

**Voices as Equal as Others:**  
**A Narrative Inquiry into the Doctoral Journey of**  
**Psychologists and Psychotherapists from Authoritarian**  
**Background**

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*“...All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others...”*

(Orwell, 1945, p. 97)

*“...Expressing one’s own ‘truth’ or viewpoint - even when deeply threatening - appears as the only hope to retrieve humanity... In a socio-political context that nullifies people’s voices and instigates fear... how may we attain freedom?”*

(Elías, 2016, p. 823)

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my great grandfather Georgi Nikolov and to my former communist squad leader at school, Comrade Mutafova.

My great grandfather was one of the sweetest spirits I have ever encountered. Originally from Macedonia, his own father moved to Bulgaria at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I can still hear his voice in my head, even as I am writing this: *“Why do you do this to your eyes, my Dove? Why do you need to study so much? Go outside, look at the sky.”* A farmer all his life, he was sensitive and affectionate, providing a warm, caring presence in my early childhood and adolescence. He loved nature and everything living; above all, he loved life itself. His land was taken away by the State under the government of the Bulgarian Communist Party because no private property was allowed. He lost his farm, but his connection to the land remained. Rest in Peace: I love you and I hope we meet again.

Comrade Mutafova, I do not know whether you are still alive, and you never told me your first name. But I want you to know that I am doing something that will displease you greatly - I am using my voice. A lot.

## **Abstract**

The relationship with power and authority operates on multiple levels, influencing the development and clinical practice of psychological practitioners. This narrative inquiry explored the lived experiences of power and authority during the training of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists from authoritarian backgrounds. To enhance understanding of power differentials within training and supervisory contexts, practitioners' training journeys were examined against the backdrop of their life stories, early experiences and attachments. Individual narrative interviews were conducted with six UK-based counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, born and raised in countries with authoritarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and South America. All transcripts were analysed and condensed into narrative accounts. Three overarching themes, called "Silence", "Otherness and power" and "Transition across time and space", and 12 subthemes were identified. Nine learning points were offered, following a critical discussion of issues around silence, embodied trauma, cultural and linguistic differences, subtle and overt forms of racism, and intersectional discrimination. The findings highlight the importance of multicultural competency, personal therapy from the outset of training, and fostering more secure attachments within the training setting.

*Keywords:* counselling psychology and psychotherapy training; relationship with power and authority; life story; silence; otherness

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## Introduction

### The Girl, the Wall, and Number 8

*“...on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again...  
Before I built a wall I’d ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out.  
Something there is that doesn’t love a wall  
That wants it down...”*

(Frost, 1914, pp. 11-13)

While deciding how to assemble and locate my research puzzle in the context of my life experience through an inquiry into my autobiographical “narrative beginning” (Clandinin, 2013), I realised that I have always associated “power” and “authority” with oppression. To this day, I find it difficult to divorce these terms from certain negative connotations. My early years were marked by intense scrutiny, anxiety, and paranoia. Born in the late 1970s in the (former) Communist Republic of Bulgaria, I not only found it difficult to voice my opinion; I simply did not know that I possessed a voice or the right to use it. Growing up during the Cold War era meant being subjected to constant brainwashing and indoctrination. It was a period suffused with vast amounts of Soviet propaganda and values, heavily promoted by the Bulgarian Communist Party and its youth division, the Komsomol. “Black and white” thinking was reinforced, with the “good” ones and the “bad” ones, separated (literally) by a Wall which was often referred to as the “Iron Curtain”. I was reminded

of this “split” every time my cousin (the son of my Bulgarian uncle and his ex-wife, originally from West Berlin) wanted to visit his maternal grandparents but was not allowed to cross the border at the heavily fortified, brick-and-barbed-wire Berlin Wall.

Living in a totalitarian state as a little girl was a rather confined way of being at a time when the rest of the world was feeling increasingly liberated, with female voices becoming more distinct. My early memories at school are characterised by extreme conformity, rigidity, restrictions, and fear of “*stepping out of line*”. Together with my classmates, I remember standing up and saluting the teachers, like little soldiers, at the beginning of every class.

**Figure 1.**

*Hailing the Teacher*



*Note.* Photograph taken for the school newsletter by the late photographer Plamen Goranov who set himself on fire and lost his life during the Bulgarian anti-corruption protests in 2013.

I remember marching under the rain during a parade on 1<sup>st</sup> May (Labour Day), aged eight or nine, wearing my uniform and singing, *“I am a beautiful flower on planet Earth”* with hundreds of other children, and followed by a tank. Large portraits of prominent Bulgarian communists and Soviet political leaders decorated the walls of my classroom. The authority of the teachers was never questioned but unconditionally accepted and obeyed. Whatever went wrong in the classroom was always the pupil’s fault, never the teacher’s. As part of our Manual Labour module, we had to work on the field twice a year for a fortnight without being paid. What would nowadays be characterised as child abuse and exploitation was considered “educational” at the time, and even useful for our transformation into future communists. On one occasion, a classmate cut her finger during the Manual Labour class and was not allowed to go to the nurse because, according to the teacher, she deserved to be injured for *“not following the instructions”*. Terrified that I might be the next to be targeted for *“getting it wrong”*, I crouched down into my seat. On reflection, this experience might have marked the onset of my anxiety and intense fear of failure.

In class, we had allocated seats and were referred to as numbers. Between the ages of seven and 11, I was **“number 8”**. Thinking of Siegel’s (2017) concept of “identity integration”, I spent many hours in personal therapy, exploring and reflecting on how this depersonalising, almost military upbringing might have impacted my developing sense of Self and identity. I was literally not seen as a person but as a number, a little cog in the vast machinery of the State. My love-hate relationship with numbers began at that point and persisted throughout the ensuing decades of my life.

**Figure 2.**

*My School ID Card: The Number Precedes My Name (Personal Archive)*

ЕСТУ "Иван Вазов"		<b>School</b>
(учебно заведение)		
гр. (с) <u>Руче</u>	окр. _____	
<div style="border: 2px solid red; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">         № в класа <u>8</u> курса       </div>		<b>Number</b>
<b>ЛИЧНА КАРТА</b>		<b>School ID Card</b>
<u>Деница</u>		
<u>Радева</u>		<b>Name</b>
(трите имена)		
<u>Д. Радева</u>		
(подпис)		
роден(а) на <u>28. VII</u> 19 <u>78</u>		<b>Date of birth</b>
в р. (с) <u>Руче</u> окр. _____		
ЕГН <u>7807285376</u> живущ(а) в _____		<b>Uniform Civil Number</b>
гр. (с) <u>Руче</u> окр. _____		
ул., №, бл., вх. <u>ул. Сивница "2"</u>		<b>Address</b>
е учени <u>7кв</u> в <u>IV</u> клас (курс)		
през 19 <u>88</u> ... / 19 <u>89</u> ... учебна година		
Директор: _____		
(подпис)		

Whereas at school I was under constant scrutiny from the teachers, at home I often felt lonely and isolated. Being an only child did not help. Both my parents, the primary authority figures, were busy and hard-working professionals with little time to spare. Yet I could sense their dissatisfaction, living within the totalitarian bubble, and their disillusionment with the hypocrisy and oppressive character of the regime, even though these were never openly discussed. Regardless of the ideological "straitjacket" imposed on me, I was curious, passionate, and impressionable by nature. However, I soon discovered that such propensities could easily get me into trouble. I could only escape punishment and receive praise and acknowledgement if I worked hard to be compliant and suppressed any individual opinions or feelings. I learnt to adapt, conform, follow the rules, and ignore my own needs. In these formative years, there seemed to be no space for my curiosity and rebellious streak.

I was taught - literally - to be ashamed of my own **voice**. Even after the (formal) end of the communist era, my teachers' mentality did not change overnight. I remember being chastised in my late teenage years by a prominent professor for "*speaking out of turn*". In hindsight, I believe there had always been some tension between the "Rebel" and "Conformist" aspects of my personality.

## **My Academic and Professional Background**

Following the end of the communist regime and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, I found I had more opportunities to pursue my passion but, having lived as a number for nearly one-third of my life, I did not know how. Despite my interest in psychology and creative writing, I was advised by my parents to choose "*something more practical*". Therefore, at the age of 19, I left home and relocated to another city, where I enrolled on a Healthcare Management bachelor's degree course with the hope of finding a job within the newly established National Health Insurance Fund. An academic overachiever, at 23 I was awarded a long-term scholarship to study abroad. In 2002, I completed my International Master's Degree course in Public Health in Jerusalem, in a class of 25 people from 16 countries, representatives of various ethnic and religious groups. My world was no longer black and white; it was becoming more colourful and less regimented. I was beginning to see more nuances, learning about different cultures and ways of being.

After my graduation, I spent nearly a decade working in the field of clinical research, extracting numerical data as part of research and audit projects, and performing statistical analyses. My role also encompassed compiling research proposals and ensuring data verification, integrity, and consistency with the

“prescribed” protocol. It recently dawned on me that adhering so strictly to research protocols somewhat paralleled the conformity and compliance with a rigid set of rules from my early childhood! My relationship with numbers became even more ambivalent. On the one hand, there was comfort, certainty, and stability in “finding answers”. On the other, I felt trapped and suffocated, “not allowed” space for growth, independent thinking, or self-expression. Again, this was reminiscent of the dogmatic beliefs instilled in me by the Party operators. For a long time, I remained a firm believer and proponent of “objectively” conducted research, aiming to “reduce bias” and produce strictly quantifiable answers while remaining oblivious to its reductionism. Overseeing the completion of clinical randomised trials in different parts of the world, including the Middle East, Africa, and the UK, expanded my “horizons” and helped me grow as a person. However, I was still stifling a big part of myself - namely, my curiosity and creativity. In my professional life, I believe I had started to see myself as something mechanical; a hybrid between a person and a numbered research unit. There was a complete “split” between my personal and professional Self. I finally began to address it during my training in psychotherapy and counselling psychology.

## **Conception of This Research Project**

Arriving in the UK in 2010, I started adapting to a very different way of being but soon discovered that certain societal groups were in a less favourable position than others. This reminded me of Orwell’s *“Animal Farm”* (1945), where some animals are deemed “more equal” than others. This at least felt familiar. As a Bulgarian citizen, I have had encounters with prejudice and stereotypical beliefs



about Eastern Europeans the minute I open my mouth and people hear my accent, which makes me think of power discrepancies in a broader historical and political context.

At the beginning of my doctoral training, I was unaware of how my past experience with power, authority figures, control and oppression would emerge or influence my learning process. Actively engaging in group process, I experienced it as highly rewarding but also challenging and at times excruciatingly painful. It did not escape my notice how differently group members, including me, responded and reacted to various group dynamics, and in what way tutors and facilitators (perceived as authority figures) influenced the group, eliciting complex feelings and evoking personal material. Similar processes occurred during my individual and group supervision. One morning, after a particularly difficult training weekend when I felt seen but not heard, I woke up with the intuitive “knowledge” that I had to change my research topic (despite having written a research proposal in a different area). It occurred to me that there was very little awareness (even on doctoral courses such as mine) of what trainees who had been raised in oppressive regimes might be going through; this included the powerful feelings and traumatic memories that might be evoked and, above all, the difficulty of speaking up - especially in a language which is not your “mother tongue”. On a purely visceral level, there was something about breaking that deafening silence within me, that urged me (almost in a dreamlike state) to send an email to the programme leader and my research supervisor with the request to change my topic. Trying to make sense of my own and other fellow trainees’ experiences is what ultimately led me to writing this thesis. However, I do not think that I consciously “chose” my topic, at least not initially; it **chose me** as a

result of my embodied response to everything that had happened and was still happening to me and around me but also to others.

In educational settings, the relationship with power and authority is continuously shaped and reshaped. Like therapy, it operates on multiple levels, influencing trainees' intrapsychic and interpersonal processes, as well as their professional development (Gazzola et al., 2011). However, although psychologists and psychotherapists are taught to pay attention to the "inherent power differential" with their clients (Brown, 1994; Pope & Vasquez, 2007; Zur, 2009), the ways in which their own experiences and perceptions - particularly around power and authority - are shaped in the course of their training through the lens of historical, social, and cultural narrative auspices, are rarely addressed. My embodied belief is that all individuals, regardless of their background or origin, have an equal right to voice their subjective experience and be heard. This is also in line with the practice guidelines and principles of the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2017), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (2018), and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) (2019a), which deeply resonate with me as their member. I wanted to learn more about the experiences of colleagues who (like me) had been subjected to relentless oppression in childhood, embarking on training in the psychological therapies in their adulthood, learning to use their voices and connect with others in ways that would empower both them and their clients.

What did they feel and think? What was the role of their training institutions? Most importantly, how could I make them feel heard?

## A Review of the Literature

*“...The traditions of old dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living...”*

(Marx, 1852/1968, p. 96)

### Introduction and Search Strategy

During my literature review, I endeavoured to cover issues around power, authority and authoritarianism, linking them to experiences on training courses in psychotherapy and counselling psychology. To identify relevant articles, I searched the PsycINFO, PsycArticles, MEDLINE, Science Direct, and Wiley Online Library databases using the following key terms or search strings: power; authority; power dynamics; counselling psychology training; psychotherapy training; counselling psychology AND psychotherapy training in the UK; power AND counselling psychology training; power AND psychotherapy training; authority AND counselling psychology training; authority AND psychotherapy training. I did not apply any date parameters during these searches. The search terms were entered into each database using the “\*” truncation symbol to identify studies, examining either psychotherapy or counselling psychology training (for example, “psych\* training”), and were set to be detected in either the title or abstract. I endeavoured to retrieve the full-text articles of previously conducted studies, relevant to my topic (e.g., Cartwright, 2019; Jakubkaitė & Kočiūnas, 2014; Moller & Rance, 2013; Robson & Robson, 2008). Afterwards, I examined their reference lists to identify additional studies which might have been missed while searching the databases.

The search identified literature that pertains to power and authority as well as to different aspects of the training process in counselling psychology and psychotherapy. In addition, I consulted the ethical frameworks, practice guidelines, and standards of education and training established by the United Kingdom (UK) membership organisations for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists.

During the write-up, the literature review was divided into two parts. The first part examined issues around power and authority in the broader historical context of social and political transition, while the second part focused primarily on the training environment in counselling psychology and psychotherapy. It explored the body of literature on trainees' personal and professional development, experiences of relational and power dynamics between tutors and group members in experiential groups as well as within the supervisory relationship. At the end of the chapter, I discussed my research focus and rationale in the context of gaps identified in the literature, which helped me to formulate the research aims and research question.

## **Power, Authority, and Transition: The Historical Scene**

### ***Power and Authority***

In the past (resonating with my early history), power has primarily been associated with domination or control (Adler, 1927). While some authors view it as unitary, monolithic, and unidirectional (Proctor, 2002), others describe it as nuanced and multifaceted, differentiating between expert, referent, reward, coercive, and informational power (French & Raven, 1959). However, the unique feature that distinguishes power from prestige, authority, or status is that a *powerful* person is

typically regarded as a potential source of either need gratification or deprivation (Zander & Cohen, 1955). Power also encompasses the ability to act upon others or upon an organisational structure (Obholzer, 1994) and emanates from both internal and external sources. Externally, it derives from factors that the individual controls (e.g., money, privileges, references, promotions), from the sanctions one can impose on others, and from the nature of one's social and political connections. Internally, power is derived from the individual's knowledge and experience, strength of personality, charisma, and state of mind; how powerful they feel and how they present themselves to others.

I view power relations in the family and in the wider social environment as having a profound effect on individuals' personality and psychological experiences. For example, individuals who have encountered abuses of power early in life tend to develop the so-called "internal oppressor" (Batts, 1998) or "internal aggressor" (Freud, 1936). This sometimes manifests in later life as a sense of helplessness, unassertiveness, and avoidance of conflict, turning anger against the Self or attacking other groups as inferior (Batts, 1998). Implicitly, power is often perceived as destructive and detrimental to those who are "power-less". It is seen as either "good" or "bad" (Fruggeri, 1992). However, from a relational perspective, I believe this is an overly simplified, dichotomous view of power. I wished to step outside this binary mode of thinking, exploring power relations as neither "good" nor "bad" but central to the process of recognising the Self and *Other* in the meeting between two "subjectivities".

Foucault (1980) posits that power relations dissipate through all relational structures of society. He therefore proposes an alternative model of power centred on the human individual as an active agent, rather than a simple object on whom

power is imposed. His assumption is that “individuals are vehicles of power, not its points of application” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Inverting a negative concept, Foucault (1977, 1980) views power as a strategy, rather than a possession, highlighting its productive nature. In contrast to Marxist thinkers, who regard power simply as a form of repression or oppression, Foucault is more interested in the resistance of those upon whom power is exerted and the subsequent effects of this resistance. He explains that “it is one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies... discourses... desires come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual is, I believe, one of its prime effects” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Unlike power, authority is usually perceived as an attribute of roles rather than persons. It is associated with the right to make an ultimate decision which is binding to others, derived from an individual's role in a system and exercised on its behalf (Obholzer, 1994). “Authoritarian” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2012, p. 41) as “in favour of or demanding strict obedience to authority”. Authoritarianism is characterised as the tendency to give uncritical credence to the pronouncements of an authority figure, whether this is an individual, an institution, science, or religion (Jourard, 1957). The term is most widely employed using the connotation of dependency upon authority, rather than upon the Self. In contrast to democracy, the main principle underpinning authoritarianism is obedience to authority and limited autonomy of the individual in thought and action (Bedeski, 2009). As a form of government, authoritarianism concentrates power in one leader or in a small elite, not constitutionally accountable to the people. An authoritarian leadership style relies heavily on the coercive use of power (Fodor, 1976). Authoritarian leaders have often been regarded as possessing “superior knowledge or ability” (Hays & Thomas, 1967, p. 41) or are seen as the sole powerholders and decision-makers, determining all

policies and active steps to be taken in pursuit of group goals, even the particular task to be performed by each group (or society) member (White & Lippitt, 1960).

Profoundly aware of the dangers of authoritarianism, Fromm (1947) argues that, unlike irrational or dictatorial authority, rational authority has its origins in competence and requires constant scrutiny and criticism of those subjected to it. Like power, authority does not derive solely from an external structure; it also has internal components that may be explicit or implicit. To coin a term derived from Winnicott's (1971) concept of "good-enough" mothering, "good-enough" authority appears to arise from a continuous mix of authorisation from the organisation or structure, sanctioning from within the organisation, and confirmation of authority from within individuals, which largely depends on the nature of their relationship with inner world authority figures (Obholzer, 1994). Therefore, both power and authority depend on the inner world connectedness, where "authority without power leads to a weakened, demoralised management. Power without authority leads to an authoritarian regime. It is the judicious mix and balance of the two that makes for effective on-task management" (Obholzer, 1994, p. 42).

### ***Authoritarianism as the Foundation for Totalitarian Regimes***

Authoritarianism provided the conceptual framework for modern dictatorships (Bedeski, 2009), which can be authoritarian or totalitarian. The latter is a more extreme or radical form of an authoritarian political system with an explicit or implied national ideology. However, in both cases, the executive, legislative, and judicial powers are concentrated and the agents of government are not chosen in popular competitive elections (Almond & Powell, 1996). Totalitarian dictatorships, aspiring to

remain in power indefinitely through the complete eradication of participation and politics (Arendt, 2005; López, 1984), emerged in the pre-war late industrialising countries of Germany, Italy, and Russia, but only survived in the USSR, which created satellite dictatorships in Eastern Europe (including my home country Bulgaria) after the war. The Soviet model was an example of the more radical variety, characterised by high levels of incarceration and social control over different aspects of individuals' private lives, including movement and personal residences (Shelley, 2003).

Importantly, Ispas (2013, p. 101) argues that “authoritarian regimes can only impose their domination if they succeed in establishing a shared social identity with those they seek to dominate.” She contends that when individuals become part of a crowd, they tend to behave according to its norms, gradually internalising the group's perspective as their own. This view is confirmed by Goodman and Uzun (2013), who interviewed students in an urban “disciplinary” secondary school to investigate their reactions and attitudes towards highly controlling, authoritarian practices. The authors expected that most students would object to the regime and consider it unduly repressive. However, to their surprise, the majority appeared to approve while objecting to any proposal to grant students greater self-expression and autonomy. This prompted Goodman and Uzun (2013) to discuss the extent to which students had identified with the school's norms. However, they noted that only one-third of the 150 surveys were returned, and that the “...data were messy. Often students left questions blank or wrote answers that were not intelligible” (Goodman & Uzun, 2013, p. 9). My interpretation is that a large number of the students were fearful of being “discovered”, or felt they were under an “obligation” to participate but did so reluctantly and in a way that either complied with what they thought was expected of



them or simply made their answers difficult to read or decipher. This possible explanation was not discussed in the article. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that students might have internalised the authoritarian view of being “undeserving” of freedom.

### ***The “Other” as a Source of Fear or Hope***

Totalitarian power has no use for authentic human interactions or individual freedom and self-expression. Despotic governments sustain themselves by instituting terror, simultaneously debasing the individual and proscribing communal engagements, thus truncating the basic human drive for inter-relational experiences (Elías, 2016). The different “*Other*” is viewed as threatening and suspect. Consequently, totalitarian regimes create and sustain divisive rhetoric, as well as symbolic institutional arrangements that systematically undermine difference (Stohl & López, 1984). Those who desire but cannot flee the oppressive and terrorising conditions may grow apathetic and isolated from others, becoming subsumed into what Elías (2016) referred to as an internal exile - a life in seclusion, alienation, and silence. Through official propaganda, dictatorial regimes aim to divide people by instigating mistrust and fear of the different *Other*, leading to a permanent sense of dread and chronic trauma (Erikson, 1995).

Yet, in the darkest of times, hope emerges when we engage with others (Stivers, 2008). Speaking of our reality from our own position, subjective experience, and frame of reference constitutes a move towards a state of Being or Dasein (Heidegger, 1962) in which we are conscious of our freedom. Parrhesia, translated by Elías (2016, p. 811) from Greek as “free and direct speech or truth-telling”, has

been described as a catalyst for open deliberation in oppressive contexts. It allows people to join with others in speech and action, creating the public space (Arendt, 1958; Stivers, 2004). In the face of a tyrannical regime, the courageous citizen may seize the opportunity to speak out the truth - what she knows to be true in the light of her hands-on experiential understanding of the situation. The exercise of parrhesia implies fully opening up the heart and the mind to the interlocutor through one's discourse (Foucault, 2001). While power differences play favourably for some people and extremely adversely for others, parrhesia enables a socially powerless person to challenge the status quo. In speaking freely and deliberating, we discover the *Other* not as a foreign other but as a reflection of ourselves and our own potential - a mirror that unveils part of who we are and who we might become. In that context, reality lived through different viewpoints refuses to be told as a single and official discourse, and people may discover that they have more in common than their apparent differences or prejudices have led them to believe.

### ***Liminality and the Psychosocial Impact of Political Transition***

I often reflect on different "rites of passage" in my life through the lens of liminality. Having experienced communism and the subsequent transition to democracy during my formative years, followed by immigration in adulthood (including relocating from Bulgaria to the Middle East, Equatorial Guinea, and then the UK over the course of ten years), I view my doctoral journey as yet another liminal situation, perhaps the most challenging of all.

The concept of liminality (from the Latin word *līmen*, meaning "a threshold") was originally proposed by Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) to describe a person's

passage (or shift) from one identity state to another, sometimes referred to as “*the modern condition*” (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003, p. 269). It connotes a transitional state, typically bounded in space and time. However, Ybema et al. (2011) made an important distinction between time-limited liminality and the experience of permanent “*betweenness*”, in that transitional liminality generates a sense of being “*not-X-anymore-and-not-Y-yet*”, whereas permanent liminality creates an enduring sense of being “*neither-X-nor-Y*” or indeed of being “*both-X-and-Y*”. In my quest for identity, I feel I can strongly relate to and even embody that state of permanent liminality in my position as a citizen of two countries and a “vessel” of at least two cultures who is “constantly crossing the threshold” (Ellis & Ybema, 2010, p. 300) as part of an ongoing, dynamic process in which I am continually learning to “integrate” these cultures. Liminality is sometimes described as a period of ambiguity and uncertainty (Beech, 2011; Turner, 1982). Therefore, it can be painful, unsettling, and disruptive (Hoyer & Steyaert, 2015; Swan et al., 2016), yet it allows us to understand the manner in which anguishing situations of uncertainty can emerge or be artificially provoked and exploited. For instance, Horváth (2013) explored how communists acquired power in a post-war situation within the context of a collapse of the established order of things. As a result of the subsequent fall of the Iron Curtain 45 years later, massive political, economic, and social changes drove Central and Eastern Europe to a previously unknown liminal situation of transformation. Lesse (1990) described this as a unique opportunity to observe the macro-psychosocial effects of this transition. However, three decades later, its full impact on the collective psychosocial wellbeing remains unclear. Some research findings suggest that the prevalence of mental health disorders in post-communist societies and populations increased significantly (Orosa, 2013). For instance, the cluster of stress-

related factors that emerged during the transition period included higher rates of depression and suicide, addiction, violence, and risk-taking behaviours. While the democratic changes induced greater respect for human rights and the deinstitutionalisation of mental health facilities (Orosa, 2013), attention was also diverted from the role of the State as a provider of care (Lewis et al., 2001), resulting in many individuals adjusting poorly to the process (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2003).

However, while reflecting on our work as psychological practitioners, familiar with the practice of “listening between the lines” or “multiple listening” to what is being said or not said, it is precisely within the “gaps and cracks that exist between these different stories that the liminal or threshold spaces... the points of entry to “other” sites and identity performances” emerge (Speedy, 2008, p. 32). Therefore, crossing the *límen* can become socially and psychologically transformative in a positive way (Sankowska & Söderlund, 2015). It is likely to encourage freedom and creativity, engendering new structures and relationships (Shortt, 2015). Holding these opposing views, I have encountered writings by some authors who argue that when the liminal person metaphorically crosses the threshold, a new identity emerges that could be meaningful and beneficial both for the individual and for the community (Beech, 2011). It is akin to a “*transitional organising experience*”, often used in relation to a structural and dynamic transformation, taking place within the client-psychotherapist dyad (Cancelmo, 2009). I believe that it can also be applied to training or educational settings, where psychotherapists and counselling psychologists are in a constant state of “becoming”, learning, and reflecting on as well as modifying their ways of being and relating intersubjectively to their clients, particularly as part of the experiential component of their training courses.

## Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy: The Training Context

### *Training Environment in the UK*

The impact of training on counselling psychologists and psychotherapists is an important, yet under-researched, area (Grafanaki, 2010; Kamen et al., 2010; Ridley & Mollen, 2011). Previous research has revolved around clinical skills and outcomes (Crits-Christoph et al., 2006; Pascual-Leone et al., 2015) or relied heavily on quantitative data (e.g., Hall et al., 1999) even though some researchers, emphasising the importance of a “bottom up” approach, have focused on the interpretation of subjective experience as a means to inform counselling psychology and psychotherapy practice (McLeod, 2001). However, Rønnestad and Ladany (2006) contend that research in this area needs to move beyond correlations between training and therapeutic outcomes towards providing a better understanding of the training process *itself*, as well as of its impact on practitioners’ overall experience and development. Therapists’ professional development is considered essential not only for students, trainers, and supervisors, but also for clients and society at large (Grafanaki, 2010; Rønnestad & Ladany, 2006), whereas “advances in our understanding and provision of training are pre-requisites to further advances in basic therapy research” (Strupp, 1993, p. 432).

The training environment in the UK has its own distinct identity, standards for professional training, and competency requirements that have been established by professional counselling and psychotherapy bodies such as the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), and the British Psychological Society (BPS). The UKCP is the primary

professional and membership organisation for psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors in the UK. The UKCP Standards of Education and Training (2019b) outline the minimum core criteria for training courses, which include the development of “awareness, effectiveness and courage to communicate, and take action to reduce, the harm and trauma caused by discriminatory practice and insensitivity to **power differentials** within therapeutic, service provision, **training** and **supervisory** frames” (UKCP, 2019b, p. 8). The importance of a self-reflexive recognition of interpersonal and intra-personal phenomena from the perspective of equality and diversity is emphasised and includes a critical understanding of unconscious bias as well as of its impact on working with sameness and difference. This includes “the dynamics of privilege, oppression, marginalisation and assumption as they impact psychic and social development, and shape life experience” and the ways in which “these dynamics, and the resulting power differentials, impact the therapeutic process and relationship” (UKCP, 2019b, p. 8).

Counselling psychology in the UK holds a humanistic value base with influences from counselling psychology in the USA and European psychotherapy (Jones Nielsen & Nicholas, 2016). Its aim is to reduce psychological distress and promote well-being by focusing on individuals’ subjective experiences. Counselling psychologists in the UK are regulated by the HCPC which has set the threshold for qualification at doctoral level or equivalent (HCPC, 2017, p. 7). To be registered to practice, counselling psychologists must earn a qualification from an HCPC-approved programme. The role of the BPS in terms of regulation has been to work with the HCPC to represent members, curriculum frameworks, post-registration education and training, and continuing professional development. Working collaboratively with education providers, it promotes efficiency among its members

by requiring them to maintain a high standard of professional education and knowledge (Jones et al., 2016). According to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018), acting ethically can be affected by various individual and group influences; thus, even when practitioners have a high level of self-awareness, their motivation or ability to act ethically may be compromised. They are therefore encouraged to engage in ongoing reflection on key factors, including issues around power, resistance, and conformity (BPS, 2018). Although both the HCPC and BPS focus on the “outcomes” of the training, the BPS takes a significant interest in the training *process*, with the aim of fostering a supportive professional community.

To meet the standards established by the professional bodies, training programmes in counselling psychology focus on four core domains of activity, including psychological theory, clinical skills, psychological research, and personal development (Gillon et al., 2017). Although programmes differ in terms of how these domains are addressed during the actual training process, they are invariably seen as part of an integrated whole. In balancing learning in each of these domains with the tensions that exist between them, trainees are required to cultivate a personal commitment towards humanistic values in action (Cooper, 2009), a broad range of competencies necessary for the effective delivery of context-relevant psychological interventions, confidence, and resilience (Roebuck & Reid, 2020). They are also expected to develop a capacity to handle multiple challenges while accepting and managing uncertainty en route to becoming psychotherapists and counselling psychologists. Subsequently, the training journey is considered a “challenging endeavour” (Gillon et al., 2017, p. 362).

In relation to psychological theory, counselling psychology training programmes advocate a highly critical and reflective stance as well as a meta-

theoretical perspective, highlighting contextual relevance over the deployment of unitary theories of psychological wellness and distress, designed to both describe and explain “reality” (Gillon et al., 2017). Therapy is seen as a process of co-creation in which both client and therapist are active agents, with the practical domain being one of the most important mechanisms for developing insight and an understanding of different theories.

Acquiring intervention skills is another core component of the training. This involves taking part in various learning activities, most commonly practice development role plays with other trainees (which often takes place in groups of three, with two participants and one observer rotating their roles), observation through audio and video recordings or in vivo, and work in placement settings (e.g., the NHS or charity sector, educational Counselling services, organisational employee assistance programmes, etc.) where trainees acquire experience in working with clients presenting with a wide range of difficulties. Counselling psychology trainees in the UK are required to undertake a minimum of 450 hours of clinical placement work with clients (Gillon et al., 2017) over the course of their training programme, and normally gain experience in a variety of different settings. This is also in line with the UKCP Standards of Education and Training (UKCP, 2019b, p. 4). Placement learning is supported through clinical supervision, where trainees regularly review their work with an experienced practitioner (usually, a counselling psychologist). Supervision groups and a range of other methods may also be employed to promote the development of good practice.

Over the past decade, counselling psychology training has become benchmarked at doctoral level. This typically requires the completion of a substantial independent research project that makes a practical contribution to the field (Kaskett,



2012), in line with the scientist-practitioner model to which counselling psychology has predominantly subscribed, internationally and in the UK (Nicholson & Madson, 2015; Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009). Its key focus is on the integration of scientific research and clinical practice in all aspects of the psychologist's role (Nicholson & Madson, 2015). The main criticism of this model is around its emphasis on scientific knowledge and the tensions this presents in relation to the prioritising of human experiencing and subjectivity (Lane & Corrie, 2006; Martin, 2010). A different theoretical model, namely the reflective-practitioner model (Schön, 1983), has therefore been proposed as the basis of professional practice in the psychological domain. Its aim is to build a bridge across the perceived gap between science and practice positions (Woolfe, 2012) and to ensure that clinical practice is effective and relevant to both the context and the client's needs.

In terms of personal and professional development, whereas the former involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills which can be applied to the therapeutic context (Wilkins, 1997), the latter is not an isolated phenomenon applied solely to the professional field but a process, influencing the whole person. Its principal focus is on the authentic, reflective, and disciplined use of the Self in the therapeutic enterprise. While frequently alluded to as the most significant part of the training, it is often the most challenging and the least well-defined (Johns, 2012). Some authors suggest that the outline of both the concept and route to personal development is unclear (Donati & Watts, 2005; Irving & Williams, 1999). Rizq (2010) asserts that the lack of clarity around personal development can be viewed as a source of confusion and uncertainty for trainees, especially with regard to identifying the aims and outcomes to be achieved during the training process. Counselling psychologists and psychotherapists are required to "work with the Self", which is

based on the premise that they are expected to have attained a significant level of psychological maturation and personal awareness in order to be able to help another person do the same (Norcross, 2005). Moreover, because the developing professional life and identity of trainees emerges in parallel with their existing personal relationships, personal issues that might affect their work are frequently a matter of reflection whilst in training and complying with ethical codes.

The personal development component is typically embedded in the curriculum in the form of a personal development (PD) group, within which trainees explore their own reactions and experiences on the course. A debate has arisen, however, regarding the extent to which such groups help or hinder personal development, as well as how best to structure them as a formal part of the training process (Galbraith & Hart, 2007). Modern PD groups within the context of training in the UK are typically non-directive, closed, and confidential. They lack an explicit agenda and are exempt from being directly assessed, instead aiming to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and other important therapeutic skills and processes (Payne, 1999, 2004). However, elements of PD group participation may be used to indirectly assess students (Rose, 2008). In addition, if the PD group is facilitated by a course tutor, as is the case on some courses (Moller et al., 2008), including mine for the full duration of my doctoral training, there is the potential for dual roles (Shumaker et al., 2011). Such factors may impact trainees' interactions in the group and their willingness to engage in or take risks. Some findings suggest that while many trainees consider such groups positive (e.g., Ieva et al., 2009; Small & Manthei, 1988) and helpful in promoting skills relevant to clinical practice, attitudes, and personal development (Fairhurst & Merry, 1999), others find this type of group experience highly anxiety-evoking and even potentially damaging (Anderson & Price,

2001; Kline et al., 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Bates & Goodman, 1986) as they feel under pressure to adopt the path of personal growth espoused by their training providers.

Mandatory personal therapy has been proposed as another, or rather an additional, approach to personal development because it provides trainees with a greater insight into the role of the client (Grimmer & Tribe, 2001). However, there are mixed research findings regarding the extent to which this experience is helpful (Aveline, 1990). Currently, most training institutions require trainees to engage in personal therapy compatible with the theoretical orientation of the training and as part of obtaining their qualification. This is in line with the guidelines of membership organisations. For example, according to the UKCP Standards of Education and Training (2019b, p. 4), candidates are expected to have undertaken a minimum of 105 personal therapy hours. Nevertheless, engagement in “mandatory personal psychotherapy” remains a highly contentious issue.

On the one hand, the process of undergoing personal therapy has been described as a difficult but immensely enriching experience, identified by graduate students in counselling psychology (Kumari, 2011; Murphy, 2005) and practicing psychotherapists (Rake & Paley, 2009) as facilitating the development of their professional identity and as beneficial to their work overall (Oteiza, 2010). Williams et al. (1999) identified three domains in which counselling psychologists benefited from personal therapy: handling their personal issues, dealing with difficulties encountered in their training, and developing their clinical skills. Psychotherapists who have engaged in the process of personal therapy have reported increased warmth, empathy, genuineness, tolerance, a more effective use of the Self (Grimmer, 2005; Kumari, 2011), and a greater awareness of issues related to transference and

countertransference (Bike et al., 2009; Macaskill, 1992). In addition, personal therapy has been identified as a vitally important support mechanism that facilitates trainees' growth (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013).

However, self-exploration can also be an incredibly demanding process, both emotionally and financially. Views differ on whether personal therapy should be a mandatory requirement for future training of therapists, and at what point in their training they need to engage in such a process. Factors inhibiting trainees from entering personal therapy have been grouped into four categories, including trainees' belief that self-analysis will suffice, a fear of personal regression, the perceived transfer of power to another person, and shame (Burton, 1973). Some of the most frequently presented reasons for not seeking personal therapy, for example by clinical psychology doctoral students (Holzman et al., 1996), have been associated with issues around confidentiality, affordability, lack of time, a sense of self-sufficiency and personal coping strategies, support from family and friends, fear of exposure, and difficulty in identifying an appropriate psychotherapist (Norcross et al., 2008; Norcross & Connor, 2005). Another argument is that alternative methods, not involving the same emotional and financial demands (for example, participation in PD groups) can be equally effective (Atkinson, 2006). According to Murphy (2011), any requirement that places an additional financial demand on students must be fully justified, especially taking into account that access to the profession is already considered exclusive of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Liu & Colbow, 2017). Furthermore, some researchers have highlighted significant ethical challenges in mandating personal psychotherapy, such as the potential for harm to the trainee; issues of justice in regard to removing trainees' autonomy; and the integrity of the process in terms of whether trainees engage authentically in the

therapeutic process (Murphy et al., 2018). These findings present serious considerations for training course providers and for accrediting and regulating professional associations.

Views regarding the specific time period in which to engage in such a process also differ. For instance, Dryden and Feltham (1994) recommend that trainees should participate in PD groups in their first year, only becoming involved in personal therapy during the second year of their studies when they start working with clients. Conversely, Malikiosi-Loizos (2013) suggests that personal therapy should be essential and mandatory for practicing therapists, but that “trainees could be given the alternative of engaging in it after training” (p. 44).

### ***Stages of Professional Development and the Trainee Experience***

The notion of *becoming* implies change, which is viewed as an important concept in both therapy and training. Alred (2006) notes that the training period entails a process of intense self-exploration that can be painful and anxiety-provoking. An examination of trainees’ experiences is likely to illuminate not only what they absorb from training but also to highlight potential areas for further development or “growing edges”. Therapist development models have generally been informed by developmental models such as Freud’s (1905/2000) psychosexual development and Erikson’s (1980) theory of psychosocial development. The models of counsellor development, formulated by Friedman and Kaslow (1986), and Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992), are influenced by both Freud and Erikson, whereas other models such as the one developed by Grater (1985) implicitly ascribe to the

assumption that trainees should move towards higher levels of growth, in line with Maslow's (1943) motivational theory and hierarchy of needs.

Friedman and Kaslow (1986) formulated a six-stage model of the development of professional identity, based on psychodynamic principles. They identified the development of a stable and coherent "healer identity" (p. 31) as a major goal of training, contending that this identity provided the trainee with a sense of stability. Development was seen as a progression from a state of diffuse anxiety to a gradual reduction that induces a sense of calmness. Greater professional autonomy, an internalised frame of reference, and an ability to integrate theoretical and clinical material were identified as indicative of growth and development. However, Friedman and Kaslow's (1986) assumptions concerning the avoidance of ambiguity and the development of a stable "healer identity" appear to be located within a modernist position. By contrast, Loewenthal and Snell (2003) identify a postmodern attitude as favouring uncertainty over generalisation and questioning over received wisdom or established authority.

Grater (1985) formulated a model of psychotherapist development that drew on his observations as a supervisor. He identified themes and stages of professional development among psychotherapists that were based on increasingly complex topics brought to supervision by trainees. Progression was manifested through a trainee's increasing ability to select appropriate interventions and the greater use of the Self in assessment and interventions (Grater, 1985). However, a limitation of his model, as well as of the reflective learning model of trainee development formulated by Ward and House (1998), is that it relies heavily on supervisors' accounts. Consequently, trainees' thoughts and reflections on how they experience their own growth and development might not have been adequately reflected.

An eight-stage model of professional development that spans the entire career of psychotherapists was proposed by Skovholt and Rønnestad (1992). This was based on common themes in the narratives of psychotherapists at varying points in their careers. The authors employed a longitudinal research design to study changes in how practitioners in the psychological therapies experience themselves on a wide variety of parameters, related to their work over time. They interviewed 100 practitioners with different levels of experience: two student groups, novice and advanced graduate students of counselling or psychotherapy, and three postgraduate groups of practitioners who held doctoral degrees in professional psychology. During the initial interviews, the authors were informed of the myriad ways in which experiences in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood impacted professional functioning and development. Family interactional patterns, sibling and peer relationships, parenting experiences, disability in family members, and other crises in family and personal lives were found to influence current practice and long-term development in both positive and adverse ways. Remarkably, two of the learning arenas that were identified, especially among senior practitioners, concerned the profound impact of early life experience and personal experiences in adult life (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). The primary family themes included psychological abandonment, a demanding achievement orientation in the family of origin, rigid and restraining child rearing practices, receiving conditional love from parents, and growing up in a family with a “no emotions” rule. These negative experiences were seen as continuously influencing work as an adult professional in various ways, such as selection of work role and theoretical orientation, therapeutic style and focus, attitude towards colleagues, the hardships experienced, and ways of coping in practice. For reasons of parsimony and clarity, the eight stages of

professional development that Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) identified were later collapsed into six, referred to as the Lay helper phase, the Beginning student phase, the Advanced student phase, the Novice professional phase, the Experienced professional phase, and the Senior professional phase.

The authors described the Lay helper as typically identifying the problem quickly, providing strong emotional support, and relying on giving advice or employing direct problem-solving techniques (often a result of over-involvement and strong identification). They referred to a distinctive shift at the beginning of professional training where new students (in the Beginning student phase) typically feel excited but also intensely challenged. Attention shifts towards theoretical bodies of knowledge (e.g., developmental psychology, theories of disability and pathology, conceptions of counselling psychology and psychotherapy) and professionally based conceptions of methods and techniques. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) found out that although influences on beginning students vary considerably, tutors and supervisors have a major impact during this stage. The dependency and vulnerability of students make them particularly appreciative of the support and encouragement offered by more advanced members of the profession, while direct or subtle criticism can have detrimental effects on trainees' confidence and professional identity development.

However, the Advanced student as a practitioner (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) may still feel vulnerable and insecure, actively seeking confirmation and feedback from senior colleagues and peers. There is still a considerable degree of external dependency but simultaneously, an increased preference for developing an internal focus. In this phase, supervision experiences have particular significance. Works by Gray et al. (2001), Moskowitz and Rupert (1983), and Ladany et al. (1996)



have demonstrated the counterproductivity that may result from a nonoptimal supervision relationship. Negative supervision experiences are powerful, possibly even more powerful than for the beginning student. More is at stake as the student is further along in training and is supposed to master professional tasks at a higher, more sophisticated level.

The Novice professional phase encompasses the first years after graduation, marked by a tangible sense of freedom from external constraints such as oral and written examinations but also of “being on one’s own” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003, p. 17). The Novice professional therapist may experience an eagerness to test or confirm the validity of what was learnt at the training institution. Surprising for many, however, are the hardships and disillusionment that follow from not feeling adequately prepared. Especially practitioners who rely exclusively on a single conceptual system often feel disillusionment when confronted with heterogeneous client populations. Newly qualified therapists are therefore likely to look for workplace mentors who will offer guidance and support, thereby easing the transition to autonomous professional functioning.

In the Experienced professional phase, therapists have been practicing for a number of years and have typically had experience with a wide variety of clients in different work settings. A central developmental task for most experienced professionals is to create a therapeutic role that is highly congruent with the self-perceptions (including values, interests, attitudes) of the individual and which makes it possible for practitioners to apply their professional competence in an authentic way. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) posit that experienced or “seasoned” therapists learn primarily by reflecting upon interpersonal experiences in professional and personal life domains. While interviewing experienced therapists, the authors

increasingly heard stories of the interrelationship between adult personal and professional life and how this can increase therapists' connections with human pain. This suggested a long-term positive influence of adverse experiences on therapists' adult personal lives. However, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2001) also heard stories of negative experiences in early childhood and family life, exerting an adverse rather than positive influence on professional functioning.

Finally, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) described the Senior professional as a well-established professional who has been practicing for 20 years or more (although some attain this senior status in mid-career). The experienced practitioner's transition towards becoming a guide for novices in the field may be hesitantly welcomed by some and actively embraced by others. However, the authors emphasised the practitioners' ability and willingness to continually reflect upon professional experiences, difficulties, and challenges as a prerequisite for optimal development during all phases.

Complementing models and conceptualisations of therapists' developmental stages is empirical research on the actual experiences of trainees. However, the main focus tends to be on teaching helping skills or providing specific training in manual treatments (Crits-Christoph et al., 2006). Few studies explore the perspective of trainees and how such foci fit their developmental needs. Some researchers in this area have focused on critical incidents (i.e., significant learning moments or turning points) in the development of novice psychotherapists (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Howard et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2001). Their findings indicate that such critical incidents involve trainees grappling with self-awareness and self-efficacy, feelings of similarity and difference in relation to clients, self-criticism of their performance in sessions, concerns about taking on the psychotherapist role, and the

helpful nature of supervision. Heppner and Roehlke (1984), for example, found out that most critical incidents in the supervision of beginning practicum students involved issues related to support and self-awareness. Trainees expressed satisfaction with supervision when they received support and skills training. In another study conducted by Rabinowitz et al. (1986), trainees cited supervisory support, treatment planning, advice, and direction as the most important supervisory interventions. One concern with this line of research, however, is that it focuses solely on specific events. Therefore, it may not reflect the full range of experiences involved in becoming a psychotherapist, or indeed trainees' internal reactions. By contrast, when trainees are asked to describe their experiences in an open-ended manner, they may include much richer content. These studies thus provide some initial information about trainees' experiences. However, further research is needed, using in-depth qualitative methods to examine the full range of reactions and discover more about the trainees' process, not only in the beginning but throughout their training.

Hill et al. (2007) investigated the experiences of five counselling psychology doctoral trainees at the start of their first pre-practicum course in order to learn more about their inner experiences, specifically with regard to their feelings and concerns about becoming counselling psychologists. They analysed the text of trainees' weekly journals, written across the course of the first semester of graduate training, anticipating that they would provide them with a rich sense of the trainees' experiences. Some of the challenges identified by the trainees included being self-critical, their reactions to clients, the process of learning and using helping skills, and session management. As the semester progressed, trainees generally reported feeling better adjusted to being in the therapist role and less anxious about seeing

clients. Supervision was identified as a major factor, helping them cope with anxieties and difficulties that arose during the semester. One possible limitation of this study was that the professor and research assistant provided questions and feedback to the students during the semester and also served as the primary research team, analysing the data. Hill et al. (2007) acknowledged that the adoption of such “dual roles” may be controversial. To address concerns about bias in this procedure, two external auditors were invited to ensure that the conclusions were solidly based on the data. However, the fact that the trainees’ journals were graded with “pass” or “fail” might have influenced the results - for example, the level of honesty and openness in their reflections, given that they were aware that these may affect or jeopardise their “pass”. One of Hill et al.’s (2007) recommendations for future research included examining trainees’ experiences over the course of graduate school as they progress through their training.

### ***Power and Relational Dynamics in Experiential Groups***

An integral part of training courses in the psychological therapies (Johns, 2012), experiential or PD groups are viewed as enhancing reflexivity by exploring in greater depth the interactions between group members, tutors, and module convenors. Rose (2008) outlines various stages in the course of a PD group as it deals with fundamental themes such as conflict, authority, resistance, and difference. According to Dryden et al. (1995), establishing an atmosphere of trust allows group members to identify developmental needs that might have otherwise remained blind spots.

Some earlier studies, often employing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches, were conducted to explore the trainee experience in PD groups. For example, Hall et al. (1999) found out that the group experience was perceived as providing unique opportunities for members to develop confidence and to step into their own authority. They obtained information on course alumni via a student database that covered a period of more than 20 years. All former graduates were sent a questionnaire, asking them for information and to detail their experience of small-group work as well as enquiring into the long-term professional application and outcomes of Rogerian small group and Tavistock Group Dynamics training. Although 334 questionnaires were sent by post, only 92 (approximately 28%) completed responses were returned. The authors reasoned that the low response rate could be at least partially explained by the likelihood that a proportion of the addresses were out-of-date. Those who responded, consistently rated both the Rogerian small group and the Group Dynamics small group well above average on a 7-point scale (from “very useful” to “totally useless”) with respect to applications in the professional setting, with colleagues, and in their personal lives. In terms of learning and the application of counselling skills in personal and professional settings, over half of the Rogerian group members mentioned acquiring specific skills such as handling silence, self-disclosure, giving and receiving feedback, listening, challenging, being empathic, expressing negative and positive feelings, and recognising incongruence in the Self. A different but overlapping pattern was found for the Group Dynamics small group, where “taking personal authority” received the highest rating - 67% of respondents ascribed learning how to step into their personal authority to their participation in the group. Interestingly, when exploring feelings evoked by the group experience, both forms of group training were described as stimulating and

“providing long-term gain” yet also as disturbing, “anxiety-provoking”, and “confrontational” (Hall et al., 1999, p. 108). While group members are undergoing such a process of stimulation and disturbance, they may act out the feelings involved in ways they describe as uncharacteristic or “bizarre” (Hall et al., 1999, p. 109). The authors explained how some group members can become extremely angry or defensive and withdrawn. Others may leave the group temporarily if their feelings become overwhelming. They emphasised that this may parallel the process of behaviour change in a client, indicating how the experience of small-group training can provide insight into the client’s learning process while promoting the personal growth of the trainee therapist. However, the authors also acknowledged the limitations of self-report measures (Hall et al., 1999). For example, alumni who had perceived their experience as damaging or painful might have chosen not to complete the questionnaires and hence a higher proportion of them might have remained hidden in the non-responses.

While group experience is a key factor in enabling trainees to develop their own authority, it also has the potential to be disempowering and even retraumatising. Difficult group dynamics and power imbalances may arise, including dependency, peer pressure, monopolising the space, subgrouping, and/or demanding “rescuing”. Some group members may engage in automatic talking and over-disclosing, whereas others may remain silent (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), creating a “skewed” sense in the group where certain individuals “carry” and voice not only their own but also others’ feelings, emotional struggles, and concerns. Through the mechanism of projective identification (Klein, 1946), one group on behalf of another, or one group member on behalf of others, may come to serve as a “sponge” for the collective anger, depression, or guilt within the group. This individual may temporarily become

a “container” for difficult feelings (Bion, 1961), unconsciously “used” to export something that the rest of the group need not feel in themselves. However, if these unpleasant feelings and anxieties are tolerated long enough to enable other members to reflect on them, it may be possible to bring about change, an opportunity for growth, and sharing. In a study examining the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental factors that trainees felt contributed to their self-awareness in their current PD group, Lennie (2007) notes that the PD group is not an isolated unit but part of a larger social setting that is likely to have an impact on trainees’ experiences. In this study, groups were held with a cross section of 88 counselling trainees. A grounded theory analysis was then performed, allowing the data to be segmented and quantified into meaning units and overall themes. Afterwards, these themes were incorporated into a Likert-type questionnaire, where trainees were invited to rate the “presence” of the factor in their current PD group and the extent to which they thought it contributed to their developing self-awareness. The highest scores were recorded for those in the middle phase or at the end of their training. However, no statistically significant relationship between “comfort fit” in the group and self-awareness was found. The only significant association was reported between self-awareness among those who were close to completing their course and environmental “comfort fit”, where the environmental conditions of the group encompassed the facilitator’s personality and guidance, student support, choices regarding fellow group members and/or facilitator, comfort of physical surroundings, residential factors, and adherence to time boundaries (Lennie, 2007).

In another study by Robson and Robson (2008), safety was revealed as a major reoccurring theme. The authors employed thematic analysis to identify why some students regarded the PD group experience as the most important element in

their training while others thought it was “a waste of time”. Their results suggested that “safety needs to be experienced by group members before they can take the risk of learning about themselves or others” (Robson & Robson, 2008, p. 380). Their participants associated loss of safety in the group with lack of trust, privacy, and confidentiality, but also with perceptions of disapproval or not being heard. The authors emphasised that a vital element in creating emotional safety seemed to be the facilitator’s willingness to take responsibility for the safety of the group and then work towards sharing this responsibility with members by making the issue overt (Robson, 1994). Several factors, underlying the divergent experiences of trainees, have also been identified. For example, PD groups vary enormously in nature and structure (Galbraith & Hart, 2007; Shumaker et al., 2011) as do group facilitators in terms of their relational style and the way in which they run groups or feel it appropriate to inform (or not) members about the purposes of the group (Johns, 2012). Some authors (e.g., Irving & Williams, 1996) have highlighted the importance of making explicit the underlying assumptions, aims, and process of the PD group, arguing that not doing so may create a power imbalance which can leave group members feeling manipulated (Corey, 2000). The group members themselves also vary in terms of their ability or willingness to open up to “genuine exploration” (Rose, 2008, p. 2). However, the differences and characteristics of trainees that may contribute to such perceptions and dynamics, for example attachment, previous history and cultural background, as well as how these influence their experiences and interactions with fellow group members or facilitators, remain understudied. Indeed, some researchers have emphasised the importance of early life experiences (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001) as well as issues around difference, but these are mostly limited to experiences of racial difference (Henfield et al., 2011; McKenzie-



Mavinga, 2005) or academic challenges, such as linguistic differences affecting communication (Georgiadou, 2014; Morris & Lee, 2004). Expanding the scope and depth of such investigations might illuminate factors, contributing to trainees' difficulty to "open up", engage, or make the most of the group process.

Moller and Rance (2013) utilised anonymised qualitative questionnaires, containing open-ended questions, to explore the beliefs of 25 trainees enrolled on counselling diploma or counselling psychology doctoral courses. They aimed to investigate their understanding of the rationale for PD groups as part of the training. The collected data were subjected to a thematic analysis that identified three main themes, namely, "The Good", "The Bad", and "The Uncertainty". The first theme, "The Good", demonstrated how some trainees might have a clear understanding from the onset of training of the purposes of PD groups that is in line with their theorised role in fostering self-awareness, client understanding, and therapeutic skills. Conversely, others were concerned about the possible negative sequelae of their participation. The theme "The Bad" underlined trainees' anxiety about the potential for being judged or misunderstood, feeling unsafe, schisms being created in the training group, or their learning on the course being negatively impacted. Some expressed doubt that they may not "have adequate support or understanding in dealing with very difficult issues" (Moller & Rance, 2013, p. 286). The third main theme, "The Uncertainty", represented trainees' multiple levels of "not knowing", both explicit and covert. The authors referred here to trainees who seemed unsure about the purpose of the PD group or why participation was required by the programme. Some of the limitations in this study were associated with the fact that a number of participants had prior experience of PD groups while others did not. However, participants were not asked directly about past PD group experience, which meant

that it was not possible to systematically explore how this might have impacted their responses. Also, a course tutor was involved in data collection. This may have limited the extent to which the students felt they could be honest and transparent about arising negative feelings. Moller and Rance (2013) acknowledged these limitations, suggesting that future research might explore trainees' experience and perceptions at the end of their involvement in the PD group, not just their initial expectations. They also recommended using alternative data collection methods such as interviews, referring to their potential to allow for more detailed responses.

For example, Jakubkaitė and Kočiūnas (2014) carried out semi-structured interviews to explore students' views of the experiential group process in a training context in Lithuania, uncovering very interesting perspectives. Some of their participants did not wish to disclose their personal experiences and problems for fear that they would not receive adequate support within the group and their perception was that *"...if you don't manage to refrain and get involved in the process, which is for training purposes, you'll be left alone with your unresolved problems"* (Jakubkaitė & Kočiūnas, 2014, p. 42). In another example, they reported that *"...some competition is present. It's like who of us will be a better therapist in the future... a kind of [sic] some powers and influences in the group"*. Others felt they could not show vulnerability, asserting *"...I don't feel as safe... I can't speak, because I know I can't be weak in this group. I have to fight"* (Jakubkaitė & Kočiūnas, 2014, p. 42). Experiencing inconsistency in experiential group goals was associated not only with confusion about how to behave in the group but also with the role of group facilitators. Clarity and unambiguity of their position were considered essential.

### ***Tutors and Supervisors as Authority Figures***

From the very start of the training, group leaders, module convenors and supervisors assume a unique position of authority and power to guide, intercede, and assess training candidates' progress. As a result, power discrepancies between trainees and authority figures (e.g., senior colleagues, tutors and supervisors) may develop. I whole-heartedly agree with Cole's (2013, p. 186) epiphany that "we sometimes experience an Orwellian sleight of hand in which all the members are equal, but the leader is more equal than others." I would like to add, based on personal observation, that not only the leader but also some group members may at times be experienced or treated as "more equal" than others, depending on their roles and functions as well as their origin and social status.

Raubolt (2006) contends that advanced psychotherapy training is often plagued by power struggles and authoritarian practices, some subtle and others pronounced. These often permeate the therapeutic relationship, preventing training candidates and their prospective clients from developing authentic and meaningful experiences. He also poses questions, related to structure and organisational processes within educational settings. For example, I am struck by the way in which trainees and their educators are required to perform multiple roles throughout the training process. Trainees have to act as therapists in positions of authority with their clients, as supervisees and doctoral candidates, attempting to complete requirements for academic programmes or licenses, and as clients in their personal therapy. While juggling these different roles, they are assigned or attributed varying degrees of power. For instance, whereas the therapist role accords trainees a certain degree of power, being a student places them in a less powerful position. Tutors and

supervisors, by contrast, are expected to maintain an evaluative yet therapeutic stance, fulfilling the roles of teachers, therapists, consultants, and colleagues (Bernard, 1979; Stenack & Dye, 1982). At the same time, they are expected to provide emotional holding and containment to ensure the safety and development of the trainees, the clients, and the training institution. According to Nelson and Friedlander (2001), the complexity of such relational dynamics sets the stage for interpersonal conflict. Each role carries with it expectations which may or may not compete with one another. Role conflict often results from conflicting expectations (Friedlander et al., 1986). An example is a trainee who feels compelled to reveal personal shortcomings but worries about being evaluated poorly because of them. Another problem, role ambiguity (Olk & Friedlander, 1992), arises when the expectations placed on the trainee are unclear. Role conflict tends to be more frequent among advanced trainees, who often prefer collegial relations with their tutors and supervisors, while role ambiguity has been shown to occur more frequently in the early stages of training (Olk & Friedlander, 1992). Both role conflict and role ambiguity, however, have been found to contribute to higher levels of anxiety among trainees (Olk & Friedlander, 1992). Subjected to such multitude of pressures, individuals in training settings tend to engage in what Raubolt (2006) refers to as the use and misuse of power, authority, status and control. This sometimes results in trauma and retraumatisation cycles which could be prevented by introducing new supervisory and training models, based on empathy and respect for subjective experiences (Raubolt, 2006).

In her response to Raubolt, Buechler (2008) presents what I see as a slightly different perspective, suggesting that advocacy for one's deeply cherished therapeutic stance is not necessarily coercive. I agree with her view that power

should be nurtured and not feared, provided it is conveyed with integrity and respect while remaining open to and tempered by criticism. Taking on board the views of a supervisor or teacher and incorporating or benefitting from some of their ideas can be a constructive and important part of a trainee's professional journey. Buechler (2008, p. 170) is adamant that "without the intergenerational transmission of clinical values, much that is precious would be lost", as long as we are able to differentiate between constructive influences and indoctrination. She describes this stage of the training process as a time in which to develop a nurturing "internal chorus" (Buechler, 1998, p. 111) of helpful voices and theories. This can provide vital soothing and internalisation of the positive object usage of the *Other*, ultimately enabling candidates to create their own clinical style and ways of working and connecting with clients that contributes to their internal dialogue (Orange, 2016) and the distinctive, personally resonant voice emerging from the *choir*.

While over time candidates develop their own unique amalgam of personal, clinical, and cultural values, the important role of tutors and supervisors as role models and perceived authority figures is indisputable. This was demonstrated by Gazzola et al. (2011) who interviewed doctoral students in counselling psychology to ascertain the experiences and conditions they identified as contributing to or hindering their professional identity. The importance of role models, supervisors and mentors emerged as a category, endorsed by more than half of the participants. Although positive experiences in supervision fostered their sense of professional identity, I noticed how some participants' answers, quoted in the paper, hinted at covert power discrepancies. For example, one participant confided that "...*now where I'm doing my internship, my supervisor wanted me to work a certain way, and sort of struggling with this new way of working highlights to me how I really had been*

*working before...*" (Gazzola et al., 2011, p. 264). Based on the phrasing, I wondered how much control and freedom the students felt they really had when developing their own therapeutic approach.

The so-called autonomy-dependency dilemma (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998) frequently arises in supervision, especially during the Beginning student and Advanced student phases (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003), because supervisory relationships are characterised by a power inequity. According to some authors, this inequity can be minimised by seeking mutual respect (Robiner, 1982) and bonding (Holloway, 1995), as well as by setting clear boundaries (Murphy & Wright, 2005). Worthen and McNeill (1996), for example, found out that helpful supervisors were perceived as empathic, non-judgmental, validating the experiences of their supervisees, non-defensive, willing to examine their own assumptions, and possessing the capacity to normalise their supervisees' struggles. This encouraged supervisees to explore and take risks. Similarly to therapy, theorists have long viewed the quality of the relationship as essential for generating positive outcomes in training and supervision (Holloway, 1995) and as the primary vehicle by which trainers and supervisors enhance trainees' development (Eckstein & Wallerstein, 1958; Loganbill et al., 1982; Mueller & Kell, 1972).

Supervisory models have developed within each of the main psychotherapy theories. For instance, psychodynamic supervision draws on the clinical data, inherent to that theoretical orientation (e.g., processing and interpreting affective reactions, enactments, defence mechanisms, transference and countertransference). This includes an examination of parallel process (Eckstein & Wallerstein, 1958), a phenomenon wherein the student brings to supervision and unconsciously replicates the emotions, moods, and conflicts that transpired during

the session with the client. Thus, the supervisee's interactions with the supervisor might be viewed as reflecting the client's behaviour with the supervisee in the role of the therapist (Haynes et al., 2003). Unlike psychodynamic supervision, which focuses on internal processes and the transference realm, cognitive-behavioural supervision makes use of observable cognitions and behaviours, employing a highly structured and directive approach (Liese & Beck, 1997). By contrast, person-centred supervision assumes that the supervisee has the resources to effectively develop as a therapist, which is in line with Rogers' (1961) person-centred therapy and belief that the client has the capacity to resolve life problems without direction from the therapist (Haynes et al., 2003).

Integrative models of supervision rely on more than one theory and technique. Examples of such models include Bernard's (1979) discrimination model, which comprises three separate foci for supervision (intervention, conceptualisation, and personalisation) and three possible supervisor roles (teacher, counsellor, and consultant), and Holloway's (1995) systems approach to supervision, which places the supervisory relationship at the heart of the supervision process and aims to bestow power on both members. Gilbert and Evans (2000) also developed an integrative relational model of supervision that draws on developmental theory. Their focus was on the quality of the supervisory alliance, viewing an egalitarian, non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian supervisory relationship as having the potential to create a space of safety, trust and mutual respect which assists the process.

One of the most widely researched developmental models of supervision is the Integrated Developmental Model (Stoltenberg, 1981; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Stoltenberg et al., 1998), which describes three levels of development. The first refers to entry-level students who are strong in motivation yet high in anxiety and

fearful of evaluation. The second level (or mid-level) supervisees tend to experience fluctuating confidence and motivation, often linking their own mood to success with clients. The third level occurs when supervisees feel more secure and stable in motivation, offering “accurate” empathetic responses, and using the therapeutic Self in interventions (Falender & Shafranske, 2008). The Integrated Developmental Model stresses the need for the supervisor to employ skills and approaches that correspond to the level of the supervisee. According to some authors (Littrell et al., 1976; Loganbill et al., 1982; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), the key is to accurately identify the supervisee’s level in order to provide feedback and support, appropriate to that developmental stage, while at the same time facilitating the supervisee’s progression to the next stage. If the supervisor consistently mismatches the responses with the developmental level of the supervisee, this may make it extremely difficult for the supervisee to master the current developmental stage. For example, when working with a level-1 supervisee, the supervisor may utilise this model to help balance the high level of anxiety and dependence by being supportive and prescriptive. When supervising a level-3 supervisee, the same supervisor would emphasise supervisee autonomy and engage in collegial challenging. The process, however, may not be so linear. A supervisee may simultaneously be at different stages; for example, at mid-level development overall but experiencing high anxiety when meeting a new client (Stoltenberg et al., 1998), which is characteristic of an earlier developmental stage.

Regardless of the model however, in order for trainers and supervisors to be able to assist the development of trainees’ clinical competence, trainees need to feel comfortable to disclose information about their clinical interactions (Bordin, 1983; Ladany et al., 1996; Wallace & Alonso, 1994). Yet, nondisclosure is common



(Farber, 2006). Mehr et al. (2010) aimed to identify factors, contributing to trainee nondisclosure in supervision. Their sample consisted of 204 therapists-in-training, instructed to list the thoughts, feelings, and reactions they had not disclosed to their supervisor during their most recent supervision session. The results indicated that within a single supervision session, 84.3% of trainees withheld information from their supervisors. The most common type of nondisclosure seemed to involve dissatisfaction with the supervision experience. Another important and frequently reported reason of deference highlighted the power differential in the supervision relationship. The authors mused that "in any relationship characterised by power inequity, the person with less power often remains cautious about what is revealed" (Mehr et al., 2010, p. 111). On the other hand, they noted that in some situations, nondisclosure is not a cause for concern and could represent the trainee's intentional effort to navigate the power relationship or simply to utilise supervision appropriately. For instance, they contended that numerous personal issues might be irrelevant to supervision and recommended that these would be best addressed in one's own psychotherapy (Ladany et al., 1996). Still, they emphasised that supervisors need to explain to trainees that supervision is an appropriate setting to discuss personal issues that might affect clinical practice. They also recommended that supervisors consistently communicate their openness and willingness to discuss supervision-related issues and to make changes in supervision. Mehr et al. (2010) identified the timing of data collection as a limitation of their research. Specifically, because the data were collected near the end of an academic semester, most trainees might have been especially attuned to the evaluation process. Another limitation was the researchers' focus on a single supervision session, meaning that the full extent of trainee nondisclosure may not have been captured. Nevertheless, the results

supported their hypothesis that the perception of a strong supervisory working alliance (Bordin, 1983) was related to a lower level of trainee nondisclosure, while higher anxiety was linked to a greater level of trainee nondisclosure. The relationship between trainee anxiety and nondisclosure was further supported by a commonly reported reason for nondisclosure, linked to negative feelings (e.g., shame, embarrassment, discomfort). Prior literature has addressed trainees' susceptibility to shame (Alonso & Rutan, 1988) and the learning regression they tend to undergo while developing their new professional identity (Rice et al., 1985). According to Alonso and Rutan (1988), learning regression is stimulated by the very nature of the supervisory process, and the supervisory hour is the optimal place to experience this if the supervisor is aware of the value of this process and the learner is to ultimately integrate the new knowledge and experience.

It has long been argued that supervision, like therapy, not only has the potential to enhance a supervisee's confidence, learning, and the development of professional identity, but also the potential to harm (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). For example, Ellis et al. (2014) conducted two studies to determine the occurrence of inadequate and harmful clinical supervision from the supervisees' perspective. They divided negative supervision experiences into "inadequate supervision", defined as encompassing practices that do not "meet the criteria for minimally adequate supervision" (Ellis et al., 2014, p. 439), and "harmful supervision" which might occur "when the supervisor engages in supervisory practices that result in psychological, emotional and/or physical harm or trauma to the supervisee" (Ellis et al., 2014, p. 440). The authors reported that 93% of their sample of 363 supervisees were receiving inadequate supervision and 36% harmful supervision at the time of data collection. Similar findings have been reported in other studies, where prevalence

rates vary between 20% and 40%, representing a serious cause for concern and increased attention (Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018; Nelson & Friedlander, 2001; Ramos-Sanchez et al., 2002). Numerous factors have been studied to elucidate how supervision becomes a harmful process, including contextual factors such as workload pressures (Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018), organisational culture (Davys & Beddoe, 2010) and the specific characteristics of the individuals involved, for example, the supervisor's lack of responsiveness (Friedlander, 2012) or difficulty in managing diversity (Beddoe, 2017; Cook, 1994). Negotiating the unequal distribution of power and authority in the supervisory relationship has also been cited as a core underlying difficulty (Beddoe, 2017; Copeland et al., 2011; Ellis, 2017; Murphy & Wright, 2005). The abuse of power by supervisors may manifest in various ways, including attempts to pathologise and shame the supervisee's actions (Cartwright, 2019), an overemphasis on blind spots and mistakes, discrimination, allocation of excessive workloads, and the use of authority to ensure the supervisee adheres to their ideas (Beddoe, 2017; Ellis, 2017; Murphy & Wright, 2005). Harmful supervision has the potential to negatively affect not only the quality of the supervisory alliance and trainees' levels of anxiety but also their professional development, learning potential, career choice, competency, and self-efficacy (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001; Ramos-Sanchez et al., 2002). All of the above also impact the client's treatment process (Ladany et al., 1996).

In a recently published article, Cartwright (2019) presented an exploratory case study of harmful supervision, illustrating an extreme example of abuse of power and authority where the supervisee had made a complaint about being called degrading names in supervision. A narrative research design was employed, drawing on both supervisor and supervisee perspectives. During one of the

interviews, conducted by Cartwright (2019), the supervisor alluded to feeling tired and overworked, perceiving her supervisee as overly insecure and anxious, and needing to be told what to do. She explained how *“I see myself as a kind of teacher-mother... I see my children in her and want to guide her in the right direction”* (Cartwright, 2019, p. 350). This seemed to push her supervisee into unconsciously becoming “the child”, reflected in the supervisee’s comment that *“I needed to be a good little girl who doesn’t know who she is and needs the supervisor to feel validated by discovering it”* (Cartwright, 2019, p. 351). Because both the supervisor and supervisee appeared to deal with strong transference and countertransference issues, enactments seemed inevitable. With hindsight, the supervisor admitted that she felt *“inadequate dealing with countertransference”* (as she was not psychodynamically trained) and at the same time did not feel she could *“voice that because I’m supposed to have the knowledge”* (Cartwright, 2019, p. 350). The author hypothesised that the supervisor’s adoption of a “maternal role” might have served as a “stand-in” to manage uncertainties about her competence. This, however, contributed to a rapid accumulation of negative events, where the supervisee began to withhold important information about her clients. Eventually, both the supervisor and supervisee withdrew from the process (Safran & Muran, 2000), as a result of neither feeling understood nor recognised by the other.

Wishing to uncover common themes, emerging from supervisees’ phenomenological experiences of harmful conflict in supervision, Nelson and Friedlander (2001) conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 master’s and doctoral trainees. The in-depth interviews uncovered two primary themes. First, power struggles characterised most of the relationships that supervisees experienced as harmful, and second, dual relationships created considerable

confusion and disharmony in their supervisory experiences. Both themes were strongly associated with the concepts of role conflict and role ambiguity (Friedlander et al., 1986; Olk & Friedlander, 1992). Additionally, some participants reported that issues around difference were not tackled sensitively and effectively by their supervisors. One supervisee described comments made by her supervisor about her ethnicity that she viewed as inappropriate, yet she felt unable to raise the issue for fear of engendering further misunderstanding. Other participants perceived their supervisors as unsupportive or inflexible. As a result, they maintained a guarded stance in supervision and described experiencing a tangible sense of powerlessness, mistrust, fear of failing professionally, self-doubt, and even developing health problems they linked to the difficult dynamics with their supervisors. Nelson and Friedlander (2001) deliberated how supervisors' uncertainty about their own competence may give rise to ambivalence about being helpful to a supervisee (Mueller & Kell, 1972). A supervisor may strive to be helpful, then retreat in frustration when met with a lack of response from the supervisee. One way of compensating might be to become competitive with the supervisee, attempting to demonstrate their adequacy to lead. Such a response, however, may be interpreted as angry or punitive by the supervisee and may result in them pulling back, leading to a cycle of mistrust. Based on their findings, Nelson and Friedlander (2001) suggested that supervisors need to understand and handle the power issues that naturally occur in the supervision relationship. For instance, when the supervisor displays openness to the supervisee's discomfort, insight about the conflict and willingness to adapt, supervision (like psychotherapy) has the potential to provide a corrective emotional experience (Alexander & French, 1946; Kohut, 1984). The supervisee who directly experiences productive conflict resolution with a supervisor

will be better equipped to provide such experiences for clients. One of the implications for future research was that studies of power and its relation to conflict and impasse in supervision could provide information on how the natural power imbalance may influence these phenomena.

I pondered whether and how fostering a culture that gives permission, support, and validation to students' various experiences on training courses and in supervision may help to equalise power. Exploring issues around power and authority in the literature review and how they manifest during the training journey in counselling psychology and psychotherapy made me think of the need to hear more from the people, embarking on that journey.

## **Identified Gaps and Rationale**

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in enhancing understanding of the development of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists (Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005). However, the impact of training on psychological practitioners remains an understudied area (Ieva et al., 2009; Jakubkaitė & Kočiūnas, 2014; Luke & Kiweewa, 2010; Moller & Rance, 2013; Robson & Robson, 2008). While the existing literature provides insights into different aspects of the trainee experience, such as the development of professional identity (Friedman & Kaslow, 1986; Gazzola et al., 2011; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992), self-awareness (Lennie, 2007), resilience (Roebuck & Reid, 2020), participation in PD groups (Hall et al., 1999; Ieva et al., 2009; Jakubkaitė & Kočiūnas, 2014; Moller & Rance, 2013; Robson & Robson, 2008), and supervision

(Cartwright, 2019; Ellis et al., 2014; Moskowitz & Rupert, 1983; Nelson & Friedlander, 2001), some gaps were identified.

Firstly, despite previous studies referring to the unequal distribution of power and authority, and its negative impact which has been emphasised especially within the supervisory context (Beddoe, 2017; Copeland et al., 2011; Ellis, 2017; Murphy & Wright, 2005), no comprehensive study was identified that focused explicitly on power dynamics and relationships with authority figures during training to become a psychotherapist and counselling psychologist. Although research on best practice approaches to training and supervision has been increasing over the last two decades (Borders, 2014; Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Spence et al., 2001), there is a paucity of research with a specific focus on power dynamics and imbalances arising during the process of training and supervision, especially from the trainee's perspective. Yet, previous research findings suggest that power differentials and relationship with authority during training are likely to significantly impact practitioners' professional development and evolving clinical practice. For example, Nelson and Friedlander (2001, p. 394) posit that "harmful conflict in supervision detracts from a trainee's efficacy with clients". Additionally, the evaluative and hierarchical nature of the relationship between tutors and trainees as well as between supervisors and supervisees requires careful examination and management (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009) because the risk of harm for trainees (and subsequently clients) is greatly increased if specific attention is not given to issues of this kind. It is also important to consider the ethical implications and consequences of such practices. Therefore, research focusing on the relationship with power and authority during training is both necessary and highly relevant to the professional field. Better understanding of the subtle and overt power imbalances, processes and

factors that influence trainees' development and the relational dynamics with their tutors, supervisors, peers and therapists may improve the learning process as well as various aspects of training and clinical practice. It may enhance awareness, openness in communication, safeguarding and conflict resolution, all of which would ultimately contribute to more ethical practice. For example, positive supervisory outcomes have been found to include improved confidence, a refined sense of professional identity, greater willingness to engage in the learning process, and increased therapeutic perceptiveness (Worthen & McNeill, 1996).

Secondly, the majority of the identified studies focused solely on specific events, for example "critical incidents" in the development of novice psychotherapists (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Howard et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2001), or explored only a small part of the therapist's training journey; usually at the beginning (Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Rabinowitz et al., 1986), over one year (Gazzola et al., 2011), or a semester (Hill et al., 2007), or were even limited to a single supervision session (Mehr et al., 2010). It is important to note that, despite a significant body of research, examining experiences of inadequate or harmful supervision (Beddoe, 2017; Ellis et al., 2014; Hendricks & Cartwright, 2018), the individual characteristics of trainees which potentially contribute to such dynamics, including relational style, previous history or culture, have received less attention in the research domain. Rather than trying to focus only on "critical incidents" and on obtaining a snapshot of specific events, I felt that exploring the lived experiences of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists throughout the duration of their training, as recommended by Hill et al. (2007) and Mehr et al. (2010), might be a step towards providing a more thorough and sophisticated picture of their process. This would yield insights into the fluctuations, shifts, and changes in their progress and development over time.



Moreover, factors such as trainees' attachment styles, the ability to manage shame and anxiety (Alonso & Rutan, 1988; Kearns & Daintry, 2000), and the impact of early life experiences, including demanding, rigid, and restraining child-rearing practices (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001, 2003) have been previously identified as impacting professionals' clinical practice in adulthood and deemed worthy of further investigation. Hence, I decided to explore the trainees' unique process and training "journeys" against the backdrop of their life stories, including early interactional patterns in the family of origin, relationships with primary caregivers, and experiences with power and authority in different environments during their formative years. I felt that positioning the training journey within a broader context might result in richer, more nuanced descriptions and understanding of the lived experiences of psychotherapists and counselling psychologists, simultaneously shedding light on factors, likely to influence their development, competence, authority, and relationships with their clients.

A third issue (or rather, limitation), emerging in previously conducted studies, was the inherent power asymmetry in pre-existing relationships between "researcher" and "researched". For instance, some studies exploring the experience of training from the perspective of the trainee were conducted by trainees' tutors or assessors (e.g., Hill et al., 2007; Moller & Rance, 2013) who were usually involved in data collection, analysis, or both. Such "dual relationships" and the power imbalance that existed due to the superior status of the principal investigators inevitably invited questions regarding the research findings, specifically the authenticity of participants' responses which in some cases were even subjected to evaluation (Hill et al., 2007). As I did not have such a role or pre-existing relationship with potential participants, I

felt that conducting a study where I was positioning myself as an “equal” alongside them may open up new avenues in which to explore their experiences.

I therefore endeavoured to address the existing gap in the field by exploring the lived experiences of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists during the course of their training, specifically around power and authority issues arising within training and supervision. Rather than searching for “objective facts” or “truth”, my interest lay in the subjective meanings, captured in the unique stories. Apart from my (very personal) relationship with the topic, I believed that this research might be useful for trainees, tutors, and supervisors in understanding subtle power dynamics and reshaping their relationship to power and authority. Exploring practitioners’ unique experiences during their psychology and psychotherapy training could assist in identifying and addressing power discrepancies both in the training institution and in the consulting room. As the literature suggests, a clearer understanding of practitioners’ development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) and the challenges encountered during their training may significantly contribute to the advancement of training and education, and to the delivery of better services while circumventing negative outcomes such as burnout, a sense of incompetence, or impairment (Goodyear et al., 2003; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Thériault & Gazzola, 2008). I contemplated how my project might stimulate further critical discussion and inspire future researchers, hopefully contributing to the development of new guidelines and recommendations, aiming to reduce power imbalance. First and foremost, however, I wished to raise awareness by “giving voice” to a group of colleagues and professionals who were often treated as unwelcome, foreign “*Others*”.

## Research Aims

The aim of this project was to explore counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' lived experiences in relation to emerging processes of power dynamics during their training. At the time this study was conceived, I wanted to understand more about my fellow trainees' perceptions and views of power and authority in all aspects of the training - the academic component, experiential group process, and supervision. Reflecting on my own experience, I wondered what it was like for other practitioners with a similar background to my own who had enrolled on such advanced training. How did it feel for them? What was the impact of their early relational bonds and the social and political environment on their meaning-making processes at this stage of their lives, learning, and careers? Did it affect the development of their own authority and professional identity? How did they interact with and relate to their tutors, peers, therapists, and supervisors? How did these subtle processes influence the way they worked with their clients? Driven by insatiable curiosity, I hoped that this project would shed light on the way they made sense of their experiences with power and authority. I expected to gain a better understanding of the role and influence of early attachment and relationships with past authority figures, family, and the social environment.

## Research Question

My research question was: **“What are the lived experiences of power and authority during the course of training of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists from authoritarian backgrounds?”** I was especially interested in unpacking the unique experiences and meaning-making processes of practitioners who (like me) had “arrived” to study and settle in the UK after being raised within the context of highly oppressive, authoritarian regimes.

## Methodology

*“...Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself...”*

(Barthes, 1993, pp. 251-252)

### Philosophical Underpinnings of My Research

Having worked within the positivist paradigm, I underwent a process of change during my doctoral training and clinical practice, becoming increasingly influenced by Kantian theory (Kant, 1934) and, more recently, critical theory (Horkheimer, 1982; Ponterotto, 2005). Instead of looking for quantifiable, statistically significant outcomes or a single “objective truth”, I began to recognise the co-existence of multiple truths and meanings (Kant, 1934), created by the human mind as a result of engaging with other human beings and with our surroundings (Crotty, 1998).

Ontologically, I recognised the impossibility of fully capturing or partitioning out one “true”, “objective” reality from my research participants because reality is not an externally singular entity (Hansen, 2004). It is processed and labelled through unique, different lenses (Sciarra, 1999) based on individual experiences and interpretations. This ontological distinction facilitated my shift from positivism to my “new home” - the domain of constructivism-interpretivism (Ponterotto, 2005). This is essentially a relativist position that assumes multiple and equally valid realities (Schwandt, 1994). It espouses a hermeneutical approach which maintains that

meaning is hidden and can be brought to the surface through deep reflection (Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999), stimulated by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005).

According to Papert (1980), knowledge is essentially grounded in contexts, remaining “situated” rather than detached from the surroundings in which it is constructed and actualised. Becoming one with the phenomenon under study meant occupying a substantially different position than that of my previous struggle to remain “objective” and detached from the participants and the data. Through the lens of this union between researcher and researched, the focus shifts to how knowledge is formed and transformed within specific contexts. As a researcher, this prompted me to look closely at individual ways of learning and knowing while remaining acutely aware of the fragility, contextuality and flexibility of knowledge under construction. Epistemologically, therefore, I share the idea of jointly constructed understandings of the world. My research stance lies on the interpretivist end of the epistemological continuum, recognising that both power and authority have a great depth of meaning for individuals and groups, and can be conceptualised as social constructs that differ, based on private contexts and experiences.

Critical theory also contributed to my shift towards a more subjectivist stance. Pioneering critical theorists, including Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, believed that “injustice and subjugation shape the lived world” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 280). They noted the contrast between the progressive rhetoric of egalitarianism and existing racial and class discrimination. While also advocating a reality that is constructed within a social-historical context, they took this a step further, conceptualising it within power relations. I share their belief in a constructed lived experience that is mediated by power relations within social and historical contexts

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). I feel greatly impacted by injustice and perceive my visceral, embodied response to the “status quo” and urge to change my research topic as stemming from witnessing power imbalances and oppression in a broader social and political context. Therefore, I found inspiring the way in which critical theorists use their research inquiry to help emancipate oppressed groups, empowering participants to work towards egalitarian and democratic change and transformation (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001).

## **Narratives and Culture**

Creating and narrating stories is an essential part of being human (Fraser, 2004). Through narrative, we organise our life histories and experiences into meaningful episodes that call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation (Berger, 1997). The very process of continuous narrative construction and reconstruction enables the individual to maintain a sense of personal identity (Murray, 2000). According to Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, interaction and continuity enacted in situations (also referred to as “experiential continuum”) provide the foundation for attending to a narrative conception of experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place and sociality. Framed within this view of experience as the phenomenon under study, the focus is not only on the individual but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which this experience is constituted, expressed, and enacted.

Narratives can be viewed as integral to human culture because regardless of whether it is in the general community, school, workplace or home, culture shapes how individuals envisage their world and speak about their place in it (Berg, 1998;

Fraser, 2004). At the same time, culture consists of people who are not always compliant and may not readily take up the types of dominant, cultural narratives they are “meant to”, nor do they necessarily voice them in the ways that are “intended” (Simon, 1996). Thus, storytelling may be used to reinforce but also to contest dominant social practices (Milner, 2001; Plummer, 2001; Riessman, 1993, 2003).

## **From Storytelling to Research**

For the purposes of this thesis and to avoid repetition, I use the terms “story” and “narrative” interchangeably at times although I am aware that some authors distinguish between them in the research context (Knight & Sweeney, 2007; Smith, 2016), or define the first as a subset of the latter (Feldman et al., 2004). A “story” is often alluded to as an individual’s account of related events, while a “narrative” has been referred to as a co-construction or co-composition of the story by the interviewee and interviewer. Furthermore, according to Murray (2003) and Smith (2016), narratives take into consideration the cultural and social as well as interpersonal context that “we use to help construct our stories” (Smith, 2016, p. 204).

Far from being limited to the verbal domain, narratives are infinite in their variety (Barthes, 1993). We find them in myths, legends, fables, tales, novellas, plays, but also in paintings, films, broadcasts, and stained-glass windows. The interest in the study of narrative can be traced back to Aristotle’s *“Poetics”* (Butcher, 1902; Murray, 2000). Following the increased popularity and greater acceptance of postmodern research methods, personal storytelling is nowadays seen as a valid means of producing knowledge (Cotterill & Letherby, 1993; Riessman, 1993;



Skeggs, 2002). The late 1980s and early 1990s are sometimes referred to as the “narrative moment” (Plummer, 1995) or “narrative turn” (Bruner, 1990), providing an alternative conceptual framework for psychologists who had become disenchanted with mainstream positivist psychology. It also epitomises the connectedness with other disciplines, including philosophy, literature, history and the social sciences, increasing understanding of their commonalities rather than their differences and the historical context surrounding their development.

Although storytelling is a universal competence and narratives can be employed whenever there is a story to be told, not every social situation is conducive to producing “reliable” narration (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Narratives appear to be particularly useful in projects where different “voices” are at stake, combining life histories and socio-historical phenomena.

## **Why Narrative Inquiry?**

Having strived for nearly a decade to “get rid” of my “subjective views” in order to minimise potential biases while analysing data, I finally arrived at the conclusion that I was trying to do the impossible. While planning this research project, I longed to embrace my subjectivity. Narrative inquiry (NI) does not attempt to “sanitise” research by appealing to scientific facts and linear trajectories (Ezzy, 1998; Franzosi, 1998; Plummer, 2001). Instead of using the language of certainty, it presents ideas in ways that are more tentative, circular, and multiple (Borland, 1991; Hyden, 1994), accepting that “research is frequently a muddled, piratical affair, and we do no service to anyone pretending otherwise” (Stubbs, 1983, p. 246).

Prior to choosing NI and while I was still in the early stages of conceiving my project, which at the time was primarily aiming to explore power dynamics on training courses, I briefly considered using Grounded Theory (GT) (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). I perceived it as a solid methodology, well-respected in the field and with a “good enough” reputation in the world of “scientific facts” I had recently emigrated from. I reasoned that examining power discrepancies could make significant contributions to enhancing trainees’ sense of empowerment, and GT methodology which is anchored in the reality of practice has been considered particularly relevant to exploring power and empowerment in health care settings (Udod & Racine, 2017). Because power and empowerment represent concepts clearly rooted in social and relational dynamics that are neither easily observable nor measurable through quantitative instruments (Dennis & Martin, 2005), GT can provide an in-depth qualitative exploration and better conceptual grasp (Glaser, 1992) of the processes that may be missing or not well developed in this specific area of inquiry. As such, a fine-grained detailed analysis of the social, institutional, and relational processes that underlie these concepts to improve the quality of training deserved further consideration. However, as my interest and research question “crystallised” further, they were directed towards understanding the lived experiences of a small sample of counselling psychologists and psychotherapists during training and how they made sense of their own process in relation to power and authority. Rather than seeking to construct a new theory from the data (for example, around the impact of power), I wished to build upon, expand, and deepen existing knowledge of the trainee experience and how it affects professional practice with specific foci on power dynamics and relationship with authority within the context of practitioners’ backgrounds and life histories. Therefore, narrative research and specifically the life

story approach was better suited to the purpose of my project and research question. This is not to say that GT cannot be used in future research to consider in more detail the social and psychological processes, taking place within larger populations of trainees, tutors, and policymakers.

Since I wanted to honour and recognise the embeddedness and agency of the researcher in data construction and interpretation, I also thought of using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Like NI, IPA is concerned with a detailed examination of the individual's lived experience and meaning making while emphasising the researcher's role in interpreting that experience and focusing on the reasoning behind events and processes. IPA would have been relevant in terms of understanding the psychological phenomena, namely underlying experiences of power and authority on training courses, but it is not designed to examine the relationship between individual experience or consciousness and social processes (Willig, 2013). A principally phenomenological method, IPA is premised upon "a natural ontology, assuming that behind the folds of hermeneutics, we can nonetheless look through a window onto psychological entities, the character of which are largely independent of circumstance and historical-cultural process" (Goodbody & Burns, 2011, p. 177). In contrast to IPA, NI has the potential for developing understandings linked to social and cultural contexts, as well as of the workings of ideologies and power relations. Taking into consideration the fact that power is central to understanding minority-majority relations and their influence (given that my sample consisted of practitioners who were not born in the UK), the methodology had to be able to interrogate such workings of power in relation to subjectivities, including that of the researcher. Besides, I wished to "avoid the perils of both individualistic and social reductionism" (Tappan, 2005, p. 50) and of methods

which often involve a fundamental decontextualisation in their assumptions and analytic procedures whereby themes and patterns are separated from the individual case to be interpreted across a sample (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, in order to maintain an idiographic and holistic perspective, a narrative methodological frame was adopted which had the potential to honour “the complex conversation between sociocultural influences and the profoundly personal interpretation of our experiences out of which we create a distinctive life course” (Shapiro, 1998, p. 92). Consequently, I saw NI as the best choice given the requirements of the research. Two of its dimensions are referred to as “sociality” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 40) and “place” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 41). The first dimension, sociality, makes it possible to consider the individual’s thoughts and feelings, as well as the social conditions or specific context; thus, NI is concerned with both the personal and social conditions of the participant and the inquirer. The second, “place”, permits a consideration of aspects of place and their impact on the study in terms of “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480).

Ultimately, I perceived NI’s dynamic “in process” nature, its strong emphasis on human lives as culturally and relationally constructed (Smith, 2016), and above all its collaborative, reflexive stance (Etherington, 2009) as more compatible with my constructivist-interpretivist epistemological position as well as with the underlying principle of jointly constructed meanings and understanding of the world (Crotty, 1998). It was especially suitable for creating a more equitable relationship between “researcher” and “researched” (Chase, 2005). This was in stark contrast to my previous role as an “objective” researcher, which involved following a strict agenda. I felt this was crucial to reduce the power imbalance often occurring in hierarchical

interviews, especially pertinent to my topic. Additionally, narrative interviews and the resulting accounts have been described not only as a co-construction between researcher and participant, but also as a co-construction produced within a social and temporal context (Kvale, 1996, 2007). According to McAdams (1996), an individual's story has the power to tie together past, present and future. Through this lens, narrative is an expression of individual experience and internal representations of phenomena, structured temporally and given meaning through the creation of self-understanding, which is reflected in language. It represents not only an "antidote to positivist research" (Goodbody & Burns, 2011, p. 178) but an alternative to research focused on presenting a "snapshot" of isolated events rather than on how an individual's journey, experiences and perceptions change over time, and what might influence such transitions.

According to Goodbody and Burns (2011), narrative is best seen as an organising principle, shaping the research process, its conception, practice, and analysis. NI is particularly suitable for inquiries into identity development, psychological, social, and cultural meanings and values, and documentation of the life course (e.g., through oral histories). At the level of method, however, it can be variously constituted so that analysis and interpretation can be conducted from differing perspectives. I chose the theme-oriented strand where I engaged in coding and "themeing" of the data. However, as Saldaña (2016) reminds us, coding is just *one way* of analysing data, not *the way*. I am aware that there exists a range of different ways, from systematic to open-ended explorations of meaning. Riessman (2008) notes that narrative analysis encompasses thematic, structural, dialogic, and performative methods. Some narrative researchers experiment with arts-based presentational and representational forms (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund 2008;

Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2015). Thus, there are “no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best level at which to study stories” (Andrews et al., 200, p. 1). On the contrary, scholars assert that the process of narrative analysis is highly exploratory and speculative (Freeman, 2004, p. 74) and that its “interpretive tools are designed to examine phenomena, issues, and people’s lives holistically” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xi). Nevertheless, there are occasions when the researcher wishes to code participant narratives, choosing this approach to systematically organise or arrange the data and capture its primary content and essence, but also as a faster way to detect patterns or explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions (Saldaña, 2016). This can help to illuminate the storied, structured forms of data, and potentially create a richer aesthetic through a retelling. With hindsight, I believe that while this was partly my motivation to choose this particular strand, there were other, less overt, less pragmatic or rational reasons I was not consciously aware of at the time but have been reflecting on in another chapter (see p. 184).

By choosing a narrative approach, I wanted to acknowledge that “multiple stories” exist about experiences of power and authority. This was not only compatible with my ontological and epistemological position but also with the reflective, critical stance in relation to theory, encouraged by many counselling psychology training programmes which propose that there is no single “truth” or “right way” of conceptualising any psychological phenomena, rejecting a single irrefutable way of understanding and instead emphasising a meta-theoretical perspective (Gillon et al., 2017).

Given my concern with how issues around power and authority emerge within different relational contexts and at different points in time, **temporality** as well as **continuity** were essential for my choice of methodology. I felt I had to understand my participants as individuals but also as situated in relations inseparable from a specific, social context. Through temporality, NI acknowledges that an event or a person is in temporal transition. Therefore, they are being described in relation to a past and present, projecting a future if possible (Kim, 2016, p. 90). Choosing NI enabled me to not only hold different contexts in mind but also to attend to “temporality - past, present and future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50), encapsulating various environments at different points in the life story of each participant, creating a richer, multifaceted “picture” and understanding of the phenomenon under study. It also facilitated moving back and forth between the personal and the social, the individual and the institutional, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future in ever-expanding social milieux (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3).

Dewey (1938) postulates that one criterion of experience is **continuity**, or the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences and lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in the experiential continuum, each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. The term “narrative” is itself sometimes referred to as “a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions which, importantly, are also chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). Dewey (1938) asserts that an experience promotes growth when it allows movement on the experiential continuum. I reasoned that temporality and continuity would facilitate travelling backward and forward not only from the moment I attend to (the beginning of a

practitioner's training journey in psychotherapy and counselling psychology) but also within each story, allowing inward and outward questioning and connections where the inward represents "the internal conditions", such as feelings, hopes and emotional responses, while the outward speaks to "existential conditions, that is, the environment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

Bülow and Hydén (2003) introduce the notion of "shadows of time" as a way to analyse the multiple temporalities, emerging in illness narratives and the sense of responsibility storytellers might have in delivering their stories about suffering and disease. Space as well as time is fundamental to identity formation, especially in multilingual contexts (Blommaert et al., 2005). For example, storytellers often evoke particular places and their associations with said places in their stories. It is through narratives of place of residence that storytellers construct multiple identities (Taylor, 2003). For instance, while conducting their fieldwork in an immigrant neighbourhood in Belgium, Blommaert and colleagues viewed space in relation to scaling processes since "movements across space involve movements across scales of social structure having indexical value and thus providing meaning to individual, situated acts" (Blommaert et al., 2005, pp. 199-200). Spatially, these multilingual environments are "polycentric" in nature, as individuals continuously refer to a myriad of different centres. In other words, a spatial and scalar perspective is well suited for the study of multilingualism as well as transnationalism (Blommaert et al., 2005; Heller, 2003; Vigouroux, 2009). Silverstein refers to "the temporally (hence, chrono-) and spatially (hence, -topy) particular envelope in the narrated universe of social space-time in which and through which, in emplotment, narrative characters move" (Silverstein, 2005, p. 6). A chronotopic analysis of sociocultural phenomena can assist researchers in unveiling the subtle dynamics of narrative in interaction and uncover



situations that would otherwise remain unclear or hidden, such as “environmental racism” (Blanton, 2011) or student dynamics in the classroom (Bloome & Katz, 1997; Wortham, 2001).

Life story research methodologies (Etherington, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 1999; Josselson & Lieblich, 1999; Mishler, 1999; Roberts, 2002) tend to focus on people’s stories of particular aspects of their lived experience (e.g., the process of training in psychological therapies) against the backdrop of an entire life. This approach draws on what Bruner (1986) described as narrative knowledge, created and co-constructed through the stories people tell about their lived experiences, and the meanings they give to those experiences over time that might change and develop as their stories unfold. The value of enabling people to create and tell stories that help them make meaning of their experiences has long been understood in therapeutic circles and, more recently, in response to trauma research (Etherington, 2009). I felt that life stories constitute a particularly relevant means of knowledge creation, appropriate and compatible with my professional identity as an integrative psychotherapist and a counselling psychologist in training. Life stories allow us to bring together several layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and how they have created change in their lives. I felt that the life story approach would be especially useful in identifying complex, multi-layered patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact on a person’s knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Etherington, 2007; Harber & Pennebaker, 1992). Knowledge gained in this way “is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterised by *multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings*” (McCormack, 2004, p. 220), which links my methodological choice to my epistemological position. Through an active process

of restructuring and mapping out certain events in one's life, life story research provides participants with opportunities to move towards developing a narrative of their lives in ways that position these within their cultural contexts (Etherington, 2009). This could enable participants' shift from seeing their experiences as related only to their personal, internal, experiential state towards viewing them as shaped within certain contexts, relationships and discourses of power, thereby maintaining a dual focus while allowing them to experience movement or change (Etherington, 2009).

According to Bateson (1994, p. 11), we all lead storied lives on storied landscapes, where "our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories". Thus, the plotlines become the provocateurs to change that can mislead, become ambiguous, and "have more than one meaning" (Bateson, 1994, p. 11) with no "single true interpretation" (Bateson, 1994, p. 84). The focus of my research was on the continuity and wholeness of an individual's experience of power and authority during training in the psychological therapies but also on the various social, institutional, and political contexts which shape that experience.

Central to the creation of field texts is the relationship of researcher to participant. Although all field texts are essentially selective reconstructions of field experience and thereby embody an interpretive process, the researcher's relationship to ongoing participant stories shape the nature of the field texts (in this case, the storied accounts), establishing their epistemological status. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that a relationship embeds meaning in the field text and imposes form on the research text. What is told and its meaning is shaped by the relationship - therefore, the extent to which a field text is collaboratively constructed or interpretive, varies. However, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), a "good

enough” research relationship with a sense of shared meaning, trust, and significance between researcher and participant is important but insufficient for the writing of narrative inquiry texts. After all, a story involves storytelling - a reciprocal event between a teller and an audience. Storytelling is therefore a social activity that requires an audience. As Plummer (1995, p. 174) eloquently puts it, “stories gather people around them”, dialectically connecting individuals and social phenomena. Narrative always includes some form of a dialogue that looks for the presence of *others* (e.g., the others in the mind of the author, the significant others in the story, the relational networks inside but also outside of the story, for example, a community or readership). In short, no story can ever really be a monologue. Narratives therefore require audiences or communities to hear them and “for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics” (Plummer, 1995, p. 87). According to Plummer, storytelling per se is a relational activity that congregates others to listen and empathise. It is a collaborative practice that assumes tellers and listeners interact in particular cultural milieux - historical contexts, essential to interpretation. Personal stories do not exist in isolation but are located in specific times and places, and individuals’ narratives are as much works of history as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in. Furthermore, analysis in narrative studies opens up forms of talking about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. Hence, we are interested not only in the content of the story but also in the particular way in which it is told (Riessman, 1993).

When we tell our life stories as adults, we do so from a wider perspective as we are able to situate our childhood experiences in the larger context of adolescent and adult experience. Although our interpretations of our lives and experiences have

been shaped by cultural conditioning, with maturity we are able to stand back from that culture and examine its influence. When the discourses available are examined, expanded, or recognised for simply being one among many ways of understanding and explaining people and their lives, this allows us to describe, explain, or interpret events in different ways and therefore alter our responses (Gergen, 1999). This creates possibilities for people to engage with alternative identity projects that provide opportunities for “creative reengagements with their own histories” (White, 2001, p. 66). A sense of an audience, peering over the writer’s shoulder, needs to pervade the writing and the written text. Thinking of the audience, however, creates another tension and another balancing act for the author to address and navigate. A writer’s struggle to respect working relationships and construct a place for participant voice and signature tends to be in tension with the notion of audience. Establishing voice and signature pulls us inward to the inquiry and to the field and its participants (where we are each other’s audience). Outside the immediacy of the research encounter, audience is almost always in the imagination and outside the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 149). I perceived my task as continually balancing voice and signature with audience while positioning my NI within an ongoing scholarly conversation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 67).

Thinking of my participants as co-researchers or collaborators (a term widely accepted and used in the NI ethos), I wished to give prominence to their self-agency and imagination while being able to reflect on, marvel at, and become deeply immersed in their stories with a freedom I had never before experienced. Mindful of my past identities as “number 8” and, later on, a “quantitative” researcher in the clinical field, I felt that (long suppressed!) pull to the literary form of expression. I longed to unleash my curiosity and creative streak. In practice, this meant exploring

ways of writing that “baffle the boundaries between literature and science, self and other, data and analysis... mastery and surrender” (MacLure, 2003, p. 172).

The power of storytelling and the need for a “personal voice” became evident to a teenage me after reading a (forbidden at the time) translation in Bulgarian of Marie Cardinal’s (1983) highly evocative account of her own psychoanalysis, entitled *“The words to say it”*. This sparked my interest in the healing, cathartic power of finding one’s voice. Later on, Wiesel’s *“Night”* (1960), a chilling memoir of his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as well as Ellis’ (1993) personal and heart-wrenching story of the loss of her brother, also moved me deeply. However, the idea of “equal voices” and other stories alongside mine particularly appealed to me. I was inspired by Etherington’s (2003) book *“Trauma, the body and transformation: A narrative inquiry”*, specifically the way in which she had situated her own story and reflections alongside those of others. This inspired me to refer to my participants as “collaborators”, often using the two terms interchangeably. I started to envisage the “path” for my research project as involving a “degree of mutual exploration and discovery” (Walsh, 1996, p. 383). Hence, I chose to address my research question by exploring my collaborators’ perceptions and interpretations, as well as the richness of their “lived metaphors”, rather than deciding what I wanted to hear before the story has been even told. I also felt drawn to the integration of time and context into the construction of meaning (Simms, 2003), a “trademark” of NI that is highly compatible with my epistemological position. Beginning from the standpoint or perspective of the storyteller, I was able to pay close attention to the overall emotional atmosphere and underlying tone, as well as to the way in which certain patterns emerged chronologically. Instead of simply listing themes as isolated units of analysis, I sought to find them - like precious

gems, incorporated in the story and in the context of my collaborator's world. This is what I associated with Saldaña's (2016, p. 289) idea of being on the lookout for "buried treasure". I found this process time-consuming and arduous but at the same time, incredibly exciting and invigorating. Data collected in this way seemed to me naturally arising from the lively process of storytelling, once I had introduced a "generative narrative question" at the beginning of each interview (along the lines of, "*What were your experiences during the process of your training?*"). This enabled me to see whether themes related to power and authority would emerge spontaneously and how they would be interwoven in each narrator's tale.

Allowing myself to be surprised, I followed each collaborator's story without a set interview schedule. I was prepared for the discussion to steer in a completely different direction, similarly to what happens in my clinical work as an integrative psychotherapist. This is in line with West's (2013) notion that most practitioners will feel drawn to research methodologies that suit their practitioner stance. Clandinin (2013, p. 23) often alludes to NI as a relational methodology, or "people in relation studying people in relation". Likewise, I perceived the stories lived and told in the NI relationship as a co-construction, an "intentional co-composition" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24) in the spaces between my participants and me.

## **Planning and Designing the Narrative Inquiry**

### ***Sampling and Recruitment***

NI falls under the umbrella of qualitative research that adopts purposive sampling (Carter & Little, 2007), with selected samples serving an investigative

purpose - namely, to examine a specific phenomenon and to uncover private meanings rather than to yield statistically significant results. At the stage of planning and applying for ethical approval from the Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University (Appendix 1), I aimed to recruit 3-5 collaborators. I used several paths to access my target population, including mailing lists, recruitment advertisements placed on noticeboards at training organisations as well as on the UKCP and BACP research notice boards (Appendix 2), and “word of mouth”, which involved asking colleagues directly in case they had acquaintances who met my inclusion criteria.

### ***Inclusion Criteria and Participant Details***

I intended to approach qualified practitioners from an authoritarian background (e.g., born and raised in totalitarian regimes such as the communist member states of the former Eastern bloc) who had been enrolled on an advanced (academic and experiential) counselling psychology and/or psychotherapy training course (doctoral or MSc/MA level) in the UK. I wanted to ensure that my participants would have had considerable experience undergoing self-exploration during their training and personal therapy, as well as in building their own authority, resilience, and self-reflective capacity. My rationale was that if they were already qualified, this might facilitate free expression as they would be likely to perceive their tutors and supervisors as holding less power over their future.

A total of nine psychotherapists and counselling psychologists expressed an interest in my research topic and a wish to participate - eight responded to the advertisements and one was recruited via a mailing list at one of my placements. Two ultimately decided not to go ahead with the interviews. The story of one

potential participant was not included. Her mother was raised in an authoritarian regime in Southern Europe but she herself relocated to the UK before the age of two and had no conscious memory of the regime. Therefore, she did not fully meet the inclusion criteria for this specific project. However, we have remained in contact and I will be able to arrange a meeting with her at a later stage if I decide to explore the experiences of psychotherapists and counselling psychologists who are first generation immigrants from authoritarian states.

For the purposes of this NI, the remaining six participants or collaborators were interviewed. All six had undergone a lengthy process of personal psychotherapy (a minimum of 40 hours per year for 4 years), compatible with their theoretical model. Their stories were included in the final analysis and (re)presentation. Table 1 presents further information on the characteristics and background of the participants.



**Table 1.***Participant Details*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age bracket</b>	<b>Geographical area of origin</b>	<b>Training modality</b>	<b>Current occupational area / sector</b>
Dimitri	M	Late 30s	Eastern Europe	Integrative Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	NHS, Private practice
Eileen	F	Late 30s	Central Europe	Gestalt	Higher Education, Private Practice
Alice	F	Mid 30s	Asia	Integrative	Charity Sector, Private Practice
Zoya	F	Early 40s	Central Europe	Integrative Person-centred	NHS, Private Practice
Mantas	M	Early 40s	Northern Europe	Integrative	NHS, GP Surgeries, Private Practice
Beatriz	F	Late 40s	South America	Integrative	Higher Education, Private practice, Supervision

***Means of Data Collection***

All stories were collected by means of unstructured individual interviews (conducted between October 2018 and August 2019) where collaborators talked about their training journey. To ensure depth and reflexivity (Morrow, 2005), I planned to set aside time to transcribe all interviews myself while journaling (Appendix 3) and writing memos (Appendix 4). I anticipated that each individual interview or “research conversation” (Etherington, 2006) would be approximately 60-

80 minutes long. Prior to conducting the first interview, I asked a “critical friend” (a colleague, familiar with NI) to interview me. The purpose was to identify any ideas and existing preconceptions I harboured, and to gain some “first-hand experience” of being interviewed. The interviews with my collaborators were carried out in the places that felt most comfortable to them (e.g., their homes, workplaces, or even cafés). To create a research situation that would permit explorations through a meaningful, ethical dialogue (Miller, 1996), I felt that a critical first step would be to give them a choice regarding the location and a sense of control, which would enable them to express themselves. Instead of having a set interview schedule, I prepared some preliminary questions (Appendix 5) but, above all, encouraged them to speak freely, using their own words, analogies, and metaphors. I simply followed their natural flow while gently facilitating the discussion. I believe that this created an atmosphere of safety and mutuality. After every interview, I recorded field notes in my research journal to provide details of the context, nonverbal communication, and reflect on any thoughts, impressions, feelings, and resonances evoked during and after the interview. Each collaborator was debriefed at the end of the first interview and invited to a second (follow-up) interview which was expected to take place within 4-5 weeks, to discuss any arising issues and to ensure that additional, emerging themes have been covered.

### ***Recording and Storage of Narrative Interview Conversations***

I conducted all interviews face-to-face. Prior to meeting my collaborators, we talked briefly on the phone to arrange a time and place that was convenient for them.

All interviews were recorded on an Olympus WS-853 MP3 Digital Stereo Voice Recorder and transcribed verbatim by me. I stored the recordings and the encrypted transcripts in a password-protected folder on my computer, which is also password-protected. In addition, I kept backup copies of recordings on data storage devices in a securely locked metal cabinet at my home.

### ***Data Analysis***

In line with NI methodology, data collection took place concurrently with data analysis. Viewing every interview as a distinct story, I spent a prolonged period of time engaging with the data to ensure commitment and rigour (Yardley, 2000, 2008). I repeatedly listened to the interviews, reading and re-reading each transcript and associated field notes, exploring how my collaborators made sense of their experiences. In addition, I also actively sought their feedback before inviting them to the follow-up interview. Further systematic reading to help draw out the main narratives involved looking for similarities, differences, inconsistencies, and heightened affective moments (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002).

### **Conducting and “Living Out” the Narrative Inquiry**

In order to gain some clarity and visualise my approach to data analysis, I created a diagram (Appendix 6) outlining the steps I wished to follow. In hindsight, I wondered whether I was slipping into an older, more structured mode of being and working. However, I was aware from the very beginning that the conversations with my participants would be always “in the midst” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43) of both my

and their personal and professional lives; institutional, social, political, cultural, familial, and linguistic narratives. Also, I realised that I would be situating myself in more or less relational ways with them rather than simply “retelling” the stories they shared with me. When I first approached my collaborators, I immediately began noticing and identifying “moments of meeting” (Stern et al., 1998) and “possible tensions” (Clandinin, 2013), making notes for myself for later. This entailed thinking within the three commonplaces of NI - temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### ***Narrative Interviewing***

As a method, narrative interviewing endeavours to minimise the interviewer’s influence by avoiding any pre-structuring of the interview (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). When applying for ethical approval, I had outlined very tentatively some of the things I would be looking for while reading the transcripts (Appendix 5). However, these were not prearranged questions. Instead, the interviews were largely unstructured. The underlying presupposition was that my collaborators’ perspectives would be best revealed in stories where they were using their own spontaneous language in the narration of events while I followed them “down their trails” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). The first interview lasted between 58 and 78 minutes. On the following day, I contacted each collaborator to check how s/he was feeling, offering a phone conversation in case any issues had arisen. The second, follow-up interview was usually shorter (20-40 minutes) and took place after I had sent the first transcript to my collaborator and received his or her feedback, approximately a few weeks to a couple of months after the initial interview. The first series of interviews

began with a broad question along the lines of, *“What was your experience during the doctoral/MSc Counselling Psychology and/or Psychotherapy training?”* or *“Can you tell me how you feel in terms of the overall process of training and your journey towards becoming a psychotherapist/counselling psychologist?”* Subsequent interviews opened up with the more informal, *“How have things been with you lately?”* This non-specific approach encouraged participants to speak naturally about issues they deemed important. From these starting points, I explored areas of interest or relevant to the topic using gentle probes (e.g., *“Can you tell me a little bit more?”*, *“Can you expand on that?”* or *“What was happening for you?”*, *“And what happened then?”*). Occasionally, I summarised, reflected back, or repeated a word that seemed to be touching upon a “key issue”, paying attention to the interviewee’s reaction. To ensure ongoing reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003), I took field notes or memos and kept a reflective diary to track feelings and thoughts as they emerged, reflecting on components such as time and place but also on the “emotional climate” of each interview.

### ***Transcribing the Material***

I decided to transcribe the interviews myself, following a discussion with my research supervisor. I felt this would help me connect on a deeper level with each of the stories. Despite being monotonous and time-consuming, the transcribing was as much a form of interpretation and analysis as it was a technical activity (Mishler, 1991; Riessman, 1993). By the time I had transcribed each interview, I could cite specific lines and had already identified certain expressions and metaphors that were resonating strongly with me. This helped me tremendously in the latter phases

of the analysis. Moreover, my collaborators felt reassured that I was the only person apart from them who had access to the “raw data”. Considering the sensitive nature of the material and the difficulty of disclosing earlier traumatic experiences, this was an important decision. Additionally, I endeavoured to transcribe paralinguistic features, for example to convey voice tone, stuttering, laughter or pauses, in order to study the rendering of stories not only by content but also by rhetorical form.

### ***Coding and “Themeing” the Data***

Mindful that some researchers view coding as incompatible with modern interpretivist methodologies (Hendry, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I nonetheless decided to trust Saldaña’s (2016) promise of a payoff and found the coding process useful. On reflection, perhaps there was a part of me that was still a bit preoccupied or fearful of “getting it wrong” and therefore I sought a sense of security by following the well-trodden path instead of what was for me completely uncharted territory.

While still transcribing, I was already “pre-coding” (Saldaña, 2016; Layder, 1998) by underlining and highlighting certain quotes or passages which, I felt, could lead to flashes of insight (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Additionally, I was jotting down any preliminary words or phrases on the transcripts themselves for future reference. Boyatzis (1998) calls these jottings “codable moments”, worthy of attention.

During the process of coding, I kept a copy of my title, research aims, and research question in front of me on one A4 page to help me stay focused and grounded, and also to enable me to decide which specific coding choices to make (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). After I had finished transcribing both the initial and

subsequent interviews, I separated each transcript into three columns as recommended by Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005). The first and widest column contained the data itself - the text of the actual interview with all exchanges between my participant and me (including paraverbal information such as sighs, pauses, laughs, and tears). The second column contained the so-called “preliminary codes”, and the third column listed the final codes. Initially, I called them “subordinate” and “superordinate” codes but found that constantly looking at these words, hinting at power and hierarchy, distracted me and did not work for me so I decided to change them to “preliminary” and “final” codes. This reflected the initial, “fine-grained” First Cycle coding, followed by a Second Cycle coding, which consisted of collapsing the original number of First Cycle codes into a smaller number (Saldaña, 2016). I wrote down my code words and phrases, and assigned them reference numbers, keeping a detailed list of all initial codes in my codebook (Appendix 7). The initial and secondary coding of each transcript was carried out on a line-by-line basis (Appendix 8).

The process of initial coding involved a combination of elemental and affective methods, primarily In Vivo and Process coding (Saldaña, 2016). All the codes I derived during this cycle were tentative and provisional. A Second Cycle coding or rather, re-coding the data, helped crystallise the analytic work even further. I utilised it to reduce the initial number of codes (by merging conceptually similar codes together) and to generate higher-level themes and insights.

The First Cycle coding yielded between 90 and 130 preliminary codes per transcript. During Second Cycle coding, I managed to collapse these into 40 to 60 final codes per transcript, planning to eventually synthesise them into five to seven major themes (Lichtman, 2013). I felt that a general “rule of thumb” would be to keep

to a minimum the final number of major themes or concepts in order to ensure the analysis remained coherent (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). However, aware of the possibility of falling into “the numbers trap” again, I preferred to approach the (re)telling of the stories with curiosity and open-mindedness.

After performing First and Second Cycle coding, I engaged in what Saldaña (2016, p. 198) refers to as “themeing the data”. This involved identifying themes in order to bring meaning to and express or unify the basis of a recurrent, “patterned” experience and its various manifestations (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Themes identified during the First Cycle were often woven together during later cycles to detect processes, tensions, epiphanies, causes, and/or conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Having primarily used a combination of In Vivo (i.e., literal or verbatim) and Process coding, I decided to use In Vivo themeing to ensure consistency and to honour my collaborators’ stories and voices. In Vivo themes were extracted or selected directly from the participants’ own language, capturing and summarising a major idea. I combined codes extracted from the interview transcripts under the “umbrella” of a common theme, naming them using a brief, verbatim quote. I also attempted to incorporate as many of my collaborators’ metaphors and expressions as the word count limitation permitted, hoping to provide a glimpse into their experiential worlds and subjective ways of constructing meanings through speech patterns. I then created a thematic outline for each collaborator, containing the themes I had identified (Appendix 9) and adding any newly emerging themes during the follow-up interview to ensure layering of the narratives (Ronai, 1995).



### ***Interpretation and Scanning across Different Domains of Experience***

The next step was to consider more purposefully the specificities of each transcript as a whole (Fraser, 2004), identifying the types and directions of the stories, as well as any contradictions and particular themes, points, or sets of ideas around which the story evolved or which kept re-emerging. One of the main challenges of this phase included my attempts to disaggregate long chunks of transcript into specific stories or segments of narratives while feeling restricted by the word count limitation (again, the power of the numbers seemed to take hold of me). Keeping an eye on the chronological sequence of each story, I was also aware that the storyteller's use of chronology is rarely straightforward (Riessman, 1987) and may involve "jumping" from one story line to another. I tried to tease out what kinds of meanings might be applied to the different story lines within each story, bearing in mind that NI is always a work in progress and can be subjected to many interpretations.

I examined my collaborators' stories for intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural aspects (Fraser, 2004; Mullaly, 2002) to unearth insights into their lived experiences on their training courses, past and present relationships, and interactions with power and authority. Because such distinctions between the different "domains" and aspects of lived experience might seem somewhat artificial (Fraser, 2004), I was mindful that their purpose was primarily explanatory, rather than suggesting that we can look at them separately and in isolation from one another. For example, all stories were multicultural, reflecting and speaking to cultural norms, values, and other components in my collaborators' home countries as well as in the UK while also incorporating the culture of their/our professional field. I

considered the importance of linking “the personal with the political” (Jackson, 1998; Segal, 1999), looking carefully for metaphors, exclamations, repetitions of specific words or phrases and trying to position them within the social and political context of their storied existence. I also anticipated that similarities and differences between the participants might become more apparent after examining and interpreting the transcripts. The “OSOP” or “one sheet of paper” per participant technique (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006) helped me to identify and collate the principal shared themes (Appendix 10).

### ***(Re)telling and (Re)presentation***

The next step involved condensing each narrative from some 40-50 pages of interview transcripts into approximately 9-10 pages by writing a separate section for each participant (see “*(Re)presentation of Participant Narratives*”, p. 117). Focusing on one story at a time, I read it once, writing down my impressions of what I thought was going on for each participant, for myself, and between us. Next, I re-read the story with a purposeful search for answers to my research question. In interpreting and re-telling the individual stories, I also asked myself who were the characters, the protagonists and antagonists but mainly, the multiple voices, heard in any single speaker’s voice. Examining this multiplicity of voices while paying attention to tone and emotion illuminated individual complexities as well as social, cultural and psychological processes. I then began the process of drafting the story, using verbatim quotes and as many of the shared lived metaphors as possible. In retelling each story, I followed Chase’s (2005) concept of supportive voice which presents the participant’s voice as central. Due to the word count constraints, I initially struggled

before deciding to include all six accounts instead of removing one and adhering to five (my original plan was to recruit 3-5 participants). I simply could not make this choice - to me, it would have meant prioritising some of the stories as more important, valuable or precious than the others, which I disagreed with - it would run counter to the basic premise of “equal voices” this project was built on! Therefore, after much agonising, I included (shorter) versions of all stories, grudgingly revising the other chapters to make sure I could “fit into” the word count.

Once I had the condensed narratives in front of me, I embarked on collating the principal shared themes and subthemes. I achieved this, using the “OSOP” technique (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006) which helped me to organise my thoughts while outlining and creating the structure for my Discussion. Striving for consistency, coherence, and credibility, I checked that the written analyses I was producing corresponded to the stories told, as well as to the research aims. However, as a narrative researcher, pulling together threads of others’ stories, I was also weaving a story of my own (Ellerman, 1998; Solas, 1995), cognisant of the multiple possibilities for representing stories rather than hoping to produce “the right” knowledge, a.k.a. “the truth”. I therefore embraced Hyden’s (1994, p. 109) view that “narrative is never concluded, it is always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation”.

## Ethical and Quality Considerations

### Ethical Considerations

Relational ethics was continually at the heart of my NI, permeating it from start to finish (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Prior to narrative interviewing, my participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time (up to the point where the final project has been submitted for publication). Every collaborator received an Information sheet (Appendix 11) and was asked to sign an Informed consent form (Appendix 12). Each interview was conducted under the condition that all names would be omitted or altered (I asked my collaborators to choose their own pseudonyms). Their proper names were changed while the names of places such as home countries, hometowns, training institutions, and other “characters” in their story were omitted to maintain confidentiality. Notwithstanding my efforts to reduce identifiability, I am aware that a risk of identification always remains.

While interview-based research affords people the opportunity to be heard and understood within the context of an (albeit brief) relationship, the interview method is sometimes considered intrusive or invasive (Miller, 1996). Prior to the interviews, I discussed with my collaborators their options for support (including friends, family, peer groups, and/or therapy) and referred them to a List of organisations, offering support (Appendix 13). I endeavoured to be attuned to the *Other* in the immediate situation, regularly “checking in” to ensure that the unpacking of the material was not too overwhelming and was prepared to terminate the interview if this was the case. I debriefed everyone carefully after each interview, providing space for them to discuss any feelings that might have been evoked. Once

I switched off the recorder, I usually asked a question along the lines of, *“How was it for you to be talking to me today?”* as a form of debriefing, inviting the participant to reflect on the experience and ask any questions s/he may have, related to my topic or to the interview process. I also sent an email (Appendix 14) to each collaborator on the following day, offering a brief phone call in case they wanted to address something or to express any feelings of distress. Using my skills as a psychotherapist, I did my best to manage the boundaries and ensure that my collaborators felt psychologically “held” and contained. I realised that they may have felt vulnerable, having exposed important aspects of their lives, so I perceived as important returning to less emotionally saturated ground at the end of the interview (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

## **Quality Criteria**

I admit that I assumed an ambiguous “one foot in, one foot out” position when thinking of quality criteria for my NI, slightly reminiscent of the tension between the little “Number 8”/Conformist aspect of me, scared out of her mind that she would fail and be unduly punished, versus the deviant, “devil-may-care” Rebel part, enjoying freedom and creativity. On the one hand, I was keeping in mind Atkinson et al.’s (2001, p. 5) assertion that researchers should not be “so seduced by the radical chic of new strategies of social research as to neglect the need for methodological rigour”. On the other, I found myself falling in love with Sandelowski’s (1994, p. 60) preference for “a research report that reads like a novel”, insisting that it “can be both rigorous and imaginative, true and beautifully rendered”. In the end, what prevailed in my mind and helped me to find “middle ground” between the two was Riessman’s

(2008, p. 193) notion of the “ultimate test”, namely whether or not a piece of narrative research can become a basis for others’ work, which I sincerely hope this project to be.

In my positivist past, I adhered to the so-called traditional criteria of research quality - validity, reliability and generalisability. During my shift to post-positivist research, I was strongly influenced by the guidelines of Elliot et al. (1999), which helped me to own my perspective as the researcher, situating the sample and grounding my findings in examples. Additionally, Yardley’s (2000, 2008) “open-ended” and flexible quality principles assisted me in increasing my reflexivity and sensitivity with respect to contextualising my research, encouraging me to think of commitment and rigour while striving to provide a transparent account of how data were collected and analysed. However, what I found to be especially helpful was one of the earliest sets of trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research, developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which prompted me to consider issues around credibility, transferability and dependability, as well as verisimilitude, narrative truth and utility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Loh, 2013).

### ***Credibility (Internal Validity)***

To ensure credibility or internal validity, I used Prolonged engagement and Member checking. Prolonged engagement was achieved by debriefing my collaborators, keeping the channels of communication open, and inviting them to attend more than one conversational interview (Seidman, 1991). It also involved continuously reading and re-reading their stories, engaging with the data at different points in time. Member checking involved sending participants the interview

transcripts and the final accounts (Creswell, 2009) for verification and clarification, as well as ensuring there was a “good enough” fit between my interpretations and representation, and their *own* understanding of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This also contributed to the layering (Ronai, 1995; 1999) or overwriting and re-telling of the narrative accounts, a process within which each layer was superimposed on prior layers to facilitate the emergence of new meanings, altering and expanding on the multiplicity of voices and identities.

Additionally, I employed Peer and Audience validation to ascertain the trustworthiness of the interpretation (Loh, 2013). Firstly, for Peer validation, I sent excerpts of my coding and the final accounts to my “critical friend” and peer (a trusted colleague, familiar with NI) as well as to my research supervisor to ensure some form of corroboration, concerning the interpretation of the data. Secondly, for Audience validation (Kvale, 2007; Loh, 2013), described as validation from the “primary intended users and readers” of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 561) or in this case, counselling psychologists, psychotherapists and educators at training institutions, I sent the accounts to a colleague and friend who is also a counselling psychologist from an authoritarian background but who did not take part in the study, to assess their coherence and credibility. The feedback and comments I received were used to refine the stories and interpretations.

To ensure credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also recommend the use of Triangulation, namely different standpoints and perspectives in Data analysis. Enriching understanding through Triangulation can be achieved by gathering data from different groups of people or from the same people but at different points in time (Yardley, 2008), which is what I did in this NI. However, my goal was not to achieve “accuracy” or a single “knowable” truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013) but to offer a richer

and broader picture. Hence, I chose to replace Triangulation with Crystallisation or, in metaphorical terms, the image of the two-dimensional triangle with the multi-faceted crystal as suggested by Tracy (2010). I employed Crystallisation throughout the piece, in the form of multiple sources, theoretical lenses and different researchers' perspectives. These were interwoven into its texture, together with the interview-generated data, in order to capture multiple "voices" or "truths" relevant to my topic and to the emerging shared themes, meanings, and threads.

### ***Transferability (External Validity)***

I felt it was important to provide a detailed description of the specific contexts, collaborators, settings, and circumstances (Braun & Clarke, 2013) - so long as this did not interfere with confidentiality! - to enable the reader to evaluate the potential for transferring the findings to other contexts or participants. I considered the trustworthiness technique of "Thick Description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to be useful in ensuring transferability or external validity. To make my research journey as clear and transparent as possible, I included rich quotation in the narrative accounts but also detailed information in the Appendices, such as a diagram of my step-by-step approach to Analysis and (Re)presentation, interview excerpts, reflective memos, examples of line-by-line coding, and "themeing".

### ***Dependability (Reliability)***

In my Methodology section, I included information about the means of Data collection (p. 89) and the recording and storage of narrative interview conversations



(p. 90). I repeatedly listened to the taped interviews, transcribed them myself and re-read them multiple times to ensure that I was being sufficiently “immersed” in the data - a process, sometimes referred to as “bathing in the data” (Goodson, 2013, p. 40) or “indwelling” (Smith, 2016, p. 216). I also sent the original transcripts to my collaborators to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I presented examples of my First and Second Cycle Coding to my research supervisor and asked for her feedback prior to coding and analysing the remaining transcripts.

### ***Narrative Truth***

While conducting the NI, my purpose was not to verify facts or “historical truth” and whether certain events occurred exactly as described but to seek “narrative truths” concerned with personal meanings (Spence, 1982). Consequently, I was driven by my wish to uncover and explore forms of understanding expressed by my collaborators through their stories (Coulter & Smith, 2009) which I envisaged as constructed around a core of facts or life events taking place in their countries of origin, in the UK, or at their training setting. However, I acknowledged the “wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection... emphasis on, and interpretation of these “remembered” facts” (Lieblich et al. 1998, p. 8). Several researchers assert that the principal difference between reported real events and fabricated events or stories lies in the narrative details (Pezdek & Taylor, 2000; Sjöden et al., 2009). I encouraged my collaborators to use details and figurative expressions such as metaphors to assist in accessing and displaying the intricacy of their experiences (Ricoeur, 1984). I endeavoured to include these in the

(re)presentation of narratives to capture the richness, complexity, and liveliness of private meanings.

### ***Verisimilitude and Utility***

Verisimilitude is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2012, p. 820) as “the appearance of being true or real”. It helps evaluate the quality of “realness” and aliveness of the writing, allowing the reader directly into the world of the study (Creswell, 2009; Loh, 2013). When the narratives are presented in a way that is coherent, plausible and easy to follow, this facilitates insights and aids in the understanding of the participant’s subjective world (Eisner, 1997; Lieblich et al., 1998; Webster & Mertova, 2007). I wanted my audience to feel “transported”, allowing them to access and vicariously experience the subjective world, thoughts, and emotions of my collaborators to facilitate insight. The trustworthiness techniques of Peer and Audience validation were extremely useful in ascertaining that the NI “rings true” to others (Loh, 2013).

Eisner (1998, pp. 58-59) provides a list of three criteria to test the usefulness of a study, also referred to as its “instrumental utility”, namely comprehension (enhancing understanding of a situation or phenomenon that would otherwise remain enigmatic or confusing); anticipation (providing descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given); and a guide or map (providing, highlighting, and expanding directions the reader can take into account as well as deepening and broadening our experience and understanding). The trustworthiness technique of Thick Description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was very useful because by elucidating the

context and the actions situated within that context, the detailed description allowed the uncovered meanings to be transferred to a different (yet similar) context.

Throughout the conducting and “living out” of the NI, I also kept a journal to ensure reflexivity, which I saw as the most significant “element in shaping the integrity” (Speedy, 2008, p. 29) of my NI. I viewed it not as a “separate affair” but as a dynamic process of ongoing self-awareness (Finlay & Gough, 2003) integral to this piece and operating on multiple levels (Etherington, 2004). However, I wanted to dedicate two chapters specifically to reflect on what was emerging for me **before** and **after** hearing the voices of my collaborators.

## **Reflexivity (Before Hearing the Voices)**

*Drowned stars are floating in the sea.*

*Salt burnt the freshness of their colour.*

*How softly, and with no “goodbye”,*

*They lost both light and power.*

(Dubarova, 1988, p. 185)

### **The Total Institution of My Childhood**

While reading papers for my Literature review, it dawned on me that my early experience within the social and educational system of the Communist Republic of Bulgaria resembled what Goffman (1961) alludes to as a “total institution”. I started experiencing bright and vivid flashbacks which I discussed in my personal therapy. Reflecting back on my early years, a multitude of suppressed memories were brought to the surface - often traumatic. For example, we had no privacy, living constantly under the watchful eye of the ever-present Party operators and monitors, whom we called “comrades” or “squad leaders”. There were highly specific, strictly regulated times for meals, marching, memorising, and reciting rules and regulations, sent to us by the Komsomol. On many levels, I felt I was living in a total institution, effectively brainwashing me and preparing me for a future in the totalitarian society. Goffman (1961) discusses ways in which members or inmates are “programmed” and how their lives are controlled from above by regulations, judgements, and sanctions - an extraordinarily accurate description of my own experience until the

age of 11, growing up as “Number 8”. All the children I knew were given numbers at school and all members of society at large were given Uniform Civil Numbers at birth. This anachronistic tradition that the number precedes the person still exists today.

Because my research topic was highly personally evocative, I became mindful of attending to my own self-care by seeking support from my psychotherapist, clinical and research supervisors. Also, I decided to take a break for a while from the research, visiting family and friends, taking long walks, spending time with my daughter, and practicing mindfulness meditation. Once I felt I was becoming more grounded and self-regulated, I decided to engage with my research once again. At times, it felt like I was trying to conquer an invincible, massive fortress. I needed to change the imagery during therapy, “re-imagining” it as a park with brighter and darker alleys, allowing myself slowly and gently to venture into the more shadowy parts of my past.

Having been born within this total institution and “branded” by the institutional machinery, I found it hard at the beginning of my training in the UK to find my voice. I was feeling regressed, vulnerable, and raw. It was as if the “total institution” was being resurrected within me, emerging to haunt me and preventing me from speaking. Unsurprisingly, when I asked a “critical friend” to interview me prior to data collection, what emerged was the difficulty, impossibility even, of speaking up freely, prevented by what I found to be a mix of fear, anger, and distrust.

## Emerging Influences and Preconceptions

Sitting together with my “critical friend” while she interviewed me enabled me to access my deeply seated mistrust in relation to authority but also in relation to my peers from the PD group. I did not expect this, at least not as much. Also, I initially “masked” my suppressed anger as “slight irritation”, perhaps unwittingly:

*“...When I feel misunderstood and silenced... I am really annoyed. I feel ang... there is something about the whole experience of... finding my voice, I guess. It’s so confusing, sometimes I feel like, ok, I don’t want to think about it. I’ll just... suppress it and not worry about this. But at random moments... there’s like a little trigger... and I feel again, this very slight irritation. It’s not anger, it’s not... a nice one. I don’t know exactly how to put it, um... and distrust... They don’t get how I feel... Few people do.”*

In hindsight, I made sense of my emotional response in the light of growing up in an environment where mistrusting others was the “status quo” and strongly encouraged. For instance, even at school, we were obliged to report to the teacher if we noticed something “wrong” or witnessed “deviant behaviour”.

*“... You are giving information behind your friends’ backs. It’s... you’re basically stabbing them in the back. And when you’re older, you can go to the militia. You can do it anonymously, as well. Like, write a letter and say, such and such person, for example, has contraband... and they will go and inspect them.”*

My “critical friend” was astonished and taken aback by the ways in which mistrust and doubt were fostered, even towards those closest to us (at least with the authority figures, we knew they were the people to be feared and obeyed; but it was a “grey area” when it came to our relatives, friends and confidants). Apart from not trusting my fellow group members, another thing that emerged while reflecting on my training journey was how I felt about change and new authority figures, being introduced on the course:

*“...About someone new coming... a new Head of the course... I don’t know how I feel about it because he’s yet again, a new authority figure and... Even though it may be expected that I may be much more accepting of change now... but my instinct is to ask myself, “Will I be able to trust the new Head?” Yeah. This is the question... Immediately! And almost as an after-thought, oh, maybe they’ll find another way to make this harder for us [laughs]”*

It occurred to me that my automatic “go to” place and modus operandi was to distrust the authority figure (even prior to meeting them) and to expect the worst-case scenario. Again, I linked this to the rigid, strict, and punitive behaviour of my teachers. However, my laughter at the end was an expression of my tendency to suppress or try and “minimise” such thoughts and reactions; almost like rephrasing my feelings of anger as “slight irritation”. My hunch is that this stems from a still deeply ingrained fear of speaking against the status quo (once upon a time, represented by the regime; nowadays, by anyone I perceive as holding any power

over my future). I needed to be more honest and transparent with myself about my immediate feelings in the here-and-now. At the same time, this was a bleak outlook which I thought might colour my expectations and perceptions of my future collaborators. I felt I had to bracket these preconceptions and allow myself to be surprised. The opposite of my experience, I reasoned, would be someone recalling a positive, enriching, and trustworthy relationship with authority. Also, I felt I needed to work on developing my self-agency and embracing my power while writing the thesis. During my own interview, I started to get in touch with the more rebellious part of me which, with the help of my therapist and supervisors, I gradually learnt to accept and love as a healthy, non-adaptive, and more creative self-state.

*“...Maybe at the moment as an adult, I have an aversion... if anyone tries to define me or assume that they know, they can predict what I am thinking or feeling, I get angry. And I’d rather be... Oh Gosh, I do feel angry! I have an aversion to being placed “in a box”. I would never, ever feel comfortable with anyone being placed in a box. I don’t think I used to rebel as a child because I was very small, terrified. I was never allowed to be myself... I think this is the big lesson for me, so maybe in my adult age... yes, I am rebelling. I think even with doing this project... It’s so powerful, I haven’t realised how powerful it is...”*

The symbol of my “Inner Rebel” emerged strongly during this conversational interview, as my favourite Bulgarian poet Petya Dubarova.



“...she was born in 1962 and killed herself in 1979. At the time when she was a student, there was even more scrutiny. No one, especially such a unique talent... Petya was unique. She stood out. And she was a rebel. It was very difficult to box Petya, ‘cos she was like a free spirit... she wanted to be a bird, to spread her wings and fly. She went to an English language school - when you go to a language school to study Western languages, it’s probably the worst thing of all, because then... the monitoring gets very severe ‘cos obviously you are being exposed to “corrupt”... the “corrupt” influence of the West... Unfortunately, lots of people were very jealous of her. And the teachers, instead of encouraging her talent, they were actually saying, “you think you are superior, you think you are better than us?”... They felt intimidated. Poems, written by pupils, were mostly about the Party and... how great is the state. Petya didn’t want to write about the state, she wanted to write about her dreams and her experiences at school. She wanted to write about boys. And in some ways, ‘cos of her sense of humour, she was very sarcastic, this was perceived as criticism of the system. Unthinkable!... “We need to cut your wings”, this is what her Head teacher told her. I am talking [here] about an internationally recognised young poet. She was playing in a movie as well. They hated her so much, they couldn’t stand her talent; **it was not about encouraging difference, it was punishing her for not being the same.** Sameness was being rewarded, servility was being rewarded. And being an... informant...”

A disciplinary punishment was imposed on Petya after a tiny piece of equipment was broken during the mandatory weekly work practice class, based in

the local State Brewery. To this day, there is no evidence that she was the one to break it, but the School Board “jumped” on the opportunity “to make an example out of her” and by reducing her behaviour mark, practically eradicated her chances of going to the university of her choice. On the following day, she took her own life at the age of 17, becoming one of the youngest victims of the regime. However, she also became one of the biggest rebels against the system and a symbol of resistance, *“because by taking her own life, she said, “I am not going to take part in this shit. I am done.”* During the interview, I reflected on the influence she had on me and my life, because her poems and personality greatly inspired and resonated with me (I had read all her diaries in the early 1990s, which were preserved by her mother and published posthumously after the fall of the Berlin Wall).

### **“Bulgar Off!” or Being in the Skin of the “Other”**

I started to come to terms with the widespread discrimination and, at times, demonisation of Eastern Europeans (particularly of Bulgarians and Romanians) after the UK Independence Party published a post with a clock, counting down the hours before the travel restrictions and visas for Bulgarians and Romanians were removed back in 2014. The underlying assumption was that “they” (“we”) would “invade” the UK and steal “people’s jobs”. More recently, Parker (2019) titled his article about the racist attitudes of several Bulgarian football fans “Bulgar off!” instead of “Bugger off!”, seemingly not taking into consideration the dangers of overgeneralising, or the irony of how openly racist his own article was - which presumably condemned racism. Based on my experience, I believe that covert forms of racism and ethnic discrimination, often experienced by immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe,

might be as psychologically damaging as overt forms of racism. Albeit in a different shape or form, the exclusionary practices sustained due to fear of the different *Other* continue to exist and are now becoming stronger, encouraged by politicians around the globe. Recently, my (otherwise, friendly) neighbour exclaimed spontaneously, *“but you look just like us, only when you open your mouth to speak up, I realise you are different!”*. I reflected on this in my personal therapy and on being judged based on skin colour versus based on voice, speech, and accent. Sometimes, I laugh; other times, I cry. Upon hearing that I am from Bulgaria, assumptions are often made (usually by strangers) that I work in a low-level job. On one occasion, a charity fundraiser knocked on my door and mistakenly took me for the cleaner. This was his only association with people from the Balkan peninsula, residing in the UK. On another occasion, the interaction quickly turned into something a lot more sinister when an egg was thrown at me from a van on the street, the local driver practicing his “hit and run” skills.

The subtle nature of a singular microaggression makes deciphering a microaggressive attack challenging. Often, a microaggression is not identified by the occurrence of a singular event but by the accumulation and regularity of small injustices that promote an environment of hostility and confusion in the target of the aggression (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010). What further complicates the identification of microaggressions is that they are often unconsciously communicated by well-meaning and kind-hearted individuals. For example, the effect of repeated exposure to a simple, seemingly harmless question such as *“Where are you from?”* caused U.S.-born Asian Americans to feel demeaned and like a “perpetual outsider” (Sue et al., 2007). It dawned on me that, especially after 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 when the EU Membership referendum took place, I often perceive this question as laden with

hostility as it makes me feel “foreign” and an intruder, emphasising my *Otherness*.

Grappling with my past and present reality of isolation and *alienation* only

strengthened my determination to treat my participants as equal collaborators rather

than “objects” or “subjects” of the research.

## **(Re)presentation of Participant Narratives**

*“How do I do representation, knowing that I can never quite get it right?”*

(Pillow, 2003, p. 176)

The six narratives that follow, including a brief introduction, excerpts and verbatim quotes from the transcripts, (re)present my collaborators' training journeys in the order in which I conducted the interviews. Proper names have either been omitted or altered to ensure confidentiality. One way in which I tapped into my creativity was to use different colours for different collaborators' quotes and verbatim excerpts that I felt were particularly rich and poignant. Also, I selected and compiled words and sentences from their transcripts in order to put together short poems, reflecting their experience. While remaining fairly concise and firmly grounded in the data, I saw these poems, included at the beginning of each narrative, as enhancing creativity and representing the essence of our joint, co-created process of “meaning-making” - told by them; written by me. Guttorm (2012) admits that whenever she struggles to represent the multifaceted nature of her data or becomes stuck, what frees her are poetic representations which allow her to cross boundaries and dichotomous concepts. By creating poems, consisting entirely of my participants' words but compiled by me, I felt I could incorporate my visceral “Self” and aliveness regarding the ways in which I perceived my collaborators during our interactions.

## Dimitri - The Transformation of the Time Traveller

*Higher rank meant higher power,*

*“Never speak until you’re asked!”*

*Like a phoenix, broke and rebuilt myself,*

*Left the uniform behind.*

I travel several hundred kilometres to meet Dimitri on a rainy Sunday afternoon. Feeling slightly sweaty and anxious in the car, I call him because I am running late due to a traffic congestion. However, he reassures me that he will wait and has nothing planned for the afternoon. We meet up at a café which is quiet and cosy. We ask to be seated on the second floor where we are the only visitors. Dimitri, in his late 30s, starts sipping his coffee while I warm my hands on a cup of hot chocolate, lulled by his voice which takes me on a journey to his past.

Originally from Eastern Europe, Dimitri initially pursued a career in the military. He became *“a well-respected officer”* but later enrolled on a psychology degree course in his home country. Prompted by discussions with his lecturers, he began wondering what else was out there, outside this *“culture of boxes”* and hierarchy he had known all his life. Having befriended a girl from the UK whom he met on a train (later to become his wife), he took a two-year break from his career to travel to the UK and spend some time with her. Consequently, he completed his training in CBT, then found a job as a support worker and later as a counsellor within the NHS. In the meantime, he got married to the same girl he referred to as his *“best*

*friend and soulmate*” and settled in the UK with his new family. Shortly afterwards, Dimitri enrolled on a doctoral training course in psychotherapy and counselling psychology which he described as *“life-changing”* while sharing with me the story of his transition.

### ***“Back home”***

Dimitri started by telling me that perhaps the hardest part of the training for him was comprised by what he initially perceived as a massive discrepancy between the culture *“back home”* and undergoing advanced level training in psychology and psychotherapy in the UK:

*D35: “...back home, everything was well structured, in boxes, all the authorities... had their own place and the individual clearly had his own place within society which I knew **exactly**; and culture, and jobs, and umm, and in school, your place even within the group was very well established...”*

He grappled with the challenge of trying to reconcile the idea of this rigid societal structure, which nonetheless gave him some sense of security, with the constant “back and forth” movement associated with his new “home” and new life in the UK. Also, during the process of our research encounter, Dimitri started pondering how even though at present he felt more accepted and appreciated by the *“local people”*, in the beginning he often felt *“inferior”*.

***“They were British and I was not British, and that was a hard one”***

With a far-away look in his eyes, Dimitri explored his sense of being perceived as an *“Other”*, which was accompanied by a constant fear that he would *“never be able to work with the British or the other side”* but only with people from his home country. He referred to the political propaganda, present at the time he started his private practice, and the impact of the social, economic, and political climate on his client work:

*D59-D61: “...running sessions as a therapist while on the TV they were talking about immigrants from Eastern Europe, coming in millions and invading Britain... That was a very challenging point. I had to tell clients about my accent and respond when someone asked ‘where are you from?’ and dealing with racism... within the sessions... although I was more trained than this client, they were seeing themselves as [more] superior than me, and I was feeling inferior because they were British and I was not British, and that was a hard one.”*

An interesting paradox was emerging in Dimitri’s work and relationship with his clients, a dichotomy between “inferior and superior” which seemed to be linked to his previous history of being in the army and working as a military officer, becoming accustomed to his precise position within the military hierarchy. On the one hand, Dimitri felt his privilege as being highly educated and possessing a certain power (of knowledge and expertise) in the therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, he was acutely aware of his own *Otherness* as perceived by what he thought of as “the *Others*” within a hostile environment! He felt simultaneously at an advantage and



disadvantage, expressing his own prejudice and stereotypical beliefs about less educated clients, yet at the same time voicing his misgivings and profound feelings of self-doubt and inferiority, stemming from his fear that they did not perceive him as their “equal”. He emphasised how this often prevented him from speaking up during group process at his training institution, experiencing his British colleagues as *“a lot more free and able to vocalise their opinions in the big group”*.

***“The uniform in my dreams was the authority part of me”***

Realising how the hierarchy, overly rigid rules and structure of the authoritarian state had become very deeply ingrained within him and drawing parallels with object relations theory (Fairbairn, 1952; Klein, 1946, 1952), Dimitri started recognising the authoritarian state as an internalised oppressive *Other*. Notably, he confided that the whole process of change and growing self-awareness began in his dreams.

D43-44: *“...in the beginning, I would dream of myself back home, wearing the uniform, then of myself in the UK, wearing the uniform... um... after that I started having dreams of me being a civilian and being you know, just m-me, without the uniform... I would keep track of how... my unconscious mind was manifesting in the form of dreams...”*

I noticed how his voice trembled and he stuttered when saying *“just m-me”*, as if it was still difficult for him to separate his identity from the role assigned to him by the State (Jung, 1953; Young-Eisendrath & Dawson, 1997). His speech, which was otherwise very coherent, became slightly disjointed and seemed to signify a

heightened affective moment, while his reflections also suggested deep trauma at seeing all these “*people in uniforms*”.

D48: “...*I started to realise that this uniform was the authority part of me that was coming and criticising me, and **the policeman**... which is just traces of my former Self... but also people I met in real life...*”

This critical and highly judgemental introject seemed to present and “emerge” most forcefully during PD group process which Dimitri described as “*the hardest part of the training*”. He found it difficult to consolidate his previous experience with his ongoing training journey and relationship with the module leaders, group facilitators, and other group members.

D22: “...*back home, we always had someone in charge of the group; someone who is leading the group. I was taught to look up to these people and **to seek permission to help** or to... er, and I was always doing that...*”

The way in which Dimitri was initially positioning himself in the group in relation to the tutors was painfully obvious.

D27: “...*I mean, it was the rule back home that... You [should] listen to... those into a high hierarchy position... to the professional **without questioning too much** [smiles]...*”

Not questioning authority had become second nature to him, so deeply internalised that it emerged in the training. However, his wry smile and capacity for self-irony suggested that in the present moment, he was able to observe and reflect on how this aspect of his former Self, the internalised “policeman” or ex-army officer, had started to automatically place group members in boxes, ordering them hierarchically:

D24-25: *“...I was looking for um, who’s got the ranks, who’s got the power, and... trying to place all the members of the group on some kind of a scale... Who’s in charge. **Who has the right to talk, who should listen...**?”*

Whenever his peers interrupted the group leader, he found this confusing and upsetting, feeling frustrated that he was not being praised for his compliance and rigid adherence to what he thought of as *“the rules”*.

***“I liked that freedom”***

Dimitri felt that the experiential component of the training strongly challenged some of his former beliefs and values:

D38: *“...You didn’t even have the freedom of relating to people at home, because you will be judged or condemned by family, society, the system... who you gonna be friends with, the way you choose your partner, while here there’s a lot more freedom. Well, I liked that freedom...”*

Gradually, he started expressing himself more freely, his voice serving a purpose other than that to give or obey orders; he became more comfortable in his skin and in being *“just m-me”*, thus leaving the uniform behind. His self-perception also changed. He started to feel *“free of everything, of all these beliefs”*. Observing his peers freely using their voices during PD group process seemed to model something which has been missing from his past - the joy of simply being Dimitri; the sense of empowerment, resulting from the freedom of expression.

*“Like the phoenix, I had to break into pieces and rebuild myself again”*

Dimitri often referred to change, transition and transformation, indicating his changing self-perception and relationship with Self and Others. In the beginning, he mainly referred to himself as the *“army officer”*. There were frequent allusions to his uniform as an embodiment of rank and order, almost as if he identified with his uniform, and his *“real Self”* or identity was entirely merged with the role and position of authority given to him by the authoritarian state. I perceived the uniform as a symbol of the oppressive system. It felt as if he was hiding a little behind it, a part of him still residing in this deeply lived metaphor (Clandinin, 2013). He confided that he initially perceived the term “civilian” as slightly derogatory, even choosing to work with clients who were veterans (this was his first placement during the doctoral training). He then described the process of transformation using a different metaphor, namely a phoenix bird, destroyed and miraculously resurrected.

*D39-40: “...like the ph-phoenix, I had to... Um, breaking to pieces and rebuilding myself again to make sense of my life and who I am actually...”*

The officer’s uniform, this inanimate object, slowly transformed into a living being, a bird, but not just any bird - a phoenix with magical, self-destructive but also self-healing properties. Then slowly and gradually in our co-created process he became an ordinary human, a civilian, enabling us to meet and connect on the same human-to-human level as equals. I found this transition fascinating. It was hard for me to imagine the friendly, warm, approachable person in front of me as a stern officer with an unreadable face. In the present, he seemed to be aware of that change and the fact that he was *“living a normal life, not being chased by that*

*uniform, that power, that authority*". Another layer of change was reflected in his growing capacity to challenge others' perceptions of him while *"transforming their questions, their curiosity in a positive experience... challenging their belief about foreign people, and foreign therapists... and I don't feel like hiding my Real Self, or trying to be somebody else, or something that I am not..."*

### ***"I am like a time traveller"***

Time and space were two concepts which frequently came up in Dimitri's narrative. He often referred to the doctoral training as *"life-changing"* and reflected on experiencing the field of psychotherapy and psychology as *"50 years behind"* in his home country, compared to the UK. He shared how his family members would jokingly call him a *"time traveller"* which once again emphasised to me his process of transition; his capacity to change, learn, absorb new information, and adapt quickly to his new environment.

*D67: "...I came here and my wife is saying... 'you managed to jump that 50 years and to make it into 5 years'. So, er, we came to the conclusion that I managed to trick the time and to make a jump, I am like a time traveller..."*

We both laughed and I thought of the complex stages of Dimitri's transformation, of becoming "human" again, but also associating the image of the Time Traveller with powers which can only be viewed as extraordinary or supernatural. I pondered if he was also attributing such "life-changing", transformational powers to his training and process of personal therapy.

***“The doctor is NOT telling you what to do... The doctor is there with you!”***

The culmination of Dimitri's transition seemed to be transforming what he initially saw as a strictly hierarchical relationship with authority to a much more collaborative one. This also influenced the way he related to his clients. He referred to his past view of authority as *“following the doctor's advice without asking too many questions”*. That belief changed gradually during his training, prompting him to assume a much more relaxed and relational *“I-Thou”* stance (Buber, 1958) with his clients:

*D92: “...I kind of changed that role... ‘the doctor is telling you what to do’. The doctor is there with you! So I challenged that belief, for me and for them... they can see that, and I relate to them in that way now. They will appreciate that - ‘I am there with you’...”*

Dimitri also discussed this transition in the context of his initial CBT training and then moving towards a more person-centred, integrative position:

*D95-96: “The CBT training... was more structured, more directive... giving me a lot of confidence at that point, because I was **telling them exactly** and... I was using that as a way of dealing with some of my issues with clients, and being different but knowing and being superior, and putting myself as... the doctor telling them each session what they have to do... And now even that has changed. In the beginning, I was almost like being the authority of, ‘I am the doctor, I know what is good for you, we’re going to follow this protocol’. Now I am accepting that I might not know... but I’ve got the resources to listen...”*

This insight and shift enabled him to connect on a person-to-person level with his clients, *“and it doesn’t matter you know, it’s not about who is in charge here...”*

***Follow-up: “I wouldn’t do it again, fuck that!”***

During the follow-up interview, which took place a few months after the original one, Dimitri confided that he had started a new job and had just published a book in both English and his native language, discussing the supervisory relationship which seemed to be a significant, supportive mechanism for him during the training. An additional theme that emerged was linked to the cost, not only the massive investment of resources such as time and money but also the emotional toll and mental energy, required on the doctoral course. While happy with the job opportunities and experience the *“life-changing”* training journey had given him, he also confessed that he was feeling tired and drained.

*D157-158: “...It was amazing... but such a painful and hard journey... I wouldn’t do it again, fuck that! [laughs]... I studied enough in my lifetime.”*

He was, however, very happy to be able to challenge the negative prejudice associated with Eastern Europeans.

I felt excited, energised, and enthused while reflecting on his story of *transformation* (Riley & Hawe, 2005; Young, 1984), expressing a change in how Dimitri related to his own and others’ power and authority that was especially poignant and demonstrated through the use of metaphors, related to his changing identity.

## Eileen - The Wounded Healer, Getting on with It

*They still had the final word about me.*

*Losing ground, I was floating in space.*

*But I get on with it because I have to do it myself*

*Oh yeah, I'm on it, whatever it takes.*

Unlike other meetings when I travel to participants' chosen locations, Eileen asks to come and visit me in Kent. On my way to the train station to pick her up, I buy tea, coffee, milk, baklava, sweet and savoury biscuits, with the vague wish to "nurture" her. Thinking of the importance to provide holding and containment, I experience her as embodying a mixture between vulnerability and resilience which I associate with Jung's (1951) concept of the Wounded healer. We arrive home and once she has settled in, I switch on the recorder, telling her that we can stop at any time (indeed, we pause twice - once because she feels she needs a break, and then a second time, to go for lunch and have a "change of scenery").

In her late 30s, Eileen was born in a former communist country in Central Europe. Her childhood and adolescence were marked by trauma and the loss of a sibling. As a teenager, she had to take care of her mother who struggled with depression as a result of the loss and bereavement. Eileen reflects on the lack of support at the time, adding "*I wanted to know if there was something more I could do*". Around the age of 18, she felt driven by her wish "*to do something for my fellow humans... something more, something deeper*". Initially, Eileen wanted to be a social



worker and spent a few years studying and working in this field before relocating to the UK and enrolling on an advanced MSc training course in Gestalt psychotherapy. She undertook placements in various educational settings and started developing her private practice but also recognised that she had always harboured an interest in spirituality and healing, something forbidden under communism.

### ***Lost in Translation***

Referring to her training as *“the journey of my life”*, Eileen shared that she used to feel extremely self-conscious in the PD group (consisting of 20 people in the beginning, which she viewed as intimidating). Struggling to be *“authentic”*, she reminisced how she often felt subdued, withdrawn and embarrassed, especially during the first year (shame seemed to be an important, recurrent issue). In addition, she experienced the academic and supervisory component of the course as exceptionally challenging:

*E37: “...It was difficult to bring my work to my supervisor... and I still find it a bit exposing. I think it’s my shame... It’s the language, do I express myself enough, when I show her the transcript? Is my English academic enough?... My supervisor also said, ‘I think it’s not that you wouldn’t know, but I think it’s the language really’...”*

Eileen proceeded to tell me of her ongoing battle with the words, literally feeling *“lost in translation”*. To her, *“not having”* the right words in English to convey what she wished to convey was incredibly hard. Throughout her training, Eileen was also involuntarily comparing herself to her English peers, who *“didn’t have to worry*

*about a language barrier*". She came to accept and embrace this struggle towards the end as part of the journey, linking it to her identity as a foreign student in the UK. However, she referred to receiving insufficient support around that.

***"You chose it, so get on with it"***

A recurrent theme was Eileen's unmet need (as a foreign student) and the perceived deficiency of academic support from the educational organisation. However, I noticed that even though she often mentioned this, she tried to minimise it, adding *"I just needed a little bit more"*, which made me visualise a tiny crumb of bread, a "miniscule" amount of support and nurturance which became an ongoing joke between us, similarly to how she worried about not *"overstaying her welcome"* at my home. Almost reluctantly, she admitted:

*E26: "I felt a bit disadvantaged... at times it felt like kinda, 'you chose it, so get on with it'... I made the choice to be [here] but I wondered whether there'd be a bit more... support around it. Since they also decided to accept foreign students - it has to be fair for everyone..."*

Deliberating on the importance of equal responsibilities but also of equal rights for students, Eileen mused how her struggle did not seem to be fully taken into account.

***“They decide if I am good enough”***

Eileen was acutely aware of what she seemed to perceive as an inherent and inevitable power imbalance on the course, with the tutors and supervisors always having *“the last word about me”*.

*E20: “I sensed their power, yeah. At the end, I thought... they’re the ones that decide whether I’ll continue, whether I am ‘good enough’ to become a therapist...”*

She identified this issue as ongoing and predating her enrolment on the course, recognising that something was going on *“about me and authorities - I am aware that they have the last decision about me, about my future...”*. I noticed that she was flustered, and her speech was becoming less coherent. She struggled to formulate what she wanted to say, musing *“That... pa-part of power... I had to still let go of something of... or... er... “they will decide at the end”*. Trying to give her some time to breathe and settle down, and thinking of her past trauma, I suggested going for lunch and a walk in the park prior to deciding whether she wished to continue.

***“This kindergarten was like an institution”***

After a much-needed lunch break, Eileen felt ready to delve deeper into her past history which I perceived as an invitation to “world-travel” (Lugones, 1987) with her to a different, dark, and scary (albeit not unfamiliar to me) dimension. She confessed how, as a little girl, whenever she encountered an authority figure, she

would see an institution instead of a person. She would then feel overwhelmed because *“my power would instantly diminish, while the authority, it’s got more power than me. Always.”* This made a lot of sense, especially in the context of her difficult childhood:

E95-97: *“...I was little when communism finished, I was 8 years old. But the education, and the teachers... it was a very suppressing system, and very institutional... I remember all of the shaming... a lot of punishments, even I was... physically punished by teachers in the kindergarten... Then we had some... teachers, very strict, in eleme... the first school before secondary.”*

The physical and emotional abuse endured by Eileen was something she had to cope with on a daily basis, both at school and at home:

E109-115: *“...I had these difficulties also with my parents, my first authority! There were physical punishments in my family, too... Sometimes I had to stand in the corner, it was very shaming. And I forgot about it but then I know, yeah, that’s why I felt that shame in the process group because I thought, I was worried how, if I say something, will it be... wrong and will I get punished like in the... kindergarten... because I didn’t do something I was asked to. We were forced to sleep in the afternoon. And I couldn’t! But I didn’t do anything... I simply couldn’t fall asleep, and the teacher just shouted at me. And then, she slapped me. It hurt and I got really... er, shamed, and thought I did something really bad, or I am not OK the way I am. So, it comes from that. I was maybe four or five... This kindergarten was like an institution...”*

I felt very impacted by Eileen's tone of voice and expression, as well as by the content of her story. She referred to her lived experience of feeling “*ungrounded*” and as if she was “*floating*”:

E131-E139: “...*there was punishment from my parents, punishment from the teacher. So I was in the middle... I felt, ‘something must be wrong with me, that’s why I got punished’... And then I was silent. I didn’t... say much between the ages of four and 12, maybe 13... I kept a low profile... It’s... very confusing when you’re little. You don’t know because you make sure you can trust. But then you lose your trust and supportive environment. You don’t know where to get resources, because normally you get support from your parents, but if you don’t get it from them, teachers or... you’re kind of without it. So, there is no ground almost. You’re floating in space... You’re lost, you lost it. Loss of yourself. Loss of identity, like... So all of this... it’s in my roots but it’s been worked on, as well. I’ve been through that in my therapy, it’s very personal... it’s part of my journey.*”

Eileen confided, her voice exceedingly low, that healing her “*Inner Child*” was one of the hardest things she was still working on. She said she realised that her primary wound was the original source of her sensitivity around her relationship with authority figures. Nevertheless, at the same time, she saw this experience as allowing her to grow and to help others heal “*through healing myself first*”.

***“I’ve been through worse, so I am stronger now!”***

Reflecting on her traumatic experience, Eileen recognised that despite all the pain, it had also helped her to develop resilience, because *“with awareness I’ve gained more understanding. And with understanding I feel I have more control and power”*.

She alluded to becoming stronger, more empowered, and better equipped for the future:

E197: *“...I remember thinking at one point in Year 4, ‘I’ve been through harder times, I’ve been through tougher things and I really know what I want. I want this, so I’ll do it... Whatever it takes, I’m on it’.”*

***“This gives me power - knowing what I want!”***

Eileen identified the past hardships as the seeds which led to personal growth and, ultimately, the strength to fulfil her potential. Recognising that what she really wanted was to become a psychotherapist, thereby *“helping others to heal themselves”*, she began seeing her motivation as her main source of empowerment:

E184-186: *“... At the end of the day, I wanted to become a therapist... I believed it was worth it. So it gives me meaning... I guess this also gives me power - knowing what I want, no matter what the obstacles are, and just go for it... This is beyond everything... Above every authority. I have this deep sense of knowing since the first year of training, and this is the power that*

*keeps me going... umm, I don't know how to say it... and now I am missing the words... yeah, it's my motivation!"*

Processing her past, painful experience in an embodied way became the biggest source of her empathy and capacity to develop deeper, stronger connections and bonds with her clients:

E240: *"...As I can be more compassionate to myself... starting from myself first, I can be there for my clients more... with that openness and compassion... Also... I am more grounded, and I can be more available for my client..."*

Developing self-compassion helped her to feel more comfortable with the realisation that *"I am not perfect, I am human"* which then seemed to take the pressure off, allowing her to connect and engage warmly with *"the other human"*, namely her client. It was striking that at the very end of the first interview, Eileen remarked several times that she found the process of talking rather challenging but also very empowering, allowing her to get in touch with what she called her *"inner power"*.

E194: *"And there's the inner power, the motivation, yeah. **Now I allowed myself to get in touch with that.** This is above everything and that's the... this is maybe the strongest inner source... because **I got in touch with it now... this just came to me now** [smiles]..."*

She commented at the end:

E264: *"...And I am glad we got to where we got now, talking about my journey and my background... I think that was really the most important. Uh-hm... I feel I voiced what I've wanted to say."*

In turn, I felt excited and slightly shaken, thinking of the power of the words and simply being able to tell one's story to another.

***Follow-up: "It's tricky training, like trick or treating, like Halloween a little bit!"***

I kept in touch with Eileen over the next couple of months until we met again. She appeared full of jest, planning to move from the Big City to a smaller town, to be closer to nature and also to hire a place with her girlfriend, laughingly exclaiming, *"I am still on it!"*. She mentioned again her training journey. Two additional themes "emerged" as a result of our conversation. One of them I identified as *"different authorities, different voices"* and the other as *"the nature of the training"*.

When recalling her struggles with passing her academic assignments (especially her clinical dissertation), Eileen mentioned that she sometimes found having different tutors with different demands confusing and frustrating:

E296: *"...One tutor may say, 'oh, this essay is great, and I like it!', and the other tutor is expecting something else... In hindsight, every tutor wants something specific from you, or... and they are always different, and that's very unclear. That's why I never knew would this be 'good enough'..."*

She pondered how, because of this, she felt that the training was *"tricky"*:

E299: *"...So I guess it's a tricky training, I feel 'half-half'. Some things were good, some things could be better. Um, so it's like trick or treating, like Halloween a little bit! You don't know if it's gonna be a treat or a scare..."*



I felt that her reference to the “*trick-or-treat*” nature of the training was spot-on, encapsulating well her complex feelings and her ambivalence towards the whole process - especially the formal, academic assessment.

I perceived Eileen’s story as one of *endurance* and *perseverance*; the organising theme (Riley & Hawe, 2005) seemed to be about “*getting on*” with her training no matter what, sometimes against all the odds. I thought of it as a very “forward” story but also with what I saw as a surprisingly strong inward direction that allowed a series of epiphanies to occur, including during the interview process itself. This helped deepen reflection to unearth more implicit layers of meaning (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2007). For instance, she identified and named her motivation as her “*inner power*” and driving force, moving her forward.

## Alice - The Compliant Student, Reclaiming Her Power

*Trying to please, trying to be a good student,*

*It felt like being questioned by the police.*

*This was my identity, the authority telling me right and wrong.*

*It left no space for me.*

I embark on my train journey, travelling to the Big City to meet up with my next participant, Alice. Born in a totalitarian state in Asia, Alice has *“moved around quite a lot”*. I feel that I have a lot in common with her, both of us experiencing different cultures and transitioning from worlds of *“logic and numbers”* to the relational realm of psychotherapy and counselling psychology.

Like Dimitri, she prefers to meet up at a quiet coffee-shop. I feel calm, a bit sleepy, simply leaving Alice’s story to unfold while sipping my cappuccino but the peace and calm disappear when at times I experience a strong, visceral pull and reaction to some of the things she shares in her slow, melodic voice.

Despite having a degree in a different, more technical field, Alice recalls her growing interest in various psychological theories, feeling more drawn to the face-to-face contact and interactions with clients, *“rather than just purely research-based psychology”*. She also compares her experience at two highly disparate locations in the UK - a small, *“close-knit”* community in Middle England and the much more diverse social climate in the Big City.

## **The Importance of Being Compliant**

Alice recollected her early experience within the educational system of her home country, which fostered rigid adherence to rules and *“only one right answer”*. She candidly spoke about the importance of needing to *“please”* the teachers while being *“told what to do”*:

A8-12: *“...It was all about memorising things... At school, we would sit in class and the teacher would tell us what we’re supposed to learn. For example, these are the formulas; read this text and memorise it for the exam... There’s no room for creativity... there’s only one right answer. So I answer this a certain way and I get points. You are just being told what to do - there’s no discussion...”*

The measures taken to ensure compliance and discipline included physical punishment and harsh scolding:

A14-18: *“...the teachers were the absolute authorities, so they would tell us exactly what we were supposed to do. When I was in primary school, they were even um, physical... the teacher would actually s-slap... some of the children. Now I look back and it is child abuse in [modern] terms... You can’t possibly justify that. But when I was growing up, that was quite common, and nobody said anything about it. And the parents knew about it, but it was just common practice... Because I was really academically strong, I was kind of like the **teacher’s pet**... If you do well in your exams, the teachers can be a little bit lenient around your behaviour otherwise. Um, but even then, I remember being called to the teacher’s office... So I was... being harshly*

*scolded by the teacher until I was in flood of tears. And it was all normal, no one questioned any of these things...*

The abuse was something that was perceived as “*normal*” and “*common*”, never challenged or questioned by anyone, including the children’s parents who were aware that it was taking place. However, similarly to not allowing space for questioning or alternative views, there seemed to be little or no room for exploring feelings:

*A117: “...I never really thought about how I feel, would it mean anything... I thought I was supposed to... just do things by the book, you know, there’s a manual with questions or responses you are supposed to have with the client...”*

The echoes from her traumatising past seemed to influence Alice’s lived experience of the training in various ways, especially in its early stages.

### ***Asking for Permission to Speak***

Deprived of a voice and without any prior experience of being encouraged to express her opinions or feelings, Alice found herself in a “strange situation” (Ainsworth et al., 1978) of complete uncertainty, “not knowing” what to do or when to speak in the PD group:

*A104-A105: “...in Year 1... I would... ask for permission to speak [smiles]... if I really wanted to say something, I would raise my hand. There was something really about becoming more vocal and becoming... more*

*natural and a lot more sure that if I say something, it would have weight and it would be listened to, whereas before, it was like I couldn't say anything because I was worried that... that what I said wouldn't matter. Or it would be [up] for people to judge me, or criticise me, or think I am weird..."*

Her initial stress and concern that she might be harshly judged by the group members or perceived as *"weird"* led to Alice regressing, developing a habit of *"checking in"* with the tutor after class or seeking reassurance to ensure compliance. She reflected that, *"in the beginning, my process was very young"*. However, what seemed to be a pivotal moment which marked the beginning of the end of striving to be *"the teacher's pet"* occurred when she was referred on one of her assignments.

A5: *"...My essay being referred [felt] very personal rather than just having failed a paper in physics... it was very much about... 'am I good enough'... So, that was very difficult but also, it was very good having personal therapy around that, and it was kind of tremendous... obviously good for my personal growth, in terms of identity, um, and how do I value myself..."*

While confiding how difficult it was for her to feel like the *"bad student"*, deskilled and unworthy, she also recognised this as a poignant moment of learning and growing, as well as starting to explore her sense of worth and identity outside the narrow mould of the *"good, compliant student"* or the *"teacher's pet"*. Alice also seemed to get in touch with her rebellious streak, reminding me of the first tendrils of healthy defiance (Tolpin, 2007).

***“Girl power” or “wives of powerful men”?***

Being a highly qualified Asian woman in the western world seemed to add a layer of complexity to the power dynamic often experienced by Alice, especially in the presence of *“white, male authority”* such as a tutor or supervisor:

A36-A41: *“...maybe it’s more a societal thing? I suppose... the white male figures always turn out to be very... powerful figures. So, there may be a bit of that... But you see, I went to a girls’ school and my **Headmas...** **Headmistress**, she was a very strong female character. And then when I went to university, we had a female president. So... actually... in terms of school, the white men were not the top, powerful figures but for some reason, I think I still perceive it to be the case...”*

I noticed that Alice automatically used the masculine noun (*“headmaster”* instead of *“headmistress”*) when discussing authority, before correcting herself. The same happened (perhaps as a parallel process) while I was transcribing, reminding me of the power of gender stereotypes. Indeed, she linked some of her beliefs to the broader social and political context of being surrounded by people with conservative and traditional values, mentioning how, despite attending a seemingly *“progressive girls’ school, embracing girl power”*, the *“unspoken”* message or assumption was that *“all these women are going to be wives of powerful men”*. Listening to Alice reminisce about the way in which her former classmates were *“being groomed to be very glamorous wives of politicians, [republicans] or CEOs”*, which they ultimately became, I couldn’t help but think of the copy of Levin’s (1972) *“The Stepford wives”* in my bag, which I had forgotten to take out on my way to the train station!

Apparently, the training and the process of personal psychotherapy helped elucidate some of Alice's experiences, including how they seeped into client work:

*A49-A50: "...I think, being Asian, being female... There's still this thing about... expats going to Asia to find Asian girls... I've had clients coming to me and being very flirty, very demeaning in an objectifying kind of way... I set boundaries, I try to stay calm and professional but I've been subjected to this a lot, that sort of... everyday sexism..."*

I listened to Alice explore her experience from a slightly different perspective, viewing her clients as *"very vulnerable"* and *"intuitively trying to be on top... maybe they are worried or they perceive me as the authority and they are trying to almost overpower, overcome that, making these comments about me"*. Looking at this through a different lens seemed to enhance her awareness when working with this particular client group.

### ***"They don't like anyone different"***

While reflecting on her authority as a female Asian psychotherapist based in the UK and the unique challenges encountered on her journey, Alice also talked about the lack of belonging or feeling like an "outsider" while starting her placement at a Counselling Service in a small town in Middle England:

*A65-A68: "...when I went in, I felt that they were looking at my face... because I am different. And they don't come across very many Asian people... They had difficulty accepting me into the organisation. Even though*

*they kind of tried to befriend me, on the surface... Um, but I really noticed their facial expressions, 'cos you can't hide that... Then it became quite hostile because some of my clients also didn't like that... I wasn't one of those white, middle-class, middle-aged ladies. And rather than explore that, my supervisor's approach was, 'You must have done something wrong, it's all your fault'..."*

Because the racism was very subtle and covert, never acknowledged or discussed, Alice found this even more damaging, *"because then they made me question my professional ability"*. Once again, there seemed to be no place for discussion with either the placement supervisor or the Head of the Counselling Service, "channelling" the harsh, critical authority figures from her childhood. Referring to their very *"fixed idea of what a therapist should be"*, Alice reflected on her decision to move back to the Big City in order to *"be able to be myself"*.

***"Rather than this authority telling me right and wrong, it's about me"***

Discussing Alice's experience in supervision seemed to encourage deeper self-exploration. She mused about her countertransference (trying to please the authority figure she initially viewed as an overly strict, *"critical"* parent), which gradually shifted to a different perception of the supervisor as a more *"nurturing"* parent with whom she felt more *"equal"*. Distinguishing between *"authoritarian and authoritative"* supervisors and tutors, she recalled her experience with her first supervisor:



A110-A113: *“...I went to her house, and... she sat there, on the other side of the room... It almost felt like being questioned by the police. I always had this feeling of her as the executioner or something, and I am sitting here and being questioned. I don’t know whether it was partly the setting, ‘cos it was literally so apart. But also I think that was... just me... with her being my first supervisor, when I was still kind of waiting for her to tell me what to do...”*

Coming to terms with her own historical process enabled Alice to shift her perception and *“the way I treat supervision”*:

A119-A121: *“...Rather than this authority telling me right and wrong, it’s about me taking an active role and asking for what I need. And also trusting the relationship, so I can explore my mistakes or my uncertainties...”*

A massive step towards developing her own authority was learning to identify and express her needs, and also starting her private practice. She confided how this made her realise that *“many Asian clients want an Asian therapist... so being Asian actually became a unique, selling point”*. Seeing her background as an asset rather than a disadvantage helped improve Alice’s self-esteem and fuelled her growing motivation to find another supervisor whom she perceived as more attuned to her:

A135-A138: *“...I tell her about my difficulties and my dilemmas... and I **feel very equal**. It felt like a really big shift... ‘Cos it’s not so much about the supervisors, they all have different styles but also what I looked for in a supervisor and how I responded. Because my supervisor in the early stages of my training... she maybe wanted to create... a more equal relationship but I couldn’t engage in that as I wanted her to be the authority... to provide praise or acknowledgment. Now with my current supervisor, I’m finally engaging in*

*that equal relationship and have my own voice... still getting her opinions and comments to help me, to support me. But I am in charge...*

Alice felt that she no longer needed that external validation from *“the powerful”* in order to feel less disempowered. Instead, she could more authentically discuss and reflect on her needs, dilemmas, and challenges during the clinical process.

A139-A143: *“...I was more about pleasing my supervisor and whether I am ‘good enough’ whereas now I don’t feel like I need to please her. I just appear as I am...”*

Becoming the *“person in charge”* and reclaiming her power in supervision as opposed to being forever *“stuck”* in the role of the *“compliant student”* seemed to facilitate Alice on her path towards *“integrating my two identities - the professional and the personal one...”*

### ***“Insecure attachment made my experience harder”***

Reflecting on some of the difficulties she encountered during the process of training and adapting to another culture, Alice linked them to her early attachment which she referred to as *“disorganised”*. While she alluded to her father as a *“passive”* presence, she described her mother as *“highly competent but also unpredictable”*, only wanting to hear *“the good news”* about her daughter’s achievements; yet nothing about her struggles:

A156-A157: *“...My mother is very unpredictable... She’d get very angry, volatile really. And she was only interested in me when I did very well academically. So, growing up, it was always like, I tell her the good news. You know, ‘don’t tell me about anything bad. I am not interested if you’re sad, or if you’re unhappy’. So I think that’s probably... feed into my... inability to ask for help in the process. I felt like I had to be really good. That’s the only way to please tutors, whatever, make them like me. But then I didn’t really know that, actually, I could ask them for help or tell them I am struggling with something. Initially, that was the issue... I felt quite alone and struggling on my own.”*

In a powerful moment of revelation during the interview, Alice reflected how her attachment to her parents, particularly her mother, might have affected her *“assumptions and projections about authority figures in the training process”*.

### ***Follow-up: “Staying out of trouble”***

During our follow-up communication, Alice expressed her concern after reading the original interview transcript. While referring to perhaps *“being too cautious”*, she was worried that a former tutor or supervisor may identify her because of the uniqueness of her story, despite the changes made to names and places. She hinted at some recent experiences *“...which have also made me a bit paranoid about [the risk of] offending anyone personally and wanting to stay out of trouble”*. Alice mused how, ironically, this was part of her past experiences with authority. She appeared comforted by my confirmation that I would be transcribing all the interviews myself, without anyone else having access to the raw data. However, mindful of the

possibility of publishing my project at a later point, I restated what was already in the Informed consent form, reassuring her that she had a right to withdraw or to decide what would be included in the final narrative account. I felt that discussing this openly while giving her a choice would be a different and more positive experience compared to her early years when discussion or *“having a voice”* were strongly discouraged.

In subsequent communication, Alice emphasised that *“...I stand by what I said... I think it’s important to communicate the ideas we discussed”*. I experienced the tension of holding opposing views (both Alice’s and mine), namely the wish to bring her story to life and not *“back out of that”* but at the same time, *“to stay out of trouble”*. While initially I linked the latter and her fear of being identified to her trauma and difficulty of speaking up, in hindsight my perception shifted. As a result of Peer validation (the feedback I received from my “critical friend” and my research supervisor), I began to feel that by asking me this, she was in fact using her voice, safeguarding herself by setting a boundary and making her preferences known in regard to what I include in her narrative account, rather than trying to please me or to comply with my criteria. This transformed her into an assertive collaborator and the *“person in charge”*, actively employing her self-agency.

## Zoya - The Survivor, Who Grew Wings

*With no one there to protect me,*

*It was survival, it was boot camp.*

*Someone putting your guts through the blender*

*But then I was held, while falling apart.*

I travel to the home address of my next participant, Zoya. I feel humbled, appreciative of her trust to invite me into her personal space, a bit nervous but nonetheless excited. I look at the grey sky, wondering if it will start raining and emotionally preparing to cross the threshold. An eloquent, kind woman close to my own age (around 40), Zoya opens the door to greet me. I hear her dog barking. A smell of cookies and fresh linen reaches my nostrils. I see her daughter's drawings in the corridor (she is the same age as mine), as we walk together to Zoya's study.

Born in a former communist republic in Central Europe, Zoya tells me about her decision to leave her *“messed up family, obsessed with money and status”*, arriving in the UK nearly two decades ago. She muses how she desperately needed a new start. Entirely on her own in the beginning, Zoya reflects on working as an au pair and a childminder for a few years before meeting her husband, and shares how taking care of *“autistic children made me think of diagnoses as a way to place people in boxes”*. She links this to her growing interest in the field and ultimately applying for a BSc degree course in psychology, followed by training as a person-centred

counsellor and, subsequently, as an integrative psychotherapist working within the NHS.

***“The power of uniqueness and individuality”***

While enrolled on the psychology degree course, Zoya felt that more attention was paid to people as groups rather than as individuals:

*Z5-9: “...I always believed in the power of uniqueness and individuality. When we were doing research, I was aware of that uniqueness and individuality being lost in the data. The extremes, the ‘outliers’ were never included... because of messing up your data. I had a very internal reaction to those things... I think an internal and emotional world that was always very fascinating to me, gets lost while you try to measure it or run statistical analysis on it...”*

Wishing to understand more about the individual human beings rather than to *“reduce people to a bunch of symptoms”*, she embarked on her counselling and psychotherapy journey:

*Z23-24: “...It was fantastic because I felt **safe** there very quickly, in the group. Yes, it was difficult... but I felt for the first time after many years the sense of belonging - a big driver for me, like you feel at home. **You’re important as a person...**”*

She reminisced about being part of a group she described as immensely supportive, providing her with an unfamiliar sense of security.

***“In a nurturing environment, you grow, you blossom”***

Zoya felt that her tutors’ consistent, robust presence and acceptance also contributed to her growing trust and wish to learn. She alluded to one tutor in particular:

*Z27: “...That teacher, she was challenging but extremely caring, spiritually there for me... and inspirational. And even though it was very painful... in the second year particularly [smiles], **it was like someone putting your guts through a blender**... a complete deconstruction of the Self... like, going back to basics and starting... and naming things. Yet... for the first time in my life, it was a group of people where I felt safe and okay being exposed. So, I shared a lot and... I felt ‘held’ even when falling apart. My tutors were challenging but they believed in me and I felt like I grew wings! I thought, ‘God, I can do this!’...”*

In contrast to her unhappy childhood, where both she and her three siblings were *“never important, never the centre of attention”*, Zoya was seen as a unique person. She tentatively drew parallels between the way she felt in the process group and in the presence of her caring grandmother, who lived in a rural area in her home country - the only member of her family *“who gave me unconditional positive regard”*:

*Z38-42: “...She always, um, nurtured me. She always had time for me, we had amazing conversations. She was this... very free spirit and very open... I then started to believe that what I am feeling is validated and important. I suppose if you say... **she built a home in me**... I like the metaphor of the home that you built for yourself with different rooms that need*

*spring cleaning sometimes - it speaks to me... It taps into my way of looking at the world..."*

Zoya added, her eyes tearing up, that she always associated the idea of home with *"the feeling it gives you"*. She regarded her grandmother's home as a *"safe place"* to go to, visualising it when things were particularly hard, and felt similarly in the process group:

*Z47: "...It's never about how big the house is. My grandma's house was a tiny cottage, very humble and modest but the safest place on the planet, and I had this same feeling of safety in my process group... In a nurturing environment, you grow, you blossom. It had... unspeakable value. I never felt that at my parents' big, flashy, empty home..."*

She recalled the tense relationship between her father whom she described as *"an extreme alcoholic"* and her mother whom she viewed as *"incredibly narcissistic, obsessed with money and status"*. Following their divorce, her mother quickly remarried an affluent man and had two more children after Zoya and her brother, *"because her new husband had no children but his business was important to her and she wanted to keep him"*.

***"You're no one unless you have money and status"***

Reflecting on her family values, Zoya became emotional and expressed some of her (still palpable) anger and frustration. She talked about the expectation to look after her younger siblings while her mother and stepfather were *"out and about,*



*earning money and doing business*". She explained how, *"according to my mother, you're no one unless you have money and status."* Financial success and grandeur were seen as the only signs of prestige and power. Zoya never felt that her unique world and sense of being were *"on the agenda"*.

Z59-63: *"... There was no room for your questions, for your mistakes... My mother's favourite word is 'you should' and she always said her children were her biggest disappointment. At the same time... you were required to do certain things but... there was no rhythm to the day... the dinner was never on the table on time, or we had to make our own dinner. There was a role reversal, so... We were never kids. We had to be very independent, therefore we did not know how to handle certain things and... our structure was never built, we were never guided, or led by a responsible adult. We just hit puberty and... it was a mess."*

With no role model around or a parental figure to lean on, Zoya and the other children were left to their own devices. She mused how during her teenage years, *"I went completely off the rails"*. Consistently neglected as a child whose needs were never met, Zoya was not used to asking for help and support - and they were never offered.

### ***Teachers as Indifferent Bystanders***

Having to rely only on herself despite yearning for a sense of belonging, Zoya confided that she enjoyed going to school and excelled academically. However, once

the most turbulent, teenage years started, she did not receive the pastoral care one might expect nowadays:

*Z72: "...It's not that school failed me, educationally speaking they didn't but... no one noticed that I... am not looked after. In today's world, if a child is going through what I was going through, not being cared for in a lot of ways - I sh... I would be taken... into foster care or... At school, it was all about 'this is a test and that needs to be done' but also there's a reason for things not... for me not being able to concentrate. I struggled but what was happening to me they didn't see... The teachers were just indifferent bystanders..."*

I could sense Zoya's pain and confusion that her emotional turmoil and struggle went unnoticed or were completely ignored by the teachers, as if she were invisible; that no one intervened. As a result, her feelings of distrust intensified.

*Z86-90: "...There was no one to protect me. I had to learn to survive, and as we know, the individual is very creative in finding ways to survive. So, my rule was, 'don't listen to anybody because no one will have your best interest at heart', neither school, nor family, the only person being my grandma, but I very quickly also learned to protect her, so I wouldn't tell her things... If I think about developmental stages, I was never allowed to be a child in a sense of being carefree, going to play, using my imagination... It was all about survival. It was boot camp [smiles]..."*

I pondered whether her smile was a sign of being slightly dismissive of the hardships she had to go through, masking her anxiety and defending against the pain. Due to the neglect she had to endure, Zoya learnt to be self-sufficient, developing a *"survivor mode"* but also referring to how she *"froze emotionally"*.

Seeing this as an impediment, an obstacle *“that blocks me sometimes”*, she explored how it manifested itself, especially in therapy.

***“The feeling of belonging I could find with my therapist beyond language”***

Zoya talked about the process of personal therapy, which she initially saw as simply another mandatory requirement on the course:

*Z90-91: “...This conviction had developed in me that I don’t need anything, because once the help is not coming, and once you grow up in this environment where you have to count on yourself, you never ask for things... So when I started my therapy, I had this, ‘I have to be here, but I don’t need it. I’m fine.’ You know, this arrogance about it, I suppose. And just ticking off the box. But I happened to be pregnant at the time with my second child and I miscarried... I completely fell apart, but that became a **door** to my feelings...”*

She went on to say that her psychotherapist’s solid presence and empathy enabled her to open up:

*Z95-101: “...She made me feel safe, and she had a quality about her, that helped me open up and relate to her... Er, and being a foreigner is quite a rare feeling but I always felt that I was different even when I lived in my home country. So, it wasn’t an alien feeling to me - feeling like an outsider. I lived in London for 8 years so that was a completely... yeah, I felt like a part of the cosmos. Um, but the feeling of belonging, I could find with my therapist beyond language... She was very calm and she had this quality about her,*

*that calmness that my grandma had. Something was there that I found very comforting and nurturing. Yeah, and the way she was welcoming every emotion... Some of the things were very difficult for me to articulate..."*

This really influenced the way Zoya was relating to her own clients, focusing on their personal autonomy and creating the nurturing environment she herself had been longing for since her childhood.

***Follow-up: "Just because you have a title, that doesn't mean you deserve to be glorified"***

Zoya and I kept in touch until our next meeting, when she informed me that she had decided to leave her job within the NHS following a rupture with her supervisor. She alluded to experiencing intense anxiety and struggling to cope:

*Z161-165: "I have always wanted to help my clients feel safe, holding them, because it has a personal value to me, because I lived through it, I know what it can do to a person. But I realised I had ended up in a job... an environment where none of that was important. It was box-ticking, it was... Again, authority, rules imposed on me, that I don't agree with... rules for the sake of rules... it [felt] so wrong... I actually experienced anxiety for the first time since early childhood. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't function. I would completely detach, I would have chest pains, I would wake up in the middle of the night because I was losing my integrity at work. I couldn't treat those people in six sessions... And... I decided to give one more session to a guy - I made a clinical decision, and then I was criticised about that in supervision.*

*She said, 'so why did you give him an extra session?'... I said, 'because his mother just died.' And then she said, 'so what?' to me... I... I could feel myself literally boiling. And things like, if I have to explain this to you, well, I don't want to work with you... Just because you have a title, that doesn't mean you deserve to be glorified... when I can see you don't care..."*

Making the difficult decision to quit her job, Zoya decided to focus on developing her private practice. She felt this was the *"right choice"*, despite her mother calling her a failure. She felt that her training had really helped her to find the strength to make a stand and to resign:

*Z226-228: "...The most magnified part of the training was the care that they were providing, it was the way they trust, you know, the favourite saying, 'trust the process'. They were embracing that... and that was the first institution in my life which provided that in a very wise way. They didn't... sort of, glorify themselves because they had that status. It was all very much about the people, about the students. This made the whole difference..."*

Reflecting on this, Zoya expressed a deep sense of gratitude at being able to transfer it to her own relationship with her clients and clinical work, adding, *"now my intuition is the driving force... I believe once the person feels safe, if they feel that you can hold them, they will show you the way."*

Feeling deeply impacted by Zoya's *story of survival* but also (similarly to Dimitri) of *profound transformation* and *flight*, following the complete deconstruction of the internalised past concepts and *"unfreezing"* of the person underneath the mask, I was in awe. I felt shaky and had goose bumps at the end, as if I had listened to a manifesto (Frank, 1995).

## Mantas - The Rebel, Refusing to Sit Still

*I was wronged, the system failed me.*

*They wanted to punish me, and they did.*

*Being boxed, being pigeonholed,*

*I refused to be another brick.*

I travel to meet up with Mantas on a particularly hot, summer day. We have arranged a meeting at his private practice setting. The cool air in the lobby hits my flustered face. It takes a while for my eyes to adjust to the darker interior after being out in the blazing sun. I finally see his smiling face and follow him to his consulting room which is air-conditioned but I notice straight away that there are no windows. As if to compensate, Mantas has decorated the walls of his office with pictures of windows and open spaces. I think of this as an interesting paradox, once his story about refusing to have a *“boxed view of things”* and needing *“air and space”* starts to unfold.

Born in a Soviet-style socialist republic, Mantas is an Integrative psychotherapist working in the areas of substance misuse, anxiety, and anger management. After the sudden death of his brother in a car accident, he relocated to the UK, feeling *“lost”* and with the vague idea that he needed to *“fix himself”*. Following his process of bereavement and a few unsuccessful business endeavours, he eventually enrolled on a psychology degree course and subsequently embarked on two postgraduate training courses in counselling and psychotherapy. What I find

particularly fascinating about his account are the varying experiences he had at three different educational settings.

### *Tutors as “celebrities” versus “ordinary human beings”*

Reflecting on the beginning of his training journey towards obtaining his psychology degree, Mantas alluded to his tutors as tremendously knowledgeable “*superstars*” in their field:

M5: “...I mean all the lecturers at [Training setting 1] were just absolutely amazing... head of their field, celebrities of the topics that they were teaching... you could ask any question. They would encourage you to think... it was the perfect environment for me to grow and freed me from a lot of... yeah, they literally changed my worldview there...”

In contrast to this positive experience, he perceived his counselling training very differently:

M6: “...Then I started my postgraduate counselling training at [Training setting 2]. So... it was kind of 50:50 experience. There were a couple of lecturers that were really good and interesting, and knowledgeable. Another half were very insecure. You couldn’t ask them questions... if you asked something, they’d start attacking you...”

Mantas referred to his tutors at Training setting 2 as “*defensive, angry and punitive in their responses, if I asked them something outside of their repertoire of information they had prepared to deliver*”. He described feeling “*pushed back into my*

*place*". This seemed to trigger some of his past material and experiences with authority (e.g., teachers at school). Thinking of narrative and plot, and the position of the characters (Gergen & Gergen, 1984), enablers, and constraints, it was not hard to identify the tutors in Training setting 1 as the "heroes" (or rather, "*superheroes*") in Mantas' story, as opposed to the "villains" he encountered on his journey in Training setting 2. I was curious about this almost Kleinian division (Klein, 1952) which he was also able to pick up on and link to his growing self-awareness and reflective capacity, mentioning how later in the process he had started to realise that *"...I still had many of these 'shoulds' and 'hads' - this is how things should work, this is how a lecturer or a teacher should be, instead of staying open to what the tutors had to offer."*

By the time he started his Integrative psychotherapy training at Training setting 3, his thinking was no longer "*black and white*". He began to perceive the tutors as "*ordinary, very wise, very skilled but... mortal human beings*". He was also able to reflect on different aspects and nuances of the training:

M104: *"...At [Training setting 3], they were actually quite stable, I didn't see them as bigoted. Just sometimes they would say, 'OK, you have a sharp mind but it's not all about logic and reason. Some things are felt. You can't explain and rationalise everything. It needs to be experiential kind of feeling and understanding...' So, they probably were teaching a bit of that to me..."*

He was able to recognise the impact of this stable "*down to earth*" environment while simultaneously developing a more balanced view of the tutors as "*ordinary human beings*" rather than as bigoted villains or "*superheroes*". He applied some of these insights to his own clinical practice:



M95: *“So... when I am working with people... There are so many reasons why and how people end up struggling... experiencing pain, but it puts me in this humble position of asking, ‘I really don’t know how did you get there’ and listening to what clients have to say... because it’s complex...”*

### ***Transference in Supervision***

Seeing his tutors as “*human beings*” (the phrase “humanising the authority” kept popping up in my mind), Mantas was also becoming better equipped to reflect on his own process in supervision:

M44-M45: *“...One of my tutors is actually my clinical supervisor now. Initially, there was some kind of transference. I thought, ‘Why is she so... snobbish and cold?’ I don’t know where I got it from, how did I put her into that kind of... **bad authority box** that she didn’t deserve but I got this really kind of negative vibe and attitude towards her... but then, eventually, I realised that all of that was just coming out of my head... nothing to do with her. She was very kind, very um, attentive. Very supportive...”*

Reflecting on what was evoked in the transference realm enabled Mantas to revisit some old “*wounds*” and to make sense of how past experiences impacted his more recent perceptions.

### *“Would you like to sit on it?” or History Repeating Itself*

Mantas had a strongly felt experience of “déjà vu” and of early history repeating itself during his psychotherapy training. While in his second year at Training setting 3, he had to apply for mitigating circumstances due to a delay in starting a clinical placement. Apparently, his request was approved and the deadline was extended but he never received a reply. Not having any idea what was happening, he *“was waiting and waiting”*. Finally, he was informed that he had failed the module due to an insufficient number of clinical hours and had to repeat Year 2.

M29-M33: *“...How was I supposed to know if nobody had communicated it to me? I was livid, really angry... it felt personal, why am I treated this way... I remember I went to my course leader to complain, and it was like, ‘Um, would you like to sit on it?’ So... what? ‘What do you mean? I was wronged, the system failed me, and now I have to pay the tuition fees for one more year, resubmitting everything, just because somebody failed to do their job. And you are telling me to sit on it?’... I felt so vulnerable, coming for support, and all I was getting, was ‘Would you like to sit on it?’...”*

Mantas explored his *“bouquet of feelings”* among which anger, frustration and vulnerability, perceiving his course leader’s response as a *“failing duty of care”*. Eventually, a compromise was reached. After Mantas filed his complaint, the decision was made for him to repeat Year 2 but without paying and only submitting the assignment for *“that one module”* while accruing the required clinical hours. He recalled feeling exceedingly disappointed. However, repeating Year 2 proved to be a *“blessing in disguise”*, leading to some highly profound moments of learning

especially in the experiential group, where *“I met some really good people, really bright students, so I was happier with the group in Year 2 the second time around and I became very close friends with some of them.”*

Yet, in the process of his therapy, early memories were evoked of feeling unsupported and punished, linked very closely to this more recent experience in an almost eerie way:

M47-M48: *“...Repeating Year 2 was almost history repeated where I’ve experienced being back at school... Umm, it was... 1989-ish. The smell of freedom was in the air... but at school... the things were like, really in the box, really kind of telling you what and how to do and no space for you to do anything different, and I wasn’t the mind that they could put in a box... I was a kid, I was bright and if... they couldn’t get me with... the academic requirements because I did it above and beyond, so they put it on my behaviour...”*

Feeling bored and stifled in the classroom, young Mantas, who was only 7 or 8 years old at the time, was forced to repeat Year 2 at his primary school, despite having excellent grades, for failing his behavioural report and for being disobedient and not *“sitting still”* in class.

***“I never wanted to be another brick in the wall!”***

Recalling his early experience within the educational system in his native country, Mantas explained how he never felt challenged academically or given a more advanced task to complete, to ensure that his young mind was engaged:

*M53: “...If they asked me any questions, I’d answer them, and they’d say, ‘now go sit, and be quiet’. And I wouldn’t be quiet. I would make jokes, I would write things, I would disrupt the classroom, because I was bored. I had nothing... I wasn’t challenged. So, eventually the teachers conspired and they... basically put the marks so that I would have to repeat the year. They wanted to punish me, and they did...”*

When his mother attempted to plead with the Headmaster and the other teachers, asking them to test him and ascertain that he did not need to repeat the year, Mantas explained how:

*M59-M60: “...I saw her upset and arguing with them, so I said, ‘Mum, let’s go home. I... I accept the defeat. I should have kept quiet, I shouldn’t have annoyed the teachers, and I did it, and now I am paying for it’. I guess that was my life lesson. And again, it was a funny thing, because I... when I repeated the year, I ended up being in a selected class with... the brightest kids. I really felt at home, I made the best friends...”*

While Mantas was able to appreciate the “*silver lining*” and the friendships he built the second time around, he was acutely aware of the failure of the system to provide a more stimulating environment for children who were ahead or more academically advanced. Listening to him allude to his resignation, sense of

helplessness and acceptance of the defeat at such a young age was heart-breaking for me. The teachers had decided to simply “*deal with him*” and other children in a similar situation by punishing them and impeding their progress. He added:

M74-M77: “...*There were a lot of these problems that shouldn't be a problem. Wearing the school uniform I hated or what pen you write with, for example! Who cares? Write with this or write with that, as long as I am writing and learning, who cares... But those things were really important for some reason... I think I've still got this, er, something switches when I meet a bigoted person. It's almost like, they're stuck in their way, can't see beyond some rule they heard and have been repeating for decades...*”

He drew a powerful analogy with Pink Floyd's music video:

M81-M83: “...*I really suffered because of that - being boxed, being pigeonholed... like this Pink Floyd video, 'The Wall'!... I never wanted to be another brick in the wall. And always pushed very hard and suffered if somebody tried to turn me into a brick...*”

### ***“Enforcing the rules for the sake of enforcing the rules”***

Mantas contemplated how these early experiences might have shaped his view of authority:

M79: “...*I can accept authority I can respect. But if I don't, if it's just authority because somebody said they are authority, they've got this for some*

*reason, I always struggle... with people who are enforcing the rules for the sake of enforcing the rules...*

He mused how, whenever the system fails, the *“rebel gets out of the box and I attack, I retaliate”*. However, looking through a different lens of “humanising” the authority (reminiscent of his more recent view of tutors as *“ordinary human beings”*), he alluded to how they may be doing *“the best they can but they’re just humans and sometimes they don’t support you in the best possible way because they have their own soft spots”*.

Mantas also examined his experience and emotional responses in Training setting 3 in the broader context of his early education:

M108: *“...Some of that was being fuelled by being hurt by system failure, being hurt by the course leader... She was supposed to support me but told me, ‘go sit on it’. So, there were those elements that maybe triggered my rebellious part... again it’s fine when the authority is fair, but when it’s unfair and it traps you, puts you into a frame that you can’t get out of, that’s when I don’t... sit still. I make noise...”*

His refusal to fit into a box was illustrated while taking on a job at a Drug and Alcohol Service immediately after completing his postgraduate Counselling qualification and shortly before his Integrative psychotherapy training. Initially, he felt motivated and inspired but following cuts in public spending, the charity lost its funding. It was bought by another charity he described as having a markedly different, *“corporate style”*. Explaining how face-to-face contacts with clients (often struggling with severe withdrawal symptoms) had been *“almost reduced to nothing”*, Mantas referred to having *“strong clashes with the new management”* and becoming

*“enemy number 1”* after repeatedly mentioning a *“duty of care”* to the clients and standing up on their behalf as a clinician. Eventually, completely drained and overworked, he resigned, refusing to apply for a similar position and making the decision to work as a self-employed practitioner because *“I [don’t want to] have any more bosses but do it my own way...”*

Similarly, when choosing his psychotherapy training modality, he shared how *“I went for an integrative model, where I am not bound by one school of thought”*. Mantas felt that this provided him with a sense of freedom as it meant he did not have to *“adhere to one dogma, one faith”*.

#### ***Follow-up: “Things that are raw are the most valuable”***

During our follow-up meeting, Mantas reflected more on his relationship with his parents:

M136-M139: *“...My dad was a flagship captain... he would command the whole fleet and he had this very powerful aura around him... for me he was some kind of a demigod. I wouldn’t question him... I was more into figuring out what he wants, what he would approve...”*

Seeing his father as this god-like, powerful figure, who only valued reason, logic, and *“rational things”*, Mantas focused his efforts on subjects like maths and physics, playing chess in his leisure time in order to impress him and earn his approval. Decades later, it dawned on him during the psychotherapy course that *“not everything is logic and reason, some things are felt”*, in contrast to what he had

internalised from this early idealised (and very powerful) role model. Mantas referred to his mother as *“the complete opposite - irrational, raw, creative energy that just splashes everything. She used to beat me black and blue...”* On the other hand, he perceived her as *“an open book”* even though he acknowledged that she was abusive. He added, smiling, *“I was her counsellor since I was five!”* I linked this with Minuchin’s (1967) idea of parentification, reverse roles and inverted family hierarchy, wondering whether Mantas had been acting as a substitute attachment figure for his mother (Lapsley et al., 2000) ever since his parents’ divorce which also took place when he was in Year 2, following *“an incident of domestic violence”* when his father *“got drunk and started throwing furniture around”*. Even though Mantas was not physically hurt, this deeply traumatised him, further complicating the already difficult relationship with his mother:

M149: *“...Despite... me and my mum, having a very close relationship, and actually a lot of fun, I think that really my first... wrong authority was mum. She was enforcing the rules that were not reasonable, they were a lot of the time just emotional, just because somebody said something... I know it now but back then I didn’t understand... she was the first authority I started to distrust, to fight against... knowing that if I don’t stand my ground, I’ll be wiped out... Still, looking from another angle, I was the purpose of her life. Every penny she earned, she would buy me these expensive shoes and clothes, she’d spend on my education. She would be wearing the same shoes she bought 5 years ago. I mean, I was her beacon. But at the same time, beaten... Beacon and beaten. So, both...”*

The process of training, personal therapy, and reflections in group process and supervision helped Mantas come to terms with the confusion and



disorganisation around being “*beacon and beaten*”, enabling him to work through some things. He mused how despite the pain in the past, he had come to realise that “*things that are raw are the ones that are the most valuable*”, deepening his learning in later life. His story reminded me of the *epiphany* narrative (Saldaña, 2016), a journey in which the storyteller meets suffering head on, accepts it, and seeks to use it as a life lesson. I kept thinking of a knight’s quest, but also of a fairy-tale inhabited by heroes, villains, different forces, and even a demigod. Yet, I perceived this tale with a tinge of sadness, evoked by his journey from “*beaten*” to “*beacon*”.

## **Beatriz - The Good Girl, Gone... Manager!**

*“Tap-tap-tap!”, the tapping of the boots,*

*Just around the corner, chasing someone all night.*

*Growing up in silence, with this awareness of danger...*

*Each conversation for me was a fight.*

Beatriz got in touch with me after reading my announcement on the BACP research board in May 2019 but went travelling overseas shortly afterwards. I did not hear from her for nearly 3 months. During this time, I interviewed Mantas and thought that he would be my last participant. However, just two days before my (tentative) deadline to finish Data collection (towards the end of August 2019), Beatriz wrote to me, explaining that she had been exceptionally busy and asking whether we could meet up. In line with the relational ethics of my research and the idea of “equal voices”, I agreed. Moreover, I felt very curious. I was experiencing a sense of loss and regret that this stage of the research which I found to be the most exciting - getting to meet my collaborators and to hear their stories - was coming to an end. Therefore, we arranged a meeting at the University Counselling Service where she worked.

Beatriz was born in South America. Shortly after her birth, a coup d'état overthrew the government in her country of origin, replacing it with an authoritarian military dictatorship. I felt slightly intimidated prior to meeting her because of her extensive experience not only as a trauma therapist but also as a supervisor and

manager of a University Counselling Service. I reflected on my own countertransferential feelings, realising that I was seeing her as an embodiment of authority (more so than the other collaborators). I wondered how this may play out in our power dynamics. However, her straightforward approach and warm demeanour quickly put me at ease. Two minutes into the interview, I was feeling immensely grateful that I had decided to meet her because her story revealed a markedly different perspective.

### ***“Time of violence and threat to life”***

Revisiting some of her earliest memories, Beatriz referred to her childhood as a *“time of violence and threat to life”*:

B18-B23: *“...It was [everywhere]. You’ll see it on the streets... If there was a demonstration, you’ll have to be careful and look for the exit... Because... You may be... taken by the police which was very violent... that’s also how people were being tortured and... disappearing, too. So, I grew up with that awareness of danger... And until today, I keep my distance from the police, although I live in a completely different country...”*

This early experience of seeing the authority as the aggressor rather than the protector, as someone or something to be feared and avoided at all costs, seemed to lead to an almost automatic “flight response”. Many years later, already living abroad, Beatriz found herself amidst a peaceful demonstration:

B25-B27: *“...My immediate reaction was, ‘where is the police coming from?’ Being caught in the middle, I had this millisecond and I thought, ‘hang on, I am not in my home country’ [smiles]... That demonstrates to me how*

*automatic... the response and the reactions had become. How embedded... from a very young age, 'police is bad' as a default, as an immediate thought. Something that you don't stop to think about..."*

Beatriz was only a toddler at the time of the coup d'état, without any conscious memory of the militaries' presence in her family home. However, she became used to being hypervigilant. Much later in life, she realised this early trauma was manifesting as an overpowering sense of dread, anxiety, and paranoia:

*B29-B39: "...Friends of my parents were killed, some of them were prisoners. The militaries came into my house as well, so my dad was, was at shotgun. And they were registering the whole house and they, they... I was so small when that happened, so I don't know, but this was something that my mum always carried around. I was living in an area where there were militaries around, near my house... With the guns and everything. And at night, I remember the... the sound of their boots, walking around, looking for people or chasing... Sometimes they were shooting as well. So, there was always some kind of movement. You'd hear [knocks on table "tap-tap-tap"] the tapping of the boots. Running around, at night. My mum would always say, 'Don't go to the windows!', and things like that... So yes, there's a lot of memories from demonstrations in the 1980s, also quite dangerous... That's where the big guns... early 80s, and I was older, so I understood more..."*

While I noticed her slightly disjointed speech and the way she hesitated to describe the *"militaries and their guns"*, I was also struck by the discrepancy between her sharp inhalation and how it was quickly replaced by a calmer, almost conversational tone, as if masking and suppressing her emotions had become second nature. She almost appeared detached from the vivid descriptions of killings,

torture, and disappearances of loved ones which made me think of possible dissociation.

### ***School as a Shelter***

In contrast with my own experience, Beatriz confided that while the streets in her homeland were full of threat and the walls of her home echoed with *“the tapping of the boots”*, her primary and secondary school had become *“a shelter of sorts”*. She did not perceive school as *“an oppressive environment”* because *“we had all sorts of things going on - music and theatre, and an annual festival... There was a whole way of thinking and doing things slightly differently.”* Being at school provided her with a sense of security and with some semblance of control over her life. In that safe, protected environment, she threw herself into her studies:

B54-B59: *“...I have always been very committed to studying... I read all I had to read, and then I would go to my classes and my tutorials, challenging and questioning the teachers... Always being very vocal. So now I was challenging these authorities but the trick was to... know and to be diligent with my studies. And I was always on time for my classes... presenting my assignments, very punctual... **doing everything right.** I’ve been reflecting on this part of me that’s like, the ‘Good Girl’. The one who behaves very well...”*

In hindsight, it dawned on her that the *“Good Girl”* persona allowed her to voice some of her opinions and from that position to challenge not only the teachers but the authority she felt they represented as *“part of the system”*.

***“I didn’t like anybody, representing any authority”***

Unsurprisingly (in the light of her early experiences), Beatriz started developing a highly ambivalent relationship with authority, including her own. As a university student in her country of origin, she felt wary and suspicious, perceiving every argument or discussion with her teachers as a “fight”. She confided that *“I didn’t like anybody who was representing any authority. So my attitude was always confrontational.”* While preparing her arguments and getting into “fights” with the teachers, she thought of them as representing the system - this invisible but very violent machinery; and perhaps in a way, they were. Beatriz started losing sight of the human beings behind their roles and positions, until her parents’ divorce when she was 21. Struggling with depression and unable to focus or find the motivation to return to campus, Beatriz skipped a couple of weeks without notifying anyone.

B65-B69: *“...I finally went to the university to talk with the Director - my teacher in Social Psychology. He was very well known and appreciated, and I hated him. His classes were the ones I was diligently preparing for to challenge him. But then we’ll always end up having conversations and discussions that for me was kind of a fight but he... he embraced that... However, I didn’t experience this as something nice and positive. But when I was in this difficult situation, I went to his office and I said, ‘Listen, I haven’t been coming, there’s this [problem that I have]’. And he replied, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll talk to all your teachers and everything will be okay. Is there anything else I can do for you?’ And I was like, er... He was so kind, so supportive. Even offered to talk to my parents. It was incredible, and that made me realise that in a way we were bonding through all these conversations and discussions...”*

*But my view of what I was doing, was, 'I am up against these people. I am against the system'... Which was to do [inaudible] with authority. I felt immature..."*

Curiously, I experienced Beatriz as being almost reluctant to acknowledge that the director (a fear-inducing, prominent authority figure) had been supportive. Reflecting on her positive relationship with her parents (once she had come to terms with their divorce), she attributed her distrust towards authority almost entirely to the regime:

*B71-B74: "...Despite the divorce... at home we had a very nice upbringing. My father wasn't an authoritarian man... There were conflicts but they were spoken about and we did have... a lot of good family memories. So, in terms of authority, I saw him more as a protective, benevolent authority. My... desire to challenge authority came from the system... we couldn't speak freely, we couldn't... but I found my way, probably through being a 'Good Girl' I was able to say what I wanted to say. Or earn some level of respect..."*

### ***"Scared of giving my opinion in writing"***

Some of these early, traumatic experiences emerged when Beatriz took on a position of power and authority herself, becoming the senior counsellor and manager of a UK charity. Notably, she was not worried about having to handle a completely new role or interact with her team; what really *"bothered"* her was something else entirely:

*B8 2-B90: "...I had to give my opinion in writing. So... I was in a position of au... Having to say and give my opinion. And I was sooo terribly*

*scared of doing that; of putting my opinion in black and white... I mean, feeling really paranoid and... This may be used against me. In therapy, I was trying to figure out why am I so scared of this, it doesn't make sense! Then I realised this big thing related to silence, that stemmed from childhood. You have to be quiet, you shouldn't express your opinion... er, you are not allowed to... to express... anything against the system, ultimately... because that was very dangerous. If there was anybody else, and they hear you, and there was secret police around you, so... that was creating all these paranoid... thoughts, like 'Something bad can happen to me, if I put my idea in writing... In black and white'. I think **silence** was a huge part of that."*

She added that using English instead of her native language complicated matters further, musing how *"there was a lot of insecurity and fear to give my professional opinion"*. I noticed how initially she had difficulty even pronouncing the word "authority" while referring to her new position in the organisation. Gradually, however, Beatriz overcame her fear and began to enjoy her newly discovered right to express herself, *"and good things came out of that - we managed to establish some very interesting partnerships with other services."* In later years, she actively encouraged the members of her team at the University Counselling Service to voice their opinions and to provide constructive feedback. She was surprised to find out that some of them just wanted to be *"told what to do"*, refusing to take the initiative.

***"I don't want people to be scared of me"***

Reflecting on her current position at the university, Beatriz alluded to feeling *"in-between"*, finding her work and especially the task of motivating people and



changing their attitudes extremely challenging. She said she differentiated between leadership and management.

B102-B108: *“...If we look at the styles of leadership, I tend to be quite collaborative... I like working in a team, I understand collaboration theoretically and in practice, the whole thing about working together and being accountable to each other... but then, there’s this whole element of management that creates a lot of feelings in people, you know, towards you...”*

She explained how she struggled to embrace her authority at times, to be a “good-enough” manager which she saw as being able to tell her team members what to do, and to be more strict and “*assertive*” sometimes, especially when there was a deadline. She realised that she feared turning into an intimidating, stern authority figure, adding pensively, *“I don’t want... people to be scared of me”*. However, she also acknowledged that having structure and working towards a “*common goal*” helped her regain balance and “*stay grounded*”.

### ***“Like ants”***

Reflecting on her role as a clinical supervisor, Beatriz clarified why she believed that “*nobody is too small to make a change.*”

B128-B129: *“...I keep telling my supervisees that I value their work. When they’re in the most desperate moments of... ‘Nothing is changing, this is very difficult’ and so on, I’d always bring up this idea of us, being like ants... Even when we are doing something little in our therapeutic roles, this ‘little something’ has the capacity to touch your client, and then I’ll do something*

*little, and then the other one would do something... that way, we're working together, we're not alone... we're like hard-working ants, bringing the... this whole idea of... togetherness."*

When I asked Beatriz how she thought her supervisees and clients perceived her, she cheekily replied that she knew how she **wanted** to be perceived, namely as *"someone who is present... together with them"*. She wanted to be seen as *"challenging but caring, so that they can experience a sense of safety and security, and express themselves, even be vulnerable in front of you"*. I could not help but notice once again a slight discomfort and reluctance to fully embrace her authority. This also reminded me of vicariously giving to others and trying to provide the systemic and organisational holding she had lacked in her youth.

***Follow-up: "A sense of togetherness, provided by someone that leads"***

During the follow-up interview which took place a little over a month later, Beatriz referred again to being in a state of *"in-betweenness"*. Apparently, the university was undergoing organisational changes and a *"consultation period"* had commenced. As a result, the Counselling Service could be closed. Unlike some of her colleagues who felt anxious, Beatriz said she was excited at the prospect of making a change and being able to provide feedback and have a voice.

Alluding to the transcript I had sent to her as *"inspiring"*, she mentioned thinking about her experience on the trauma therapy course and also during her supervision training in the UK, referring to both as *"very insightful, very stimulating"* in helping her understand more about her own trauma and *"personal path"*. Beatriz only briefly mentioned the experiential group and *"gaining a lot from self-reflection"*.

However, she lamented not being able to form closer relationships with the other group members:

B148-B149: *“...along the way, I’ve managed to establish very positive relationships with tutors, but never with peers... It’s interesting because I never managed to create a group for me...”*

She linked this to cultural differences and a way of relating to others that was *“much more distant than it is in my home country, so that’s something that I’ve learned over the years and at different workplaces”*. While she viewed her work relationships as positive and engaging, she did not perceive them as *“something big and important for me”*. We also discussed an epiphany she said she had recently:

B134-B138: *“...Our conversation... it’s making me realise that in the end, we do need a level of direction. A goal, something that will give us a sense of togetherness. And that can be provided by someone that leads...”*

The interview seemed to bring her new insights while also changing her preconceptions and pre-existing ideas.

The story of Beatriz reminded me strongly of a *testimony* while I was being in the role of the witness. I found some of the traumatic experiences she shared very triggering, especially the ones linked to her embodied paranoia and the *“tapping of the boots”*. The antagonists in this story, *the militaries*, were armed with *“big guns”* and she appeared still unable to talk about them with composure.

## **Reflexivity (After Hearing the Voices)**

*No foreign sky protected me,  
No stranger's wing shielded my face.  
I stand as witness to the common lot,  
Survivor of that time, that place.*

(Akhmatova, 1976, p. 19)

Throughout my fieldwork experience with both Data collection and analysis, from the first contact with my collaborators to transcribing the last word from the last transcript, my process was accompanied by vivid imagery and colourful dreams. Even as I am writing this, sitting in my living room in Canterbury and looking outside, I don't see my flowerpots but Dimitri in the uniform; Zoya, running to her grandmother's cottage; Mantas, bending his head in the Headmaster's office; Beatriz, waking up in the middle of the night to the sound of the boots. Following a conversation with my research supervisor, it occurred to me that this intense connection to the stories (as well as feeling overly attached to my topic) might be linked to conducting the research as an insider, meeting all of the inclusion criteria for the research project myself.

### **Insider Perspective**

While grappling with what was being evoked during the process-laden NI, I began thinking of my position as a narrative researcher and also as a member of the

social group or culture under investigation (Greene, 2014; Ross, 2017). It dawned on me that I was both identifying with and being seen by my collaborators as a “total” rather than “partial insider” (Chavez, 2008), sharing multiple identities with them. In hindsight, I realised that this made my emotional response to their stories and the possibility of arising identificatory feelings particularly strong.

By drawing upon interview transcripts, field notes, and informal recollections, I examined my experiences while interviewing my collaborators, as well as the benefits and challenges of my insider status. On the one hand, it was offering multiple advantages such as access, expediency of building rapport, and richness in the interpretation of data in the light of deep, embodied knowledge of the social, political, and historical contexts (Chavez, 2008). The fact that my relationship with my collaborators continued beyond the initial interview created a very special and (to me) unfamiliar bond. Our shared emotional realities facilitated rapport by providing a deep validation of the *Other's* feelings. My sincere, deeply felt empathy and engagement as well as the shared trauma helped to create an environment where they felt comfortable disclosing emotions, events and processes that they might not otherwise have contributed (Ross, 2017) if interviewed by someone they saw as an “outsider”. In turn, I also identified several important emotional benefits, including feelings of comfort, reassurance, and confirmation of my own painful history which I derived from hearing my collaborators’ stories and reflections, alleviating the sense of isolation and loneliness I had experienced at the beginning of my training (feeling markedly *Other* and the only trainee from an authoritarian background).

On the other hand, however, the “continued sharing of our same-ness” (Ross, 2017, p. 328), especially in relation to our emotional experiences, sometimes felt “too close for comfort”. The presumption that there are shared understandings of

important concepts may sometimes curtail their explicit discussion (Chavez, 2008). I realised that because of my subjective experience of multiple identification (or “total insider” status), I had to pay extra attention to “establishing and maintaining an appropriate degree of both social and emotional distance” (Greene, 2014, p. 9).

In the context of this research, I experienced myself as an insider on multiple levels of emotional significance, including by virtue of having a stigmatised or less privileged identity (immigrant, non-native English speaker and a foreign *Other*, living in post-Brexit Britain) from an authoritarian background (born and brought up in communist Bulgaria) as well as more privileged identities, linked to working in the same professional field (psychology/psychotherapy) and having the same level of education (enrolled on a doctoral training). With some collaborators, I also shared the identity of a cisgender, white woman and/or parent and spouse. I felt that I needed to establish a delicate balance between closeness and distance, between “*me*” - *the researcher*, and “*me*” - *the insider*, maintaining my observing ego.

For example, with one of my collaborators in particular (Zoya), I shared important commonalities (in addition to the inclusion criteria or prerequisites), namely age, gender, an early history of abuse and neglect, and being mothers of daughters (both only children) who were also the same age! It should also be noted that we live in close proximity to each other, in communities which are generally homogenous. It felt natural when Zoya asked me if I would like to go for coffee a week after the interview, together with a friend of hers. However, as tempting as this was, I politely declined her invitation. Josselson (2007) discusses the ethical dilemma of establishing a rapport and close connection with participants who wish to continue the relationship, especially when working with lonely or vulnerable people (Booth, 1999). Even though my target population consisted of individuals who were highly

aware of boundaries (all of them working as psychotherapists or counselling psychologists with a significant experience of personal therapy and clinical supervision), I nonetheless felt that I needed to gently but clearly restate my role as having just a certain period of time to devote to each participant. Josselson (2007) warns that multiple interviews and interactions over time are also more likely to encourage the fantasy of a continuing relationship. I sensed that I was walking a fine line between being respectful and open to communication, and withdrawing gradually in a way that I hoped would leave Zoya feeling honoured and not exploited (Lieblich, 1996).

Furthermore, another downside of my insider status was that my insight into my participants' emotional realities often seemed to be accompanied by intense emotional investment. I strongly felt these emotional implications while conducting and "living out" the NI. Feeling drained and sometimes physically aching after becoming "immersed" in the data, I had to think once again of self-care. In such moments, my insider perspective felt a lot like "going home to a part in my history that I had not learned to love and grieve" (Nguyen, 2012, p. 315). In this homecoming, many memories emerged while listening, transcribing, and diving deep into my collaborators' stories, some of which I included in the Reflective Memos (Appendix 4). I was reminded of a time during my group supervision process when I had felt silenced and unable to utter a word. Another, even more deeply buried memory was that of the labour camps, also referred to as concentration camps, built in Bulgaria during the first decade of the regime and operating until the very end. Especially during the 1950s and 1960s, many people were imprisoned, tortured and perished there. One name in particular - "Belene" - was whispered a couple of times in relation to my great grandfather and how he had to give away his land. Resistance

back then would have meant being sent to the camp in Belene (Appendix 15), and most likely I would not have been here, writing this thesis. The memories, emerging during the process of transcribing particularly Alice's and, at a later stage, Beatriz' interview, impacted me so much that I decided to book six additional sessions with my therapist to explore what had been evoked until I felt more grounded.

### **“Drowning in my own material”**

As Wilkinson (1988) argues, a fully reflexive analysis examines both how our life experience influences the research process, and how our research feeds back into our life experience. Firstly, my approach to research was strongly influenced by feminist principles related to power and equality, and by Buber's (1958) “I-Thou” stance. This required me to be collaborative, transparent, and reflexive in my research relationships (Etherington, 2004). I saw this kind of respectful, trusting, collaborative working relationship as the cornerstone of a transformation where human connection is restored, and agency remains central to the process. However, in conjunction with my insider status, this complicated matters and put me in a position of holding multiple tensions.

I have since been reflecting more critically on my insider status, as well as on the motives, challenges, and consequences of my decision to position participants as collaborators (or co-researchers) which rather than involving an actual collaboration in terms of writing the project, in the NI ethos and tradition usually stems from a wish not to adopt an “expert” position of knowing (Etherington, 2009) but to reduce the power imbalance between “researcher” and “researched”. Gradually, I have come to realise that I was experiencing intense



countertransference in relation to my research topic (around power and “equal voices”) as well as towards the colleagues I had interviewed and their stories. Moreover, to add to this highly emotionally charged and complex dynamic, a parallel process seemed to take place between my experience during Data collection and analysis, and what often transpires on training courses.

Initially, I intensely idealised both my methodology (NI) and the stories I was collecting, feeling **thirsty** and eager for more which I mentioned in my research diary and reflective memos (Appendix 4, p. 311). Later on, however, I started feeling that it was “too much” and began to withdraw emotionally. This was at least on some level reminiscent of what Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) describe in their model for professional development when students tend to idealise their professors and supervisors at the beginning of their training journey but later withdraw or devalue them, resulting in an affective engagement followed by a “dis”-engagement (possibly intensified by the power differential). Such dynamic also echoes the process of idealising one’s parents as a child, devaluing them as an adolescent, to then seeing them as ordinary human beings (reflecting Mantas’ life story and training journey).

At the time of Data collection, I was unaware that my motivation to position myself as a “collaborator” alongside the other “collaborators” (so that we are “equally footed”) went beyond my intention not to oppress them or the importance I placed on the joint co-construction of meanings. Instead, it was largely fuelled by my unconscious need (previously unmet during my own training which was marked by a sense of loneliness and isolation) to experience a sense of belonging, to generate “my own community” of voices and *others* who were able to relate to my struggle in a visceral way and confirm my early relational and historical process. Etherington (2009) discusses becoming part of a community of participants, especially within the

context of early traumatic experiences because trauma tends to create a similar sense of isolation and alienation within survivors. Individuals, who have suffered in silence and whose suffering has been ignored or denied, can come to believe that they do not matter. Inviting participants to become part of a community of people with similar stories can break down the previously felt isolation and stigma. As a result of being listened to respectfully and carefully by someone who is interested in their stories and how they make sense of their experiences, they learn that their life stories are of value to others: when listeners and readers (i.e., “the audience”) are moved by those stories, their suffering is affirmed. Richardson (2000, p. 26) posits that “by emotionally binding together people who have had the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation... It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness.” Although research participants may never meet each other face-to-face, they can nevertheless feel part of such a shared community. This seemed to be one of the implications of this research, but it also constituted part of my unconscious motivation to carry it out - namely, to “generate” a sense of community for those who had experienced such trauma as to be rendered silent or who struggled to find their voices and could not articulate their difficulties even after years of training and personal therapy (like Beatriz). Being the researcher, the interviewer, the collector of stories and, effectively, the author of the shared, collective story made me simultaneously a member and the speaker of that community... but these were one too many hats to wear.

What I had underestimated was how this process of listening to and engaging with the stories began to affect me emotionally and, over time, triggered my own material and past traumatic experience. Retrospectively, I believe this added to the

complexity by making it more difficult to preserve an emotional distance at times. Additionally, my closeness to my research topic sometimes prevented me from assuming a more balanced, middle position between “insider” and “outsider”. Metaphorically speaking, in relation to my insider/outsider status I was treading a tightrope that was stretched over a vast ocean. While this was effectively enabling me to look at multiple different aspects, angles, horizons and to see a “bigger” picture, walking this tightrope required agility and maintaining a fine balance which at times was extremely hard. I was feeling as if I could easily tip too much towards one side or the other. Once aware of that risk, I knew I had to withdraw in order to put a distance between myself and my participants or to assert a boundary, for example, when Zoya signalled picking up on that by communicating a wish to become closer. If I had recognised my countertransferential response sooner or asserted more clearly my role and the boundaries earlier in our communication (thus acknowledging the inevitable power imbalance between us), this might not have transpired.

However, it was difficult to step out of this or gain that much needed distance earlier because I felt “too close for comfort” to some of the stories. This was especially the case given that over-saturation might have been occurring due to the duration of Data collection, conducting the interviews one after the other and trying to maintain an open and empathetic stance. I felt as if I was beginning to experience this over-saturation as drowning in the data rather than what Goodson (2013) refers to as “bathing in the data”. This reminded me of Bromberg’s (2011) description of trauma as “tsunami-like”. He refers to an overflow of affect which is difficult to regulate (Bromberg, 2011; Schore, 2012). On the one hand, the shared trauma with my participants alleviated my loneliness. On the other however, it made it more challenging to maintain the fine balance between closeness and distance because

my own, personal material had been activated and I was not as emotionally regulated as I might have been if I were carrying out the interviews as an outsider. Thus, due to my insider status and identificatory feelings, I was essentially at risk of “drowning in my own material” (“Paula” in Etherington, 2004, p. 122). Needing more structure, a system to organise the data, or (to continue the metaphor) a lifeboat to escape the huge wave threatening to drown me by distancing myself from the rawness of the stories, I withdrew emotionally by becoming overly technical during Data analysis. I got busy with not one but two cycles of coding while also keeping track of code frequencies. Essentially, I believe that I was regressing or reverting slightly to old ways of being and to my previous Self as a “quantitative” researcher, living in a world of numbers, charts, statistical analyses, and clear answers. To put it succinctly, I began coding in order to stop drowning. While this helped on some level, on another it perhaps created more water (due to the amount of codes I ended up with) which meant that some subtle details, possibly mentioned in passing by my interviewees, might have been lost or gone adrift during this dissection of the stories.

I am now aware that my trainee and researcher selves became somewhat enmeshed during Data collection and analysis, and my insider status strongly contributed to this process. As a researcher, I collected data far richer than I had expected. Yet, I had not fully processed or taken into account the scope and depth of the emotional loneliness and unconscious longing I had been left with, both as a trainee during my training journey and in the final stages of “writing up”. I had to become much more measured and careful in the extent to which I “threw” myself into the data. At present, I am cognisant of the need to balance the personal and the professional; of being immersed in the data but also respecting and asserting the boundaries, both my own and those of my participants. I still refer to them as

“collaborators” but with a level of clarity that we are, indeed, not equally footed (my attempts to achieve this only “muddied the waters”). At times, the process of Data collection and analysis felt like “drowning” or a difficult balancing act that posed an emotional challenge. However, while conducting my research, I experienced myself as going through a process of deconstruction and reconstruction that parallels my sense of what happens to counselling psychologists and psychotherapists in training. Zwiebel (2004, p. 259) refers to the “tension between empathic identification and observing distance”. As evidenced by some of the challenges I encountered during Data collection and analysis, keeping an eye on this space and tension is important and may have implications both for the client-therapist dyad, and for tutors, supervisors and module convenors, seeking the optimal balance between closeness and distance.

### **Personal Relationship with Power**

In order to contextualise further my research project and its findings, as well as to shed more light on some of the processes, taking place during the conception and writing of this thesis, I have been reflecting on my evolving relationship with power, strongly influenced by the work of Foucault (e.g., 1977, 1978). The Foucauldian approach to power construes it as a ubiquitous feature of human activities. Foucault even talks of the “microphysics” (McNay, 1994, p. 3) of power, and was concerned with the ways in which it is “imbricated in all social relations, discourses and institutions” (Westwood, 2002, p. 135). This idea of power as something which is everywhere, in a sense omnipresent, seems more plausible to me than examining the concept of power as “some kind of entity whose essence can

be revealed or abstracted from its situations of use” (Dennis & Martin, 2005, p. 200). As an inevitable part of society, power and power imbalances permeate all spheres of life and are bound to occur on training courses. What really resonated with me, however, was that within the Foucauldian context, power (as mentioned earlier) is seen as a productive force - as producing rather than repressing meanings, categorises, and practices in society.

Thinking of myself as “powerless” was very much linked to my childhood experiences. When I was little, I was terrified of the power others had over me. I believe that I wished to change or reframe my previous associations (mostly derived from fearing a faceless, omnipotent State apparatus and its operators) by building a different connection to it, because in my past I felt helpless; power and those dressed in power represented a force against which I could do nothing. While writing my Literature review, I began to see power as a more “tameable” force that could be employed to produce rather than repress new meanings, thereby becoming a conduit towards understanding better my experiences and those of others. Instead of seeing it as something that some people possess and others do not (the top-down or “sovereign” model of power to which I was accustomed), Foucault not only treated power as productive, having the capacity to generate knowledge, but also as relational, operating between people and institutions (Dennis & Martin, 2005). I perceived his ideas as contributing to an effective approach towards contesting and challenging dominant narratives. This made me think of the particular context in which my thesis was written, or to be more accurate, “contexts”, because it was a process encapsulating several different levels of trauma, retraumatisation, and the beginning of healing.

I was inspired to change my research topic in April-May 2016. The idea for this project was conceived after witnessing a rupture between my course tutor at the time and a colleague, who was effectively silenced by the tutor with the words, *“I am not interested in your curiosity”*. A few more incidents followed (including being called *“a borderline monkey”* in my PD group and witnessing other group members being ridiculed, pathologised, or silenced). At first, I dismissed this, as I naively believed that such things could not happen at a modern training setting - especially one, modelling to students empathy, respect, and equal treatment of colleagues and clients alike. Shortly afterwards, I began to feel frozen, light-headed and speechless, experiencing my surroundings as if moving in slow motion. I started having vivid nightmares about the group process; yet, the setting was not my training institute in the UK but my primary school back in Bulgaria (I recognised the staircase, featuring in my nightmares with an astonishing amount of detail). It did not take long before it dawned on me in one of my personal therapy sessions that I was being re-traumatised, experiencing the training environment as very unsafe. Initially, I decided to change the training setting per se by applying to another university. Upon reflection, however, I recalled Foucault’s ideas about how power and power imbalances can produce new knowledge and meanings while fostering new practices. I was determined to change my position with respect to power in a way that would enable me to see power, power imbalances, and even power misuse as having the potential to be a constructive force and a source of learning.

I made the decision to change my research topic towards the end of May 2016. This, however, was less than a month before the EU Membership referendum took place which provided the broader context, on a social and political level, for what was going on in my life at the time. During these few months, I did not feel I

could speak freely during group process or even speak at all in the town where I was living in June 2016 where nearly 80% of the population voted “Leave”. Feeling powerless and once again, silenced, I focused my efforts on my research which simultaneously became the only source of voice I felt I had and the main outlet for my frustration; a container for my helplessness, fear, anger, and hope. Put simply, at times this was “too much” for me, or indeed for the project, to hold. In addition, I struggled to juggle my different roles and multiple identities (as a student, trainee therapist, supervisee, wife, mother, daughter whose parents lived in another country thousands of miles away, immigrant from Eastern Europe, and a non-native English speaker), residing in the UK at a particular period in history when the society itself seemed split into two halves, “leavers” and “remainers” (not unlike our experiential group, illustrating how enactments happen on training courses). With hindsight, I realise how individuals, including trainees and clients, deprived of a voice (especially for a long time), may then be at risk of overusing it or of becoming overly focused on issues around power and authority, thereby losing sight of other aspects and the ability to find “middle ground” which is necessary both in research and in the therapy room. Too much can remain unsaid and unresolved when we are “muted”. This further emphasised to me the importance of creating an arena, a space for all members’ voices to be heard.

I hoped to step into my own authority and to feel empowered while writing the thesis. Ironically, one of the recommendations at my PAP (Programme Panel Approval) meeting, where I presented my research proposal, was to remove the phrase “power dynamics” from my project title which I later replaced with “equal voices” - a concept which also strongly resonated with me. However, on a more primitive, embodied level, this condition or recommendation to remove “power” from



the title, despite the rationale and discussion at the PAP meeting, also made me feel smaller and power/less, “having to comply” with the conditions and expectations of the authority which was a reminder of my early formative years at school.

Interestingly, it did not cross my mind to object at the time, or to insist on keeping the word “power” in the title. Thereafter, I believe that I developed an aversion to my own authority as the author of my project. I felt both angry and somewhat impotent – that, combined with what was going on within the wider social and political context, was not a great place from which to start writing a piece about power and authority! Or perhaps, in truly Foucauldian fashion, this was precisely the right time and place to start writing it.

With hindsight, I did not want to see myself in the role of the authority figure or the “expert” (Lambers, 2000) because at the time (also echoing my past), I did not find the authority figures around me trustworthy and I did not want to identify with them. Therefore, I was strongly influenced by past and present historical processes. I wanted to annihilate any power imbalance arising in my research encounters, not realising that such strivings were impossible, idealistic, perhaps on some level narcissistic and potentially harmful (because in previous drafts of this thesis, I almost de-anonymised my participants by trying to “give” too much voice rather than enable them to find their own voices). I pondered how sometimes what starts as a collaborative effort may be stalled because of a temporary inability to contain and reflect on dissociated or dysregulated affects (especially when my own material was triggered) or because of projections that mutually impinged on some of my participants and me, also known as enactments (Wallin, 2007). I believe that my unprocessed feelings and affective reactions to what was going on institutionally and historically (e.g., ruptures in the group process; “power” taken away at my PAP; the

EU Membership referendum) was perhaps contributing to my strong longing for my own community or “family” of *Others* (perpetual liminars and immigrants with similar experiences). This, in turn, might have led to an unconscious creation of an “us versus them” dynamic where I wanted to “position” myself alongside my collaborators as an equal and “against them”, namely, the powerful “authority figures”. Perhaps this unconscious “split” and my reluctance to fully “own” my position as the researcher, the writer of the thesis, and the doctoral candidate might have increased the risk of blurring the boundaries and influenced the dynamic with my participants, for example with Zoya, as discussed previously. Sometimes, however, enactments can be useful and can teach us something. For instance, enactments may be the only way to bring to life implicit affective and relational patterns, especially for clients presenting with early trauma and dissociation (Ginot, 2009).

Gradually, I began to acknowledge that my positioning with respect to power was (and still is) an ongoing process, “a work in progress”. I started to comprehend the importance of holding multiple tensions (e.g., between closeness and distance; between being the researcher/author and being the “total insider”; between voice and representation; between delegating authority and stepping into my authority). I realised that it was necessary to maintain a delicate equilibrium between reducing the power imbalance and recognising the impossibility of “total equality” in my research relationships. This, I feel, is something important to consider in training courses in counselling psychology and psychotherapy, where course leaders and group facilitators alike need to be able to hold multiple tensions and to understand the implications of their own positions of power and authority. They need to become attuned to both the implicit and to the “shadow of the leader” (Cole, 2013, p. 179) in

order to prevent splitting of the group or the powerful, empathic failures I and some of my fellow trainees endured.

## **Bearing Witness**

Throughout the research process, I felt committed to identifying the roots of the past as they manifested in the present, offering myself as a “partner in thought” (Stern, 2009). Gerson (2009, p. 1342) defines a witness as “an *Other* that stands beside the event and the Self and who cares to listen; an *Other* who is able to contain that which is heard and is capable of imagining the unbearable”. Because trauma often leaves a residue of unprocessed, dissociated affect that the brain is unable to regulate (Bromberg, 2011; Schore, 2012), listeners may experience the need to protect themselves from the intensity of the flood of affect, directed towards them. Yet, their task is not to flee or step back but to be unobtrusively present throughout (Auerhahn et al., 1993) - this is how I felt in my role. That kind of witnessing is not easy; it takes its toll. Boulanger (2012) argues that, as clinicians, we are morally and ethically obligated to bear witness when an external event has caused such a profound disruption in the *Other's* sense of Self (and frequently Self in relation to *Other*) that a witness is necessary to validate the extent of the psychic distress. Sometimes, survivors have difficulty crediting the legitimacy of their experience and even coming to terms with what happened to them because trauma defies both memory and narrative. Traumatic memories are fragmented, chronologically “all over the place” because the words often fail to capture the events while gaps in the story reflect the tendency to dissociate and the psyche’s reluctance to re-enter the dreaded territory that caused the Self to collapse (Boulanger, 2007).

Consequently, survivors of trauma often exist in a sort of an exile (Boulanger, 2012), suspended in this *“in-between”* state Beatriz also referred to - a kind of limbo. When the myriad layers of trauma are seen and acknowledged by moral witnesses, “a community of understanding is re-established, some prior certainties may be regathered and healing can begin” (Thornton et al., 2010, p. 355).

Although no issues were explicitly raised by my collaborators after the interviews, I was nonetheless aware that many of their memories and past experiences were still very much alive in the present, as illustrated by Eileen’s need to take frequent breaks, Alice’s wish *“to stay out of trouble”*, or Beatriz’ difficulty in pronouncing *“authority”* and her reluctance to describe the *“militaries with their guns”*. Through listening to my collaborators’ stories, I was mindful of the battles they had to lead before being able to speak - sometimes, having existed “in a black hole of absolute silence, where no testimony or witnessing is possible” (Boulanger, 2012, p. 321).

## **Interpretive Authority, Voice, and Representation**

Another challenge I encountered, particularly during the process of Data analysis and (re)presentation, was related to the interpretive authority and ownership of the narratives. At times, as I discussed earlier, it felt as if I had developed an aversion to my own authority as the writer of this thesis. I was trying to fathom out whether this was partially due to my transference reaction to authority figures, or whether in my quest for equal distribution of power and wish to place my collaborators in the spotlight, I had moved over to the other extreme - almost denying that it was me, effectively, writing this piece of work. I reflected on this in therapy and

supervision, trying to find a “middle ground” where I could prioritise and honour my participants’ voices and perspectives while avoiding giving all of my power away. Having gone to great lengths to ensure that the (re)presentation of my collaborators’ stories was truthful, it was still me, making interpretations and editorial choices when compiling the poems and the narrative accounts. It was my responsibility to tell the story of the research as its instigator, author and “narrator” in the academic world; to analyse, seek and convey what I saw as its significant messages. Eventually, I followed Byrne’s (2017) recommendation that if as researchers we cannot avoid the problems, inherent in the representation of others, we can at least seek to make our influence explicit and provide space for the non-hierarchical inclusion of other interpretations, such as those received during Peer and Audience validation, employed to refine the accounts. For example, one of my peers interpreted Dimitri’s uniform, a symbol I had previously associated solely with oppression, as a protective shield to hide behind. In a conversation with my peer, I was reminded that by telling me his or her story, each collaborator was *“peeling off a layer”*. It was important to be sensitive and hold feelings of discomfort, vulnerability or self-consciousness, accompanying the exposure. Also, thanks to Peer validation, I started seeing silence as not always indicative of complicity. An alternative interpretation was that sometimes, it is a “healthy place to be”, associated with safekeeping and self-preservation (Galasiński & Galasińska, 2005) - yet another way to survive but also to quietly resist rather than comply with the status quo.

Through the process of Audience validation, my colleague psychotherapist reminded me to *“pay attention to the implicit”*, specifically when discussing trauma. For instance, when Mantas mentioned the incident of domestic violence with his father, I had to keep in mind that this is very rarely a single occurrence but it was,

after all, my collaborator's choice how much to reveal - in line with Polkinghorne's (2007) view of participants' resistance or reluctance to disclose certain aspects of their experience fully. My colleague's comments also helped me to reflect on the parallel between Mantas' dichotomous view of his tutors, and his relationship with his idealised father (the "*demigod*") and vilified mother. The initial dynamic between Mantas and his first (female!) supervisor or "substitute mother figure", automatically placed in the "*bad authority box*", was perhaps echoing his perception of his mother as the first "*wrong authority*". Discussing this with my colleague helped open up a whole different domain - namely, the transferential, exploring how the power of enactments (Ginot, 2009) may affect the relationship with authority figures on the training journey.

These are just some examples of alternative views and "voices" that made me re-evaluate some of my initial perceptions. I cannot possibly include all of them, but they clearly demonstrated the multiplicity of meanings, layers and interpretations contributing to the process of crystallisation (Tracy, 2010). Additionally, my peers and "critical friends" helped me to remain mindful of my own trauma and possible overidentification by reminding me to stick as closely as possible to my collaborators' language and by offering empathy and compassion whenever I needed to "offload".

## Discussion

*“To (be) allow(ed) to speak without censorship became an act of unmaking the repressed silence of the past... a means... to recodify the present...”*

(Mohamed & Ratele, 2012, p. 285)

The multifaceted issues, emerging in the narrative accounts, illustrated the manifold nature of reality - considered by some as a “sine qua non” for human existence and (inter)action (Arendt, 1958). They also emphasised the complexity and non-linearity of the training journey itself. In the Discussion, I examine the shared, overarching themes and subthemes I have identified, linking them to relevant research in the field. I also reflect on the limitations and implications of the NI, offering insights and points of learning for future consideration by counselling psychologists and psychotherapists in training, supervisors, tutors, and training institutions.

### The Narratives...

Reviewing the direction (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), overall process (Frank, 1995, 2016) and emotional undertone of the narrative accounts, I perceived the stories (re)presenting the lived experiences of Dimitri, Zoya, Mantas, and Beatriz as progressive narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) in which the protagonists' evaluations and sense of Self seemed to improve over time. Eileen's story was what I considered to be a stable narrative, with her persistence and endurance in *“getting on with it”* remaining the same over the course of time until she achieved her goal.

My interpretation of Alice's story was slightly different. Her doctoral journey started as a regressive narrative in which she reverted back to a younger version of herself in the experiential group and during communications with her tutors and supervisors. However, in the process of her training (also paralleled by our dynamic during our research encounter and subsequent interactions), she began to reclaim her power, making her own choices and creating a much more progressive narrative for herself, effectively transitioning from *"the teacher's pet"* to *"the person in charge"*.

The chaos narratives (Frank, 1995, 2016) within my collaborators' stories seemed to be represented by themes related to being an outsider and additional roadblocks on their journey, which included reporting inadequate academic (Eileen) and administrative or pastoral (Mantas) support, lack of awareness of the "invisibility" of the past trauma, and subsequent misattunement that might have contributed to their experience of isolation and aloneness. In the beginning especially, Alice and Dimitri disclosed struggling to be accepted at their respective placements. They deliberated on challenges related to fulfilling expectations (e.g., what a therapist should look and sound like) and feeling discriminated against because of their gender, ethnicity and/or race, forcing them (in Alice's case) to even change geographical location. Chaos narratives were evident when they talked about feeling like an alienated *Other* within the communities where they lived and worked. This made it harder for them to achieve organisational and social inclusion. Only after changing locations, undergoing a lengthy process of personal psychotherapy, and creating family bonds and social networks were they eventually able to integrate and feel more accepted. I wondered whether Beatriz also experienced social exclusion due to her reference to never managing *"to create a group for me"*. Listening between the lines made me realise how she also had been left on her own to



manage a Counselling Service and express her professional opinion on official documents without any awareness of the fear, paranoia, and traumatic memories this could have (and indeed had) evoked.

Regardless of the challenges, all collaborators had managed to complete their courses while simultaneously undergoing a process of adjusting to another culture. Quest narratives (Frank, 2016) represented their struggles and efforts towards achieving their dreams and obtaining the coveted qualifications. At times, they felt disadvantaged compared to their peers (e.g., Eileen's story) because of the language barrier or a perceived lack of support and understanding of their needs by the training organisation.

The narratives I interpreted as having a restitution narrative plot (Frank, 2016) were those that included allusions to receiving support, organisational holding, and achieving a sense of belonging in the training setting. This helped my collaborators to develop their own authority and potential, resulting in a sense of empowerment. Zoya, for example, referred to "*growing wings*" because she felt that her tutors, even though they were challenging, "*believed in me.*" This in itself seemed to provide what Kohut (1984) might have described as a "corrective emotional experience" during the training, gratifying some of Zoya's unmet developmental needs of connection, attunement, mirroring and praise. As a result, later on she was able to stand up to the authority figures at her workplace, making a conscious choice to resign and pursue a different path. She seemed to attribute this largely to her sense of empowerment and supportive environment during her training, which enabled her to "*grow wings*". Beatriz also alluded to the support she received - contrary to her expectations and preconceived notions - from the director of her course, when she arrived at a particularly difficult crossroad. It is important to acknowledge that her

training journey started in **South America** and was completed in the UK, which is reminiscent of the process of transitional liminality (Ybema et al., 2011).

While all stories had their distinctive voices, they were also - at their core - testimonies of the once silenced, powerless individuals, grappling with complex or multiple trauma in their quest to become psychotherapists and counselling psychologists in order to help others feel empowered. The curious backward-forward process, taking place throughout the stories, seemed to facilitate the rebuilding, claiming, and reclaiming of identities while opening up new possibilities for the future.

### **The Themes...**

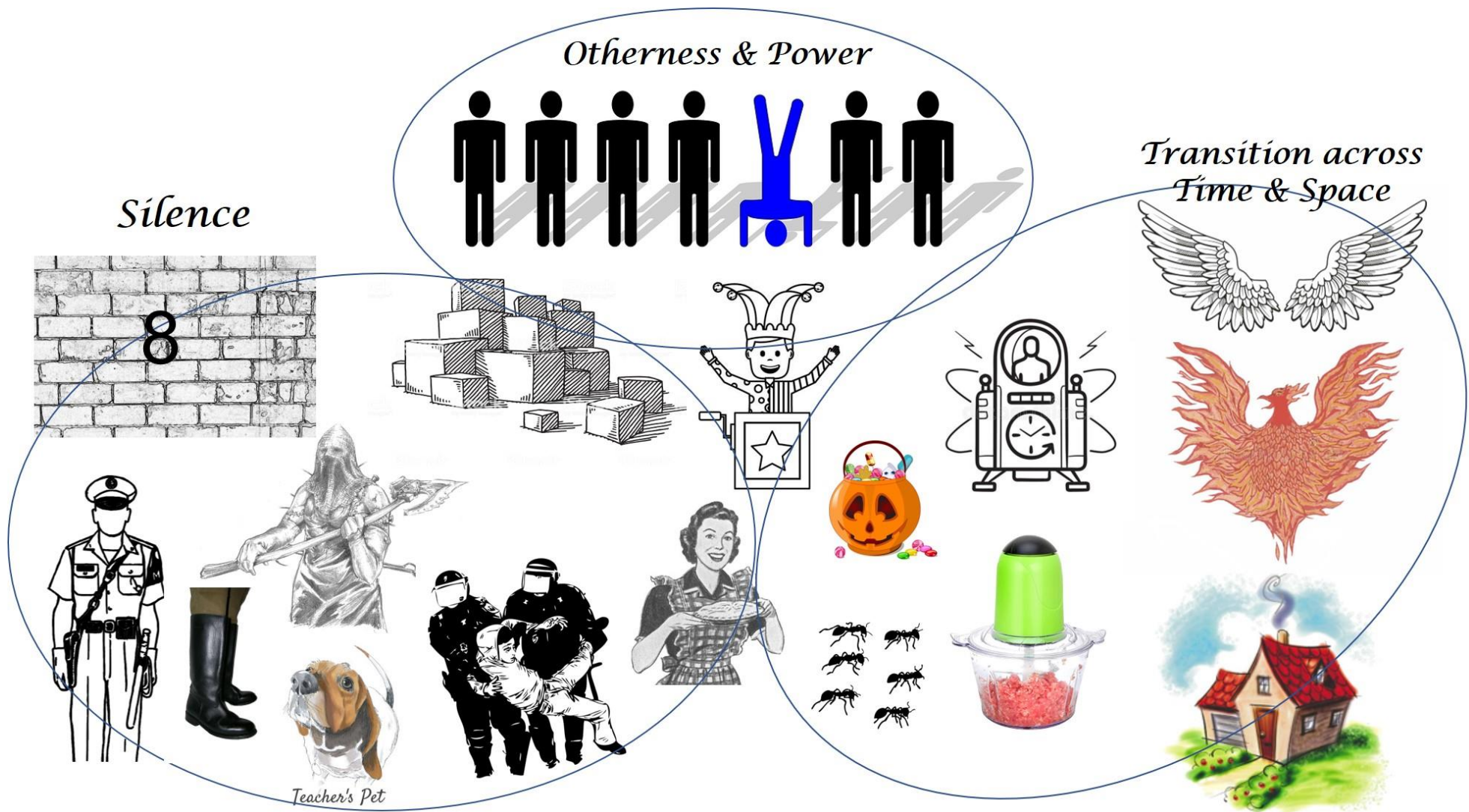
Sitting down with the six narratives in front of me and then leaving only the single A4 sheet (OSOP) for each (Appendix 10), I asked myself what the three overarching themes were, generated thus far (Saldaña, 2016). They all seemed to revolve around *Silence*, *Otherness*, and *Transition across Time and Space*. Perhaps as an echo from my overly structured past, I created a spreadsheet to try and organise the principal themes and respective subthemes I had identified (Appendix 16), which became the “skeleton” for my Discussion. Based on these themes, I compiled short vignettes, focusing on a particular learning point or reflection that became apparent through the process of conducting and “living out” the NI. However, it occurred to me that the interconnectedness and interaction of the themes could be better represented by a visual of some kind - for instance, encompassing the vivid “lived metaphors” that spontaneously emerged from the unchecked, organic flow of my collaborators. This, I felt, would allow space for a non-linear and less orderly appearance, which corresponded with my idea of “equal

voices” and fluidity. It also helped me to connect to the stories in a more visceral way.

In my clinical work, I often rely on my embodied sense and somatic markers (Damasio et al., 1996) as well as on the sensory and affective qualities of imagery, generated within me by my clients (Schore, 1994), as a guide to my countertransferential responses. These provide me with a valuable insight into the world of the *Other*. Jung (1964) described in a wealth of detail the kind of symbolic images, encountered in the unconscious, often particularly useful when working with clients who have experienced significant or complex trauma. I felt that, similarly, a visual representation of my collaborators’ lived metaphors might help “loosen up” the overly rigid, regimented, and structured world of tables and numbers. This could open up a reflective space in which to explore joint meanings, transcending dichotomies and binary thinking by providing room to “play” and consider alternative interpretations. With the help of my daughter (a much more talented artist than I could ever be), the diagramming tool MS Visio, the graphic editor CorelDraw Graphics Suite, and a scanner HP Scanjet 200, I created a collage which helped me in formulating the main themes:

Figure 3.

*A Collage Representing the “Lived Metaphors” in the Stories*



I interpreted the inanimate objects, emerging in the stories, as symbolising the overwhelming power of the regime. Shoved in a *box*, separated by a *brick wall*, suffocating in a *uniform*, threatened by the *big guns* and the *military boots* - they all spoke to me of the unspoken; of living in a state of fear and silence (a world that I knew so well!), feeling *lost*, *not being cared for*, *abused*, *inferior*, *emotionally frozen*, *shamed*, *chased*, *scared*, *paranoid*, *judged*, *harshly scolded* and *pigeonholed*. No wonder that these “re-emerged” and took the shape of “real life” authority figures during the training, an embodiment of the terrifying ghosts from the past - the *executioners*, the *policemen*, the *Army officers*, ready to strike at any point or at the smallest sign of disobedience. However, stories of defiance and resistance, ways of and journeys towards separating the collapsing timelines, and finding the courage to reclaim the Voice gradually began to emerge in my collaborators’ narratives. This was particularly evident when coming to terms with and embracing their *Otherness*; transforming themselves slowly but relentlessly like hard-working *ants*, one small step at a time, building relational homes in difference - “*beyond language*”, beyond ethnicity, race and expectation, *beyond everything, above every authority*. At times, this process of transformation was excruciatingly painful, “*like someone, putting your guts through a blender*”, requiring a complete deconstruction. At other times it was truly magical, growing powerful wings to emerge as the *Phoenix*, taking flight to new horizons and new identities.

## Silence

The most devastating aspect of living under a totalitarian regime involves being forced to tell, hear, and act out nothing but the official state narrative (Lyotard,

1991). Failing to do so is highly likely to result in effectively being “written out of the scenario”. This threat - of being figuratively (and sometimes, literally) silenced or coerced out of one’s voice - has sadly proved to be a highly efficient tool of oppression. I link this with Seligman’s (1973) theory of learned helplessness, based on the premise that psychological well-being and resources can be adversely affected as a result of a lack of control over the outcome of a situation. Those, subjected to abuse, may stop resisting or otherwise standing up for themselves. I view the relationship between the individual and the totalitarian state as a striking example of emotional, physical and psychological abuse. My collaborators had to “unlearn” that learned helplessness on their training journeys - what an ordeal for those, raised in silence!

### ***The Deprived of a Voice Learn to be Silent***

There was something especially deafening in the silence that permeated the beginning of every story I heard. Dimitri alluded to his attempts to gauge “*who has the right to talk*”. Alice would ask for “*permission to speak*” by raising her hand in order to “*stay out of trouble*”. Eileen, “*silent between the ages of four and 12*”, struggled to find the words in the PD group. A different type of silence, especially terrifying and initially completely out of awareness, seemed to be internalised by Beatriz. Born out of fear for her life and the lives of her loved ones, it extended to the written word, to feeling “*scared*” and “*paranoid*” at the thought of having her opinions visibly displayed “*in black and white*”, tangibly there and in plain sight. Because the paralysing fear of repercussions was so overwhelming that it had to remain hidden - undiscussable and indescribable (Bar-On, 1999), Beatriz seemed to have somatised

the trauma until (decades later) it began manifesting as her flight response at the sight of a policeman. She had developed intense ambivalence even towards her own authority, not wanting *“people to be scared of me”* because in her past the authority was always the aggressor, never the protector, inducing fear and symbolising a threat to life. Her story was a testimony of the dictatorial state’s persecution and how it could penetrate so deeply into an individual’s experience as to disrupt their capacity to function, voice, or express their views many years after the end of the regime; across time (decades) and space (continents). Perhaps paradoxically, in the context of previous research on professional identity development I viewed Beatriz as the participant at the highest level of (institutional) authority, approaching the two final stages, described by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) as the Experienced professional phase and Senior professional phase. The fact that she still found it difficult to talk about or reflect critically on some of her early experiences, or indeed the training itself, made me wonder what might be happening at some of the earlier stages of trainee development, such as the Beginning and Advanced student phase (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). I had to “listen between the lines” (Speedy, 2008, p. 32) and really pay attention to paraverbal communication, for example to her pauses, tone of voice, or semi-uttered words, to try and decipher what was not being said; what, indeed, seemed to be still ongoing and the early trauma of the deafening silence (the price of living within conditions of a *“threat to life”*) that did not appear to be fully processed even after years of therapy and extensive training. This indicates how powerful early traumatic experiences can be and how they can still impact even therapists and supervisors in the “more advanced” stages of professional development. This was perhaps one of the most striking, unique qualitative findings in the current research project with possible implications not only for training but also



for clinical practice. While an open attitude has been found to facilitate professional development, a restricted or closed attitude often fosters professional stagnation (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). The current project thus demonstrates what happens in the context of early experiences within an exceedingly restrictive environment, where silence (or absence of voice) and blind compliance are the norm. This certainly interferes with the openness to learning. It is perhaps worth noting that, since Beatriz' training journey began in South America at a time when personal therapy was not mandatory for trainees (as she explained in subsequent communication), Beatriz commenced therapy at a later stage, compared to the other collaborators (and also after she had started seeing clients).

Essentially, Beatriz' story accentuated Jaworski's (2005) view that there are many forms of silence and some are not necessarily quiet. Hearing the stories and voices of my collaborators made me realise that not every "unsilence" necessarily equals "voice". Beatriz referred to her younger Self as being ostensibly "*very vocal*" at school but from the position of being a "*good girl*" even overly compliant (Winnicott, 1965), which I found to be a commonality she shared with Alice. Only in this position did she feel safe. The right to express herself was not a given; it had to be "earned" by doing "*everything right*". In fact, I thought, by engaging in debates, wasn't Beatriz at least unconsciously facilitating the maintenance of the same oppressive system's façade she consciously wanted to rebel against? This made me think of the paradox where sometimes the very silence we want to break is reinforced by mere unsilences as presumably vocal members acquiesce and actively participate in those structures, speaking only from a position compatible with the rules of the status quo. Carpenter and Austin (2007) allude to silences which are not just those gaps in speech that occur when there is nothing to say. Rather, they are



spaces that are inhabited by so much more that could be said. Ultimately, what remains unsaid or is drowned out by words that are irrelevant is a means of silencing the powerless. Alice, Zoya and Eileen spoke of being deprived of a space in which to discuss their difficulties. Alice's mother only wanted to hear *"the good news"*. Zoya's needs were never *"on the agenda"*. Both Eileen and Alice were chastised and severely punished for not complying with the rules, which contributed to them becoming silent and unable to ask for assistance. Mantas on the other hand kept trying to make himself heard but was told to *"sit on it"* and had to repeat the year. Similarly to Alice's experience of being *"told what to do"*, Dimitri conveyed his deeply ingrained belief that *"you [should] listen to the professional without questioning"*. This happened even with benevolent authority figures whose function was to help, perhaps leading to an even more profound sense of disempowerment because of the assumption that "the doctor, the expert knows best".

At the same time, previous research findings suggest it is important to remember that silence may sometimes serve other functions and may be a way to safeguard oneself (similarly to Alice, following our research encounter and subsequent communication) or to reduce the power imbalance within training or supervision context by being more selective and feeling in control of what is voiced and/or shared. To quote Mehr et al. (2010, p. 112), "sometimes silence actually is golden" and therefore trainers and supervisors need not be concerned with all nondisclosures or "silences" in supervision, in the classroom, or indeed silences between ourselves and our clients which we tolerate and learn to "sit with" in the consulting room. Notably, one self-confessed "silent member" in the previously mentioned study by Hall and colleagues (1999) reported that "silence became a sanctuary in which I believed that I could remain psychologically safe" (Hall et al.,

1999, p. 110). However, Mehr et al. (2010) also point out that while trainees should be given a choice whether to disclose or not, tutors and supervisors need to create an environment that will invite trust as well as communicate clearly that both the supervisory and training setting are “safe spaces” where trainees can explore personal issues, influencing their learning and/or clinical practice. Discussing the multiple facets and aspects of silence may therefore help foster the openness to learning and the freedom to explore, mentioned by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003), especially when the student feels so regressed that it is difficult to initiate a conversation, express curiosity, or even ask questions. Helping trainees (and subsequently clients) to find their voices has the potential to encourage a more developmental approach to training (as well as to therapy).

*Learning point 1:*

*The many faces of Silence*

Tutors, supervisors and practitioners need to be aware of the many faces and dimensions of Silence/Unsilence when communicating with trainees and clients from an oppressive, authoritarian, or any other background that could constitute a traumatic past. It is important to keep this in mind on an individual basis but particularly within a group setting (e.g., group process, group supervision, and/or group therapy).

***Fear, Shame, Anger***

Some of the main affective and emotional aspects, emerging in my collaborators' stories, included fear (particularly embodied by the narrative accounts of Alice and Beatriz, and in a more subtle way by Dimitri's dreams of the “*people in*

*uniforms*") and shame which seemed to emerge most overtly in Eileen's story. Anger was another primary emotion, brought up in Mantas' story.

Fear has the capacity to wipe out all vestiges of meaningful interrelations. According to Arendt (2005, p. 68), fear politically understood alludes to the "despair over my impotence when I have reached the limits within which action is possible". It has also been discussed as an expression of chronic trauma for decades (Erikson, 1995). Yet, in the face of despotic regimes, it can also be a condition of normalcy, albeit distorted (Elías, 2016), enabling the individual to survive. Although the fear response to traumatic events has been widely researched, still relatively little is known about shame, "an equally powerful and potentially toxic emotion" (Herman, 2008, p. 299), which is implicated in emotional distress (Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005) and the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Leskela et al., 2002). Early life experiences may lead to the development of core beliefs of the Self as unworthy or unlovable. For example, Eileen, who was repeatedly criticised, punished, and reprimanded by authority figures in her family of origin and at school, seemed to endorse a core belief of incompetence, thinking that there was something inherently "*wrong with me*". This increased her self-doubt in relation to completing her academic assignments (Platt & Freyd, 2012). She alluded to feeling shame back then but also much later during group process on her training. I also thought of the (most likely, unintentional) shaming in supervision when her supervisor (the authority figure in the present) had told her that "*it's the language really*". This reminded me of the importance of refraining from making comments that might inadvertently reinforce a supervisee's negative core belief about the Self while potentially repeating some of their earlier dynamic with authority figures, which endorses Mueller and Kell's (1972) previous assertion that the supervisor needs to be

someone whom the supervisee can trust and depend on, rather than an individual, responding in a way that re-enacts the supervisee's painful relationships with past authority figures. More recently, Platt and Freyd (2012) found out that undergraduate students in psychology and linguistics who scored high in negative underlying assumptions on the Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale (Weissman, 1979) were much more likely to have experienced a traumatic event and a shame response, following negative feedback on an academic task. A traumatised individual's experience of failing to succeed academically may trigger feelings of shame as the sense of the Self as worthy becomes easily shattered (Platt & Freyd, 2012). This made me re-examine through a different lens Alice's self-perception as a *"bad student"* after being referred on one of her academic assignments. Perhaps her negative core belief and underlying assumption about her Self (within the context of being raised by a harshly critical mother) had also been reinforced prior to beginning the process of repairing shattered beliefs (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and changing her self-conception.

A comparison between Eileen's and Alice's experience, and previous research focusing on the supervisee-supervisor relationship, suggests that it is important not only to identify the current stage of development of the supervisee (Littrell et al. 1976; Loganbill et al., 1982; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987) but also to gain deeper understanding of and take into account the supervisee's background and the possible impact of early experiences and attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Sroufe, 2005) because these are likely to have an influence on the development of professional identity, authority, and autonomy. For example, in the context of their experiences of silencing and chronic trauma, both Eileen and Alice felt at some point "unmet" by their supervisors. For Alice, this

seemed to occur mostly during the early stages of “becoming” a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist, which corroborated previous findings around models of professional development (e.g., Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) and also appeared compatible with the Integrated Developmental Model (Stoltenberg, 1981; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Stoltenberg et al., 1998), suggesting that a supervisor who tries to engage in collegial challenging, expecting autonomous behaviour from a level-1 supervisee, is likely to intensify the supervisee’s anxiety.

For Eileen, however, the experiences of shame, anxiety and feeling exposed, previously linked to nondisclosure in supervision (Yourman & Farber, 1996), appeared to be ongoing even after graduation. Moreover, they were not limited to “meeting new clients” (Stoltenberg et al., 1998) or wishing to avoid negative evaluation by her supervisor (Farber, 2006; Ladany et al., 1996). This suggests that models of therapist development or supervision should not be taken at “face value” and applied to trainees in an indiscriminate (or prescriptive) manner; instead, it is important to “tailor” feedback, responses and support accordingly to facilitate students’ progress. The current, newly emerging and original finding emphasised the importance of careful consideration of the supervisee’s unique history rather than primarily focusing on a particular “training stage” without taking into account their specific background and life experiences in their continuity. Discussing clinical trainees’ vulnerability to shame and humiliation in supervision, Alonso and Rutan (1988) identified the supervisee’s learning regression, the supervisor’s management of the supervisory hour, and the transference and countertransference in supervision as factors, contributing to shame. However, in line with the current research findings, they emphasised that while some experiences are ubiquitous for beginners in the field, the personal developmental history of the trainee plays a significant role in

shaping the way they react to certain demands and pressures. An awareness of the intricacy of trainees' experiences might increase sensitivity and help supervisors become more attuned to the individual supervisee, thus minimising the risk of "mismatches" similar to those, experienced by Eileen and Alice. This is also in line with Bernard's (1979) recommendation that supervisors should not respond from the same "place" out of personal preference, comfort, or habit, but instead ensure that their responses meet the most salient needs of the supervisee in that moment (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). In turn, this may strengthen the bond between supervisor and supervisee whereby, as Gilbert and Evans (2000) postulate, uncertainty and shame can be reduced once the relationship is "good enough", with the potential to evolve and deepen.

In contrast to Eileen's and Alice's experiences, in Mantas' narrative, the trauma and vulnerability he described frequently manifested as rebellious feelings and anger rather than fear or shame. People become angry when faced with an injustice (Lazarus, 1991) or when others insult, reject, criticise, or act aggressively towards them and their loved ones (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Wiseman et al. (2006) argue that anger is associated with the frustration of the wishes to assert the Self and be understood by the *Other* (especially in the context of finding it difficult to speak up in the first place!), which seemed to resonate with Mantas' experience during his interactions with the course leader. While being interviewed by my "critical friend", I also identified my tendency to go to a place of anger when feeling misunderstood or silenced during my own training journey. Being able to express anger calmly, rather than inhibiting it or resorting to aggression, is an important relational skill (Guerrero, 1994) that enables the individual to move towards finding their voice and reclaiming their power.

*Learning point 2:*  
*Muted shame and anger*

Counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, in their capacity as clinicians, supervisors, tutors and module convenors, should be alerted to paying special attention to experiences of muted anger and shame, related to trauma.

***Finding the Words, Finding the Voice***

Ruminating on the disabling, internalised silences and embodied trauma of my collaborators, I was also profoundly aware of their bravery and the immense courage, required to overcome these early experiences in order to carry on. I felt that my main task was to open up a space for their voices, as well as assemble an audience to hear some of the marginalising experiences along their journey.

According to Frank (1995), at the centre of narrative ethics is the wounded storyteller, where “the wounded healer and the wounded storyteller are not separate, but different aspects of the same figure” (Frank, 1995, p. xii). Listening and telling are phases of healing; the healer and the storyteller are thus one. Even though I perceived all of my collaborators - and myself, the author of this thesis - as wounded storytellers, I associated Eileen most strongly with both the wounded storyteller and the wounded healer. By “*healing the Inner Child*”, she felt empowered to tap into her own healing process to help others by using her voice. Dimitri and Alice also tasted and appreciated for the first time the **sense of empowerment, emerging from the freedom of expression** and the ability to be authentic; to “*just appear as I am*” and to communicate freely as “*just m-me*”.

Foucault’s (1980) main focus is not on power itself but on the opposition and resistance to that power. Knowing what she wanted provided Eileen with a sense of

*“inner power and motivation”*. During their clashes with the management, Zoya and Mantas were effectively defying the authority and the rigid rules, standing up for what they thought was right and refusing to be voiceless *“bricks in the wall”*. Both resigned and left their respective workplaces, bringing this resistance to another level by actively seeking institutional and possibly at a later stage social change in the way things were done, which reminded me of the “least gentle” of Frank’s (1995, p. 120) quest stories - the manifesto. Bearing witness to how the system not only supports but sometimes contributes to the therapist-client “inherent power differential” (Zur, 2009), their accounts asserted this as a social issue, not just a personal affliction based on solidarity with the afflicted.

## Otherness and Power

Is the *Other* friend or foe, or a little bit of both? I think it depends. Based on this NI, the presence of an empathetic, attentive *Other* in the face of a tutor, supervisor, or even the training organisation per se, is a major factor in helping and supporting trainees deprived of a voice. If this is absent however, they face the risk of succumbing to silence - or unsilence! - once again.

Alice’s allusion to her first supervisor as an *“executioner”* and Mantas’ automatic categorisation of his supervisor as *“cold”* and belonging to the *“bad authority box”* are powerful reminders of how re-enactments occur in the transferential realm, especially during the early stages of training. Everyone (including the Self) is seen as suspect and the *Other* as the “bad object” (Fairbairn, 1952). Nevertheless, a holding, synthesising experience has the potential to allow for the “creation anew of a cohesive, historical narrative” (Auerhahn et al., 1993, p. 436).



Only then can the I-Thou (Buber, 1958) connection between Self and *Other* be re-established.

### ***Intersectional Discrimination***

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1988) examines experiences of discrimination that focus on a person's multiple identities. Its main premise is that a combination of social characteristics can have multiplicative effects that are more than the sum of their parts. For instance, being either black or female can be disadvantageous, but being a black female is a social identity, associated with additional discrimination and disadvantage (Bell et al., 2019). I contemplated my participants' experience of intersectional discrimination since arriving in the UK. For example, Alice candidly examined her experience with power, oppression, and internalised silence against the backdrop of gendered racism or racialised sexism, associated with being an Asian woman. Like some of the trainees in Nelson and Friedlander's (2001) study, she could not confront her placement supervisor and the Head of the Counselling Service at her placement setting in Middle England due to their covert racism and inability to approach openly or tackle issues around difference (Beddoe, 2017; Cook, 1994). Her experience made her doubt her professional ability, matching Ellis' definition of "harmful supervision" (Ellis et al., 2014, p. 440). It also seemed to confirm the existence of serious gaps in relation to teaching and/or efforts to improve practitioners' intercultural and interracial competency on psychotherapy and (evidently) supervision training programmes.

In the broader social and political context of colonialism and the former British Empire, Alice's race immediately put her at risk of discrimination. Female gender, added to this already disadvantageous position, led to her experience of feeling sexually objectified and encountering "*everyday sexism*" in both her personal and professional life. This made me think how "a society that privileges whites, men and English speakers" (Chen, 1997, p. 59) certainly does not make it easy for Asian women (but also black women and women from other ethnic groups) to fight sexual harassment. I thought of my own identity as an Eastern European woman and the associated widespread prejudice and disparaging notions of such women, being perceived as "gold-diggers" (echoed by Zoya's narrative of her mother, conditioned and in turn, conditioning her daughter to associate power with money and status rather than being able to fulfil her dreams). According to Hune (1997, p. 187), capable and highly motivated women in doctoral programmes often feel "*othered*", disempowered, and have to contend with a wide range of non-academic issues, including questions about their personal lives such as "*Will you finish your doctorate if you get married?*". However, some women in academia have also been encouraged to break the silence and contest the educational power structure through a strategy of "**talking back**" (Kosasa-Terry, 1994). Women's studies and ethnic studies provide such spaces for "talking back" and are locations for empowering students.

Even though this was not explicitly addressed during Eileen's interview, I wondered if yet another intersection, namely her sexuality, put her at a disadvantage along with her identity as a foreign student. She was able to "come out" as a bisexual woman and move in with her girlfriend only after arriving in the UK; not prior to that. These subtle complexities which remained unspoken but implied made me ponder

the (even more than I had previously imagined) multi-layered “picture” of power and oppression, and of the many dimensions of “Otherness”.

*Learning point 3:*  
*Intercultural aspects*

Training organisations in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy still seem very much oriented towards mainstream, Western “*middle-class, middle-aged, white*” culture. Intercultural aspects, especially outside the big cities, often remain underexposed. To ensure diversity, inclusivity, and effective multicultural education, it would be helpful to consider different cultural backgrounds when choosing group facilitators, academic staff, and planning the training curriculum.

***Language***

Another factor, indirectly linked with discrimination and stigmatisation, is language status (Dawson & Williams, 2008). Frandsen et al. (2019, p. 68) point out that “there can be a lack of appreciation or understanding, regarding [how one’s] ‘native tongue’ influences one’s expression of Self”. Among their concerns are students’ resistance to multiculturalism and the prevailing norm that therapy should be conducted in the language of the therapist. Implicit assumptions, regarding universal spoken English, may perpetuate racial privilege (Eckert & Rowley, 2013) and result in the marginalisation of non-native English speakers. For example, Beatriz had to “switch” quickly from her native language to English with no support whatsoever from the organisation she was expected to “manage”. This left her vulnerable to mistakes and paralysed with freshly renewed paranoia. Eileen had to deal with the double burden of the excruciatingly challenging training and finding the

“*right words*” in English to meet the academic requirements on her own. Yet, considering her complex history and what might have been internalised, I wondered whether it was also her lack of expectation of support which convinced her that support was not available.

While investigating how language proficiency and ethnicity relate to teacher ratings of students’ academic and social competence, Edl et al. (2008, p. 43) concluded that “language proficiency, more than ethnicity, is the key factor for either struggling in school or having lowered teacher views, or perhaps both”. Language-related difficulties may therefore account for some of the differences and perceived inequality between the trainees, contributing to the experience of feeling “different” and *Other*. This is corroborated by previous studies, examining the experiences of culturally diverse or international trainees who have to manage academic pressures whilst struggling with issues around linguistic proficiency (e.g., Morris & Lee, 2004).

#### *Learning point 4:*

##### *Addressing linguistic differences*

Acknowledging and discussing linguistic differences and challenges in clinical and training settings and making support more visible may help to interrupt the vicious cycle of silence and retraumatisation. Trainees may acquire a level of sensitivity and understanding, regarding the needs of clients and colleagues with more limited English proficiency. Supervisors and tutors may benefit from further professional development around cultural and linguistic differences, and how these tend to affect attention and interaction within the group. This is likely to contribute to creating a more egalitarian atmosphere and improved communication.

### ***The Authoritarian State as Internalised Oppressive Other***

Internalised oppression is sometimes defined as “a set of self-defeating cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours that were developed as one consistently experiences an oppressive environment” (David, 2014, p. 14). To address this, the person needs to reclaim individual experience as situated within the historical reality of the group by recognising and rejecting the dominant narrative that has been the primary context in which one’s entire identity has been fashioned. I perceived the uniform that featured in Dimitri’s dreams as the most poignant example of the internal persecutor or oppressor (Batts, 1998) in my collaborators’ stories. Dimitri referred to it as *“traces of my former Self”*, which made me think of the authoritarian state as an internalised, controlling, and oppressive Other. Similarly to Beradt (1966) who collected hundreds of dream reports, articulating the haunting experiences, anxieties, and suffering of dreamers in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939, I felt that Dimitri’s dreams powerfully revealed how an oppressive regime can deeply influence and disrupt a person’s experience within his transitional spaces (Bulkeley, 1994), and, moreover, threaten the individual’s fundamental sense of identity. I started seeing the uniform in Dimitri’s dreams as representing more than the sinister presence of the authoritarian regime, permeating in a powerful but straightforward way every space, including the sanctuary of one’s bed. I thought of his compliance, transforming into identification with the oppressor, emerging during the group process on the training by harshly judging others and trying to place them in boxes according to perceived power and hierarchical order. Beradt (1966) described how some dreamers saw themselves in beautiful uniforms, or at the sides of important leaders, their happy participation experienced in the dreams as both pleasurable and

shameful. In fact, they seemed to merely satisfy important needs (e.g., for praise, belonging or relief from tension), but at the greater cost of losing their identity, becoming instead an agent of the State. I pondered if this process resonated on some level with Dimitri's identification with the uniform. Perhaps it signified his role and the authority ascribed to him by the State but also embodied the loss of his self-agency. Yet, recognising and rejecting this deeply ingrained symbol of the dominant narrative also started during the process of dreaming - the dreams became the very vessel of change. By sharing his dreams with me, Dimitri provided an opportunity for us to enter together and creatively explore this transitional space. What emerged was that something extraordinary - nothing short of supernatural - was required in Dimitri's transformation to restore what was lost. It took a huge effort, a *50-year jump* across time and space; a radical process of deconstruction and resurrection - another unique finding of the current research in terms of degree and intensity - until (like the Phoenix) Dimitri rose from the ashes of the destroyed False Self (Winnicott, 1965), created by the State, to become a more authentic version of himself, the civilian "*just m-me*" with his humanness and vulnerability.

#### *Learning point 5:*

#### *Addressing long-lasting effects of trauma, deconstruction, and regression*

Introducing modules and/or group work to raise awareness and educate members about subtle power dynamics (e.g., using different theories such as Object relations) and the long-lasting effects of trauma as a result of growing up in an oppressive, silencing regime may be beneficial and may enhance understanding of the level of deconstruction and regression which might have been underestimated for that particular student cohort.

### ***Otherness as Power***

As early as 1980, Snyder and Fromkin reflected on humankind's quest for individuality and "pursuit of difference". While conformity (Kim & Markus, 1999) and its associated norms are considered a core cultural goal in many East Asian cultural contexts, fostering group harmony in line with a collectivist cultural tradition (Yang, 1981), in Western culture people are taught to respect individual rights. We observe the tendency to reject norms in favour of individual freedom, something that fascinated Dimitri upon his arrival in the UK. This made him draw comparisons with the culture "*back home*" and helped him find a relational home in difference.

In her story, Alice referred to a gradual shift in her self-perception. She began to view her identity as an Asian psychotherapist as a "*unique, selling point*" rather than a disadvantage. Zoya also emphasised the "*power of uniqueness and individuality*" which could be seen as an aspiration for self-actualisation (Forbes, 2011; Maslow, 1987). In the spirit of plurality, this presented a different interpretation of *Otherness* as an asset, leading to a sense of empowerment that is supported by previous studies, identifying advantages associated with practitioners' diversity. For example, there have been occasions when a therapist's lack of familiarity with local culture and limited linguistic proficiency have been perceived as facilitating the therapeutic process by international trainees (Georgiadou, 2015), potentially reducing the inherent power differential (Zur, 2009) in therapeutic work. Lau and Ng (2012, p. 101) concur that counselling and related programmes should "examine their curriculum and training environment to improve inclusiveness, by appreciating the contributions international students bring to them". For instance, students may be encouraged to share their perspectives on various issues in class, to the advantage

of both domestic students and faculty. Subsequently, inclusive learning environments can embrace individual differences as a source of diversity that can enrich the learning of others as well as their multicultural competency, which is seen as an increasingly important professional attribute (Turner & Robson, 2008).

*Learning point 6:*

*More active involvement of students from oppressive backgrounds*

Student representatives of minority groups and oppressive backgrounds need to be encouraged and more actively included in policies, programmes, and faculties to diversify training institutions. They may bring new skills (e.g., multicultural and multilingual competency) and novel, fresh concepts and perspectives on power dynamics, alienation, and *Othering* (due to exclusion and discrimination) that enrich the well of knowledge and quality of training and must therefore be valued.

## **Transition across Time and Space**

Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia enables us to explore "cultural identities" in narratives as multi-voiced productions. They arise from participants' presentations and enactments of multiple images of Selves and *Others*, of "kaleidoscopically" presented voices across here-and-now narrating and there-and-then narrated events (Bamberg, 1997; Keane, 2011). My collaborators did not simply reflect their multiple identities as static, monolithic entities (Koven, 2015) but weaved them into their stories together with their longing to belong, vulnerability, and resilience. They allowed me to take a glimpse into their subjective worlds during our interpersonal exchanges, while grappling with the social and ideological levels within which their individual life stories and identities were positioned (Murray, 2000) to



uncover the relationship between these stories and the “narratives, attached to cultural and institutional formations” (Somers, 1994, p. 619).

### ***Changing Identities***

The processes of transition and transformation occurred through a multiplicity of interconnected, dynamically changing identities and contexts. This was present in all stories, but Dimitri’s identity transformation was especially complex and multi-layered. His metaphorical “jumping” between past and present led to a poignant moment of liberation where he regained the freedom of expression while adopting various cultural identities - from the stifling role of the *Army officer* to the magical and mythological identities of the *Time traveller* (moving across different time domains) and the *Phoenix* (possessing self-healing, self-resurrecting powers). Alice transitioned from the “*teacher’s pet*” and the “*compliant student*” to the “*person in charge*”, making her own choices and setting her own boundaries. Mantas refused to be “*another brick in the wall*”, instead turning into the “*Rebel*”. Beatriz left behind the “*good girl*” to become the “*manager*”. These powerful transformations suggested a process of growth, evident in the metaphors and analogies used by the collaborators; starting with something small (i.e., a child, a pet or a small animal, an inanimate object) and then progressing developmentally by turning into someone with more power and control over their own life (i.e., the *Time traveller*, the *Person in charge*, the *Rebel*, the *Service manager*).

### ***The Wound as a Source of Power***

According to Etherington (2003), transformation implies not only recovery or healing but a fundamental shift at the core of our being. Going through early traumatic experiences (including significant loss and parental abuse) was another commonality, shared by my collaborators. Vocalising such experiences and being able to see the original wound as a source of strength and resilience can itself become another step towards healing (Pennebaker, 1993). On a personal level, transforming trauma is about putting together aspects of our past and present while preparing to meet the future. However, on an interpersonal level, the research encounter itself became an arena for some of these transformational processes. For example, having reflected on her painful past, Eileen exclaimed that she was getting in touch with her *“inner power and motivation”*. Indeed, in the process of storytelling, we might simultaneously discover “strengths and resources within that we did not know existed” (Etherington, 2003, p. 34). An important facet of Dimitri’s quest story was the automythology (Frank, 1995; Zweig, 1976) characterised by its predominant metaphor of the Phoenix, reinventing himself from the ashes of his past life. May (1991) uses this metaphor as a way to describe the totality of self-reinvention, following massive trauma. Like the manifesto, the automythology reaches out but its language is more personal than political. Individual change - not social reform - is emphasised, with the storyteller often embodying this change.

The risk, associated with the Phoenix metaphor, is that it can present the burning process as too clean and the transformation as too complete, thereby implicitly deprecating those who fail to rise out of their own ashes. The antidotes to the illusion of reaching a state of invulnerability are chaos stories, reminding us that

some situations are “tricky” or cannot be transcended, as in the stories of Alice and Beatriz who are still grappling with the trauma of the past, or indeed of Eileen who is still enduring it. I felt that Zoya’s comparison of the beginning of her training journey to “someone putting your guts through a blender”, despite being a lot less romantic and much more graphic and gory, conveyed in a poignant way the pain and messiness of deconstruction and trauma transformation. Also “echoing” a thriller or a horror movie, albeit in a more playful way, was Eileen’s reference to the training as Halloween-like “trick-or-treating”. Feeling “lost” and “floating” like the children, abducted by the shapeshifting monster in Stephen King’s (1986) “It”, she had to focus on healing her wounded “Inner Child” prior to becoming stronger. Like Zoya, who felt that “falling apart” ultimately became a “door” to her feelings, Eileen recognised that having been “through tougher things” helped her regain her strength and confidence to connect with her clients from a place of empathy and deep, embodied knowing. Her process is reminiscent of the common perception of “the wounded healer”, where wounds healed early are understood to contribute to more effective practice (Henry, 1966; Stiles, 1997). It is also very similar to prior findings around using “wounds” (as part of the Self) in therapeutic work, suggesting that the immediate influence of adverse personal experiences is often negative. However, regarding long-term prospects, Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) maintain that therapists can use traumatic experiences in a highly constructive way in their work. They have also previously contended that extensive experience with suffering may contribute to heightened recognition, acceptance, and an appreciation of human diversity and vulnerability which is confirmed by the current findings and theme of the wound as a source of power - depending, however, on the extent to which early

wounds have been tended to and healed. This, in turn, to a large degree depends on the environment both in the training setting and in personal therapy.

### ***Place, Belonging, and Building a Relational Home in Difference***

My collaborators were more likely to experience restitution (Frank, 2016; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018), empowerment and longer-lasting change, allowing them to embrace their own authority, when they felt supported and experienced a sense of safety and “holding” within their training setting. By contrast, lack of a sense of belonging resulted in loneliness, self-doubt, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Benner & Kim, 2009; Faircloth, 2009). Unsurprisingly, the individual is more likely to acquire new skills and experiences within promotive environments that afford ongoing access to protective factors (Juang et al., 2018). Connection to place has been defined as “a long-term affective bond to a particular geographic area and the meaning attributed to that bond” (Morgan, 2010, p. 12). Humans seek proximity to certain places which can be safe havens that engender their sense of security. For example, Beatriz referred to her primary school as a *shelter* amidst an increasingly hostile environment. Conversely Eileen, Zoya, and Mantas described the spaces they had occupied in the past (specifically within the educational system in their countries of origin) as “*an institution*”, a “*boot camp*”, or even “*a box*”. In choosing to transition to and settle in another country, Zoya felt determined to leave the “*flashy, empty home*” of her family, associated mostly with pain and neglect, to acquire a new sense of belonging. This suggests that sometimes “home” is not necessarily associated with a physical space but with the feeling it gives us or with the people, “*building a home*” in us.

I have always been aware of a certain ambivalence in relation to an immigrant's native country or birthplace. Speaking from personal experience, people are very reluctant to leave a place they feel a strong connection to, unless forced by factors outside of their control which can be extremely distressing (Giuliani, 2003; Morgan, 2010). Dimitri's allusions to and "*movement*" between the culture in the UK and "*back home*" seemed to convey that ambivalence, initial confusion, and fragmentation until eventually building a new (physical but also relational) home in the new place. Transforming the training setting itself into a "secure base" (Bowlby, 1988), which entails fostering a nurturing environment by establishing a sense of safety, holding, and containment, builds upon previous research and ideas. For example, Alonso and Rutan (1988, p. 577) argue that whatever interferes with the trainees' sense of safety around exposing their work "will sharply curtail the learning". Safety emerged as both a "dominant theme" and a pre-requisite for risk taking and learning in the study, conducted by Robson and Robson (2008), exploring trainees' experiences of PD group process. Because trainees are likely to have different ways of learning and a varying ability to engage in groups (Irving & Williams, 1996), providing a wider range of options and opportunities for students to communicate with tutors and peers outside the formal teaching and "experiential component" may help them find their voices and feel more included in a freer environment, one where they are not unconsciously thinking about their participation being "assessed". Yet, it is important to be mindful of boundaries and negotiating the space between closeness and distance. Pattison and Robson (2013) also recommend offering students in multicultural cohorts a variety of explicit opportunities to interact with and learn from each other. Such variety can assist in gaining an understanding of different knowledge traditions and cultures (De Vita, 2007), and their influence on

professional roles. Additionally, it is likely to promote reflective behaviour, intercultural learning, and heighten students' awareness of their own cultural contexts.

*Learning point 7:*

*The training setting as a “secure base”*

Creating a nurturing environment, a sense of safety, belonging, and a “secure base” within the training setting may enable trainees to develop positive connections to people and places while navigating a difficult life and academic transition. Furthermore, fostering the development of supportive networks may counter some of the inequalities, discrimination, and social stratification that candidates, representing minorities, experience in other spheres. However, formal structures and edicts alone are unlikely to replace the hierarchy with a climate of egalitarianism and inclusion. It is important to take into consideration the power of informal practices and interactions. A more direct way to tackle (real or perceived) inequalities might be by creating informal spaces (e.g., organising cultural evenings, “language cafés”, etc.). These provide opportunities for students to communicate with tutors and peers outside the formal teaching and “experiential component”, thus positively helping them to advance their competences and enhance their lived experience of being included.

***Training Setting as a Liminal (Transitional) Space of Becoming***

When examining my collaborators' connection to places, the training setting itself emerged as a transitional space of “becoming”. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise, considering Zeddies' (1999, p. 234) reference to “the **developmental** process from student to seasoned clinician”, which highlighted the role played by

students' experiences of graduate clinical training programmes in determining how they utilise their own psychological and emotional resources in their work as therapists. Most of my collaborators referred to the training as "life-changing" or transformative in some way. However, their perceptions were complex and far from straightforward. For Dimitri, the training was "*amazing*" but required such a huge investment of time and resources and was so "*painful and hard*" that he exclaimed, "*I wouldn't do it again, fuck that!*" Eileen also referred to it as "*the journey of my life*" but "*tricky*" enough to compare to Halloween. According to Zoya, although enabling her to "*grow wings*" and "*blossom*", it initially required "*a complete deconstruction*", akin to having "*your guts through a blender*".

A greater awareness of how challenging and evocative the training can be (often in directions and ways that cannot be foreseen), including how early transference experiences may begin to develop between trainees and their supervisors or tutors (Ayling et al., 2018; Cartwright, 2019), as well as among themselves, elucidates the importance of personal therapy in a different way, as opposed to perceiving it simply as a ritual step taken to comply with the implicit or explicit demands of the training and therapy culture. For instance, it is worth noting that Beatriz was the only participant who had accrued most of her personal therapy hours at a later stage (after she had started seeing clients), and she seemed to still be in the process of working through her early trauma, grappling with silence, unsilence, and voice (at least, based on her narrative account and paraverbal communication). This outcome of the current research project supports previous findings of the role of personal therapy and the nature of the training. In other words, training to become a psychotherapist and counselling psychologist is a mentally and emotionally charged activity - students are trying to master new skills, establish a

professional identity and a sense of self-efficacy as a therapist while dealing with the personal issues that arise from the experiential nature of the training itself (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013). Self-exploration offers them the opportunity to reflect and work on their personal "Achilles heels" which, if not identified and dealt with, may come to the surface and impede or interfere with their client work in the future. In practical terms, this means that trainees need to build resilience in order to be able to hold or confront others' suffering and to tolerate anger, criticism, contempt, and rejection by their clients (Orlinsky et al., 2005). High standards of performance, unrealistic expectations, the achievement orientation of academia, fear of being unsuited for work within the field, and self-doubts regarding professional knowledge and competence are elements that combine to create an evaluative focus and pervasive anxiety for many trainees (Dodge, 1982). Thus, addressing such issues in personal therapy while also making sure that early trauma is explored and worked through might help diminish the anxiety levels of a trainee from the very beginning of her training journey. Furthermore, the current findings imply that personal therapy can be beneficial, providing a space and "*door*" to the trainee's feelings; for example, by achieving a sense of belonging, as Zoya described it, "*beyond language*". Contrary to Malikiosi-Loizos' (2013) assertion that personal therapy does not need to be mandatory or can be postponed until the end of the training, the current research findings indicate that it is important for candidates to engage in a process of personal therapy as early as possible, preferably before they start seeing clients. Another implication concerns the importance of being informed from the very outset of the nature of the training, in particular the possibility of undergoing a process of retraumatisation, regression and deconstruction. Indeed, there have been some ethical concerns regarding the effect of mandating therapy on trainees with respect



to their willingness to engage in the therapeutic process (Murphy et al., 2018). This raises issues for course recruitment as it highlights the need to ensure that applicants are fully informed and committed to the processes involved if they are required to participate in mandatory personal therapy. For example, the current findings can be used to underscore the challenging nature of the training in introductory workshops for potential candidates, wishing to embark on training courses in counselling psychology and psychotherapy. This will help ensure that they have greater awareness and are able to make an informed decision prior to enrolling.

*Learning point 8:*

*The nature of the training as “life-changing” but highly evocative*

Trainees need to examine carefully their motives for choosing a career path in the psychological therapies, familiarising themselves with the nature of the training as challenging and potentially triggering from the outset in ways they may not necessarily be able to foresee. Therefore, they need to be prepared to make effective use of personal therapy to enhance their awareness.

***Relationship with Authority***

Based on my collaborators’ relationships with their primary caregivers (sometimes alluded to as the “original authority figures”), and on their shared experiences of loss, separation, abuse or neglect, none of them seemed to have developed secure attachments early in life (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Mantas referred to being “*beacon and beaten*”. Eileen was punished and “*shamed*”. Zoya felt “*frozen emotionally*” and as if she were “*never on the agenda*”, while Alice directly linked her

insecure attachment and relationship with her “*angry, volatile mother*” to what made her experience on the training “*harder*”. Beatriz had a seemingly “good enough” relationship with her parents but developed depression and lost interest in her studies after their divorce and the disruption of her “secure base” (Bowlby, 1988).

Parental maltreatment has been associated with developmental or relational trauma (Bromberg, 2011) which in turn can be an antecedent of disorganised attachment in infancy and childhood, associated with numerous negative outcomes later in life (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2016). Attachment relationships are also embedded within institutional- and societal-level structures (Juang et al., 2018). Certainly, the “strange situation” (Ainsworth et al., 1978) of relocating to another country and enrolling in a highly challenging and competitive academic course (Lapsley et al., 2000) is likely to be extremely stressful and to activate the attachment system. In general, immigrants and refugee youths who have formed secure relationships with prior attachment figures tend to adapt better than those with insecure relationships (Juang et al., 2018), reaching out to others, for example teachers or mentors, as stable sources of support. By contrast, less secure people have less accessible secure-base scripts. They employ alternative ways of dealing with difficult situations (Ein-Dor et al., 2011) which is in line with Eileen’s strategy of “*getting on with it*”, Zoya’s belief that she had nothing to address in personal therapy because she was “*fine*” and was only there to “*tick off the box*”, and Alice’s lack of awareness that she could reach out and ask the tutors for help, leaving her feeling “*alone and struggling on my own*”.

Thankfully, our brains are capable of continual adaptation (Cozolino, 2017; Schore, 2014) and attachment can change in response to newly emerging situations and relationships (Sroufe, 2005). I construe the training as offering the possibility of a

more stabilising experience where tutors have unconditional positive regard and treat candidates equally, even when they are not always able to perform their best. For example, Zoya was initially self-sufficient and “frozen”, most likely because she had developed an avoidant attachment style (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Lopez, 1995), which I linked to her early interactions with abandoning and inattentive parents. As a result of feeling validated and valued as a person, unconditionally supported by her tutor and her therapist, she was able to have some of her developmental needs met and to establish more secure attachments to others, simultaneously getting in touch with her pain and vulnerability.

Intriguingly, I noticed that my collaborators initially viewed authority figures through the lens of an early acquired, dichotomous “black and white” form of thinking. Authority often seemed to feature in their stories as either the nurturing, benevolent parent or the cold, critical parent. For example, Zoya seemed to idealise her grandmother and vilify her mother. Her early experience of her teachers as disinterested “bystanders” seemed to represent the mother’s neglect while her therapist and “inspirational tutor” on her psychotherapy training course reminded her of her grandmother. Mantas’ portrayal of his (actually, also abusive) father as a “demigod” and of his mother as an “irrational” uncontrollable force and “wrong authority” seemed to resonate strongly with his binary view of his tutors as either “superstars” or, conversely, bigoted villains - literally embodying the archetypically light and dark sides of leadership at an institutional level (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2010, 2012).

Gabriel (1997) argues that narratives in which leaders feature as larger-than-life, mythical figures are rooted in early life experiences of the primal mother and father but I contend they can also be connected with “us versus *them*” thinking; the

brainwashing, idealisation, and personality cult promoted by the political propaganda of the ruling party in the despotic state. Gradually, in the course of the training and therapy, other aspects and nuances resurfaced, enabling Mantas and the others to view the authority figures as fallible, “*ordinary human beings*”, carrying both light and darkness. This signalled to me their growing awareness and integration. These findings also concur with prior research (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) where trainees’ perceptions of “professional elders” often start with idealisation, are followed by devaluation, and then finally these opposing views are integrated to appreciate them as ordinary humans. The interpersonal orientation of the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy finds its expression in students continually scrutinising and evaluating professors, teachers, and supervisors. Trainees want to learn from and model seniors they see as competent. Strong admiration is expressed for those who possess behaviours or personal characteristics that are perceived as highly positive, such as intellectual brilliance, strong therapeutic skills and supervision ability, emotional support for beginners, and the modelling of professional values in personal life. However, negative reactions and devaluation can be just as common and just as intense. According to Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003), being in a dependent and relatively low-power position is often the fuel, propelling such strong reactions. Behaviours perceived as highly negative include unfair criticism from tutors or supervisors, insufficient support, inflexibility, as well as patronising and pathologising attitudes. Based on their research findings, Mehr et al. (2010, p. 111) investigated possible factors, contributing to trainee nondisclosure or “silence” in supervision, suggesting that “trainees would be more apt to share and disclose information if the supervisor makes active attempts to foster a strong supervisory relationship through utilisation of clinical skills, such as

empathy, positive regard, and reflections”. This builds upon Mueller and Kell’s (1972) proposition that trust is a prelude to collaboration in supervision, and that - like therapy - supervision can only succeed when there is safety and a “good enough” relationship. Also, it has been previously emphasised that tutors and group facilitators (Cole, 2013) as well as supervisors (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001) need to be aware of themselves and their position in relation to others from a perspective of power, and may benefit from strategies that help them react nondefensively when challenged by trainees.

Because a distinctive feature of training and supervision is the explicit focus on evaluation, it is recommended that authority figures provide comprehensive feedback throughout the supervision and training experience. For example, supervisors could communicate to their supervisees that the formal evaluation is primarily the composite of that feedback (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). During Eileen’s follow-up interview, she referred to frustration and confusion regarding the (sometimes) conflicting demands from different tutors, identified as “*different authorities, different voices*”. According to Mehr et al. (2010), one way to tackle this, as well as to further alleviate anxiety and assuage evaluation fears, would be to describe specific evaluation procedures during the first supervision session or training module, incorporating the trainee’s goals into the evaluation criteria and inviting them to engage in an ongoing assessment of progress which may also serve to reduce the power imbalance. Other studies suggest that the power differential can be addressed when tutors and supervisors identify expressions of their power in training and supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009), and understand how to manage the inevitable power struggles (Nelson & Friedlander, 2001). Additionally, it is recommended that they invite an open discussion of the power differential and

utilise empowerment strategies - for example, the supervisor can ask the trainee to direct the focus of each supervision session (Kagan & Kagan, 1997). Nelson and Friedlander (2001) also state that open discussion from the outset of power imbalances and inevitable conflicts, stemming from them, might also be helpful. Trainees, tutors, and supervisors can therefore disclose their feelings about the power differential, examine how each might react to it, and plan for anticipated difficulties. Based on the current research findings, I propose that such openness can create more secure attachments in the training setting while emphasising consistent holding and continuity throughout the training that might help improve trainees' experiences and the ways in which they process and cope with past trauma.

*Learning point 9:*

***Developing more secure attachments within the training setting***

Insecure attachment configurations and difficult power dynamics with the primary caregivers often emerge in the transference realm and may affect negatively the transition and communication with authority figures during training. Offering consistent holding, support, and unconditional positive regard may provide candidates with a more stabilising experience, enabling them to get in touch with suppressed feelings, to process trauma, and to develop more secure attachments to tutors, supervisors, therapists, and peers.

## **Study Limitations**

In terms of addressing some of the limitations of this NI, I am mindful that it was specifically designed to “give voice” to a cultural group, representing a minority

in the UK. Researcher and researched alike embodied diversity and *Otherness* in the research endeavour. While I see this as especially poignant in the current social and political climate, I also recognise that some of the insights, findings and reflections might not be transferable to practitioners from other cultural groups which therefore may need to be investigated separately.

In addition, I did not consider the specific training modality to be an explicit part of my inclusion criteria which might have influenced the research outcomes. However, to ensure transparency, I have included information, regarding each collaborator's training modality (see Table 1, p. 89).

Another possible limitation was associated with language. All conversational interviews were carried out in English; yet, even richer data might have been unearthed if each narrator was given the option to speak in his or her first language. Regrettably, I had no resources available to ensure translation. Moreover, even in studies where interviews have been conducted in the narrator's mother tongue, questions have sometimes been raised around issues of validity, pertinent to NI as a research methodology (Polkinghorne, 2007). Among these are certain limits of language to capture the full complexity and depth of experienced meaning. Acknowledging language limitations, Kleres (2010) reminds us that not only speech but also prosodic features or (paraverbal) "markers" can unravel a myriad of emotions. As the sole researcher and interviewer, conducting all the fieldwork and transcribing the interviews, I was able to listen to each interview repeatedly, noticing prolonged silences, stuttering, exclamations, changes in topic, and heightened affective moments. Metaphors and analogies were also immensely helpful in transcending some of these language difficulties, dichotomies, and binary thinking. Establishing an atmosphere of intimacy also allowed me to access and display the

intricacy of my collaborators' experiences (Ricoeur, 1984), expressing vividly emotional states that might otherwise have been harder to access.

## **Future Research**

I believe that future researchers might aim to acquire greater breadth and depth of information from an additional range of sources (Kim, 2016). While I only interviewed counselling psychologists and psychotherapists who had completed their training journeys, talking to “non-completers” about their unique experiences as well as to trainees from specific training modalities might contribute to a broader understanding of the topic, offering additional insights or perhaps presenting a completely different “side”. Examining the transgenerational impact of authoritarianism, for instance by interviewing counselling psychologists and psychotherapists whose parents had been raised within authoritarian regimes, or exploring the effect on trainees' development of other aspects of “authoritarian background” outside the political context (such as the influence of religion) might elucidate additional factors, shaping the experiences of power and authority during the training journey. On a similar note, exploring the lived experiences of tutors and supervisors may crystallise even further the themes and concepts that emerged, enhancing our joint understanding of the relational and power dynamics on training courses.

More recently, I have been reflecting on possible sequence in the choices of my collaborators around training modality. For example, Dimitri (a former army officer) had initially chosen the more directive CBT approach, while Zoya who had never felt that her unique world and feelings had been noticed, acknowledged or “on



*the agenda*", had opted to train as a person-centred counsellor. My hunch is that it would be interesting to investigate further how participants' background and history might have influenced their choice of modality and theoretical affiliation.

Future studies should also focus more on the experiences of intersectional discrimination across multiple identities. For example, exploring ways in which Black, Asian, Eastern European or Hispanic female psychotherapists experience discrimination and exoticisation in the workplace or as part of the erotic transference in the consulting room might shed light on the potential impact of developmental process versus power, control, and racial stereotypes.

### **Contribution to the Field**

Addressing the "So What?" and "Who Cares?" questions of this NI (Clandinin, 2013, p. 35) while thinking of its potential contribution to the fields of counselling psychology and psychotherapy, I consider it a stepping stone towards "empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 204). First and foremost, working on this project changed the way in which I relate to my clients. It made a difference to my clinical practice as I became a lot more sensitised to issues around power and authority. Working as a psychotherapist and counselling psychologist in training, both in private practice and within the educational sector (primarily with students), highlighted even further the potential impact of power imbalances and the importance of attending to such power differentials both within therapy and training context. I believe that colleagues, working within the same field (or with specific client populations, e.g., with individuals who represent minority groups and who feel disempowered, with immigrants who

struggle with language and other issues around difference, etc.) might also consider my research findings helpful. This demonstrates the breadth of the implications and of the entire topic of power. Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) emphasise how for many years therapists have strived to look for, navigate and negotiate, both internally and externally, the appropriate level of involvement with clients. The findings of Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) illuminate how well therapists regulate their emotions in their work, identifying categories of practice patterns from combinations of high and low scores on the dimensions of stressful and healing (therapeutic) involvement. Overall, up to one-third of therapists reported stressful involvement with their clients. With experience, practitioners gradually become more adept at regulating involvement and identification with clients, developing an increased awareness of their strengths and limitations. With a clearer definition and differentiation of responsibility, it becomes more likely that their level of involvement will be fine-tuned in a professional manner. By knowing more about one's issues around power and the impact of early experiences on personal and professional development or, to put it succinctly, by knowing more about our own suffering, we are better able to "bracket it" and achieve that balance with our clients. Evidence from previous studies (e.g., Hill et al., 2007) suggests that if counselling psychologists and psychotherapists in training gradually begin to develop and enhance their self-awareness, sense of professional identity and authority, trusting that they will be able to offer appropriate interventions, they are likely to feel more comfortable working with clients, even in the early stages of development. If trainees are to use "the Self" effectively as therapists, then they need to be aware of their relationship with power and authority, of their positive and negative reactions to clients, their fears and urges, and what clients evoke or elicit within them (Hill et al., 2007). The BPS practice guidelines

(2017) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2015) both draw attention to the use of Self and an understanding of one's own personal experience, highlighting its effect on their work as critical for counselling psychologists. Because the use of Self is such a core component of counselling psychology and psychotherapy, trainees must engage in ongoing work on their own issues to facilitate growing awareness and self-exploration, and to ensure safe working. While this differs for everyone, revisiting our "ghosts" from the past can often be traumatic and painful (even if the source of trauma is different - authoritarian states are far from the only aggressor!). Therefore, the current project further accentuates the role and importance of personal therapy as an essential component right from the outset of the training.

Sometimes, the act itself of narrating a significant life event in the presence of an attentive and empathetic listener facilitates positive change (Chase, 2013). When group members are given support and permission to articulate the deeper undercurrents of their experience, empowerment and growth become possible (Cole, 2013). Feeling listened to without fear of being silenced or sanctioned opens up a path towards achieving a more authentic sense of belonging both on an individual and organisational level. Helping trainees voice their reactions (in their own words) in PD group process, therapy and supervision while providing them with the skills to deal with situations where they feel silenced or subjected to discrimination, may strengthen their self-confidence while alleviating anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, regression, or learned helplessness (Seligman, 1973). This may also impact positively on the therapeutic relationships with their clients.

Additionally, the current research project emphasises the transformational power of training programmes in the psychological therapies while illustrating how

incredibly challenging the training process itself can be. A more practical justification for the NI, therefore, is that it might help individuals who have decided to pursue counselling psychology or psychotherapy as a career to familiarise themselves with some of the difficulties they may face prior to making an informed decision. It might encourage them to review and re-evaluate their expectations about the nature of the training. For instance, candidates at the very beginning of their training journey may already expect to be challenged by it.

On an institutional level, the knowledge construction emerging from the narratives is critical because they speak directly to ethical practice. According to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018):

Acting ethically can be affected by a number of individual and group influences... Key considerations include **conformity and resistance**, **context, power**, emotion, and **the role of social norms**, organisational pressures and **group/self-identity**. Psychologists are well placed to consider and reflect on these factors in their own decision-making. (p. 3)

For example, the emerging themes and points of learning can be referred to and used in multicultural competency training for clinicians who may then become more attuned to clients' lived experiences of being silenced, brainwashed, oppressed, abused, and facing exoticisation or conflict in relationships.

The current findings also challenge the way researchers think about "quality of education" and how it is perceived in the practice of training individuals to become psychotherapists and counselling psychologists. For decades, the tension between education as hegemonic and education as emancipatory has fascinated scholars (Hune, 1997). To this day, training settings continue to be seen as contested spaces between those preserving the dominant order and those who seek to subvert it, or at

least to make it slightly more accommodating to historic outsiders. While educational institutions have the power and capacity to enable members of marginalised groups to alter their status and earnings potential (Nasaw, 1979; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993), simultaneously (albeit inadvertently), they sometimes maintain hierarchies or continue to reproduce inequities with respect to sex, race, ethnicity, and class lines. The stories, presented in this NI, illuminate the ways in which training programmes in psychotherapy and counselling psychology **are about more than the academic and experiential aspect**; namely, the creating of a nurturing environment that has the capacity to offer candidates (especially those undergoing major transition) a sense of holding and stability, thus facilitating self-agency, resilience, and the development of professional authority. This highlights the importance of implementing and regularly revising guidelines and standards of education and training; for example, developing further the UKCP recommendation for “maintaining a safe learning environment” (UKCP, 2019b, p. 11).

In a broader context, this research can be used to highlight issues around intersectionality, liminality, embodied knowing and trauma, thus reducing silence and invisibility, and ameliorating the impact of subtle and overt forms of racism in various environments. Helping individuals name and navigate these experiences is the crucial first step towards achieving empowerment and equality.

## Conclusion

I envisage that programmes and training organisations that attend to the points, raised in this research project, are more likely to provide a better quality of education, learning environment and pastoral care, compared with courses that do

not regularly take into consideration or critically reflect on issues around power and authority. Having accomplished the difficult transitions from authoritarian regimes to democracy, from silence to speaking, from helplessness to empowerment, my collaborators also had to work persistently to challenge the stereotypical assumptions made about their ability to be successful within (not particularly) friendly or welcoming social and political contexts. Above all, their stories were testimonies to how the repressed and silenced may become intrinsically motivated, challenging the assumed characteristics of people who are assigned the “*Other*” label. I feel that every time one of them succeeds, fertile ground is created on which to break apart the assumptions that inform racist labels.

Ultimately, while working on this inquiry, I felt that there was a shift occurring deep within me - from the urge to build a well-structured, orderly, methodologically “accurate” piece, (re)presenting almost poetically (re)told stories, towards a raw, honest, and reflective account of my collaborators’ struggles and sufferings; a humongous effort to expose what this project was ultimately built on: blood, sweat and tears. “*Getting on with it*” against all the odds. In this process of bearing witness, which helped elicit the rich and powerful stories of my fellow liminars and “*Others*”, I felt humbled, transported, and connected. I experienced “a sense of belonging to a community of voices that has for too long remained unheard” (Etherington, 2003, p. 179). They epitomised courage, resilience, and survivorship but also represented disowned and disallowed parts of myself, finally coming together. This made me feel less alone in my own struggles to “become” and to “be” in another country, so different from my own. Yet, it also alerted me to the importance of maintaining a fine balance between closeness and distance; between empathy and overidentification - within the research and training context as well as in the therapy room. Lugones

(1987, p. 17) describes being in relation as allowing us to “travel to other worlds and understand what it is to be *Other* and what it is to be ourselves in *Other’s* eyes”. This ultimately resonates with our work as psychotherapists and counselling psychologists, essentially construing an empathic resonance and establishing empathic modes of understanding and knowing the *Other* (Ginot, 2009), enabling us to connect with our clients and affirm their experience while respecting their autonomy. I recognised myself and my own experience in each story and finally felt ready to make that “jump”, stepping into the ashes of the Phoenix and reaching deep inside to deliver a gut-wrenching tale of pain, silence, survival, and rebellion.

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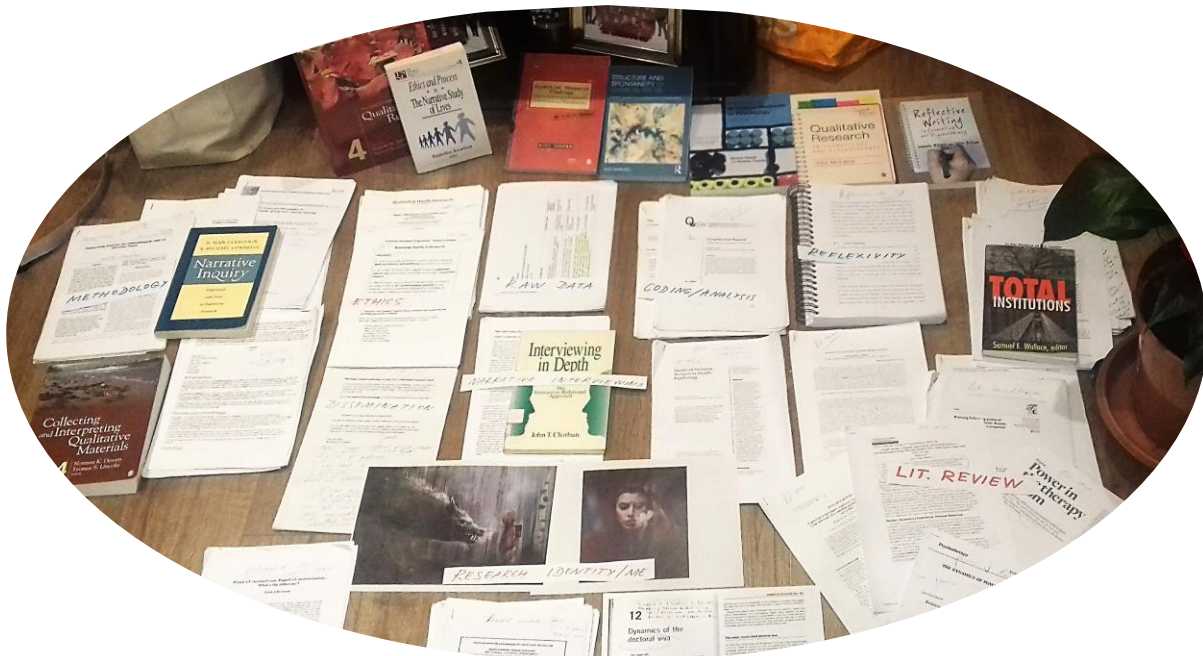
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## Appendix 1. Ethical Approval Letter



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Denitsa Radeva-Petrova  
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych)  
Metanoia Institute

8<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Ref: 20/16-17

Dear Denitsa,

*Re: Voices as equal as others: a narrative inquiry into the doctoral journey of psychologists and psychotherapists from authoritarian background*

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as research ethics representative for the DCPsych programme.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Vanja Orlans  
Senior Director of Studies & Programme Leader DCPsych  
Faculty of Post-Qualification and Professional Doctorates

On behalf of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Registered in England at the  
above address No. 2918520



## Appendix 2. Recruitment Advertisements

# Voices as equal as others: A narrative inquiry into the doctoral journey of psychologists and psychotherapists from authoritarian background

4 April 2019 Denitsa Radeva-Petrova

I am enrolled on the Doctoral programme in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy (DCPsych) at Metanoia Institute / Middlesex University. I wish to interview counselling psychologists and psychotherapists about their experiences related to power and authority during the training journey.

The aim is to explore how power dynamics (individual and within a group), relationships with authority figures (from the past and present), early relational bonds, and social and political environment impact the development of trainees' own authority as well as other aspects of their work and life.

The findings may assist educators and training institutions in developing new guidelines and recommendations for improving the quality of training and creating more egalitarian relationships in training and supervisory contexts.

- Are you a Counselling Psychologist or Psychotherapist?
- Have you been enrolled on an advanced Counselling Psychology and/or Psychotherapy training course (doctoral level or equivalent)?
- Were you born and/or raised in an authoritarian regime (e.g., totalitarian or post-totalitarian countries in Central/Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, or South America)?

If the answer is “yes”, I would be happy to talk to you and give you space to find your voice. Each interview will take place at a mutually agreed meeting place/time, will be audio recorded, and will last approximately 60-80 minutes. There will be a second, follow-up conversational interview to check how you feel and to address any issues which might have been left unresolved or unprocessed. You will have the opportunity to read, check, and verify the interview transcript and the final account of your story.

Your participation will be strictly confidential with all details anonymised.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact me:

[denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk) or [deni\\_r\\_r@yahoo.com](mailto:deni_r_r@yahoo.com).

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Denitsa Radeva-Petrova

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## Call for Participants

### **Voices as equal as others: A narrative inquiry into the doctoral journey of psychologists and psychotherapists from authoritarian background**

I am enrolled on the Doctoral programme in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy (DCPsych) at Metanoia Institute / Middlesex University, and I wish to interview counselling psychologists and psychotherapists about their experiences related to power and authority during their training. The aim of the study is to explore counselling psychologists and psychotherapists' lived experiences of power dynamics, relationships with authority figures, and their impact on the development of their own authority during the training journey.

The study will increase practitioners' awareness of subtle power processes (both individual and within a group), as well as of the role and influence of early relational bonds, relationship with past authority figures, and social and political environments. The findings may assist educators and training institutions in developing new guidelines and recommendations for improving the quality of training and creating more egalitarian relationships in training and supervisory contexts.

The project is open to recently qualified practitioners from authoritarian backgrounds (e.g., totalitarian and post-totalitarian regimes such as former and current communist states) who have been enrolled on an advanced Counselling Psychology and/or Psychotherapy training course (doctoral level or equivalent).

Your involvement in the study will consist of two individual conversational interviews. Each interview will take place at a mutually agreed meeting place/time, will be audio recorded, and will last approximately 60-80 minutes. You will have the opportunity to see the interview transcript and to read, check, and verify the final account of your story.

Your participation is strictly confidential with all details anonymised.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact me for further information on [denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk) or [deni\\_r\\_r@yahoo.com](mailto:deni_r_r@yahoo.com).

Thank you.

Denitsa Radeva-Petrova

### Appendix 3. Excerpts from Research Notes and Reflective Diary

What what did  
this signify? No  
response from the  
Russians...

18/7/2019

I interviewed 'Maurice'  
between 3.30 pm and (just  
after) 5 pm on Thursday  
18/7/19. The interview took  
place at his private practice  
in London in his office.  
I felt tired but very  
excited. At the end I  
invited him to answer  
our questions he might  
have. His main one expressed  
his curiosity about the  
title of our project,  
and how I chose this  
topic. I related some  
of our experiences on  
the training on the Pts

panel as well as the  
link of our title ('equity  
voices') to Orwell's  
'Animal Farm'. He imme-  
diately knew what I  
was talking about; he  
mentioned "the pigs"  
and smiled with  
recognition in his eyes.  
I definitely had a  
strong sense of  
resonance and that  
he 'got' me and our  
idea. He also spoke  
briefly about his  
grandmother, who wanted  
to take him to church,  
and how under the  
regime, our such artists  
might jeopardise the  
father's job. I felt  
enthusiastic on the way to



the train station.

I reflected again on  
the fact that Le Spone  
Russian but was not  
Russian.

Shunned by the  
'Russians'.

7/8/2019

Having listened to Mantov's  
story to his interview I  
felt 'terrible, especially  
when he talked about  
his childhood. I found  
his resignation, acceptance  
of the punishment imposed  
on him heart-breaking and  
deeply unsettling.

Interestingly I did not  
feel this at the time  
of the actual interview  
only afterwards on the  
train and a few days  
after starting the process  
of transcription.

Was I dissociating?  
Was I disallowing  
something? It did resonate,  
especially when he  
was reflecting on his  
"surrender" what I

saw as surrender, because  
 the system as 'so strong'.  
 While he was talking  
 about the beatdown  
 chart and how this  
 is how they managed  
 to punish him, I was  
 struck by the injustice  
 and thought of my  
 favorite poet Robert  
 Lowell, who killed  
 himself after a similar  
 punishment at his  
 high school. Nobody  
 believed her. Nobody listens  
 to her explanation. And  
 she just quit, she 'won'  
 by removing herself  
 completely, and forever,  
 at only seventeen.

I found the place, where  
 we conducted this first  
 interview, a bit claustro-  
 phobic - it was a small  
 room with no windows.  
 Nurses had put a  
 nice painting (of a  
 window!) on the wall  
 to create that illusion of  
 something that wasn't  
 there in reality. But what  
 is reality?  
 The emotional climate  
 kept changing. I was  
 relatively calm - premeditated.  
 Initially, I perceived him  
 as a bit wary as if  
 testing me, but  
 later on, he opened  
 up. Towards the end  
 of the interview, there  
 was much warmth,  
 there was a sense of  
 camaraderie.

## Appendix 4. Reflective Analytic Memos

1/10/2018

**Dimitri: Initial interview**

### **MEETING WITH THE “TIME TRAVELLER”**

I travelled to [REDACTED], to meet up with Dimitri. We had arranged a meeting at a quiet coffee-shop near the town centre, where we could have some peace and quiet to carry on with the interview. I felt enthusiastic and a little bit unsure how to proceed as this was the first interview I was conducting. However, I quickly became very engaged with the material, presented by Dimitri.

What he was describing as his childhood, the rigid rules and way to behave, especially “only speaking when being asked and when it is your turn to speak”, certainly resonated with me and reminded me a lot of my own childhood in my home country. I noticed the lingering respect of status and “visible” ranks he still seemed to harbour, as well as being defined by a uniform (which also echoed some of my childhood experiences, along with being “a number”). I found especially poignant the analogy he made between going through the process of psychotherapy training and a Phoenix bird, bursting into flames and then becoming once again “new” and whole; the process immediately reminded me of a sort of a “resurrection” of the Authentic Self. I also liked his metaphor about the Time Traveller. The overall atmosphere was one of warmth, excitement, and wonderment. After the interview, I felt like a shark, tasting blood for the first time and feeling very thirsty, wanting MORE, MORE...! It was a very visceral response; this thirst and hunger, and URGE to **satisfy my curiosity** (with data, rather than with blood!). Because his experience resonated strongly with mine, especially in relation to the group process in the beginning, I also wondered whether it meant that I was almost having some of my own impressions and perceptions during the group process validated?

I called my “critical friend” on the way home in the car to discuss what emerged and what was being evoked for me. It was a long journey, both figuratively and literally. Yet time was flying because I felt almost feverish with excitement, anticipating the next interview.

9/3/2019

### **Dimitri: Follow-up**

#### **“FUCK THAT!”**

I had to wait for quite some time before reconnecting with Dimitri which resulted in some feelings of frustration on my part. Initially, he had to travel to the USA, carry out some training for work, and then spend some time with a relative visiting from his home country. It made me think of the busy pace of life in general, and how precious every moment is. Our follow-up interview was a lot more relaxed, not as charged and with some humour and familiarity with each other's voices. Dimitri had started a new job and had just published a book in his home country on the supervisory relationship. He did refer to feeling “fed up” with studying and needing a break and also that, as amazing as the training journey was for him, it was so challenging that he “would never want to go back and do it again, fuck that”. I reflected on that, whole-heartedly agreeing and we laughed a bit which made me feel lighter.

16/9/2019

### **Dimitri: Initial Coding Experience**

#### **DIMITRI'S SELF-PERCEPTION AND MY RESPONSES**

I am looking at Dimitri's transcript, reading each line carefully and coding, often “in vivo”. Then I am trying to group the codes into something “broader”.

I feel completely exhausted. This transcript feels endless. I literally need to convince myself, to coax myself: “*just one more page for today and you can go out and have a cup of mocha praline macchiato*”. Yet I am slowly disengaging, looking at the words and the tiny numbers of the codes. I think of “Number 8”, of my module in Epidemiology, and my work in the clinical field. I really have a “love-hate” relationship with numbers! Mostly “hate” at the moment.

Then I am noticing something when I consider Dimitri's SELF-PERCEPTION - how he starts referring to himself as the “ARMY OFFICER” in the beginning, almost as if there is this identification with his UNIFORM which I strongly perceive as a symbol of the oppressive system. It feels as if he is hiding from me behind that uniform, I am fearful, frustrated but I cover it up. I completely disengage and fall asleep, throwing the pages on the floor.



Then the following day - progress still very slow and painful - I notice his allusion to the PHOENIX, destroyed and then miraculously resurrected; then becoming a CIVILIAN (which he seems to use as a slightly derogatory term initially), and finally he refers to himself as a TIME TRAVELER.

I think about his own self-image, self-perception, and how others see him. I am aware of the OFFICER'S UNIFORM - the transition from this inanimate object, then slowly how his language changes; he becomes a BIRD but not just ANY bird - a PHOENIX with some magical, self-destructive but also self-healing properties. Then slowly and gradually he becomes an ORDINARY HUMAN - a CIVILIAN. I wonder if this is how he sees me? As an ordinary CIVILIAN as well. I feel comfortable and at ease with that; I am not worried about not being perceived as "special"; content to be just HUMAN. Finally, he becomes the SUPERHUMAN - the Time Traveller. This creature which is SOMETHING else, something supernatural. I think of Nietzsche and feel fascinated by the complex stages of Dimitri's transformation. My crippling anxiety slowly transforms into excitement and the painful urge to write this down lest I forget.

13/2/2019

### **Alice: Initial Interview**

#### **SEEN BUT NOT HEARD**

I went to [REDACTED] to meet up with "Alice". The interview took place at a coffee-shop at one of the stations. A lot of things resonated with me, for example the love-hate relationship with numbers and also with the teachers. Although physically abusive and not permitting any freedom of expression or creativity, they seemed to be looked upon as the "absolute authority", very compatible with growing up and studying as a young girl in my own communist country of origin.

I was however particularly struck by the stereotypical thinking and prejudice Alice encountered in the UK. Her story about her counselling experience in Middle England definitely struck a chord within me, particularly regarding the more "subtle" and almost more socially "acceptable" forms of racism, which remain unacknowledged, denied, a huge "blind spot". I thought of my own experience going to Dorset and seeing the looks on people's faces; no smiles, just hostile stares like a predator, guarding its territory or at least that was my perception. The estate agent correcting my husband's English. Then I went even further back, thinking of my experience at [REDACTED], and how one of the other supervisees would place her feet on the arm of my chair.

18/4/2019

## **Alice: Memories, Emerging after Hearing Her Story**

### **DIRTY SHOES, BLOCKED EARS**

Alice's story about her counselling experience in Middle England reminded me of my own experience at my first placement, [REDACTED]. I was attending weekly group supervision with four other supervisees, two born locally, one from the USA and one from a country in Western Europe. One of the supervisees who was local would sometimes lift her feet with her shoes on and place them on the arm of my chair. I never spoke about it and finally asked her not to do it but in hindsight and while transcribing Alice's interview, it occurred to me that she would only invade my personal space (in the course of 14 months), in a gesture which I metaphorically (and literally) interpreted as wiping her shoes on my arm, which made me feel like rubbish. This took place in London, a cosmopolitan, international city. The placement supervisor and the other supervisees never commented on that during the supervisory process but finally one of the supervisees said, "How could she do that!" to me, after the end of our supervision session. I always felt that I wasn't considered "equal" by the others. In fact, even though I rarely took more time than them, I was often accused (presumably, "jokingly") of taking more time than them. Now I find the fact that she did that, the fact that no one said anything in the group, frankly astonishing. However, the scariest thing was my own reaction - when she first did that, I froze, feeling speechless, paralysed, transported back to my experiences as a little child in Bulgaria, with no voice, no power, and no rights. And no one said anything. I did not feel I had the right to say anything - until... I did. If this had happened now, I would have said something sooner but I was still in the beginning of Year 2 (a very early stage of my process of "becoming") and not very confident or assertive. This memory of feeling frozen, paralysed, inferior, and sitting amidst the horror of the unspoken slowly unravelled and left me shaken while listening to and transcribing Alice's interview.

Another thing I recalled while listening to her talk about her first supervisor and feeling as if she was being "questioned" by the police was when I went for the first and only time to meet with a potential supervisor back in Year 2. I knocked on her door. Maybe she thought it was too loud but when she opened, she had her hands over her ears. This on an unconscious level immediately put me off because it signalled to me that she didn't care to listen to me and it didn't matter what I would say. Then the whole meeting proceeded with her asking me questions, looking at a list and writing everything down. So, it did feel a lot like an interrogation and "box-ticking". I felt taken aback. I reflected on these two emerging memories and how I wasn't able to say anything back then - again, the multifaceted nature of Silence.

19/8/2019

**Beatriz: Initial Interview**

**GROWING UP IN SILENCE**

Our meeting took place on Monday afternoon, 19<sup>th</sup> August. I was feeling slightly nervous, experiencing heart palpitations just before the interview started. I was wondering what was going on for me. Perhaps it was that this participant was not exactly from the same background as mine, not from Eurasia / Central or Eastern Europe / the former communist block I felt familiar with. There was a lot of “not knowing” about what she had witnessed, coming from a country where a military coup had taken place shortly before she was born. As oppressive as the communist regime in Bulgaria was, I had never witnessed people being taken away, literally being dragged by the police on the street and disappearing - never to come back. So, I didn’t know what to expect and what would happen if very traumatic experiences emerged, thinking of potential ways to contain her and prepared to keep an eye on that. From the beginning, I was very cautious. But she appeared to be a lot more robust than I expected.

I quickly felt more at ease once the interview started. I experienced her as being very bubbly, open, communicative, and emanating resilience which struck me at the same time. I could see that my participant was very experienced and had reflected a lot on some of these memories, which kept emerging especially in the first half of the interview, which seemed to be predominantly about how the military dictatorship had impacted her, living “in silence” and being terrified of using her voice. The second half, on the other hand, seemed to be more focused on how my participant had started claiming her own power and embracing her authority, still struggling to leave her image of “the good girl” behind, wanting to become the “good manager” which didn’t seem as a real transformation, having difficulty telling people outright what needs to be done and to be more directive. This reminded me of me! The question about differences and similarities between management and leadership (encompassing what I perceived as different forms of power, different types of authority) also seemed to be very much in the foreground and Beatriz was grappling with it in her current work.

I felt curious and as if we were working towards formulating something together when we talked about her associations related to “authority”, including her own. I felt especially emotional when she was describing her fear whenever there was a demonstration, expecting the police to arrive and thinking automatically how to get out, even nowadays in the UK; still not trusting THE POLICE on an implicit level. At the same time, I was noticing the difference in our experience - she had felt good

at her “experimental” school, thinking of it as a “safe haven” and a “secure base”, a contained bubble, whereas I perceived my primary school as a horrible “total institution” to use Goffman’s language, and hated every aspect of it. I felt sick to my stomach every time I had to go there in the morning, walking behind one of the most hated, authoritarian teachers (teaching Manual Labour) who had beaten my mother two decades ago, and never missed an opportunity to humiliate me, belittle me, mock me or to give me negative marks in my mark book. He would use the term “nerds”, referring to me and a few other of my classmates who were straight A students, as something very derogative and BAD, shameful even, making the assumption that if you are “bookish” and get good grades, this means you are BAD and lack skills in other areas, such as carpentry for example. I hated that school perhaps because there were also these “monitors” and “informants” in the state schools, ALWAYS present. I felt watched, scrutinised - and very relieved when I was back on the street in the afternoon, finally able to breathe and not feel the horrible cramps of anxiety in my tummy.

For Beatriz, it seemed to be the opposite. She had felt “free” to express herself and challenge the teachers at school; terrified and unable to speak up on the street. The fact that she had been given some creative space and freedom in her school environment evoked in me strong, irrational feelings of envy and even jealousy; thinking of the absurdity of it all, how even a military dictatorship seemed to allow on some level more warmth and better relationships between people (maybe because the state was clearly seen as the “enemy”), whereas in Bulgaria the paranoia and the distrust was mostly towards each other. We didn’t trust our peers and had to “spy” on each other, while the State remained this frozen ideal, the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov - on his unreachable pedestal; not unlike the Superego ideal which was forever distant and unattainable, and beyond my grasp. In a way beyond criticism, forever elusive and “perfect”! Never seen as “flawed” but also never understood by me. I always felt so small, insignificant and basically worthless in comparison to the PARTY, this faceless institution. I began to understand why they called it the “Cold War”. I started wondering whether seeing a policeman brutally beating another fellow human outside, openly on the street, might actually lead to - paradoxically - people being much closer to each other, supporting each other, developing a camaraderie of sorts, not unlike siblings living with an abusive, unstable parent and having no other choice but to help each other to survive?

Towards the end, I felt exhausted and needed some time on my own and some fresh air as I was attacked by vivid images, mostly of being persecuted and punished. I spent some time in my garden and talked to my daughter about her art lessons and other things to distract myself, then had a glass of wine.

27/10/2019

### **Beatriz: Follow-up**

## **GHOSTS FROM THE PAST, HAUNGING ME IN THE PRESENT - BELENE CONCENTRATION CAMP**

An even more primitive feeling and earlier memory was triggered after my second, follow-up interview with Beatriz. It was brief but she made a comment about something in the first transcript which made me read the part where she had mentioned the disappearances of friends and acquaintances, presumably being imprisoned and tortured. I got a headache - I had been thinking of a name, the ghost of a name - Belene. I heard that name being whispered when I was little, in my great grandparents' house, in the small village where my grandmother was born. I felt terror maybe because my grandmother looked so pale when she mentioned it but I quickly stopped thinking about it afterwards. A decade later, I read about Belene Concentration Camp, also referred to as Belene Labour Camp, a part of the network of forced labour camps in Communist Bulgaria. It was located on the Belene Island, between two branches of the Danube river where my home city is located. The Belene Prison is still operating today. Apparently, an anonymous letter was sent decades before I was born from an "informant" to the militia, accusing my great grandfather of being a "kulak" (an insult, used to describe a wealthy farmer resisting the forced collectivisation process). Under the threat of being sent to Belene where he would have undoubtedly perished in the 1950s, he gave away his land, his heart no doubt bleeding to stay with his family. Horrible accounts of people being tortured, killed or dying slowly in Belene were not a myth and started invading my dreams. I remember feeling anger; righteous anger or rather fury; blind, blood-thirsty, primitive fury and indignation at the killings, torture and injustices, the crimes committed, which fill me up as I am writing this. Fury I had too long suppressed and denied. Had he tried to resist, I wouldn't be writing these sentences now.

2/2/2020

### **My Relationship with the Stories OF SHARKS AND EASTER EGGS**

After the first interview (with Dimitri), I called my "critical friend" to express my excitement but also sudden hunger, feeling "like a shark, tasting blood for the first time". I wanted to hear more and more stories, more and more details, feeling almost insatiable to get confirmation that what was happening to me then, while marching

under the rain, was real and others could relate to it. As I was collecting my collaborators' stories, I started visualising them as a basket full of Easter eggs, literally "seeing" and dreaming of the colours of each.

In Bulgaria, we have this tradition of painting and decorating hard-boiled eggs on Easter. Struggling to "fit" all the stories within the word count, I nonetheless could not force myself to exclude one - this felt like an impossible choice; I needed every single confirmation, every single egg.

As much as I wished to display the stories I had collected as beautifully decorated Easter eggs in neat little packages, at some point during my analysis I realised that under the egg's shell, there is a raw, messy substance; a symbol of life itself, sometimes coloured by specks of blood which is the opposite of neat. I felt that I had to embrace that chaos and fragmentation, literally the "mess" underneath the beautifully wrapped up stories; the pain and the fear and the suffering and the ambiguity and the "not knowing" and the trauma and the paranoia in order to bring them to life as if in a painful but wondrous process of birth and renovation.

I believe that a part of me wanted to re-present my collaborators' narrative accounts as neat little packages with a pretty bow on top instead of accepting that sometimes the shark's teeth may leave a mess; not all can be hidden and pretty beneath the lavishly decorated shell of the Easter egg.

28/7/2020

## **Reflections on Presentation**

### **COLOURS AND POETIC EXPRESSIONS**

Recalling a chat with Beatriz about her anxiety, related to seeing her opinion "*in black and white*", we discussed how she felt about using different colours. She said she would rather like it if I could use a different colour for her story. So I got the idea to use colours for all verbatim quotes in the final thesis - a different, unique colour for each of my collaborators. But colours were not necessarily received very well by peers reading the accounts. Initially, they were considered "too bright". I changed them to more muted ones. Also, some concerns were being raised - what if someone with dyslexia is reading the work and finding it difficult to concentrate on what is being said because of the colours? What if the examiners think that presentation is more important to me than the content? I took these comments on board and changed the whole piece back to black and white... but it didn't feel right. I remembered that one of the recommendations at my PAP was to remove the phrase "power dynamics" from my project title which I later replaced with "equal voices" - a concept which spoke to me even more. However, on a purely embodied, primitive

level, this condition to remove the word “power” also made me feel smaller and powerless. I felt I had to comply with the conditions and expectations of the authority in order to be able to complete my Doctorate, which was a reminder of my early formative years at school. It did not cross my mind to object at the time, or to insist on keeping the word “power” in the title. But the colours... would it feel like I am removing something of the uniqueness of my collaborators’ voices? I felt strangely protective of them, not only in relation to Beatriz, but to the others, as well.

The colours make us uncomfortable

Not just black or white, or a tiny grey mouse

They’ll scratch our eyes, they’ll burst into flames

Flames, that would not be put out

Flames, that could not be put out...

The colours are not one or the other, they have shades

They have nuances, can be darker... or lighter...

The colours are sounds,

Real and loud.

I heard your steps, then I hid like a mouse

In my black and white uniform

You towered over my head.

Knocked me on the forehead with a stick,

Scratched my eyes, poured guilt down my throat.

Shut me up. Made me small. Stepped on me.

But I grew up, taller than you and bigger - like Alice.

Now, who’d keep the colours at bay?

That’s enough: take it or leave it. Won’t give them up.

The colours WILL stay.

## Appendix 5. Preliminary Questions

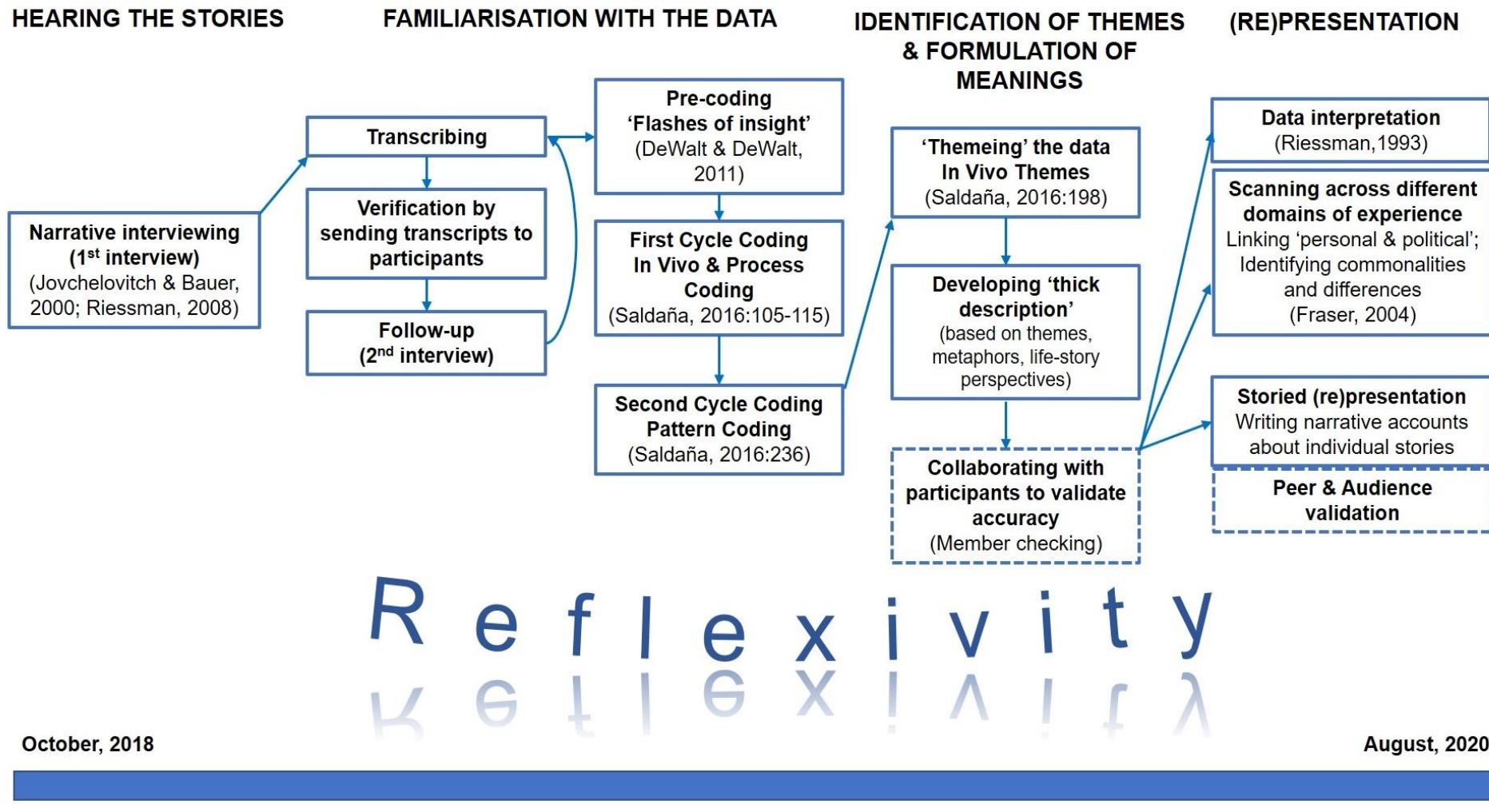
### *Preliminary Questions\**

- What are counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' lived experiences of their training?
- What are counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' lived experiences related to power and authority across all aspects of their training - academic component, experiential group process and supervision?
- What is the impact of early relational bonds, early social and political environment on counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' experiences and meaning-making processes?
- What is the impact of relationships with past authority figures on counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' experiences and the development of their own authority during the process of their training?

\*The method of this narrative inquiry will be an unstructured or non-directive interview in which questions are not prearranged. Instead of having a set interview schedule, the researcher will follow the co-researcher's story, simply facilitating the discussion. The questions above are only an example of what the researcher will be looking for when analysing the data, embedded in the co-researchers' stories without the obligation to carry it out in that particular order.



## Appendix 6. Step-by-step Approach to Data Analysis and (Re)presentation



## Appendix 7: Excerpt from My Codebook

Dimitru - Transcript 1:

Initial coding:

- 1) Interview questions
- 2) Classification of study format
- 3) (Lived) experience of training
- 4) Therapy journey
- 5) Lack of appreciation
- 6) Ambivalence/hesitation
- 7) Work as a support worker
- 8) Difference btw. 'back home' & UK (cultural difference)
- 9) (More) respect in UK
- 10) Rationale for continuation
- 11) Doctorate seen as 'life-changing'
- 12) Perception/attitude towards Doctoral training
- 13) Change/transition/transformation
- 14) Reflective practice
- 15) Initial attitude to personal therapy/introspection

- 16) Educators back home (past)
- 17) Reluctance (to be in therapy)
- 18) Fear/uncertainty
- 19) Group process
- 20) Finding/losing voice
- 21) 'Only speak if asked' (in vivo)
- 22) Lived experience/personal process
- 23) Defensiveness
- 24) Perceived inequality/power imbalance
- 25) Rules & regulations
- 26) Participant-observer / stepping outside
- 27) New personal vs. group process
- 28) power
- 29) power struggle/conflict
- 30) Relationship with authority figures / group leader
- 31) Past identity/role



- 32) Military / Army
- 33) Hierarchical order
- 34) Impact on CLIENT  
WORK
- 35) Parallel process
- 36) "without asking too much" (in vivo)
- 37) "Follow the doctor's advice" (in vivo)
- 38) Rebelling
- 39) Self-discovery
- 40) Arranging people in boxes
- 41) Course expectation
- 42) Stepping into own authority
- 43) Safety / certainty
- 44) "Something new" (in vivo)
- 45) Real self vs Role
- 46) Humor-to-humor interaction
- 47) I - THOU / Authentic connection
- 48) Structure
- 49) Being taught COMPLIANCE
- 50) Curiosity
- 51) Leave the system

- 52) 'Leap of faith' (in vivo)
- 53) Freedom
- 54) 'Being judged' (in vivo?)
- 55) ~~Intersectionality / confusion~~
- 56) Phoenix metaphor
- 57) Challenge
- 58) (process of) Integration
- 59) Self-perception ("superior" vs. inferior)
- 60) Judgment vs. Appreciation
- 61) "Firing up the uniform" (in vivo)
- 62) Dreams
- 63) Relationship with colleagues / peers
- 64) Internalized Other (Internalized Oppressive Regime?)
- 65) me vs. 'not-me' (separation)
- 66) Traumatic memories
- 67) Past history
- 68) Affect regulation vs. dysregulation
- 69) Growing awareness

- 70) Guilt (in vno)
- 71) Sadness (in vno)
- 72) Unresolved issues (in vno)
- 73) Resolution
- 74) 'The other side' (in vno)
- 75) 'Where are you from?' (in vno)
- 76) Political propaganda
- 77) Economic situation
- 78) Prisoner (in vno)
- 79) Supervision
- 80) Empathy
- 81) Confidence as a therapist
- 82) Relationship with clients
- 83) Feeling accepted & appreciated
- 84) Finding commonalities (in vno)
- 85) Relationship with spouse
- 86) Language
- 87) 'Fifty years ahead of us' (in vno)
- 88) 'Time Traveler' (in vno)
- 89) Humour

- 91) Old vs. young clients
- 92) Time / time loop
- 93) 'Making sense' (in vno)
- 94) 'Putting the puzzle together' (in vno)
- 95) 'Open mind' (in vno)
- 96) Appearance
- 97) Learning to listen
- 98) Foreign people (in vno)
- 99) Hiding
- 100) 'Trying to be somebody else' (in vno)
- 101) To win or lose (in vno)
- 102) 'To be a good therapist' (in vno)
- 103) Acceptance
- 104) 'The doctor is here with you' (in vno)
- 105) CBT approach
- 106) Being dramatic



(82) (feedback) things that ~~are~~  
~~now~~ <sup>were</sup> are the  
 ones that are  
 the most valuable

Frequency (in the text) of  
 the first codes

1 1	17 1 1	26 1
2 III 1	15 1 2	27 1
3 II 2	16 II	28 1 2
4 II 2	17 1	29 III
5 1	18 II	30 II 2
6 II	19 II	31 II
7 II	20 II 2	32 1
8 1	21 II 3	33 1
9 II	22 1	34 1
10 1	23 1	35 1
11 IIII	24 III	36 IIII
12 1	25 1	37 1
13 III		38 1

39 1	61 IIII
40 1	62 1
41 IIII	63 1
42 II	64 1
43 II	65 1
44 1	66 1
45 II	67 1
46 1	68 1
47 1	69 1
48 1	70 II
49 1 1	71 1
50 1 1	72 1
51 II 1	73 II
52 1	74 IIII 1 1 1 <sup>st</sup> authority to distrust
53 1 1	75 1
54 II 2	76 II
55 II 2	77 1
56 1	78 1
57 1 3	79 1
58 IIII 3	80 1
59 1	81 II
60 1 3	82 1

## Appendix 8: Example of Line-by-Line Coding

*Dimitri: Excerpt from First Interview Transcript (R = Researcher; D = Dimitri)*

	Transcript / Raw Data	Preliminary Codes / Subordinate	Final Codes / Superordinate & Comments
R1	Ok, and I will just in case...		
D1	Hm... Have you not done any... have you done... <sup>1</sup> questions or...	1 Interview Questions	1 Discussing Study Format
R2	Well. <sup>2</sup> It's not like this... So this is a qualitative... mostly conversational...	2 Clarification of study format	
D2	Right.		
R3	Umm. Ok. So if you can tell me what's been your <sup>3</sup> lived experience of... the training... on your <sup>4</sup> journey towards becoming who you are today?	3 Lived experience of training 4 Training journey	2 Experiential nature of training
D3	Umm... Well, <sup>4</sup> it started in 2012, when I applied for the Doctoral training. Um, after two years of break coming from [home country]. Two years of break... when I decided that <sup>5</sup> I am going to continue further. Obviously two years I wanted to take it further as probation because <b>back home</b> is not... to be a counsellor or psychotherapist or psychologist is not that well appreciated, is it...	4 Training journey  5 Lack of appreciation	3 Historical background 4 "BACK HOME"
R4	Of course.		
D4	They see us... as a professional but um <b><sup>5</sup>you are not that appreciated back there</b> . The people... they don't have the tendency to go to a psychotherapist or a psychologist or counsellor um, and <sup>6</sup> I was thinking a lot... <b>shall I continue or shall I just change my profession totally...</b> ummm... I was... already qualified. I had a Master's in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy...	5 Lack of appreciation  6 Ambivalence / hesitation	
R5	Of course.		

D5	And I, er, you know, I didn't want to do that, er, so after <sup>7</sup> <b>two years of working as a support worker</b> in a hospital... um	7 Work as a support worker	
R6	Uh-hm, uh-hm		
D6	Actually, I started to [think] of Psychology a bit more and you know, to see that there is <sup>8</sup> <b>a difference between [home country] and UK</b> , it is a much <b>more respected profession</b> , you know? <sup>9</sup> <b>Respected and regulated</b> , and I could have a future.	8 Difference between home country and UK 9 More respect	5 Cultural difference vs. sameness
R7	Yes, yes		
D7	So that's my... <sup>10</sup> <b>that's what made me continue and get where I am now.</b> So... and obviously, <sup>11</sup> <b>being given a place on the doctoral training, that was very... something amazing and something... which totally changed my life.</b>	10 Rationale for continuation 11 Doctoral course seen as "life-changing"	6 Doctorate as a life-changing experience
R8	Umm.		
D8	And <sup>12</sup> I am glad I did it. You know, <b>it was a big struggle but yeah, it completely changed my life, changed ME, helped me to change personally, as an individual.</b> And to...	12 Perception / Attitude towards Doctoral training 11 Doctoral course seen as "life-changing"	
R9	So personally and professionally you felt like...		7 Change / transition / transformation
D9	Professionally, yeah		
R10	It was quite a <sup>13</sup> <b>big change, and...</b>	13 Change	
D10	Yeah. It made me think more about myself and... the <sup>8</sup> difference is there... <b>at home</b> , you don't spend a lot of time reflecting... so much <sup>14</sup> reflective practice, so much analysis. Well, I didn't have so much personal psychotherapy <sup>8</sup> back home. It is not such a... it is not so important on the training. I was not asked to do that. I came here and I was asked to do that. <sup>15</sup> So in the beginning I was thinking, "my God, that's crazy!"	8 Difference between home country and UK 14 Reflective practice 15 Initial attitude to personal therapy / introspection / self-exploration	5 Cultural difference vs. sameness 8 Reflective practice

R11	Yeah		
D11	<p>Why should I do that? Even <sup>16</sup>my mentors, my supervisors, my... <b>Back home, and my teachers they didn't have their own personal psychotherapy and they never went to a psychotherapist before.</b> <sup>8</sup>I came here and they asked me to go to a psychotherapist. Very strange... <sup>17</sup>I felt very reluctant. But I had to do it, so... and that was an <sup>11</sup>amazing experience as well! [laughs]</p>	<p>16 Educators back home (past)</p> <p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p> <p>17 Reluctance to be in therapy</p> <p>11 Doctoral course seen as "life-changing"</p>	<p><i>No point in doing something which authority figures don't</i></p>
R12	Umm! So you are saying, there was some kind of reluctance.		
D12	Yeah, yeah.		
R13	Interesting... so feeling a bit <sup>17</sup> reluctant as well in terms of...	17 Reluctance related to therapy and self-exploration	9 Personal process
D13	<p>.... To be asked to do my own analysis and psychotherapy - all these feelings of um... <sup>18</sup><b>scared, not knowing</b> what's going to be there after that - if I can do it, or not. And um... <sup>19</sup>that was a hard... one of my hardest modules on my training.</p> <p><sup>13</sup>But in the end of that I kind of felt how important it was and started to feel differently, like through my personal analysis - that really helped me out.</p> <p>And the <sup>19</sup><b>group process on the training was something I was... that kind of destroyed some of my beliefs and challenged some of my beliefs... in that. That was the hardest</b> er, part of the training. <b>Not so much the essays</b></p>	<p>18 Fear / uncertainty</p> <p>13 Change / transition / transformation</p> <p>19 Group process</p> <p>13 Change</p>	<p>7 Change / transition / transformation</p> <p>10 Group process</p>



	<p>writing... or the modules, but <u>the group process</u> which was, which was a <u>hell</u> for me, because we did not do that at all. <sup>20</sup>Something new, something which I had to understand... the logic of the course and that actually changed me, and um, yeah. So I was very, very, very lucky to do that.</p>		
R14	<p>It sounds like a real challenge and you are saying, all these feelings, shame, <sup>18</sup>fear, kind of <sup>17</sup>reluctance to actually really maybe go into such depth and explore that... um...</p>	<p>18 Fear</p> <p>17 Reluctance</p>	<p>9 Personal process</p> <p><i>Why did I mention "shame"? Participant didn't. Wondering if I am bringing in my own experience / If something has been evoked for me.</i></p>
D14	<p><sup>20</sup>Finding my voice because... <sup>8</sup>back home as a culture, as a... from you know, from my training, from my work or from my... <b>always what was the most difficult in the group is finding my voice</b> and speaking up...</p>	<p>20 Finding voice</p> <p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p> <p>19 Group process</p>	<p>11 Finding voice</p> <p>4 "BACK HOME"</p> <p>5 Cultural difference vs. sameness</p> <p>10 Group process</p>
R15	<p>Yes</p>		
D15	<p><sup>8</sup>...while we were trained and educated that <b><sup>21</sup>you don't speak unless you're asked, or you don't speak unless it is your turn to speak.</b></p>	<p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p> <p>21 Only speak if asked</p>	<p>5 Cultural difference vs. sameness</p>
R16	<p>This is how it used to be at <sup>8</sup>home?</p>		
D16	<p>This is how the way I was... in school... <sup>8</sup>from the elementary school to my degree and to my master's and to my work. Um, and in the family also. <b>So all of them.</b> <b><sup>21</sup>You speak when... you speak up when you're asked</b> and when is your turn to speak and [here] people were speaking without being</p>	<p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p>	<p>3 Historical background</p>

	asked... I see as something being very negative and very... um, um, yeah, people with no education or people.... And obviously <sup>8</sup> seeing my colleagues from London, British colleagues just speaking up	21 Only speak if asked	
R17	Yes		<i>This resonates strongly</i>
D17	Er, that was such a... I had so many feelings about that, um... and you know, being <sup>22</sup> quite upset to them, being quite... you know, <b>thinking that it's quite rude</b> that... you know, or <b>feeling that I would have to tell them to stop doing that</b> , and... so... it was very, very difficult, which was kind of stopping my process, there was a <u>parallel</u> you know, having to take this to my personal psychotherapy to discuss it, and... <sup>14</sup> reflect a lot, and having to understand what was going on actually in the room... yeah. So I think it was very, very difficult to complete that process and to go there... to understand it, um, and if I go back, I am thinking now... many times I was <sup>22</sup> upset about being there in the room. I thought it was a waste of time [laughs] and you know, kind of my <sup>23</sup> defenses umm... we shouldn't do that, we are wasting our time... we should do research and we should do [other?], we should study, while actually that was <sup>19</sup> the most important part of the training.	22 Lived experience – personal process  23 Defensiveness  14 Reflective practice  19 Group process	9 Personal process      10 Group process
R18	Umm! Like really <sup>20</sup> finding your voice and managing to speak up in a group with people like perhaps, you maybe <sup>24</sup> didn't quite feel like you had a voice or...	20 Finding voice  24 Perceived inequality / power imbalance ?	9 Personal process  12 Power imbalance
D18	Well, I was looking to understand <sup>25</sup> the <b>rules as... as I was taught to - to understand the rules</b> and to make some sense which was again a waste of time because there is no such at thing as "the rules". There are some kind of rules but taught at home and school, like "I should stick with what's right" and er, when it's right for some people to, to talk, than um, to jump in and to say something unnecessary and actually <sup>27</sup> this internal process was in the way of you know, observing my own process. In the beginning and in Year Two when... <sup>13</sup> slowly I started to make more sense and to	25 Rules and regulations      13 Change / transition / transformation	13 Rules

	actually realise that my... my... <sup>22</sup> process is somehow you know... I could start it, I was <sup>14</sup> able to <sup>26</sup> observe this process from stepping outside of what was going on and that was the point when I started to feel that I am making progress but...	22 Lived experience / personal process  14 Reflective practice  26 Participant-observer / "stepping outside"	9 Personal process
R19	<sup>14</sup> Almost like being an <sup>26</sup> observer as well as taking part...	14 Reflective practice 26 Participant-observer / stepping outside	
D19	Yes, <sup>26, 14</sup> rather than being caught in this process, which I was being able to step out and observing and yeah, that's, that was <sup>27</sup> the most challenging experience of my life.	26 Participant-observer / stepping outside 14 Reflective practice  27 New theme: personal vs. group process ?	9 Personal process  <i>Personal/internal vs. group/external process</i>
R20	Of course, it does sound like quite er...		
D20	I wouldn't be here without all that.		
R21	This really resonates with me actually. Just as you are speaking, I can feel I am also...		<i>Resonance</i>
D21	Yeah		
R22	Impacted.		
D22	In terms of <sup>28, 29</sup> <b>power and, and... conflict</b> . Obviously, <sup>8</sup> back home we always had <sup>30</sup> someone in charge of the group; someone who is leading the group. I was taught to look up to these people and <b>to seek permission</b> to help or to... er, and I was always doing that, the same thing. While, <b>actually the <sup>25</sup>rule was not that</b> , that during the group process and...	28 Power  29 Power struggle / conflict  30 Relationship with authority figures / group leader / "someone in charge"	12 Power imbalance  <i>Experience, related to power during experiential group process</i>  4 "BACK HOME"

		8 Difference between home country and UK / back home  25 Rules and regulations	14 Relationship with past & present authority figures  5 Cultural difference vs. sameness  13 Rules
R23	Yeah		
D23	Um, um, and I <sup>31</sup> am an ex-army... an <sup>32</sup> ex-army officer	31 Past identity/role  32 Military/army	15 Past role
R24	Umm, uh-hm, uh-hm		
D24	[laughs] which was <sup>8</sup> quite different. I was looking for um, <sup>30</sup> who's got the ranks, who's got the power, um, and... um, looking at all the <sup>19</sup> members of the group, you know, trying to place them on <sup>33</sup> some kind of scale, on some kind of... and I was doing that all of the time!	8 Difference between home country and UK  30 Relationship with authority figures / group leader / "someone in charge"  19 Group process  33 Hierarchical order	5 Cultural difference vs. sameness  14 Relationship with past & present authority figures  10 Group process  16 Hierarchy
R25	Almost like a <sup>33</sup> hierarchy, or a scale...	33 Hierarchical order	

D25	A <sup>33</sup> hierarchy, yeah. Who is in charge. Who is stopping, <b>who has <sup>24</sup> the right to talk, who should listen</b> . And that was, I think with <sup>34</sup> my clients I was doing as well. Um, client hours and I was doing practice as well. I noticed it was a <b>parallel process</b> , what I was doing in the room with the client, who is... who is... in charge here.	24 Perceived inequality / power imbalance  34 Impact on client work  35 Parallel process	12 Power imbalance  17 Impact on client work / Self as Authority Figure  17 Parallel process
R26	Umm, umm, yes?		
D26	And I will apply.... That's the <sup>25</sup> rule - who is in charge here.	25 Rules and regulations	13 Rules
R27	Uh-hm, uh-hm. Can you tell me more about that because I think it's...		
D27	Umm, yeah, I mean, it was the <sup>25</sup> rule that having a title <sup>8</sup> back home would put you into a <sup>24, 33</sup> high <b>hierarchy</b> position and the client is somehow in a lower hierarchy position. And would listen to the professional <sup>20, 21, 24, 36</sup> <b>without questioning too much</b> [smiles] and <b>if you go to the doctor, the doctor will tell you clearly what you need to do and you have to follow the doctor's advice</b> .	25 Rules and regulations  8 Difference between home country and UK / back home  33 Hierarchical order  24 Perceived inequality / power imbalance  20 Finding / losing voice  36 "Without asking too much"  21 "Only speak if asked"	13 Rules  5 Cultural difference vs. sameness / "then & there" vs. "here & now"  16 Hierarchy  12 Power imbalance  18 Voice

R28	Yeah		
D28	<p><sup>20, 24, 36</sup>Without asking too much, you might not even get the chance to, to... inquire and they won't have the time to give too many explanations. You'll tell them what's hurting and they will tell you what tablets you ought to take or what to do. Thus, <sup>37</sup>follow the doctor's advice.</p>	<p>20 Finding / losing voice</p> <p>24 Perceived inequality / power imbalance</p> <p>36 "Without asking too much"</p> <p>37 "Follow the doctor's advice"</p>	<p>18 Voice</p> <p>12 Power imbalance</p> <p>16 Hierarchy</p> <p>19 Following the doctor's / authority figure's instructions</p> <p>14 Relationship with past &amp; present authority figures</p>
R29	<p>That was interesting, I was just thinking 'cos you're mentioning <sup>37</sup>following the doctor's advice and following somebody else's <sup>25</sup>rules and I am just aware how you mentioned at the beginning <u>"I am not a follower"</u>. Almost, very interesting. Just observing but... Yeah</p>	<p>25 Rules and regulations</p> <p>37 "Follow the doctor's advice"</p>	<p><i>CONTRASTING STATEMENTS: leader vs. follower?</i></p> <p>19 Following the doctor's / authority figure's instructions</p>
D29	<p>But I got to <sup>22, 38</sup>rebel against this process. That's um, um, that's a result of my <sup>19, 27</sup>group process.</p> <p>That really helped me to <sup>39</sup>discover myself and to kind of, <sup>38</sup>disagree with these <sup>25</sup>rules and to find my Real Self and probably... even <sup>8</sup>back home I was not a follower but I never had the strength, not in the proper</p>	<p>22 Lived experience / personal process</p> <p>38 Rebelling</p> <p>19 Group process</p>	<p><i>Self-empowerment ?</i></p> <p>20 Reconnecting with "Real Self"</p>

	<p>environment to develop this, take it further and to [inaudible] in the way of <b>seeking more power and getting it to a more powerful position</b> so why understand follow me in much, in an unhealthy way. So <sup>31</sup>I became a well-respected officer which in the <sup>32</sup>Army, in which I had many people following me and, yeah... but I noticed within the <sup>19</sup>group process, doing that and looking around me, and thinking, what kind applies and what kind of achievements, who can speak to me and who achieved what I achieved... and you know, how much training and life experience they have and putting this into, and <sup>33, 40</sup>trying to arrange them in some <b>boxes</b>... And of course <sup>30</sup><b>the leader of the group</b> being the... from [Educational Setting], the <b>tutor</b></p>	<p>27 New theme: personal vs. group process ?</p> <p>31 Past identity / role</p> <p>32 Military / Army</p> <p>39 Self-discovery</p> <p>25 Rules and regulations</p> <p>8 Difference between home country and UK / back home</p> <p>30 Relationship with authority figures / group leader / tutor</p> <p>33 Hierarchical order</p> <p>40 Arranging people in boxes</p>	<p><i>Lived experience related to power and authority - academic component and group process</i></p> <p>15 Past role</p> <p>13 Rules</p> <p>5 Cultural difference vs. sameness</p> <p>14 Relationship with past &amp; present authority figures</p>
R30	Yes		
D30	<p>Being <sup>30</sup>the person in charge of the... I am <sup>41</sup><b>expecting them to make this kind of <sup>25</sup>rule and to impose it on the group</b>, and becoming <sup>22</sup>quite upset with them if they wouldn't do that and.... So that was <sup>22</sup>my process, <sup>35</sup>in parallel doing to <sup>34</sup>my clients and kind of, I ended up... my first placement</p>	<p>30 Relationship with authority figures / group leader / tutor</p> <p>41 Course expectations</p>	<p>21 Expectations</p>

	<p>was <sup>32</sup>with the veteran service, it was working with <sup>32</sup>ex-military, and noticed that every time I was sitting down, I was asking them “<b>what rank did you have?</b>” and they will... and <sup>33,40</sup>I started making signs, who was a higher officer, a lower officer, so I was doing that until I had to finish my placement after a year because I noticed it was not actually positive. After my Supervision with <sup>30</sup>the leader of the course at [Educational Setting], their recommendation that I will never develop as a psychotherapist ‘cos <sup>8</sup>I am still caught in <b>that culture</b>. <sup>22, 42</sup><b>I need to step out and be more brave.</b> It was <b>safety</b> - that’s all I knew, from home, from school, from... so <sup>13, 42</sup><b>had to step out and work with civilians</b>. And... [laughs]</p>	<p>25 Rules and regulations</p> <p>22 Lived experience / personal process</p> <p>33 Hierarchical order</p> <p>40 Arranging people in boxes</p> <p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p> <p>34 Impact on client work</p> <p>32 Military / Army</p> <p>22 Lived experience / personal process</p> <p>42 Stepping into own authority</p> <p>43 Safety / certainty</p> <p>13 Change / transition</p>	<p>14 Relationship with past &amp; present authority figures</p> <p>9 Personal process</p> <p>16 Hierarchy</p> <p>5 Cultural difference</p> <p>15 Past role</p> <p>3 Historical background</p> <p>13 Rules</p> <p>7 Change</p> <p>22 Developing own authority / power</p>
R31	[laughs] what was that [like]?		
D31	<p>Which I had to... which <sup>13</sup><b>I had to leave my uniform, and my ranks</b> and step out and... Yeah. <sup>4</sup>It was very challenging. It was <sup>44, 4</sup><b>something new</b> which... <sup>34</sup><b>nobody would care about your ranks and achievements. They would care about how much you can help them</b>. Umm... and actually to</p>	<p>13 Change / transition / transformation</p> <p>44 “Something new”</p>	<p>7 Change</p>



	get in touch with my <sup>45</sup> Real self, my experience with... relate the time and relate with the client, and be more humble, be more... and I don't think... <sup>27</sup> I was talking a lot within the group process. I was not listening. So I was busy with my internal process and I was not listening. <sup>34</sup> While in the practice with clients I had to actually learn to listen, and step away from this process of....	4 Therapy journey  34 Impact on client work  45 "Real Self" vs. Role 27 New theme? (Personal vs. group process)	23 New state of being / new identity
R32	Leaving the uniform behind and focusing maybe on the <sup>46</sup> human-to-human interaction and what...	46 Human-to-human interaction	24 I-THOU
D32	Exactly <sup>46</sup> the human-to-human interaction, um... Getting in touch with their Real Self, and looking for that, and that was the point when I thought, actually <sup>42</sup> I can be a good psychotherapist because I achieved that and <sup>45</sup> I am feeling I am in touch with my Real Self and [getting] in touch with their Real Self. Um, and it doesn't matter you know, it's not about who is in charge here, who's got the best experience, do I know it better or do they know it better which was the... which was what one has to do and what I was taught	46 Human-to-human interaction  42 Stepping into own authority  45 "Real Self" vs. Role 47 I-THOU / Authentic communication	24 I-THOU  22 Developing own authority / power  17 Impact on client work / Self as Authority Figure
R33	Uh-hm, so this was the <sup>13</sup> transition	13 Change / transition / transformation	
D33	The <sup>13</sup> transition to, um... becoming a psychotherapist and... ummm, yeah.	13 Change / transition / transformation	
R34	Umm. Very interesting process and just listening to... obv-obviously once again I am just thinking about, what you mentioned about this <sup>40</sup> culture with boxes and... almost maybe unconsciously, implicitly trying to put people in some kind of <sup>33</sup> hierarchy or order and then, being able also to engage differently	40 Arranging people in boxes  33 Hierarchical order	16 Hierarchy
D34	Yeah		
R35	With this		

D35	To a higher level back, <sup>8</sup> back home, everything was <b>well <sup>48</sup>structured</b> , in boxes, <b>all the authorities</b> they had their own place and the <b>individual</b> , <b>clearly had their own place within society</b> which I knew exactly, and <b>culture</b> , and <b>jobs</b> , and umm, and <b>in school</b> , <b>your place even within the group was very well established</b> .	8 "Back home" – difference between home country and UK  48 Structure	5 Cultural difference  25 Structure
R36	How was that for you? Do you remember these past experiences when you knew exactly what place everyone had, where in a way you had to be placed? Do you remember how... how did it feel for you?		
D36	Yeah, er... I was just accepting, just <sup>50</sup> taught that I had to accept it the way it is, and to stick with that, and if you want to achieve something, then you have to do exactly the steps you have to do. And if you do them, you'll achieve and you'll move on to something else. So at that point I, it was like... I am being on an <b>automatic pilot</b> ... and <b>the first sign</b> that I wanted to know was <sup>50</sup> <b>curiosity</b> . And a <b>form of curiosity</b> ... it was anything outside this, when I decided that I am gonna <b>leave the system</b> , I am gonna leave the country... I became a little bit curious, even then with the intention that I might go back after two years, I had a career break and I am gonna go back. Ummm, so <sup>50</sup> curiosity was my first sign that umm, maybe, maybe I was a bit unhappy about that but I couldn't express it and I didn't know it, I was very confused about um	49 Being taught compliance  50 Curiosity  51 "Leave the system"	26 Compliance vs. defiance  27 Curiosity
R37	So initially it was almost like a...		
D37	I was thinking of a <sup>52</sup> <b>leap of faith</b> , almost like <sup>50</sup> <b>following this curiosity</b> and thinking of this as like a two-year kind of break or process rather than something that may last much longer. Maybe becoming better, maybe getting some more knowledge and going back into the system, <sup>33</sup> and going up a little bit more and umm, yeah I was a bit confused about that but... followed that curiosity.	52 "A leap of faith"  33 Hierarchical order / upper social development?	28 "A leap of faith"
R38	So what <sup>13</sup> changed, what changed that it became actually longer - it wasn't just the two years?		

D38	<p>What, being here for two years. And <b>moving onto a system where <sup>8</sup>people were thinking differently</b>. Where they are not separated into classes in such a way that it was at home, and umm, I think they had more <sup>53</sup><b>freedom</b>, so the freedom is what I kind of liked and appreciated but I felt I didn't have that much freedom back home to, to do that... and even to relate and the way you relate to, act towards people is different. You didn't even have the freedom of relating to them [at home] because you will be <sup>54</sup><b>judged or condemned by family, society, the system</b>, the way you gonna make friends, who you gonna be friends with, the way you choose your partner, while here there is a lot more <sup>53</sup>freedom. Well <sup>22</sup>I found that I like that, I liked that freedom.</p>	<p>8 Difference between home country and UK</p> <p>53 Freedom of choice &amp; expression</p> <p>54 Being judged</p> <p>22 Lived experience / emotional response / personal process</p>	<p>5 Cultural difference</p> <p>29 Freedom vs. judgement / oppression</p> <p>9 Personal process</p>
R39	<p>Uh-hm, uh-hm, so really there is something about <sup>53</sup>freedom of expression and making your own way and making sense of the world, and choosing your friends and your circle, your partner...</p>	<p>53 Freedom of choice &amp; expression</p>	
D39	<p>Although I was struggling a lot with this issue, um, coming here I became very <sup>55</sup>confused but um, I thought you know, attending [Educational Setting] and that, and being told that I have to umm, like <b>the ph-phoenix</b>, I have to...</p>	<p>55 Confusion</p> <p>56 Phoenix metaphor</p>	<p><b>30 "Like the phoenix"</b></p>
R40	<p>About which one is it?</p>		
D40	<p>Um, <sup>13, 56</sup><b>breaking to pieces and rebuild myself again to make sense of the life and who I am actually</b>. And that was like the... or it was the <sup>57</sup>challenge back home and I think that was the advantage. And <b>even now as an individual I like the challenge</b>, being <sup>50</sup>curious and liking the challenge. So I thought <b>I am not going to leave this unresolved, and I am gonna resolve it</b>. And it came out and I resolved it the right way. Now, you know, I am at peace with my background, with my history and I keep in touch strong relationship with home, with university, I am teaching at a university back home and I am practicing over here, um... Yeah, I think it was the right</p>	<p>13 Change / transition / transformation</p> <p><b>56 Phoenix metaphor</b></p> <p>57 Challenge</p> <p>50 Curiosity</p>	<p><b>BREAKING TO PIECES</b></p> <p>31 Challenge</p> <p>27 Curiosity</p> <p>32 Fragmentation vs. integration</p>

	outcome with the right support in place. Um, managed to put them, <sup>58</sup> <b>integrate them together</b> , yeah	58 Process of integration	
R41	Yeah, it does sound like going to a <sup>13</sup> very different place and I was wondering also when... now when you go home for example, does it feel like you're seeing it through a slightly <sup>8</sup> different lens? Maybe with slightly different eyes, given all the experience you've already had on this journey?	13 Change / transition / transformation  8 Difference between home country ("BACK HOME") and UK	7 Change  5 Cultural difference vs. sameness
D41	Um, yeah. I am not thinking about myself as <sup>24</sup> being superior because I speak English, because I've got a degree from London and I've got experience from here. I see myself just lucky.	24 Perceived inequality  59 Self-perception - "Superior vs. Inferior"	12 Power imbalance  33 Self-perception
R42	Umm!		
D42	<sup>60</sup> And I appreciate very much what they have, and I am trying to contribute to the system if I can, but at the same time I have to respect that that's the way, this is the world they live in and you know, in fact making a contribution is OK. I can't judge them for the way they practice <sup>8</sup> at home and actually, that I still have a lot to learn even from, you know, from them, and er...	60 Judgement vs. appreciation  8 Difference between home country and UK	34 Perception of others  5 Cultural difference
R43	And what about your <sup>42</sup> own authority, cos... you can [drink] please, help yourself, here it is...? [tea]	42 Stepping into own authority	22 Developing own authority / self-empowerment  <i>I am inviting him to drink his tea, as if metaphorically inviting him to take on / use his authority</i>
D43	I am.... I gave up [laughs] being a, trying to be a <sup>32, 33</sup> higher officer and er, that never, in <sup>34</sup> my relations with clients, just produced ruptures and all kind of unhealthy relationships. Um, and it's very interesting um, cos I	32 Military / Army 33 Hierarchical order  34 Impact on Client work	

	don't see myself... <sup>61</sup> I gave up my uniform um, it was going in the form of <sup>62</sup> dreams at some point, having dreams in the process of... <sup>35</sup> parallels, monitoring my dreams for a long time, um... in the beginning, I could dream myself back home wearing the uniform, it went into dreaming of myself in the UK, wearing the uniform...	61 "Giving up the uniform"  62 Dreams  35 Parallel process	
R44	Interesting!		
D44	And then um, until I started having dreams of me being a civilian and being you know, <sup>61</sup> just m-me, without the uniform, and I had all kinds of dreams of people being here in uniforms with me... <sup>31</sup> in uniform, or me being home and <sup>31</sup> back in uniform. So the <sup>13,22</sup> process, like... I would keep a track of how umm... I was, <sup>62</sup> my unconscious mind was manifesting in the form of dreams.	61 "Giving up the uniform" Civilian Self  31 Past identity / role  13 Change / transition / transformation  22 Lived experience – personal process  62 Dreams	<i>Officer vs. civilian</i>  15 Past role  7 Change  <i>Change started in dreams</i>
R45	Yes		
D45	At the same time as my progress in the reality and umm, having <sup>34</sup> my sessions with clients and going through some ruptures and some, all kind of <sup>63</sup> relationships with colleagues at work and clients. And it was <sup>35</sup> matching exactly the way I was progressing [laughs], my dreams with my life, and...	34 Impact on Client work  63 Relationship with colleagues  35 Parallel process	

### Appendix 9: Example of “Themeing” (Early Thematic Outline)

Common Theme #	Superordinate / Final code - Description	Frequency (Transcript 1)	Emerging Themes	Quotes
1	“BACK HOME” - Cultural difference versus sameness	24	1 BACK HOME / Finding relational home in difference	<p>D35, p. 12 “...back home, everything was well structured, in boxes, all the authorities they had their own place and the individual, clearly had its own place within society which I knew exactly, and culture, and jobs, and umm, and in school, your place even within the group was very well established...”</p> <p>D38, p. 13 “...moving onto a system where people were thinking differently... and umm, I think they had more freedom, so the freedom is what I kind of liked and appreciated but I felt I didn’t have that much freedom back home to, to do that... and even to relate and the way you relate to, act towards people is different...”</p>
1	Sense of belonging	1		
2	Change / transition / transformation	15	2 Power as transformation / Power as ability to change and adapt	<p>D39-40, p. 13 “...and being told that I have to umm, like the ph-phoenix, I have to... Um, breaking to pieces and rebuild myself again to make sense of the life and who I am actually...”</p> <p>D44, p. 15 “...And then um, until I started having dreams of me being a civilian and being you know, just m-me, without the uniform...”</p>
2	Personal process	14		
2	Developing own authority / empowerment	7		
2	New state of being / new identity	7		
2	Fragmentation vs. integration			
2	Leaving the script / uniform	1		
2	Reconnecting with Real Self	1		
2	“Like the phoenix”	1		
2	Emerging curiosity	4		
3	Self-perception	8		
3	Growing awareness	7		

3	Making sense	5	3 Power as self-knowledge / awareness	D86, p. 25: "And I don't feel like hiding my Real Self, or trying to be somebody else, or something that I am not..."
3	Reflective practice	4		
3	"Step outside" [In vivo]	3		
4	Relationship with past and present authority figures	9	4 The Authoritarian State as Internalised Oppressive Other	D48, p. 16 "...And the former style of telling you what to do and so I started to realise that the uniform of the dreams was the authority part of me that was coming and criticising me, and the policeman, and the... um, which is just traces of my former Self..."
4	Power imbalance	8		
4	Rules and regulations	7		
4	Past role / past identity	7		
4	Hierarchy / order	5		
4	Trauma	3		
4	Internalised Other / "THE POLICEMAN"	2		
4	Structure	2		
4	Historical background	4		
4	Religion / Church	2		
5	Group process	6	5 Group process as a factor, hindering or facilitating / impacting "finding voice" or "losing voice"	<p>D13, p. 4 "...And the group process on the training was something I was... that kind of destroyed some of my beliefs and challenged some of my beliefs... in that. That was the hardest er, part of the training. Not so much the essays writing... or the modules, but the group process which was, which was hell for me..."</p> <p>D14, p. 4: "...always what was the most difficult in the group was finding my voice and speaking up..."</p> <p>D104, p. 30 "Well, in the way I was trying to hide, to run, to avoid some of the... whatever happened in the group process, conflicts and all the emotions that I was coming up with, and avoidance, and my feelings of trying not to, and lots of feelings of you know, paying attention to all</p>
5	Impact on client work / Self as Authority Figure	6		
5	Finding / losing voice	6		
5	Avoidance	1		

				these feelings. And mainly through the group process I realised that I was able to get in touch with this past and to reflect on this past life experience that is in the way of me, <b><u>becoming a free individual</u></b> .
6A	Perception of Others	7	OTHERNESS AND POWER!	<p>D59 – D61, p. 19, “...when I think about their problems of being bombarded with all kinds of news about people from [Eastern Europe], and the economic situation... At the same time, running sessions as a therapist while on the TV they were talking about the [immigrants from Eastern Europe], coming with millions and invading the EU, Britain... That was a very challenging point, so I had to deal with that, and I had to answer them and tell them about my accent and I used that in my favour and dealing with racism...”</p> <p>D61, p. 19: “...within the sessions and again that was um, the power and conflict although I was more trained than this client, they were seeing themselves as [more] superior than me, and I was the one who was feeling inferior because they were British and I was not British, and that was a hard one...”</p> <p>D65, p. 21 “...we have a lot in common with them although they come, become very defensive but somehow, in some ways I discovered that we even the language we [have in] common, and I spent a lot of time thinking about their culture, and visiting museums, and different... finding commonalities and being able to actually discuss them sometimes and, in therapy if the client brings it up, feels very important to relate to that culture. At the same time, being, when in a relationship,</p>
6A	Challenging stereotypical beliefs about “Others”			
6A	Multicultural component	2		
6A	Accent	2	6A Power as Otherness and	
6A	External vs. internal	1	Otherness as	
6A	Intergenerational differences	3	Power	
6A	Racism / discrimination	1		
6A	Impact of current social and political climate	2		
6B	Finding commonalities	3	6B Power as sameness	
6B	Feeling accepted and appreciated	3		



				and married to a local woman, did help me to connect to the culture and getting accepted...”
7	Compliance versus defiance	5	7 Power as freedom	<p>D38, p. 13 “...You didn’t even have the freedom of relating to them [at home] because you will be judged or condemned by family, society, the system, the way you gonna make friends, who you gonna be friends with, the way you choose your partner, while here there is a lot more freedom. Well I found that I like that, I liked that freedom...”</p> <p>D104, p. 30 “Free of everything, of all these beliefs, and you know, and being able to practice as a psychotherapist and to help the client. But seeing the difference between me and them, speaking up freely, all my colleagues were speaking up freely...”</p>
7	Freedom vs. judgement / oppression			
7	Taking risks	3		
7	Challenge	3		
7	“A leap of faith”	1		
7				
8	Time traveller	3	8 Training as a transitional space / liminality / The journey within	D67, p. 21: “...Somehow, I came here and my wife is only saying that “you managed to jump that 50 years and to make it into 5 years”. So, so, er, we came to the conclusion that I managed to trick the time and to make a jump, I am like a time traveller...”
8	Time / space	2		
8	Doctorate as a life-changing experience	2		
8	Experiential nature of training	2		
9	“Following the doctor’s advice”	5	9 Hierarchical versus collaborative relationship with authority	<p>D32, p. 11 “...Exactly the human-to-human interaction, um... Getting in touch with their Real Self, and looking for that, and that was the point when I thought, actually I can be a good psychotherapist because I achieved that and I am feeling I am in touch with my Real Self and [getting] in touch with their Real Self. Um, and it doesn’t matter you know, it’s not about who is in charge here, who’s got the best experience, do I know it better or do they know it better which was the... which was what one has to do and what I was taught...”</p>
9	Losing versus winning	4		
9	“I-THOU”	3		
9	Hierarchical versus collaborative relationship with authority	3		
9	Working hard versus trusting the process	4		
9	Defining a “good therapist”	1		
9	Mentalising	1		

				<p>D92, p. 27 “...they will respect your part of... the role of being a therapist, being there for them. And I kind of changed that role in that game, “the doctor is telling you what to do”. <b><u>The doctor is there with you!</u></b> And they will appreciate that the doctor is with you [smiles]... And they can see that, and I relate through that way. They will appreciate that “I am there with you”, then everything works fine...”</p> <p>D96, p. 28 “...Almost like being the authority of, “I am the doctor, I know what is good for you, we’re going to follow this protocol and I’m gonna tell you what’s good for this, for your problem”. And now I am accepting that I might not know... but I’ve got the resources to listen...”</p>
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## Appendix 10: “OSOP” for Collation of In Vivo Themes

Dimitri He has been here since  
of the new minister

(1) "See home" (one of our old friends)  
unhappy situation -  
above ground floor  
Lantana - white - just no

(2) They were British ones I don't see  
British and that was a hard one  
(Rory & Jimmy)

(3) The unhappy in his dream was  
the outlook part of us!!

(4) I had that freedom  
(peace is freedom of expression)

(5) Like the Phoenix, I had to  
break it apart and rebuild  
myself from

(6) I am like a have forgotten

"The doctor is not telling you  
(7) what to do. The doctor is there  
with you."

Ella - (8) "I wouldn't do it again  
with something else. Just that!"

**Birds!!**

Zora - The Summer who grew up

(wings) (feathers)

(1) The power of conspicuous and individualistic

(2) In a wasteful environment  
no green or blossom (she built her home) in me!

(3) "You're no one unless you have money (power & money & status)"

(4) Teachers as indifferent bystanders

(5) "The feeling of belonging I could find with my thoughts beyond language"

Follow up Just because you have a little that doesn't mean you descend to the Glass Bed deformity?? Survival-

Eiken - the wounded sister getting  
on with it home?

② lost in translation


③ 'You chose it in fit on with it'

④ 'Then decide if I am just enough'

⑤ 'This unhappiness was the instruction'

⑥ 'I've been through worse so  
I am stronger now!  
(trauma → source of strength/  
resilience/empowerment)

⑦ 'This gives me power - knowing  
what I want!  
(power of genuine / deep  
planned) more free - more -  
free'

⑧ 'I feel I saved what I  
wanted to say!' 

Follow up: 'I'd I a future  
travelling like twice in  
travelling like travelling - a little bit!'

(Note: 'I've got a lot of different words')

MANTAS - The Rebel refusing to sit still in the box! But (higher to him) repeated in 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033 2034 2035 2036 2037 2038 2039 2040 2041 2042 2043 2044 2045 2046 2047 2048 2049 2050 2051 2052 2053 2054 2055 2056 2057 2058 2059 2060 2061 2062 2063 2064 2065 2066 2067 2068 2069 2070 2071 2072 2073 2074 2075 2076 2077 2078 2079 2080 2081 2082 2083 2084 2085 2086 2087 2088 2089 2090 2091 2092 2093 2094 2095 2096 2097 2098 2099 2100 2101 2102 2103 2104 2105 2106 2107 2108 2109 2110 2111 2112 2113 2114 2115 2116 2117 2118 2119 2120 2121 2122 2123 2124 2125 2126 2127 2128 2129 2130 2131 2132 2133 2134 2135 2136 2137 2138 2139 2140 2141 2142 2143 2144 2145 2146 2147 2148 2149 2150 2151 2152 2153 2154 2155 2156 2157 2158 2159 2160 2161 2162 2163 2164 2165 2166 2167 2168 2169 2170 2171 2172 2173 2174 2175 2176 2177 2178 2179 2180 2181 2182 2183 2184 2185 2186 2187 2188 2189 2190 2191 2192 2193 2194 2195 2196 2197 2198 2199 2200 2201 2202 2203 2204 2205 2206 2207 2208 2209 2210 2211 2212 2213 2214 2215 2216 2217 2218 2219 2220 2221 2222 2223 2224 2225 2226 2227 2228 2229 2230 2231 2232 2233 2234 2235 2236 2237 2238 2239 2240 2241 2242 2243 2244 2245 2246 2247 2248 2249 2250 2251 2252 2253 2254 2255 2256 2257 2258 2259 2260 2261 2262 2263 2264 2265 2266 2267 2268 2269 2270 2271 2272 2273 2274 2275 2276 2277 2278 2279 2280 2281 2282 2283 2284 2285 2286 2287 2288 2289 2290 2291 2292 2293 2294 2295 2296 2297 2298 2299 2300 2301 2302 2303 2304 2305 2306 2307 2308 2309 2310 2311 2312 2313 2314 2315 2316 2317 2318 2319 2320 2321 2322 2323 2324 2325 2326 2327 2328 2329 2330 2331 2332 2333 2334 2335 2336 2337 2338 2339 2340 2341 2342 2343 2344 2345 2346 2347 2348 2349 2350 2351 2352 2353 2354 2355 2356 2357 2358 2359 2360 2361 2362 2363 2364 2365 2366 2367 2368 2369 2370 2371 2372 2373 2374 2375 2376 2377 2378 2379 2380 2381 2382 2383 2384 2385 2386 2387 2388 2389 2390 2391 2392 2393 2394 2395 2396 2397 2398 2399 2400 2401 2402 2403 2404 2405 2406 <

Alice - The Compliant Schoolgirl

genuinely happy? sometimes  
(blue in Wonderland?) <sup>happy</sup>

(1) The importance of being compliant

(2) Asking for permission to speak (voice)

(3) 'Best place' 'up' or 'down' of provincial men? (white, bottom of race, gender)

(4) 'The don't like anyone different' (otherness, racism)

(5) 'Faster than this without delay no right, but I don't want to' (disparaging Americans)

(6) 'Fascinating attachment' (not expounding herself) 'gayest'

Follow-up: sfynguarding, sharing out of her 'back' (afterwards) as a sex object at work

Bentley - the good and good managers!

- 1) Type of violence and Host to life (police as the oppressor) and the protection
- 2) School as stability (Secure base) (daily over the top - in fact not)
- 3) 'I didn't live nobody representing our authority'
- 4) 'second of my in opinion' black & white!
- 5) 'I don't want people to be scared of me'
- 6) 'Come ants'

Follow-up: a series of Lyttelton provided to someone that last (more with power)

for 20017

## Dimitri - the transformation of the Time Traveller

Phoenix

1) 'Back home'

(Army officer / policeman /  
uniform → ordinary  
human / through phoenix)  
(anti) mythology? "just me"

2) 'They were British and I was not  
British, and that was a hard one'  
(Kuer & otherness)

3) 'The uniform in my dreams was  
the authentic part of me!!

4) 'I lived that freedom'  
(power is freedom of expression)

5) 'Like the phoenix, I had to  
break to pieces and rebuild  
myself again


6) 'I am like a true traveller'

7) 'The doctor is NOT telling you  
what to do... The doctor is there  
with you!'

Follow-up: 'I wouldn't do it again,  
cost / emotional toll fuck that!'



Eileen - The Wounded Healer, getting on with it <sup>horror ???</sup>

- ① Lost in translation <sup>Halloween Thriller??</sup>
- ② 'You chose it, so get on with it!'
- ③ 'They decide if I am good enough.'
- ④ 'This kindergarten was like an institution' ✓
- ⑤ 'I've been through worse so I am stronger now!'   
 (trauma → source of strength/ resilience/ empowered)
- ⑥ 'This gives me power - knowing what I want'   
 (power of knowing / being attuned / inner pre-MOTIVATION)
- ⑦ 'I feel I voiced what I wanted to say!'   
 

Follow-up: 'It's a trick / training like trick or treat like Halloween a little bit!'   
 (voice of text / voice of experience / different voices)

Alice - The Compliment Student  
 relating to power? (compliment, teacher's pet)  
 (Alice in Wonderland?) (it just appears as if AM)

1) The importance of being complimented

2) Asking for permission to speak (voice)

3) 'Girl power' of 'or  
 'wives of powerful men'? (intersectionality)  
 race, gender!

4) 'They don't like anyone different' (otherness / racism)

5) 'Rather than this rather  
 telling me right and wrong  
 it's about me' (disorganised / Avoidant / Anxious)

6) 'Insecure Attachment made  
 me experience harder' (parental safeguarding)

Follow-up: 'Striving out of  
 trouble' (rather is  
 still being a bit in what's  
 right & wrong. compliance? resistance?)

birds!!  
wings!!  
(angels?)

Zoya - The survivor who grew wings

1) The power of uniqueness and individuality

more complete & transformation complete deconstruction just the blend growing wings

2) In a nurturing environment, you grow, you blossom' (she built a home in me)

3) 'You're no one, unless you have money and status' (power as money & status)

4) Teachers as indifferent bystanders

5) 'The feeling of belonging I (built a home in me) could find with no therapist beyond language'

Follow-up: Just because you have a title, that doesn't mean you deserve to be glorified' Survivor - defiance??







Bentley - the good girl, gone...  
manager!

- 1) Time of violence and threat  
to life (police as the aggressor!)  
state not the perpetrator
- 2) School as a stalker  
(secure base)  
 (doing everything right - 'the good girl')
- 3) 'I didn't live truthfully  
 representing our intensity'
- 4) 'Scared of being in unity' in my opinion  
black & white!
- 5) 'I don't want people  
 to be scared of me'
- 6) 'Live auth'

silence...

Follow-up: 'A sense of togetherness  
 provided to someone that  
 leads'  
 (never with peers)  
perfection

## **Appendix 11: Participant Information Sheet**

### **METANOIA INSTITUTE & MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Study Title: Voices as Equal as Others: A Narrative Inquiry into the Doctoral Journey of Psychologists and Psychotherapists from Authoritarian Background**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask if anything is unclear, or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you decide to take part, you will receive a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The aim of the study is to give voice to counselling psychologists and psychotherapists from oppressive / authoritarian backgrounds and to explore their lived experiences of power dynamics and relationships with authority figures during their training journey. I believe that all practitioners, regardless of their origin and background, have an equal right to voice their subjective experiences and be heard. I hope the findings will shed light on the way practitioners make sense of their experience with power during their training and how it has deepened, facilitated, or hindered the development of their own authority, professional identity, and the way they relate to their clients. The study is expected to take place between July 2017 and July 2019.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen as you responded to my advertisement. You were selected as you met the inclusion criteria - a qualified counselling psychologist or psychotherapist from an authoritarian background who has been enrolled in an advanced (doctoral level or equivalent) training course in Counselling Psychology and/or Psychotherapy.

There will be 3-5 participants taking part in this study.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason (up to the point where the final project has been submitted for publication).

### **What do I have to do if I take part?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in an audio recorded conversational interview, which will last an hour to an hour and a half. You will be given a voice to share your experience of power and authority during the process of your training, as well as how this may have impacted your personal and professional development, your own authority, and client work.

After about 4-5 weeks, there will be a second conversational interview, giving us the chance to explore how you were impacted by the first interview.

All recorded conversational interviews will be transcribed by the researcher (Denitsa Radeva-Petrova) and anonymous extracts of the transcripts will be used in the research write-up. As I endeavour to work collaboratively and transparently, I will send you a copy of your transcribed interview to check and verify before the follow-up. You will also have the opportunity to read my account of your story to ascertain that you feel comfortable with the amount of detail and to check if I have done your story justice or omitted something important. The completed study will also be available for you to read afterwards.

In order to ensure quality assurance and equity, this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case, your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

As a result of taking part in this study, you may experience psychological distress in recounting your experience. If this happens, I will guide you towards accessing appropriate sources for emotional support. Throughout the interview process, your well-being will be my priority. I will debrief you about your interview experience and use my counselling skills throughout the interview process to create a safe and containing environment. I will remain vigilant for any sign of distress and if at any point you show any such signs, you will be asked whether you wish to continue. You will have the right to end the interview without giving an explanation.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Participants will be given the opportunity to tell their stories out loud and express their views in the presence of an active listener. This may assist self-exploration,

facilitate meaning-making processes, and help address past or recurrent power issues. The study findings may develop counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' understanding of subtle power processes and contributing relational dynamics, both individually and within a group. Gaining insight into practitioners' perspectives and subjective experiences of the training journey may result in identifying and addressing power discrepancies by training institutions, therefore empowering trainees, deepening self-reflection, and strengthening confidence. Educators may use this study to reshape their relationship to power and their own authority. This could result in developing new guidelines and recommendations, improving the quality of training, and creating more egalitarian relationships in training, supervisory and therapeutic contexts.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information that is collected about you or people you know who are involved in your story will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is used will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised. Your personal details will be stored securely and will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

All data will be stored, analysed, and reported in compliance with the Data Protection legislation of the UK.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

This research will be published as part of a postgraduate dissertation around November-December 2020 (at the earliest), and a copy of the published results can be obtained by emailing the researcher at [denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk).

Please note: you will not be identified in the report or any further publications.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee.

### **Contact for further information**

Denitsa Radeva-Petrova (Researcher): [denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:denitsa.radeva-petrova@metanoia.ac.uk)  
Dr Saira Razzaq (Supervisor): [saira.razzaq@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:saira.razzaq@metanoia.ac.uk)

**THANK YOU very much for taking part in this study!**

## Appendix 12: Participant Consent Form

Participant Identification Number:

**Title of Project: Voices as Equal as Others: A Narrative Inquiry into the Doctoral Journey of Psychologists and Psychotherapists from Authoritarian Background**

**Name of Researcher: Denitsa Radeva-Petrova**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated .....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I choose to withdraw, I can decide what happens to any data I have provided. ☐
3. I understand that my interview will be taped and subsequently transcribed. ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐
5. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor. ☐

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

## Appendix 13: List of Supporting Organisations

### A LIST OF ORGANISATIONS OFFERING SUPPORT AND ADVICE FOR URGENT EMOTIONAL AND/OR HEALTH PROBLEMS

- [Anxiety UK](#) runs a helpline on weekdays 9.30 am - 5.30 pm on 08444 775 774.
- [b-eat](#) runs a helpline for people experiencing an eating disorder. The Beat Adult Helpline is open to anyone over 18. Parents, teachers, or any concerned adults should call the adult helpline. The national number is 0808 801 0677 or you can email them at [help@b-eat.co.uk](mailto:help@b-eat.co.uk).
- **C.A.L.L.** If you live in Wales, you can contact the [Community Advice and Listening Line \(C.A.L.L.\)](#) for a confidential listening and support service. Their number is 0800 132 737 or you can text “help” to 81066.
- **Mind’s Infoline.** For mental health information, [Mind’s Infoline](#) is open 9 am - 6 pm on weekdays. You can contact them on 0300 123 3393, text 86463 or email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk).
- **NHS 111 / NHS Direct.** If you need medical help or advice fast, but it’s not a life-threatening situation, you can call [NHS 111](#) (in England) by dialling 111, or [NHS Direct](#) (in Wales) on 0845 46 47.
- **Nightline.** If you are a student, you can look at the [Nightline website](#) to see if your university or college offers a night-time listening service. All Nightline phone operators are also students.
- [No Panic](#) run a helpline for people experiencing anxiety disorders (charge 5 p a minute plus your access charge), open 10 am - 10 pm, 365 days a year, on 0844 967 4848.
- [OCD-UK](#) has an advice line, open on weekdays 9 am - 5 pm, on 0845 120 3778 or 0345 120 3778. You can email them at [support@ocduk.org](mailto:support@ocduk.org).
- **Papyrus HOPEline.** If you’re under 35 and struggling with suicidal feelings and self-harm, the [Papyrus HOPEline](#) can offer advice. They are open weekdays 10 am - 10 pm, weekends 2 pm - 10 pm, and bank holidays 2 pm - 5 pm. Their national number is 0800 068 4141, or you can email [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org) or text 07786 209 697.

- **Samaritans.** [Samaritans](#) are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to listen to anything that is upsetting you, including intrusive thoughts and difficult thoughts of suicide and self-harm. Their national free phone number is 116 123, or you can email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). Samaritans also offer a Welsh Language Line on 0300 123 3011 (7 pm - 11 pm only, seven days a week)
- **SANEline.** [SANEline](#) offers emotional support and information 4.30 pm - 10.30 pm daily, 365 days a year. Their national number is 0300 304 7000.
- **Switchboard, the LGBT+ helpline.** If you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, [Switchboard](#) is available 10 am - 10 pm, 365 days a year, to listen to any problems you're having. Their national number is 0300 330 0630, or you can email [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt).
- **Victim Support** offers support to people, affected by crime or traumatic events. You can call their free Supportline, the number for which is 0808 1689 111.
- **Your local NHS Trust** may also offer a crisis phone line, or information and support on what to do in a crisis. Check your local NHS trust's website for more information about their services.

**If you feel at risk, please contact your GP or go to your nearest A&E department.**

## Appendix 14: Email Exchange with a Collaborator

Re: Follow-up

Inbox



**Denitsa Radeva-Petrova** <[dradevapetrova@gmail.com](mailto:dradevapetrova@gmail.com)> Wed, Apr 3, 2019, 10:56 AM Re

to [REDACTED]

ply

Dear [REDACTED],

I just wanted to thank you again for your time and your beautiful story which you shared with me yesterday. As discussed, I wanted to check quickly how are you feeling today, and if you would like to address any issues which might have been raised or left unprocessed (after the interview). Please, let me know. I am available today for a phone call. I am here until Saturday, then going away for two weeks over the Easter break (back on 24th April).

Probably it would take me some time to transcribe the interviews, but I will keep you updated, and you will have the opportunity to read, check and verify the transcript, as well as decide to add/change or omit something.  
Again, it was pleasure to meet you!

With best wishes,

Denitsa

--

**Denitsa Radeva-Petrova**  
**Integrative Psychotherapist (UKCP reg.)**  
 Psychodynamic Counsellor (MBACP, MBPsS)  
 Lombard House, 12-17 Upper Bridge Street  
 Canterbury, CT1 2NF  
[www.denitsarpetrova-therapy.com](http://www.denitsarpetrova-therapy.com)





to me

9:21 AM Re  
ply

Hi Denitsa,

Thank you for your email.

I am very happy i was able to share my story with you. I did feel noticed, connected and heard, which was enriching in a lot of ways.

I am absolutely fine, the experience has left me energised and gave me a sense of being empowered.

Thank you for contacting me and giving me the opportunity to tell my story.

Kind regards



**Denitsa Radeva-Petrova** <dradevapetrova@gmail.com> Fri, Apr 5, 2019,

8:16 PM Re  
ply

to [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you so much for your email and positive feedback about the experience. I am glad that it gave you a sense of feeling listened to and empowered.

I will be happy to keep in touch & also will keep you updated on my progress as well as when we can have a follow-up after you have had the chance to read the transcript.

Wishing you a lovely weekend!

With best wishes,

Denitsa

## Appendix 15: Belene Labour Camp

Available from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80-00809A000700050030-1.pdf> [Accessed 1 June 2020].

Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/09/23 : CIA-RDP80-00809A000700050030-1

CLASSIFICATION <del>RESTRICTED</del> <b>RESTRICTED</b>		REPORT	STAT
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY INFORMATION FROM FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS		CD NO.	
COUNTRY	Bulgaria	DATE OF INFORMATION	1951
SUBJECT	Political - Concentration camps	DATE DIST.	10 Mar 1952
HOW PUBLISHED	Monthly periodical	NO. OF PAGES	3
WHERE PUBLISHED	New York	SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.	
DATE PUBLISHED	Oct 1951		
LANGUAGE	Bulgarian		

THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

SOURCE Bulgarski Pregled.

### THE BELENE CONCENTRATION CAMP IN BULGARIA

On 15 September 1951, a Bulgarian who recently escaped from Bulgaria wrote that Bulgarian prisons and concentration camps are filled with fighters for the liberation of Bulgaria. He also stated that as of 1 April 1951, over 2,300 families were evacuated from Kula, Vidin, and Belogradchik okoliyas and moved like cattle to the Dobruzha and Stalin regions.

Another Bulgarian, who spent 6 months in the Belene concentration camp and later succeeded in escaping from Bulgaria, gives the following information on that camp:

The Belene concentration camp is made up of four compounds, Belene No 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The first two compounds are located on an island in the Danube, just opposite Belene, 12 kilometers west of Shvishitov and 15 kilometers east of Nikopol. The island is about 12 - 13 kilometers long and from 20 to 1,000 meters wide. The source was first interned in compound No 1.

Compounds No 3 and 4 are located on the Danube 5 and 10 kilometers respectively from Belene, in the direction of Nikopol. There may be other camp compounds at the same location but the source has no knowledge of their existence and location.

From 700 to 1,000 male prisoners are interned in the two compounds on the island. The food is very poor; for breakfast, every prisoner receives 400 grams of bread and tea, and for lunch and supper, a very thin soup containing almost no fat. A tablespoonful of marmalade is distributed among 25 prisoners. Once a week, a small amount of macaroni is put into the soup. The internees receive meat once every few months and try to supplement their diet with whatever raw vegetables and fruit they can find in the vegetable gardens where they work.

- 1 -

CLASSIFICATION <del>RESTRICTED</del> <b>RESTRICTED</b>		DISTRIBUTION	
STATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NAVY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NSAS	
ARMY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AIR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FBI	

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The prisoners cultivate fields. They have to get up at 0400 hours and must be ready to go to work at 0600 hours. Many of them have to walk from 5 to 7 kilometers from the camp to their place of work. They are lined up in the morning, separated into groups of 20 each, and marched to work by three armed militia-men.

The Belene concentration camp is used for the more active political prisoners. Criminal prisoners are not sent there. Some of the internees have been in the island camp since 1949. Others are kept there several weeks and are then sent classing where. The prisoners believe that the policy of the authorities is to keep shifting internees from one camp to another.

Every prisoner arrives at camp with his file, which contains detailed data about his private life, his identity, his political convictions, his political activity, etc. For a period of time the administration of the camp used to separate members of the same party into different groups.

In compound No 1, beatings are not performed publicly. The prisoner who is to be punished is taken to the administration building at night, and there he is beaten and tortured.

At the beginning of 1950, the function of guarding the camp compound was taken away from the militia and turned over to the so-called border troops.

Old age and poor physical condition of a prisoner are of no concern to the camp administration. All prisoners are treated equally. Only those who have received very serious bruises during the beatings are given less strenuous work or are sent to the hospital to get well.

Many Bulgarian politicians and public figures were interned in compound No 1. Among them was Tsvetli Ivanov, former editor of the newspaper Svoboden Narod (Free People), organ of the opposition Social Democratic Party. He was beaten, and during the beatings contracted tetanus. He was already dying when the camp administration decided to send him to the hospital. Ivanov died in compound No 1.

A prisoner is thoroughly searched upon arrival at camp. He is stripped naked and everything that he has on his person, such as money and documents, is taken away from him. He is then given coupons equal in value to the amount of money he has with him. These coupons can be used only in the camp canteen. The prisoner is given an old and worn-out police, military, or prisoner's uniform to wear in camp.

During 1950, compound No 3 was used by the so-called "Trudova Mobilizatsiya" (Labor Mobilization). The barracks of this compound are now occupied by camp internees. There are also seven large tents for internees, a brick building for the administration, barracks for the militiamen, a kitchen, and a warehouse for storing food. The entire camp [compound] is surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. A painted white line, 10 meters from the fence, marks the death zone. If a prisoner crosses that line, the guards shoot to kill without warning.

There is no hospital at compound No 3. Internees who are seriously ill are taken to a small tent used by the doctor. The doctor is also a prisoner and is not allowed to issue any kind of certificate about the working ability of a patient.

Compound No 3 is located 5-6 kilometers from Belene, in the direction of Eikopol, and about 5 kilometers south of the Danube. At this compound, the guards are numerous and very well armed. The only road between Belene and the compound is an old country road connecting Belene with Orshah. Behind the compound, the internees have constructed an irrigation canal 4-5 meters wide and 1.5 meters deep. The area surrounding the compound is crossed by similar canals which have been dug by internees.

- 2 -

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Once in the Belene camp, a prisoner loses all contact with the outside world. He may not have any contact with the inhabitants of the nearby villages.

The internees are followed and spied on constantly by agents of the State Security Police, who are here called "instructors." These instructors are assisted by the so-called "cultural and educational committees" composed of camp internees who volunteer as informers in return for small favors and privileges. The head of the cultural and educational committee in the Belene camp is Grozdanov, an old army general. Other members of the committee are Dr. Khristo Kunchev, Lt. Nikola Minchev, Levcho Ignatov, and Evstati Popov. These informers are called "antennas" by the internees. Every new internee who is twice called to the administration building is suspected by the other prisoners of being an antenna until he gives proof to the contrary.

During 1950, the commanding officer of the camp was Major Kurtev of the border troops. He was dismissed because of accusations that he displayed weakness toward the camp internees. The most ruthless members of the camp staff are instructor Donevski, superintendent Pesh, and militiaman Marin. These men are real sadists.

In compound No 1, the following Bulgarian politicians and public figures are interned:

Stoycho Moshanov, former cabinet minister, 50 years old, member of the former Democratic Party; Dr. Khralambi Oroshakov, former mayor of Sofia, 60 years old, member of the former Democratic Party; and Mikhayl Ganchev, 65 years old, member of the former Democratic Party. The following had been active members of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union: Nedko Botev, Petur Surbinski, Kiril Popov, Sergi Zlatanov, Engineer Boshkov, Dr. Gochev, Asen Payantov, Slavi Popignatov, Kocho Bonev, Vangel Gorov, and Eftim Arsov.

Also interned are Atanas Moskov, a well-known leader of the former Social Democratic Party; Gen. Ivan Velkov, an army career officer; Georgi Dimchev, a former Macedonian leader; Gen. Gocho Gochev, Col. Petko Ignatov, and Col. Encho Mateev, all former partisan officers; Dancho Sailov, a member of the former Democratic Party; a group of anarchists; about 20 well-known Bulgarian Communists, (sympathizers of Traycho Kostov); and three orthodox priests and five protestant ministers, most of them over 70 years old.

The internees are permitted to send out and to receive only two postcards a month, after these have passed the camp censorship. Relatives are allowed to visit internees only on 1 January, 1 May, and 9 September. Militiamen search all visitors and are present at their meetings with internees.

The commanding officer of compound No 3 is Captain Andreev, a brutal person who shows much bestiality in beating the internees. Prisoners of this compound dig canals in parts of the Danube region. They are marched to work in groups of 20 to 200 and are guarded by armed militiamen. Work starts at 0600 hours and continues all day. Each internee is expected to dig 3.5 to 5 cubic meters of earth a day. Those who have received disciplinary punishments are assigned double quotas of work.

There is a special "disciplinary detachment" in compound No 3. The internees assigned to this detachment are treated in the most cruel way imaginable. When a new prisoner arrives, the State Security Police decides whether he should or should not be put in the disciplinary detachment. The commanding officer of the detachment at compound No 3 is David Vidov, a former chief of the State Security Police at Berkovitsa. He is cruel and terroristic. The plight of all internees is tragic, but despite hardships and tribulations, all of them live in the hope of an impending liberation.

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- 3 -

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## Appendix 16: Principal Shared Themes and Subthemes

Principal shared themes and subthemes across time and collaborators	Dimitri	Eileen	Alice	Zoya	Mantas	Beatriz
<b>Silence</b>						
<b><u>The deprived of a voice learn to be silent</u></b>	<i>"You [should] listen to the professional without questioning..."</i>	<i>"They decide if I am good enough"</i>	<i>"The importance of being compliant"</i> <i>"You are being told what to do"</i> <i>"Asking for permission to speak"</i> <i>"Staying out of trouble"</i>	<i>"You are no one, unless you have money and status"</i>	<i>"The things were like, really in the box, really kind of telling you what and how to do and no space for you to do anything different"</i>	<i>"Growing up in silence"</i> <i>"Each conversation for me was a fight"</i> <i>"Scared of giving my opinion"</i> <i>"The Good girl, doing everything right"</i>
<b><u>Fear, Shame, Anger</u></b>	<i>"Not being chased by that uniform, that power, that authority" (implies he has been)</i>	Feeling shamed, <i>"I thought I did something really bad"</i>	<i>"It felt like being questioned by the police"</i>	<i>"Froze emotionally"</i>	<i>"I was livid, really angry... it felt personal, why am I treated this way"</i>	<i>"There was a lot of insecurity and fear to give my professional opinion"</i> <i>"I was sooo terribly scared of... putting my opinion in black</i>

Principal shared themes and subthemes across time and collaborators	Dimitri	Eileen	Alice	Zoya	Mantas	Beatriz
						<i>and white... feeling really paranoid</i>
<u><b>Finding the words, finding the voice</b></u>  <u><b>Power as freedom of expression, resistance, and opposition to authority</b></u>	<i>"I liked that freedom"</i>  <i>"I don't feel like hiding my Real Self"</i>	<i>"I feel I voiced what I wanted to say"</i>  <i>"This gives me power, knowing what I want"</i>	<i>"With my current supervisor, I'm finally engaging in that equal relationship and have my own voice... I am in charge"</i>  <i>"Rather than this authority, telling me right and wrong, it's about me"</i>	<i>"Just because you have a title, that doesn't mean you deserve to be glorified"</i>	<i>"I never wanted to be another brick in the wall! And always pushed very hard if somebody tried to turn me into a brick in the wall"</i>	
<b>Otherness and power</b>						
<u><b>Intersectional discrimination (race / ethnicity / class / gender / sexuality)</b></u>	<i>"They were British and I was not British, and that was a hard one"</i>	<i>"I felt a bit disadvantaged"</i>	<i>"They don't like anyone different"</i>  <i>"Girl power" or "wives of powerful men"?</i>	<i>"Being a foreigner is quite a rare feeling but I always felt that I am different even when I lived in [my home country]. So, it wasn't an alien feeling to me -</i>		

Principal shared themes and subthemes across time and collaborators	Dimitri	Eileen	Alice	Zoya	Mantas	Beatriz
			<i>"Expats going to Asia to find Asian girls"</i>	<i>feeling like an outsider"</i>		
<u>Language</u>		<i>"Not having the right words in English"</i> <i>"Lost in translation"</i> <i>"Is my English academic enough"</i>		<i>"The feeling of belonging I could find with my therapist beyond language"</i>		<i>"Writing in English made it even harder"</i>
<u>The Authoritarian State as Internalised, Oppressive Other</u>	<i>"The uniform in my dreams was the authority part of me"</i>	<i>"You chose it, so get on with it"</i>			<i>"I still had many of these <b>"shoulds"</b> and <b>"hads"</b>"</i>	<i>"I don't want people to be scared of me"</i>
<u>Otherness as Power</u>			<i>"Unique selling point"</i>	<i>"I always believed in the power of uniqueness and individuality"</i>		
Transition across Time and Space						

Principal shared themes and subthemes across time and collaborators	Dimitri	Eileen	Alice	Zoya	Mantas	Beatriz
<b><u>Changing identities</u></b>	<i>Army officer/Uniform - Civilian - Phoenix - Time traveller - "just m-me"</i>	<i>"Through healing myself first" - "Healing the Inner child" - "I am more grounded, and I can be more available for my client"</i>	<i>"Teacher's pet - "I just appear as I am" - "Person in charge"</i>	<i>"It was all about survival" - "Complete deconstruction, guts through the blender" - "growing wings"</i>	<i>"Brick in the wall" - "Rebel, getting out of the box"</i>	<i>"Good girl" - "Service manager"</i>
<b><u>The wound as a source of power</u></b>	<i>"Like the phoenix, I had to break to pieces and rebuild myself again"</i>	<i>"I've been through worse, so I am stronger now"</i>		<i>"I completely fell apart, but that became a door to my feelings"</i>	<i>"Things that are raw are the ones that are the most valuable"</i>	
<b><u>Place, belonging, and building a relational home in difference</u></b>	<i>"The individual, clearly had his own place within society which I knew <b>exactly</b>"</i>	<i>"This kindergarten was like an institution"</i> <i>"Floating in space" - Loss of ground</i>		<i>"It was boot camp"</i> <i>"The feeling of belonging / she built a home in me"</i>	<i>"Brick in the wall"</i> <i>"Rebel in the box"</i>	<i>"School as a shelter"</i> <i>"In-betweenness"</i>
<b><u>Training setting as a liminal space of becoming</u></b>	<i>"Life-changing"</i> <i>"I wouldn't do it again, fuck that!"</i>	<i>"The journey of my life"</i> <i>"It's a tricky training, like trick or treating!"</i>		<i>"It was like someone putting your guts through a blender... a complete deconstruction of the Self... going back to basics and"</i>	<i>"It was the perfect environment for me to grow"</i> <i>"They literally changed my worldview"</i>	<i>"Like hard-working ants, bringing... this whole idea of togetherness"</i>



Principal shared themes and subthemes across time and collaborators	Dimitri	Eileen	Alice	Zoya	Mantas	Beatriz
				<i>starting, and naming things."</i>  <i>"In a nurturing environment, you grow, you blossom"</i>		
<b><u>Relationship with authority figures</u></b>	<i>"People in uniforms"</i>  <i>"The doctor is not telling you what to do; the doctor is there with you"</i>	<i>"Different authorities, different voices"</i>	<i>"White, male authority"</i>  <i>"The teachers were the absolute authorities"</i>  <i>"Trying to please"</i>  <i>"Harshly scolded by the teacher"</i>  <i>"Insecure attachment made my experience harder"</i>  <i>"Authoritarian and authoritative"</i>	<i>"Messed up family, obsessed with money and status"</i>  <i>"The teachers were just indifferent bystanders"</i>  <i>"With no one there to protect me"</i>  <i>"But then I was held, while falling apart"</i>	Tutors as <i>"villains"</i> or <i>"superheroes"</i> vs. <i>"ordinary human beings"</i>  <i>"Beacon &amp; beaten"</i>  <i>"Enforcing the rules for the sake of enforcing the rules"</i>  <i>"Would you like to sit on it?"</i>  <i>"They wanted to punish me, and they did"</i>	<i>"Police is bad as a default"</i>  <i>"The tapping of the boots"</i>  <i>"Chasing someone all night"</i>  <i>"I didn't like anybody, representing any authority"</i>  <i>"A sense of togetherness, provided by someone that leads"</i>