it kind of gave me understanding for how maybe  
446 gangs can feel or how, how they can operate and how things you know in the

447 working of a gang, erm, or just a group of young people, cos I was thinking about  
448 young people and I held them in mind, erm, and how, how quickly that can go off into  
449 a different direction so (I(?) went into a different direction which was against the  
450 system, erm and and has no desire to be a part of it because the system disables,  
451 erm, you know just so seeing things from another perspective. I've never been again,  
452 I've never been kind of in a group that's been ostracised as such so if I wasn't in the  
453 conference I would never have experienced it from the inside like that, because it  
454 was so you felt, you know, everything that came with it. Erm, I think I learned a lot  
455 about the outside perspective really, you know, erm...

456

457 DB: what about yourself in that sense?

458

459 P3: yeah, I think, I think for me I think I saw that... I see, it very m, even though we  
460 were in the outgroup, I was very much secure all because I felt like I was within a  
461 larger group, so from me I think I'd always still tend to hide within the middle, erm...  
462 so I think, yeahs, I think, I, I've, I'm not left, I'm not really been on my own so I  
463 wondered what it would be like if I was on my own and I think thinking about it there  
464 is, as a sense, I think I feel a bit, not scared about it, but something apprehensive  
465 about being on my own because I came into the conference as part of a group,

466

467 DB: Yeah

468 P3: I was in a big group every time, even when I was on the outside I was part of a  
469 big group, erm, and so maybe I'm thinking now that technically I was okay because I  
470 was still with other people and I'm wondering how insecure I feel if I was on my own  
471 still, but it was group relations so it's all about groups anyway but it was about the  
472 individual within the context of the group but I think maybe I'm thinking now, erm, that  
473 is a psychologist I will very much beyond my own sometimes and how will I then  
474 function without having the group around me, erm, to always support or even just be

475 on the same wavelength, erm, so that's something to think about I think. Erm, I don't  
476 know what other things, what other things you kind of... to think about

477

478 DB: I'm interested in one of the phrases you said there about yourself as an  
479 individual within the group. Any thoughts about that?

480

481 P3: mm, I think I had supervision aft, I had supervision after the conference and I  
482 remember my supervisor asked me about how was I perceived by other people, erm,  
483 or was I aware of how I was perceived, erm... And I think at certain points I was but  
484 but other points I was so consumed with everything that was going on, I didn't really  
485 think about how I, erm, came across and I think I can go back to different situations  
486 and wonder now how was I received, erm, like for example when I joined the group  
487 that I thought I didn't agree with and I thought I'd join them just to see what it was like  
488 from the inside I said to them I joined their group and not because I agree with what  
489 they've done but because, erm, I don't agree with it so I wanted to see from their  
490 perspective. But I'm wondering how that would be received by, erm, how would, that  
491 would have been received by them with someone coming in to their group, erm, to  
492 join them but then saying to them well I don't agree with your philosophy or thinking, I  
493 don't think like you, but, erm, I want to see what you do. If someone said that to be I  
494 would be suspicious or I'd think well why are they here really, erm, so I'm wondering  
495 how I was seen, I read as it turned out we seemed to get all, so maybe I was much  
496 more like them than I thought (laughs), than I before(?), erm, I got on and since then  
497 we've seen each other in the corridors of its bigger shared experience as such, erm,  
498 but I think I try, I think from that and from that question that my supervisor asked me  
499 afterwards, erm, I do try to think a bit more about how I seen from the other  
500 perspective, because, eh, because that will then change how I k, try to come across  
501 as well, erm, but in the conference I don't think I was, I think it was just me and here's  
502 some think I want to say or h, this is something I want to do and played a part but not

503 thinking about what it meant to others that I was playing that particular role, erm,  
504 which makes me sound a bit self consumed, but, erm, I think, I think that I probably  
505 was in survival mode that week and it really was just about be trying to cope, erm,  
506 and I think I just did just do what I have to do to survive. Erm ...

507

508 DB: what do you mean by survival?

509

510 P3: just get through the week really, I mean, because it, it was anxiety provoking  
511 throughout the whole week, you know because we didn't know what we were doing  
512 each day, we didn't know what to expect, I didn't know what to expect, erm, there  
513 were a lot of times where it did seem like it was just open to interpretation and there  
514 was a lot of silences which were left to be filled and so I think probably to avoid that  
515 not knowing, I just thought well what do I need to do to get through it, erm, and I think  
516 I've ... Yeah...

517

518 DB: what did you notice yourself doing to get through it?

519

520 P3: erm, making sure I was involved I mean that's probably a good thing, I had to be  
521 involved any way but just making sure I was involved and contributing, erm, I,  
522 listening a lot like, as in not being, just being of high alert throughout the whole week,  
523 erm, trying to make friends as well, I think that's like buying allies really just to get  
524 through, erm, probably a lot of defensive things like insulting the consultants with the  
525 other group members just two ally yourself with the team members, erm, which was  
526 all, I mean, it was all just to get through just to make, I guess just to be stronger really  
527 because if there are more people on your side you're a bit stronger. Erm, but I think it  
528 was just getting through the week like I said, you know, it was part of som, I had to  
529 do the cor, the conference, it wasn't an option. Erm, and all the stories but I've been  
530 told work quite, erm, they, they did provoke a lot of anxiety, erm, so I have got in the

531 back of my mind, even though I went into it, thinking erm (I'm?), Okay I want to get  
532 the best experience out of this it was very much as in, almost as if you were going to  
533 hold your breath underwater. Just need to do it for 10 seconds. Go away, come out.  
534 So it was like I just had to get through this week, whatever it, whatever brought, it  
535 brought me, just had to get through it, erm, 's just looking for Friday afternoon. So it  
536 was very much is in just to survive that we, but experiencing gifts as well, but looking  
537 for, towards the finish line really ... I did very much feel like every day, I did describe  
538 it to somebody it felt like, erm, at the end of each day we'd come up, it was so, for  
539 example being in, being in a ocean or something. At the end of each show coming up  
540 for air but before you know it somebody is going to do again because it's the next  
541 morning I'm just starting all over again. So it really did feel like he just had a few  
542 seconds to grasp that there before you were underneath again, fully immersed, erm,  
543 within this ocean of group relations and it literally felt like that, because even going to  
544 sleep it was in your sleep, in your dreams, erm, and then you woke up and it was  
545 allowed (?) To go in, go again so it literally was just like being dumped in the ocean  
546 (laughs) and just coming up for air.

547

548 DB: yeah. And what's that like?

549

550 P3: it's exhausting, very exhausting and I think ... Yeah I don't think I've processed it  
551 fully until a couple of weeks later because outside of work everything was, because it  
552 was December, it's around Christmas time and from the there's loads of stuff going  
553 on outside of work so I didn't get to process it until a couple of weeks later when I just  
554 collapsed, what you ha, just done (?). Just have a bit of a rest, erm, and I, I, I spoke  
555 in supervision about not knowing what I was running on, I felt like my tank was  
556 empty, erm, wasn't sure what was fuelled me but I was still going, erm, but that's  
557 what it fee, it felt like, it felt like you didn't feel like you have anything left that was  
558 fuming but somehow you are still going through it. Erm...



559 DB: during the conference?

560

561 P3: during the conference and then afterwards as well, but because the conference  
562 was still there, erm, I haven't had a chance to process it yet so it was still, still going  
563 through it really.

564

565 DB: in that sense of running on empty?

566

567 P3: yeah it just because it was so I mean you got ba, it finished quite late, erm, the  
568 many just about had time to go home have something to eat, go to sleep and then,  
569 but because so much that happened in today oftentimes is still thinking over things  
570 thinking what it'd be like the next day so it didn't really stop. And so you, you know,  
571 you'd fuel up for a week let's say you put some petrol in the car you got enough to  
572 get you to a certain destination, but when you don't know where you're going and you  
573 don't know happily detours you have to type you don't know if you got enough petrol  
574 for the week so, I think, by Tuesday the next week should be over because it felt  
575 really intense. Erm, and you don't have time to stock up, from, with more petrol so  
576 you just keep going. Erm, and that's how it felt, it felt as if because we didn't know  
577 where we, where our, I didn't know where I was going each day, erm, journeys took  
578 longer than I expected, and so the petrol ran out, energy, but somehow there was  
579 still enough. That's why I think I was on survival, because there was still enough to  
580 get me through but I was pretty exhausted physically and just mentally exhausted,  
581 you know (?), Yeah.

582

583 DB: okay thank you. Erm, I'm just going to ask for any other thoughts you might have  
584 in terms of personal learning about yourself during the conference?

585

586 P3: erm, that I can be a lot more assertive than I thought I could be before. Erm...

587

588 DB: how did you find that?

589

590 P3: I think because I think and also be, just being able to take a bit more, like a few  
591 more risks as well. I think within a group situation, erm, I like to listen to whats before  
592 I place myself and see what's going on, I'm not very, I'm not typically one of those,  
593 the first wants to step out speak, erm, or even initiate the direction of a discussion, I  
594 like to see where things are things out first of all. Erm, but I think in the conference I  
595 was able to take a lead, well, if I felt confident enough to do so, and I did, I did it a lot  
596 more as well and I'm wondering whether it was because I felt like I was playing a role  
597 or whether it was parts of me that actually were me coming up (?), Being having the  
598 opportunity to come out in, erm...

599

600 But taking a lot, taking a few more risks, erm, so' speaking out within the large group  
601 because I didn't know what if what I was saying was correct or if it was, erm, even  
602 what I was trying to communicate, but I still, you know, experimented with that.

603 Erm...

604

605 DB: what did you learn through that?

606

607 P3: I think that, in terms of me professionally well (?) I learnt that I ha, I can actually  
608 be more assertive I can take m, initiate the direction of things, erm, which I don't  
609 typically do so I think, yeah, that's what I learned but I can do it so possibly I should  
610 do it a bit more often because, erm, I, what I noticed as well was that a lot of things  
611 that I had to say were listened to and were taken so it just kind of showed me that if I  
612 do take a more proactive approach within a group, erm, it can actually benefit the  
613 group, it's not necessarily that of just throwing out suggestions or ideas that I feel  
614 good but no one else does. Erm, which I may have thought before, erm, so just I

615 think in terms of learning about myself, that you can take risks take a more active  
616 approach in groups, an, don't, I don't always need to map things out before I step in.  
617 Sometimes it's okay just to jumping. Erm, and also thinking my role as a  
618 psychologist, some things they are risky when we are, when I'm discussing children  
619 or parents and families, erm, I don't have all the answers. So learning about how not  
620 having all the answers is okay and been able to take risks within, you know, a safe  
621 space. An, you know, and also thinking about the risks that being taken and who it,  
622 who it effects really in a sense. So I think but one thing I learned about myself.

623

624 DB: what do you mean?

625

626 P3: so, for ex, is just affecting me or if it's affecting other group members, because  
627 obviously I can't take risks that will, can be damaging to other people even if I have  
628 ideas. So just being aware of you know, who it impacts, who it affects, erm, and  
629 what you can comfortably take a risk in really. Like I said, I said before about always  
630 having like me and like rules and things like that, but then that often can translate to  
631 having to get things right as well, but then, within the conference, erm, is almost, it  
632 wasn't and write it all wrong and so there was room to play about with it and I think  
633 that, that I can take that into my work and my personal life is the just playing around  
634 with things, well there's no, there might not be a right or wrong, just trying different  
635 things out. So I think that something will have been able (?) to think about and  
636 translate, in that way...

637

638 DB: it seems like you're describing some changes or shifts in thinking?

639

640 P3: mm, I think so, I think it gave me a lot to think about, erm ... the think it gave me  
641 a lot to think about myself. I know, I know that like I've described before it was the  
642 individual within the context of a group, erm, and so I think, the reason I think it

643 made me think a lot about myself is because I'm in training at the moment and it, it is  
644 about personal growth and development, and here especially the training isn't about  
645 creating good clones, it's about, you know, creat, or developing the individual and so  
646 I think that's why... I thought a lot about myself within the group and how it, what my  
647 thinking was and being aware of how I'm reacting, erm, and I think because I wrote  
648 it, I wrote it all up an, every day, you know, the different experiences that I'd had the  
649 different thoughts I had about the experiences, erm, I think that all contributed to  
650 change. So I'm thinking now that even me talking to you now is... Like somewhere  
651 along the line of change...

652

653 DB: yeah

654 P3:erm, because I don't think I was like this before the conference, so... I'm  
655 assuming now that I'm ha, halfway along but I'm along a bit more further down the  
656 road of change since the conference, erm... because it was such an experience, and  
657 I, I said it, I've said, I've said to people (?) It was a very rich experience and I wouldn't  
658 do it again, erm, but I really value it at the reason I wouldn't do it again is because I  
659 don't want to take away anything that I've gained from the first time round. So it's not  
660 because I would avoid it, but I don't want to lose anything? Erm, and I think that it  
661 was a big, just being in that situation has changed my thinking. So even if I can't label  
662 and so a' sh, how it has, erm, it just one, I th, I feel like it has been one of those life  
663 changing experiences, or even just in terms, if it's just professionally then fair, fair  
664 enough but it has been something which has sort of shifted me on the road an (?)  
665 professionally, erm...

666

667 DB: what do you mean?

668

669 P3: just in terms of s, I don't know, I can't, I mean I can't fully describe it but I think  
670 just exp, like I (?), You know I talk about being on the outside in that experience and

671 how I've never experienced that before, erm, er, just when you experience something  
672 that you don't, you haven't experienced before it changes the way you think about  
673 things. So, I talked about gang culture, erm, whilst I don't condone certain behaviours  
674 I might have an appreciation or I (?) Feel a bit more empathy towards certain groups.  
675 Erm, I might now advocate of particular groups that I might not have done before,  
676 erm, I think it's just because I feel that I can unders, I understand, d, a different, from  
677 a different perspective now. It might not be my perspective or the way I think about  
678 things, but I can see it now. Whereas, whereas I wouldn't have seen it before, erm...

679

680 DB: seen what?

681

682 P3: I wouldn't have seen, so if I'm, if I'm using the gangly example, with (?) the  
683 outgroup example, erm, I wouldn't have seen how the system which is supposed to  
684 be perfect if I'm talking about society, perfect, it's not perfect but how it's supposed to  
685 enable people to grow and to develop, it's supposed to support. Being in the group  
686 and I saw how something which was there to keep us safe, to make sure everyone  
687 had a fair chance and to make sure we had a voice and were (?) Protected, seeing  
688 how even with that perfection, erm, somebody (?) can still lose out, erm, now I think  
689 about society think about actually help people are losing out. The system isn't  
690 perfect, I know all part of the system and I'm working to this, this particular system,  
691 but people are losing out, so I kind of more likely to consider now, actually if, who are  
692 the people who are missing out and why. And should they be forced to fit in? Just so  
693 they can recei, or does there need to be a system shift, whereas before I would have  
694 thought, youth (?) to fit in because the culture is not appropriate for society, even  
695 though I work with young people, it gave me an understanding of maybe my work  
696 outside of work, working with them, erm, and because I like rules, I would have  
697 thought well, everybody needs to fit in now, but now I'm not w, now I think hmm, I  
698 don't think I like rule, not as in I don't like rules but I don't think I like the boundaries

699 that are set people as much, especially if they're not enabling people, but they're  
700 disabling them. And so that, just, it just shifted my perspective, erm, in terms of how  
701 the structure is in perfect, erm, so I don't know for describe that very well, probably  
702 happen, because I have a tendency to do that, but (laughs), in my, reminds me a  
703 little bit, but...

704

705 DB: it's really helpful, really helpful. Thank you. I'm going to stop there because we  
706 got to stop somewhere.

707

708 P3: ok.

**Initial interview: Participant 4**

1 DB: okay my first question is to ask you to talk to me about your experience  
2 of attending a group relations conference.

3

4 P4: my experience of group relations, erm, well it was very, erm, there was so  
5 many sections to it that, erm, I find that it's (?) Quite difficult to talk about it,  
6 erm, and because I think talking about it, it's, there was so much, it was so  
7 rich and diverse that it is quite hard to take, it's hard to talk about it without  
8 jumping from one section to another. So, erm, there was the part where those  
9 the whole group, erm, all, I think there was about 100 or just like under 100  
10 and would all sit in a spiral and that was quite a, erm, key thing I remember,  
11 sitting in the spiral because we did that every day so that, the and of the, the  
12 visual kind of memory of this spiral and talking about the centre of the spiral,  
13 erm, who sits in the middle. At first it was undesirable and by the end of the  
14 week it was completely desirable to sit in the middle, erm, and in that section  
15 of the group relations conference I got really interested in gender roles, erm,  
16 and it was a pred... It was predominantly female, erm, group, erm, of, the  
17 inter, of the group like, taken as a whole. Erm, but I, I perceived it as the men  
18 in the group taking, erm, dominant roles and I, I raised it as an issue and I  
19 raised it as a comment, I commented on it in the group and, erm, some  
20 people, one woman in particular said oh, no it's not just, it's not that the... she  
21 thought, she said that the men had been nominated as leaders of this group  
22 and she said that was because they were the best people for the job, that  
23 they were good leaders, they had good qualities in them of leadership. So  
24 they were, erm, they had been, the group had taken it upon themselves to  
25 allocate them as leaders. And I was saying, erm, that actually we were kind of  
26 mirroring society where we, we expect to see m, le, men as leaders and so  
27 we, we kind of put that into the men. Erm, and by white men, it was white

28 men who took this, they had kind of self appointed all they thought that the  
29 group had appointed them leaders, or they were, they were, I think if you had  
30 measured the time they were speaking, they had dominated the conversation.  
31 Erm, they talked about wanting to sit in this middle chair of the spiral which  
32 became this kind of talking point and, y, yeah, and I think it began to emerge  
33 as a fiend than me that I can that didn't fit very comfortably because you  
34 think, for me I was thinking there's lots of psychotherapists and psychologists  
35 and, erm, psychiatrists and people who I considered to be very thoughtful,  
36 people who are very aware of society and, erm, are very aware of their roles  
37 their gender and racial roles but yet would still allocated the white men as  
38 leaders. So that was something that stuck out for me.

39

40 DB: what sense did you make of that?

41

42 P4: erm, I found it quite, in some ways quite depressing that even the most,  
43 the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London,  
44 kind of thing, erm, still, erm, were not, I didn't see them to be as reflective as I  
45 hoped they would be. Erm, I'm prepared to, erm, erm, concede that these  
46 men were the bes, you know I'm prepared to, to take that as a hypothesis, oh  
47 these men were the best leadership, have the best leadership qualities, erm,  
48 but I think we needed to think about what that was about when there's only  
49 sort of six men, six white men in the room and we've allocated five of them as  
50 leaders or something. You know, what does that mean out of 88 people,  
51 what, what's that about? And just thinking about that and, are we, where the  
52 women doing themselves a disservice, because I saw two women who I  
53 considered to be very le, not myself, but other people who I considered to be  
54 very, erm, holding leadership qualities, but they weren't named by the group's  
55 leaders. And that neither of those were white they were of different racial



56 backgrounds and I just wondered what, what, what the group was doing and  
57 whether we were reflecting society in that small little microcosm.

58

59 DB: and you said you found it depressing?

60

61 P4: erm, perhaps depressed is a bit strong but I had higher hopes, I thought  
62 that that would be something that we'd be able to really, erm, erm, think about  
63 and reflect on

64

65 DB: mm hm

66

67 P4: every... came to the conclusion that these were, these were mine and  
68 then that's great, that's fine, but I just felt like we gath... Amount of talking and  
69 thinking was what I was after and, but didn't quite, erm, it didn't, we s, we still  
70 ended up with that as our conclusion...

71

72 DB: and you mentioned the reflection about that...

73

74 P4: mm, I, I, think that the, I think that big groups are hard because I think  
75 then only certain people talk out, and I think there is something to be said that  
76 there talking to the group, erm, but, I think they had in the canteen and things,  
77 during break, people, we'd have a little mini discussion with friends or people  
78 that I'd met of the course and they'd say, oh why thought that man was totally  
79 wrong when he said that and I sort of think that, oh I wish that you'd said that,  
80 because that voice, that dissenting voice, just wasn't heard. And there was a  
81 lot of people, I think also, thinking visually of the spiral image, there was a lot  
82 of people sat on the outside of the spiral who didn't speak. And it left me

83 wondering what they were thinking and I think it said a lot about whose voices  
84 were heard. Erm, I think role, like professional role came into it as well.

85

86 DB: could you say a bit more about that?

87

88 P4: erm, I think you need confidence to speak in front of a large group of, in  
89 any situation and I think that the group relations conference was, erm, such a  
90 odd situation that a lot of p, I mean it's unfamiliar to most people, but if, if  
91 you're a bit familiar with the Tavi then it you, you kind of expect something a  
92 bit odd like that, and you feel a bit more comfortable and a bit more, a bit  
93 more, erm, confident really to say I think this is rubbish. But I think that if  
94 you're new to the Tavi, new to the setting, or you're not familiar and you're not  
95 confident with that sort of, erm, way of talking or way of setting things out, like  
96 sitting in a spiral you (unclear) think that this is rubbish but you're not going to  
97 say it. I did wonder about the people who weren't speaking.

98 DB: what did you wonder?

99

100 P4: I wondered to what extent they thought it was no good, I wondered if  
101 some of them thought this is interesting, erm, I wondered if some of them felt  
102 like they wanted to speak but they, erm, couldn't, they didn't, they wanted to  
103 say something but they weren't, didn't, feel happy to speak in front of the  
104 group.

105

106 DB: yes, and you mentioned those that are more familiar with the Tavistock?

107

108 P4: mm

109

110 DB: what was your thinking in that sense?

111

112 P4: erm, some of the people who were at this, erm, conference work here,  
113 erm, full time, erm, some of us are studying here full-time, erm, some of us  
114 have been connected to the Tavistock for a long time, erm, so more familiar  
115 with the kind of oddities of the institution

116

117 DB: what do you mean by that?

118

119 P4: well, okay, that's probably not the right word, but the... The way that, well  
120 sitting in a spiral for an hour every morning is not how most institutions work,  
121 and therefore if that's the first time you've done that, you're going to be  
122 thinking what's going on here. And if you know the Tavistock a little bit and  
123 you know that they are a bit more creative, an., or unusual, erm, the way they  
124 do things, more experiential learning, then this won't, this would cover such a  
125 shock, you'd may be be a bit more comfortable, a bit more cynical may be, a  
126 bit more aware that you could say, you can speak out and that anything will  
127 be listen, will be heard, erm, that the dissenting voice is actually a learning  
128 experience for other people, erm, and I think that if you're new to the place  
129 you might feel, so not comfortable, erm, and it would be so unfamiliar that  
130 you, you might not know how safe it is (unclear 12.03) to speak out.

131

132 DB: and you mentioned a dissenting voice, what are you thinking of in that  
133 sense?

134

135 P4: erm, I think we were asked to do a lot of things which, erm, were, erm, I  
136 don't want to say uncomfortable because that makes it sound as if it was  
137 immoral or it was somehow wrong, so it wasn't, I don't think it was wrong, but  
138 it wasn't normal, erm, it wasn't only usually go about a conference. Erm, there

139 was a, I mean to an example, there was somebody that I, in one of my groups  
140 who was expecting conference - conference like a business conference Ali  
141 arrived wearing a suit and he had a pen and paper, and like a notepad and  
142 pen and it was, it was and then I saw him at the end of the day and he, erm,  
143 he was almost crying, because he was expecting conference and he'd just  
144 been sent from room to room two, what he perceived waste of time, and I  
145 don't know if he'd paid for it as well...

146

147 DB: sure

148 P4: erm, I, I think it would have been really interesting to hear his voice, how  
149 he was feeling, but I think that he felt so disappointed that he, he didn't speak  
150 up, erm, so...

151

152 DB: what was that like from your point of view?

153

154 P4: it was really hard to see that, erm, because, erm, I don't know, I suppose  
155 as our role as EP's, I like to think that we are a bit of an advocate and, and,  
156 but I speak for him and it wasn't my, it was appropriate for me to speak for  
157 him, erm, but I really felt at the beginning of the first day that he was really  
158 expecting something else and didn't get it, erm, kind of raised the issue of  
159 what p., How much preparation people had had the conference, I know that  
160 we had a lo, that we'd been prepared what to expect.

161

162 DB: can you say a little bit about that?

163

164 P4: mm. that we had erm, in our course, erm, sort of forums within the  
165 course, we'd had, not a huge amount, I don., maybe an hour or so od, erm,  
166 what what we could learn, what we could get out of it, not what to expect in,

167           erm, specific terms but that it would be an experiential learning, er,  
168           experience where we would need to think but to take some time beforehand  
169           to really think about what you want to say, how much you want to share, erm,  
170           your boundaries, professional roles, to maybe be a bit experimental or try out  
171           new roles or 'stink about it or maybe if you wanted to do some reading about  
172           it, or it just kind of, we were given a space to think about our hopes our fears  
173           our, erm, what we are looking forward to, what we're nervous about and I  
174           think that particularly the social workers didn't, just came to it blind and it was  
175           a big shock, erm, when, when I saw this man expecting a conference, I just, I,  
176           it was, it was quite, it was quite hard to, to hear that. And the next day he  
177           arrived late and he wasn't there for the big room in the morning, and I thought  
178           oh God he's gone, erm, but he arrived at lunchtime and I saw him and I just...  
179           So excited to erm, so please to see him (laughs), and so I went over to him  
180           and chatted to him and said how pleased I was to see him. By the end of the  
181           week he actually...

182

183           DB: how did you make sense of that?

184

185           P4: what? That I was pleased to see him?

186

187           DB: mm

188

189           P4: erm, because I think, I think for me when I think about groups I think  
190           people hold things for the group, and if certain individuals can end up holding  
191           things for the group, I think, erm, as a group, some of us left the first day  
192           feeling exhilarated, some felt, erm, erm, that it was a waste of time and angry.  
193           And those (unclear), different people kind of felt different things and I  
194           wondered if as a group if we put things, weird sort of let some people take

195 something from the group, or kind of hold something for the group... no, I  
196 didn't want him left feeling like that, erm...

197

198 DB: could you explain that a bit more to me?

199

200 P4: what the?, Which bit? The talking about holding things for the group?

201

202 DB: mm

203

204 P4: well it's quite, it may be better demonstration when I'm thinking about  
205 other aspects of the group relations conference, so

206

207 DB: sure

208

209 P4: there was erm, when we had to split into territories, into territories, it got a  
210 bit erm (laughs), increasingly bizarre when we had to split into territories...

211

212 DB: how did it get increasingly bizarre?

213

214 P4: erm, well there was, we split into, we we were all, 88 of us in o., the room  
215 and we had to split into, erm, while initially we split into groups by just, without  
216 speaking, but that was for a separate thing, and this time we split into groups  
217 by whichever means we like to use,

218

219 DB: yep

220

221 P4: erm, but having worked in schools, erm, I'm very familiar with the fact that  
222 if you have 88 people in a room, children or adults, it's quite good to have a

223 leader to just to sort of separate people into groups, it's a lot easier that way.  
224 Erm, which made it more interesting for me to see how we were going to do  
225 it, separated into groups without someone allocating groups,

226

227 DB: and what did you notice?

228

229 P4: I noticed but there was a lot of professionals shouting at each other,  
230 someone was standing on a chair, erm, that the two facilitators, erm sort of  
231 staff on the course, one of them was shouting, erm, above the noise level had  
232 gone so highly that the woman, the, the female facilitator was having to  
233 shout above the noise, erm, to let, she seemed very (sigh), worried she just,  
234 she seemed to panic, it seemed like she was panicking, erm, the... it became  
235 chaotic so quickly, it seems chaotic actually that was something that I just  
236 didn't expect because, I don't know, you think these, these most thoughtful  
237 people and they're so educated and thoughtful, erm, and it just, it takes just  
238 being told to get into groups and you've got people shouting and, erm, and  
239 then what happened is there's a group left behind.

240

241 DB: right

242

243 P4: erm, some people, there's a group of people who said that they'd had  
244 enough of thinking about things, they wanted to do,

245

246 DB: mm hm

247

248 P4: so that became the theme of the doers the thinkers and the doers  
249 decided that they didn't want to think about how they'd split into groups, they  
250 wanted to just get into groups, then someone said I'm going to get into a  
group downstairs in this room, and if you want to then join me and, erm, some

251 people followed, and then there, it kind of sparked panic amongst the group,  
252 the whole group that - oh God I'm not going have anywhere to go. So it just  
253 kind of became chaotic and people were shouting and then everyone just left  
254 and it was mad dash and it wasn't thoughtful at all and people just went into  
255 groups, went into rooms, and then there was a group of, erm, n., a fairly large  
256 number of people left behind who didn't have a territory,

257

258 DB: yep

259

260 P4: and, erm, I think coming back to the man who was so disappointed, I  
261 think, there were, each smaller group held, held in role for the larger group  
262 and the group left behind which sort of kind of ended up being referred to as  
263 the refugee group, erm, held something. There was also a group of people  
264 who were of ethnic minorities and they considered themselves, they  
265 perceived that they had asked for other people to come and join them and no  
266 one wanted to and that had really kind of, erm, hit a nerve for them and they  
267 were wondering what it was about that, they felt really rejected and dejected  
268 and the man who on mond, on the first day had expected it to be, er, a  
269 conference was in that group. And I just thought I would God, he's got the  
270 short straw again and he's, erm, low, yeah...

271

272 DB: what was that like for you, that experience?

273

274 P4: well, for me it was really helpful, the having, the, the buildup to the  
275 conference, having erm, had a few minutes, not that long but, some, session  
276 set aside, to think about it, what we wanted to share and what we wanted to  
277 do and I had decided that, erm, I was going to be quite protective of myself.  
278 Erm, I could see that it was something that I could find upsetting, erm, that I, I



279 could... That is, is an environment that I could find quite, er, uncomfortable,  
280 but not just uncomfortable, I think I could get really hurt in that environment.  
281 Erm, so I, I'm glad that I had some time to think about what I was going to  
282 share, what, whether, what roles I would be experimenting with, erm, and to  
283 use it as a learning opportunity, not take it too seriously. So, if for example, in  
284 that situation when we went into groups, I said I was gonna go into one group  
285 and then last-minute I went into a room which had already selected their own  
286 group. They're are already a group and so I came in and they were already a  
287 group sat down with a facilitator and I came in and said can I join yours,

288

289 DB: mm hm

290

291 P4: erm, knowing, I suppose knowing that they didn't want me there, because  
292 they'd already formed a group, erm, but in a way I was then, erm, I then p,  
293 protected myself, erm, because I I was I, I think by doing that I was, I knew I  
294 wouldn't be wanted so I was in a position of knowledge and I could use my  
295 kind of psychology to think about the group and, and new that they probably  
296 wouldn't say no but they'd be wanting to say no and, erm, kind of looked at it  
297 with a bit more of a - this is interesting, whereas if I think I'd been in a group  
298 where, if I'd gone into a group with friends that I knew already then I might get  
299 a bit more, I'd be a bit more vulnerable to getting hurt...

300

301 DB: okay, you said you use your knowledge of psychology, what were you  
302 thinking?

303

304 P4: erm, well I had, erm, a, erm, not very extensive knowledge of group rel.  
305 relations and group dynamics but I have read up on it and, erm, I know how  
306 groups work and I have work, I have done a lot of psychodynamic, erm, , erm,

307 ex, erm, training. I have worked in a lot of psychodynamic places and worked  
308 psychodynamically in institutions, so I'm able to use that, I was able to use  
309 that to think about that. Erm.

310

311 DB: can you remember any things that you did think about in that sense?

312

313 P4: yeah I mean I've been part of experiential groups before, erm, when I've  
314 been thinking about the work, erm, in, erm, disturbing behaviours that I've  
315 seen during work when I've been working with children, erm, or thinking about  
316 the emotional implications of working with challenging children. So, I feel, I  
317 felt really confident, how to express myself in a facilitated group. Erm, and  
318 also I know that when I am able to s. think of myself a little bit removed,  
319 because I know that when I'm annoyed with the person, I'm not actually  
320 annoyed with them as a person, I'm annoyed at thing that they've done and  
321 I'm able to really, I really, I'm able to recognise that in other people that I don't  
322 dislike them, I wish they hadn't done that thing, so equally I could see people  
323 will cross at me. Erm, it's because of what I've done, it's not me as a person.  
324 Erm, which I suppose you don't need psychological background but once you  
325 read up on all the theory about it and you sort of confirmed in... But in, but  
326 also then maybe a defensive thing because I could then think how they don't  
327 like me because I come in late rather than they don't like me because they  
328 find my personality annoying...

329

330 DB: okay, erm, I think what I'm going to ask next he is something that we  
331 might have touched on in some ways, erm, and it's a question about your  
332 personal learning, erm, and if you'd be happy to share any thoughts about  
333 what you learned about yourself during the group relations conference.

334

335 P4: erm ... I learnt about myself that, erm, once, once I have decided upon a  
336 role, that I am quite able to play that out, erm, I found it a lot easier to be in  
337 groups where I didn't know anybody, erm, I found it quite, er, fun and  
338 interesting to play around with how I acted, erm, I made a conscious choice  
339 not to being groups with people from my course, erm, although I did end up in  
340 one group with somebody else from my course but erm,

341

342 DB: what was your thinking there?

343

344 P4: I was thinking that I'm going to be with people on the course for the next  
345 three years, I want to stay friends with them, they're a nice bunch. I don't want  
346 to mess that up by annoying somebody or being, er, find myself in a situation  
347 when I disagree with them and one of us has to win and, at the time we were  
348 very new into the course and it was still at that stage of trying to build  
349 relationships and I didn't want to scupper that by showing them (laughs) what  
350 I could do...

351

352 DB: what do you mean?

353

354 P4: I think that the g. important thing that I learned was that it was again and I  
355 saw it as a game and when it were it became a bit too real I tried to bear that  
356 in mind, I'm a, it was a learning experience, erm, but I was aware that some  
357 people experienced it differently and also that indicate, it hi, the hit on, it  
358 touched on things that was so sensitive pertinent to individuals and I, erm, in.,  
359 some people were genuinely very hurt, and, erm, I, I didn't want to hurt  
360 anyone but I knew that it was an environment where it would be very easy to  
361 hurt somebody, because such sensitive things were being brought to the fore,  
362 erm,

363

364 DB: could you give any examples?

365

366 P4: well for example group that perceived them, that nobody had joined their  
367 group because of their race. Erm, in a reflective group in the end of the day,  
368 erm, somebody from that group was, erm, spoke to us, and it's quite hard to  
369 talk about this, I don't want to, I want it to remain anonymous, who that  
370 person was.

371

372 DB: sure, absolutely

373

374 P4: erm, because I don't think that it would be nice for it, because it was kind  
375 of confidential space, and I don't want to kind of identify them

376

377 DB: please don't feel pressured to, it's quite all right not to, and we can move  
378 to another question.

379

380 P4: no that's okay, but the point is, let's, if I talk about it more generally

381

382 DB: yeah

383

384 P4: Erm, I know that there were some people who'd experienced, erm, huge  
385 levels of racial discrimination in their lives and to have been able to move  
386 past, move on, move past it and it had brought up for them, erm, memories of  
387 the past, erm, about their race, which is just such a huge thing, and I think the  
388 level of distress was quite heartbreaking. Erm, and I think, you know, you  
389 can't play a game, that's not playing the game, that's real life and it didn't sit  
390 quite right with me, cos I felt like we were tapping into feelings that, I

391 wondered how they were being managed really, and was taking responsibility  
392 for bringing up or letting that emerge and then what happened to that. Erm, I  
393 think it did bring up issues that (sigh), we are generally protect ourselves  
394 against and I just kind of (sigh), I felt like we'd been warned, and I felt like  
395 some people hadn't.

396

397 DB: yeah

398

399 P4: and I was all happy to see it as a game until I saw people crying, then I  
400 thought this isn't a fun game, this is upsetting people, and I just wondered  
401 what kind of support they had, once they'd re-engaged with something, so  
402 painful memories of whatever it is. Erm, it doesn't have to be the example I  
403 gave, it can be loss or it can be feeling victimised or feeling, erm, you know,  
404 erm, excluded. And then you bring it all up, and then what happens?, Do you  
405 know what it was?, What happened? Christmas happened.

406

407 So what's that, what's that about? I think that, that's when I felt uncomfortable  
408 about it, and that's when I made a decision to protect myself and see it more  
409 as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on  
410 the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect  
411 myself.

412

413 DB: could you talk a, your choice, would you be willing to talk a little bit more  
414 about that choice that you made, that decision?

415

416 P4: I think, professionally, you've got yourself in role, and personally, you've  
417 got yourself and if somebody says something to me as a professional I'm able  
418 to understand and think about what it is that they're erm, feeling negative

419 towards. Me as an EP or me as a [describes previous work role] for me as a  
420 woman, me as a, erm, young person. You know, what is it that they're angry  
421 at and I can sort of then understand it and deal with it and I suppose I use  
422 quite cognitive part of my brain that thinks, I see they are across at me as a  
423 professional because they feel that I'm not doing enough. Erm, then there is a  
424 personal part of you and, and I think, erm, that's a lot more vulnerable and if  
425 someone is negative towards me b. for my being, that's, er, I would take that  
426 a lot more personally, you feel a lot more vulnerable to that, erm, I think the  
427 first day I took things, erm, as if they were, I, I, I, was too sensitive to thinking  
428 it was about me as a person, but I think then from Tuesday onwards was able  
429 to, or decided to think of myself as a role in it as a professional and how they  
430 saw me. Erm, I'm saying that I'm a doctoral student and trainee educational  
431 psychologist, you know, that what they see when they see me and what, how  
432 I felt I was was different.

433

434 DB: how did you make sense of that?

435

436 P4: erm, I think, what do you mean by how did I make sense of it?

437

438 DB: that kind of choice you made, erm, to act in role, is that right?

439

440 P4: mm, yeah

441

442 DB: erm, just wondering if you have any reflections on that decision?

443

444 P4: I'm glad I did. I could see that it was a week that could potentially open a  
445 can of worms and I didn't want any worms (laughs) released, erm, I can see  
446 how upset I got on the first day, I got, I did get really upset. When I got home I

447 was very upset and it brought up things from my personal life that I was  
448 struggling with that I was, that hadn't entered the Tavistock building and then  
449 I, then, but then I was able to kind of think to myself they don't know any of  
450 that, they were annoyed at me because I said something that they found  
451 annoying, and so then I thought, then I was able to think about right, well,  
452 they perceive we as someone who is gonna say annoying things, that's fine, I,  
453 and I can kind of take, I can take that.

454

455 DB: mm hm

456

457 P4: and having worked with children who've, erm, got difficulties in the area of  
458 emotional and behavioural, erm, area, areas that I know when they will cross  
459 me, it wasn't because of what, whatever was going on with my personal life,  
460 it's because I've asked them to do some work, erm, and, and when I, when I  
461 was being sworn at everyday, never wants would I cry. So when someone  
462 said it to be in a really sort of eloquent, erm, educated way from an adult it, it  
463 hurt me because, I don't know, I was thinking of myself as myself rather than  
464 in role. I think it was then helpful to remember, it's just like being at, when I  
465 was working in schools, erm, so in a way it makes you stronger, but I, it  
466 made, but it was hard because some people were still being themselves and I  
467 then really didn't feel like I could play a game or kind of be immoral and say  
468 oh I don't like what you are saying because they are still being beggars  
469 themselves, and I can't, they may be not got that front, erm, so, I think by the  
470 end of it us as the, erm, course, we would meet at break and lunch and kind  
471 of talk quite animatedly about how what, how we were going, what we would  
472 do, what we were experimenting with and what kind of psychological  
473 principles we would bringing it in and isn't it interesting that this happens and  
474 it, but it, for all of us it didn't sit quite comfortably because we thought well we

475 are looking at it as a interesting, and some people are experiencing real pain,  
476 I don't know, but then I did as well.

477

478 DB: I'm just going to return to that question about your personal learning,  
479 anything you might become aware about yourself in the group relations?

480

481 P4: I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups. Erm, like for example where  
482 they'd already formed a group and I went in, and they said oh, we're called  
483 whatever and I said well I don't want to be called that they are based sort of  
484 looked at me and I could tell they were thinking about God it's not fair, you  
485 can't come into a group that's already established, we've already got a day,  
486 and then what's you're in, you then decide to change the group name. That's  
487 the sort of thing that would really annoyed me.

488

489 DB: right

490

491 P4: so, but I did it. And I, and nobody said it, no one said it out loud, so I just  
492 bought okay go this. Erm, I'd, in another group, erm, I said, I was saying that  
493 there needed to be a leader, but I didn't want to be the leader, but I insisted  
494 that there should be one, and then eventually when they said I should be  
495 read, erm, I said I'd only be leader with someone else and I just sort of was  
496 being quite ambivalent you could see it, or difficult you could see it as. I  
497 wondered if I did it in by, in other things as well, I think it brought it to my  
498 attention that this is something that I do.

499

500 DB: could you say a bit more?

501



502 P4: erm, I think, I mean, fro in one group someone upset me, then I refused  
503 to speak at all.

504

505 DB: mm hm

506

507 P4: and people, and I could tell it was... irritating other people, but I did it  
508 anyway. I suppose it made me aware of, that I can do that. Erm, but also, I  
509 know that some people think that when I was talking to them about it, that it,  
510 that's maybe quite an egotistical way of looking at things.

511

512 DB: how did you make sense of it?

513

514 P4: erm, I think it, I think, I made sense of it in a brought to my attention  
515 something that I do generally, and that group relations was able to, because it  
516 was such an artificial situation and such an intense situation and c. er,  
517 concentrated time that, erm, one of, it brought to my attention that I have  
518 been doing in the broader scheme of my life.

519

520 DB: yeah, what kind of things?

521

522 P4: well like that, erm, and this sort of in role, out of role vulnerability, erm,  
523 protecting myself against vulnerability, feeling, feeling very vulnerable and,  
524 erm, strategies I use to overcome that. Not wanting to get in touch with that  
525 feeling, erm, yeah.

526

527 DB: how do you reflect on that now?

528

529 P4: I think it was useful learning experience, erm, and also I think it's useful to  
530 be able to reference it because sometimes you can say, oh I'm a really  
531 outgoing person, or sometimes I think like I speak for other people, cos they  
532 don't want to say things are like that's a kind of general comment that now I  
533 can say, oh well I went on a conference and, and we thought about this and,  
534 and learned from that, that I speak, erm, for people, I speak when other  
535 people don't want to speak, or, and I say things that other people don't want  
536 to say. Erm, sometimes I like (laughs), I like to sabotage things. Erm, but it  
537 feels like referencing that makes it bit more, it, it gives you a week to really  
538 think about your roles, your role and what you do and how you are as a  
539 person.

540

541 DB: and I'm just going to come back (unclear), you talk about roles to  
542 something that you started on, erm, in terms of some reflections you, you  
543 mentioned in terms of gender, ethnicity, I wondered if you had any more  
544 thoughts in that regard? Or about your experience of the group relations  
545 conference?

546

547 P4: as a group outside of the group relations conference, there is ten of us  
548 and we're all girls or female, and, I think I noticed the genders and how the  
549 men took leadership positions and that irked me, erm,

550

551 DB: how come?

552

553 P4: well, I sort of already just spoke about it. I think that sometimes you think  
554 that, erm, with moved past that. You know we are all, we are all educated and  
555 thoughtful people and, not that you have to be educated, but we've, we have  
556 thought about it a lot and that the year 2012 we, we're equal and equality's

557 arrived. And then I think, just see it played out like that, where people from  
558 ethnic minorities felt disempowered, erm, and women were saying, oh I think  
559 that that man is the reason that we've elect., we've think about him as a  
560 leadership qualities is because he's got them, it's not because we've put  
561 them, put these qualities into him. I was thinking, how can you say that as a,  
562 erm, sort of, thoughtful person in 2012. But, yeah and I think it came up, like,  
563 there was a lot of talk about Nelson Mandela, because he had j., just died  
564 during that time. And there were some people that stood out from the as  
565 people who I admired, er, individuals, individual characteristics I admired and  
566 that I would sort of like to work towards being more like those individuals,  
567 erm,

568

569 DB: individuals from within the

570

571 P4: from within the group, yeah, erm,

572

573 DB: could you go a bit further with that thought?

574

575 P4: well there was a woman who spoke about Nelson Mandela and, she, so  
576 eloquent and good at speaking out and confident and thoughtful and able to  
577 get her thoughts across, erm, so. I suppose that's something I also learned  
578 from it, was that I'd like to be a bit more, like that (laughs).

579

580 DB: ok, thank you, erm, we're approaching the end of this conversation, erm,  
581 were there any other thoughts that we haven't touched on that you think might  
582 be worthwhile sharing, about your experience of the group relations  
583 conference?

584

585 P4: erm,

586

587 DB: there doesn't have to be.

588

589 P4: just thinking. I think it was really, I learned a lot from it but, I think it was  
590 very unique and that I think that some people's experiences would be very  
591 different and I'm interested in, I would be interested in hearing what people  
592 thought about it who hadn't had so much preparation and warning about what  
593 to expect.

594

595 DB: what did you take from that preparatory work?

596

597 P4: I think somebody spoke about a hard hat, well I know somebody, one of  
598 the members of staff talked about a hard hat and wearing a hard hat and I  
599 really took that on board because on my, after, after I had been really upset  
600 on the first day and I'd cried, I thought about the hard and I, sort of put the  
601 hardhat on Tuesday. And I'm glad that I was sort of prepped for that.

602 DB: you're glad because?

603

604 P4: I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset.

605

606 DB: would you like to say any more of that?

607

608 P4: no

609

610 DB: okay I think we are going to stop there, because we got to stop  
611 somewhere.

612

613

P4: mm, yep.

**Follow-up interview: participant 1**

1

2

3 DB: okay, it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations  
4 conference, since then have you made any links to that experience?

5

6 P1: erm, yeah, yeah definitely, erm, I think when we last spoke it was very fresh in  
7 the mind, erm, and I think since then I've not, it's not really been at the forefront, but  
8 it's definitely been there, so, and I think even just seeing visual reminders, seeing  
9 people who attended the conference, I mean even up until last week I bumped into  
10 someone, and it just brings it all back again. Erm, I suppose in terms of links, erm, I've  
11 seen it in terms of, erm, thinking more dynamically, so group dynamics, erm, group  
12 dynamics in schools that can happen, erm, group dynamics within teams within, erm,  
13 my EPS service, erm, and how people work together really, erm, and I suppose  
14 come to a solution, so I suppose what I'm thinking of was, erm, there was a case I  
15 was working on in school and, erm, I mean the referral came to me in terms of this  
16 child may have some, a specific learning difficulty and we may need you to assess.  
17 Erm, his attainment scores didn't meet the criteria for assessment so it was more  
18 around consultation work, erm, but when I met with mum, who met with me and the  
19 school, mum was very persistent on the dyslexia assessment and school kind of  
20 colluded with her. So I really felt, erm, I'd been trapped in a corner and I think that  
21 kind of brought back the group relations mentality where, erm, fight, fight for survival,  
22 but do it in a professional way. Group relations was very raw and very, you know,  
23 erm, I think especially thinking back to the experience when I was part of a, a group  
24 who had been left out essential, essentially. Erm, we were all asked to get into  
25 groups and go find a room and complete a task and there wasn't a room made  
26 available for us, so, so I'd felt like I'd been pushed on the outside. And I think with  
27 that meeting in school and the mum, that similar experience had occurred where I'd

28 been pushed on the outside, I'd walked into something I hadn't anticipated, and it  
29 went a totally different direction, and especially being a trainee I'd felt, erm, quite  
30 incompetent in terms of being, erm, undermined by mum and then undermined by  
31 the school to say, but your supervisor does that, and your supervisor can do dyslexic  
32 assessments and I was like, (sigh), so it was erm, yes so that and I think reflecting  
33 back on that was very much seeing the dynamics there, that group dynamics  
34 particularly, how mum was such a powerful figure, erm, she was quite passive  
35 aggressive, erm, but I could see that she just wanted the best for her child really, so  
36 she was pushing that forward and I think school were put into a position where they  
37 weren't quite sure what to do and they thought it was best to align with mum so it  
38 was, erm, yeah (laughs).

39

40 DB: yeah. And you made some connections it sounds like with group relations  
41 conference?

42

43 P1: mm, so in terms of being pushed so, being in a group setting, erm, a group  
44 setting where there's different professionals and being the one that was pushed out  
45 and feeling slight, and feeling incompetent basically and I think I've felt, I don't think I  
46 felt it as much in group relations, but reflecting back on it, erm, a lot of the  
47 professionals there were qualified for quite a while, you know, they were quite high  
48 up in their profession and I was just beginning as a trainee, so still trying to discover  
49 my role, and you know, what it means, I hadn't even gone out to placement at that  
50 point, erm, so yeah, so I think, just really realising my position and where that fits in  
51 with the group. Not only as a professional but also as a trainee. And I think that came  
52 about then in that school meeting, that I was going in as a professional, but also as a  
53 trainee. And I was challenged on both those levels, so, yeah. (Laughs) I'm not, I'm  
54 not pushed out so obviously like group relations, but to see how easily that can  
55 happen.

56

57 DB: what's your reflection on that, kind of connection you made?

58

59 P1: mm, what you mean?

60

61 DB: it sounds like you're making some links with the group relations experience and

62 you've given an example, erm, in your role in practice, just wondering what sort of

63 reflections you might have about those connections that you're making?

64

65 P1: okay ... I suppose I was thinking, erm, in my role how, how easy it can feel to fit

66 as being quite incompetent and maybe it might be easier for others to challenge that,

67 because you're not so, I don't know, I wasn't so confident in my thought or my

68 experience, erm, especially in terms of saying no to the dyslexia assessment. Erm, I

69 mean I had to go back and, you know, just clarify with my supervisor and get some

70 evidence just to back that up so I could go in again and say I can't do it, and these

71 are my grounded reasons why. Erm, so that was with that particular example and I

72 think with group relations, erm, being a trainee I didn't feel I suppose as, I don't feel

73 as confident in myself to assert myself fully, to say no I shouldn't be thrown out and,

74 you know, I felt myself kind of going along with it, feeling the anger, but not really

75 being able to express myself. Erm, and that's what I found in the meeting I was, you

76 know, I was, obviously the anger was being brought in me where I was being

77 challenged and I kind of felt woah, where has this come from (laughs), which was

78 similar to group relations it was just, come out of nowhere. And then where that left

79 me or where it didn't leave me I supposed to challenge that in that particular moment

80 in time. And having to go away and reflect and think back on it, and I think what the

81 difference was, I could go back into the school and discuss that further. In group

82 relations I couldn't, I had to live with it and leave that as it was, there wasn't an



83 opportunity to go back and say this is what happened, and this is how I personally  
84 felt, so, yeah.

85

86 DB: thank you. Any other kind of thoughts that you might have linked with your  
87 experience of attending the group relations conference in the sort of 6 / 7 months  
88 since then?

89

90 P1: mm ... I think, erm, I think also being, linking onto that experience and I suppose  
91 the rest of the experiences, so having the experiential groups where you had your  
92 voice to talk and the review groups afterwards, so more of the smaller groups, erm,  
93 being given that space to reflect and think, I think I really value that in my work both  
94 in CAMHs and EPS. Erm, and allowing parents a space to speak and think, erm, and  
95 I've had two opposites I suppose with parents. One where a parent, erm, her English  
96 was very limited and although we had an interpreter she didn't speak as much, and I  
97 don't know whether it was a confidence thing or it, we'll never know but, erm, it was  
98 really allowing mum to have that opportunity there to, erm, express her needs,  
99 express her concerns. And appreciating that from group relations, the space that you  
100 need for that and, erm, I suppose the containment aspect to that as well, erm, and on  
101 the other end having a different mum who just wanted to get everything off her chest  
102 and really trying to contain that meeting, so I was able to elicit the information that I  
103 needed as opposed to letting her run-off with the meeting and not being a very  
104 productive session. Erm, so looking at it from two angles that there can be people  
105 who will talk loads and they need that type of containment as well and to try and  
106 really manage and funnel that. And I saw that especially in our, erm, review meetings  
107 where that was managed quite well by the facilitator, by allowing everyone the  
108 opportunity to talk and really think about their thoughts. Erm, and then I was able to  
109 take that then and do that work with the mum, so letting her talk and then really trying  
110 to reflect back on, okay, so what are you saying here and what are the needs, what

111 can we do to help support your son. And then on the complete opposite to that with  
112 the mum who didn't talk as much, also containing her anxiety as well, perhaps,  
113 around not being able to reflect so much, but then eliciting more of a response in  
114 terms of asking her lots more questions I suppose and trying to contain it that way.  
115 So, erm, yeah.

116

117 And reflecting that back to the experiential group, where there were the periods of  
118 silence and sometimes they were needed to really allow that time to reflect, so, see  
119 how two different groups can work in real life situation with, and you come across so  
120 many different types of people, so

121

122 DB: two different groups?

123

124 P1: so sorry, the review group which was facilitated and then the experiential group  
125 which although there was a facilitator it was more left up to the group how we ran it,  
126 how much we spoke and didn't and some input from the facilitator.

127

128 DB: I see

129

130 P1: so not as structured is what I'm saying, yes.

131

132 DB: yes, thank you that's helpful. I noticed you mentioning the facilitator as you  
133 described those kind of experiences, erm, and perhaps, well just wondering if you  
134 had any other thoughts about the group relations conference and subsequent  
135 experiences outside, perhaps related to facilitators?

136

137 P1: erm, I mean I've seen them around, I've seen my review one around, quite a few  
138 times, erm,

139

140 DB: I guess I'm wondering through your description, was there something that you  
141 were taking from watching them and being part of the discussions with the facilitators  
142 to other work that you've been involved in?

143

144 P1: yeah, yeah, I think so, I think taking that, erm, objective viewpoint, so being  
145 within the group but still on the outside, yep, and, erm, like the mediator approach, so  
146 yeah I'm seeing that used within the facilitators.

147

148 DB: what do you mean by that?

149

150 P1: erm, so, maybe I haven't used the right word, erm, but mediating the group so  
151 just ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to speak, everyone had the  
152 opportunity to think and reflect and having to use that, erm, in meetings, especially  
153 school meetings were I'm meeting a SENCO, a class teacher, and parents and really  
154 having to manage three different lots of thoughts and view points and opinions and,  
155 erm, yeah and conflicts as well (laughs), which can arise, yeah.

156

157 DB: what's that been like?

158

159 P1: interesting, (laughs), erm, interesting in terms of where you can have some  
160 parents who really aren't sure and where the school are very focused and very  
161 directive and yes, we know this, this and this and parents who can sometimes be -  
162 oh I thought she was fine, or yeah I know she struggles a little bit but I didn't think it  
163 was that hard, erm, but I think with those particular parents the case was a lot more  
164 complex where there was, erm, it was a child protection case, and so, erm, upon  
165 reflecting back on that meeting I understood a bit more why parents were quite  
166 reserved, because they'd been going through all the social services and so forth, and

167 they were very skeptic of professionals. Erm, but just in that meeting, not having that  
168 prior information, erm, trying to manage and really illicit parent responses and  
169 containing schools desperate need for this child's learning and she was really  
170 struggling, erm, and sometimes noticing, like in a different meeting how, it was a  
171 team around the child meeting, and some professionals were just so blunt and I  
172 suppose insensitive to where parents were in the room. And, and m, from my point of  
173 view, I think I just felt, they're still humans and they still have feelings and, and I know  
174 you're doing the best you are for, for their children, but there is a way, I don't know,  
175 so, yeah.

176

177 DB: and did you make any connections in your mind at that kind of time or  
178 subsequently to experiences at the group relations conference?

179

180 P1: erm, yeah, yeah I think so. Not, I don't think I'd had at the time, but I think  
181 thinking back to it now and especially thinking back to my experiential group which  
182 carried on, everyone was very sensitive to one another so no one, and I,  
183 remembering other people saying oh, there were arguments and someone was so  
184 rude and we never had that, and I think I appreciated that because everyone was,  
185 there was that professionalism there in the room, which allowed the space for people  
186 to really open up and be honest and feel more trusting in the group as opposed to  
187 feeling if you open up, you will be attacked. Erm, which is what I think is what  
188 happened in some of the groups, erm, so I think really appreciating the delicacy of  
189 language and how much it can take for someone to be so open and honest, erm,  
190 especially when we're dealing with cases in our work and the delicacy around that  
191 and how much it can take for a parent to be honest and actually for themselves to  
192 realise the needs of their own child and what that can mean for them. And the impact  
193 on that, on them, erm, and how others just aren't aware sometimes of that's their

194 child and their dealing with that. It's not another pupil and, you know, difficult, so yeah  
195 (laughs).

196

197 DB: okay, thank you I also heard you mention, erm, some links or experiences that  
198 you might have linked up with your educational psychology service that you were  
199 placed with, and wondered if you might be happy to share any thoughts on that?

200

201 P1: erm, yeah, (laughs), it's an interesting service they, erm, I've noticed they all  
202 work quite individually so they've all got their own style, so it's difficult to ascertain  
203 whether it's a consultative type of service although use lots of psychometric assess, it  
204 is very much based on an individual EP and how they choose to work, as opposed to  
205 an overall service way of working. Erm, and it's interesting in the sense that they're  
206 still all a team, but I'd, I ha personally I haven't seen much of that team working going  
207 on. Erm, yeah.

208

209 DB: what tells you that?

210

211 P1: er, well from my, erm, from shadowing and so forth, so shadowing different types  
212 of EP's and the different work they do, erm, attending team meetings and their CPD  
213 days, erm, you know, where one particular EP has taken a different stance, another  
214 one has taken a different stance, erm, I haven't seen any joint working, or haven't  
215 seen much project work going on at all there. Erm, I mean there may be, but it's not  
216 been so evident.

217

218 DB: I see, have you made any links with your experiences at the group relations  
219 conference in that sense?

220

221 P1: it kind of reminds me of, erm, the event were they said everyone get into a group,  
222 erm, but don't speak to each other,

223

224 DB: right

225

226 P1: so it was like this room of strangers and they all, you all have your own individual  
227 ways but you were just put into a group together, it kind of feels like that, everyone's  
228 their own individual, but they were in a group together. (Laughs). It could be different,  
229 but that's, but then I'm there on Friday's, so there's not, there's some EP's there,  
230 there's some aren't.

231

232 DB: sure

233

234 P1: but even on my block placement weeks, where I've been there for two, three  
235 weeks at a time it's, erm, yeah, everyone seems to be very much in their own way of  
236 working or their own individual casework.

237

238 DB: what's that like for you?

239

240 P1: mm, it was quiet, I found it quite difficult because I'd come from working in an  
241 EPS and working very much as part of a team, erm, especially with the psychology  
242 assistants, so there were six of us, and four based in one area, so we were all very  
243 close to a lot of group work, erm, a lot of working together, and a lot, and there was  
244 lots of projects going on in that EPS so lots of EP's were working together with  
245 different EPs and seeking supervision from each other, so peer supervision. Erm, so  
246 this was very different where I felt very much on my own and if I, and I, and anything  
247 I had to do, I had to do on my own merit so it would h, be up to me to go out and  
248 seek the shadowing and, you know, rearrange that, erm, you know, rearrange

249 meetings with schools and so forth, there wasn't much direction there. I mean I found  
250 it very difficult to settle in at first, erm, it was a different style of supervision I wasn't  
251 used to and, erm, I very much felt thrown in at the deep end. So that was, erm, quite  
252 difficult to contend with.

253

254 DB: yeah

255

256 P1: yeah (laughs) yeah

257

258 DB: okay I'm going to ask, erm, a question which I think we've very much begun to  
259 think around, erm, and it's this: have you made any links between attending the  
260 group relations conference and your experience as a trainee EP?

261

262 P1: (laughs), erm, yeah I suppose, er, I really think the competence level comes into  
263 it, the competencies, so being consciously competent and unconsciously... yeah, so,  
264 consciously competent and consciously uncompetent and so forth the, the diagram,

265

266 DB: yeah

267

268 P1: (laughs) erm, I, and I think I can see links back at the time in group relations  
269 where there were some groups where I was, erm, consciously aware of how much I  
270 could contribute to the group, erm, how much I could (sighs), so contribute in terms  
271 of feeling confident enough to speak out in the groups, so in the smaller groups and  
272 larger groups, erm, and also really thinking about some of the things I was saying  
273 and why I was saying them, erm, and thinking back to my profession as well I  
274 suppose, erm, I'm thinking more in terms of our small experiential group, there was  
275 one example where they started talking about everyone's professionalisms and I  
276 think I was a trainee and then there was a social work trainee, and everyone else

277 was quite highly qualified, erm, and someone mentioned that there was, because  
278 there was a consultant did that make her the lion of the group, or something,  
279

280 DB: right

281

282 P1: and for me, I think I, it was an uncomfortable saying, erm, that didn't sit very  
283 comfortably with me, because I know I was only in the early stages of my training,  
284 but then did that then mean that I wasn't good enough I suppose to fit in with the  
285 qualified people, and where did my role as a student come in and as a professional,  
286 and I think I really, erm, yeah, I really contended with both those ideas because I,  
287 being a student and being a professional felt very separate in group relations where  
288 people were either referring to them as I'm a student, or oh I'm a professional, and  
289 people would ask you, oh so you're a student, so you had to come (unclear),  
290 whereas I'm a professional, I took my time out, I paid for this, that very much became  
291 a part of it as well, so, erm, yeah.

292

293 DB: and are you making any links with that kind of experience to your experience as  
294 a trainee educational psychologist since then?

295

296 P1: erm, yeah, yeah, I think, erm, I think in my CAMHs placement I felt very  
297 supported, erm, as both the student and a professional, erm, so my supervision has  
298 very much been links to the teaching and the practice, so being able to put both  
299 those links together, whereas in my EPS it's very much been a more about the  
300 practice as opposed to the teaching, I've had to kind of consolidate that teaching  
301 myself, erm, in terms of feeling in the pecking order, it very much has felt like that,  
302 especially in my EPS, where, erm, sometimes I've felt because I'm still a trainee,  
303 have I been, is it okay for me to challenge certain things, especially to a senior and,  
304 erm, am I coming from it, is what I'm saying valid enough, because I'm a trainee?



305 And I'm challenging a senior over something, and I think that's been a challenge  
306 (laughs), and I think it's probably going to be a challenge for the next two years and  
307 however long, erm,

308

309 DB: what's that like?

310

311 P1: difficult, difficult because I want to express myself, but really trying how to do  
312 that, how to do that safely as well, erm, and fortunately for me I had the opportunity  
313 to express that here at the Tavistock in one of our lectures, erm, where we get into  
314 small groups and do consultation type work, so, it kind of got brought up there, erm,  
315 and I was able to explore that more with one of the lecturers here to, erm, really think  
316 about how I can make my feelings of not feeling very confident and competent  
317 known, erm, because my supervisor really saw me as quite competent so I think  
318 there was that juxtaposition, erm, and I think when that was finally brought to the  
319 forefront, so I had to explain, I think we had like a midway review and I wrote that in  
320 there, that I didn't feel as confident, she was quite taken aback, so when we  
321 discussed that and because I didn't want to say oh, I'm a trainee and you're a  
322 supervisor, but I think what you're doing is wrong (laughs), or you're not teaching me  
323 enough, or you kn, because I think she felt I was okay enough to go out and do  
324 whatever where as I really felt I need more support from you, and it was difficult to, to  
325 elicit that, erm, so, I, yeah, so then, by bringing that into the review and discussing  
326 why I didn't feel so confident and, erm, because I was really, you know, trying to still  
327 grasp transitioning from a psychology assistant to a trainee and a trainee in  
328 education setting firstly and then going into a placement and the placement that was  
329 very different to my other placement, erm, and I think that brought about a massive  
330 change. So the supervision changed, the level of support changed, and my  
331 confidence grew with that. So, so the relationship got a lot better, I felt, yeah.

332

333 DB: how come?

334

335 P1: erm, I think it was having that opportunity to reflect here at the Tavistock, just  
336 how much of an impact it was having on me. And how I was struggling, and being  
337 able to have those conversations in a safe manner here, erm, and then taking that  
338 back to the EPS, feeling confident enough to reflect that back in a professional way I  
339 suppose, erm, and then seeing that being taken on board with some of my more  
340 complex cases as well so yeah (laughs).

341

342 DB: I see

343

344 P1: yeah, I didn't feel so much as being thrown in at the deep end any more, I felt  
345 more supported, I felt it was more a two-way supervision as opposed to me talking  
346 the whole time, so,

347

348 DB: and again I'm just wondering and I am interested in your thoughts about any  
349 links with group relations conference in that example you've given?

350

351 P1: mm

352

353 DB: there doesn't have to be

354

355 P1: yeah, I'm thinking, erm, I'm thinking back to our three, o, not three-way, sorry,  
356 just made that up (laughs), erm, our review, the review groups at the end, erm, and  
357 how that felt like mini supervision, erm, it was group supervision but facilitated by one  
358 person and, erm, on the four days we had it, being allowed to explore different ways  
359 of your thinking and feelings, so one day doing drawings, and one day talking and

360 can't remember the rest, something, something else, I think there was more drawings

361 (laughs)

362

363 DB: sure

364

365 P1: erm, so feeling, so having my anxieties and thoughts and, erm, feelings from the  
366 day contained in that space, erm, but being allowed to explore it in a safe way, in a  
367 safe way with the group and the facilitator, and in different formats, so and I think that  
368 shows with my other supervision it doesn't just have to be a, a, typical one-way thing,  
369 there's different ways to explore thoughts and feelings and be reflective, erm, so the  
370 drawings were really helpful, you know, talking about through different things,  
371 different experiences, erm, yeah so I think I've really appreciated that, yeah.

372

373 DB: are there any other links you've made, erm, following attending the group  
374 relations conference to your work in role, as a trainee EP?

375

376 P1: I think, erm, definitely taking on board the multidisciplinary working, erm, working  
377 with lots of different professionals who have different thoughts professionally,  
378 personally, erm, and trying to, I suppose work together, so thinking of my CAMHs  
379 work, erm, you, the whole office is open office, and there's lots of different teams. So  
380 I've had lots of opportunity to work with different professionals, which has been really  
381 helpful because it's allowed me the opportunity to gain their perspectives on a case  
382 and bring my own perspectives into it, and thinking about our team meetings where  
383 it's lots of different professionals involved. Erm, kind of reminded me a little bit of our,  
384 one of the groups where we were cho, we could choose ourselves who to get into  
385 groups with, so I chose to be part of the MDT group as such, erm,

386

387 DB: MDT?

388

389 P1: so, multidisciplinary team, and that was, erm, and that was quite interesting  
390 because it was all female, and its predominantly female in our role in CAMHs and  
391 EPS, erm, but it was e, there was a lot of tension and it was, it wasn't bought to the  
392 forefront, but it was very difficult for the group to gel and come up with a similar idea.  
393 Everyone had their own individual ideas and their own, erm, I mean it took us ages  
394 just to come up with the first ta, I can't remember what the first task was, but it took  
395 us ages to come together and the, whoever we'd appointed as the leader, she just  
396 couldn't contain the group, she couldn't manage it, she couldn't lead it very well, but  
397 no one else stepped into lead, people tried to take over but they weren't really  
398 leading as such, and she'd been appointed through choice, everyone else had a fair  
399 choice, you know, it wasn't like she'd said yep I want to, everyone was happy with  
400 that, but it was erm, I think it went to show that there needs to be someone, you need  
401 to have that strong leadership there or, or it needs to be very clearly defined who is  
402 going to manage the meeting for example, and I think, erm, seeinat team meetings  
403 and, yeah, team meetings both in EPS and CAMHs, it's very clear who's managing  
404 the lead, who's managing the meeting which has made it run a lot more smoothly.  
405 But also allowing the opportunity for people to talk and, erm, in the group relations it  
406 was very difficult to manage lots of people talking at the same time, lots of things  
407 were getting lost, where as I think seeing it in a professional team meeting space,  
408 you get the opportunity to really talk about caseloads and discuss a child, and  
409 soforth, so, and any needs or concerns that are brought up. So it needs that structure  
410 and I think that's what was missing from group relations. And I think thinking back to  
411 it now, (laughs) there was hardly any structure in group relations at all which is why  
412 there was probably a lot of problems and I think that's probably what I've appreciated  
413 quite a lot in my work placements, that clear structure that's there, and when it's not  
414 there, like I said at the beginning of EPS, I felt I was thrown in to the deep end and I  
415 think that's why I really struggled, because I didn't know where to go, what to see

416 and, erm, you know, what do I do next and, you know, I know I've been in an EPS  
417 before but it's just totally different ballgame now and yeah.

418

419 DB: and you mention the was some kind of experiences there for example the MDT,  
420 that reminded you of group relations conference?

421

422 P1: mm

423

424 DB: you were talking about, well, just wondered what it reminded you of?

425

426 P1: I think it was, erm, just the fact that there was a room of so many different  
427 professionals, you had to work alongside them really on different tasks and that,  
428 thinking back to that is a true reflection of what happens in the workplace, especially  
429 our work, erm, and thinking back to it now, especially thinking forwards in terms of  
430 education, health care plans and really working alongside lots of different teams,  
431 erm, observing SEN panels that you (unclear), you will clash with some people on  
432 certain things, but at the end of the day you've got to all come up with some outcome  
433 because this is a ch, and I think perhaps maybe that's where the different lies betw,  
434 in group relations there wasn't an actual life child's life in your hands and their future,  
435 whereas in the workplace that's somebody's life that you are essentially contributing  
436 to and determining where it's going to go, so yeah...

437

438 I think that's maybe what, I think that's what may have been lost and I think I saw that  
439 when we were part of that displaced group, that we were the ones, I think someone  
440 had said it as well, this is what happens with children who, erm, get lost in the  
441 system, they, you know, get passed around and sometimes you could just easily get  
442 lost in the system and we were the group that got lost in the system and no one  
443 wanted to take ownership of that, and passing the buck onto everybody else, yeah.

444

445 DB: what reflections have you got on that?

446

447 P1: erm, it was still, I mean it's still quite, I don't know, I, I know at the time and even  
448 for a long time afterwards it was, it was still quite a difficult experience I suppose to  
449 really reflect on, erm, because there was so many different aspects to it in terms of,  
450 how all the groups just merged together and ran off and did their own thing, and you  
451 with just le, it felt like a whirlwind, and everything else was happening around you  
452 and you had no control over it. And I think that can easily happen to children in the  
453 service or and parents as well, especially parents who ma perhaps may not be as  
454 articulate or affluent, and, erm, don't fully understand everything. So, yeah. And, and  
455 I think, for me, erm, what I really valued this year is really trying to put myself in the  
456 child's shoes, especially writing reports and thinking from the child's viewpoint, and  
457 that's what my supervisor has really, you know, put into me (unclear), to think from  
458 the child's point of view, you are the voice for the child and ha, and I hadn't really  
459 made that link before to that experience, but, I think it really, so obviously something  
460 in that, of being part of that displaced group left something in me to really think, I  
461 really want to put myself back into these children's point of view, and how can I then  
462 a voice that for them, yeah. (Laughs)

463

464 DB: any other reflections on, on those kind of links you are making?

465

466 P1: mm ... yeah I suppose just being, being put in the outsiders shoes, because it's  
467 very easy to say I can, well it's very easy to think well I can sympathise with you, and  
468 I think especially for myself where, erm, I'm sure I'll be challenged - you don't have  
469 children, how do you know what it feels like, or, you know, and so forth. Erm, an I've  
470 ha, and I've had the challenge of you're a trainee, we can't take you into this school  
471 and, erm, so there's work I was doing in the school and the head teacher was very, it

472 was traded work and she wanted a maingrade EP and so forth, and so through the  
473 principal, we managed to negotiate our way of working into that, erm, yeah, I  
474 suppose coming up, being faced with challenges and difficult challenges, erm, like  
475 that pressure from the, the teacher and the parent, erm, thinking back to group  
476 relations and being put into that challenging position of that group and not being able  
477 to voice my opinion, my personal opinion as much, as a group we could but I think  
478 individually it was very difficult given the amount of people in there and the lack of  
479 time (unclear) conference.

480

481 DB: and help me to understand the link with the subsequent experience, in terms of  
482 that case around dyslexia?

483

484 P1: okay yeah, so, erm, being, I suppose, thinking now about mum's position and  
485 perhaps why she may have been so pushy, feeling as the one on the outside, and  
486 everything else being done to her child, but she was on the outside there and she,  
487 and maybe that was why she was coming in from a passive aggressive viewpoint,  
488 really pushing for that assessment, which I completely understood, erm, so her  
489 feeling like that dis, like how I'd felt in the displaced group and, but all she wanted to  
490 do was represent for her child so, yeah.

491

492 DB: okay thank you, have there been any other times since, since attending the  
493 group relations conference that you've been reminded of what happened in the  
494 conference in your work as a trainee EP?

495

496 P1: ... erm, I can't think of many, yeah I think, I think, because they have been the  
497 biggest, some of my biggest cases, erm, or are thinking all my cases really I've  
498 managed to reflect in some way whether it's been a meeting with a SENCO, or a  
499 group meeting, or representing the child's views where they've not been able to s,

500 give their own view, erm, yeah, so holding the child in mind, yeah, and w, the whole  
501 systemic psychology and bringing that into it as well, so, erm, thinking of the systems  
502 around the child, systems in the school, how they all come together, the dyna, group  
503 dynamics, parenting dynamics and how (laughs) all of that was reflected with group  
504 dynamics in group relations and the systems within the systems so the yeah the fa,  
505 the facilitators the participants and soforth and the systems of students and  
506 professionals, and how that worked together.

507

508 DB: could you say a little bit more about systems within systems?

509

510 P1: erm, oh, so... I think what I was thinking was, erm, that you have, you have the  
511 group relations as a system, but it was still encompassed in the Tavistock is a  
512 system as well, so there was no, I mean th, they called it an external event or  
513 something, and pretend like the tavi's not the tavi, but it, you can't (unclear) the fact  
514 that it's still what it is, erm, yeah, and, and I think what I mean by the systems it's  
515 possibly the different groups, so you had the directors doing, and everyone kept  
516 themselves very separate, so the directors, the facilitators, the, oh what are they  
517 called now? Like spies, but they weren't really, I can't remember now what they were  
518 called, they were part of the group, but they were still part of the, the team the, the  
519 yeah. (Laughs) oh never mind.

520

521 DB: sure

522

523 P1: and then there were the participants.

524

525 DB: yeah

526



527 P1: so, who we were, and then within the participants, you have the professionals,  
528 you have the students, and all the different gr, subgroups within that as well, so I  
529 suppose just thinking there was lots of systems, yeah,

530

531 DB: yeah, yeah and you, it sounds like perhaps have made some connections with  
532 other systems beyond the group relations conference in your work?

533

534 P1: mm, yep, so systems, school systems and the groups within the schools, erm,  
535 the dynamics of the head teacher with the SENCO's, SENCO's with teachers, erm,  
536 parents, where parents come into that and the differences with more pushy parents  
537 and parents who are bit more passive, erm, the children, and then you've also got the  
538 systems around your EPS service, or your CAMHs service and the different teams  
539 you're working you and your local authority, or your NHS, erm, yeah the community  
540 as well, the community bases, so yeah, there's lots of different professionals, groups,  
541 systems that you have to work with especially as a EP and, in training what I've  
542 learnt is really taking account of all those different, just how many different systems  
543 can be involved in a particular child or a case, and the impact that can have on your  
544 work as well.

545

546 DB: what you mean by that?

547

548 P1: erm, so the impact in terms of thinking around that, erm, team around the child  
549 meeting, there was a good seven - eight professionals there, erm, and it was a  
550 family, erm, and I think all five children, three had been diagnosed with [names  
551 diagnostic category] and two were diagnosed with [names diagnostic category], so it  
552 was very difficult for parents to handle, erm, and, I'm losing my train of thought now,  
553 sorry, erm, so the systems, there, I m, I think just thinking about that one particular  
554 family and their five children, and how many groups of professionals and systems

555 were focused around one child and how that grew then when they included them as  
556 a whole family and what that meant, and that impact, an, I mean this particular  
557 meeting was for the family to gain extra support and care and there were difficulties  
558 because the children were treated individually, and individually the parents didn't  
559 meet the threshold, but as a whole it was very clear that they met, they could access  
560 support so it was, it was a meeting around that and to try and access that support for  
561 them, but, and I think from me, even as a trainee, I was just going there to feedback  
562 about some work I'd done with the eldest child, so I wasn't fully aware of what the  
563 meeting was around and so forth, erm, it was quite overwhelming then to hear all the  
564 different professionals viewpoints, their opinions, their strong thoughts, and this is  
565 where I meant by them not being so sensitive either to parents, where they could be  
566 quite blunt, erm, around this one family so, yeah.

567

568 DB: what's your reflection on that experience, and being part of that experience?

569

570 P1: erm, really I think put, erm, just seeing how, how much the parents have to  
571 content with, in terms of the number of professionals in their lives for their children,  
572 and how overwhelming that can feel, I mean, I was feeling overwhelmed so poor  
573 mum and dad were, and mum expressed that towards the end, that she really was  
574 feeling stressed, erm, and the frustrations that can bring out in the system about  
575 whose responsibility is it to take it forward and t, and to ensure that something is  
576 done with this so, erm, and I think that can easily be, the buck can be passed  
577 between people yeah.

578

579 DB: yeah

580

581 P1: yeah, which I suppose brings back to the group relations where, the displaced  
582 group, it was just passed between people, and there was loads of other groups

583 around, no one wanted to take that overall responsibility until one group stepped up,  
584 and said yep okay we'll take you in. So, yeah.

585

586 DB: what do you think about those kind of connections you've made?

587

588 P1: erm, I suppose where does that leave me in my role then, and where does my  
589 responsibility lie, and to what extent for these children, or for the children we're  
590 working with. Erm, and the EHC plans not being so clear as yet and where will that,  
591 and who that will lie with in the future and, because I know in my EPS, it's still not  
592 very clear, and they're not quite sure who's going to take overall ownership of it all.  
593 And, and I haven't got a clue what's going to go on in my next EPS placement, erm,  
594 so I think it's just bringing to the forefront who takes that responsibility and where is it  
595 in my role, erm, maybe not my role so much as a trainee, but at least to reflect that  
596 back in my supervision, if I was in another meeting like that, would it be my place to  
597 step up and say I'll take that responsibility, I'll email so and so, because I think it was  
598 a head teacher of a school that did that in the end, erm, yeah. I think it, I think it  
599 comes back to that lack of structure again, and when you're placed in a situation  
600 where there's not much structure, where does your role fit in then and how much  
601 authority do you have to, erm, to take that responsibility.

602

603 DB: what do you think about that?

604

605 P1: erm, in an ideal world (laughs), I think everyone should be, erm, equally  
606 responsible, but I think, erm, see I think as EP's, erm, see I feel a lot of the  
607 responsibility lies upon us as well, because you're not just doing, er, cognitive  
608 assessments or so you're not just doing am, you're not just doing that one-to-one  
609 work with the child, you're also eliciting information from the school, from the parents,  
610 so you're doing a lot of that, erm, the ground work and building your own particular

611 case for this child and I think having sat on SEN panels and read through quite a few  
612 papers, erm, other professionals have done something similar, but I don't think it's  
613 been two, in quite as much depth, I suppose, erm, because they're focused on a  
614 particular, like physio might just be focusing on the particular aspects of that child,  
615 and OT and so forth, where as I feel our role, and especially in, er, at the Tavistock  
616 and our e, trainee EP, erm, training, it's child, community and educational  
617 psychology, it's not just educational, or just child, so you're looking at everything as a  
618 whole, so erm, so I think a lot of the responsibility would lie on us, but then, where  
619 would you elicit that and take that forward, and I think that's, erm, so with that  
620 particular TAC meeting, erm, I fed back my results, back to the principal, so it was  
621 kind of filtered upwards and then for them to take that overall responsibility. It was  
622 quite a complex case. So yeah.

623

624 DB: and you talked as part of that description about responsibility, and taking up  
625 authority, if I'm right

626

627 P1: mm, erm, in terms of bein, taking up the authority to make a decision I suppose,  
628 so, you, responsibility in terms of your responsible for what you write in your reports,  
629 your recommendations, sorry, and, erm, you know, the work that you do with the  
630 child, with the parents and the school, erm, and I think the authority bits comes into it  
631 in terms of the power then you have and to, how far forward you can take that and it's  
632 very difficult as a trainee, there's only so much further you can go, I mean, you have  
633 to have all your reports countersigned, which is fair enough but it's, it just shows that  
634 power dynamics again within a syste, within the EPS system and, you know, you are  
635 reminded again that you are still at the bottom, but, in my experience this year even  
636 though, erm, you know, I'm seen as the trainee, I haven't fully felt like I've been the  
637 trainee, or been treated like the trainee, it's been more trainee/ maingrade. So yeah,  
638 so there's been that.

639

640 DB: and you talked about power there as well?

641

642 P1: mm, so who, who would have the, erm, how, yeah so how much pow, how much  
643 authority you have within your service I mean in, in my current service the seniors  
644 very much are, have a lot of the decision-making and the principal. I don't see much  
645 of the maingrade EP's. I don't know, I don't think it's more, I feel there's more, the  
646 power dynamics lie more in the seniors and the principal, erm, and I can't, and I don't  
647 see much of a, a joint working or a, or equal level working, if that makes sense,  
648 where as I suppose in a previous service it did feel quite equal and you know, erm,  
649 there were seniors but they didn't, they weren't the ones seen to make all the  
650 decisions I suppose. Yeah, it was, or maybe, or maybe it's just on the days that I'm  
651 not there (laughs), I don't know, but, yeah.

652

653 DB: sure, sure, okay thank you, and going to ask again that, that question in terms of  
654 your experience of the group relations conference and subsequently now as a  
655 trainee educational psychologist, any kind of connections that you've made?

656

657 P1: mm, I think that's everything, yeah.

658

659 DB: what's stood out to you in terms of the connections you have made?

660

661 P1: mm, I think talking to you today, I've no, I think since our last meeting, I've not  
662 really, erm, sat and thought explicitly about the links made, erm, I was aware they  
663 were always there and it would have an influence but I think having sat now and  
664 spoken about it, especially thinking about the child in mind and being the one in the  
665 displaced group and trying to voice that and maybe that has had some reflection on  
666 my desire to really voice the child's opinion, an, come at it from a different point of

667 view and seeing them on the outside and all these decisions being made around  
668 them. I think that'll be really important as well when, erm, doing the education, health  
669 care plans, erm, because it's very person focus, person centered and how much of  
670 an influence that will have. Yeah.

671

672 DB: yeah, that's one thing that stood out in your description, are there any other  
673 things that have stood out, any connections that you've made?

674

675 P1: erm, yeah, the group dynamics as well, I was always aware of them, so the  
676 different group dynamics I experienced in group relations, just on the different group  
677 levels, erm

678

679 DB: what you mean by that?

680

681 P1: so, (unclear), group dynamics in terms of how everyone gelled as a group, as a  
682 large group, erm, how they struggled to form the smaller groups, hence the displaced  
683 group, erm, the smaller experiential groups, the review groups, uh, that little MDT  
684 group I was part of as well. In the different dynamics within those, how some worked  
685 well and y, we all got on together, and some didn't work so well and there was that  
686 underlying tension.

687

688 DB: what was that like for you?

689

690 P1: erm, interesting, I think that was manageable, erm, because I had expected  
691 somewhere along the line, it's not all going to be as easy-going or as free-flowing as  
692 the experiential groups were going, and the review groups were quite structured. So I  
693 think that MDT group was quite an experience in terms of seen when you're not,  
694 when you're left to your own devices (laughs), and everyone's got such different

695 opinions, how much of it actually works and how much can you elicit your opinion  
696 and be listened to fully when there's two other conversations going on there and the  
697 leader can't control what's going on and yeah (laughs).

698

699 DB: what was that like?

700

701 P1: (laughs) it was chaotic, yeah it was very chaotic, it was difficult, um, to sit with, I  
702 remember the next day thinking I really don't want to go back to this group, erm, but I  
703 think a lot of people then had time to reflect on that, the day before, so it, erm, so it  
704 seemed to be a lot more comfortable, erm, a lot more relaxed I suppose. And the day  
705 before it was towards the end of the day, whereas the next day it was the morning  
706 group, so, yeah.

707

708 DB: we talked about a few things that have stood out to you, erm, in terms of  
709 connections that you've made, are there any others that you haven't mentioned or  
710 that do, do stand out to you, in your role as a trainee at the moment?

711

712 P1: er, I think what I spoke about at the beginning, about the competence, the  
713 competency and, erm, my role as a trainee and where that sits in an EPS, erm, and  
714 having, and remembering back to that discussion in the, in the group relations where,  
715 erm, everyone went round talking about their professionalisms, and it was like oh so  
716 the consultant is at the top, er, it was just, so it's that idea that - do I need to wait to  
717 I've qualified to feel on the same level, or, I don't know, it was just yeah, I m', do, is  
718 that something I have to sit with now, erm, or, or just, it's so difficult to tell because I  
719 don't know what it's going to be like in the next, in my next placement, and that's  
720 going to be the biggest part of my training. Erm, but from my experience so far in this  
721 year, erm, I've en, I've enjoyed being that trainee, but I, it has been difficult at times  
722 as well, to be put in at the deep end – and am I expected to be taking on this much,

723 is this normal or, erm, or should I be getting more supervision, more support and so  
724 forth, so, and having had those conversations as well, which is, erm, I think leading  
725 back to it's, erm, I, it's not just me in my placement, y', I am still part of the Tavistock,  
726 and this is still my training, so it's something I could bring back here, which I was able  
727 to and that then helped me take it back to the placement and deal with difficulties.

728

729 DB: and there's something there that you're describing about being a trainee and  
730 different professionals, erm, and something about, if I'm right in listening to you, does  
731 that change when you become qualified?

732

733 P1: yeah (Laughs)

734

735 DB: what were you thinking in that sense?

736

737 P1: erm, just in, I suppose, how you're viewed as, how people view you, as a trainee,  
738 do they think that you're competent enough, you're confident enough, is it something  
739 you have to give off? Erm, you know, to, for others to perceive that or, or is it just  
740 that's your title so they must be like that, they mustn't be that competent or, you  
741 know, or they're a tr, they're an actual main grade EP so they must know it all and  
742 they, erm, and having discussions with different people, you know, you get, you get  
743 to understand that you can be a main grade for so long and still not know everything  
744 and still be taking questions back and so forth, erm, so, yeah.

745

746 DB: yes, how do you make sense of that now, how does that seem to you as  
747 something you've thought around?

748

749 P1: erm, that you will forever be learning (laughs), erm, and I think for me having  
750 known the kind of supervision that works well for me, that I would like, and that I



751 learn best with, erm, I think that, that is what I would look to progress, not only as a  
752 trainee, erm, but also as a qualified EP.

753

754 DB: and what would that involve?

755

756 P1: erm, I suppose a two-way supervision, so it's not just me talking the whole time,  
757 having the input from my supervisor in terms of, erm, discussing the case in different  
758 ways, different, erm, things I could do, different scenarios and so forth, erm, taking,  
759 taking my cases as a dilemma I suppose and looking at it from different angles and  
760 also having had input from my supervisor in terms of perhaps their experience of  
761 something similar and how they've learned to deal with things or different strategies  
762 they've tried, erm, and as a trainee I really valued linking the theory to practice, erm,  
763 so in my CAMHs that's being really helpful, when I bring cases and then we talk  
764 about the psychology involved around that, and linking, erm, linking that and being  
765 reflective about that and also, erm, me being quite reflective as well on, how these  
766 cases may impact on me and how I'm feeling doing this work and so for, I think that's  
767 really helped, erm, binged, bring to the forefront my competence and confidence in  
768 some of the cases. Yeah.

769

770 DB: thank you, erm, and just going to give one last question, erm, which again is any,  
771 any other reflections that perhaps we haven't touched on, or that you'd like to pick up  
772 on again, in terms of having attended a group relations conference and what it's like  
773 for you as a trainee educational psychologist?

774

775 P1: ... I think that's everything, yeah. Yeah.

776

777 DB: sure, okay, I'm going to stop the tape recording there then

**Follow-up interview: participant 2**

1

2

3 DB: it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations

4 conference, since then have you made any links of experience?

5

6 P2: erm, yeah I think I have, I've, erm, trying to, I was thinking recently about the

7 course as a whole as we were in the process of evaluating the first year and, erm,

8 and I was reminded that the first year has an individual focus, second year has a

9 group focus and the third year has a systems focus. Erm, so that, erm, made a lot of

10 sense to me actually, because I felt that in our, erm, in my thinking it wasn't perhaps

11 as explicitly addressed, erm, and maybe on the course content in terms of teaching

12 and, erm, integrating that understanding, so a lot of it so far has felt, it's been quite, I

13 don't know, informal, kind of impromptu basis. And I think I had some, my first maybe

14 links were, erm, my, I think my first link was, was when I did, erm, a joint staff

15 consultation with a colleague of mine, fellow trainee. Er, we actually did two, erm,

16 and I think that's where I started making links to group relations, erm, thinking about,

17 erm, firstly even just kind of the positioning of the staff in the room and, erm, the, er,

18 special, the SENCO's, erm, involvement or semi-involvement in that case, kind of

19 coming in and out, er, representing where her maybe relationship or where she was

20 in relation to that staff, that group of staff, it was, erm, in a children's centre,

21

22 DB: right

23

24 P2: the first one was a nursery room consultation and, erm, and even just kind of

25 level of seating and then how the staff were sat, I found how they were sat in line

26 with, almost their opinions or where they stood or, in relation to us as trainers as well,

27 because the wasn't, the seating wasn't directed (unclear), so, erm, and I think and in

28 conversation, just thinking about where conflict lies and, erm, and how certain people  
29 take on different roles and one person might be at the receiving end of a lot of that  
30 conflict. Erm, thinking about the position of being a scapegoat for example in a  
31 group. Erm, and the kind of class teachers, erm, ro, hierarchical roles, within the staff  
32 team, within that one class for example.

33

34 DB: yeah

35

36 P2: and that really, erm, I felt informed our thinking, cos I, I was talking about it with  
37 my colleague afterwards, informed my thinking, in, in, and made a lot of sense in  
38 relation to their responses that they were giving us and, erm, which shaped our  
39 facilitation and our, erm...

40

41 DB: could you say bit more on that?

42

43 P2: erm, yeah, mm, it was quite a long time ago so perhaps, erm ... for example,  
44 erm, the class teacher, erm, seemed to have this role of, erm, recognising the  
45 strengths of the support assistants in the classroom and that came out, cos, we were  
46 asking for collective feedback, ul c, we were having a group discussion, erm, the, the  
47 s, the kind of SENCO's role in, in naming the anxiety that she feels with working with  
48 certain children almost on behalf of some of the other staff members that were there.  
49 And being able maybe to articulate that or, erm, recognise it's, it's, erm, er, an  
50 acceptance of it perhaps, erm, and, er, and for example this one staff member that  
51 was at the receiving end of quite a lot of conflict from a parent, erm, she kind of sat  
52 really close to us (laughs), as trainees and kind of really took on the role of, erm, I  
53 guess her, e kind of having kind of a worrying role erm, and being really erm, anxious  
54 about her performance in a way (laughs), er, I don't know if that e, explains it a bit.

55

56 DB: and you were linking some of that kind of experience with the group relations  
57 conference?

58

59 P2: yeah so, erm, I guess in the group relations conference, erm, I've, I related that  
60 in a sense, thinking of hierarchies maybe, erm, it was a multi-professional event,  
61 erm, and there were people from lots of professions and there s, there seemed to be,  
62 there almost was a bit of a hierarchy in those professions. So for example, the  
63 psychiatrists were at the top (laughs) of the pecking order. Erm, and, erm ... the erm  
64 ... and were perhaps more able to articulate some of the things on behalf of the  
65 group, erm,

66

67 DB: what do you mean?

68

69 erm, so for example, erm, being able to ar, to articulate a worry, or an anxiety, or  
70 express it without fear of being, erm (laughs), may be persecuted for that as much or,  
71 erm, almost having a, a bigger voice, erm, and I think I related to it in that kind of  
72 consultation wh, where we thought that perhaps the, the assistant staff that were  
73 maybe lower down in the hierarchy were more fearful of expressing weakness or,  
74 erm, and yeah.

75

76 DB: the weakness?

77

78 P2: oh, erm, perhaps a one, a weakness in, which might be an anxiety or a worry or  
79 about the performance or a question about their own abilities for example.

80

81 DB: and you mentioned a bigger voice?

82

83 P2: yeah, erm, so that was quite interesting because in this particular consultation  
84 the special needs coordinator, which in a way was seen at the top of that hierarchy in  
85 the consultation did a lot of the talking (laughs), when she was there, erm, you know  
86 said she was only going to come for a little bit but then stayed, and almost, erm ...  
87 erm, I guess, kind of, it made us aware of that, erm, maybe being a danger of  
88 suppressing other voices or, erm, and simply because of this, you know, hierarchy,  
89 erm, and, and I mean perhaps more may be confident or critical than other members  
90 of staff would, erm, feel that they could, er, question that or, erm, confront, not  
91 confront, challenge it, yeah. That was one example.

92

93 DB: yeah thank you, erm, and just going to ask one more time around that, that  
94 bigger voice, who were you referring to? Who were you thinking of?

95

96 P2: erm, so I was thinking of the professionals at the top of the hierarchies in the  
97 systems that they're working in.

98

99 DB: yeah

100

101 P2: so, erm, th tend to be ones with perhaps more experience or more training or  
102 more qualifications or (unclear) around for longer. So, and that was quite noticeable  
103 in the group relations conference, there were, erm, group, (laughs), I'm going to  
104 name the psychiatrists who had, erm, were, had spent more time training and, erm,  
105 they often ended up taking these kind of quite, well, ta, taking and been pushed into  
106 perhaps, into these almost leadership roles within a group, erm, yeah.

107

108 DB: and what reflections have you got from your experience, erm, that you've  
109 described there?

110

111 P2: erm ... so for example I felt that ... erm, making these links helped me in my  
112 training in my understanding of what role I could take in that, so if I was facilitating a  
113 consultation, erm, you know, my role in, in, ensuring that everyone feels they're able  
114 to contribute and have an equal voice and almost, erm, mana, manage, erm, maybe  
115 voices that are perhaps too dominant and taking over (laughs), erm, and, erm, yeah  
116 kind of being almost an advocate for the, those lower down the hierarchies (laughs),  
117 erm, in the way that you might advocate for a child or a staff member that might be  
118 struggling in a team or, erm,

119

120 DB: what was that like?

121

122 P2: erm ... (laughs), I don't know, I think a lot of the thinking came afterwards  
123 because we were preoccupied with our actual, erm, responding to what was being  
124 said at the time, erm, but I think it informed, for example, our next consultation which  
125 was in the same children's centre, but with another group of staff, erm, an a and,

126

127 DB: in what way?

128

129 P2: it was with my, it was with my j. joint (laughs), fellow trainee we were in the same  
130 placement and it almost prepared us a little bit for it, so we were thinking about it a bit  
131 in advance, we were thinking, er, where as in the first consultation we hadn't really  
132 considered it so much so it brought it to our awareness so the next consultation we  
133 were, erm, er, maybe less preoccupied by it (laughs) ourselves as trainees. Or, or  
134 maybe, erm, how else did it? Erm ... yeah I, I'm not sure (laughs), I'm not sure.

135

136 DB: okay, erm, I'm just going to repeat that kind of opening question in terms of since  
137 the group relations conference, erm, have you made any links with that experience  
138 and any, anything subsequently?

139

140 P2: erm, yeah I felt, erm, although this is, I'm going to be even more vague with this  
141 one, but I felt there was a lot of relevance with, er, my CAMHs placement, so the  
142 multiagency team I was working with, erm, it almost felt more explicitly relevant  
143 because a lot of the same professionals in the group relations, not the same adults,  
144 sorry, the same roles,

145 DB: yeah

146

147 P2: were present in this multiagency team I was placed in. But I do feel that the kind  
148 of size and the, of the team, and my, you know, one day a week involvement meant  
149 that I didn't, I didn't reach an understanding of this really complex system and how it  
150 worked. Erm, but I did feel that there were, erm, definitely some links there. For  
151 example, erm, I was able to attend two whole team meetings where all the staff  
152 was there, erm, and again it was interesting to see, erm, the pr, the leadership roles,  
153 the professionals, how this affected almost their input to the meeting at the time.  
154 Erm, and this related to kind of I think gender and age issues as well, it touched on  
155 those issues cos there was, there's quite a female dominated team and, erm, that a  
156 kind of more middle-aged, senior gentleman that was probably the only one there at  
157 the time, initially, if I hadn't of known who was who would almost seem like the team  
158 leader (laughs), like they were kind of in, leading the meeting initially, erm, I mean  
159 that was partly related to them presenting something at the beginning which is a  
160 rotor, which works on a rotational basis, so I don't, if it was just coincidence, erm, but,  
161 er, I guess it made me think of, erm, when you are in a, in a meeting full of all these  
162 professionals, how they are all giving their diff, they're giving a, a perspec, a different  
163 perspective to a situation so the topic, whatever the topic of discussion is, erm, I  
164 noticed that in group relations you could almost distinguish their professions from the  
165 way they were reflecting on the topic of discussion, erm, and, erm, yeah and just kind  
166 of a more awareness of, er, maybe members that are quieter. Again I, I keep thinking

167 about hierarchies for some reason (laughs), I don't know why but professional  
168 hierarchies, erm, and members of staff that were quieter, erm, it prompted thinking in  
169 me and why that was. Erm, what else was you know, going on behind this, erm,  
170 where this is a massive team, where is the conflict? (laughs) but I guess within group  
171 relations one of the kind of realise, well realisations or, I almost felt that a conclusion  
172 was drawn that there, there was conflict in the systems somewhere, and almost had  
173 to be, erm, but I couldn't really see it the whole time (laughs) I was there. Erm, but  
174 then I thinking that, in those two meetings I started noticing from the way staff  
175 interacting with each other, there might have been some issues there, er. Might have  
176 been some conflict of there, but quite healthy conflict that helped, you know,  
177 enriching the discussion, er in their teams.

178

179 DB: could you say a bit more on that?

180

181 P2: erm ... er, so for example that if there is a team and there is conflict, it's not  
182 necessarily a bad thing because it sometimes pushes the team forward into thinking  
183 of more, it pushes their thinking I guess. Erm ... I think ... erm, for example the team  
184 leader at the multiagency, at the CAMHs team I was working with just towards the  
185 end of this year was resign, resigned actually and left, erm, and, and then how they  
186 almost, erm, that made me question how did the team relate to that event and h, and,  
187 erm, that perhaps some kind of these feelings were then projected onto the team  
188 manager who was (laughs) leaving, erm, in order t, t, to protect the team that  
189 remained (laughs). Erm, but that's, that's also kind of linking in with other parts of the  
190 course, our experiential groups that we've had over the year, these are things that  
191 we've thought about within our group. Erm, and I think that almost, it, it, it, merges a  
192 bit with group relations because it was one of the most similar aspects of the course  
193 related to that, erm, and so I'm almost can't, not able to distinguish any more whether



194 that's come from the group relations conference or the experiential, com, an  
195 amalgamation of both.

196

197 DB: could you say a little bit more about that amalgamation?

198

199 P2: erm ... so ... erm, so I think ... if group relations, if the event potentially triggered  
200 some thinking, erm ... I think in our experiential group, erm, some of those thoughts  
201 were able, to, to, erm, maybe develop a little bit and we were facilitated by a  
202 professional who helped us in our thinking as well (laughs), erm and, you know,  
203 almost it helped us maybe gave us some potential explanations for why these things  
204 were happening. Erm, and, and I just felt that because the, the, the processes were  
205 so similar, I'm not sure where that thinking, you know, it's rooted from (laughs), it  
206 merged, it merged in my mind.

207

208 DB: okay, erm, bearing that kind of subtlety in mind, I'm going to ask a second  
209 question here, erm, I'm interested in your thoughts, have you made any links  
210 between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee  
211 educational psychologist?

212

213 P2: mm. Yeah, so thinking, I think it, erm, again started a process of thinking about  
214 our role in our EPS placements and, erm ... how in a trainee position, erm, I guess it,  
215 I guess it c, more take, it's about taking up our role as a trainee educational  
216 psychologist, erm, how am I going to expand on that? (Laughs), erm...

217

218 DB: it's your choice

219

220 P2: yeah (laughs), erm, so thinking about for example, erm, if we go back to  
221 hierarchies, for example, when you enter a service, erm, you'll have, you'll have a

222 principal educational psychologist, you'll have senior educational psychologists, erm,  
223 and thinking about, that you're, e in, experiences of trainees maybe entering, erm,  
224 maybe just below an EP role, before the, erm, an educational psychologist, so in a  
225 kind of lower hierarchy, but perhaps above administrative support or assistant  
226 psychologists. Erm, and taking into account, erm, we've had some discussions in  
227 preparation for next year, thinking about services that sometimes treat their trainees  
228 as fully qualified educational psychologists. Erm, and our role in reminding them of,  
229 that we are still training and still need supervision support and take longer to do  
230 things (laughs), and a facilitation in understanding, erm, that's about the same  
231 (unclear) hierarchies.

232

233 DB: yeah, and you talked about, in terms of any links between attending the group  
234 relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist,  
235 something there about yourself in role?

236

237 P2: mm, yeah so, erm, I think in group relations, brought up a lot of discussion about  
238 being a professional (laughs) and, erm, our separate or in intertwinednesses with  
239 your personal development, erm, and so taking up a role of a profession, erm, I think  
240 it brought to the surface a lot of thinking about, an awareness of how much of that is  
241 personal (laughs), erm, and how much, erm, it's hard to separate as being  
242 professional and your personal, (laughs), your personal kind of being, erm,

243

244 DB: have you got any thoughts on that?

245

246 P2: yes so for example, in the conference, although I had a role I was a, you know ...  
247 actually, although we were, I was there as a trainee educational psychologist, a lot of  
248 my behaviours, were behaviours that I would do in any context and that weren't  
249 specific to my, the professional, me being you know, professional role. Erm, and,

250 erm, I think I remember we had a discussion in, in our experiential group following  
251 that about, well what is being professional and is it any different from being, you  
252 know, genuine to yourself and following your kind of instinct, erm, and, erm, you  
253 know,

254

255 DB: what do you think about that?

256

257 P2: erm, yeah I felt, I felt it was quite (laughs) enlightening from me in the sense that,  
258 er, I spent a lot of, erm, my career separating (laughs) the two, erm, purposefully  
259 trying to keep them separate and for me it brought about, erm, almost an, an  
260 appreciation that my personal qualities are those that enhance my professional  
261 qualities. So that was quite erm,

262

263 DB: could you say a little bit more on that?

264

265 P2: (laughs), erm, so I think an example we, we discussed in experiential was about,  
266 erm, our playfulness and being creative and how, erm, and how as trainees, we felt  
267 that some, that sometimes we were more creative and playful outside of our  
268 professional roles, and I think the question was raised, well why is that not brought to  
269 the professional role, because actually it can really develop your work and it can  
270 really make you a better (laughs) professional. Erm, so, erm, that almost freed us up,  
271 well it freed, maybe freed, it felt it freed me up to, t, to erm, t, perhaps be more playful  
272 and more creative in my role as an EP, or in learning to take up this role (laughs).

273

274 DB: yep, yeah, I'm just going to repeat that question, erm, one more time, in, in terms  
275 of have you made any other links between attending the group relations conference  
276 and your experience a trainee EP?

277

278 P2: mm, yeah, I w, I, I found that, erm, it, erm, it encouraged me to think about  
279 systems, erm, so again it, I felt as well as the experiential group, the group relations  
280 really, erm, was integrated with the systems taught module that we've had and those  
281 principles, erm, in thinking, erm, about as a training course, we've, we're in the  
282 middle of a lot of change, we have big staff, erm, we've had a lot of staff changes  
283 over the last six months or over the last year, the year, the courses historically for the  
284 last few years has had a lot of staff changes and, erm, erm, I think it, I think group  
285 relations help, helped me, als, ins, began some thinking about us as a group, as a  
286 training group and how we respond to that, and how, erm, and how for example we  
287 pr, protected almost our year group and, erm, projected, erm, feelings of you know,  
288 anger and maybe abandonment onto the staff, onto kind of management, erm, er, in  
289 response to, to these changes and, erm, just an awareness of, of how all this stuff,  
290 however (laughs), it's kind of made me realise that it's, it's, it's not personal to people  
291 but it's the whole group that feels these anxieties about who is coming in next and,  
292 erm, what's going to happen next year, and who are we going to have, erm, it, it's  
293 really encouraged me to think almost less individualistically and more, more with the  
294 group's mind, erm, or a recognition that the group has a mind (laughs), erm, which  
295 was something I hadn't really appreciated before.

296

297 DB: could you talk a bit more about that kind of idea?

298

299 P2: erm ... erm, I think a sense, a sense that like, for example in any group or in any  
300 consultation, when one person speaks of an anxiety or a worry, or a feeling of anger,  
301 erm, they speak on behalf of everyone in the groups, that almost, erm, almost, erm,  
302 recognising that everyone has an element of those feelings and, erm, some might  
303 not, and some might disagree, and that's how your conversation moves on, but, erm,  
304 how one person speaks, can speaks on behalf of a group or a system. Yeah.

305

306 DB: and you mentioned some thoughts around systems and, and principles from  
307 thinking systemically?

308

309 P2: yeah, I think, erm, again I, I, it feels a bit informal but in my work with families for  
310 example, erm, thinking of a family as a system, I remember working with one boy,  
311 erm, and then s, erm, at some point during by intervention/assessment, erm, by the  
312 time I got to, I got to the final consultation with parents and SENCO again, the  
313 concern had shifted from this boy I was working with to his sibling, erm, and just  
314 really won, 's, erm, wondering why that happens and how that happens, and I haven't  
315 got the answers yet (laughs), but I think it's, it's made me think of that, it's made me,  
316 erm, be more curious, perhaps.

317

318 DB: okay thank you, I'm just going to offer a chance for any other, other reflections  
319 around attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee  
320 educational psychologist since.

321

322 P2: mm, I think because we have end of year evaluations at the forefront of our  
323 minds at the moment as we're ending, erm, there has been a bit of discussion, erm,  
324 around this conference being unique to our course and, erm, thinking about how that  
325 might affect, erm, affect our training in comparison to other trainees on other courses  
326 and how EPS's might receive us differently or, erm, with or without an understanding  
327 of these experiences, erm,

328

329 DB: do you have any thoughts on that?

330

331 P2: erm, no I think, I think it's the group relations conference is not very known, erm,  
332 amongst other training courses, and any attempt to explain it (laughs) just gets, gets  
333 me into a muddle anyway, erm, I think if you have services where there are Tavistock

334 trainees there might be, erm, there might be more of an awareness of it, erm, but I  
335 think perhaps it's something that as trainees we we're h, we're holding as quite a  
336 unique experience and, erm, we're, I'm kind of hoping that more of the, erm, learning  
337 from that will become more explicit in the next two years as we think about groups  
338 and as we think about systems and, and in the future, erm, so, erm, th,

339

340 DB: what does it mean to you for it to be unique, to this training course?

341

342 P2: er ... I don't know, erm, what does it mean for me,

343

344 DB: just wondering if there was any other kind of reflections that followed on from  
345 that kind of recognition?

346

347 P2: er ... yeah, I don't know, I feel like, erm, at one level ... you know, it's, I don't  
348 know, I'm completely stumped by that question actually (laughs)

349

350 DB: should I move onto another would you like a little bit more time to think?

351

352 P2: mm, I think move on (laughs)

353

354 DB: okay, erm, I was also interested when you said, as you might try and explain the  
355 group relations conference, how that can become something of a muddle, erm, just  
356 wondered if you have any thoughts on that front?

357

358 P2: erm, yeah, I think it's quite, erm, I, I think that's linked with me generally finding  
359 difficulty in expressing, erm, one of my areas for development (laughs), is expressing  
360 the, erm, a, explicit psychological frameworks and the kind of application and  
361 naming, you know, these terms that support my work and, erm, so I think it's

362 something to do with my difficulty in expressing that, erm, but, also, it, I think it might  
363 be related to, to not, erm, not knowing the full impact of it yet (laughs), er, I think it's,  
364 erm,

365

366 DB: what do you mean?

367

368 P2: so I feel that, that, erm, links, or I anticipate that links will continue to come up as  
369 we're encouraged to think more about groups and systems and so, next year we're  
370 going to be running a group in our EPS's, erm, and I'm thinking that might bring  
371 some things back to the forefront. We'll be writing assignments that are thinking more  
372 about groups and systems over the next two years, so it might, erm, I think that will  
373 help me articulate things better and link it to theory, erm, a bit better, but at the  
374 moment it, it does feel like I'm holding onto kind of experiences, and erm, and I've  
375 still got to bridge it to the theory because during that week we had a lovely long  
376 reading list which I didn't manage to get through, erm, but I think, erm, as has  
377 happened so far you have these moments, memories of these links, of these kind of  
378 ... experiences that you, that you link to your work and eventually hopefully link back  
379 to theory.

380

381 DB: I see, and is that important for you to link back to theory?

382

383 P2: I think for me it is, I think, erm, that helps my understanding of it, erm, I think it,  
384 erm, I think the theory helps me, yeah helps me understand it, articulate it, express it  
385 better, which I think goes parallel with my, erm, with my erm, my depth of  
386 understanding, yeah.

387

388 DB: okay, thank you, erm, just coming to the end of our conversation, erm, just the  
389 last opportunity to, erm, offer any, any reflections in terms of, since the group

390 relations conference that you attended, any kind of links to your experience  
391 subsequently as a trainee EP?

392

393 P2: mm ... I think because it has, erm, because one of the first links I made well, was  
394 with my CAMHs team, with a multiagency team, I think if the profession is moving to  
395 multi-professional teams again, multi-agency teams, that, erm, because it almost it  
396 replicate, it felt that it replicated that, erm, I think it would be really, really valuable in  
397 that context, if, if, I, erm, after graduating (laughs) erm, applied for roles, erm, in, in  
398 CAMHs teams or in, erm, in bigger teams like that I think it, I think that would be quite  
399 a valuable experience to bring to that. And also, an al, erm, in my multiagency work  
400 in it, through the local authority as well (unclear) equally.

401

402 DB: and you say a valuable experience to bring to that, what are you thinking?

403

404 P2: so I'm thinking at, erm ... that perhaps it would be an advantage, erm, in entering  
405 a complex team, erm, in that, erm, what I think they said at the conference which still  
406 sticks out in my mind is, erm, an awareness of these processes frees you from those  
407 processes. So it means you're not restricted, erm, by that which in theory enables  
408 you to work better and not be, erm, yeah, not be bound by these group processes  
409 that might prevent a team functioning, erm,

410

411 DB: what you think about that?

412

413 P2: erm, er, I think, erm, I think an awareness starts within you from the process but  
414 I, er, I do feel that linking it to theory and deepening my understanding of it would  
415 free me a bit more (laughs), from it. Yeah.

416



417 DB: okay, erm, have you got any other comments, any things that we haven't  
418 mentioned that you wanted to pick up on?

419

420 P2: erm ... I just think making your point of all the different levels it can, erm, it can  
421 affect so you know, a, as small as a, even just a, a family as a system where a lot of  
422 the, erm, principles apply, just as, just as well as a, a massive, erm, a massive group  
423 of organi, a massive organisation even, you know maybe nationally, erm, and I just  
424 think it, it doesn't blow my mind a bit about the potential (laughs), erm, the concept of  
425 groups.

426

427 DB: how come?

428

429 P2: erm, I think I, I mentioned this in my last interview, that I just, group processes  
430 was something I avoided quite actively (laughs), until now and, erm, just the, what  
431 feels like infinite, erm, possibilities of application. Er, as, you know, as much as my  
432 mind will let me access.

433

434 DB: and you say, perhaps, you might have avoided it to some extent previously, how,  
435 how does that feel now?

436

437 P2: erm, I think, er, well I remember during the conference, questioning whether not  
438 understanding it, or I think this is something I said in my last interview, not  
439 understanding it, erm, because that limits really, you know, understanding only a  
440 fraction of it, does that limit its potential? Erm, and I think it, it raises the question of  
441 timing and, erm, for me, I think, you know to, now is the time to do it, and to address  
442 this because it, it can be really influential in my r, in, in my role as an EP, erm, but I  
443 do think that this is the kind of stuff, these are the kind of processes that would be  
444 really helpful to me as, as a, in my previous roles as a [describes previous work role]

445 as a, erm a, you know a, erm, [describes previous work role], erm, but I just don't  
446 think I was ready for them at the time, so I think there's something about the timing of  
447 it.

448

449 DB: what about now?

450

451 P2: erm, now?

452

453 DB: you say you didn't feel that you were ready, I just wondered how it feels now?

454

455 P2: yeah I think now it feels (laughs), it feels, I feel a lot more ready, and a lot more, I  
456 think it feels really appropriate because it was done in the context of my year cohort  
457 which, erm, because we attended it as a group, erm, we are each other's support  
458 network through that, where as if I'd attended it as an individual, I don't know, I can't  
459 even imagine attending it as an individual, erm, so I think there's a maybe, valuable  
460 in attending it with your fellow trainees, erm, because then you can explore its  
461 potential together a bit more and,

462

463 DB: and what's it like imagining it as an individual?

464

465 P2: erm ... isolating? (Laughs)

466

467 DB: I'm just picking up on one of the things you mentioned in terms of how relations  
468 conference, if I'm right in hearing you could influence you in role, just wondered if you  
469 had any comments on that front?

470

471 P2: mm, I think an awareness of, of the importance of the role of an EP of being  
472 external to the systems that you're entering in and out of on a daily basis, erm, and

473 that's was reminded to us by the conference by the, the facilitators, erm, that will, b,  
474 but will perhaps allow you to, to be aware of more of the processes if you, as, as  
475 being kind of an independent, erm, individual that's supporting the system that's  
476 external to the system, erm, which I think makes me think about a lot about the  
477 potential of being an EP based in a school for example, or, erm, attached to, erm,  
478 working in a school and the pros and cons of being part of a system and being  
479 outside the system, so I think that was, I think some of the thinking it provoked.  
480  
481 DB: okay, okay, erm, I'm going to stop there, erm, because we got to stop  
482 somewhere.

**Follow-up interview: participant 3**

1 DB: it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations  
2 conference, since then have made any links that experience?

3

4 P3: erm, I think one explicit link that was made was erm, discussion of paper on  
5 groups and gangs in one of our modules, erm, and I've had to present that paper I  
6 think that a lot of examples that I used I drew upon, from the group relations  
7 experience. So that was quite nice, and because it was a shared experience it  
8 helped us to think about the paper collectively, and so...

9

10 DB: could you tell me a bit more about, about that?

11

12 P3: erm, I can try, I can't really remember the paper that much at the moment, erm,  
13 but it was just about the underlying principles

14

15 DB: I guess I'm interested in any links with the group relations conference...

16

17 P3: yeah, I think it was the underlying principles and I think because I was,  
18 remember the last time I talked about group relations, how I was in a group that, erm,  
19 was left without what they called a territory. And that was a space to work in, erm,  
20 and how we would told by the group, by conference facilitators that, erm, we had to  
21 be based in one of those rooms, otherwise we couldn't, we weren't recognised as  
22 part of the system and so I likened that to a gang and it being something outside of  
23 the system almost, and but as a group at the, at the time we very much felt that we  
24 wanted to stay together and we had that shared mindset but that made us I guess  
25 strong in some ways and weak in others, and but I linked that to the paper because  
26 it, it talked about, erm, shared mindsets and no exploration of difference and that

27 being, erm, pretty much like a gang, and so I guess even though we appeared to all  
28 have the same idea and agreement, erm, in effect we kind of reflected a gang, which  
29 I felt, I mean, I felt like that anyway so, but it was nice to be able to tie it to literature  
30 and have an experience to go with that, experience that I had had myself, but also it  
31 wasn't real, but it was real in a sense, if you know what I mean, so yeah, it was nice  
32 to share that experience.

33

34 DB: and through that what reflections did you have about any links that you were  
35 drawing?

36

37 P3: erm, I guess, what I was, one of the things I was thinking about was, erm, that  
38 we were quite a large group and we appeared to all share the same viewpoint, erm,  
39 but from reading the literature, the fact was that we probably didn't. But what  
40 would've happened if we had verbalised or articulated differences within the group  
41 and had, and were forced to explore differences, erm, and I guess in the paper it was  
42 talking about the conflict that arises when you start to explore differences, erm, and  
43 then if the group is able to work with those differences and function alongside it, or if  
44 it disbands the group and, erm, so I guess I was reflecting upon I mean, what would  
45 have happened if we had felt secure enough or (unclear) to show how, or to show  
46 what we didn't agree on, erm, because we didn't but no one said anything so...

47

48 DB: have you got any thoughts on that?

49

50 P3: I think it was more about at that time, I think, I mean, I described the  
51 experiencing in quite a survival mode way. Erm, I think it was more about, it was  
52 safer to stay together at that point, erm, and so we didn't, like, expose who we were  
53 in effect. So then I was thinking about gangs and the security in gangs. Erm, you  
54 don't expose different or who you are as an individual but rather who you are as part

55 of a group. And its, it appears to be safer because, so I guess I was just thinking  
56 about I don't know (laughs) I don't know really just erm, just little thoughts, I didn't  
57 really think too deeply into it I just touched on the surface of the links and...

58

59 DB: okay thank you (I'm just going to open a window for us)

60

61 P3: please, thanks yes it's quite, it is quite hot.

62

63 DB: I'm just going to ask that question again, erm, in terms of, since you attended the  
64 group relations conference, any links that you've made to that experience?

65

66 P3: mm, I think being a member of my cohort as well, I think we've explored it a little  
67 bit, erm, we have experiential groups and in the early months we were told by our  
68 facilitator that we were too nice to each other and that we appear to all like each  
69 other or share the same, erm, perspective on things but that wasn't correct. And I  
70 remember we disagreed with the facilitator on that and you know, we thought that  
71 she was just trying to almost force us to have conflict, but what I noticed in, in us as a  
72 group, erm, towards the end we were quite verbal with how we disagreed with each  
73 other and there were conflicts within the group, within our experiential, erm, sessions  
74 and they were okay, and I think we explored that a lot more and I think that's  
75 something that thinking about the group relations, er, conference where I've just said  
76 we didn't explore difference, erm, and were able to stay together as a collection of  
77 people in my cohort we have explored difference and had disagreements, and we're  
78 still together as a collection of people. Linking it back to that paper that I said I'd read,  
79 one would be called a group, one would be called a gang. Erm, but we're both still  
80 together, just one seemed to be more healthier than the other, so I guess that's  
81 another reflection, erm, that is linked in three ways to now. Erm, but now I think as a  
82 member of that group, that cohort I am more willing to I guess express things that go

83 against what the collective group says, erm, or explore that even, and feel more free  
84 to be myself erm, within the group. Er, yeah, I don't know if that was what you were  
85 looking for, but yeah, that was just something that came into my head when you  
86 asked the question again, so... mm

87

88 DB: I'm not sure what I'm looking for

89

90 P3: yeah okay (laughs)

91

92 DB: I am interested though in that comment you made in terms of, if I'm right, more  
93 able to be yourself?

94

95 P3: mm, yeah because I think as I got to know, I don't know if it's as I've got to know,  
96 I felt, I felt more comfortable to, I think I know enough about the place here, about the  
97 course, about the group, erm, and about myself to be able to then confidently share  
98 that, knowing that there could be, erm, conflict or consequences, but that's okay. And  
99 it's, so it's almost that safety that I can just explore and experiment, erm, and it's not  
100 gonna be something that's going to have a detrimental effect, because, collectively  
101 we are a group and that our commitment is to the course and to be that group. So  
102 there is a kind of I guess a commitment outside of just us as a group, erm, and so  
103 that is a kind of security, erm, that allows me to bring myself really, I don't, I don't  
104 know but I think I've just, I personally have developed, erm, since the conference but  
105 also being on the course as well, because obviously you know, whatever I  
106 experienced at the group relations conference, erm, ran, runs parallel to me  
107 developing on the course as well so I guess it's hard to say what has been an ongoing  
108 thing through the course and what started or was contributed by the conference in  
109 itself, so... erm, or if they're just interwoven the whole way through, you know, I  
110 mean our tutor said to us that in 20 years time will have those 'a-ha' moments where

111 we'll see something and relate it back to group relations. So, in f, we'll never know re,  
112 really if it was that or just the course because they're two, they, they started so close  
113 together really. The impact has been throughout so...

114

115 DB: and as the tutor spoke to you about the 'aha' moments, I just wondered what  
116 your thoughts might be on that?

117

118 P3: I had a few, like, like the one I said before about reading that paper and, you  
119 know, linking it to our group experience, erm, and then I guess realising the  
120 experiential group that we were able to explore conflict and be different, and it was  
121 okay, and also recognise when we disagreed. So I guess those were all those  
122 moments, erm, and I guess as I continue to practice as well and train, erm, I'll have  
123 more, I think, but I think that's generally about all experiences in life and you know,  
124 little, those experiences that stand out, erm, as significant those once-in-a-lifetime  
125 things, it's later on that you realise, oh yeah that's because I did that back then, erm,  
126 so I guess it's one of those really...

127

128 DB: you mentioned personal development

129

130 P3: mm

131

132 DB: just wondered if you had any sort of reflections in relation to the group relations  
133 conference?

134

135 P3: ... I guess maybe in my thinking, erm, about groups I guess, erm, just been able  
136 to think about, I mean I said that last time as well, I said that it made me think about,  
137 erm, groups on the outside of society and thinking about what goes on, erm, in the  
138 infrastructure and the communication between them, because obviously I said that I



139 was in a group that was classed as a gang or an outcast group, erm, but within our  
140 conversation we very much felt that we were strong and united and we felt that we  
141 had a purpose and vision, erm, but it wasn't seen by anyone else and when I heard  
142 about how that group was described outside of our group, it was like as refugees as  
143 homeless people and we didn't see that and so we didn't know we were called that.  
144 And so I guess in terms of personal develop, development, erm, it makes me think  
145 about the groups that I work with young people for example, erm, and how I might  
146 have seen them before and now how maybe how I see, or want, would like to see  
147 past what is presented on the outside because I'm more aware that there are  
148 intricate details that are not seen.

149

150 Erm, and so I guess that's, that's one way that I think I've develop personally and just  
151 my ability to be able to think past what, erm, b, passed what how, past how society  
152 frames particular groups and think, and think to what's going on underneath that,  
153 what is actually the reality, rather than just what is just presented to you.

154

155 DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?

156

157 P3: ... No (laughs) I don't.

158

159 DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you  
160 made any links between attending the group relations conference and your  
161 experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

162

163 P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a  
164 trainee educational psychologist and the conference, erm, cos I think, like I said  
165 before, like developing on the course alongside the experience of group relations, it's  
166 been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and

167 professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am  
168 a psychologist in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and  
169 professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally  
170 because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for  
171 example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a  
172 different way, that would be my personal development, my thinking, but then how  
173 that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role  
174 as a trainee educational psychologist and so I think, yeah just every link that I've  
175 made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well...

176

177 DB: can you think of any times where you've made those links, erm, between the  
178 group relations conference and yourself in role?

179

180 P3: ... I can't really think of, erm, explicit examples, erm, I think it's more likely to be  
181 that my thinking has been challenged or changed, and then it's just, you've just seen  
182 the effect of it in my work, erm, erm, ...

183

184 DB: maybe if we take those in turn, the, the effect on your thinking?

185

186 P3: ... what about that, what do you mean, what about it?

187

188 DB: I'm just interested in any links that you might have made since, since attending  
189 the group relations conference, erm, you mentioned perhaps an influence on your  
190 thinking and perhaps on yourself in role. Just wondered if there were any kind of  
191 connections that you might have made?

192

193 P3: ... I'm not sure, erm, I'm just tr, I was just trying to think back to the conference,  
194 see what could I remember of it, erm, and I'm struggling to remember it to be honest

195 but I think little, at different times in the training, erm, different memories of parts of  
196 the conference will come up that will be linked to something that is current, erm, so I  
197 guess those would be the times when I recognise it but I think right now I'm just  
198 struggling to remember like and just to make links, erm, yeah, it's just a bit hard to  
199 think about the moment, I don't know I guess it's because it's just I don't know, I  
200 suppose busy outside, yeah, erm, I think because also I'm at a point in the course,  
201 cos the end of term that there's no time for thinking, you've just got to do, to finish  
202 everything in time, so having to think right now is quite hard (laughs), sorry (laughs).

203

204 DB: that's okay, that's really okay

205

206 P3: but, erm, but I think often, I think the experiences of the conference, maybe  
207 they're not always at the conscious level, maybe they just, a lot of it is unconscious  
208 and you wouldn't realise until afterwards that there was a link, and so I've described  
209 like explicit links that I've been able to see now but I think maybe over the next few  
210 months or even if I am reflecting on the year again at a time when it's a bit less  
211 stressful I might think of things and that it will trigger a memory or a link back to the  
212 conference. But I definitely think that it, it did have a big impact, erm, but I think it  
213 varies at different times as to, you know, how much of that impact is conscious.

214

215 DB: Yeah

216

217 P3: ... and I think I'm thinking about it, in terms of groups, erm, as a whole rather  
218 than individuals, there were pockets of individuals or that stood out in the group, in  
219 the wider group, but I'm thinking about applying it in terms of groups as a whole and  
220 as a trainee I've not yet dealt with groups. I mean the focus for, erm, the three years  
221 here is that you work on, it's mostly individual work in year one, groups in year two  
222 and organisations in year three, so I, maybe in year two after having lots of

223 experience of working with groups I may be able to make more links between my  
224 experiences then and I might be able to see things more explicitly then, er, yeah.

225

226 DB: and you mentioned something there perhaps about individuals and groups?

227

228 P3: mm, cos a group is, is a collection of individuals isn't it, so, and I think in the  
229 conference there were times where you saw an individual which stood apart from the  
230 group, maybe they were louder or they seem to carry all the thoughts of the group,  
231 erm, other times you just saw the group as a whole and they didn't, you didn't really  
232 notice them, they're just a collective group. Erm, and I guess that's linked to like  
233 when we have experiential groups and our facilitator always used to say that, so  
234 when someone speaks, they speak on behalf of the group unless they're challenged  
235 or someone presents another viewpoint, erm, and so I guess that's a link as well,  
236 erm, because linking back at the conference there were loads of people there, but I  
237 could only tell you a few I remembered, erm, and the ones that I can't remember the  
238 faces of, were the just ones that blended into whatever group they were with, erm, so  
239 I didn't recognise them as individuals, so I guess that's something in, someone  
240 speaks out or does something and it's not challenged or opposed or there is not an  
241 alternative viewpoint then it does speak for the group.

242

243 DB: what are your thoughts on that?

244

245 P3: oh, I think, I think I agree with that because, erm, nothing else has been  
246 presented and people can't tap into the unconscious thought of the group or the  
247 conscious thoughts of the group, it's what's expressed, erm, and I guess, it's so, like,  
248 for, if I go back to experiential groups, erm, and one person's speaking, if it was  
249 something that myself or the others felt strongly against, then we would challenge it,  
250 if not, if we didn't challenge it, or couldn't be bothered, then on some level we were

251 willing to accept it enough that we felt that we didn't have to change the way things  
252 were going, so, that's accept, even if you accept it a little or a lot you're still  
253 accepting, erm, so I agree with that, erm, speaking on behalf of the group. But also,  
254 erm, they talked about people carrying things on behalf of the group as well so if they  
255 were negate, well, we say negatives and positives, it's not really the opposites, but, if  
256 erm, if a viewpoint was presented, it wasn't that it was that person's viewpoint it was  
257 that that was part of the viewpoint of the group that was being expressed through  
258 that person, and so we explored that, erm, which was nice to get an understanding  
259 about, because I guess working in schools at the moment and in the clinics, it helps  
260 me to not locate things within one person, and so I guess to understand that what is  
261 being shown or what's being expressed is just being channeled through that  
262 particular person but it's you know, it's, it's pretty much a system feeling or idea or  
263 viewpoint. Yeah, I can't remember the question (laughs).

264

265 DB: that's okay ... I think the question really was just very interested in any links, any  
266 connections you might have made between that group relations conference  
267 experience and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist subsequently?

268

269 P3: mm, so I did kind of answer it.

270

271 DB: one of the things that you mentioned that I was interested in was this idea of the  
272 personal and professional, wondered if you have any other thoughts on that?

273

274 P3: mm I think that was more development through my, through the course, erm,  
275 rather than from the conference itself, erm, I don't think it, yeah didn't, it wasn't  
276 something that the cour, unless, well like I said the conference impacted on my  
277 thinking, but that was on the personal level, erm, and then I guess as I practice, that's

278 where it meets the personal and professional. Erm, but that's pretty much developing  
279 throughout the course. Erm, yeah...

280

281 DB: okay ... I'm just going to offer the question, erm, in terms of any other links that  
282 you might have made since attending the group relations conference and your  
283 experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

284

285 P3: ... I learnt to manage anxiety in different lev, in a different way. That was  
286 something that came out of the cou, er, out of the conference. Erm, or manage, erm,  
287 like difficult internal feelings, erm, which I guess is personal, and professional, erm,  
288 and that then allowed me to think about that when I was going into schools and being  
289 able to manage difficult meetings when I was taking them personally, but having to  
290 act professionally, and how to manage those two faces really. Erm, like for example  
291 one part of the conference, erm, involved sitting in a group and it pretty, it pretty  
292 much was like an experiential group, it was pretty much, it pretty much went how it  
293 was, how it went really, there wasn't any agenda or any plan. Erm, and so there were  
294 a lot of sil, there were a lot of silences in the group, which I was used to anyway from  
295 having our own experiential groups. But they, the anxiety of the others was (excuse  
296 me) projected on to other individuals so we were picking up a lot of other people's  
297 anxieties, erm, which is like working as a trainee educational psychologist, you pick  
298 up the anxieties of the staff you work with and also some of the patients, erm, but I  
299 was aware of that and I was aware of what I had, or how to kind of deal with that,  
300 erm, so that was something from the conference that then because of that I could  
301 then work on outside. I think one, one experience, I can't remember what it was, I  
302 don't remember, but I think I was angry in one of the sessions, erm, because I think  
303 that I'd asked a facilitator a question and he'd ignored me, and everyone was like,  
304 everyone had been there, and I was really embarrassed and angry and I felt really  
305 like heated and I was like livid, and I just, erm, and but then I, I noticed how that

306 blocked me from accessing the rest of the session and realised when I came out that  
307 if, that I will probably get angry working in schools, erm, with some of the comments  
308 that staff can make or, you know, but how do I deal with that and how, and how do I  
309 work without becoming disabled, erm, but still able to practice effectively and  
310 manage my own feelings. So that was something that I then worked on, erm,  
311 professionally, so in context, but also outside in my personal life, erm, doing that.  
312 And it was about finding ways to channel like the emotion, so that's a link that, going  
313 back to your personal development question, erm, that could probably be relevant  
314 there. Erm, and how to manage difficult feelings in context. Erm...

315

316 DB: what's your thoughts on that?

317

318 P3: on what?

319

320 DB: well, if I'm hearing you right there was some reflections there about managing  
321 that internal kind of emotions, erm, and it felt like you were making some links with  
322 the group relations conference and perhaps subsequently. I just wondered if you had  
323 any, if you could speak a little bit more about that?

324

325 P3: erm, I could say it again and maybe it'll come out in a different way, I don't know,  
326 erm, so just, er, just being aware that, erm, about the impact of certain feelings and  
327 how that made me at that time, erm, unable to almost function really, it kind of  
328 disabled me, erm, and knowing, but recognising that because I, we had, you know, I  
329 personally went back to reflect on each day and made notes, erm, on what I felt I had  
330 learnt and wanted, what I could take away that could work, you know, towards my  
331 personal development. Erm, and the management of emotions in a prof, in a  
332 professional context was one of them. Erm, because obviously in a personal context  
333 you can shut down and deal with it later, you can release all the emotions and you

334 know, kick-off. But in a professional context you can't so it was a, but, but I've noticed  
335 that I was being, that I'd felt disabled and I knew that that wasn't effective so it was  
336 just about working on ways to be able to manage that. And I mean it, I, I have erm, I  
337 have developed in that area. So for example working, erm, as a trainee in one of the  
338 ser, in one of the services, had a difficult meeting where a member of staff didn't  
339 want me to work in the school because I was a trainee, erm, and I knew I'd been  
340 asked to do work there and the SENCO had a very difficult morning and so she'd  
341 been shouted at, and so she shouted at me. Erm, but in that moment I was able to  
342 take all that in and still do the work. And I, you know I was able to offer her and say  
343 okay well, I'll go away and have discussions but what I can offer you now is this,  
344 would you like to accept it? And they accepted, erm, then I went away and screamed  
345 about it, but the point was that in that moment, in the professional moment I could  
346 contain myself, contain the other professional and practice, take that away and then  
347 personally deal with it. Probably needed some shaping as well but I was able to take  
348 it to the right place, I was able to call friends and say this is what's happened and just  
349 talk things over. Erm, in a, on a personal level and then, then take it to professional  
350 supervision and say this is what's happened, so we deal with it. So I, by that point I'd  
351 learnt how to take things to the right places. Erm, and I guess that can all link back to  
352 me feeling disabled emotionally in that room at the group relations conference. Erm,  
353 and knowing that this can't, I can't continue like this because it's not effective. Erm,  
354 so that was a learning that I was, yeah, in the area of personal development, you  
355 know, knowing where things go I guess, navigating that personal-professional  
356 interface I guess. Actually I like that phrase (laughs) yeah.

357

358 DB: the personal-professional interface?

359

360 P3: yeah, just where they meet. Erm, which is in meetings like this where there's, you  
361 know, it's a professional context but you're very much present and you're



362 experiencing it and you're involved in it and it's running through you, and you're  
363 running through it. Erm, but then there are aspects of say your personality or your  
364 character which is inappropriate to bring into the context because it just is not  
365 effective, so, but that's, that's where things are playing out, and so it's at those times  
366 that, erm, you're actively managing almost both worlds if you like, erm, cos I was  
367 offended in the meeting, and I knew I was offended but I was able to put that aside  
368 for a second, deal with it professionally, and then take it away and say can you  
369 believe what they actually said to me? But I knew I was conscious enough, erm, to  
370 be able to manage both sides and where it played out was in I guess in the  
371 management or the interface is the management of the both I guess. Erm, yeah, I  
372 could write a book on that actually, it was quite interesting. But yeah, that's, so that's  
373 one thing that I think, erm, well another thing that I think, you know how, what, how it  
374 impact, how the conference impacted me.

375

376 DB: and what was it that interests you in terms of that interface as you described it?

377

378 P3: because I go into schools, erm, and I see the conflict amongst staff, I was in a  
379 meeting a couple of weeks ago and, erm, with two SENCO's and just seeing the  
380 conflict between them and speaking to them individually and they were gossiping  
381 about each other and it was a really ineffective way to function professionally. Erm,  
382 they were working together but they were backbiting and they didn't agree with each  
383 other's practice but they never talked about it, erm, and so I guess seeing that, I was  
384 able to see how when you don't manage the personal and professional interface it's  
385 just a bit difficult and you don't move forwards. This school has actually become  
386 stagnant, erm, it's got a high level of need, erm, advice has been given, nothing has  
387 been done because of the conflict. And so I guess being able to see that, and  
388 knowing it starts but you have to do it in yourself as an individual first before you can  
389 do it, erm, with others. Erm, but because it's somewhere that I feel I'm sort of getting

390 to I can see it in others, but also I can support others in developing, you know, that,  
391 erm. So if I was ever in there because of the conflict amongst the staff, I would feel  
392 confident that I could talk from personal experience and talk about, erm, ways that  
393 they could move forward to develop managing the personal and professional  
394 appropriately. Erm, and just talk from experience, and I'm not talking from expert  
395 position because I still feel like it's still something that I go through, but I think that I  
396 could talk about it with enough knowledge and experience that could at least  
397 encourage other people to explore it further. Erm, yeah.

398

399 DB: and you spoke there about exploring within yourself and

400

401 P3: with others

402

403 DB: yeah

404

405 P3: because I guess, erm, my realisation is that I felt, or how I manage myself now is  
406 managing how I feel personally and almost filtering what can come through into the  
407 professional context, that's all within person. Erm, someone like the SENCO that I  
408 spoke to who offended me, or, I mean it's to the point I don't even know if she  
409 offended me, it should have offended me, but I guess because I managed it so well it  
410 didn't, but she was unaware that all of this was going on inside me, so I had to deal  
411 with it within person before it could be experienced, you know, outside. And then if  
412 we did ever have a conv, ever have a conversation about it, we could talk about, well  
413 what went on with her personally, she'd had an argument beforehand and this is how  
414 it came across professionally, she'd then put it all on somebody coming into the  
415 school, so we could have had a discussion between person about what was going on  
416 within, but there would have had to have been that understanding first of all, where  
417 as I could see what happened within me. I'm not sure if she saw what happened

418 within her, so our conversation may have been, void, because, well unless we'd both  
419 had that realisation really. So, yeah...

420

421 DB: okay, thank you I just, sort of, final offer, erm, as we come to the end of our  
422 conversation, any other things that perhaps you haven't mentioned or that you'd like  
423 to build on, erm, in terms of your experience as a trainee EP and that experience of  
424 attending a group relations conference?

425

426 P3: ... er, one thing I was just thinking about just now was, erm, something that I  
427 didn't do, erm, and it was about questioning the way things are presented, erm, so  
428 every day we had to do certain things like sit in a certain way, erm, do this at a  
429 certain time and, you know, there was a point that I think was on one of the days  
430 where we'd always sat in a spiral, sometimes we sat in a circle, one of the days, they,  
431 the chairs were everywhere, some were in groups, some were just on, on their own  
432 and we sat like that and somebody said this is really uncomfortable, erm, and then  
433 the facilitator said we're surprised you didn't move the chairs back, erm, they'd had a  
434 rush before the meeting, they just randomly allocated them everywhere, but  
435 everyone sat in those places because they felt, and no one questioned it, I mean I  
436 moved mine anyway because, I just did that, I can be a bit of a rebel sometimes, but  
437 the point was that we assumed that's the way it's supposed to be and it was like that  
438 for a reason and then we questioned as a group, should we challenge it, are we  
439 allowed to? And then it turned out that it wasn't there for, it wasn't like that for a  
440 reason, we could have moved it, people were surprised that we didn't and it just  
441 makes me think about when I go into schools or when I work with, erm, patients, do I  
442 always accept what I'm presented with, or do I have the f, the insight to question and  
443 think, well actually why do you all, why is it always done that way or why is it  
444 presented like this or why do you think that's happening, is that okay, and, and even  
445 if it is okay, is there another way? and so I guess that's something, thinking about

446 now that I could take with me to think about when I go, erm, into the field, into  
447 fieldwork, just, erm, questioning and always being open to other ways of doing things  
448 rather than accepting exactly what's given. And I guess like in this profession, it is a  
449 lot about change, erm, and you can't have change whilst doing everything in the  
450 same way. So I guess having those questions, what could be done differently?  
451 Should always be in my mind anyway because we're always looking for things to be  
452 different. Erm, even if it's a small thing but, erm, there should always be like a  
453 question outside the box I guess.

454

455 DB: yeah

456

457 P3: yeah, that's my final reflections (laughs).

458

459 DB: okay, erm, unless there is any other, other thoughts that you'd like to share we  
460 can stop there on recording.

461

462 P3: ... yeah, I think that's it.

463

464 DB: okay, thank you very much.

**Follow-up interview: participant 4**

1

2

3 DB: okay, been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations  
4 conference. Since then have you made any links to that experience?

5

6 P4: I have made links. Erm, but I think that seven months, you know, that has been a  
7 really busy seven months, erm, and I think professionally I have developed hugely in  
8 those seven months. Erm, thinking about December, now, it just feels like you know  
9 so much has changed and I haven't even done any assessment in December and  
10 now I seem to feel much more confident (unclear), so, it has been a big kind of a  
11 learning curve in the last seven months. Erm, I do, I have b, I have sort of had it in  
12 mind though definitely. Erm ... and I do kind of think back to it sort of fairly, fairly  
13 frequently. In terms of making links,

14

15 DB: mm, any thoughts, any thought?

16

17 P4: erm, I think it's, I don't know if I can think of some specific examples but more  
18 that it definitely is like influenced how I feel about the Tavistock and, as I've like  
19 formed, erm, my ideas or like as my thoughts have been, sort of like deepened and  
20 developed about Tavistock as an institution, educational psychology as a profession,  
21 erm, assessment, consultation, all these sorts of things. Erm, I think that the group  
22 relations conference has influenced that thinking. Erm,

23

24 DB: in what kind of way?

25

26 P4: erm, I think particularly working in a placement as a trainee EP, I'm, meet, erm,  
27 other trainees from different institutions and it really does feel more, erm, I don't

28 know, like kind of a bigger deal that we had that. Now that I'm working amongst other  
29 trainees who haven't had group relations it kind of really shows, differentiates the  
30 Tavi as a training course. Erm, and it,

31

32 DB: in what kind of way?

33

34 P4: erm, oh, I think because, you know I was talking to someone, a UEL trainee and  
35 she was talking about, well some dynamics in their train, in their, er, within their  
36 training course and, erm, I was sort of saying, oh well, don't you, how, how do you  
37 talk about those dynamics you know. Do you have an experiential group? Do you  
38 have, all these things and they have, they don't. And I was thinking oh right, okay,  
39 I've taken for granted that we have lots of group discussion forums for us to talk  
40 about us, ourselves as individuals within the group and how we go from there and,  
41 erm, I thin, I think you don't realise what you've got until you compare it to elsewhere.  
42 And I realise that I think that our experience has been quite different to other, if I'd  
43 gone to UCL or UEL or else other places.

44

45 DB: what is it that you realise you've got in that sense?

46

47 P4: I think that there's a lot of structured opportunities to think about our role, as a  
48 trainee, as opposed to a fully qualified EP. Er, as a trainee EP and, um, as ourselves  
49 as individuals within a group of a cohort, erm, and b, by being given a formalised  
50 space, I'm not really referring to group relations, but I think it kind of, well so, by goin,  
51 by being given a formalised space on the training course, it really encourages us to  
52 think of ourselves as the tool, rather than having a toolkit. And I think that relates to  
53 group relations because I think the group relations event put that, er, sort of  
54 philosophy of learning there, at the forefront of our minds, right at the beginning.

55

56 DB: philosophy of learning, what do you mean?

57

58 P4: I think like, experiential learning and, erm, speaking explicitly about group  
59 dynamics, which I'm sure as psychologists, people, you know, our skills are being  
60 analytic and thinking about ourselves and thinking about ourselves in groups and so  
61 on. But I don't think the other training courses might have that opportunity to speak  
62 so explicitly, like, you've got an hour to think about it or you've got a group relations  
63 conference to think about it.

64

65 DB: and so when you're making that comparison, from your experiences to other  
66 training courses, what sort of reflections of you got on that?

67

68 P4: erm, I'm really glad that we have that opportunity actually, cos I think in (sighs)  
69 let's put, let's call it real life, you don't get that opportunity.

70

71 DB: sorry the opportunity of?

72

73 P4: to talk about yourself in a group, in a safe and structured environment.

74

75 DB: and by that, just to clarify, are you thinking of group relations conference, the  
76 experiential groups, or?

77

78 P4: I'm talking about both, because although the group relations conference was just  
79 for a week I think, I think it kind of set the scene for a way of thinking which we are  
80 encouraged to use.

81

82 DB: could you say a little bit more about the way of thinking?

83

84 P4: erm ... I think as a psychologist you, there's a way of thinking, which could be  
85 that you have a toolkit, erm, and you, so you, when you were to meet a family or  
86 client you would, you've got a t, a sort of, it's a, it's not a literal toolkit, but you've got  
87 a kind of mental toolkit to use, erm, and I feel that the tavi, tavi trainees instead of  
88 having this toolkit, well we have a toolkit but it's more of like thinking of ourselves as  
89 the tool, so we, I'm, can approach a family and I know that I have a kind of way of  
90 thinking which, erm, I can use to help that family. And I think that I've developed that  
91 through being part of the, I think part of the group relations conference has helped  
92 me because it made explicit things which I maybe didn't, I had only thought about on  
93 a, not unconscious, but on a level where I wouldn't, it brought to the fore those things  
94 that I haven't thought about explicitly before.

95

96 DB: could you give an example?

97

98 P4: erm ... so say I'll be in a meeting with a hard to reach family and, erm, the parent  
99 is feeling angry towards me, erm, and I'm feeling, oh God I don't know what I'm  
100 doing, erm, I think referring back to things like group relations in conjunction with  
101 reading and, erm, other experiences, I can think about - do I actually not know what  
102 I'm doing, or am I part, am I sort of part of a relationship that's happening when,  
103 where I'm, where feelings are being projected into me of I don't know what I'm doing,  
104 and to think about that, and to use that and to, I mean the ideal would be to be able  
105 to say something helpful at the time, erm, in a helpful way. And I don't know, I think  
106 I'm yet to master that skill, but I think that that is a really useful skill and I think that  
107 the group relations conference did help me to think a, it's a kind of way of processing  
108 at the time, to sort of stop, think how do I feel, I wonder why I feel like that and how  
109 can I express that in a helpful way so this meeting can be better run and better sort  
110 of facilitated.

111



112 DB: and is that linking to your comment about you using yourself as a tool?

113

114 P4: mm, yeah. It does, because say, I suppose like if someone is being, if a, if, if a  
115 client is being, isn't, is, if you're in a difficult meeting with a client, family, child,  
116 teacher, whoever it is and, you felt like the toolkit was external to you, you might start  
117 thinking oh what can I do, what strategies can I use? Oh I can start using this  
118 strategy, oh that's not working, let's try using this strategy, oh God that's not working,  
119 but if to, I think to be more self reflective you can, it, you're relying more on a kind of  
120 internal skill, skill set really that you could use. Erm, and so you're not kind of so  
121 reliant on things because when the strategies run out you, you're stuck. But if, if you  
122 can sort of use what you're given and the processes which are happening within the  
123 meeting, I think that the group relations conference sort of helped me become more  
124 aware of the processes which are happening in a meeting which aren't written down  
125 on a piece of paper in front of you, you know, what's not being said, who's leading  
126 this meeting, who is really leading the meeting, erm, you know, why do I feel like I  
127 want to cry? Is it they, are they my feelings am I, am I holding this for the group?  
128 Erm, and also I suppose group relations conference taught me that I'm prone to  
129 feeling like this, feeling like that, so when I'm in a meeting and I'm feeling like I'm  
130 going to cry, is that because I'm, that's the role that I often take and realising my own,  
131 what I bring to the meeting as well.

132

133 DB: what's that been like?

134

135 P4: er, what's what being like?

136

137 DB: the description you gave there of, what you're doing in for example those kind of  
138 a meetings, just wondered what your reflections have been in terms of what that's  
139 been like for you personally?

140

141 P4: erm, I suppose that kind of keyword in that question is personally. And I think  
142 there's a lot of sort of, what's professional what's personal? Erm, and how to keep  
143 the two separate? Erm, where the boundaries are and how you as a person want to  
144 work those boundaries. Erm, so all of that's definitely come into play as I'm, as I'm  
145 kind of going through the training to become a psychologist, because I suppose it's,  
146 can you switch it off? Erm, and,

147

148 DB: what do you think?

149

150 P4: what, can you switch off being a psychologist? Erm, I think that you can  
151 definitely, erm, go into, I'm out of role now. Erm, but I think, you know, once you've  
152 learned something it's hard to unlearn it. Erm, so ... I think part of a psychologist is  
153 being able to know, is being able to pick and choose, you've got all the knowledge  
154 and you can then decide what you think. Erm, like the psychodynamic elements of  
155 the course, I feel like I'm comfortable enough now with the theory to have an opinion  
156 on it. I can use it if I'd like to, if I think it's appropriate and I can have it in the back of  
157 my mind if I'm, erm, working with somebody if I want to and it's good to have  
158 knowledge of a theory and then not use it is much preferable to sort of have no  
159 knowledge of it and not know what you think about.

160

161 DB: and you mentioned that kind of boundary between the personal and  
162 professional, could you say any more about that?

163

164 P4: yeah and I mean I suppose that was one of the hardest things of the group  
165 relations conference because I think that it muddied up that boundary, erm, and  
166 meeting people professionally now that I had initially met whilst in the group relations  
167 is tricky, erm, because group relations kind of ... you were out of role, as in out of

168 professional role, you were in a different role. Erm, so I think when you meet  
169 somebody, erm, you know, if you're working in a team it's, it can be difficult because  
170 you know, when you're working in a team you keep to polite conversation and you  
171 wouldn't talk about anything except for the task at hand and so on, and I think having  
172 kind of had a different knowledge of somebody, erm, in your initial meeting is quite  
173 difficult. Depends on what the meeting was but you can form quite strong bonds, but  
174 depends really, how, how things were and

175

176 DB: yeah

177

178 P4: I think that you're very vulnerable in the group relations actually. Erm,

179

180 DB: what's that been like for you since?

181

182 P4: what?

183

184 DB: that kind of reflection you mentioned there about being vulnerable in the  
185 conference, meeting other people subsequently who were there, just wondering what  
186 that's been like?

187

188 P4: erm, I haven't really encountered it that much but, erm, ... I think, I think, I mean,  
189 I ha, I actually haven't, but if I had I think I would have found it, I wouldn't, I think I  
190 wouldn't have liked it at all really. Erm, I expect I will do more as well, erm, but maybe  
191 it's a sort of thing where what happened at group relations stays at group relations, I,  
192 I imagine that would be how I would deal with it. You just, you both know that you  
193 saw each other playing this particularly odd game where you're going from room to  
194 room with some territory, what was it territory, and you're not allowing the homeless  
195 group to come into your territory and all this sort of thing, you, but in the real world,

196 outside of group relations conference it sort of doesn't really, don't know if it has so  
197 much of a place to be spoken about really, don't really feel it would be appropriate.

198

199 DB: okay I think we've touched on this question but I'm going to ask it, erm, now in  
200 terms of - have you made any links between attending the group relations  
201 conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

202

203 P4: erm, ... well, yes, I don't know what you, what you're after as an answer, but

204

205 DB: I'm not sure I do.

206

207 P4: erm, I think the links that were made have been when I'm working in a group  
208 after group relations, I have thought about it differently to having been t, t, to before  
209 it. So if I'm in a group situation where I'm, where I'm thinking about it analytically, I  
210 will have in the back of my mind the group relations conference and how people act  
211 in groups. Erm,

212

213 DB: what kind of things will you have in mind?

214

215 P4: ... well, I suppose in terms of professional roles, erm, how people act under  
216 different situations, erm, there was a sort of splinter group from the main group, at  
217 group relations, who called themselves the action group, and I found that interesting  
218 and I guess I've been mindful of that, erm, as a psychologist working with other  
219 professionals, that I don't, erm, I try not to create in somebody else the, m, the d, the  
220 desire to become a kind of action group person. It, I, it's quite hard to explain, but I  
221 think that psychologists could come across as being all talk, talk, talk and not  
222 anything useful, you know, and then maybe as, when I was working as a teacher I  
223 would si, be feeling like oh it's all right for them they can come in and give me all

224 these suggestions and then off they go and they leave me to do all the hard work.  
225 And I think that was replicated in the group relations conference because there was a  
226 lot of talking and talking about how we feel and, you know, everything was like really  
227 talked about which created some people to feel like - this is ridiculous, I just want to  
228 go and do s, do the task.

229

230 DB: right

231

232 P4: so I think that kind of doing and thinking divide has really epitomized the group  
233 relations. Like, people who wanted to do, stood up, said, had enough of this, I'm  
234 going to go and do something, and then they went, and that was, I guess I'd always  
235 known about that feeling, but it was made really clear. So, and I'd always been on the  
236 do'er side of it.

237

238 DB: yep

239

240 P4: and now I, group relations I realised I was on the thinker, erm, side of the  
241 continuum, erm, but, so if I'm talking to other professionals and they're looking at me  
242 in a way, er, that makes me think - she's talking so much and she's not been very  
243 helpful, I do try and bear that in mind. That they're, they, they're of the, they've been  
244 kind of made to feel like the action group, that they've disengaged and they'd, they  
245 don't feel that this talking was helpful.

246

247 DB: and have you noticed yourself making any different choices in that sense?

248

249 P4: erm, it's hard to dis, distinguish it really, because I don't think I could attribute any  
250 choices, changing choices to group relations.

251

252 DB: okay, okay,

253

254 P4: I think it, I've learned so much this year, that I don't think any choice that I've  
255 made has been, could be directly linked to group relations.

256

257 DB: okay, are there any other ways since attending, erm, and thinking about yourself  
258 in role as a trainee EP, erm, are there any other times where you've made any links  
259 with group relations conference and yourself in role?

260

261 P4: ... erm, I suppose that I've got a deeper understanding of my colleagues on my  
262 course, since we all were in it together. Erm, and we all had different experiences,  
263 but we all experienced the group relations. So, I think that probably brought us  
264 together, but I think we're all very careful to make sure it brought us together.

265

266 DB: right, so, you're drawing some links with yourself as a member of your training  
267 cohort.

268

269 P4: mm

270

271 DB: could you explain that a little bit more?

272

273 P4: erm, I think, well, once you've done, I think that the group relations brought us  
274 together as a group of, on my training cour, cohort. When we started the week we  
275 were all quite separate and went, did a kind of, erm, played it in a individualist way,  
276 but we all met at break time, lunchtime, to kind of touch base, erm, and by the, I  
277 think, I feel like at the end of the conference, when we all sat together over the centre  
278 of the spiral as, we realised we were, an, an eighth of the people there, we had quite  
279 a strong voice and it was quite empowering in that way. Erm, I think we all played it a

280 bit as a game, erm, we were quite resilient, and I suppose it ... it ... I don't know,  
281 maybe it kind of reminded us that we were 10 very, on, embarking, you know, we're,  
282 we are 10 quite resilient people who are, can sit together, can be apart then but we  
283 could kind of rely on each other and things like that.

284

285 DB: you mention resilience?

286

287 P4: yeah, I think we, I think we were able to support each other, and in having each  
288 other we were able to be a bit braver. I think if I had done that conference as a, on  
289 my own, without knowing anybody I would not have been as brave as I was with  
290 knowing that there was nine people that if I got myself into trouble they'd back me up.  
291 Erm, so that was quite good to sort of have that feeling. Erm, I think we're probably  
292 quite careful as well, I think we all wanted to make sure that we end, we came out of  
293 it still a working group of colleagues. Erm, we made sure that we, that you know  
294 when we kind of went into little subgroups that we all pr, pretty much, erm, went into,  
295 like we, what's the word? Like separated into, so that we weren't with each other. So  
296 that we could be our secure base back at break time, kind of thing, rather than them  
297 seeing, for me, like, the nastier side, or the vulnerable side, or the whatever. Erm, but  
298 we, I think we all played it more as a game than some people who were there, were  
299 upset. So, and it's quite nice to have a kind of common framework, that we've each  
300 got like a kind of thing in common now, that we can all say oh God, do you remember  
301 that thing? Group relations, that was so crazy.

302

303 DB: mm hm, so you've noticed, or made some kind of links with the training cohort,

304

305 P4: mm, like a sort of initiation process. Into the tavi world (laughs).

306

307 DB: and what, sort of following that, have you noticed, erm, about that, as a member  
308 of that group? Are there any other links that you've made?

309

310 P4: I don't think so.

311

312 DB: okay. We thought about, erm, linking that group relations conference to yourself  
313 as a member of that year cohort, erm, here, was there, just interested in going back  
314 to any other reflections that you might have about yourself in role as a trainee  
315 educational psychologist, and again any links to experiences of the group relations  
316 conference that come to your mind?

317

318 P4: I think group relations conference made me think about myself as, okay let, let  
319 me say again. So, when I read something about a person, erm, however, I guess I, I  
320 suppose it's easier to think of a person as like the other, so, you know, you read  
321 about attachment theory and you're like oh that's like a child I've worked with and  
322 their, their attachment, but group relations made me think oh okay I am also have  
323 attachment relationships that I also, erm, you know, play into dynamics and so it's  
324 that kind of, ref, reflexivity or like the self reflection that obviously I know that I have  
325 attachment, erm, relationships but group relations really really makes you realise that  
326 you have attachment relationships, or, I mean, and relationships with other people  
327 and peer relationships and you are a person in role and dada dada da. But erm, that  
328 kind of experience just you can, you cannot, you can no longer think I'm a  
329 professional you're a client. You've, it's been very acutely demonstrated that you're  
330 also a po, a potential client, you know, you're also a person who is in society and in  
331 groups and, and I think that's, that's really good because when you're working in a  
332 school, you think - oh you know I'm, I'm totally impervious to any, any of this silliness,  
333 but actually like, you know, it takes you three days of group relations and you're  
334 going bonkers so d, it's only t, between you and a difficult friendship peer, peer



335 relationship, difficult learning environment, a difficult behaviour, all of those things  
336 that it's easy to put into the other, it's only a couple of days and you're acting just the  
337 same. And it is a kind of microcosm and I guess working in schools you see all this  
338 stuff and you think oh children, that's children, but it's not. You know, it's adults as  
339 well and it doesn't, it's not very long before we're acting like children in a playground  
340 being mean to other children, forming cliques, erm, being bullies, being bullied.  
341 Segregating ourselves, erm, being rude to teachers or the equivalent and (laughs),  
342 you know, I think it's quite good to be given that bit of a reality check that actually we  
343 were all very capable of being just like children in a playground. And so that's quite  
344 good.

345

346 I suppose one of the other things would be that, what do you do with that? Once  
347 you've got that kind of awareness, erm, so it's quite easy to, like I mean, it's good to, I  
348 really think it's good to kind of be reminded that, but what do you do with it? And  
349 once you're made aware of it, maybe, I think you might feel things more acutely, erm,  
350 you read into things more, sometimes you might read into things too much, erm, and,  
351 you know...

352

353 DB: I'm interested in your question about - what do you do with that? Erm, should  
354 you have an awareness, any thoughts? Or maybe a particular example might help?

355

356 P4: it's really hard because I know that you're, I'm, don't want to be quoted, I'm trying  
357 to be, I don't want and sort of don't want to give an example, but let's, erm,

358

359 DB: we can certainly ensure anonymity to

360

361 P4: I know, but there's only like four of us isn't there, and were all from the tavi, so  
362 (laughs), it's going to be one of the four, so, let's think about something more  
363 general, erm, okay so let's say you're, erm,

364

365 DB: only what you're comfortable with

366

367 P4: yeah I know, I know that, thank you, erm, so say attachment and then you're  
368 thinking, erm, like group relations people are like - oh well you feel abandoned  
369 because, oh it's like the mother-child relationship dada dada da, but if... you've never  
370 really thought of it like that before, and then next time it, a, er, something happens  
371 when you, a, e, a similar thing happened in, er, for example professional rel,  
372 professional relationship previously you'd have just thought oh that's just, erm, a  
373 thing, now you're thinking – oh, maybe they're abandoning me, I've got feelings of  
374 abandonment, does this relate to my, to some sort of, erm, early childhood  
375 experience or what does this mean, you never felt abandoned before, but because  
376 like, you know, a, a colleague is leaving, you previously wouldn't have felt  
377 abandoned but now you're wondering what the meaning is behind it and it aban, and  
378 so now, you, you've got all, its kind of opened up a Pandora's box of, that you, of,  
379 which, you wouldn't have felt before. So,

380

381 DB: what's opened up a Pandora's box?

382

383 P4: well I think, I suppose, I mean, it's maybe not explicitly group relations, but, a  
384 kind of way of thinking an, psychoanalytically, of which group relations is quite a key  
385 aspect. Erm, so maybe you would ... you're, maybe it was kind of, maybe you were  
386 sort of blissfully unaware before (laughs), I don't know. You know, what you do with  
387 it? Once, once you think – oh maybe I feel this because of this, then, then what?

388

389 DB: have you got any thoughts on then what?

390

391 P4: well that's when I get a bit critical of the whole thing really because I think that  
392 it's, I think there's ethical responsibility about it that I don't know if they really uphold. I  
393 don't think it's really thought about, I feel like they do s, it is, it does sort of play with  
394 your mind a bit and I don't know if it's really contained well enough. I mean there was  
395 a lot of other people who were very upset, like I mean I mentioned it in the last  
396 interview we had, but I'll never forget, like that person crying and crying because she  
397 felt that someone had not liked her because of her race and it was just heartbreaking  
398 and she had had such, she had lived for her whole life without feeling that and then  
399 been made to feel that. And I guess it's just a question of the ethics of that, you know  
400 ... I know that racism exists, how ethically fine is it to make somebody realise that  
401 people are, think badly of her and it may be to do with her race, like, how, how is  
402 that, how is that okay, you know, I think that it's, it's dodgy. Erm, and it does make  
403 me feel uncomfortable. And I do think there should've been more of a disclaimer  
404 about what people are letting themselves in for, because I felt like we had had a  
405 really good preparation and other people hadn't and it was like kind of going into big  
406 brother or something and everyone was very vulnerable and to rai, to mentioned very  
407 difficult topics like race, like, erm, power and all these things, and then just leave  
408 people to, to kind of go and cope with it, I don't think that's okay. It's alright if you're, I  
409 mean we're very privileged bunch because we've got supervision, we've got, erm,  
410 tutors that I feel comfortable going to if I felt that something was inappropriate, but if I  
411 had gone the year before I went, when I was working as a [describes previous work  
412 role], or a couple of years before, and I would have been, I would have been a mess.  
413 And some of the people there, social workers, erm, erm, some other professions,  
414 they didn't have supervision or anything like that, what do they do with that? Then  
415 they go back to work on Monday, and they've got back to like child protection and all  
416 of that. Then, you know, what was that? What do they do with all of those feelings

417 that have been stirred up? And, it was a compulsory part of their course, they didn't  
418 have any choice about it, I think it's, (sigh), I think you've got to be robust to do things  
419 like that, and I don't know if everybody was, I don't think everyone was warned and I  
420 think the ethics of it are, I'm not, definitely not 100% comfortable with it. And I  
421 wouldn't recommend it to anybody I knew, who I didn't know was very robust and  
422 comfortable and secure, cos, no, no, none of my friends and family would I  
423 suggested it's a good idea, because I think it could be really upsetting.

424

425 DB: so you certainly got some, I think, thoughts that you shared there in terms of  
426 some critical thinking about the group relations conference, some questions about  
427 ethics, erm, as part of that experience,

428

429 P4: mm I guess, I think it also reinforces a stereotype about the tavi that maybe we  
430 could do without.

431

432 DB: what do you mean?

433

434 P4: erm, I think p, when you meet people out in the field and they s, when you say  
435 you're tavi trainee and they sort of, they always ask - oh did you go on this crazy  
436 week where you all did that, you know, sit round in a circle, whatever. And, I think it  
437 does kind of, may alienate us as a teaching institution. Not alienate us, erm,  
438 differentiate us in a negative way.

439

440 DB: okay, how come?

441

442 P4: cos it's all ivory tower stuff I reckon, I think, you know, it's such a luxury

443

444 DB: what do you mean by the ivory tower stuff?

445

446 P4: well it's kind of all this sort of ... you know, it, a person, a friend or family member  
447 of mine, who works in a job where they have to work for a certain number of hours  
448 and they get paid a certain amount of money and they don't get to sit around and talk  
449 about this and think about this and (sighs), I think there's, there is a po, a potential  
450 perception of psychologists and psychological profession that we don', we do a lot of,  
451 we don't do a lot, or we're not, we get paid a lot, an, to not do much, o, I mean I don't  
452 think, I don't agree with that obviously, but think there is, there's potential for that and  
453 I think if you were to say this psychiatrist gets paid (laughs), God knows what, and  
454 this week they got paid this amount of money to sit around and play, play games  
455 about territories and, erm, you know, if it was a politician there would be an outcry,  
456 erm, I think, I just

457

458 DB: why?

459

460 P4: cos I think when cuts are being made and the, you know, to the NHS, and people  
461 are get, you know, hard-working people are getting paid not very much and we're all  
462 being paid by the NHS to spend a week doing that, I wondered if you add, you know,  
463 added up all of everybody's salary plus the, however much entrance fee, it's a lot of  
464 money going into that and there's a lot of people losing their jobs for, for less money.  
465 And, I don't know, I don't really believe it, what I'm saying, but I do think it's  
466 something that should be thought about. I mean I believe what I'm saying, but,

467

468 DB: what should be thought about?

469

470 P4: is it a good use of resources and time?

471

472 DB: what do you think about that?

473

474 P4: erm, find it very hard to reconcile my two sets of beliefs. And it's all very nice now  
475 that I'm a trainee EP and I've got this luxury to sit about thinking about thinking, erm,  
476 and, you know, I can sit and discuss anything, but when I was working (laughs)  
477 previously, erm, I saw really, I, I worked really hard for very little money and I got  
478 sworn at daily and physically assaulted and I was all doing it for the, you know, really  
479 because, you know, I, I w, a, for various reasons, but I was working really hard and if  
480 you had said to me, when I was working that hard, that some people are sitting  
481 around doing that, I would have been really angry that that's how some people are  
482 using NHS money. Er, I mean I do think it's important that people think, but I wonder  
483 if you need four days or whatever it was, five days, I can't remember, and whether  
484 you need it to be so full on, I guess that's what the action group were all about really,  
485 because it was great for us because the alternative for us was to sit and be lectured  
486 to which is also very nice and comfortable and lovely, and aren't we lucky, but if  
487 those other people working there were thinking – oh God, there's a child protection  
488 case that I've had to delay by a week in order to do this, I'm not surprised they are  
489 angry or, you know, so...

490

491 DB: and you said the was, sort of, on the one hand those kind of views about the use  
492 of time, was there another view that you hold as well?

493

494 P4: what do you mean?

495

496 DB: I think, you said something along the lines of there's two views that you hold...

497

498 P4: oh, right, yeah, well they're sort of contradictory,

499

500 DB: mm

501

502 P4: so, if you think about that, what I said before, like at the beginning of this, I think  
503 it's really important to do all this thinking, and someone needs to do all of this thinking  
504 because you can't have everyone just doing all the doing, cos (laughs), things don't  
505 work very well. You need somebody doing the thinking, erm,

506

507 DB: why?

508

509 P4: (laughs) well because I've worked in institutions where there's not a lot of  
510 thinking happening, it doesn't function very well at all and the more stressed out you  
511 get, the more, the less thinking that happens. And the more doing that happens, mm,  
512 everyone's doing stuff and nothing is being done, erm, so I do appreciate the need  
513 for thinking. But the other half of me questions, I don't know, maybe it's about  
514 balance, maybe it's about resources, maybe it's about the way it was done, probably  
515 bit of each.

516

517 DB: I'm just going to finish with one last question and, which is just I think to offer the  
518 same question again in terms of, erm

519

520 P4: (laughs) links

521

522 DB: yeah any links from your experience as a trainee EP to attending the group  
523 relations conference?

524

525 P4: ... mm ... well, there's just so many, I, I don', I, I don't know ... I go, I just do  
526 wonder what it's, what it's like going to the other training courses and, yeah.

527

528 DB: what do you think it might be like?

529

530 P4: (laughs) you learn a bit more, and you do less sitting around talking.

531

532 DB: what do you mean learn a bit more?

533

534 P4: (laughs) erm, well, we, we do do a lot of, we do do a lot of learning, erm ... I don't

535 know, I just wonder about, I don't know how long they'll still do the group relations

536 conference, I've got a feeling it won't last very much longer, I think that we're going in

537 a trajectory where it's not going to be high priority or if, valued, or

538

539 DB: what's your reflection on that?

540

541 P4: erm, maybe they've got a point.

542

543 DB: how come?

544

545 P4: ... erm, I think the course is going in a different direction and, I don't know, I'm of,

546 I'm of mixed, I've got very ambivalent feelings towards it really. Erm, I think it's a

547 good, I, I, I don't know I really am completely divided in my mind about it.

548

549 DB: and I think you've given, and articulated that really well

550

551 P4: (laughs)

552

553 DB: are there any final comments, erm, that you'd like to make?

554

555 P4: no, I don't think so.

556



557 DB: okay, erm, we'll stop there and I'll say thank you.