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

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Abstract

Aim

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

Design

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

Findings

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

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

A pub conversation

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

Outline

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

1.1. What is a Group Relations Conference?

‘Eric Miller headed the Tavistock Institute’s Group Relations Programme for over 30 years and came to symbolize both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical design and structure of the Leicester model.’ (Nutkevich and Sher, 2004, p11)
In a chapter entitled ‘Experiential Learning in Groups I: The development of the Leicester Model’, Miller (1990a) comments:

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

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

**How did this approach develop?**

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

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

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

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

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

The influence of World War II
Bion (1939) wrote a document known as the Wharncliffe Memorandum, describing his intention to devise a therapeutic community and environment in a military hospital. His associated work at Northfield Hospital would influence his seminal text ‘Experiences in Groups and other papers’ (1961).
Influences Post-World War II

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

Developments in the United States

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

Open Systems Theory

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

The sociotechnical perspective

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

The first ‘Leicester’ conference

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

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

Open Systems Theory, primary task and the individual

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

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

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

Phenomenology within large groups

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

Developments and remnants

In the 2012 text ‘Group Relations Conferences: Tradition, Creativity, and Succession in the Global Group Relations Network’, there is recognition of the ongoing dissemination of the approach. In a tri-annual conference (the ‘Belgirate’ Conferences), designed for members who have been on the staff at other group relations conferences, an increasing diversity of countries are reported to attend over time. It is also noted that in 2009, the World Event instead of the Institutional Event was introduced (described below). In the opening chapter of this book, Aram (2012) describes the experience of taking up the Director role of the ‘Leicester’ conference from
2007. Developments of the conference approach are described, including an emphasis on spirituality, creativity and body.

1.3. A structural view of GRCs

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

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

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

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

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

4. Review and application groups

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

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

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

Primary task of the World Event (WE)

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

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

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

1.4.1 Local context of Tavistock GRCs

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

Tavistock GRCs are authorized by the Group Relations Committee of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. Four conferences are held annually, with different focuses. These focuses have included: exploring multi-agency and multidisciplinary contexts, exploring different identities and discovering leadership. These conferences are non-residential and range between three days and five days.
Conferences are temporary organisations which offer opportunities to learn about relatedness in organizational life. The structure and types of group activities vary within the different conferences. Different activities are structured to explore experiences of authority, roles, tasks and associated management of boundaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.1. Psychoanalytic theory

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

Object relations theory

Objects and part-objects

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

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

‘Part object’ means a part or aspect of a person.

Segal (1973) helps in elucidating these concepts (p19-20):
Freud described the ego as ‘precipitate of abandoned object cathexes.’ This precipitate consists of introjected objects … The analysis of early projective and introjective object relationships revealed phantasies of objects introjected into the ego from earliest infancy, starting with the introjection of the ideal and the persecutory breasts. To begin with, part objects are introjected, like the breast and later, the penis; then whole objects like the mother, the father, the parental couple. The earlier the introjection, the more fantastic are the objects introjected and the more distorted by what has been projected into them. As development proceeds, and the reality-sense operates more fully, the internal objects approximate more closely to real people in the external world.

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

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

**Ego, libido and morbido**

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

**Projection and introjection**

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

**The good and the bad breast**

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

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

de Board (1978) goes on to explain that in objects relation theory, the mothers breast is also experienced as intensely satisfying during feeding. The infant therefore experiences a conflict
involving both the ‘good breast’ – providing, comfort - and the ‘bad breast’ – uncontrollable, persecutory.

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

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

**Splitting**

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

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

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

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

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

Paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions

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

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

The depressive position is described by de Board (1978) in relation to the developing sense an infant gains of an integrated perspective. The mother is viewed as a whole person rather than ‘part-objects such as the breast, face, and so forth.’ (p32). This sense of external integration is accompanied by a recognition that the good and bad experiences can come from the same source.
Accompanying this integration of the mother as a whole object, ‘so the ego develops as an integrated whole, with diminution of splitting and projection’ (p32). It is recognised that this description refers to healthy development. The ‘depressive’ term relates to the infant’s perception that they may have caused damage or destruction to the loved object, thus bringing about characteristic feelings of guilt and despair (de Board, 1978). The depressive position may consequently lead to ‘the drive for reparation’ (de Board, 1978).

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

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

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

### 1.4.2. Group relations theory

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

Context

As noted in the developmental history of the GRC, Bion (1961) had developed experience in instigating a therapeutic community approach at the Northfield Hospital during the World War II. In ‘Experiences in Groups’, Bion comments (1961, p29):

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

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

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

Approach

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

Fraher (2004) offers an understanding of the impact of this distinctive approach (p74):
In Kleinian terms, Bion seemed to be inviting, whether consciously or not, the group’s projective identification with him. That is, he made himself available for the group to disown their uncomfortable feelings and project them onto him as a means to understand the group’s unconscious behavior (Gabriel, 1999). As Trist (1985) put it, ‘He made it safe for the group to dramatize its unconscious situation’.

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

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

**Bion, groups and object relations theory**

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

The influence of Klein is central to Bion’s thinking (p141):
I hope to show that in his contact with the complexities of life in a group the adult resorts, in what may be a massive regression, to the mechanisms described by Melanie Klein (1931, 1946) as typical of the earliest phases of mental life.

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

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

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

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

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

Through Bion’s lens, Klein’s object relations theory explained how experiences in groups trigger ‘primitive phantasies [sic] whose origins lie in the earliest years of life (Gabriel, 1999, p118). For example, one unconscious desire is for the individual to join with others
in an undifferentiated entity, like the infant fusing with the breast. Although comforting, this desire also creates resultant fears, such as the fear of becoming overwhelmed or consumed by the undifferentiated mass of the group or the fear of being rejected or abandoned by the group.

The sophisticated group and basic assumptions

In Bion’s (1961) formulation, the sophisticated group, more commonly called the work group, is characterised by group behavior which maintains a focus on the group task and with reality. Bion saw this as one mode of group operation. A second mode of group operation, he called the basic assumption.

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

Bion (1961) identified three types of basic assumption: dependency, pairing and fight-flight. Miller (1990a) adds that group members contribute anonymously to the basic assumption and that the function of the basic assumption is to keep at bay the primitive emotional states associated with the other two basic assumptions.

Basic assumption of dependency (baD)

Bion (1961) wrote:

One person is always felt to be in a position to supply the needs of the group, and the rest in a position to which their needs are supplied … having thrown all their cares on
the leader, they sit back and wait for him to solve all their problems … the dependent
group soon shows that an integral part of its structure is a belief in the omniscience and
omnipotence of some one member of the group. (p74, p82, p99, quoted in Fraher, 2004,
p74)

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

Basic assumption of pairing (baP)

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

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

Basic assumption of fight-flight (baF)

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

The group seems to know only two techniques of self-preservation, fight or flight … the
kind of leadership that is recognised as appropriate is the leadership of the man who
mobilizes the group to attack somebody, or alternatively to lead it in flight … leaders who neither fight nor run away are not easily understood. (p63, p65, quoted in Fraher, 2004, p75).

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

**Valency**

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

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

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

**1.4.3. Open systems theory**

Miller (1990a) recognises that the influence of open systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950) was most evident through the contributions of Rice in the early 1960s. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of this theory in the context of GRCs.
Open systems theory can help in understanding organizations as open systems, involving and import-conversion-export processes (Zagier-Roberts, 1994, Fraher, 2004).

**Boundaries**

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

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

**Primary task, task systems and role**

Miller (1990a) notes that Rice (1958, 1963) and colleagues developed the notion of the primary task, in conjunction with open systems thinking. ‘It was postulated that a purposeful human system at any given time has a primary task, in the sense of the task that it must perform if it is to survive’ (p172). Task systems are seen as being defined by particular activities, that may be
demarcated by organisational boundaries (Miller, 1990a). The human dimension of the system is referred to in terms of role: ‘Finally people – the human resources of the enterprise - carry roles through which they contribute the requisite activities to the task of the organization’ (p172).

**The individual as an open system**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4.4. Further conceptual approaches

In discussing ‘the so-called Tavistock paradigm in organizational consultancy’ Palmer (2002, cited in Armstrong, 2005, p82), comments: ‘I say “so-called”, because I do not think there is one such paradigm but, rather, a variety of rather loosely linked conceptual approaches’.
This comment resonates with the experience of writing this overview of the theoretical underpinnings of GRCs. In the following discussion three broad areas of influence will be acknowledged in an attempt to gather together some outstanding parts of the picture.

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

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

**Social systems as defenses**

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


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

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

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

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

Field theory and experiential learning

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

Fraher (2004), notes how field theory (Lewin, 1936, 1950) was influential on Tavistock staff including Miller, with an emphasis ‘characteristics of interdependence’ (Fraher, 2004, p71):
There is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of their subgroups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties, which are different from properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed. (Lewin, 1947, cited in Fraher, 2004, p71).

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

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

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

In short, beta-elements are described by Stein (2004), and as hypothesized by Bion (1962), as ‘confusing and often unintelligible bits of sensory information that pierce the protective psychic boundary … and are thus experienced as threatening its very existence’ (Stein, 2004, p23). This description relates to the hypothesized experience of an infant. Stein (2004) continues a description of the consequences of this experience as follows. The infant is hypothesized to respond to beta-elements by trying to rid themselves of the experience through projective identification (for example by screaming to expel the associated anxiety). Bion highlights that this behavior is perceived as quite normal in infancy and more problematically later on in development, particularly as they remain ‘unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual’ (Stein, 2004, p24).
Stein (2004) goes on to describe Bion’s (1962) formulation involving an alpha-function, ‘the capacity to contain and process beta-elements without resorting to projective identification’ (p24). This involves ‘processing within ourselves the feelings and thoughts that are evoked by the beta-elements’ (p24).

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

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

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

**Summary**

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

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

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

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

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

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

- to develop and apply psychological theories and research that relate to practice;

- to promote improved outcomes for all service users taking account of their context
and needs

- to share understanding of diversity in development and learning; and

- to adhere to professional practices that are legal, ethical and conform to the best standards of evidence available at the time.

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

- the capacity to provide consultation (oriented towards increasing understanding and solutions); and

- the ability to gather information, synthesise, select and address different ways of intervening, as appropriate to the needs and choices of the service user. EPs have an important preventative function, for example in protecting and improving quality of service provision. There are huge social and financial costs for society when children and young people encounter difficulties with learning, communication, behaviour or well
being/mental health. It is, therefore, important to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of qualified educational psychologists to contribute to developing and improving early intervention for potentially vulnerable groups in society, and that the standards of training are continuously reviewed and revised in light of changing circumstances.

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

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

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

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

Miller (1990a) described the key aspects of group relations conferences as experiential learning events, with a focus on group and organisational behavior, with an emphasis on authority and leadership. Miller (1990a) is explicit in highlighting that the purpose of such conferences are educational.
These key aspects of GRCs will be considered firstly in relation to the BPS Standards for the accreditation of educational psychology training in England, Northern Ireland & Wales October (2014), which include the following descriptions of learning outcomes, core professional skills and requirements for practice of applied educational psychologists:

- Develop partnerships and effective collaboration with the interacting systems of families, schools, communities and other agencies, to bring about positive change (p16)

- Demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills across a range of settings and activities. (p17)

- Bring about change for individuals, children, young people and their families by working at different levels (e.g. individuals, families, groups, communities, organisations, local authorities and national priorities). (p18)

- Contribute a distinct psychological perspective within multi-disciplinary teams. (p18)

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

Health and Care Professionals Council, standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists (2012), include the following requirements:
- be able to work, where appropriate, in partnership with other professionals, support staff, service users and their relatives and carers
- understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships as both an independent practitioner and collaboratively as member of a team
- be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary team
- recognise the need to use interpersonal skills to encourage the active participation of service users
- understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different groups …
- … to assist multi-professional communication …
- understand psychological models related to … organisations and systems
- know how professional principles are expressed and translated into action through a number of different approaches to practice, and how to select of modify approaches to meet the needs of an individual, groups or communities

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

In summary, the educational emphasis of GRCs involving a primary focus on learning about group and organizational behavior, is seen to related directly to the core competencies (BPS) and professional standards (HCPC) required for accreditation as an educational psychologist (and more broadly practitioner psychologist).
This linkage between GRCs and the training requirements of educational psychologists has relevance to the development of research questions and decision-making regarding choice of participants for the research.

1.7. My position as a researcher

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

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

These experiential learning events had further stimulated my curiosity. I became dimly aware in subsequent weeks and months that I held onto experiences within these conferences in relation to my experiences in groups both within and beyond my experience at work. There was an overriding sense of ‘something’ else going on within the group I experienced. During the process of a preliminary (or brief) literature review, when developing a research and ethics proposal, my interest in Bion (1961) strengthened, and I began to consider group behavior in
relation to his basic assumptions; I became interested in how groups might be involved in dependency, fight or flight or pairing behaviours (described in the next chapter).

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

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

2.1. Introduction

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

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

2.2. Inclusion

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

These databases were chosen as they have relevance to the area of research (GRCs) either in terms of development of theory or in practical application. It is recognised that additional
databases could have been searched. However, as stated previously, that aim has not been to be exhaustive, but purposeful.

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

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

As previously stated, this literature search is not intended to be exhaustive, rather the aims have been to provide an overview of what a GRC involves and to establish a rationale for the research questions and design. These may be seen as the criteria by which relevant literature has been included and excluded from the review that follows. The fundamental aim has been to
synthesize sufficient evidence to outline the object of study rather than chronicle all writing that has been published in relation to GRCs. It can be seen that the electronic searches provide evidence to suggest that, through the process described, there has been no evidence of publications which explicitly connect GRCs with the practice of educational psychology or the training of educational psychologists.

2.3. Exclusion

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

Structure of the literature review

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

2.4. Exploring the experience

The aim here is to introduce the reader to key dimensions of the literature describing the experience of GRCs.
This section has been structured, firstly in relation to the literature describing the nature of learning at GRCs. This will be followed by description of evaluative literature.

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

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

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

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

Miller (1990a) describes his impression of learning at the Leicester conference. He acknowledges that as a result of limitations in resources to conduct in-depth evaluation of outcomes, the reflections on learning ‘remain reliant on impressionistic and anecdotal evidence … and from our own observations’ (p182). Whilst recognizing these limitations, it is seen as valuable to note the impressions of this formative figure in the history of GRCs.
Miller (1990a) states that: ‘It seems likely that three different kinds, or levels, of learning are likely to occur.’ (p182). Firstly Miller suggests that group members are likely to become able to identify and label behaviours that they observe.

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

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

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

**A note of caution**

It is salient that Miller (1990a) described his reflections on the impact of GRCs as impressionistic, arising from anecdotes and observations. The majority of the following literature may be described in the same terms. The anecdotal and observational nature of the majority of literature may be seen as a limitation. Shafer (2006) comments, ‘the lack of formal assessment
of and learning about the efficacy of Group Relations methodologies has been a limitation’ (p130).

It is also important to consider the sources from which the following writing is drawn. Predominantly, writers describe experiences of GRCs with explicit recognition of their personal involvement (and investment) in GRCs. Therefore, it should be recognised that there is the potential for a bias towards favourable accounts, given the writers interests in the object of study.

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

2.5. Descriptions of attending GRC’s

Pain and uncertainty

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

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

Bahat (2012) goes on to emphasise the importance of learners being able to tolerate not knowing: ‘There cannot be real thinking when people are stuck in pre-know positions or roles’. Reference is made to Bion (1961), who discusses the importance of a group struggling with the
tension of bringing together the primitive with the sophisticated – ‘the essence of developmental conflict’ (Bion, 1961, p128).

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

**Identity and anxiety**

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

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

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

Izod (2006) also describes tensions and struggle when discussing the interplay between the individual and the organization in the context of GRCs. Experiential learning is seen to provide opportunity to consider the issues of dependence and autonomy. It is however highlighted that
during GRCs, ‘participants and staff are thrown into, the struggle to manage one’s senses and emotions in the presence of the unfamiliar, and the struggle to access one’s cognitive resources to be able to think’ (p81). In this context, Izod (2006) describes feedback from GRC members as frequently expressing ‘that much of the learning from conference work is about one’s self and one’s own capacity to manage anxiety’ (p91).

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

**Difficulty in describing**

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

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

These comments may be viewed in relation to the previous sub-section, where the ‘churning’ within individuals and within groups during group relations conferences was described. The reader may connect the earlier discussion of Bion’s formulation (1962) of learning involving beta-elements and alpha-function with the commentary described here. The difficulty in articulating the experience may be seen within the context of the ‘undigested’ pieces of
information (Miller, 1990a), or the beta-elements, ‘unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual’ (Stein, 2004, p24).

2.5. Evaluative activities and critique

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

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

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

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

- effective communication
- taking up a leadership role
- dealing with task and role-related anxiety
- containing others’ psychological projections

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

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

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

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

Hupkins (2006) describes a study of GRCs in relation to application in the business world. Five participants were interviewed, with the aims of exploring ‘what their experiences had been like, what they had learnt there and how they applied this new knowledge in their daily work’ (p139).
The interviewees were from different management and consultant backgrounds and had attended different conferences in different countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the United kingdom). Participants had attended between one and six conferences, in up to three different countries. It is also reported that two participants had attended as members; four as members and staff on different occasions.

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

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

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

The analysis of data is loosely described, as involving making notes in the interview and writing associations (from the researcher) after the interviews ‘in order to make sure I could distinguish between what was ‘theirs’ and what was ‘mine’, to prevent contamination’ (p140). Following this claim, this statement is made: ‘As all that material percolated in my mind, it resulted in a list of observations and conclusions’ (p140). The conclusions and observations regarded applications of learning, nature of the learning and reasons leading people to attend GRCs.
A number of questions emerge in relation to the approach to data gathering and analysis. These questions include wondering about the type of notes that were made during and after the interviews. Furthermore, the claim of separating the reflections of the interviewer and the interviewee appears to be complicated by the subsequent description of ideas ‘percolating’ in the mind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Criticism of basic assumption theory has so far been highlighted in terms the potential for simplification and neglect of factors related to individual and group differences. Palmer (2001),
draws attention to possibility of external factors being overlooked when thinking in terms of basic assumptions, quoting Bridger (1990b), who stated ‘Bion, in my view, was not at ease with the group as an open system.’ (Cited in Palmer, 2001, p171).

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

2.7. A broader philosophical critique

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

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

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

… they each organise their groups somewhat differently in order to realise their various aims. Naturally, therefore, these groups produce different sorts of material – which has been put in order. Now each operator proceeds to do this – to put his material in order – by picking out a pattern of features that he judges his material exhibits. He embodies the
upshot of this ordering in a set of concepts and generalisations. These jointly constitute what can be called his Way of Talking, or WOT for short; and he uses it to train the new group member, Smith, to spot the features that his WOT picks out ... When Smith has acquired these skills, it is natural for the operator to talk about Smith by saying that he has now acquired some insight and understanding’


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

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

This awareness is helpful, firstly in recognising the limitations of the theory described and in guarding against the risk of more lofty claims. Secondly, and significantly, this analysis and subsequent awareness of the concept of a WOT, helps to inform the research design, particularly from an epistemological perspective and the decisions which follow in relation to information gathering and analysis.
The concept of a WOT can be linked to the concept of social constructionism. Burr (2003) comments that ‘Social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality’ (p6) and that (p4-5):

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

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

2.8. Reflections

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

A brief history of the development of group relations has been offered, along with a description of the potential structure of such events. Theoretical underpinnings have been described. The core triad of object relations theory, open systems theory and group relations theory have been discussed, along with some less central yet noteworthy influences. A review has also been offered of commentary describing experiences of GRCs, including critical reflections of theory. A broader critique of GRCs has been offered from a philosophical perspective, where it is recognised that an orientation to GRCs can be seen as adopting a particular Way of Talking (Babington, Smith and Farrell, 1979).
It is also recognised that the literature surveyed did not indicate that research has been carried out exploring the experience of trainee educational psychologists who have attended GRCs as part of their professional training.

2.9. Emergent research questions

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

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

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

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

Overview

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

3.1. Research context

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore:

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

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

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

How do participants describe their experience of attending a GRC?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This description may be seen to align with those describing the aims of a group relations conference, where an emphasis is placed on members understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in group situations and the impact of this awareness on personal authority and behavior in role (Miller 1990). To extend this point, Smith et al (2009) comment:
'If one embarks on an in-depth inductive qualitative study of a topic which has considerable existential moment … then it is quite likely that the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self/identity' (p163).

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

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

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

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

This concept may be linked to the experience of attending a group relations conference which members are ‘thrown’ into and which requires engagement with the people, objects, language and culture. Therefore, the following phenomenological framing of research activity is seen as relevant:
‘Participants are experts on their own experiences and can offer researchers an understanding of their thought, commitments and feelings through telling their own stories, in their own words, and in as much detail as possible. Participants are recruited because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored’ (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005).

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

3.3. Acknowledging the interpretive aspect

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It may be seen that the focus of this research fits with the qualitative description provided by Smith *et al* (2009). The emphasis is on sense-making in both questions. Smith *et al* (2009),
comment ‘How the particular question is formulated leads to a suggestion for what is probably the appropriate qualitative approach to use.’ (p45).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crotty (1998), describes objectivism as:
'The epistemological view that things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, but they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects ('objective' truth and meaning, therefore), and that careful (scientific?) research can attain that objective truth and meaning. This is the epistemology underpinning the positivist stance.' (p5).

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

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

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

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

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

'Symbolic interactionism emphasises the construction of the social world and meaning through the human use of symbols in communication, most importantly language.' (p205).
Is helpful to hold the centrality of language in mind, particularly when thinking about the construction of the social world, in relation to the research focus on group relations.

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

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

Furthermore:

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

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

Crotty (1998) argues that ‘social constructionism is at once realist and relativist’ (p63). Burr, (2003), describes a realism as:
'Ontological theory which states that the external world exist independently of being thought of or perceived.' (p204).

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

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

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

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

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

3.5. Methodological considerations

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

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

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

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

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

Grounded theory

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

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

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

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

**Discourse analysis**

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

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

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

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

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

Eatough and Smith (2008), comment:

‘Typically, IPA studies explore existential issues of considerable importance for the participant. These matters are often transformative, including change and demanding reflection and (re) interpretation from the individuals concerned.’ (p186, in Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

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

Furthermore, Eatough and Smith (2008), comment:

‘… if participants open up a novel and interesting areas of enquiry these are pursued. In this sense, participants are viewed as experiential experts of the topic under investigation (Smith and Osborn, 2003).’ (p188).
This description can be seen as in-line with the exploratory aims of the research. Eatough and Smith (2008) also describe the potential for a researcher to ‘bring to light the unexpected’ (p188). Furthermore, the concept of ‘experiential experts’ can be seen as congruent with the ideographic focus of the research and the underpinning principles of group relations conferences, which includes learning from personal experience.

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

3.5.1. Strategy

A qualitative strategy is viewed as appropriate for exploration of participants experience. Coolican (2004), describes a qualitative approach as a:

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

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

3.5.2. Technique

Robson (2002), describes the circumstances in which a qualitative research interview is most appropriate as including:
• Where a study focuses on the meaning of a particular phenomenon to the participant…
• Where individual perceptions of processes within a social unit—such as a work-group, department whole group organization— are to be studied prospectively, using a series of interviews (Robson, 2002, p271)

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

3.5.3. Analysis

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

3.6. Theoretical underpinnings

3.6.1. Phenomenology

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe phenomenology as ‘the philosophical approach to the study of experience…’ In thinking about what the experience of being human is like’ and later commented that ‘one key value of phenomenological philosophy is that it provides us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience’ (p12).
This perspective may be seen as relevant to the exploration of individual trainee educational psychologist’s experience of attending a group relations conference.

3.6.2. Hermeneutics

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

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

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

3.6.3. Idiography

Idiography has also informed the analysis of data. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), describe idiography as ‘concerned with the particular’ (p29) and as operating at two levels. Firstly in terms of ‘detail, and therefore the depth of the analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context’ (p29).
These concepts of hermeneutics and idiography are relevant to issues of validity, which are considered below, particularly in relation to Yardley’s (2000) first and second principle for assessing the quality of qualitative research - sensitivity to context and commitment to rigour.

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

3.7. Sample and participants

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

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

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

In inviting participation in this research, the aim has been to ‘go back to the things themselves’ (Husserl, 1927). The ‘things’ were the experiences of attending a group relations conference. Eatough and Smith (2008), describe ideographic methods as appropriate for subjective and ‘interpersonal involvedness’ of emotion, thought and action. Furthermore, they are explicit in acknowledging ‘messy and chaotic’ aspects of human life. This recognition is commensurate with a description Rice (1965) offers when writing of his experience of Directorship of early Group Relations Conferences:
‘... the techniques of conference learning include the removal of some of the common and expected social defences, the lowering of barriers to the expression of feeling, and an examination of the values that are placed on externally accepted modes of behaviour’ (p45).

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

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

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

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

Smith et al (2009) state that:

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

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

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

3.7.2. Situating the sample

Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) developed ‘evolving guidelines’ which ‘are intended to characterize the appropriate considerations involved in the conduct and publishability of all
forms of qualitative research' (p220). Included in the guidelines is the following recommendation for situating the sample:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Smith et al (2009) comment:

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

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

Smith et al (2009), comment:

‘How homogeneity is defined depends on the study … Sometimes the total population will be smaller and so one can be more selective about factors to consider for homogeneity and which are likely to be most important’ (p50).
The important factors which have been considered in selecting a sample were to invite participants who attended the same GRC. An additional factor which was seen as important was that participants were at the same stage in their training as an educational psychologist and were training at the same institution. These factors were seen as important in defining a ‘fairly homogenous sample’ (Smith et al, 2009, p49).

**Less is more**

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

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

Yardley (2000) supports this view, stating:

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

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

Eatough and Smith (2008) comment:
‘IPA is deeply committed to the ideographic method and this inevitably has consequences for sample size ... a clearer articulation for smaller sample sizes is emerging. For example, keeping sample size small and homogeneous and interviewing participants several times ... is a strategy that retains IPA’s ideographic emphasis whilst embedding any emerging patterns in a rich and detailed context.’ (p186).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain:

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

Furthermore, in relation to professional doctorates:

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

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

A cautious note

Smith et al (2009) comment:
‘The logic behind sample-specificity is related to the inductive logic of IPA and has consequences for the applicability of findings’ (p50).

Furthermore:

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

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

3.8. Data capture

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

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

‘The interviewer has a general idea of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area.’ (p270)
Through consultation with staff members at the Tavistock (child, community and educational psychology course), it was agreed that all members of the relevant cohort of trainees who attended the group relations conference in December 2013 would be given the opportunity of involvement.

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

The research questions are as follows:

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

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

It is these questions which informed the choice of interview questions. As stated previously, Robson (2002) describes unstructured interviews as involving ‘a general idea of interest and concern, but lets the conversation develop within this area.’ (p270)
Participants were interviewed twice. During the first interview, the interview questions – or ideas of interest to explore – were twofold, firstly with a focus on exploring participants’ experience of attending a group relations conference. In-keeping with the unstructured interview approach, the first interview began by asking participants to ‘talk to me about what it was like to attend a group relations conference’. A follow-up question was also held in mind, with a focus on describing any personal learning that participants might have noticed during the group relations conference. These areas of focus were aimed at exploring the first research question. Prompts and probes were used to further explore participants’ reflections.

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

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

3.9. Data analysis process

The purpose of this section is to describe the approach that was taken in analysing the data.
It is worthwhile noting that Smith et al. (2009) explain that there is not a single ‘method’ for analysing data using IPA. They encourage the framing of analysis as a flexible process with guiding principles. These principles are described as follows:

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

Furthermore, principles are described as including:

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

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

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

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

• The close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant…
• The identification of the emergent patterns (i.e. themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance … usually first for single cases, and then subsequently across multiple cases.
• The development of a 'dialogue' between the researchers, their coded data, and their psychological knowledge, about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns, in this context … leading in turn to the development of a more interpretative account.

• The development of a structure, frame or gestalt which illustrates relationships between themes.

• The organization of all this material in a format which allows for analysed data to be traced right through the process, from initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes.

• The use of supervision, collaboration, or audit to help test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation.

• The development of a full narrative, evidenced by a detailed commentary on data extracts, which takes the reader through this interpretation, usually theme-by-theme, and is often supported by some form of visual guide (a simple structure, diagram or table).

• Reflection on one's own perceptions, conceptions and processes…

(Smith et al, 2009, p79-80).

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

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

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case
6. Looking for patterns across cases

Reading and re-reading

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

Initial noting

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

As this stage of analysis developed, a curious stance was taken, where the language and the context of the participant was wondered about, along with more abstract concepts evident in the text. This was intended to support understanding of the participant’s sense-making.
Smith et al (2009) describe three discrete processes to be used to demonstrate a systematic approach to initial noting:

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

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

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

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

**Developing emergent themes**

Smith et al (2009) recognise that the initial noting stage will have led to a large data set and that the phase of developing emergent themes aims to reduce the volume, while maintaining the complexity. The task is to map interrelationships and patterns in the data.
Smith et al. (2009) note that this stage of analysis involves working primarily with the initial notes, while it is also recognised that these notes will be closely tied to the transcripts and the participant’s comments. This stage is seen in the context of collaboration between the researcher and participant: ‘a synergistic process of description and interpretation’ (p92) in order to develop emerging themes.

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

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

The word ‘developing’ is key here, and as Smith et al. (2009) comment:

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

**Searching for connections across emergent themes**

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

It is also helpful to recognise that not all emergent themes must be placed in the evolving structure. However, the process is iterative and the use of a research diary for commentary provided evidence of rationale, rigor and reflection.
Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that themes should then be clustered and connections sought. This process involved writing themes on cards which were moved around, allowing also for a sense of any spatial relationships to emerge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Looking for patterns across cases

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

‘What connections are there across cases? How does a theme in one case help illuminate a different case? Which themes are most potent? Sometimes this will lead to a reconfiguring and relabeling of themes’ (p101).
The end product of this stage of analysis was to provide a graphic which represents connections across the group as a whole. Tables of themes for each individual participant were also recorded.

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

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

Closing comment

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

3.10. Trustworthyness

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

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

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

3.10.2. Commitment and rigour

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

3.10.3. Transparency and coherence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rice goes on to normalise this point, suggesting that:

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

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

**What precautions will be taken?**

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

This concept is viewed as in-line with this research, where participants were invited to engage in a reflective discussion about their experience of attending a group relations conference. This opportunity was seen as similar to that provided in supervision and indeed outside of supervision, in less formal discussions. In this sense the proposed interviews were seen as
compliant with a reasoned balance ‘... between protecting participants and recognising their agency and capacity’ (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010, p9).

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

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

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

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

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

Fourthly, Laverne Antrobus (Consultant Child and Educational Psychologist and Year 1 training programme lead) also offered to be available for discussion about any concerns participants may have had.
Fifthly, the possibility of accessing the student support service at the Tavistock was considered. It was also made clear that a duty of care judgment would have superseded consent for sharing of significant concerns.

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

**Informed consent**

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

**Personal data**

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

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

Data was stored securely within Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service.

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

Introduction

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

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

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

During both the initial and follow-up interviews, while the area of focus was pre-determined (in relation to the interview questions), the interview questions were deliberately open-ended and used flexibly in the unstructured interview approach, as the underpinning aims of the interviews were to explore participants personal experiences and reflections.
Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), note the significance of the ‘I’ and ‘P’ during analysis. The phenomenological aspect of the exploration comes primarily from the direct quotations. The interpretative aspect comes in the commentary accompanying these quotations. The following analysis will focus on the initial interview. Subsequently, this approach will be used to explore data gathered during the follow-up interviews.

Transparency

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

Thematic overview

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

Through a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts (as described in the methodology section), the following themes have been identified:
4.0. Figure 1 Graphic representation of thematic overview

A note on presentation of extracts

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

The following notation has been used in transcript extracts:

... significant pause

[] material omitted
4.1. Chaos

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

Participant one, (line 306) comments:

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

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

It became chaotic so quickly.

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

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

Alongside the sense of pace, movement and being out of control (‘being dumped in the ocean’), there is a powerful sense here of the oceanic enormity of the experience and the dangerous forces which are imagined as threatening to drown the participant.
Participant three also appears to describe a sense of magnitude and how powerful the experience of being in the environment was (line 35):

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

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

4.2. Confusion

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

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

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

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

My heart started beating really quickly and I remember looking down and I could see my top moving so quickly and I thought why am I ... why is this happening to me? why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why. Erm, and so I was thinking is it other people’s
anxiety that I’m picking up on, erm, because I didn’t feel like in my mind, I didn’t feel you know, uneasy or concerned, but physically I was reacting like that. Erm, so that that was one of the occasions where I thought, okay, there’s something that is happening here which is quite unconscious but I’m reacting, erm, quite physically, erm and this is all in the first day.

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

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

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

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

I didn’t really know what was going on.

Indicating perhaps that not only putting words to the experience can be difficult, but that sense making in the moment appears to have been difficult.
In this part, the theme of confusion has been considered. One of the participants explicitly makes a link between the external (group) experience and internal (personal) experience of attending the group relations conference.

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

4.3. Conflict

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

4.3.1. Conflict and territory

Participant one comments:

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

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

‘They felt the sense that we were going to infiltrate them and they kept people in the room just in case some of us tried to take over’ (line 165 – 167).
There is a clear sense here of the significance of territory and vulnerability. Participant three offers further comment on this theme, speaking as a member of a large group, that did not have a territory during an activity:

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘… this conclusion (laughs), I quote, that seems to be there has to be conflict somewhere in a group and in an, which was quite a revelation to me, perhaps, that erm,
if you don’t see the conflict, then you need to, then you’re not seeing it, it has to be somewhere (laughs), and, erm …

DB: what do you think about that?

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

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

4.3.2. Difference, power and leadership

Participant four brings up the themes of difference and conflict:

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

There is a sense of difference, separation, rejection and dejection, which is picked up on later and extended to include gender:
'And then I think, just seeing it played out like that, where people from ethnic minorities felt disempowered, erm, and women saying, oh I think that that man is the reason that we’ve elect, we’ve think about him as a leadership qualities is because he’s got them, it’s not because we’ve put them, put these qualities into him. I was thinking, how can you say that as a, erm, sort of, thoughtful person in 2012.' (line 646 – 652)

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

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

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

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

'I suppose before group relations, I never really thought a lot about, erm, my ethnicity as such, erm, unconsciously more than you know is very visible (laughs), but I think what that means and what that brings, erm, and what that means to the person I’m speaking to, erm, and I suppose being aware of, of that, of my role as a woman’ (line 931 – 936).
This subsequent reflection explicitly exploring roles, ethnicity and gender also indicates a shift in awareness and perspective at a personal and interpersonal level.

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

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

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

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

‘the group got stuck at this issue of leadership, why is this man leading group and how did that get decided and, erm, do we all want this? Erm, and so the group was stuck in this position for a while, erm, a facilitator was invited in to help think about it and, erm, in a quite perhaps unusually directed way they said something along the lines of, erm, this, er, all these women are attacking the male leader, erm, because they want to be leaders and it's a way of dealing with the competition amongst themself as women and taking it out on this male (laughs), erm, so that’s something that I wouldn’t of even thought about before, erm
In this extended extract, it is apparent that the experiential learning within the conference raised questions, potentially contentious questions, which participant two appears to be open to considering, while maintaining a critical stance. It is apparent when considering this quote that a significant level of reflection has been stimulated, here in relation to leadership, gender and conflict.

4.3.3. Confusion and upset

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

Participant four explained that:

'I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset' (line 697)
having earlier commented:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In summary, all participants reflected on their experience of conflict during the group relations conference. Themes of territory, gender and ethnicity are emphasised, particularly in relation to leadership and power. Underpinning these themes there appears to be undertones of vulnerability and fighting for survival, which are expressed in ways that emphasise the intensity of
the learning experience. A fundamental point which emerges is that the experiential learning approach has stimulated significant levels of reflection.

4.4. Coping

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

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

4.4.1. Fight, flight and freeze

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

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

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

‘avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and warming more towards calmer individuals. So personal preferences and avoidance of conflict (laughs)’ (line 739 – 742)
Participant three offers further evidence of thoughts associated with ‘flight’ as they spoke of the
difficult they experienced in response to receiving minimal feedback:

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

And later:

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

Furthermore:

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

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

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

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

‘it was almost very primitive [ ] those survival techniques that were being drawn out of
me being in that group’ (line 166 – 167)
There is evidence in the interview data that a range of responses to situations arising during the GRC may be viewed in terms of strategies for coping with threats, involving considerations associated with fight, flight or freeze.

4.4.2. Polarities and contrasts

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

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

Participant two also focuses on contrasts (and conflict):

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

and later, when prompted to elaborate:

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

These comments appear to suggest contrasting views of groups that must involve conflicts and an 'idealisation' of conflict-free groups.
Participant three also appears to place an emphasis on contrasts (or separateness), commenting:

‘I guess in a professional context it’s not the right forum to talk about feelings as well’

(427 – 428).

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

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

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

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

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

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

In summary, participants provided comments which indicated that part of the experience of attending the group relations conference involved coping strategies. Participants described attempts to protect themselves and survive. In relation to survival, there was consideration of control, flight, flight and freeze. Furthermore, in relation to coping, there is a reoccurring theme
that appears manifest in different form related to the propensity to emphasise the concept of contrasts (or separateness). There is also a sense of coping being described in terms of role and self-reflection, which will be explored further in the next section.

4.5. Self reflection

Participant three reflects on the experience of others:

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

And:

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

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

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

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

Participant two appears to make a similar point in stating:
‘so the erm, inseparability (laughs) of professional and personal.’ (line 603 – 604).

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

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

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

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

4.5.1. Self reflection and the group context

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

and later:

‘I was described as, erm, I think I was described as someone who wouldn’t take a side, but sitting on the fence [ ] which almost affirmed something about me that I already knew but it actually, erm, made me even more aware of it’ (line 218 – 223).
In these quotes, participant two indicates a self-awareness in relation to groups (not taking a side), which they became more aware of during the conference. Participant three appears to explore a similar theme:

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

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

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

Participant four offered the following open reflections:

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

and:

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

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

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

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

4.6. Returning to the research question

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

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

Descriptions of different coping strategies have been explored, before the final theme of self reflection has been introduced. This has included questioning of identity, including role, gender
and ethnicity and consideration of the self within a group. It has also been recognized that themes are interconnected and attempts have been made to acknowledge this rather than to provide an impression of discrete categorisation.

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

4.7. Follow-up interview

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

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

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

- Self reflection
- Group awareness

4.7.1. Self reflection

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

'affect me and my being'
(participant two, line 169)

‘for my being’

(participant four, line 493)

‘I almost felt like I didn’t know who I was’

(participant three, line 242)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DB: what do you think?

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

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

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

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

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

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

This sense of separation is also evoked by participant three when speaking about the personal and professional, questioning (line 359):
In summary, participants have shared an interest in exploring the concept of identity in terms of the personal and the professional. There appear to be differences in views about how separate these aspects of identity can be. It is evident when considering this theme that the group relations conference has stimulating thinking about this.

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

4.7.2. Group awareness

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

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

mum was such a powerful figure, erm she was quite passive aggressive, erm, but I could see that she just wanted the best for her child really, so she was pushing that forward and I think school were put into a position where they weren’t quite sure what to do and they though it was best to align with mum so it was, erm, yeah (laughs) …
so in term of being pushed so, being in a group setting where there’s different professionals and being that one that was pushed out and feeling sigh, and feeling basically incompetent…

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

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

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

This is further reflected on (line 480):

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.8. Behaviour back home

During the follow-up interview, attempts were made to explore the research question, focusing on any perceived influence that attending a group relations conference had on the participants behavior in role ‘back-home’.
It is argued that participants' have provided accounts of change following their attendance of the GRC. There is an emphasis on this change relating to a shift in awareness and sense making. Reflections on why this type of change, rather than explicit links to changes in behaviours or actions are offered in the next section. It is argued here that each participant offered accounts of their experience in role, following attending the GRC, indicating changes in perception.

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

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

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

Reflections

Analysis of findings indicated varied responses to questions focusing on any perceived changes in behavior following attending the GRC. This finding should be placed in context. Participants were in the first year of a three-year training course. This may have implications for this research question. It should be recognised that participants are required to dedicate their attention to demonstrating a raft of competencies, which may have influenced their capacity to reflect on and embed any learning from attending the group relations conference.
It is also reasonable to recognise that trainees have an increasingly active role in their fieldwork placements as the year (and years) progress, therefore this may be viewed as a limiting factor in terms of participants opportunity to ‘act’ on any learning from the GRC. Changes are described primarily in relation to a shift in awareness and sense-making.

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

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

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

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

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

5.1. Chaos

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

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

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

5.1.1. Shame and panic

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

There is a clear sense in these descriptions of a sense of panic described in the group. Participant three also reflects on experiences of conference members, and extends this reflection to a more personal observation (line 32):

‘quite a few of, erm, the other participants were describing their anxiety and then having physical reactions to, erm, what was happening within the group and I noticed that I was starting to have physical reactions as well. Erm, so I was aware of them (unclear), I was monitoring myself, erm, and I think the first one I had was my heart started beating really quickly and I remember looking down and I could see my top moving so quickly and I thought why am I … why is this happening to me, why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in my mind I was thinking I’m about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why.’
Participant three offers a powerful description of a physical response to a group situation which may be seen in terms of panic. This description of the personal is also related to an experience which is described as being in common with other group members.

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

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

And later:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.1.2. Regression

‘... in his complexities of life in a group the adult resorts, in what may be a massive regression, to the mechanisms described by Melanie Klein (1931, 1946) as typical of the earliest phases of mental life’ (Bion, 1961, p141).
Participant three appears to be considering this notion, when commenting ‘it conjured up kind of almost angry childish feelings towards the consultant for no reason’ (line 389).

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

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

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

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

5.2. Confusion

In this section, participants’ descriptions of attending the GRC, involving a sense of confusion, will be related to the literature. Initially, links will be made between the exiting literature and the participant experience of the difficulty in articulating the experience. In closing the section, links
will be made with Bion’s (1961) concepts of beta elements and alpha function as a way of understanding the difficulty in articulating the experience.

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

5.2.1. Difficulty in articulating the experience

'I find that it’s quite difficult to talk about it … it’s hard to talk about without jumping from one section to another'.
Participant four comments (line 8).

'Its hard to summarise'.
Participant two comments (line 504).

"I can’t fully describe it'.
Participant 3 comments (line 702).

There is a shared sense here of the difficulty that participants find in attempting to describe their experience. Ginor (2009), comments that ‘it is hard to describe this kind of experiential process in a publication’ (p70). Dartington (2012), comments: ‘The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word’ (pxxiii). Tagore (2012) comments: Experiences around group relations conferences do not lend themselves to
conclusions very easily’ (p257). There may be seen to be some support for these notions, in terms of participants’ expression of the struggle in attempting to articulate their experience.

In the remaining parts of this section, theoretical considerations will be offered as a tentative explanation of what might underpin this difficulty.

5.2.2. Beta elements and alpha function

Stein (2004) describes experiential learning in terms of beta elements and alpha function, as hypothesized by Bion (1962). Beta elements are described as ‘confusing and often unintelligible bits of sensory information that pierce the protective psychic boundary … and are thus experienced as threatening its very existence’ (Stein, 2004, p23). This is seen as normal in infancy and more problematic later as beta elements remain ‘unavailable for thought, development, or use by the individual’ (Stein, 2004, p24).

Stein describes Bion’s (1962) formulation as involving alpha function, ‘the capacity to contain and process beta elements’ (p24), which involves ‘processing within ourselves the feelings and thoughts that are evoked by the beta elements’ (p24).

It is acknowledged that there are different conceptualizations of the experience of taking in information and making sense or, conversely, struggling to gather information and understand. However, the purpose of this discussion is to engage in a dialogue between the interpretive analysis of participants’ accounts and the literature relating to GRCs. Therefore, it is Bion’s formulation of beta elements and alpha function that will be considered here. It is also recognised that the earlier descriptions of difficulties in articulating the experience at the beginning of this section may also be considered in relation to beta elements in particular. For example, in returning to the description offered by Izod (2006) of the experience of attending a
GRC in terms of ‘the struggle to manage one’s senses and emotions in the presence of the unfamiliar...’ (p81).

Participant three comments ‘I haven’t had the chance to process it yet so it was still, still going through it really.’ (Line 591).

There is a sense here of a reference to beta elements, remaining unprocessed. Consideration may also be given to the process of engaging in the interviews for this research – which could be seen as an alpha function – where participants are given time and the containment to process the beta elements.

Similarly, participant two comments ‘I’m not sure how much was processed in that time’ (line 20) and ‘I felt like I’ve made a lot of the pertinent points, I feel like there are lots more, erm, and probably more to come’ (line 748).

There is a sense here, particularly in the comment ‘I feel like there are lots more’, that links with the descriptions of beta elements as unintelligible or unavailable for thought or use by the individual (Stein, 2004).

Participant two also comments (line 178), I think that there were lots of areas that I was unaware of and I have had glimpses towards that were made quite explicit over the week and, erm, and it was, it was kind of food for thought’.

There is a sense here of the potential alpha function of the GRC, where ‘areas’ which the participant says that they were previously unaware of, were made ‘quite explicit’. This may be viewed in terms of a containing function of the GRC, where beta elements could be processed. However, there is a sense that there is an ongoing process of making sense or of digesting the experience. This metaphor of food for thought, resonates with Miller’s (1990a) description of
‘indigestible “lumps” of experience’ (p183) which he suggests can be difficult to process, following attendance at a GRC.

This sense of indigestible ‘lumps’ of experience and beta elements may also be considered in relation to participant one’s comments ‘And there was hostility, and I don’t understand where it came from, and I don’t understand why it was there’ (line 462).

Beta elements have been described as threatening the existence of a protective psychic boundary (Stein, 2004), and this may be seen in relation to participant four’s comments (line 475), ‘I made a decision to protect myself and see it more as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect myself’.

In summary, Bion’s (1962) concepts of beta elements and alpha function have been considered in relation to participants’ accounts of attending the GRC. It is argued that these concepts can be helpful in understanding and describing experiences in groups.

5.3. Conflict

It is acknowledged that the participants are in the process of training to become psychologists. It is argued that this transition relates to a sense of identity, which will be explored in greater detail as this chapter progresses.

Bion (1961) discusses group behavior as involving a struggle between the primitive and sophisticated as ‘the essence of developmental conflict’ (p128). Earlier in this chapter, primitive states involving regression, shame and panic have been described in relation to the experiences within groups. There are also however, illustrations within the accounts of attending
a GRC, of participants experiencing the developmental conflict and transition in thinking between the earlier mental states, and of thinking related to the self as a professional.

Participant three comments ‘so for me think it’s an ongoing process of discovering who I am in the role of an educational psychologist, as a trainee, erm, and what I bring to that individually, like my unique characteristics’ (line 282).

There is a clear sense here of participant three articulating the developmental conflict that they are experiencing, in relation to their identity, as they train as a psychologist. This level of reflection appears to have been stimulated by the attending the GRC and reflecting on the experience.

Participant one appears to be reflecting on a similar theme in relation to their experience of attending the GRC: ‘Erm, I found myself grappling with the title of erm, being a student, but then being a trainee educational psychologist. So finding the difference between the student and professional…’ (line 82).

There is a different nuance here in exploring the difference between being a student and a trainee. However, the overarching theme of exploring a transition involving identity and role is evident and appears to have been brought into focus during the GRC.

This consideration of developmental conflict and identity may be thought of in relation to Kierkergaard’s (1974) notion that ‘An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming’ (p19). There is a sense that participants are actively exploring this notion (‘an ongoing process of discovering who I am’, participant 3, line 282) in relation to their experience of attending the GRC. Further consideration of issues of identity, including gender and ethnicity with be explored in the next part.
Smith et al (2009) describe ‘in-depth inductive qualitative analysis study of a topic which has considerable existential moment … then it is quite likely that the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self / identity’ (p163). This prediction appears to be borne out of the analysis here. It should however, be recognised that tentative links have been made between the experience of attending a GRC and questioning, or, exploring identity. It is also recognised that the participants were engaged in professional training, of which the GRC is a part, and any claims of the influence of the GRC should not be overstated.

5.4. Identity

Consideration has been given to a sense of developmental conflict, that appears to been linked to the experience of attending the GRC, which some participants related to a sense of identity associated with their role as a trainee educational psychologist. In this part, consideration will be given to concepts that were described in relation to identity and the GRC; namely gender and ethnicity.

5.4.1. Gender and ethnicity

Following attending the GRC, participant one commented that she is ‘being aware of … of my role as a woman’ (line 936).

Participant four commented ‘I got really interested in gender roles’ (line 20) and participant two said ‘I would hear different things about gender, erm, and about roles, erm … the male, the white male wanting to take control of the situation’ (line 334).

It is evident that participants one reflected on gender as a result attending the GRC. It is also recognised that participant two includes reference to ethnicity and control alongside gender.
Consideration of ethnicity will be given greater focus in the following section, however, it is recognised that identity is a multi-dimensional construct and that attempts to separate out particular aspects can lead to an unhelpfully reductionist perspective.

Noumair (2004) describes a group relations conference as follows:

‘There was a wish to preserve white male authority at all costs; the system attempted to impose a familiar lens on a new experience. Through maintaining the familiar stance in relation to white male authority, both reverence for and blaming of, the conference as a whole did not have to face the anxieties inherent in giving up the oppressed position and discovering new ways of exercising authority. The old and familiar, even if oppressive, is safer and far less disruptive than the new and unfamiliar.’ (p73).

This description resonates with the writer, in relation to the comments from participants. Participant one comments, ‘there was so few men, but there was this whole idea that there needed to be the one superman or, I can’t remember now, and the white male supremacy or something…’ (line 789).

This reflection appears to share some commonality in the reflections offered by Noumair (2004). There is a sense that participant one recognises that despite being a minority in the conference, the group sought an old and familiar structure involving a white male authority. There is a clear sense of oppression within this experience as the term white male supremacy is used.

There is a similar sense evident in the reflections offered by participant four who comments (line 20):

‘I got really interested in gender roles, erm, and it was pred … it was predominantly female, erm, group, erm, of, the inter, of the group like, taken as a whole. Erm, But I, I,
perceived it as the men in the group taking, erm, dominant roles and I, I raised it as an issue and I raised it as a comment, I commented on it in the group and, erm, some people, one woman in particular said oh, no it's not just, it's not that the … she thought, she said that the men had been nominated as leaders of this group and she said that was because they were the best people for the job, that they were good leaders, they had good qualities in them of leadership. So they were, erm, they had been, the group had taken it upon themselves to allocate them as leaders. And I was saying, erm, that actually we were kind of mirroring society where we, we expect to see m, le, men as leaders and so we, we kind of put that into the men. Erm, and by white men, it was white men who took this, they had kind of self appointed them as leaders or they thought that the group had appointed them leaders, or they were, they were, I think if you had measured the time they were speaking, they had dominated the conversation … for me I was thinking there’s lots of psychotherapists and psychologists and, erm, psychiatrists and people I considered to be very thoughtful, people who were very aware of society and, erm, are very aware of their roles, their gender and their racial roles but yet would still allocate the white men as leaders. So that was something that stuck out for me.

DB: What sense did you make of that?

P4: erm, I found it quite, in some ways quite depressing that even the most, the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London, kind of thing, erm, still, erm, were not, I didn’t see them to be as reflective as I hoped they would be. Erm, I’m prepared to, erm, erm, concede that these men were the bes, you know I’m prepared to, to take that as a hypothesis, oh these white men were the best leadership, have the best leadership qualities, erm, but I think we needed to think about what that was about when there’s only sort of six men, six white men in the room and we’ve allocated five of them as leaders or something. You know, what does that mean out of 88 people, what, what’s that about? And just thinking about that and, are we, were the women doing
themselves a disservice, because I saw two women who I considered to be very le, not myself, but other people who I considered to be very, erm, holding leadership qualities, but they weren’t named by the group’s leaders. And that neither of those were white, they were of different racial backgrounds and I just wondered what, what, what the group was doing and whether we were reflecting society in that small little microcosm.'

In this extended quote, it can be seen that participant four appears to echo Noumair’s (2004) interpretation involving a sense of oppression and blame toward the group, which is being voiced when a white male leadership is chosen. Participant four actively challenged this group behavior and was disappointed at their perception of the mirroring of society, where the familiar was seemingly preferred over alternative and unfamiliar ways of exercising authority.

Noumair (2004) comments ‘If we were to uncover the irrational and unconscious aspects of diversity and authority in organizational life, as group relations methods invite us to, we may have to face the consequences of disrupted authority relations and knowing truths that we do not wish to know' (p64).

This suggestion, may offer a response to participant four’s clear questioning, in relation to the maintenance of a familiar white male authority – what’s that about?

In writing this part, consideration was given to separating out themes of gender and ethnicity. The decision to present this section in this form is informed by the GRC focused writing of McRae, Green and Irvine (2009) and the resonance that their views have with the interpretation of participants’ accounts:

‘working with differences in groups and organisations involves recognising the existence of multiple social identities held by individuals, some being more salient than others given the context. For example, women belong to a number of identity groups: gender,
racialethnic, social class, sexual identity and religious groups. Based on context one identity may become more salient than another … the ability to embrace the complexity of the coexistence of multiple identities and differences and the ways in which they impact the functioning of the group and / or organization is primary in today's world’ (p3).

McRae, Green and Irvine have developed a World Event which has been incorporated in some GRCs in order to explore this area of study. This is described in more detail in the introduction.

It appears that participants quoted above in this section may have welcomed a specifically designed forum to explore issues of multiple social identities.

5.5. Coping

This section may have been entitled ‘defences’, as the theme broadly refers to strategies that participants appear to have used to help them to manage the disturbing experiences of chaos, confusion and conflict described in previous sections.

Other themes of projection, projective-identification and containment were also considered in relation to coping. However, these themes were seen to have had a less dominant presence in the interpretation of participant accounts. A concept which was identified with greater frequency and intensity was that of splitting. This concept, throughout the analytic process has come to hold prominence.

de Board (1978) describes splitting as a core Kleinian concept, explaining how idealization and denial are related to the process of splitting, where the good object becomes exaggerated in its sense of goodness and the bad object denied (along with the associated painful emotions).
Waddell (2002) explains that in object relations theory, splitting extends into later life and includes separating people or events ‘as unrealistically wonderful (good) or as unrealistically terrible (bad)’ (p6).

This process appears to be evident at times in the interviews. For example the splitting of the personal and the professional, and in particular comments, such as ‘... even the most, the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London’ (Participant four, line 53), where it may be seen that there appears to be idolization in sway.

The purpose of this section is not to detail each and every occasion which instances of splitting were identified in the analysis (as stated at the outset, this chapter aims to describe a dialogue between the analysis and the literature, using illustrations that are resonant, not exhaustive). The aim here is to provide illustrations that offer the reader the opportunity to consider the trustworthyness of the interpretation.

Illustrations of splitting come in differing forms, at times in individual phrases, for example ‘so everybody failed’ (Participant one, line, 723). Examples of splitting were also related to experiences outside of the GRC, for example when participant two discusses their heritage involving one side of the family, described as ‘fiery’ and the other side as a ‘complete opposite’ (line 736), ‘so I’d have this (laughs) lifelong dilemma (laughs) of where I sit (laughs) and erm, dipping into each one, but, erm, an interesting thought about avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and warming more towards calmer individuals’ (line 736).

These reflections were offered by the participant as an illustration of how they had become more aware of their ‘personal preferences and avoidance of conflict’ (line 742) when reflecting on their experience of attending the GRC. Self-awareness and group awareness will be considered in greater detail later in this chapter.
Participant four comments ‘so that became the theme of the doers and the thinkers’ (line 288).

Here it appears that participant four is reflecting on a group behavior which may be seen as separating out (or splitting) ‘doers’ and ‘thinkers’. Participant four also commented ‘I suppose I use quite a cognitive part of my brain…’ (line 489), implying a separate ‘part’ for thinking rationally.

Participant three comments ‘I guess in the professional context it’s not the right forum to talk about feelings…’ (line 427). Offering a sense of a split between the emotional and the professional. And later participant four reflects on the training process suggesting that this ‘isn’t about creating good clones, it’s about, you know, creat, or developing the individual…’ (line 677). Where there is an implication of ‘bad’ clones and contrasted with ‘individuals’.

Later, participant three describes being part of an out-group (their term) and says ‘I wouldn’t have seen how the system which is supposed to be perfect, if I’m talking about society, perfect, it’s not perfect, but how it’s supposed to enable people to grow and to develop, it’s supposed to support’ (line 717). There is a sense of a struggle and some awareness of the splitting, yet there is also a suggestion here of an idealized ‘society’ – not perfect, but there to support.

In the second interview, participant three describes a ‘personal–professional interface’ (line 443) and ‘actively managing both worlds if you like…’ (line 455). This vivid example offers an illustration of the splitting that is being described in relation to role and identity issues of the personal and professional in terms of different worlds.

This experience of splitting, associated with the GRC is summed up by participant one, stating ‘the middle ground seemed to have got lost’ (line 298).
5.6. Theoretical coherence

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that analysis continues in the writing phase of the research activity. In this section, a further layer of analysis and interpretation is offered, which lends support to the notion of the ongoing nature of the enquiry.

In this section, the aim is to locate the data analysis in a wider context where, through engaging with the literature, a more coherent framing of the research findings will be proposed.

At the end of the systematic approach to analysis, the following graphic of thematic overview was offered, where the super-ordinate themes were presented as follows:

![Graphic representation of thematic overview](image)

**Figure 2** Graphic representation of thematic overview
Throughout the analysis, there was a sense of a missing link, noted in the research diary in terms of a ‘bridge’ or a symmetry, between the intrapersonal and interpersonal which was tentatively referred to in the data analysis section.

Participant three offers a clear description which highlights the difficulty in separating internal and external experiences, when commenting:

‘erm, and so I was thinking is it other people’s anxiety that I’m picking up on … Erm, so that that was one of the occasions where I though, okay, there’s something happening here which is quite unconscious but I’m reacting…’ (line 36).

There is an explicit association being made here between the internal and external experience during the GRC. This appears to be evident in the previously quoted extract from discussion with participant three (line 442):

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

DB: the personal-professional interface?

P3: yeah, just where they meet. Erm, which is in meetings like this where there’s, you know, it's a professional context but you're very much present and you’re experiencing it and you're involved in it and it's running through you, and you’re running through it. Erm, but then there are aspects of say your personality or your character which is inappropriate to bring into the context because it just is not effective, so, but that’s, that’s where things are playing out, and so it's at those times that, erm, you're actively managing almost both worlds if you like…
Participant three creates a phrase, which seems to offer some satisfaction in articulating the association between what may be seen as an aspect of the internal and external experience – ‘the personal-professional interface’.

5.6.1. A psychosocial framing

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe the term psychosocial as 'simultaneously psychic and social' (p12). They elaborate on this framing as follows:

‘We use the theories of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1998a, 1988b) about how the self is forged out of unconscious defences against anxiety’ (p17).

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) connect this premise with the concept of splitting as a defence, which appears aligned with the analysis outlined in this chapter.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) offer further conceptual framing, which resonates with the analysis describing themes of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping:

‘… threats to the self create anxiety, and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition’ (p17).

Furthermore:

‘The shared starting point of all different schools of psychoanalytic though is the idea of a dynamic unconscious that defends against anxiety and significantly influences people’s actions, lives and relations’ (p17).
This framing may be seen as congruent with underpinning theory described in the introduction and literature review, and coherent in relation to the themes which emerged from the analysis of findings. It is also noted that the influence of anxiety is described in terms of the relational. It is this aspect of the relational that is fundamental to the psychosocial framing:

‘In this notion of unconscious defences against anxiety, Klein departs radically from the assumption that the self is a single unit, with unproblematic boundaries separating it from the external world of objects (both people and things). Her proposition (based on clinical work) is that these defences against anxiety are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people.’ (p18).

And later:

‘Thus experience, being constituted from both external and internal reality, is simultaneously social and psychological (psychosocial), like the warp and weft of a piece of cloth.’ (p127).

It is argued that this framing, grounded in object relations theory, with an emphasis on the intersubjective nature of experience, simultaneously social and psychological, both external and internal, offers an explanation of the missing link (or ‘bridge’, between the internal and the external) sought for during the analysis of participants’ descriptions of attending the GRC.

Furthermore, the theme of self-reflection and questioning of an existential sense of self, being and identity is congruent with the psychosocial framing:

‘A person’s (largely unconscious) ways of coping with external threats to safety goes a long way in understanding who they are’. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p128).
Therefore, it is argued that the psychosocial framing helps to make sense of the data analysis from a theoretical perspective. It is beyond the scope of this research to develop the argument further and it is suggested that this would further abstract the discussion from the IPA principles, placing the participant experience as central to the enquiry.

However, it is argued that the psychosocial framing appears to have some commonality with Rice’s (1965) attempt to synthesise open systems theory and psychoanalytic thinking (described by Miller, 1990a as a move towards a unified theory). Rice (1965) wrote:

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

There appears a point of contact between Rice’s conceptualization and that offered by the psychosocial framing. It is also noted that in an earlier psychosocial description of intersubjectivity, the language used included the concept of boundaries, which resonates strongly with the conceptual framing within open systems theory.

In summary, a reframing of the themes emerging from the interpretative phenomenological analysis, when viewed through a psychosocial lens, appears to provide a more unified account of findings. Central to this reframe is the concept of intersubjectivity. The rejection of an arbitrary separation (or splitting?) of internal and external experience and an acceptance of the interrelationship.

Therefore, the initial presentation of findings, may be viewed through a psychosocial lens, where intersubjectivity is manifest in the overlapping sections.
It is argued that there is a symmetry between the external experiences of chaos and confusion; of conflict and coping; of group awareness and self-reflection. The mirroring may be viewed using the psychosocial concept of intersubjectivity. It is also important to note that the claims been made here are not absolute. It is recognised that the associations (or symmetries) between the themes are not intended to be viewed as rigid or discrete. They have arisen from the interpretive analysis and dialogue with the literature. It is likely that other interrelationships between the themes may be made (and, conceivably, interrelationships with themes which are not described here). The key point is that of interrelationships and intersubjectivity. The core argument here is that, through a psychosocial lens, this framing offers a more coherent interpretation of findings, where the notion of intersubjectivity enables an understanding which connects rather than separates the internal and external world.

This use of psychosocial theory may be viewed as a development, building on the theoretical foundations of GRCs (object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory) which appear to share commonalities.

5.6.2. Development, oscillation and fear

It is recognised that the following interpretation becomes increasingly abstracted as it develops. This is important to acknowledge, in terms of the greater distance from the interview data, through dialogue with the literature. However, it is also acknowledged that Smith et al (2009) suggest that IPA can be too cautious and remain at a descriptive level. They encourage researchers to ‘dig deeper’ (p103).

It is argued here that a developmental framing may be used to conceptualise the experience of attending a GRC. Early phases appear to involve the intersubjective experiences of chaos and
confusion, middle-phases may be thought of as involving conflict and coping, before a reflective phase involving group awareness and self-reflection. As described above, it is argued that an interrelationship between the inner and outer worlds are involved (using a psycho-social lens).

Further consideration of this developmental trajectory associated with GRC’s, enables a potential link to be made with the earlier phases, characterised by the paranoid-schizoid state of mind and the more reflective stages being associated with a depressive state of mind. This appears to hold theoretical consistency with the Kleinian framing, involving regression within groups. It is also noted that within this theoretical framing there is likely to be oscillation, rather than a uni-directional trajectory. It is argued here that group relations conferences appear to offer a developmental microcosm, where the struggle for survival and growth is experienced with relative intensity.

The reader will note a tentative tone in this framing. And it is again with caution that further digging in the interpretive sense will follow.

**Fear**

During the process of data analysis, descriptions of vulnerability have been alluded to in relation to the themes of chaos, confusion and conflict. However, this did not seem quite satisfactory, and I had noted in my research diary: where is fear?

It is argued here that the dissatisfaction in locating this aspect of the experience may be understood as follows. Fear is not a discrete theme, but a unifying concept. A connecting tissue. Manifest in the processes of projection and introjection occurring in the here-and-now of a group relations conference. Fear (or anxiety) as the intersubjective glue binding the psycho-social.
This framing appears to be congruent with theory and interview data. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe the threat to the self as fundamental and inherent to the human condition, and comment: ‘defences against anxiety are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people.’ (p18). Participant three described a personal physical response, which was associated (by the participant) as follows: ‘so I was thinking is it other people’s anxiety that I’m picking up on’ (line 40) and ‘I literally, in my mind I was thinking I’m about to have a heart attack’ (line 38). Kierkergaard’s (1974) concept that ‘An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming’ (p19) may be re-cast as: an existing individual is constantly in the process of defending.

In returning to the graphic of thematic overview, the shaded parts may be viewed as illustrating emotional states of fear and anxiety. It is also recognised that inadvertently, the generation of this graphic offers a sense of group awareness and self-reflection being obscured by the foregrounding of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping. This unintended outcome is however accepted as offering a sense of the initial ‘noise’ of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping as dominant, while also recognising that the themes of group awareness and self-reflection, may be obscured but are central.

![Figure 3 Graphic representation of thematic overview](image-url)
The particular structure and purpose of the GRC must be acknowledged. However, one may wonder how different these structures are to the office environment; the school environment; the playground?

5.6.3. What has been found?

As the interpretative digging is curtailed, this section offers reflections on what has been found.

Participants offered various descriptions of conflict and embedded within these descriptions was a sense of the fight for survival. Participant three, ‘it was almost very primitive [...] those survival techniques that were being drawn out of me being in that group’ (line 166).

The obverse of this fight for survival may be thought about in terms of death and the death instinct. de Board (1978) acknowledges that the death instinct is a controversial concept, ‘this idea had appeared in Freud’s later writings and although it was (and still is) a bone of contention among analysts, Klein was convinced of its existence’ (p29).

Symington (1986) describes the concept as follows, ‘I want to explain what Freud understood by the death drive: it is that all organisms tend towards the inanimate state … the paradox, however, is that the self-preservative drive is a component of the death drive’ (p130).

The varying terms ‘drive’ and ‘instinct’ result from different translations of Freud’s writing.

Segal (1973) writes:
'When faced with the anxiety produced by the death instinct, the ego deflects it. This deflection of the death instinct, described by Freud, in Melanie Klein's view consists partly of projection, partly of the conversion of the death instinct into aggression.' (p25).

This framing of the death instinct (Freud, 1930) and defences against anxiety, including mobilization of aggression, resonate with the analysis offered throughout this discussion; where the themes of chaos, confusion and conflict are described by participants in terms of primal experiences, a fight for survival, and articulation of projective processes within groups, involving a contagion of anxiety and aggressive impulses.

It is argued here that group relations conferences may be viewed in terms of the death instinct and associated psychosocial mobilization of defences. An existing individual, constantly in the process of defending.

5.7. Discussion of research process

In this section, the research process will be reflected on. In particular, ethics, method of data analysis and trustworthiness will be discussed. The personal experience of conducting this research will also be considered.

5.7.1. Ethics

As outlined in the research design chapter, the design of a GRC is intended to remove 'some of the common and expected social defences' (Rice, 1965, p45) and it was acknowledged that 'Even at the end of the conference, many members still appear to be in difficulties, and are sometimes distressed about getting an intellectual grasp of what the conference has been about' (Rice, p118).
As described in the data analysis chapter and discussion of findings, it was evident that participants did describe difficulties and distress which were experienced during the GRC. Participants offered explicit descriptions, including: ‘I had been really upset on the first day and I’d cried’ (participant four, line 692-693), ‘feeling very vulnerable as well as being left out’ (participant one, line 260), ‘in my mind I was thinking I’m about to have a heart attack’ (participant three, line 36) and ‘I was almost … stuck or frozen by this, erm, process and to the point of not being able to do anything about it’ (line 680).

From the perspective of those designing GRCs, it is argued that:

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

Rice (1965) goes on to suggest that:

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

From the research perspective, careful consideration was given to the protection of participants (which included gaining ethical approval for the research). A multi-layered approach to keeping participants safe was taken and made explicit to participants; involving opportunities for withdrawal, time for reflection following the interviews, the offer of consultation with the researcher, opportunity for reflection with the lead person for the year group and the option of accessing student support.
Following both the initial interview and the follow-up interview none of the participants chose to access these offers of support (or reported accessing these offers of support). This may be seen as an indication that the participants experienced the interviews as not out of the ordinary in terms of the challenges of engaging in the Tavistock training course.

In relation to the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2010) the participant experience is seen in terms of a balance ‘between protecting participants and recognizing their agency and capacity’ (p9).

In summary, it was recognised that an exploration of the experience of attending a GRC was likely to require participants to engage with difficult and potentially distressing emotional experiences. Analysis of data indicated that difficult and distressing experiences were recalled and thought about. It is argued that a reasonable balanced between protecting participants and valuing their agency and capacity was achieved.

It is acknowledged that care and consideration is required in order to decide on the potential costs and benefits of research involving exploration of difficult and potentially distressing experiences. This should include recourse to supervision and an ethics committee, which includes consideration of the purpose and potential value of the research activity. This issue of the purpose and implications of findings will be explored later in this section.

5.7.2. Method of data analysis

Throughout the research process a range of choices have been made, accompanied by attempts to articulate the rationale for particular decisions. The research design chapter outlines this thinking. Through discussion at the Tavistock and supervision, a particular decision has
been reconsidered and is given special attention in this section. It would have been possible to focus on alternative aspects of the research design, however, with the limitations of this writing (and the underpinning rationale described in the research design chapter) this particular dimension is seen to be of priority for discussion. What follows is a critical reflection on the method of data analysis.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe a psychosocial approach to qualitative research, which is summarized by Roseneil, 2006, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, (2013, ix):

In attending to the social construction of intimacy and personal life, sociologists have neglected their equally important shaping and constitution from inner life, have failed to address the psychodynamics of biography. It is my argument that the investigation of the meanings of contemporary formations of personal life requires the theorisation of complex intertwining of the social and the psychic. Such an analysis seeks to transcend the dualism of the individual on the social, and take seriously the realm of the intra-psychic, 'the power of feelings' (Chodorow, 1999) and the dynamic unconscious, but does so without engaging in either psychological or sociological reductionism.

Consideration has been given to the relevance of this approach to the study of participant accounts of attending the GRC. In particular a connection has been made, at the theoretical level, in relation to the intertwining of the social and psychic. Furthermore, there may be seen to be theoretical congruency underpinning GRCs and this psychosocial approach to qualitative psychology. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) describe their approach and that outlined by Roseneil (1999) as resting on:

- psychoanalytic ontology of the non-unitary, defended subject
- the psychoanalytic insistence on the importance of the dynamic unconscious
- the idea the subjects are constituted relationally, and engage continuously in processes of identification, projection and introjection

These principles may be seen as closely aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of GRCs described in the introduction (object relations theory and group relations theory in particular).

There is therefore a reasonable line of argument to suggest that this approach may be seen as an appropriate choice for the object of study in this research.

It is, however, important to reflect on criticisms of the psychosocial approach in order to balance this argument. Thomson (2010) criticises the psychosocial approach as problematic in terms of the potential for over-interpretation of data. Thomson also raises questions about the ethics of the approach and of the potential influence of the defended researcher in the analysis.

These concerns resonate with the researcher and will be considered in relation to the chosen method of analysis, namely, IPA. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) discuss the potential for a psychodynamic interpretation of an interview as different to that espoused within their description of IPA. They argue that the difference is of an epistemological nature and discuss 'the difference between a grounded IPA reading and an imported psychoanalytic one' (p105). Their argument is summarized:

‘Thus the IPA and the psychodynamic interpretations are coming from two different epistemological perspectives and each has its own explicit or implicit criteria for the validity of the reading. The direction looked to for authority for the reading is different - outside in the case of the psychoanalytic position, inside in the case of IPA.’ (p105).
On the surface, this perspective and contrasting of epistemological positions, appears to cast some doubt on how appropriate the discussion of findings are, in terms of fidelity to the IPA approach.

However. Smith et al (2009) acknowledge that they have taken a strong position for clarity and that 'as ever, reality is fuzzier!' (p105). They acknowledge that 'Many psychodynamically inclined researchers do include an analysis based on close textual reading, foregrounding the presenting account itself.' (p105). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) also recognise that within an IPA approach ‘occasionally one may wish to draw on a more specific theoretical account to assist the IPA analysis, this would be clearly marked by a difference in tone and as more speculative because of the distance between the text and the interpretation.' (p105). Furthermore they comment:

‘IPA does systematically make more formal theoretical connections, but this is more usually done after the close textual analysis and guided by that emerging analysis.’ (p105).

It may be seen within this selection of quotations that there does indeed appear to be a ‘fuzziness’ within the IPA approach.

The phenomenological emphasis within IPA emphasizes a focus on a detailed and transparent interpretation from within the participant account. It is however suggested that a theoretically driven account – from without – has legitimacy within IPA, requiring a more speculative tone and at a later stage in the analysis.

It is this approach, that has been attempted in the writing of this chapter and in the structuring of this thesis. The data analysis chapter is boundaried at that point, as the purpose of that chapter was to attempt to articulate the findings of a more 'pure' IPA approach. It is recognised that
there is an interpretive dimension to this analysis, yet that chapter remains an attempt to describe the themes that emerged through a systematic and rigorous approach. The claim within that chapter is that those themes are the researcher’s interpretation of the analysis of the descriptions each participant offered of attending a GRC. It is for the reader to decide how convincing or trustworthy the interpretation is (to be discussed in the next section).

As described at the outset of this chapter, the purpose of the discussion of findings is to relate the analysis of data to the extant literature. Thus involving the later stages of analysis in-line with the description provided by Smith et al (2009), where connections are made with theory (from without). During the writing of this chapter, a speculative tone has been used (or intended) in order to acknowledge the greater distance between the connections. The distance in the former involving the participant and the researcher, in the latter: the researcher’s interpretation, of the participant’s interpretation in relation to the extant literature.

In returning to the Thomson’s critique of the psychosocial approach, firstly let us consider the concern of over-interpretation. The solution (albeit ‘fuzzy’) offered by IPA, of a secondary theoretical discussion, it is argued here, provides a defence to the accusation of over interpretation. It is for the reader to decide how this defence is interpreted. The first layer of analysis may be accepted or rejected, before consideration is given to the secondary layer of interpretation (in relation to theory). The reader may accept the former and not the latter; both; or indeed neither. There is nevertheless a layered approach which serves to guard against wild analysis.

An additional benefit from adopting the approach taken in the structuring (and layering) of this writing, relates to the ethical questions raised by Thomson (2010). In this sense, it is argued that the different layers (and tone) of analysis provide a buffer, serving to protect the participant from over interpretation, and subsequent claims beyond the scope of the research activity.
In conclusion. It has been argued that a psychosocial approach to analysis of data could be seen as theoretically congruent with the object of study. However, it has been argued that the IPA approach described here and in the research design chapter, with an emphasis on two layers of interpretation, and the recognition of the necessary caution with which the secondary (theory based) interpretation should be viewed offers a more ethical and nuanced approach which is transparent in enabling the reader to draw their own interpretations of the analysis.

5.7.3. Trustworthiness

As described in the research design chapter, Smith et al (2009) argue that methods for assessing the validity and reliability of quantitative research are ill-fitting for the appraisal of qualitative research, and suggest that ‘qualitative research should be evaluated in relation to criteria recognised as appropriate to it’ (p179). It was therefore decided to use Yardley’s (2000) principles for assessing the quality of this research, namely: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and, impact and importance. In this section, these principles will be reflected on as the research activity approaches conclusion.

*Sensitivity to context*

Yardley (2000) describes this principle for assessing quality in relation to sensitivity to the socio-cultural context; data provided by participants; the existing literature and how meaning making, claims and interpretation are framed.

The preceding sections of this chapter aim to relate the existing literature to the data findings and offer an explicit rationale for how the layered interpretation of findings are framed and related to the data. The emergent meaning making and claims are offered to the reader with
recognition that the secondary level of analysis (relating to theory) is of a more tentative nature, while also acknowledging that the initial analysis involves a double hermeneutic.

The socio-cultural context from which data is gathered is recognised in the data analysis and research design chapter. This influence may be viewed at three levels. Firstly, it is recognised that participants were experiencing their first year of training at the Tavistock, and at a particular stage of making the transition to becoming a psychologist. Associated themes of identity have been discussed.

The second influence that has been acknowledged relates to the placement dimension of the training course. A potential imitation of the research findings has been stated with regards the comparatively limited fieldwork experience that year one trainees have accessed to, and therefore have opportunity to reflect on.

The third influence focuses on a more individual level, relating to participants’ reflections on difference. More specifically, consideration has been given to gender and ethnicity in relation to leadership and the individual participant experience.

These illustrations of sensitivity to context are offered as evidence of the commitment to this principle throughout the conduct of the research. It is not claimed that this description is exhaustive, however, explicit attempts have been made to strengthen the trustworthyness of the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Commitment and rigor

Yardley (2000) describes this principle in terms of ‘the thoroughness of the study, for example in terms of the appropriateness of the sample to the question in hand, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis undertaken’ (Smith et al, 2009, p181).
The appropriateness of the sample is discussed in the research design chapter. It is argued that the decision to recruit participants at the same stage in their training, at the same institution, who attended the same GRC provides the reader with evidence of the attempt to select a ‘fairly homogenous’ sample (Smith et al., 2009) in relation to the research questions.

The quality of the interview and completeness of the analysis has been evidenced through the inclusion of each transcript in the appendices along with summative tables of themes at the different stages of the analysis and illustrative examples of coded transcripts. It is also recognised that the researcher was building on interview skills developed at masters level (in IPA research) and drew on consultation skills as a practitioner psychologist. It is not claimed that the interview process was faultless and the researcher would share the view expressed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), that ‘the interview is a complex phenomenon’ (p67). However, care and consideration was given to the development of an interview schedule, which was trailed within a group context and reflected on through supervision. It is argued that these factors led to a satisfactory level of quality interviewing which enabled participants to explore their experience which achieved, at times, significant levels of insight and reflection. This recognition, of course, primarily rests on the commitment of the participants to engage in the research at such a level.

The completeness of the analysis is outlined in the research design chapter and evidenced throughout the data analysis and discussion of findings. It is also acknowledged that the research undertook the transcription of interviews personally and subsequently listened to the interviews multiple times with the aim of familiarization, immersion, commitment and rigour.
Transparency and coherence

Yardley (2000) describes this principle in terms of providing a clear step-by-step approach to each stage of the research, including how the analysis was undertaken.

Evidence of this principle is threaded throughout the thesis. The research design chapter offers a detailed outline of the step-by-step approach to analysis. The data findings and discussion of findings provides explicit accounts of the interpretation of findings. In the next section, reflections on the process are offered, including consideration of the double hermeneutic. In addition, relevant sections of the appendices are offered to provide the reader with the opportunity to further scrutinize the approach taken in order to appraise the interpretation of findings.

Impact and importance

Smith et al (2009) describe Yardley’s principle as follows: ‘test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful’ (p183).

Consideration of this principle will be offered at the close of this writing, where future direction of research and the fundamental concern of what has been learned will be discussed. The appraisal of the importance, interest and use of the interpretation of findings will be for the reader to decide.

5.7.4. The double hermeneutic

‘IPA involves a ‘double hermeneutic’ (Smith and Osborne, 2003). The researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of x’ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p35).
In order to maintain a focus on the participant perspective, Smith et al (2009) describe the importance of bracketing - separating out or putting to one side one's preconceptions.

A range of strategies have been employed throughout the research process, with the aim of bracketing. While some references may be found in the preceding section describing attempts at demonstrating trustworthyness, an explicit summary of bracketing techniques are offered here. Namely, the sequencing of writing chapters, use of a research diary, supervision and structuring of the write-up.

The chapters in this thesis were not written in the order they appear in this final form. The literature review was completed after the initial analysis of data. This approach was taken in order to limit the influence that this knowledge and understanding may have during the interpretive phase. It is however acknowledged that references to literature were required in developing the research focus and therefore some influence is reasonable to assume. The point here is that an attempt was made to minimize this influence.

Throughout the research process a research diary was maintained. This had multiple purposes, which included the aims of capturing and clarifying thoughts and ideas about research design and activity over time. It was also recognised that this document may help to bracket some of the thinking that had the potential to influence the interpretation of data. An illustration comes when the theme of difference, gender and ethnicity emerged. In July 2014, comments included reference to myself as a white, male, and how this could influence my interpretation of the data. There are prompts to return to the data and to raise this in supervision. This particular theme will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Supervision was used throughout the research process, and served a range of purposes, including the opportunity to step back from the analysis and to consider issues of bracketing.
Reflective discussions were held with a focus, for example, on my multiple social identities and the potential influence of my biography on the interpretation of data.

The structure of the write up is also seen as an attempt to separate out the interpretation of the interviews from the influence of the literature. The aim has been to offer transparency in terms of a balance between maintaining a focus on the participant perspective and the subsequent dialogue with the literature.

5.7.5. Reflecting on the struggle

In this section, reflections on limitations of the research will be offered.

‘Question: is it realistic to write a coherent story about incoherent stories?’

This quote comes from the research diary (June, 2014). It is a theme that returns at various points in the diary, for example, in August 2014: ‘Struggle to capture the complexity’.

It is reasonable to link this experience of struggling with complexity to references described in the literature review. There appears a commonality here. Ginor (2009), comments that ‘it is hard to describe this kind of experiential process in a publication’ (p70). Dartington (2012), comments: ‘The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word’ (pxxiii). Tagore (2012) comments: Experiences around group relations conferences do not lend themselves to conclusions very easily’ (p257). These descriptions may be seen in relation to the participant descriptions (the theme of confusion has been discussed above) and this writing.
There is a further conceptualization, which comes from one of the underpinning theoretical bases (a psychoanalytic perspective). The concept of parallel process is described by McNeill and Worthen (1989) as ‘an unconscious identification with the client’ (p329). This is offered, not as a ‘truth’, but rather, a possible framing of what may have influenced the analysis of material. I, as the researcher had sat with participants, thought with them, transcribed the interviews, listened repeatedly to the recordings and spent a considerable amount of time analyzing the material. It is argued here that it is possible that this process involved an element of identification with their experience, which, through the parallel process may have influenced the analysis and writing. There is some evidence to support his argument in the research diary, where it is noted ‘intense process re initial noting’ (at the early stage of analysis, June, 2014).

In returning to Dartington’s point (2012): ‘The experiential tradition of group relations does not lend itself easily to the discipline of the written word’ (pxxiii), I would strongly agree. The argument made here is that the structural form required in writing is, in essence, inadequate. The lived experience of being in a chaotic social situation along with the ‘churning’ internal experience, simply does not lend itself to a neat linear narrative. Thoughts, feeling and sensations do not come in a calm and orderly sequence. Reference has been made to Bion’s (1962) beta elements, ‘unavailable for thought’ (Stein, 2004, p24) and participants’ experience of confusion and difficulty in articulating the experience. The point being made here is that the very act of attempting to write about an experiential learning event is in itself an inherent limitation. This may seem a poor excuse for poor writing. I would argue that there is more than my own limitations of expression at play.

5.7.6. The defended subject

Hollway and Jefferson (2014) describe ‘defensive distortions … in the service of psychological self-protection’ (p139). Participants described experiences of chaos, confusion, conflict and
coping. Comments included ‘I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset’ (Participant four, line 697). Shame and panic emerged as themes. In this context, it is reasonable to recognise the possibility that, at times, participants may have withheld descriptions that may have been uncomfortable. There is also the possibility that recollections may have, in some ways, been distorted in order to protect the participant. It is not possible to make firm assertions in this regard, however, it is important to recognise that the potentially distressing and shameful experiences of attending a GRC may influence what is (and is not) included in the narratives which participants offer. This is seen as a potential limitation of the research activity, which further emphasises the importance of maintaining a tentative tone when discussing findings.

5.7.7. The defended researcher

Hollway and Jefferson (2014) argue for consideration of the ‘researcher and researched as anxious, defended subjects, whose mental boundaries are porous where unconscious material is concerned’ (p42).

One illustration of the experience of anxiety within the researcher relates to the themes of gender and ethnicity. Included in the research diary are notes recognising that I, as a white male am offering an interpretation of participants’ narratives involving their experience of attending a GRC in relation to their gender and ethnicity. The anxiety relates to a concern about how an interpretation may distort or minimize the experiential narrative. Participants discussed white, male supremacy and this led to reflections concerning my own role and identity as an IPA researcher. There was a fear of acting as an oppressor in creating a narrative which was not representative of the participants’ experience.

How was this concern managed?
Through reflection, supervision, recourse to the literature and, fundamentally, through returning to the data and striving to offer a transparent interpretation. The intention of the analysis and interpretation of findings is aligned with the contention of McRae, Green and Irvine (2009):

‘working with differences in groups and organisations involves recognizing the existence of multiple social identities held by individuals … the ability to embrace the complexity of the coexistence of multiple identities and differences and the ways in which they impact the functioning of the group and / or organization is primary in today’s world’ (p3).

The emphasis here on engagement with the complexity and influence of multiple social identities within groups resonates with the analysis and interpretation of findings. It is further suggested that this aspect of experiential learning within GRCs is a valuable and powerful dimension which provides an opportunity for future research.

In summary, it is recognised that I, as the researcher have the responsibility to reflect on my own experience and attempt to ensure care, consideration, transparency and reflexivity are fundamental to this research. One particular dimension, involving our multiple social identities has been discussed here. I recognise that this is my interpretation of the material and that the double hermeneutic may be seen as limitations of the research. Potential sources of bias include my own experiences of attending two GRC’s and my association with the Tavistock, firstly as a student and currently as a member of staff involved in training educational psychologists. The interest and intention throughout this research has been to critically explore the area. Attempts have been made to demonstrate trustworthyness, which the reader will appraise.
5.7.8. The interview as an influence

It has been recognised that the process of engaging in the research interviews provided a space for thinking and reflection, which GRC attendees would not typically access. This should be recognized when interpreting findings.

5.8. The claims of the research

It has been stated throughout this writing that the claims made by the research should be appropriately limited. The analysis is that of the researcher, through engagement with the interview data provided by four participants who attended one particular GRC. The claims are limited to this level of analysis and interpretation, and through dialogue with the existing literature.

Furthermore, it is recognised that the findings are offered by the researcher through careful consideration of the participants’ narratives. Direct quotations have been used throughout the presentation of findings in order to maintain a focus on the participant perspective. It should however, be recognised that the identified themes, theoretical interpretation and subsequent conclusions are the considered views of the researcher and not a direct expression of any of the participants’ own conclusions about their personal experience of attending a GRC.

Careful consideration has been given throughout the research process to Yardley’s (2000) principles of trustworthiness. In turning to the conclusions of this research, it is salient to recognise comments from Smith et al (2009) in relation to Yardley’s (2000) principle of impact and importance:
'test of its real validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful' (p183).
6. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to explore trainee educational psychologists’ experience of attending a group relations conference and any perceived influence on their behavior in role. In the first part of this section, a summary of the different levels of analysis and interpretation will be offered. Consideration will then be given to the potential implication of findings. Finally opportunities for future research will be discussed.

6.1. Summary of findings

It is important to recognise that the conclusions drawn here are based on the interpretation of four participant’s descriptions of attending a particular group relations conference. Yardley’s (2000) principles of trustworthyness have been described and reflected on in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how they may appraise the findings.

Findings may be considered at two levels. The first level relates to the outcomes of the interpretative phenomenological analysis. The second level relates to the dialogue with the literature.

The conclusions of the interpretative phenomenological analysis suggest that a number of themes were identified. In relation to the first research question, exploring the experience of attending a group relations conference, participants are understood to have experienced chaos, confusion, conflict, coping, significant levels of self-reflection and enhanced group awareness. As evidenced by these themes, participants’ range of experiences included elements of disorientation and distress.
When considering the second research question, exploring any perceived influence on behavior ‘back home’, it is argued that participants described an increased awareness and understanding of behaviors within groups. Furthermore, it is argued that participants engaged in significant levels of self-reflection, stimulated by their experiential learning.

As this analysis of findings was related to the literature, a number of theoretical connections were made. In broad terms these connections may be viewed in three parts. Firstly, the chaos and confusion has been related to Bion’s (1961) formulation of learning, involving beta elements and alpha functioning. In response to this experience, the themes of conflict and coping have been related to the Kleinian (1959) concept of defensive splitting as a way of coping with the disturbing experiences, including a sense of regression. Finally, consideration has been given to existential questions of identity (Kierkergaard, 1974). These questions of identity included McRea, Green and Irvine’s (2004) framing of multiple social identities, and included participants’ reflections on ethnicity, gender and of the self in role. Self-reflection has also been discussed in relation to group-awareness and the participants’ reflections on increased awareness of group behaviors following attending a group relations conference.

At a theoretical level, consideration was given to how a psychosocial model may be seen as building on the underpinning theories of group relations conferences (object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory). In particular it has been argued that a psychosocial lens enables a coherent understanding to emerge, where the internal and external experience are seen to be interrelated, rather than separated. It is argued that the concept of intersubjectivity is core to understanding the experience of attending a group relations conference.

A tentative exploration was offered through dialogue with the literature, where consideration was given to the struggle for survival and growth through a developmental framing of the group relations conference experience. This was linked to psychoanalytic theory and psychosocial
theory, where the concepts of fear, anxiety and defences were suggested to be central tenets of the group relations conference experience. This line of argument was extended to include the psychoanalytic concept of the death instinct, as underpinning the defensive mechanisms seen to be mobilized during a group relations conference.

6.2. Limitations of the research

A range of limitations of this research have been considered during the discussion chapter and reflections on the research process. Limitations include, the nature of claims that can be made from an interpretative phenomenological analysis of data. Furthermore, consideration has been given to the defended subject and the defended researcher. In addition, the interview process itself was seen as potentially serving a function for the participants and as having an influence on findings. The broader training context has also been acknowledged as a factor which again is likely to have influenced findings. Furthermore, it has been argued that the attempt to describe experiential learning in prose form may be viewed as an inherent limitation of this research.

6.3. Potential implications of findings

The focus of this research has been to explore trainee educational psychologists’ experiences of attending GRCs. The implications of the findings are therefore most closely associated with that group and may be of interest to those involved in training educational psychologists.

In summary, the analysis and interpretation of findings indicates that experiential learning can be a turbulent process. Potentially distressing experiences of chaos, confusion, conflict and coping have been described. It has also been argued that participants described an enhanced awareness of group behavior in their working contexts following attending a group relations conference. A central theme that emerged through analysis was that participants engaged in an
existential level of questioning in relation to their identity, which included reflections on the self in role.

It is argued here that these difficult, messy and unsettling experiences may be seen as familiar to practicing psychologists, struggling to make sense of the complexity they meet in the context of their work. It is further argued that this learning experience could serve to better equip psychologists to work in the field. Readers must draw their own conclusions.

Reference has been made to the required competencies for accreditation as educational psychologist by the British Psychological Society and the Health and Care Professionals Council standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists. These competencies and standards can be seen to make direct reference to the performance of educational psychologists working group situations. There is an emphasis on relationships, interpersonal skills and understanding of groups and organisations. It is argued that the findings of this research suggest that attending a group relation conference can contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding associated with these aspects of professional training. It is also noted that the limitations of this research design must be recognized and that further research may help to establish a clear position.

While the discussion here has focused on those training educational psychologists, it is however reasonable to assume that those involved in training allied professionals may also be interested in these findings. In addition, more experienced professionals from different backgrounds may also gain insight into the experience of attending a group relations conference and draw their own conclusions.

Finally, in this part, consideration may be given to those involved in organizing and delivering group relations conferences. This research is offered to the reader to interpret as they choose. It is argued here that attention may be given to the theoretical underpinnings of the group
relations conference model, in particular, consideration may be given to psychosocial theory described in the discussion chapter. This framing is viewed as a theoretical development, building on the foundations of object relations theory, group relations theory and open systems theory. It is argued here that the psychosocial model is a theoretical articulation of what group relations conference offer in experiential terms.

6.4. Future considerations

It has been argued that group relations conferences could make a valuable contribution to the training of educational psychologists (and allied professions), in terms of developing knowledge and understanding of groups and organisations, relationships and interpersonal skills. It has also been argued that attending a group relations conference can provide members with a stimulus to reflect on their identity and the self in role.

Future research may focus on the learning experience and influence on practice, from a range of research paradigms. Researchers will define the focus of their enquiry and the strengths and limitations of their particular research design. It is suggested here that consideration may be given to a range of possible areas for future exploration associated with group relations conferences, including the accounts of more experienced professionals and the experience of allied professionals (and allied professionals in training).

In addition, the themes of existential questioning and multiple social identities, including ethnicity and gender was highlighted in the discussion of findings. There is scope for future research to explore such themes.

This research may be of interest to those designing and delivering group relations conferences. A particular emphasis that has emerged from this research focuses attention on how these
professionals might describe their activities in relation to psychosocial theory. Consideration may also be given to exploration of the group relations conference as a forum to explore the death instinct (Freud, 1930).
7. REFERENCES


8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Information sheet and consent form

Information sheet

An exploration of trainee educational psychologist’s experience of attending a group relations conference using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The following information is aimed at ensuring that you have a clear understanding of why this research is being undertaken and what it would involve from your point of view. The reason for sharing this information is to ensure that you would be in a position to give informed consent, should you agree to participate.

What is the purpose of the research?

Educational psychologists have a unique role in supporting children and families. Practitioners use a wide range of skills which include regular involvement in a variety of groups to promote wellbeing, inclusion and access to the broad curriculum.

The Tavistock training course for educational psychologists includes attendance of an experiential group relations conference. This research aims to explore this aspect of training. More specifically, this research will focus on an exploration of how trainee educational psychologists view their attendance of an experiential group relations conference in relation to (i) individual learning and awareness (ii) perceived influence of behaviour in role.
This research may inform and generate questions for those designing courses for trainee educational psychologists. There may also be relevance to more experienced educational psychologists and allied professions.

Why ask trainee educational psychologists at the Tavistock?
The British Psychological Society requires competencies which make direct reference to educational psychologists working collaboratively in group situations. These competencies may be seen to correspond to the aims of group relations conferences as described by Obholzer, where the intention is for participants to return to the ‘back-home’ work-settings ‘better able to exercise their own authority and to manage themselves in role’ (Miller 1990, p47).

The literature does not describe the experience or learning from group relations conferences for trainee educational psychologists. It is for these reasons that you are invited to participate in this research.

Do I have to take part?
The decision to participate or to choose not to participate is yours. This information is aimed at helping you to make an informed decision and to provide informed consent. If you wished to withdraw, that option would remain available until the point at which the data is analysed. You would not need to provide a reason for withdrawal.

What would happen if I take part?
Two interview times would be arranged at the Tavistock at your convenience. One shortly after attending the group relations conference and one approximately six months later. This would be likely to last between 45 minutes to 60 minutes and you would be able to stop the interview at any time.
In the first interview I would ask questions primarily about the experience of attending the group relations conference. The second interview would have a greater emphasis on how you perceive that this training has influenced your practice.

An audio recording of the interview would be made and transcribed. If you chose to withdraw from the research in the agreed timeframe, the information gathered would be destroyed.

**What are the possible benefits and risks?**

In the ‘what is the purpose of this research?’ section above, the potential for broader benefits of participation in this research have been described. At a more personal level, it may be seen that participation will provide a forum for your own reflection.

In relation to risk of harm, it is considered that participation is no greater a risk than that encountered in ordinary life. The type of discussion that would occur may be seen as similar in nature to that which may occur within a supervisory relationship and indeed, less formal conversations.

Should, however, there be any unexpected outcomes such as personal distress viewed as beyond my own competency to support, the appropriate source of professional advice would be recommended.

**What if I complain?**

Should you have concerns about how you have been approached or treated during the research, these may be shared with myself and / or my research supervisor and / or the course director. Processes for managing the concern would be made transparent to you and a satisfactory outcome, from your perspective, would be sought.
What about confidentiality?

In accordance with the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS 2010) I would ensure that every person from whom data are gathered for the purposes of research consents freely to the process on the basis of adequate information and would be able, during the data gathering phase, freely to withdraw their consent and to ask for the destruction of all or part of the data they have contributed.

Furthermore any information provided, if published, will not be identifiable as being provided by particular individuals.

In addition, all records of consent, including audio-recordings, will be stored in the same secure conditions as research data, with due regard to the confidentiality and anonymity and will involve the storage of personal identity data in a location separate from the linked data.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

A summary of findings will be sent to you and you will be invited to make any comments you may wish to. You will not be identified in any write-up or publication.

Contact details for further information or discussion:

Please contact Dale Bartle, Educational Psychologist at dalebartle@warwickshire.gov.uk or telephone 01926 418 284.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.
CONSENT FORM

Title of research:

An exploration of trainee educational psychologist’s experience of attending a group relations conference using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Name of researcher:
Dale Bartle

Please initial on the dotted line below should you agree to the statement.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (----) for the research outlined above and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the data will be analysed (date ------), without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the research.

Name of participant: ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________
### APPENDIX 2

**Overview of themes from initial interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Participant / line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAOS</td>
<td>P4, 275</td>
<td>It became chaotic so quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 138</td>
<td>There was a lot of confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2, 159</td>
<td>Get carried away in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1, 308</td>
<td>Swept up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFUSION</td>
<td>P3, 239</td>
<td>I didn't really know what was going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2, 250</td>
<td>Overwhelmed by complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1, 315</td>
<td>Loads of thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4, 8</td>
<td>Difficult to talk about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFLICT</td>
<td>P1, 148</td>
<td>Dog eat dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 132</td>
<td>Quite, erm, aggressive in a sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4, 561</td>
<td>I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2, 258</td>
<td>Where the conflict lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPING</td>
<td>P4, 478</td>
<td>To change my plan and protect myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 28</td>
<td>Within my group I felt safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2, 169</td>
<td>How much one might let these feelings affect me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDENTITY</td>
<td>P2, 169</td>
<td>Me and my being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1, 838</td>
<td>More self-aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 240</td>
<td>A real loss of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4, 501</td>
<td>What they see when they see me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of themes from follow-up interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT / LINE</th>
<th>KEY WORDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GROUP AWARENESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>P4, 78</td>
<td>Speaking explicitly about group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P2, 212</td>
<td>I started noticing … quite healthy conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1, 13</td>
<td>Thinking more dynamically, so group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 211</td>
<td>Thinking about groups now in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF AWARENESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>P2, 316</td>
<td>My personal qualities … enhance my professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P1, 65</td>
<td>As a professional but also a trainee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P4, 417</td>
<td>I also have attachment relationships that … play into group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P3, 205</td>
<td>I am who I am, I am myself and I and a psychologist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic overview P1 (initial interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SO / themes</th>
<th>line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAOTIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- pace</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>how quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- intensity</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>all those emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- shock</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>really shocked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- confusion</td>
<td>315 / 463</td>
<td>loads of thoughts / don’t understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- complexity</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>different levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- loss autonomy</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>swept up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IDENTITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- status</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>grappling with the title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- age</td>
<td>235 / 380</td>
<td>girl / lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ethnicity</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>the only [ethnicity described] girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>one super man / role as a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- gender</td>
<td>790 / 936</td>
<td>personal and professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- role</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>more self aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- self-awareness</td>
<td>838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIGHT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- threat</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>dog eat dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- exclusion</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>didn’t want us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- speaking out</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>being quite vocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- conflict</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>tried to take over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO / themes</td>
<td>line</td>
<td>Key words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERWHELMING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- complexity</td>
<td>250/55</td>
<td>Overwhelmed by the complexity / So many things could be said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- carried away</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>Get carried away in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- difficult to articulate</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>Its hard to summarise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- intensity?</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>The intensity of that kind of atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- range of emotions</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Such a wide range of emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONFLICT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- identifying conflict</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>Where the conflict lies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- difference</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>Women managing competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- inner conflict</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>Shattered my idealisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- freeze</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>Stuck or frozen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- identity</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>Me and my being / lost myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- valencies</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>My kind of positioning in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- personal / professional</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>Inseparability of personal / professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COPING</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- defenses</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>How much one might let these feelings affect me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- seeking meaning</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Trying to kind of process and understand</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ongoing process</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Reassured by the possibility that processing continues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Thematic overview P3 (initial interview)

### CHAOS
- **intensity** 604: It felt really intense
- **lost** 289: How easy it is to get lost when you’re not sure
  - I didn’t really know what was going on
- **confusion** 239: There was a lot of confusion
- **confusion** 138: Erm, quite aggressive in a sense
- **aggression** 132: I can’t fully describe it
- **difficulty in articulating** 702

### FIGHT
- **displacement** 118: My group that was displaced
- **shut out** 201: The door was shut in my face
- **fear** 62: My hands were shaking
- **flight** 453: Wanted to walk out
- **fight** 124: We would take over a room
- **hatred** 189: I wanted to join the group that was hated
- **aggression** 132: Playfulness came out of me… quite erm aggressive in a sense as-well

### SURVIVAL and COPING
- **security** 28: Within my group I felt safe
- **personal authority** 638: I can actually be more assertive
- **awareness** 710: I understand … from a different perspective now
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONNING SELF</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- identity</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>A real loss of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- role</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>Who I am in the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- difference</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>Race and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- development</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>It is about personal growth and development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A real loss of identity
- Who I am in the role
- Race and gender
- It is about personal growth and development
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SO / themes</th>
<th>line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAOS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Chaos</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>It became chaotic so quickly</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Overwhelming</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Quite difficult to talk about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFLICT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- power</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Taking, erm, dominant roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ethnicity</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>People from ethnic minorities felt disempowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sabotage</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- vulnerability</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>Vulnerable to getting hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- protecting self</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>to change my plan and protect myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- play</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>to play around with how I acted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF REFLECTION</td>
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APPENDIX 3

Example of initial coding and emerging themes

Participant 3, interview 2 (191-216)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?
P3: … No (laughs) I don't.

DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?
P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a trainee educational psychologist and the conference.[trainee status] erm, cos I think, like I said before, like developing on the course [broader training context] alongside the experience of group relations, it's been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am a psychologist in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a different way [thinking differently about groups]

GROUP AWARENESS?

that would be my personal development, my thinking, but then how that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role as a trainee educational psychologist [trainee status]
IDENTITY?

and so I think, yeah just every link that I've made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well…
Example of initial coding and emerging themes
Participant 3, interview 2 (188-216)

(Key: commentary in **bold**, emergent themes in **BOLD CAPITALS**)

think, and think to what's going on underneath [what lies beneath?] that, what is actually the reality, rather than just what is just presented to you.

DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?

P3: ... No (laughs) I don't.

DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a trainee educational psychologist [trainee status] and the conference, erm, cos I think, like I said before, like developing on the course alongside the experience of group relations, it's been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am a psychologist [existential reflection] IDENTITY?
in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally [the personal and the professional] because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a different way [shift in perception]
GROUP AWARENESS?

, that would be my personal development, [personal development through GRC?]

my thinking, but then how that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role as a trainee educational psychologist [professional role and application] and so I think, yeah just every link that I've made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well …
Example of initial coding and emerging themes

Participant 1, interview 1 (125-149)

(Key: commentary in bold, emergent themes in BOLD CAPITALS)

P1: erm, and I don't really want to be a part of that and I thought, you know what, I'll leave you to it, you can have your, whatever you want (laughs) [painful rejection?]. And so they went off in a group.

And in the end was probably about 30 of us left. We didn't have a room, erm, [lost, dislocated?] we were… We went down to have a look, there were no rooms available, so it was a case of trying to find a room and negotiate with the other groups. Erm, how to work around the rest of the task. Erm, that was also interesting as well because everything happened so quickly, [pace, intensity?] that I sat there thinking what the hell is going on? How is everyone got together, what has happened, and how have we then left with 30 of us without a room? The group seemed to disperse a bit, so we ended up with about 20, five or six had gone off and, [fragmenting?] in the process of us trying to find a room, they'd obviously gone into other groups. Erm,

DB: what was that like?

P1: it was strange, because it seemed to be bigger and all of a sudden, it was like, where have they gone? [rejection?]

ABANDONMENT?

And then, and then I got the sense that, erm, it was er, the saying that dog eat dog world, [threat, conflict]

CONFLICT?
that everyone was in for themselves. And that seemed to snowball [escalation?]. I mean, I felt quite compelled to be ...
Example of initial coding and emerging themes

Participant 4, interview 1 (464-478)

(Key: commentary in bold, emergent themes in BOLD CAPITALS)

P4: and I was all happy to see it as a game [play?] until I saw people crying, then I thought this isn't a fun game, this is upsetting people, [distress] and I just

DISTRESS?

wondered what kind of support they had, once they'd re-engaged with something, so painful memories [past experiences?] of whatever it is. Erm, it doesn't have to be the example I gave, it can be loss or it can be feeling victimised or feeling, erm, you know, erm, excluded. [rejection?] And then you bring it all up, and then what happens?, Do you know what it was?, What happened? Christmas happened. [anger, frustration?]

ANGER?

So what's that, what's that about? [anger?] I think that, that's when I felt uncomfortable about it, and that's when I made a decision to protect myself [self protection, vulnerability?] and see it more as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect myself.

SELF PROTECTION?
APPENDIX 4

Transcript of initial interview: participant one

DB: okay, so my first question is to ask you if you could talk to me about what it was like to attend a group relations conference

P1: (laughs) erm, it was interesting it erm, I mean it stirred a lot up in me which I didn't realise was there I suppose and since being on group relations I’ve had quite a lot of time to reflect especially in my supervision in my CAMHS placement. Erm, we went into it with all these myths, all these things, about you know ,it's going to be like this, it's life changing, and you know, you just have to bear it. So it was kind of what on earth are we going into for a whole week, that's meant to be bad (laughs) but life changing at the same time. So I kind of just approach it like it will be what it will be, erm let's just go with it and let's see how it ends up.

Erm, so it first started with the big spiral in the middle and everyone sitting there. Oh no sorry they had a conference first, and I didn't mind so much of the big silences it kind of felt like our experiential groups, just on a larger scale and everyone sitting facing each other, and because we sat at the back it kind of, I felt okay with the silence. And although a lot of people didn't, and they started vocalising that which was interesting to see how human, how human behaviour… Like a domino effect basically it was silent for so long, as soon as one person spoke, it led to a whole load of other people, erm, it was Monday morning and I was tired, and so I just thought I'm going to let it be (laughs), I just couldn't be bothered to say much (laughs). So went with it, just sat back and watched. And then we have the big, erm, spiral, year, I'm sure it was the spiral… No, it was getting into groups. And that was interesting because they had all 100 or so of us in the big room.
P1: and they just asked us to walk around, and they asked us to gravitate towards whoever without talking, to form these groups that we would have mini experiential daily. Erm, I mean it was strange, but I thought let's go with it, let's see what happens. I kind of walked around for a bit, I wasn't sure what I was gravitating towards, or what I was looking for, erm our cohort of decided beforehand, erm, that it might be a good idea to split applications to see how we worked separately and if we end up coming together that might be a good thing as well. Erm, but none of this was planned in this group, so we kind of just went with it, I remember walking halfway across the room and just stood there, and all of a sudden all of these people started coming towards me. So I thought oh great don't have to do anything (laughs). Erm, but it was quite as well, nice coming together because it was such a mix of mix of genders, mix of ages, erm, mix of ethnicities. So I think it was a fairly even mix, there was about seven or eight of us in the end. Erm, which was really nice, and that worked well. Erm, and so those experiential groups were probably one of the best things that I really enjoyed about group relations. Probably because it was so consistent, that we knew that it would be the same group at that time daily. And, erm, it didn't seem to be a struggle in the experiential it was, all these different discussions coming about, but everyone was polite, in the sense that it wasn't, I didn't get the sense that anyone was there to challenge on purpose, to be difficult, to create that tension. I mean if something came up, it was brought up, but I felt that we dealt with it quite comfortably and professionally. It wasn't a case of, I personally didn't feel my personal emotions came into it as such. As compared to other situations, where I did find myself getting very emotionally charged.
P1: yeah (laughs), erm, but it was probably, because it was such a relaxed environment. It was quite controlled, and it was in a circle, and it was well managed. Erm, and I did find it interesting with different ethnicities coming up. I was the only [ethnicity described] … Sorry, the only [ethnicity described] girl in the group, there was another [ethnicity described] woman, erm and a few Caucasian people and a black man and a black woman as well. Erm, and so it was a great mix of people from completely different backgrounds and professionals as well which was nice.

Erm, I found myself grappling with the title of erm, being a student, but then being a trainee educational psychologist. So finding the difference between the student and professional and where that came into the mix in that particular group, erm, because there were a couple of other students on the course as well, but they, I mean there was a student social worker as well but she just, erm, stated herself as a student and that was it. But there was a trainee clinical psychologist, and she regarded herself as a trainee there as opposed to a student, so, so that was interesting dynamics.

DB: yeah

P1: (Pause)

DB: you mentioned some emotionally charged experiences?

P1: erm (laughs), yeah, so I mean, I suppose I started with the, the best thing of group relations, erm, I suppose it was more to do with, erm, one of the bigger events, where we have to get ourselves into groups, as a big group. Erm, and sitting and I took more of a passive role, and I sat back, just to kind of see, I, I found myself more as a logical thinker, so I thought, how will they do this logically, where is the logic in
trying to group everyone together. Erm, lots of people just couldn't really handle, being in that room and deciding how to get together. So quite a few ran out, they just decided to go off, erm, that seemed to then start the domino effect again and a lot of them people, erm, started grappling together forming quick groups, oh I'm in this group, who wants to be here, who wants to be there. Erm, and there was another Indian woman, I figure was about three or four of them on the course, on the whole group relations.

DB: yeah

P1: Erm, and then we got off into different groups, and she kind of stated, at the beginning, I want to work with men. And so all these men then gravitated towards her, and I kind of felt, well you said you wanted to work with men and seem to impl… like I suppose unconsciously imply, you don't really want to work with women? Thinking like unconsciously, erm, and I don't really want to be a part of that and I thought, you know what, I'll leave you to it, you can have your, whatever you want (laughs). And so they went off in a group.

And in the end was probably about 30 of us left. We didn't have a room, erm, we were… We went down to have a look, there were no rooms available, so it was a case of trying to find a room and negotiate with the other groups. Erm, how to work around the rest of the task. Erm, that was also interesting as well because everything happened so quickly, that I sat there thinking what the hell is going on? How is everyone got together, what has happened, and how have we then left with 30 of us without a room? The group seemed to disperse a bit, so we ended up with about 20, five or six had gone off and, in the process of us trying to find a room, they'd obviously gone into other groups. Erm,
DB: what was that like?

P1: it was strange, because it seemed to be bigger and all of a sudden, it was like, where have they gone? And then, and then I got the sense that, erm, it was er, the saying that dog eat dog world, that everyone was in for themselves. And that seemed to snowball, I mean, I felt quite compelled to be with the group and there was three of my cohort members, erm, in the group as well, just because we’d b… left there, so we kind of felt a sense of, okay, we’re together this was us, this was how we ended up being formed, so we’ll stay together. Erm, and then when discussing with the other groups how to negotiate the room and whether to smaller groups could join so we could have one of their rooms or if we could join a group, erm, two of the eight groups had only turned up and responded and I just thought how interesting that our society as a whole thinking systemically, erm, this is how people can be rejected and left out, but it was a horrible feeling. Like, and I was really shocked how people, we’re working as a group, this was date to wall really and they all, there was like passion, there was no care, and then reflecting on it afterwards with a couple of my cohort members who were part of the group that didn't want us, I mean they felt the sense that we were going to infiltrate them and they kept people in the room just in case some of us tried to take over, and it felt so childish! And I thought, we’re grown-ups and web professionals and and professionals at, and this is so weird, like who does this? It was really interesting (laughs), and I was just, yeah…

DB: how did you make sense of that?

P1: (laughs) erm, I didn't really, I was a bit, I was… That was the day, that was the afternoon that was very emotionally charged, because there was so much going on, so quickly, I didn't have any control over it, and I think that was the biggest being that lack of control and the lack of logical thinking in how we all go to work together, and
the whole sense of working together, that seem to have been completely lost in it,
erm, I mean eventually one of the groups did agree for us to join them and those
difficulties in that, just trying to emerge anyway and we spent quite a lot of the rest of
the afternoon, trying to decide how that worked, how everybody felt about joining...
erm, and how we felt grateful for them letting us in, but some of their members
weren't so happy, they felt that we had come in and taken over and then that original,
the Asia... the Indian girl with tha... with all the men around her in a group, erm, their
group came in to observe and erm one of them had made a comment about, erm, we
don't hardly have any people in our group and, erm, we're... they're struggling in our
group, erm, and we felt that a lot of people didn't want to pick our group because it
was black and Asian people (laughs). And it was a really strong statement, but I
found myself thinking, hold on, that's, that's, so, like, I had to voice it, I just I think it
... There was so much going on and it all went that I did just ended up voicing it, and
you know, I'd say, I did say that that was an unfair comment to state even though
they might have felt like that, it was unfair then to put it on others to say it was
because solely of race that we didn't pick them, when clearly there were other things
going on., everything happened so quickly and as a group who felt know what
wanted to be with them because of that they didn't even respond to the to the 20 odd
people who have been left behind. Erm, who didn't have you didn't have a gr... He
didn't have a room, so those so many issues there, one of the issues was that we
didn't have enough people, but yet there was 20 people who wanted to join and then
the other issue was because with black and Asian. Yeah but, then the rest of the g...
There's loads of other black and Asian is on this course as well and how can you say
that because you're then discriminating against the ... yeah, it was like (laughs),
woah. So that, was an emotionally charged afternoon, and we didn't, have a review
at the end, so I was left with a lot of that that evening and trying to a lot of the pre... a
lot of everything that had happened that particular day. (Pause), yeah,(Laughs).
DB: and how did that go, that sort of making sense?

P1: difficult, it was really difficult, and I think I'm still kinda going through it. Still, because it was ... I really it brought up a lot, it brought up the issues of being left as a group, and what that means wider, you know when people are left out in society and you get refugees and people get left without homes, and all that, and those feelings and how you perceive those people and how you perceive yourself in one way can be completely different to other people. The whole race and ethnicity thing. And that was a big one, it was, and I kind of felt, where does my place fitting with that, as an [ethnicity described] woman, erm, and how did that and and being the [ethnicity described] woman in our group at the time, I was the one that then spoke about that. But there was another [ethnicity described] girl in the group, who, she was all by cohort, when I reflection I thought, 'cause then I thought, oh my God, I sounded so unprofessional, 'cause in me I felt like I was getting them up and like shouting, well I was sitting in my seat, but for them, they were like, no, you articulated it well, it didn't feel like you were shouting, you just put your point across, But it wasn't in an aggressive manner, wearers, because I could feel the rage building up. And that was interesting as well, to then de-pick how I felt at the time and how I perceived myself. But wasn't necessarily how others may have perceived me, or how I appeared, as well. Erm, And tried to keep control of bit I suppose, and yeah, I think that was the other thing and then realizing that they'd all... 'cause I kept picking up my hand, like rubbing it, and then I realized that was my form of anxiety coming through and that was how I was trying to deal with it. As opposed to vocalizing it. So... yeah...

Cause I don't, I've found myself, but I'm not really put in a lot of challenging positions like that, especially, when I felt, I know it wasn't, like a bit of a personal attack as well. And haven't come across, haven't come across something like that for a long
time, and so it was very, okay, and I think because of the situation we were in and I suppose feeling very vulnerable as well being left out and, erm, only having just joined this group, and then there was anxiety from people saying oh we don’t really want you to join (laughs), and, and then them coming in, (laughs), so, yeah, there was a lot going on.

DB: yeah

P1: yeah (laughs)

DB: I’m just wondering, what reflections around that, those themes that you’ve talked about, you might have had subsequently? Perhaps in discussion with others, or on your own reflections, to think about what might have been going on from your point of view in that situation?

P1: yeah... erm... I think it was more erm, I think it was the whole thing that it was, it was a strange situation to be put in, I think group relations as a whole was just strange (laughs). It was... it wasn’t, it wasn’t, reality I suppose, and I think that's how I've deconstructed it afterwards that, it wasn’t reality it was this... what do they call it?... Oh, temporary organisation, so we kind of... That T... That was whole tone, it was a temporary organisation. It wasn't real as such. Erm, and it kind of felt, I mean for me, it made me realise how quickly I suppose I could get swept up in the whole, erm, in how quickly things can unfold I suppose.

DB: yeah

P1: I mean it hap ... Everything happened so quickly, thinking back to it, erm, and one thing led to another, led to another, and the whole domino thing. Erm, a lot of the
reflections at the end of the group relations were there seemed to be loads of polarities and and loads of contrasts, it was one way or another, erm, and for me I think I felt there wasn't much of a middle ground. The middle ground seemed to have got lost in all of that, erm, for a lot of the whole week, erm, and I thought I had that middle ground in the experiential group,

DB: yeah

P1: because it was that time then to reflect and think carefully, erm, about what was being discussed and how to respond and how my emotions were coming, whereas in that big kerfuffle of the big group, there was so much going on, there were so many people, that it was very easy to be swept up in that. And I noticed that especially in the spirals, erm, on the first few days, erm, I found myself commenting and being quite vocal, a few times, erm, and then one day I thought I'm going to sit back and stay silent and let's see what happens. Let's see what thoughts come up in my head, how I don't vocalise them, how that makes me feel, erm, and that was very interesting because, there were loads of thoughts arising in my head and I thought I could say this, and as I was about, I thought maybe I should, and then someone else would say it. Or something else would happen. And there didn't seem that space or that…. Even those few seconds just for reflection and I think that was what was really significant as well for me, just having that time to reflect and, er, knowing how quickly it can be taken without being realized. Erm, and the consequent (laughs) the consequent actions that could happen from that, or your thoughts or feelings and emotions as well. How quickly they can be side swept.

DB: yeah

P1: yeah.
DB: and do you feel you've had opportunity to talk through, some of your, sort of, thoughts following those kind of events you've described?

P1: yeah, I mean it in my supervision with my CAMHS tutor we have spoken quite a lot about group relations and how I have... What I feel I've learned from it and how, some of the things I've learned from it, how I can apply it in my work, erm, and I think should be one of the biggest things as well came as, erm, my role as an [ethnicity described] woman and how that fits into the role of educational psychologist, or a psychol... Because she is a clinical psychologist, so we are always having those discussions, erm, and in a professional role and in a um, you know, in a world where, erm, there are multi-ethnicities, so you could find that in your profession, or when I did work in [names local authority], it wasn't very multi-ethnic, some of the schools especially, erm, and how I found that, erm, and I don't think I reflected much on it previously, before group relations, I kind of just went with, yeah, I'm an [ethnicity described] woman, you know, I'm here with a different colour to some of the other people, but this job is still the same, I'm still do the same thing, I'm no different. Erm, but that really highlighted that the resulted from this and it's quite a big difference and I think it was one of the big group tasks, erm, where I reflected, and then, a lot, the three other [ethnicity described] women were very vocal on all the big group tasks. And I found that very interesting, I thought so where does that leave me then as the fourth [ethnicity described] woman and the one who wasn't as vocal as them, found myself being more vocal than I probably would have done, but not as much as them. Erm, and how and how does that leave me in my role and in you know, personal and professional and thinking, erm, thinking about a case that we've been doing in su... in CAMHS, erm, with the Somalian family and the mum's not as vocal and I was thinking what does it mean, erm, perhaps for ethnic women, erm coming in, and do they feel, they have to speak up and say they have their voice and so they can be
heard, and that's how they have to be, all, can there be that middle ground, where
they don't have to talk so much and what does it mean when they don't talk so much,
because this mother that we are dealing with, she is not very vocal and, how is she
expressing herself, and how are we able to extract that information and work with her
as best we can, given those difficulties and understanding where she might be
feeling. Erm, in relation to her being client and busy professionals I suppose, so, and
I think that really resonated with me, thinking how, how to wind them when I go into
these schools and I see these teachers and I see parents, erm, how am I then
perceived, erm, as a young [describes ethnicity] lady. And, erm, how much of what I
say, is, erm, taken into account or taken for granted, depending on how much I say.
And I think it was when we did our final review, and I brought this up in the review,
and I said I think this is one of the biggest things for me from group relations, is, erm,
where does my role, me personally fit, erm given in this big conference, there were
those three other [describes ethnicity] ladies, but they were so vocal. And a couple of
the members, they were so sweet, and they, they did bring, because I was like, am I
talking enough? And, it, when I talk, is it making sense? Or is it just talking for the
sake of talking? Erm, and a lot of them did say that, no, when you do speak up, it
makes sense what you're saying and then you leave it like that. So you're not just
talking for the … Yeah, not talking to have your voice heard because of your
ethnicity, I suppose, or your gender… so yeah (laughs). Yeah. Quite a lot.

DB: yeah. And it sounds like something that you're continuing to be thoughtful about.
P1: mmm, mmm.

DB: okay, I think we've touched on some of these, erm, things, but I'm going to ask
the question, in terms of, your personal learning, erm, and any thoughts you might
have, erm, and be happy to share, erm, in terms of what you might have learnt about
yourself during the group relations conference.

P1: erm, I suppose learning how quickly I can get erm, swept up in a flurry of things,
especially that incident, erm, with the whole group being left, erm, and the
confrontation about ethnicity, erm, being brought up, erm, and for me I suppose, erm,
learning to deal with that, and finding different ways of having to be very mindful of
erm, how easy it can be to get swept up in these things, erm, and I think I had a, erm,
I mean it was not similar, but I suppose, erm, I had one of my first meetings with a
parent and a SENCO, erm, and I was doing a consultation with them, erm, and going
on to do a developmental char… Checklist, erm, and I found, that the SENCO got
very excited and, erm, she ended up, I suppose leading a lot of the meeting and a lot
of my questions then it didn't get answered very well, but I got so swept up in all of
that and losing track of where I wanted to go that I missed certain questions, certain
answers, erm, then when I reflected back on it in supervision, it was a case of having
to take charge in that, and I suppose there was a, a wide range of things there, in
that, erm, being aware of the room, being aware erm, of the people I'm working with,
erm, and their best interests, the child's interests, erm, my role as a trainee coming
into, I know it was my first meeting, in, on my own, where I started the eps, erm, and
my personal confidence in that, in my role, you know, I was the one that called that
meeting there and I need to kind of just have that little bit more confidence in myself
to take back chargeback and say, okay thank you, but I'm trying to stick to this
(laughs), erm, and I suppose, yeah, so reflecting back on group relations, trying to,
have that confidence, okay, in myself to take charge, and take a step back, and
perhaps step up and say no okay wait let's, I need a minute, I suppose, erm

DB: yeah
P1: maybe not vocalising it but, just kind of having that there? Erm, yeah, and erm, yeah (pause). I mean being aware, I suppose of my, erm, own anxieties as well. I think a lot of group relations brought up quite a few anxieties I had but I didn't realise I had I suppose

DB: right

P1: erm, you know one was ----- my role erm, professionally, erm a student, a trainee (laughs), erm, one being, my ethniss... Ethnicity, you know it is a part of work (?), It's can I have a role some way in, in my profession and my personal life, and how that manifests itself, you know, may not be so obvious, but there will be subtle moments where you know, I just kind of need to be aware of the I suppose erm and how I also feel against, not against, how I feel mys... Because I suppose in this cohort I am the only [describes ethnicity] girl, [describes ethnicity] girl in the group, so that defines me, well not like the [describes ethnicity] girl, but I don't, on group relations because there was the three others I felt a kind of sen... Erm, like there was a sense of the challenge there with them. And there was hostility, and I don't understand where it came from, and I don't understand why it was there especially with, it was more with the one girl that said I want to be with the men and then came and made the comment. Erm, I mean the other two were fine they were friendly and and smiling, but she was quite hostile, and it, and it made me realise, that erm, in [describes ethnicity] culture girls can be quite hostile towards each other, I'm still trying to understand where that comes from, how, why that is erm, how to overcome that, especially professionally, erm, because I'm sure if I saw her in a professional meeting it wouldn't have been so, and I hope it wouldn't have been so hostile for no reason. So it was interesting to see dynamics of that and how that comes in itself and how I could erm then, how that will then work with me in my work as well, especially if I'm working with [describes ethnicity] family for instance, erm, or a young [describes
ethnicity] girl, or an [describes ethnicity] girl and how that may come out which is yet
to show itself (laughs).

DB: sure. And you mentioned you became aware of a number of anxieties?
P1: yeah. Erm, I think it was, I think the anxieties were, erm, the loss, the lack of
control and how much I feel I, pu... Personally and professionally, more probably
personally, erm, how I really much like to be in control of a lot of things erm, I'm very
much a planner, so you know, in five years I want to do this and this, and I su... And
that's how I suppose I got to this goal, I made the plan to do this work, and, which is
why there's been so much (laughs), erm, to get to this point

DB: yep

P1: erm, it hasn't, I'm not, I'm not a person to just kind of thing I mean let's just go
with it and see what happens, I d... I, that doesn't feel comfortable for me at all. And I
think that was the biggest, that was one of the anxieties that came up,

DB: mmm

P1: erm, probably before I would try to just let it simmer erm but whilst being in group
relations there was no, there was a very minimal lack of control in that, erm, so,
having to deal with that for a week, not knowing what was going to happen next and
whether we'd be in a spiral again and what would happen in the spiral and, yeah...

DB: how did you deal with that?

P1: Erm, (laughs), I (pause), I suppose I erm, in the first group, in the first big group I
kind of just thought, let's just see where this goes, let's see how it happens and I
found myself going with it, getting quite swept up in the discussion and being a bit vocal as well. Erm, and then when I chose not to be vocal, I did find it quite uncomfortable sitting there, erm, listening and, not... I don't know, it's difficult, it, because she didn't know the direction of the discussion and then when the discussion did kind of go in a particular way for whatever reason, or whatever subject to that came up, erm, yeah. I think, I think, I think I kine, erm, I think in my mind there was so many thoughts going on I didn't feel like... I had control of myself. So I had control of my mind and my thoughts erm, and how much I would say and wouldn't say. So there was still at the level of control there I suppose to some extent, as opposed to no control. Yeah.

DB: mm hm

P1: it's like, I think that's how I dealt with it, that, if I can't control a situation I can kind of control myself a bit and where I can have some control over which group I'm in or what, or how it pans out because then when we got together as a group the second time, the second big group Erm, there was a lot more logical thinking in it, there was a lot more time taken to construct of the groups and I made the decision then I want to join this particular group erm, just to see how that works, it was multidisciplinary group, and erm, I was interested in working with different professions to see how it comes together... So I thought oh I will go there erm, and then having that control there, which worked quite nicely.

DB: yeah?

P1: yeah (pause)
DB: thank you. Any other things that you noticed or would say that you learnt about
yourself during the conference?

P1: I found myself saying ‘interesting’ a lot (laughs), to hear interesting, and trying
(laughs), and trying to put meaning to the word interesting, what do, what did that
mean for today how does, how does that, how does that manifest in itself, erm,
because it was an interesting day but it was interesting on different levels, whether
they were good or bad… I suppose not bad, erm, challenging, challenging would be
the word and how I found myself dealing with that erm and I suppose also learning
that you can be thrust into different situations w… erm, without knowing erm, going to
a meeting and it could go completely different way or a different erm, concern could
come from child that may not come through referral for instance erm, and how to
erm, deal with my own emotions, and, and those challenges and erm using, that
time to reflect I mean I've erm in by EPS placement we've started doing mindfulness,
and I found that really helpful and I was reading one of the chapters this morning
erm, about anxieties and Erm, having them and letting them sit with you and see how
that feels for you. And I was thinking, oh I wish I had read this at group relations
(laughs). It would have been very helpful then to have a three minute three things
space (laughs). Erm, yeah so I suppose, and that's been very helpful as well just just
having that time those o… Given few moments, minutes, whatever, just to kind of
stop and think

DB: yeah

P1: and see what's going on as opposed to being stuck on the auto pilot as they say

DB: yeah
P1: yeah, group relations felt at times a bit like auto pilot just being swept up into it and going with it.

DB: could you say a bit more about that?

P1: yeah, erm, so I suppose with the autopilot erm, it's it's the sense that erm you go by your day without really noticing what's going on in the day erm you kind of wake up do your work come home go to sleep and tha... and your days over, I came in, erm, didn't really know what was going on, but I went with it went with everything, didn't really stop to think I suppose, erm, I mean the review meetings at the end helped quite a bit to erm reflect on what had happened but I don't think there were long dinner, we were only given about 1015 minutes each so it was kind of a case of this really challenged me today or I really enjoyed this and that was it it was about as far as it went. Erm, and it, and because everything was erm the days, I f... I mean they were long days, but I felt that there went by very quickly and so it wasn't there wasn't really the space or time to stop and think, even at the lunch with get together with our cohort and be like oh this happened all that happened, you didn't... DB: what was it like not having the space to stop and think?

P1: erm, difficult I think, I think that's why I found it challenging, it felt very overloaded, 'was very tired, it was very overloading, erm, mentally and physically I think. Lots of work going on, erm, and not, yeah and not really having the time to think, to reflect I suppose. It was like okay if I do this I need to do this or if I go in this group then we'll do this and this is our task and this is what we've got to do and there were so many different people with different things that they wanted to do with it, so it was, yeah... (Laughs).
DB: you also mentioned things were going on a number of levels, erm, I just wondered if you had any other thoughts in terms of things going on at other levels? From your point of view…

P1: erm…

DB: or different levels

P1: can't remember what I said (laughs), about levels, sorry. Erm, I suppose for me, erm, thinking back, there, erm I suppose were the highs and lows…

DB: right

P1: yeah, erm, yeah, I, with the highs and lows of the day and then the week as a whole erm and how much investment I suppose I put into a lot of it as well, I wanted to get the most out of it, so I wanted to invest myself in it as well, erm and with, although, investing myself fully, erm, I found that I was getting side swept with a lot of it so having erm I suppose the thing with the breathing space then was it the big spiral groups where erm, on the days that I chose not to be vocal where I could just sit and think and absorb and think about all of these things and how that worked erm and reflect that back in our experiential groups. We, because that was straight after, so that was helpful I think for me as opposed to investing fully into it getting side swept in the discussions and all those emotions which came with that, which is okay, erm…

DB: what do you mean by side swept?
P1: Erm I suppose erm, because the discussions were quite heated erm, those lots
about gender erm professionals erm and just getting erm, I mean having my thoughts
there but without having time to really think about them, suppose like you do in
experiential, because you have that time to sit and think erm, as opposed to then
just, just vocalising it there and then. You know the whole thing of saying without
thinking in that really fell like what the spiral was, a lot of people were just saying
without, and then you got the odd few who did really contemplate a lot and then
spoke up erm, yeah.

DB: you mentioned highs and lows?

P1: (laughs) yeah, erm I, I suppose the highs being erm, the enjoyable parts of it, so
you know meeting lots of different people which was really nice from lots of different
professionals Erm, a lot of the social work students haven't heard of group relations,
didn't really know what they were letting themselves in for erm so and a lot of them
found difficulty in dealing with what it brought, erm, and having that sense of Erm,
feeling quite nurtured by the tavi staff, erm, and we were given much information but
we were given some which was very helpful erm, things like, erm, just remember to
protect yourself and how much you choose to share, erm, is you know, your choice
at the end of the day. And things like that I suppose, and times will get difficult and
it's just how best you choose to deal with it. Erm, otherwise I suppose some of the
other students there they didn't have any of that information, so they found it very
difficult erm, and that in itself I suppose was difficult to see from our persp... From us
because we wanted to help but they are in it now and how much more can you say
and yeah...

DB: you said highs and lows...
P1: (laughs) erm, yes, so erm,

DB: it's your choice...

P1: yeah, I'm just trying to think I suppose the lows being erm, just being left I suppose especially of the day we were the group left out and all the other issues that came with erm, how vulnerable I was left feeling erm, and upset and angry erm and frustrated, I suppose frustrated with the system frustrated with myself, because it was and everyone else's fault, it was my fault too, you know I chose not to get into a group, I chose to sit passively, but within do it that I was left out, erm so it was a two-way situation

DB: yeah

P1: so that I suppose all those mix feelings, but it was mixed feelings towards myself and towards the rest of the, the rest of the group relations...

DB: how did you make sense of those mixed feelings?

P1: erm, Erm, upon Erm discussing it,, a week later in our experiential (laughs), in our tavi ten(?), experiential group

DB: yeah

P1: because I wasn't the only one with those feelings, there were the three others from the cohort in that group with me, who felt the same and through those discussions it was - yeah I felt like that to and yeah and, I made we'd had that discussion as a 20 of us, you know it wasn't, this was assistant as whole, we are part
of this system so everybody failed including us. So it was coming to that sentence as well that it's very easy to blame everyone else and it was very easy to blame, Erm, the first group that had just scattered off, but it wasn't all their fault, they had started something, but everyone else had a responsible part to play in that and including us and including me. Yeah, so I think through having those discussions, Erm, and then trying to make sense of all those feelings I was left with, because I think at the time the feelings were so strong, it was very difficult to make sense of. It was just very easy to say, oh my God I can't believe people are like this, I can't believe how childish it is, Erm, you know, it's been a rubbish … Not rubbish day, it was a hard day. Erm, and being left with that, no review at the end erm, whereas the next day having those discussions, you know with my friends and reviewing back on the system as a whole, and those feelings, and those feelings can emerge in any one, and then having a review at the end of the second day and drinking that to light there as well…

DB: there's something about talking with other people?

P1: yeah, I think, I think it's very helpful to Erm, to have the discussions, so, as opposed to just thinking on my own by myself, Erm, because I felt like I had the support of my cohort there, erm, we never once got into a group together, we were all separated the whole time but it was so nice to know that I wasn't the only one going through it on my own. There were all 10 of us. We were all having completely different experiences (laughs), from each other, Erm, at different times, though, but it was nice that we had that support there from each other to go back to when we did and then to reflect on group relations, Erm, especially in our own personal experiential Erm, a week after

DB: yes
P1: so yes, that was very helpful

DB: and again, it's certainly your choice in terms of what you'd be happy to share, but I'm just interested in that sort of reflections that you've had subsequent to the conference. Erm, I think our biggest one was differences Erm, and what sort of stood out to you, any kind of things that you took away from those kind of reflections subsequently?

P1: yeah, I think our biggest one was differences, that are, there are differences are, obviously visible differences (laughs) erm, it's not just a group of 10 women Erm, with very different 10 women and the differences that that brought. Erm, how we work independently, erm, but that we can also come together as well. Erm, gender was also a big one, erm, there weren't very many men on the group, but then they were very vocal and gender was a massive thing that kept coming up throughout the conference.

DB: right

P1: and us as an all-female cohort. How did that manifest with us with there being no man on the group, Erm, and what does that mean. Yeah, I suppose what does that mean for us erm…

DB: what thoughts have you got?

P1: yeah, I suppose Erm … It was, it was interesting the group relations because there was so few men, but there was this whole idea that there needed to be the one super man or, I can't remember now, and the white male supremacy or something,
and it just kind of felt, Erm, I don't know, it didn't sit well with me. It, they, I felt that there was a lot more challenges between the men in the group, urban, than between women in the group, erm, and for me, as at 10, there hadn't been very many cha...

They're probably hadn't been any challenges between us, erm, which has been nice, and we all get on really well. Erm, and I think if there were, if there were men in our group it'd be difficult to, I, dy… The dynamics would have changed, but it's hard to tell how. And I think, erm, yeah, I think it's hard to tell. Erm…

DB: any learning from the conference that might be relevant to that kind of question?

P1: yeah, I think… I think seeing where Erm, the male and female roles lie in the EP world and how, how you Erm, where, not defined, how, I suppose how easy, not even easy, Erm, I suppose what I'm trying to say is Erm, how many male principles you get many female principles you get and is it, as you, as you see in the business world, Erm, that men tend to do better in higher supreme of jobs Erm, than women Erm, but what is it about that, is that, is that something that seemed the, the educational psychology world? Erm, I don't yet know (laughs) urban, it's been quite a balance across the different EPS's I've worked in so far. Erm, but also there are a lot more females in the profession, and how does that then work by working with males and, erm, I think just being aware of that, that there is a big gender balance, sorry gender difference in the profession as it is. Erm, and me being a female being gone the majority (laughs), Erm, so yeah so seeing how that will come into play…

DB: I see

P1: yeah, I hadn't really thought about it, I suppose only now (laughs)
DB: okay, just going to offer, a last chance for any other reflections, any other things that have stood out to you or, sort of, been in your mind, subsequent to attending that relations conference?

And again I'm particularly interested in your, your personal learning and any learning about yourself that happened... could be any other thoughts that might, might be present?

P1: (pause) I suppose being, Erm, more self aware, so erm... er, aware of, Erm, my presence and my role, in erm in, I suppose in my personal life, in Erm, in my families, so in my family and in my husband's family, erm, and we only got married last June so it's still a very new ish (laughs) and, Erm, and le... Learning that there are different dynamics, there are differences Erm, in different families and different people and so forth and how does my role, erm I suppose especially as the, the recently married, erm, you know new girl into the family, erm, how backstreets and how mindful I am of Erm, of where my, yeah of how mindful I am of how I see myself and how I wish others to perceive me as well. Yeah (laughs).

DB: could you say a bit more?

P1: yeah (laughs) Erm, I suppose Erm

DB: it's your choice though

P1: yeah, trying to think, Erm, so I suppose, how I was... How I want to see myself is Erm, I mean, being true to myself as the person I am Erm, being true to my family traditions, my personal family traditions, Erm and being brought up as a respectful girl. So being respectful of my husbands family Erm, not always agreeing with what
they say, but being respectful of that, erm, and the traditions that come with that (laughs) and I think, and I think from group relations that's probably something that did come up as well that being respectful of others. You may not always agree with what they have to say, all, erm, all their opinions, erm, and there are ways of putting your personal opinions across, but being respectful of theirs. And I think that's something massive in our, in the profession Erm, and also personally I suppose more now with being with a new family…

DB: yes

P1: so yeah, and how they perceive me in the sense, erm, whether or not they perceive that or whether they see something else, all if I do choose to challenge something Erm, because I don't sit comfortably with the thought of sitting quietly when I really don't agree with something and how I choose to betray that whether or not they see me as Erm, someone who is able to articulate themselves and also, Erm, I'm on a doctoral course, what that means for them, erm, a lot of my [family details] didn't go into further education so, this is different (laughs).

DB: yeah

P1: oh, and how … Yeah. And the whole respect thing as well, whether they see me as respectful in that sense.

DB: and there's been some thinking that you've had that's been about your personal life as well. And self-awareness you've mentioned.

P1: mmm.
DB: any other thoughts around self-awareness?

P1: Erm, I think just, erm, being more aware, especially with doing mindfulness now

DB: yep

P1: of myself in a particular situation, erm, being mindful of all the things that I may bring into the room, erm, by gender, my ethnicity, by profession, psychology (laughs), erm, and Erm, and how others may perceive that, and how I wish to portray that across, so yeah. So I suppose mindful in a sense, being aware of, erm, how I articulate something, erm, depending on who I'm talking to, whether it's a parent or child or a SENCO, or a fellow EP (laughs), how I, and how I also articulate not only verbally, but also into words, because I've only just finished writing my first appendix D, and erm, trying to put a lot of my findings into that in a specific way and quite, erm, concisely,

DB: yeah

P1: erm, yeah, so being very aware and taking the time to think carefully around all of those little processes

DB: yeah

P1: I guess... Especially the unconscious processes, erm, that can so easily just come, come about suppose ... yeah

DB: the unconscious processes?
P1: Erm, I think unconsciously when you're not thinking about Erm, I suppose before group relations, I never really thought a lot about Erm, my ethnicity as such, erm, unconsciously more than you know is very visible (laughs), but I think what that means and what that brings Erm, and what that means to the person I'm speaking to, erm, and I suppose being aware of, of that, of my role as a woman, as a trainee, erm, and kind of as oppose to just thinking of it - oh it's just there, it's just a title or it's just whatever. Really trying to think how that might, erm, how that might come about in a meeting or in consultation, or wherever, or on the street, or in a shop or something,

so

DB: yes

P1: yeah

DB: okay, erm, just before we stop erm, opportunity for any final reflections, any things that you haven't had the chance to mention...

P1: Erm, no, I think I've spoken about a lot...

DB: ok

P1: yeah

DB: okay Erm, well I'm going to stop there because we've got to stop somewhere.

Thank you.
Transcript of initial interview: participant 2

1  DB: okay, erm, I'm going to start by asking you, though, if you could talk to me about
2  your experience of attending a group relations conference
3
4  P2: (laughs) gosh, that's a broad question (laughs), I wouldn't know where to start
5  really…
6
7  DB: it's your choice
8
9  P2: Erm, (laughs), I think it was erm, a valuable experience - whiter consuming
10  experience Barber, for that kind of week that it was in, it was quite Erm, taxing I think
11  maybe is the word…
12
13  DB: mm hm
14
15  P2: both probably physically and mentally it was slightly….erm, that it's Erm, it's
16  taxing to the point that I'm not sure how much was processed in that time and, I was
17  quite reassured by the possibility that processing continues after that (laughs). Yeah.
18
19  DB: yeah
20
21  P2: a very rich week (laughs)…
22
23  DB: when you think about what comes to mind in terms of your experience of the
24  group relations conference?
P2: I think the first kind of thought was the number of people (laughs), Erm, the large
number of adults in a room, erm, just to the image of arm, when we were all gathered
together in the lecture hall upstairs, erm, and the intensity of that kind of atmosphere.
Erm, and I think that was the one kind of dimension of the kind of, the size of it
perhaps erm, and the the kind of other dimen... the second thing that comes to mind,
I don't know which comes first, but the second thing that comes to mind is (laughs), is
the erm, the kind of personal intensity at the ends of these days when we had these
kind of review and application groups. And yeah, so those kind of two...

DB: we take those in turn? Talk to me about the size...

P2: Erm, I couldn't tell you about the size, I guess it must have been about 70
(laughs) people also about a dozen facilitators are, and different seating
arrangements. Erm, that having one conversation as a large group like that which
was I guess quite different from my experiences of those large group where there’s
all many maybe one or two people leading it and a lot of silent individuals (laughs)
but, the firm, potential for everyone to participate over the time and erm, the kind of
feeling that so many things could be said by each individual person and actually what
does end up coming out and how it... what progresses into (laughs).

DB: what was it like?

P2: Erm, (pause), because it happened on a few occasions, I think the experiences
were really, er, ranging, so you had, erm, moments of just kind of being overwhelmed
by the intensity of it, moments of boredom and irritability of being sitting, Erm, for all
those hours (laughs), Erm, a kind of, alarm, having, well not having but wanting
maybe to concentrate and be present throughout the whole process and draw as
much as you can from it. Wanting to (sighs), to experience it perhaps (laughs) and make the most of it, erm, yeah, so… quite intensive…

57  DB: yeah

59  P2: and quite variable

61  DB: you mention intensity, can you help me to get a sense of what you're thinking there?

64  P2: I guess I'm thinking (pause) if I felt that I had such wide range of emotions over this. Multiply that by 70, and put them all in a room together, and I think the atmosphere holds it, and carries it, and picks it up and it's, it's there (laughs) and your kind of sitting in it (laughs)

69  DB: (laughs)

71  P2: so, erm, deciding, you know, how much to let in and how much to let out and how much to you know, managing your boundaries I guess and erm, just trying to understand a lot of the time what was being said and trying to kind of process and understand what other people were meaning by what they were saying and sometimes it going a bit over your head and sometimes being a big no irritated or aggravated by it or frustrated by it all bored by it (laughs), so yeah I think the intensity was more rollercoaster of all those experience encapsulated in this boundary of time, but repeated itself over the week (laughs) daily (laughs).

80  DB: you mentioned boundaries
P2: yeah I think deciding where you were going to, how you were going to position yourself, your level of participation, you're kind of, erm, your willingness to input and to, and to, I guess erm, get carried away by it perhaps or you're, you're kind of deciding arm, deciding your level of interest in it as well, and, erm, keeping it real (laughs), kind of almost forcing it to sit with you in a way that feels comfortable. Because, erm, I guess I'm assuming different people adopting different to different levels and to different arm, extents. And it's deciding wh, my opinion, you know, working out perhaps my opinion my stance and my… yeah (laughs)

DB: what did you mean ‘keeping it real’?

P2: erm, I guess there were moments where things got quite, erm, perhaps abstract or I felt that the detail of thin… of things that were discussed by this whole group for example were not Erm, were all valid, but I'm kind of thinking, erm, but perhaps I, I, and this is deciding from me how much attention to pay to all this detail and arm, which detailed to pay attention to (laughs) to which extents, arm, and, arm, I guess keeping it real to, to me and to reality and I guess trying to almost merge it in with my personal stance in my (laughs), or trying to make that fitting. Erm, yeah I think (laughs), the abstractness in my language now is reflecting (laughs) how these conversations worked out at times from me. Yeah, I think that was kind of reflects my experience really.

DB: and you talked about sitting with?

P2: yeah, mmm, so (pause), it feels a bit repetitive, but that, I think saying that, arm, so say, if there was a discussion about an unconscious process, and kind of me deciding how important I felt that is, and Erm, and how real that is to me. With my life, in my kind of perspective and attitude, so arm, yeah…
DB: could you say a bit more about that?

P2: so, erm, (pause), ok, so, I'm going to make it a concrete example now, I think
that just bring it back down. Erm, so say, say if something was raised about kind of
rivalry in-between individuals, and erm, you know hierarchies, er, but say a personal
rivalry, and kind of, personal attacks that were potentially, there were potential
feelings of. Erm, maybe me deciding, erm, okay that exists but if I had that feeling,
how much attention do I want to pay to it, I want to keep it in perspective, I want to
keep it, erm, (pause) I want to make the choice, t… For example to stay in control
(laughs) to make the choice of, erm, how much attention I'm going to pay to that
anger of that person and erm, (pause) managing it, I guess…

DB: you mentioned control?

P2: yeah, because I felt that (pause), erm, there is an element of, see, there was a
kind of, there were times where I felt I could get carried away in the process and,
erm, often it's very easy to just go with the flow of it all and I wanted to make sure
that I'm, was always choosing to do that and it was always a choice and it feels a bit
controlling, but I think it's a sense of keeping your boundaries and keeping your
sense of, keeping your feet on the ground, and erm, making sure that I'm not blindly
ta… Being taken up with a current of a thought. Erm, and that I'm actually making a
choice, at times, it was staying in control of (pause), of, erm, (laughs), staying in
control of, erm, how much one might let these feelings affected me and my being.
Yeah. (Pause). Mmm. I've lost myself a bit too be honest.
DB: that's okay, erm, just going to kind of offer that question again, and it, it's any thoughts, erm, from your point of view, in terms of that experience of attending a group relations conference, what stood out to you from the experience?
P2: well I think what stood out was the erm, the awareness it raised in myself because I think there were lots of areas that I was unaware of and I have had glimpses towards that were made quite explicit over the week and, erm, and it was, it was kind of food for thought for the, so, I think there was erm, (pause), it felt like an awareness raising week. Erm, (unintelligible), and that continues (laughs) and I'm trying to kind of think about it... I've noticed it come to mind in, in situations, erm, personal situations, erm, I'm thinking because I spend more time at the moment in personal situations than I do in what feels like professional, sort of work placements situations, so, erm, facts, facts wearer feel the processing's happening (laughs).

DB: it's very much your choice, erm, as to what you would be happy to share, erm, I'm interested in what you say about that self-awareness, that personal awareness that you might have experienced during the conference. Any thoughts on that you would be happy to share on that front?
P2: Erm, yeah, I think, erm, just so kind of aware of the, one of the early kind of real... erm, earliest things that I probably felt, it hel... Increase my awareness of, was my kind of positioning in groups so, over the course of the conference were in different size groups, erm for example when the whole conference was together that I've spoken about, And then over the course of the day we were in smaller groups of may be six, from six or eight, up to erm, their anxieties (laughs) way up to 30 or something in, erm, but I guess in the smaller groups, erm, and it was in these kind of review and application sessions at the end where this was becoming explicit, because, erm, there was feedback, erm, other people would comment on how they'd observed me,
the conference for example, and that's quite a direct way of, you know, making things quite explicit.

DB: yep

P2: so for example, erm, in our small group, the, I, I've forgotten the names of them, but the small group that we had every day, erm, I was described as, erm, I think I was described as, someone who wouldn't take a side, but, sitting on the fence perhaps chorus, as part of a chorus when there was this kind of conflicting situation in in the group, erm, in with almost affirmed something about me that I already knew but it actually, erm, made me even more aware of it. Erm, and…

DB: what's your thoughts on that?

P2: Erm, it's funny because initially it felt like a bit of an accusation of, yeah, you need to state your opinion or take a side, erm, when there's a conflict, erm, and then it made me think, well actually, one of the reasons I think I'm drawn to the profession I am is this, erm, is because of this mediation role and, erm, the kind of sense of neutrality that I feel I already carry (laughs) in a lot of situations, it kind of, it made, made more sense to me why I chose the career I did. Erm, on the other hand it made me think well actually perhaps I need to, erm, work more at forming an opinion because I know there are oftentimes when I sit on the fence when I kind of need to, I need to, take a side, and follow it through and, and, erm, sometimes it takes me longer to do that (laughs), but, erm, what else? Yeah, so I think those two aspects…

DB: thank you, any other reflections about that experience of attending a group relations conference?
P2: (laughs) Erm, (pause), I'm trying to think what next (laughs), erm, I think it's started me on a journey of understanding simply groups a bit more in something I've always slightly avoided, been a bit overwhelmed by the complexity of them. So, erm, it kind of forced me to think about it in this kind of managed way and, erm, I think it's got the ball rolling in in that sense, or example, erm, when for example in groups which person, what person, who holds what in a group so someone might be carrying the anger in a group, someone might be carrying the upset in a group, someone might be erm, yeah, who holds what in a group, erm, and where the conflict lies, at this, this, conclusion (laughs), I quote, that seems to be there has to be conflict somewhere in a group and in an, which was quite a revelation to me, perhaps, that, erm, if you don't see the conflict, then you need to, then you're not seeing it, it has to be somewhere (laughs), and, erm ...

DB: what do you think about that?

P2: Erm, I think it shattered my idealisations a little bit, but I think it, erm, when I start to think about it, reflecting on all kinds of groups that I've been in, I was quite, it's quite easy to identify the conflict in every single group that I've (laughs), that comes to mind, so it was proving itself very quickly with each of my reflections, erm, of the kind of issues such as, erm, erm, hierarchies and leaderships and domination and, er, (laughs), you know in, erm, again the kind of things that I felt were considered during the week when I, whenever I took it back and linked it to a system that I'd worked in, erm, I was starting to identify those same patterns, those same kind of maybe not patterns but realities which, erm, I feel are almost inevitable in groups now, (laughs), erm, so it's started raising a bit of my awareness of how (pause), how these things kind of established groups and where, that, they're there, (laughs), and start looking for them in a way, so, erm, that was kind of group level, systems level thinking...
DB: yeah, and that was kind of something that you thought less about previously?

P2: Yeah, I think, erm, for a kind of academically, I've avoided all kind of group psychology in my studies, I've just, I don't know if I've not been interested but, I've almost had a quite a negative reaction towards it, I think I've always found it a bit complicated and overwhelming (laughs), erm, so, erm, yeah and I found that this was a way to kind of get me to think about it by attending the conference, it forced me to think about it, or it almost, you're kind of sat in an environment where everyone else was thinking about it, so (laughs) erm, it, it, yeah, it, it work in that way (pause), maybe I've, I have been a bit blind to it, not aware of it, not wanting really to be aware of it kind of, maybe a bit egocentric and kind of wanting to focus on my work and my, or myself and, erm, just not really thinking about the system very much, which is, erm, which fits in with a kind of a tendency that I, I, became aware of my kind of attention t...to detail, which came about before the conference and, and my kind of wanting to start thinking of things in a more birds-eye view in a kind of the way perhaps managers see, you know in a more holistic perspective and so it was a really good exercise for doing that, erm, for me.

DB: what was it that was good about that?

P2: Erm, (pause), good about?

DB: it was a good exercise, you say to be able to perhaps notice some of those, the birds-eye view you mentioned as part of that. Just wondered what that, what that was like, sort of, from your point of view, that awareness?
P2: Yeah, it felt, because of the kind of (laughs) the number of people that were involved, it almost felt, like its something, it's perhaps like I, might call it a skill that I don't naturally do. And it's almost like, you were kind of, your hands were held and you were being pulled up to help see things, because people were making things explicit.

DB: yeah

P2: people were naming thing that were there that I wouldn't pick up myself…

DB: and how did you find that?

P2: Erm, (pause) erm, I found it, I found it, interesting, I felt like I was learning a lot, er, I felt that there were times when I didn't understand it and I felt a bit, erm, like I wasn't grasping everything, erm, (pause), erm, but it felt that it was a bit of an eye-opener really, yeah, quite why opening, it's like, it's like a way of being taught that (laughs) doesn't doesn't come from, well it comes from within but it, it's like you're very supported in this realisations, erm, because it's spelled out to you, it's spelled out to you.

DB: how did that happen?

P2: Erm, (pause) I guess it's the naming of things, the continuous discussion and naming of, erm, things that I would see is implicit, making them explicit.

DB: ok. Could you think of an example?
P2: yeah, so for example, erm, (pause / laugh) class (?) example, one of the kind of
tasks ended up in a group with, there was, a dozen women and one man who
became the leader of the group partly because he kind of initiated the formation of
this group, and, erm, erm, so was a group will kind of busy trying to get on with this
stuck, a-a, with this task and the group got stuck at this issue of leadership, why
is this man leaping group and how did that get decided and, erm, do we all want
this? Erm, and so the group was stuck in this position for a while, erm, a facilitator
was invited in to help think about it and, erm, in a quite perhaps unusually directed
way they said something along the lines of, erm, this, er, all these women are
attacking the male leader, erm, because they want to be leaders and it's a way of
dealing with the competition amongst themself as women and taking it out on this
male (laughs), erm, so that's something that I wouldn't of even thought about before,
erm, and it was something that was named, erm, and it kind of proved itself in a way,
erm, (pause)

DB: how so?

P2: well, yeah, but I'm not sure about that actually. I stopped because I almost not
sure if I believe what I just said, erm, perhaps it was a bit, it was, so it was quite
readily accepted by everyone, erm, and maybe not by me initially, I wasn't sure
whether I like this theory (laughs) or whether, erm, that I kind of just went with it, erm,
and it was something that stuck in my mind some reason and I started trying to think
of other situations, well how's that happen before? And I kind of thought of instances
in my personal life where I felt that actually that has happened and that sounds like
quite a valid explanation for it (laughs) and I thought well okay, maybe that is true
(laughs).

DB: maybe what's true?
P2: well this pro, well this potential for when there is a system with lots of women and one man, that, or more women than men (laughs), then the women, erm, and where there seems to be like kind an attack on the, on the current leader. Although there were lots of other potential reasons for attacking a leader in any kind of system, or, or projecting (laughs), things onto them, erm, that one of… part of it might be, erm, women managing competition amongst themselves.

DB: ok, what’s your reflections on that?

P2: (laughs)

DB: sort of a hypothesis?

P2: (laughs) erm, I think, I think, it feels like part of an explanation, it doesn't feel like all of it, there's lots of other things to consider, erm, and I guess I wouldn't… I don't know if any of what feels like conclusions that came from the week I wouldn't say that any of them a hard facts it's just a hypothesis about a situation, erm, that kind of reflects a bit of what I was trying to say about deciding how much weighting to put things that come up so maybe deciding that whether that's going to take up 90% of my thinking and hypothesis or whether that's just going to take 10%, 10% of it. Yeah and deciding how much to allow, I suppose to allow it to take in a way (pause), which now just, you know, links into just things we've been taught about yesterday about baking hypotheses and not marrying them (laughs) and staying curious and staying neutral… It's starting to weave in directly to course taught elements.

DB: okay I think we've spoken to some extent about this this question, but I'm going to ask it, and it is the question of, is there anything that you'd be happy to talk about
that you have noticed during the group relations conference in terms of learning
about yourself?

P2: Erm, yeah, erm, so I mentioned earlier, kind of my role in groups, erm, I could
add to that kind of another thing that was made aware of was that in small groups I'm
a lot more, perhaps, verbal and vocal and quite an active vocal.

DB: mm hm

P2: erm, I would say I am always, I like to always be present and not withdrawn
things like that, erm, but that, for example in that large group I was very reluctant to
verbally make a contribution even though I felt I was participating the whole time.
And it was considered that, erm, was interesting I had a kind of mini debate going on
it was almost, sometimes it was seen as a ... Problem or as a difficulty my (unclear)
participating in a group, you know in a big group, erm, this was kind of interlinked
with me holding a small space perhaps the first day to the point of not being noticed
by others, but by the end of the week having more of a presence without making any
change (laughs) with my verbal contributions shall we say, erm, erm, to another
example of, erm, another hypothesis I guess was suggested was am I waiting
(laughs), this was quite a p... thought-provoking one, am I waiting for someone to
stumble across my needs? (laughs) in order to make a contribution or something,
because I was, erm, almost felt like I needed to justify why I hadn't made a
contribution to big group, erm, other kind of thoughts about, yeah, think made me
think about why perhaps, why is that happening, why am I different in different size
groups, and, erm, I've forgotten what your question was (laughs) but, erm...
DB: we were talking about, erm, that personal learning, what you might have learned about yourself, erm, you have spoken there about awareness of yourself in different groups perhaps you could go a little bit further with that?

P2: yep, yeah, I was just starting (laughs), so I was, erm, so another kind of ... So it was awareness of, erm, maybe not awareness but it was perhaps, er, I was offered suggestions of, that, that provoked thinking in me on why I take up different positions and what might one day make me have a kind of small presence the next day, erm, (pause), what might provoke me to have a bigger presence in groups, erm, there were other kind of conversations about erm, perhaps I didn't feel like I had something valuable to contribute at that time, erm, again that was seen as, quite a (pause), , erm, (pause), it was seen as something quite negative, erm, and, I wasn't sure whether I agreed with that (laughs), er, and other incidents of, I kind of suggested another reason that I felt that if, if I was struck by something perhaps more then I would then respond verbally and that was when the kind of justification of well maybe it sounds like you're waiting for someone to stumble across your needs...

DB: how did you make sense of that one?

P2: well I didn't agree with it at first, I felt I had quite the kind of defensive reaction to it initially, erm, (pause), but then I kind of relaxed to it and considered it, erm, I think I felt... I felt like I opened my mind to it but I think I then ended up coming back to thinking no I don't think that's what I was doing, but, but it, it, probably struck a chord because ... I think I've done that, in other situations, erm, I didn't, it didn't feel very relevant to the group, but I thin... but I think, erm, there was an element of truth to it, erm, perhaps in other situations, so for example, erm, I might not always make a complaint about something that I dislike, erm, and I will perhaps wait for a situation to arise where there's a bit of an opening for me to raise it, so there was no kind of
choice to... So I accepted it kind of that form perhaps, but not in that kind of immediate initial form it was presented in. Erm...

DB: any other thoughts in terms of personal learning about yourself to read the conference?

P2: Erm, yeah I think there was … It's hard to summarise, (laughs) I feel like I've got to summarise all of my learning now, but I think the points that are coming to mind perhaps other ones that have been most pertinent.

DB: yeah

P2: and so for example, er, (pause) erm, the men, the situation I mentioned earlier about these women (unclear) against themselves and attacking a male, I actually felt like I noticed myself doing it (laughs), which was one of the kind of examples of proving it right, so that was in my family, in a family system, erm, for me I kind of identified situations in the past where there was, erm, what felt like a repetition of that, which was quite, erm, a revelation perhaps, a more, erm, yeah so that raised by awareness to it. There was another (pause), kind of, er, what felt like a learning point was, erm, (pause) I don't know how to put this, something to do with recognising anger in myself (laughs) and accepting it. And, erm, expressing it, erm, (pause), in an interesting way it kind of came up, so, it, it came up, in a conversation right towards the end of the conference in this kind of what you'd think might the wrapping up session or, erm, … and it was, it was, some kind of anger named not by myself but by others, so it was kind of, er, a sense of they are but seeing it in me perhaps and from me not naming it, but it being named for me

DB: right
P2: and, and then it actually coming out in a very strange way (laughs). Over the next 
week and I had like three or four consecutive dreams about being really angry 
(laughs) with people, so that was quite funny (laughs), erm, and then I kind of 
realised that that's kind of worms, erm, and, And that's something that's definitely, so 
it's an awareness of, erm, (unclear), not just emotions that I carry but, erm, how I 
manage them or not (laughs), erm, but I think that's kind of the journey that is 
continuing.

DB: yet, your choice again, erm, I'm just interested in any other thoughts you might 
have about the the experiences subsequent to it coming up in the conference, any 
reflections at all?

P2: Erm, (pause), yeah, so I could say, erm, (pause), it was, it was quite interesting 
how it came about, so kind of at the end of the conference we were asked to think 
about our professional roles, our professional situations and think about an issue that 
was bothering us that we would take back and deal with immediately (laughs), as 
soon as we got back. Erm, I kin… I raised a, erm, what I felt was a preoccupation of 
mine, erm, and apparently just that I raised it as a preoccupation and not as a 
problem was an issue (laughs), because, it was suggested that perhaps I don't, erm, 
... (breathes out) I don't qualify things is a problem when they ought to be named as 
problem (laughs), but perhaps I didn't have, erm, some kind of (pause), erm, 
(pause), some kind of (pause), inability to ... Think I have again something worse, 
erm, acting on (laughs), erm, so anyway, so I came, I presented, this, erm, 
preoccupation as we were asked about and, erm, er, I guess in a way it was, it 
was a space for it to be thought about under the people's interpretations of it, so kind 
of, come in, erm, and it was quite...
P2: yeah it was quite (pause), it felt quite insightful because people in the group were naming things but perhaps I hadn't named before like I mentioned earlier kind of certain emotions that perhaps I didn't recognise with their or I was aware that they were there but not, erm, naming them for recognising them or acting on them. Er, and (pause), yeah it was interesting because I realised afterwards that the reas... well my hypothesis of why it was preoccupying me was related to kind of a recent family circumstance and, erm, but that wasn't shared in that kind of forum because it was, you know, this is a professional (laughs) issue, erm, so I suspect people were wondering where it was all coming from, you know, where, where, what is the route, what is behind this, but, erm, and it was kind of a personal issue manifesting itself? In my preoccupation in this professional issue. I just kind of, erm, make it a bit more concrete, it was in thinking about me within the group of trainees within the erm, within us a, a group so my, not my role... But it, it started, started me thinking about us as a group, of trainees, and how, and our, erm, group relations, which, you know, are partly addressed, in our fortnightly experiential groups (laughs), when they happen, erm, so it kind of made links for me, erm...

DB: what links did you make?

P2: (pause) I guess, the links that my preoccupation in this group context of that I'm in now with my colleagues, erm, I, I was linking with my personal, erm, kind of situation at the time, erm, and they were kind of (pause), erm, it was almost reflecting my personal circumstance, so the, erm, inseparability (laughs), of professional and personal, erm, (pause), I guess ... other links? I gu... yeah, it just, it made me think about us as a group of trainees, our relationships, our, our own group relations, which makes (unclear) think about that, so the conference linked to, like current
system (laughs). And the personal element, but obviously, that feeds in, that links to both of those things. (Laughs) imagine this venn diagram of three (laughs), overlapping… I'm a [describes previous work role], so (laughs), all used to be… I like venn diagrams (laughs).

DB: (laughs)

P2: (laughs)

DB: just wondering if we could circle back for any other thoughts you might have, we've mentioned gender as part of what it feels like there’s considered, erm, in some of your group relations conference, erm, any other reflections from your point of view in terms of that?

P2: on gender…

DB: on how gender came into, the kind of experience, and any thoughts you might have on that front?

P2: Erm, now I think the general gender proportions in the conference weren't that far off those in educational psychology time circles, which seems to be dominated by women, and few men, erm, erm, so I guess I, I felt like I made a bit of a link in thinking, erm, in thinking about men’s status in the system a lot. Especially when they are on their own (laughs), h… If they were, if they are the only male for example in the service and doing a placement in now, there's only one male in the whole educational psychology service, so it's, it's, kind of making me think I wonder if this is happening, erm, there is well, it's kind of my experience but this one group, actually this one smaller group which had a single mailing it if, if any of its, erm, if
any, erm, if there are any similarities there, erm, (pause), erm, I, I struggle to relate it
to previous experiences because I actually felt I worked in more male dominated,
erm, professional contexts, erm, (pause), it's, in terms of my group of trainees, we
are all women, erm, and I almost felt slightly glad (laughs), that I 's, don't have to do
that then (laughs), erm, but I'm sure I don't think that's valid (unclear), it's just a
fantasy, an ideal, erm... I don't know I guess it...

DB: don't have to deal with what?

P2: Erm, (laughs) an attack of the single male (laughs) that I could, that could have
been (pause), but, erm... Yeah I, I think I'm, I'm pretty certain that other things raised
instead of, in place of, so, it's never less or more is it, it's just different, erm, but I
guess I haven't really thought about it (unclear)

DB: okay, we're coming towards, erm, the close of this conversation, but I just want
to offer any last chance, is there anything that we haven't mentioned, that hasn't
come up that might be helpful just a share, all of interest from your point of view to
share in relation to the group's relations conference?

P2: (pause), mmm,

DB: there doesn't have to be

P2: yeah I guess, erm, a th, th, I guess wh, another thought which sometimes
creeps back (laughs) is, erm, during the conference where there were these tasks,
erm, although was tasks set for the whole conference to divide themselves up into
groups, smaller groups, and erm, how that was managed each time and, erm
(pause), erm, how erm, again, what position I talk, erm, with er, how I kind of, er,
coped with that perhaps, erm, interestingly for example I was almost, erm, what's the
word? Erm, I don't know what the word is, but kind of stuck or frozen by this, erm,
process and to the point of not been able to do anything about it and again, s', erm,
weighting (laughs) for it to happen to me rather than being an active participant in the
protest... Because a sense of, erm, not really knowing where to go, what to do with
it, er, being in... Incapacitated, maybe that was the word I was thinking of, by
something that feels quite overwhelming, erm, so an awareness of that happening to
me, erm, in personal life as well, kind of realisation that if the situation is, is, feels too
overwhelming, I would just kind of freeze (laughs), just let, let, let things organise
themselves and I will slot in (laughs) somewhere at the end. Er, and then, erm, ...

DB: what was an experience like, at the conference?

P2: Erm, (pause), mm, it was interesting 'cause it was an experience that... So this
small group that formed from that first time, for example was a group that we stayed
with touring the whole week and it was not forgotten about. It kept coming up. Erm, it
kept, erm, it was seen to affect our relationship as a group, kind of the sense that
some of us were there by default and not by choice, hence to small groups ended up
coming together, erm, and, erm, and then a... Perhaps a progress onto the next day
when this was asked of us again, but in a slightly different way. Again what role did I
take? I just stopped and waited and watched (laughs) and saw what was happening
before deciding when to move and what to do, erm, and my tendency in the next two
(laughs) days to do the same and wait till quite close to the end. Erm, again
reflecting, erm, my tendency to kind of leave things quite late, watch and wait and not
rush into decisions and work up to deadlines or, erm, my surname being 'w', so being
quite comfortable with being at the end of a process (laughs), all being one of the
people to enter (laughs) active participation (laughs), erm, and, erm, and again a little
bit of a kind of awareness of how I was, when I was more active in my participation,
how I was making those choices, what I was drawn to, what, what perhaps were kind
do of people I was drawn to, or, what kind of groups I was drawn to, and which ones I
was avoiding and...

DB: what did you notice in that sense?

P2: so, erm, (pause) I haven't really thought about that very much since, but, er,
remember kind of noticing, t, certain types of personalities that I didn't feel that
comfortable with and, erm, again a reflection in my tendency to avoid a lot of things
that I don't like all people that I don't warm to perhaps. Erm, I noticing kind of the
group that was quite, erm, maybe fiery, passionate and slightly, erm, an avoiding that
group a bit. Which is quite interesting 'cause I have this kind of background other
kind of fiery [describes ethnicity] family (laughs) and the complete opposite
[describes ethnicity] family, so I'd have this (laughs) lifelong dilemma (laughs) of
where I sit (laughs) and, erm, dipping into each one, but, erm, an interesting thought
about avoiding that kind of dominating perhaps stronger fiery personality and
warming more towards calmer individuals. So personal preferences and avoidance of
conflict (laughs). Yeah, er...

DB: okay, am, I'm just going to give your last chance for any further reflections on
that thought or already others before we finish...

P2: Erm, (pause), I don't know, I think, I felt like I've made a lot of the pertinent
points, I feel like there are lots more, erm, and probably more to come, erm, I
(unclear) I feel like I've, erm, addressed a lot of the bigger things or maybe just the
things that are currently now with me, erm, after, since the conference which feels
like quite a while ago now actually, erm, yeah, so… (Laughs)
DB: okay, I'm going to stop there, we got to stop somewhere, so I'm going to stop recording.
Initial interview: participant 3

DB: okay thank you, my first question, is to ask you if you could tell me about your experience of attending the group relations conference?

P3: okay, I am, so as you know it's part of the course, so it wasn't something that I chose to do initially, and I think my experience of it started from when we first began in September. From hearing lots of conversations about it, but never really gaining an insight into what it actually was and why we had to do it and I think from the second year is the third year it was always kind of address with kind of a smug look and a bit of a giggle so that kind of left me feeling with just a bit, bit I think a bit of apprehension as to what it was and why we had to do it. I am, there was no information around it, erm, and I think initially what I thought it was more like a teambuilding, Erm, week that which spend with the 10 of us growing together as a team. Erm, but from the conversations that we picked up along the way it just seemed that it wasn't that sort of thing at all. Erm, then we heard various horror stories about, erm, being in smaller groups and what members of staff would say to individuals, erm, so that added to the anxiety leading up to it. Erm, and then we partook in the experiential groups and we kind of felt as a team that maybe group relations would be similar to the kind of experiential group that we were having. Erm, so I think that as time went on leading up to the actual conference I kind of was more at ease about the whole process. Erm, and I think I kind of had an interest in what it would be, err, and always remembering that I had control over my responses to the event or how I acted within the event, something that was being done to me. Erm, so I think coming into the actual week, I think I felt safe because there were 10 of us there. So I think if I was on my own I think I'd feel a bit differently, but because I was within my group I felt safe to be there and, oh, I think the first morning when it began and there was just a complete group of silence I felt okay because I was used about
from starting the experiential groups we have. So I didn't feel, I am, as anxious first of all but then I heard different peoples comments because, erm, in the conference different people speak out and, I am, quite a few of, erm, the other participants were describing their anxiety and then having physical reactions to, erm, what was happening within the group and I noticed that I was starting to have physical reactions as well. Erm, so I was aware of them (unclear) I was monitoring myself, erm, and I think the first one I had was my heart started beating really quickly and I remember looking down and I could see my pop moving so quickly and I thought why am I … Why is this happening to me, why am I breathing like this? And I literally, in my mind I was thinking I'm about to have a heart attack but there was no reason why. Erm, and so I was thinking is it other people's anxiety that I'm picking up on, erm, because I didn't feel like in my mind, I didn't feel you know, uneasy all concerned, but physically I was reacting like that. Erm, and so that was one of the occasions where I thought, okay there's something that is happening here which is quite unconscious but I'm reacting, erm, quite physically, erm, and this is all in the first day. So…

DB: how did you make sense of that reaction?

P3: oh, I took it as in, erm, because we'd been learning about counter transference and all this other stuff, I was thinking, I took it as in other people's anxiety was, erm, because there's was so intense, I was feeling that as well, because I mean, one of the women spoke about nearly having a panic attack and she felt like she needed to leave the room. Erm, and so I think because of the distress that was being articulated from around the room I think a part of me that, you know, is connected with other people was reacting as well. Erm, but it was an experience, but I think it was more like an out of body experience because I was watching myself reacting in that way? Erm, and I wasn't scared that I was reacting in that way, but I was noticing it. Erm, and so it was, it was quite odd. Erm, but I also remember that a couple of days, I
think it might have been the next day, erm, in the group that everyone was speaking
and I have something to say, erm, my heart was beating again because I wanted to
say something. Erm, and then I said it, and after I've said it my hands were shaking
completely and I, I was just looking at my hands and they were completely just
shaking and I thought this is interesting, cus all I've done is expressed something I
wanted to say, but physically I'm reacting again. Erm, and it wasn't a fear, or anything
but I didn't, I don't know what it was physically but I saw that mismatch between what
I was thinking and what I was feeling. Erm, and just I think, I think I made notes about
these experiences because when I went into the group I thought I very much want to
experience this conference and be aware of all the different things that I'm going
through and different things I'm learning so I can get the most out of it rather than it
just being something that I have to do is torture. So I wrote up, erm, those physical
experiences and what was happening around the time just so I could look and see,
cus, how my, may then apply it to then when I'm working outside of the group. Erm,
er, other things that happened throughout the week…

DB: yeah

P3: so I, I got to experience quite a few different types of groups, erm, during the
week and I think one of the things that stood out to me was when, erm, we had to
choose groups and we had to find a room that was downstairs, we were on the top
floor of the building, we all had to go downstairs erm, but the way they got us to
choose groups was quite, erm, was left to us to decide and there were certain
number of rooms so that to be technically a certain number of groups and I was in
the group that was left, erm … Well I hadn't gone for the group, we'd still a number,
there was a number of us that was still upstairs deciding whether we wanted to be
together and by the time we got downstairs realise weren't any rooms left. Erm, and
that happened to be another group that was in the same position as us, so we joined
together and there was a group of us, 15 or 17 of us? Erm, without a room and then somehow we decided that we didn't want to be split up we wanted to stay together, so we went downstairs and we said, well we're a large group to the other groups, we need a room so we have some groups with only like five people taking up a whole room so we felt as if well they should move, um, you know, and I think the response that came back to us was that we'd have to split up if we wanted to be in part of a group and we refused. As, as, a team we said no we wanted to stay together and we found an empty room which wasn't part of the conference and we stayed there. Erm, but then the staff that were overseeing us told us that we can't stay there because we are not recognised as part of the system also from [names specific location] I started thinking about systems outside in society and how even when there is a group together if it's not recognised as part of the system you don't get the benefits that the system offers. So, because we were recognised and in a room we didn't have a voice in a sense, so I was thinking, you know to different cultures may be that don't have a voice, where they very much our group but because society is not recognised it disables, erm, them so I think I was, I kept thinking inside and outside the conference, erm, of the things that I was going through, erm, so that was an interesting experience. Erm, but just if we rewind a little bit, when we were choosing that group there was a group that was there that was very active, erm, and very outspoken in the beginning and they spoke to the group, said we don't need to spend all this time wasting time thinking about things, we just need to do certain things. So they formed a group quite quickly and left. Erm, but that resulted in the rest of the conference really looking, like looking down upon them and feeling quite angry towards that group because we thought it was quite selfish that, and it was interesting though because the majority of the people in the room that will quite vocal at the same way. But this group, was a group that didn't think about anybody else and just left. Erm, maybe we projected part of our wanting to do that into them and hated them for it, but that's how it happened. Erm, so within my group that was
displaced we were known as the refugees by the other groups, er, but we didn't
think of ourselves like that, we thought of ourselves is quite a solid group. We
happened to be the largest group in the conference so we thought of ourselves is
quite powerful. Erm, so I started thinking about gang culture as well and d'you know
what it means for you, because I think some of the suggestions that we came up with
was how we would take over a room because we had the opportunity to invite other
groups two meetings in the main conference hall. So we had ideas that we would
invite them to a meeting in takeover the room, because it was a territory. So we
likened it to gang culture and trying to find that space and the extent to which you'd
go to find a space to settle. Erm, and I was interested because I was the one that
came up with that suggestion and it's not technically how one would think but in that
situation I thought well we need to do something now, it doesn't matter about other
people, we need to find a space, let's displace them and so it was in... I was
watching how I was reacting and for kind of that playfulness came out of me but also
w'ch... It's quite, er, aggressive in a sense as well. Erm, so I was interested to see
how I was behaving in that situation, er, eventually ar, another group said that we
could join them, er, before we join them with "vocal group, we were discussing lots
of things about group and how it would look like in society outside. But what I noticed
when we join the other group was that we lost our voice completely, er, there was a
lot of confusion in that group wants with joined and no decisions were made from the
other group or for us and we thought about how almost when you're forced to
conform to something how you can lose your identity because I felt like in that
moment that we didn't have our identity as a group any more, er, we joined this
other one because they kind of were really indecisive, we'd become part of that, er, so we didn't, I didn't like it personally I felt that we should have stayed outside the
system because we got much, we have a much richer experience being outside the
system, in terms of discussions and conversations than we did as part of it. So and
we weren't functional as part of the system so I thought that was quite interesting to
think about and to see. Erm, and then the following day, or I don't know if you want to
say anything about that? Ask anything about that (laughs)

DB: yeah, erm, he said a few moments ago, erm, that you noticed yourself making
perhaps some suggestions that was typical for you.
P3: mm, yeah

DB: could you say a bit more about that?
P3: yeah, I think like, because I'm someone who likes to go by the rules and you
know, something, especially social rules or may be like probably, like the local I try to
abide by the law, so in terms of that group my suggestion was, well let's be
deceptive, let's tr, like lure out of their home take it over because we need a place so,
erm, but it almost felt like again to me, as in the guide slotted it into that role where
this group that had been ostracised, so it was within our rights take what we
deserved. And so I think, but thinking it's very, it was almost very primitive, like I, ki,
just the response that I think, erm, be something on a movie or something, survival
technique, erm, if you like and I think that it was those survival techniques that were
being drawn out of me being in that group, because it wasn't important it was just, we
would just, you know it was a conference, but being in that experience became very
real, erm, and survival meant being part of the system. So my suggestion was well
we do what it takes to get to regardless of what it meant for other people so…

DB: what was it like?
P3: being on the outside?
DB: mm

P3: erm, wh, w, when I was on the outside in that group, erm, it was annoying because we were pitied by the other groups, we were looked at as refugees and oh we're sorry you didn't have a place. And, but we didn't feel like that, erm, and so that's why I think it was a bit frustrated because we had our identity, we kind of knew who we were, but other people looked down on us and sorrow and pity, so it felt like people had misunderstood us, erm, and we had no way to communicate that because how it looked at was that we were refugees and displaced and not part of the system, just on the outside, erm, even if we didn't feel that way and we tried to communicate that but it wasn't heard at all. Erm, but from that experience I think the following day we got to choose groups again and I decided that I wanted to join the group that was hated, because I decided I wanted to see what it was like from the inside, erm, to be a group that everyone's kind of turned their backs on, erm, because I mean when, so that group when they'd left everybody they decided to call a conference again and they'd invited all the other groups to come and meet them and I went, erm, to hear what they had to say but none of the other groups claim, so it showed that no one really wanted to converse with them. So the next day I wanted to join them to see what the experience was like from the inside even though I didn't agree with, or didn't, I felt I didn't think like them, I wanted to be a part of it, erm, and so I join their group and then I was on the outside again because what happened was when I was going around the different erm, groups to, to have meetings or conversations, because I was now identified with this particular group oftentimes the door was shut in my face. So I was on the outside again for a different reason and there were a few times when the door was shut on me from people that I was in the refugee group with. So it was almost, now it was a case of, now I'm labelled with a particular group and I'm shut off from them, not with pity, but almost with, erm, I don't know what word to use really, th, it was being shut off in a different way, erm, so then
I started thinking about how, I started thinking about cultural because that was a conversation that came up quite a bit, so I started thinking about, erm, belonging to a culture and how it can be perceived by other cultures when all you see is just a culture, because all they saw was me part of that particular group. So didn't see me for who I was and for the experiences that I'd had the day before with them. They saw me as part of that group so there was a closed door and so I was thinking about how then me going into work, what do people see and what closes a door when I'm presented to them and how it stops with, it stops just that like kind of the face value rather than, erm, experiences or qualifications or personality character and those type things, erm, ... Yeah, so that was my, that was kind of, so experiencing being on the outside was something that was one of the main things that I took from the conference. Erm, and just about identity as well, I think in terms of identity, one experience that I took away that meant a lot to me was, erm, there was, there was a training group there which were people that'd been to the conference before as participants and they wanted to take more of an active role in the leadership of the conference, erm, and one of the days, I mean they were just dispersed around the group and they took part just like the rest of us, but we knew that they were there, erm, and they did cause quite a few, quite a few questions so a one point, the s’, members of the group wanted them to identify themselves and I remember I stood up and I said well why do they need to identify themselves, what does it mean to us for them to do that? And they didn't identify themselves after that. But, towards the end of the conference they did a presentation about themselves and the way they introduced it was they'd all written statement about themselves, fully in the middle, and someone else had read out their statement. So what it was, so for example, I'm reading out who you are will somebody else but you never know, knew, who was who. Erm, so we still didn't know, you know, whose statement was whose. And then, erm, one man, one of the training group members said that he, his having been read out, so I'm assuming that they wrote more than two statements so they found his and
they read it out and his one said something like he was glad to be somebody again.

And I thought that was really awful because then he is government being read out, erm, so they did their presentation and I think no one really knew what was going on, I didn't really know what was going on, erm, we didn't really know who they were because they haven't identified themselves and, I think I sat there and I thought I don't know what's just happened, and I sat there feeling like a real loss of identity, like they didn't know who they were, but then almost I felt like I didn't know who I, who I was and why I was there? Erm, and I went home that day really frustrated, really like just really d, like headache, erm, questioning why am I in this conference? Like what am I doing here? Erm, and also heard the next morning that three people had gone on the wrong trains home as well, and I felt just their kind of presentation, oh what they didn't mean to be a loss of identity, but it just come across like, had really thrown a lot of us into that place as well, into that confusing state, erm, (unclear), and what I took away from that is about how easy is just to get consumed in the confusion of others and actually forget who you are in the midst of it. Or maybe it could have been I never knew, but it was highlighted to me, but it, I don't know it was one of, I think those were two things, you know being on the outside of the system and also having the concept of identity within a group were two things that are really took away, erm, and something that I think about still in my work. Like who am I as a psych... As a trainee psychologist amongst other professionals and oftentimes there's discussion about what is the unique role and I'm thinking, do I even know?

DB: yes

P3: and it was like that when I was in the group relations conference, erm, thinking they didn't seem to know, but did I know? Was what I went home that day thinking: actually what is, what is my identity here. So it, you know it just it does I think, it
highlighted things that, it brought out things that I would have liked to have questioned about myself, but I was never in a situation to do that.

DB: right

P3: Erm, yeah, so...

DB: and what was that like?, that questioning, about your own identity in the group?

P3: mm, I think, I think it's an ongoing thing really because, I mean as a first-year trainee as well you will put into another role and you while trying to work out where you fit and we've all been pla, I've been placed in a multidisciplinary team and it's about what, what is my contribution, who am I within the team?

DB: mm hm

P3: especially when the majority of the members of the team are established and they're fully qualified, so for me and think it's an ongoing process of discovering who I am in the role of an educational psychologist, as a trainee, erm, and what I bring to that individually, like my unique characteristics or insight all perspective that I bring to that role as well, erm, but I wouldn't say I'm there yet.

DB: sure, sure

P3: just, erm, I just think that the conference help to highlight how easily it is to get lost when you're not sure and when you ha, when you haven't spent time trying to define to yourself who you are and what you bring. Erm, you know, because I think most of the time I tried to explain to other people what my role is, erm, and you have,
I think you work up a blanket statement just to make it easier for everyone to
understand, but that doesn't mean that you agree with it all that it fully encompasses
what you think your role is, so…

DB: thank you. Any other reflections from your point of view in terms of what the
experience was like of attending the relations conference?

P3: not sure, I think there were lots of other, erm, things I thought about from the
experience in terms of race and gender, but they were just little ideas that kind of
would come up, through a conversation or a comment. Erm, and I think those are
things that all develop as I go along so maybe when you do the next interview I
would have thought about it more, and I'd have some thoughts on it...

DB: mm hm, is there anything at the moment that you'd like to think out loud about?

P3: erm, I don't know, I think, I don't think I engaged in thinking about those areas. I
know other people did so I was confronted with each from other people's
discussions, for example a group, erm, that was primarily made up of Black and
Asian participants, they said to the rest of the group that they had been ostracised
and no one wanted to join them because they were black and Asian. They'd labeled
it so th, that was the reason so that, I was faced with the situation like and that but I
didn't really engage in discussion all thought about that. I just saw okay that that's
your opinion but I was ca, consumed with thinking about other things like for example
how groups of forming and how I was (?) a member of a group, so I think, I don't, I
think, well I think in work generally I've had so many discussions about race and eth,
and, eth, (?) and ethnicity already, so I'm already kind of developing my own
thoughts about that, erm, so in the conference it wasn't so much something that I
focused on, erm, or chose to but I think that's because it's something I'm exploring
elsewhere as well already and I think here at the conference I wanted to explore things I hadn't be in, or wouldn't have the chance to be in, erm, just to see things from different perspectives, so, yeah, I think yeah I think just what I've mentioned before was the things that really stick out in my mind about my experience.

DB: okay, I'm just mindful that you mentioned gender as well as part of that description, were there any thoughts there?

P3: yeah, I mean they ca, it came up, erm, in the conference just from other people's discussions so I would hear different things about gender, erm, and about roles, erm, I think one thing that came up a lot in the wider group was about, erm, the mail, the white male wanting to take control of the situation, or is it that we give control to the white male. So that was discussion that came up quite a bit, erm, I think it was interesting because I think, I don't know, I think in my mind there were a lot of white males that took control but the but we don't know if they took it all we gave it to them as a group collectively. Erm, … So I don't, I didn't, I haven't really explored that really, erm, in terms of my own thinking, I know some of my other colleagues have but for me I didn't… There was a sense of, I guess security if the white male took leadership but I don't know if that would have been the same if somebody else have done as well because it just seemed that they were the only ones that did, so I am right about that same sense for security if somebody else had as well. Erm, but then I guess what compelled them to take that role or to walking into that role I don't know, so, or whether they were forced into it, so it's. something to think about but I haven't really as yet.

DB: and you mentioned those kind of themes about perhaps a sense of being an outsider? And something around identity, is that right?
DB: other any other reflections on any of those kind of themes that we talked about in terms of your experience of attending group relations that you've got any other thoughts about?

P3: erm ...

DB: there don't have to be

P3: no (laughs) I'm just trying to think, erm ... think links to identity, erm, we had small-group sessions where we had a consultant in there with us, erm, and I felt really uncomfortable, s'cus the consultant, erm, in the initial stages of the week often didn't speak at all and how I was just remembering how difficult that I found that, erm, that I wasn't getting a response back from another person, erm, and how it did make me feel quite angry and I think I became quite angry at, erm, the consultant because those that lack of respon, that lack of feedback. Erm, and then reflecting on that I then thought about how, erm, how much I look the feedback from people I am speaking to, so for example if I'm working in a school how much do I look for feedback from the adults there all working professionally you know, for example here at the Tavistock how much do I look the feedback, erm, and I think because I was met with kind of what I perceived to be a cold character if you like, erm, it, I limited myself in how much I gave. Erm, so I think thinking about being a trainee and I think, uh, because we're still learning, because I'm still learning, I sometimes offer things tentatively, erm, and look for the response, but how dangerous that is because in that situation, erm, I based all of my kind of output on what I was, or what I perceived is there being no input from somebody else. Erm, so that could come back to identity as well and the s' of knowing who I am role and what I can give. Erm, but just I think
in those moments I was aware, I think especially the first day I experience(d?), I was aware of us. I was aware of how much impact just somebody not saying anything and not giving any feedback, b, through body language or anything, how it made me feel so insecure in my role and what I was there to do. And I'm wondering whether if I... New exactly what was happening I would have felt more confident, erm, to sit there in silence or to receive that feedback. Erm, or whether it would have been the same, but I do remember that it was very uncomfortable, erm, and it made me not want to be in that place, made me not want to speak, erm, but it also, it conjured up kind of almost angry childish feelings towards the consultant for no reason, just because, erm, I felt I was being ignored, erm, but in the professional context you could be ignored or you could be, erm, attacked almost verbally, but you, I wouldn't necessarily respond in a childish way I'd(?) feel really angry at the person but I guess we, I guess we often do was well it, it I think our, you know our interactions with others especially if they're quite hostile all regressive do conjure up in us kind of feelings that not very professional and about how to manage their so, I think being in that group and being forced to stay there for the whole hour and having to manage those feelings, erm, was quite eye opening from me.

DB: in what way?

P3: because I think, I think because it, there was so much space where nothing was happening, or nothing was happening physically, erm, so we were, there was no conversation and so those feelings were there and having to keep them inside, where as if I was in a professional context, erm, there would be a focus, I could deal with the issue at hand, go (?) away and deal with my feelings but I'm not forced to stay there, there's no, erm, but there was nothing, I mean in a professional context I, at least if I get some aggression back there's some feedback, there's something that I can work with will respond to. But, I think throwing me into a place where there is no
response kind of was really uncomfortable and I stink (just think) there's no place for it to go, because I couldn't talk about it to anybody, I couldn't act on it or I couldn't, I didn't have anywhere to put it because it was all very much exposed within that circle?

DB: yeah

P3: erm, so I think it makes me think about when I do have heated conversations or discussions or if they arise in the workplace, where do I take those feelings and how do I manage them in that moment, continue at the service level with what needs to be done and then take them somewhere else. Erm, but there it was just, we were just trapped in a room basically, that's how it felt. Erm, and not being able to work with the feelings all talk about them, well I guess we could have talked about them but it wasn't, it didn't feel like a safe space to. Erm,

DB: right

P3: and I guess in a professional context it's not the right forum to talk about feelings as well, erm, in that sense. So, don't know...

DB: thank you. I think what you've spoken about links with by next question, erm, which is about any learning that you might have noticed about yourself during group relations conference. Any thoughts?

P3: Erm, I learnt that I can manage a lot better than (laughs) I thought I could, all all physical things as well, erm, and can still function professionally whilst managing what's going on internally, erm, but I think I also learned about kind of way things are placed, erm, and I s', I became aware that I would have say for example if I was
feeling angry I put it into a particular person, so I put it into the consultant or I put it into the group that didn't do what I thought they should do and I became more aware of may be placing things in the wrong places, putting things in the wrong places, erm, and I think cus, because we had a reflection time at the end of the day I was able to explore why did I feel angry towards that person, what was it conjuring up in me that made me feel, so for example, erm, with the consultant I think I was angry at him because, erm, I think he'd ignored me because I'd asked a question, but technically I should have known the answer to the question and so what his, his lack of response, it just made me feel incompetent, but, erm, but then what it highlights to me was that then I don't feel competent in general because if I was, if I did feel competent then I thought well that's just a piece of information that I don't know right now he doesn't want to explain it to me, that's fine I'll have to find out another way rather than feeling really in, insecure and then because I felt insecure I felt angry at the consultant, put it all in here, it's all his fault, with the group that walked out maybe there was a part of me that was frustrated and wanted to walk out as well but because I couldn't, erm, and they had, I put all the anger on them, so that well I'm angry at them because they left but then also seeing the response that they had from the group so everyone else is angry at them, I thought well okay this is find them so it kind of peas to bit of me, so just seeing how things can be put in the wrong places and that when you don't have time to think about it you leave them in the wrong places, erm, so I think that was something that I learned throughout the week, erm, but also when like, as I described being in the outside groups I learned about I think I saw things from a different perspective and I think, I remember having a conversation about gang culture, erm, because I work with Young people outside of professional work as well, erm, and I just saw how easy it was to turn your back against the system and feel like you've been wronged and so I think being in the one of the outside groups and seeing things from that perspective it kind of gave me understanding for how maybe gangs can feel or how, how they can operate and how things you know in the
working of a gang, erm, or just a group of young people, cos I was thinking about young people and I held them in mind, erm, and how, how quickly that can go off into a different direction so (I?) went into a different direction which was against the system, erm and and has no desire to be a part of it because the system disables, erm, you know just so seeing things from another perspective. I've never been again, I've never been kind of in a group that's been ostracised as such so if I wasn't in the conference I would never have experienced it from the inside like that, because it was so you felt, you know, everything that came with it. Erm, I think I learned a lot about the outside perspective really, you know, erm…

DB: what about yourself in that sense?

P3: yeah, I think, I think for me I think I saw that… I see, it very m, even though we were in the outgroup, I was very much secure all because I felt like I was within a larger group, so from me I think I'd always still tend to hide within the middle, erm… so I think, yeahs, I think, I, I've, I'm not left, I'm not really been on my own so I wondered what it would be like if I was on my own and I think thinking about it there is, as a sense, I think I feel a bit, not scared about it, but something apprehensive about being on my own because I came into the conference as part of a group,

DB: Yeah

P3: I was in a big group every time, even when I was on the outside I was part of a big group, erm, and so maybe I'm thinking now that technically I was okay because I was still with other people and I'm wondering how insecure I feel if I was on my own still, but it was group relations so it's all about groups anyway but it was about the individual within the context of the group but I think maybe I'm thinking now, erm, that is a psychologist I will very much beyond my own sometimes and how will I then function without having the group around me, erm, to always support or even just be
on the same wavelength, erm, so that's something to think about I think. Erm, I don't
know what other things, what other things you kind of... to think about

DB: I'm interested in one of the phrases you said there about yourself as an
individual within the group. Any thoughts about that?

P3: mm, I think I had supervision aft, I had supervision after the conference and I
remember my supervisor asked me about how was I perceived by other people, erm,
or was I aware of how I was perceived, erm... And I think at certain points I was but
but other points I was so consumed with everything that was going on, I didn't really
think about how I, erm, came across and I think I can go back to different situations
and wonder now how was I received, erm, like for example when I joined the group
that I thought I didn't agree with and I thought I'd join them just to see what it was like
from the inside I said to them I joined their group and not because I agree with what
they've done but because, erm, I don't agree with it so I wanted to see from their
perspective. But I'm wondering how that would be received by, erm, how would, that
would have been received by them with someone coming in to their group, erm, to
join them but then saying to them well I don't agree with your philosophy or thinking, I
don't think like you, but, erm, I want to see what you do. If someone said that to be I
would be suspicious or I'd think well why are they here really, erm, so I'm wondering
how I was seen, I read as it turned out we seemed to get all, so maybe I was much
more like them than I thought (laughs), than I before(?), erm, I got on and since then
we've seen each other in the corridors of its bigger shared experience as such, erm,
but I think I try, I think from that and from that question that my supervisor asked me
afterwards, erm, I do try to think a bit more about how I seen from the other
perspective, because, eh, because that will then change how I k, try to come across
as well, erm, but in the conference I don't think I was, I think it was just me and here's
some think I want to say or h, this is something I want to do and played a part but not
thinking about what it meant to others that I was playing that particular role, erm,
which makes me sound a bit self consumed, but, erm, I think, I think that I probably
was in survival mode that week and it really was just about trying to cope, erm,
and I think I just did just do what I have to do to survive. Erm …

DB: what do you mean by survival?

P3: just get through the week really, I mean, because it, it was anxiety provoking
throughout the whole week, you know because we didn't know what we were doing
each day, we didn't know what to expect, I didn't know what to expect, erm, there
were a lot of times where it did seem like it was just open to interpretation and there
was a lot of silences which were left to be filled and so I think probably to avoid that
not knowing, I just thought well what do I need to do to get through it, erm, and I think
I've … Yeah…

DB: what did you notice yourself doing to get through it?

P3: erm, making sure I was involved I mean that's probably a good thing, I had to be
involved any way but just making sure I was involved and contributing, erm, I,
listening a lot like, as in not being, just being of high alert throughout the whole week,
erm, trying to make friends as well, I think that's like buying allies really just to get
through, erm, probably a lot of defensive things like insulting the consultants with the
other group members just two ally yourself with the team members, erm, which was
all, I mean, it was all just to get through just to make, I guess just to be stronger really
because if there are more people on your side you're a bit stronger. Erm, but I think it
was just getting through the week like I said, you know, it was part of som, I had to
do the cor, the conference, it wasn't an option. Erm, and all the stories but I've been
told work quite, erm, they, they did provoke a lot of anxiety, erm, so I have got in the
back of my mind, even though I went into it, thinking erm (I'm?), Okay I want to get
the best experience out of this it was very much as in, almost as if you were going to
hold your breath underwater. Just need to do it for 10 seconds. Go away, come out.
So it was like I just had to get through this week, whatever it, whatever brought, it
brought me, just had to get through it, erm, ’s just looking for Friday afternoon. So it
was very much is in just to survive that we, but experiencing gifts as well, but looking
for, towards the finish line really ... I did very much feel like every day, I did describe
it to somebody it felt like, erm, at the end of each day we’d come up, it was so, for
example being in, being in a ocean or something. At the end of each show coming up
for air but before you know it somebody is going to do again because it's the next
morning I'm just starting all over again. So it really did feel like he just had a few
seconds to grasp that there before you were underneath again, fully immersed, erm,
within this ocean of group relations and it literally felt like that, because even going to
sleep it was in your sleep, in your dreams, erm, and then you woke up and it was
allowed (?) To go in, go again so it literally was just like being dumped in the ocean
(laughs) and just coming up for air.

DB: yeah. And what's that like?

P3: it's exhausting, very exhausting and I think ... Yeah I don't think I've processed it
fully until a couple of weeks later because outside of work everything was, because it
was December, it's around Christmas time and from the there's loads of stuff going
on outside of work so I didn't get to process it until a couple of weeks later when I just
collapsed, what you ha, just done (?). Just have a bit of a rest, erm, and I, I, I spoke
in supervision about not knowing what I was running on, I felt like my tank was
empty, erm, wasn't sure what was fuelled me but I was still going, erm, but that's
what it fee, it felt like, it felt like you didn't feel like you have anything left that was
fuming but somehow you are still going through it. Erm...
P3: during the conference and then afterwards as well, but because the conference was still there, erm, I haven't had a chance to process it yet so it was still, still going through it really.

DB: in that sense of running on empty?

P3: yeah it just because it was so I mean you got ba, it finished quite late, erm, the many just about had time to go home have something to eat, go to sleep and then, but because so much that happened in today oftentimes is still thinking over things thinking what it'd be like the next day so it didn't really stop. And so you, you know, you'd fuel up for a week let's say you put some petrol in the car you got enough to get you to a certain destination, but when you don't know where you're going and you don't know happily detours you have to type you don't know if you got enough petrol for the week so, I think, by Tuesday the next week should be over because it felt really intense. Erm, and you don't have time to stock up, from, with more petrol so you just keep going. Erm, and that's how it felt, it felt as if because we didn't know where we, where our, I didn't know where I was going each day, erm, journeys took longer than I expected, and so the petrol ran out, energy, but somehow there was still enough. That's why I think I was on survival, because there was still enough to get me through but I was pretty exhausted physically and just mentally exhausted, you know (?), Yeah.

DB: okay thank you. Erm, I'm just going to ask for any other thoughts you might have in terms of personal learning about yourself during the conference?

P3: erm, that I can be a lot more assertive than I thought I could be before. Erm...
DB: how did you find that?

P3: I think because I think and also be, just being able to take a bit more, like a few more risks as well. I think within a group situation, erm, I like to listen to what's before I place myself and see what's going on, I'm not very, I'm not typically one of those, the first wants to step out speak, erm, or even initiate the direction of a discussion, I like to see where things are things out first of all. Erm, but I think in the conference I was able to take a lead, well, if I felt confident enough to do so, and I did, I did it a lot more as well and I'm wondering whether it was because I felt like I was playing a role or whether it was parts of me that actually were me coming up (?), Being having the opportunity to come out in, erm...

But taking a lot, taking a few more risks, erm, so' speaking out within the large group because I didn't know what if what I was saying was correct or if it was, erm, even what I was trying to communicate, but I still, you know, experimented with that. Erm...

DB: what did you learn through that?

P3: I think that, in terms of me professionally well (?) I learnt that I ha, I can actually be more assertive I can take m, initiate the direction of things, erm, which I don't typically do so I think, yeah, that's what I learned but I can do it so possibly I should do it a bit more often because, erm, I, what I noticed as well was that a lot of things that I had to say were listened to and were taken so it just kind of showed me that if I do take a more proactive approach within a group, erm, it can actually benefit the group, it's not necessarily that of just throwing out suggestions or ideas that I feel good but no one else does. Erm, which I may have thought before, erm, so just I
think in terms of learning about myself, that you can take risks take a more active
approach in groups, an, don't, I don't always need to map things out before I step in.
Sometimes it's okay just to jumping. Erm, and also thinking my role as a
psychologist, some things they are risky when we are, when I'm discussing children
or parents and families, erm, I don't have all the answers. So learning about how not
having all the answers is okay and been able to take risks within, you know, a safe
space. An, you know, and also thinking about the risks that being taken and who it,
who it effects really in a sense. So I think but one thing I learned about myself.

DB: what do you mean?

P3: so, for ex, is just affecting me or if it's affecting other group members, because
obviously I can't take risks that will, can be damaging to other people even if I have
ideas. So just being aware of you know, who it impacts, who it affects, erm, and
what you can comfortably take a risk in really. Like I said, I said before about always
having like me and like rules and things like that, but then that often can translate to
having to get things right as well, but then, within the conference, erm, is almost, it
wasn't and write it all wrong and so there was room to play about with it and I think
that, that I can take that into my work and my personal life is the just playing around
with things, well there's no, there might not be a right or wrong, just trying different
things out. So I think that something will have been able (?) to think about and
translate, in that way...

DB: it seems like you're describing some changes or shifts in thinking?

P3: mm, I think so, I think it gave me a lot to think about, erm … the think it gave me
a lot to think about myself. I know, I know that like I've described before it was the
individual within the context of a group, erm, and so I think, the reason I think it
made me think a lot about myself is because I'm in training at the moment and it, it is
about personal growth and development, and here especially the training isn't about
creating good clones, it's about, you know, creat, or developing the individual and so
I think that's why... I thought a lot about myself within the group and how it, what my
thinking was and being aware of how I'm reacting, erm, and I think because I wrote
it, I wrote it all up an, every day, you know, the different experiences that I'd had the
different thoughts I had about the experiences, erm, I think that all contributed to
change. So I'm thinking now that even me talking to you now is... Like somewhere
along the line of change...

DB: yeah

P3:erm, because I don't think I was like this before the conference, so... I'm
assuming now that I'm ha, halfway along but I'm along a bit more further down the
road of change since the conference, erm... because it was such an experience, and
I, I said it, I've said, I've said to people (?) It was a very rich experience and I wouldn't
do it again, erm, but I really value it at the reason I wouldn't do it again is because I
don't want to take away anything that I've gained from the first time round. So it's not
because I would avoid it, but I don't want to lose anything? Erm, and I think that it
was a big, just being in that situation has changed my thinking. So even if I can't label
and so a` sh, how it has, erm, it just one, I th, I feel like it has been one of those life
changing experiences, or even just in terms, if it's just professionally then fair, fair
enough but it has been something which has sort of shifted me on the road an (?)
professionally, erm...

DB: what do you mean?

P3: just in terms of s, I don't know, I can't, I mean I can't fully describe it but I think
just exp, like I (?), You know I talk about being on the outside in that experience and
how I've never experienced that before, erm, er, just when you experience something
that you don't, you haven't experienced before it changes the way you think about
things. So, I talked about gang culture, erm, whilst I don't condone certain behaviours
I might have an appreciation or I (?) Feel a bit more empathy towards certain groups.
Erm, I might now advocate of particular groups that I might not have done before,
erm, I think it's just because I feel that I can unders, I understand, d, a different, from
a different perspective now. It might not be my perspective or the way I think about
things, but I can see it now. Whereas, whereas I wouldn't have seen it before, erm...

DB: seen what?

P3: I wouldn't have seen, so if I'm, if I'm using the gangly example, with (?) the
outgroup example, erm, I wouldn't have seen how the system which is supposed to
be perfect if I'm talking about society, perfect, it's not perfect but how it's supposed to
enable people to grow and to develop, it's supposed to support. Being in the group
and I saw how something which was there to keep us safe, to make sure everyone
had a fair chance and to make sure we had a voice and were (?) Protected, seeing
how even with that perfection, erm, somebody (?) can still lose out, erm, now I think
about society think about actually help people are losing out. The system isn't
perfect, I know all part of the system and I'm working to this, this particular system,
but people are losing out, so I kind of more likely to consider now, actually if, who are
the people who are missing out and why. And should they be forced to fit in? Just so
they can recei, or does there need to be a system shift, whereas before I would have
thought, youth (?) to fit in because the culture is not appropriate for society, even
though I work with young people, it gave me an understanding of maybe my work
outside of work, working with them, erm, and because I like rules, I would have
thought well, everybody needs to fit in now, but now I'm not w, now I think hmm, I
don't think I like rule, not as in I don't like rules but I don't think I like the boundaries
that are set people as much, especially if they're not enabling people, but they're
disabling them. And so that, just, it just shifted my perspective, erm, in terms of how
the structure is in perfect, erm, so I don't know for describe that very well, probably
happen, because I have a tendency to do that, but (laughs), in my, reminds me a
little bit, but…

DB: it's really helpful, really helpful. Thank you. I'm going to stop there because we
got to stop somewhere.

P3: ok.
Initial interview: Participant 4

DB: okay my first question is to ask you to talk to me about your experience of attending a group relations conference.

P4: my experience of group relations, erm, well it was very, erm, there was so many sections to it that, erm, I find that it's (?) Quite difficult to talk about it, erm, and because I think talking about it, it's, there was so much, it was so rich and diverse that it is quite hard to take, it's hard to talk about it without jumping from one section to another. So, erm, there was the part where those the whole group, erm, all, I think there was about 100 or just like under 100 and would all sit in a spiral and that was quite a, erm, key thing I remember, sitting in the spiral because we did that every day so that, the and of the, the visual kind of memory of this spiral and talking about the centre of the spiral, erm, who sits in the middle. At first it was undesirable and by the end of the week it was completely desirable to sit in the middle, erm, and in that section of the group relations conference I got really interested in gender roles, erm, and it was a pred… It was predominantly female, erm, group, erm, of, the inter, of the group like, taken as a whole. Erm, but I, I perceived it as the men in the group taking, erm, dominant roles and I, I raised it as an issue and I raised it as a comment, I commented on it in the group and, erm, some people, one woman in particular said oh, no it's not just, it's not that the… she thought, she said that the men had been nominated as leaders of this group and she said that was because they were the best people for the job, that they were good leaders, they had good qualities in them of leadership. So they were, erm, they had been, the group had taken it upon themselves to allocate them as leaders. And I was saying, erm, that actually we were kind of mirroring society where we, we expect to see m, le, men as leaders and so we, we kind of put that into the men. Erm, and by white men, it was white
men who took this, they had kind of self appointed all they thought that the
group had appointed them leaders, or they were, they were, I think if you had
measured the time they were speaking, they had dominated the conversation.
Erm, they talked about wanting to sit in this middle chair of the spiral which
became this kind of talking point and, y, yeah, and I think it began to emerge
as a fiend than me that I can that didn't fit very comfortably because you
think, for me I was thinking there's lots of psychotherapists and psychologists
and, erm, psychiatrists and people who I considered to be very thoughtful,
people who are very aware of society and, erm, are very aware of their roles
their gender and racial roles but yet would still allocated the white men as
leaders. So that was something that stuck out for me.

DB: what sense did you make of that?

P4: erm, I found it quite, in some ways quite depressing that even the most,
the people who I had considered to be the most thoughtful people in London,
kind of thing, erm, still, erm, were not, I didn't see them to be as reflective as I
hoped they would be. Erm, I'm prepared to, erm, erm, concede that these
men were the bes, you know I'm prepared to, to take that as a hypothesis, oh
these men were the best leadership, have the best leadership qualities, erm,
but I think we needed to think about what that was about when there's only
sort of six men, six white men in the room and we've allocated five of them as
leaders or something. You know, what does that mean out of 88 people,
what, what's that about? And just thinking about that and, are we, where the
women doing themselves a disservice, because I saw two women who I
considered to be very le, not myself, but other people who I considered to be
very, erm, holding leadership qualities, but they weren't named by the group's
leaders. And that neither of those were white they were of different racial
backgrounds and I just wondered what, what, what the group was doing and whether we were reflecting society in that small little microcosm.

DB: and you said you found it depressing?

P4: erm, perhaps depressed is a bit strong but I had higher hopes, I thought that that would be something that we'd be able to really, erm, think about and reflect on

DB: mm hm

P4: every… came to the conclusion that these were, these were mine and then that's great, that's fine, but I just felt like we gath… Amount of talking and thinking was what I was after and, but didn't quite, erm, it didn't, we s, we still ended up with that as our conclusion…

DB: and you mentioned the reflection about that…

P4: mm, I, I, think that the, I think that big groups are hard because I think then only certain people talk out, and I think there is something to be said that there talking to the group, erm, but, I think they had in the canteen and things, during break, people, we'd have a little mini discussion with friends or people that I'd met of the course and they'd say, oh why thought that man was totally wrong when he said that and I sort of think that, oh I wish that you'd said that, because that voice, that dissenting voice, just wasn't heard. And there was a lot of people, I think also, thinking visually of the spiral image, there was a lot of people sat on the outside of the spiral who didn't speak. And it left me
wondering what they were thinking and I think it said a lot about whose voices were heard. Erm, I think role, like professional role came into it as well.

DB: could you say a bit more about that?

P4: erm, I think you need confidence to speak in front of a large group of, in any situation and I think that the group relations conference was, erm, such a odd situation that a lot of p, I mean it's unfamiliar to most people, but if, if you're a bit familiar with the Tavi then it you, you kind of expect something a bit odd like that, and you feel a bit more comfortable and a bit more, a bit more, erm, confident really to say I think this is rubbish. But I think that if you're new to the Tavi, new to the setting, or you're not familiar and you're not confident with that sort of, erm, way of talking or way of setting things out, like sitting in a spiral you (unclear) think that this is rubbish but you're not going to say it. I did wonder about the people who weren't speaking.

DB: what did you wonder?

P4: I wondered to what extent they thought it was no good, I wondered if some of them thought this is interesting, erm, I wondered if some of them felt like they wanted to speak but they, erm, couldn't, they didn't, they wanted to say something but they weren't, didn't, feel happy to speak in front of the group.

DB: yes, and you mentioned those that are more familiar with the Tavistock?

P4: mm

DB: what was your thinking in that sense?
P4: erm, some of the people who were at this, erm, conference work here, erm, full time, erm, some of us are studying here full-time, erm, some of us have been connected to the Tavistock for a long time, erm, so more familiar with the kind of oddities of the institution.

DB: what do you mean by that?

P4: well, okay, that's probably not the right word, but the… The way that, well, sitting in a spiral for an hour every morning is not how most institutions work, and therefore if that's the first time you've done that, you're going to be thinking what's going on here. And if you know the Tavistock a little bit and you know that they are a bit more creative, an., or unusual, erm, the way they do things, more experiential learning, then this won't, this would cover such a shock, you'd may be be a bit more comfortable, a bit more cynical may be, a bit more aware that you could say, you can speak out and that anything will be listen, will be heard, erm, that the dissenting voice is actually a learning experience for other people, erm, and I think that if you're new to the place you might feel, so not comfortable, erm, and it would be so unfamiliar that you, you might not know how safe it is (unclear 12.03) to speak out.

DB: and you mentioned a dissenting voice, what are you thinking of in that sense?

P4: erm, I think we were asked to do a lot of things which, erm, were, erm, I don't want to say uncomfortable because that makes it sound as if it was immoral or it was somehow wrong, so it wasn't, I don't think it was wrong, but it wasn't normal, erm, it wasn't only usually go about a conference. Erm, there
was a, I mean to an example, there was somebody that I, in one of my groups
who was expecting conference - conference like a business conference Ali
arrived wearing a suit and he had a pen and paper, and like a notepad and
pen and it was, it was and then I saw him at the end of the day and he, erm,
he was almost crying, because he was expecting conference and he'd just
been sent from room to room two, what he perceived waste of time, and I
don't know if he'd paid for it as well…

DB: sure

P4: erm, I, I think it would have been really interesting to hear his voice, how
he was feeling, but I think that he felt so disappointed that he, he didn't speak
up, erm, so…

DB: what was that like from your point of view?

P4: it was really hard to see that, erm, because, erm, I don't know, I suppose
as our role as EP's, I like to think that we are a bit of an advocate and, and,
but I speak for him and it wasn't my, it was appropriate for me to speak for
him, erm, but I really felt at the beginning of the first day that he was really
expecting something else and didn't get it, erm, kind of raised the issue of
what p., How much preparation people had had the conference, I know that
we had a lo, that we'd been prepared what to expect.

DB: can you say a little bit about that?

P4: mm. that we had erm, in our course, erm, sort of forums within the
course, we'd had, not a huge amount, I don., maybe an hour or so od, erm,
what we could learn, what we could get out of it, not what to expect in,
erm, specific terms but that it would be an experiential learning, er,
experience where we would need to think but to take some time beforehand
to really think about what you want to say, how much you want to share, erm,
your boundaries, professional roles, to maybe be a bit experimental or try out
new roles or ‘stink about it or maybe if you wanted to do some reading about
it, or it just kind of, we were given a space to think about our hopes our fears
our, erm, what we are looking forward to, what we’re nervous about and I
think that particularly the social workers didn’t, just came to it blind and it was
a big shock, erm, when, when I saw this man expecting a conference, I just, I,
it was, it was quite, it was quite hard to, to hear that. And the next day he
arrived late and he wasn't there for the big room in the morning, and I thought
oh God he's gone, erm, but he arrived at lunchtime and I saw him and I just...
So excited to erm, so please to see him (laughs), and so I went over to him
and chatted to him and said how pleased I was to see him. By the end of the
week he actually...

DB: how did you make sense of that?

P4: what? That I was pleased to see him?

DB: mm

P4: erm, because I think, I think for me when I think about groups I think
people hold things for the group, and if certain individuals can end up holding
things for the group, I think, erm, as a group, some of us left the first day
feeling exhilarated, some felt, erm, erm, that it was a waste of time and angry.
And those (unclear), different people kind of felt different things and I
wondered if as a group if we put things, weird sort of let some people take
something from the group, or kind of hold something for the group… no, I

didn't want him left feeling like that, erm…

DB: could you explain that a bit more to me?

P4: what the?, Which bit? The talking about holding things for the group?

DB: mm

P4: well it's quite, it may be better demonstration when I'm thinking about

other aspects of the group relations conference, so

DB: sure

P4: there was erm, when we had to split into territories, into territories, it got a

bit erm (laughs), increasingly bizarre when we had to split into territories…

DB: how did it get increasingly bizarre?

P4: erm, well there was, we split into, we we were all, 88 of us in o., the room

and we had to split into, erm, while initially we split into groups by just, without

speaking, but that was for a separate thing, and this time we split into groups

by whichever means we like to use,

DB: yep

P4: erm, but having worked in schools, erm, I'm very familiar with the fact that

if you have 88 people in a room, children or adults, it's quite good to have a
leader to just to sort of separate people into groups, it's a lot easier that way.
Erm, which made it more interesting for me to see how we were going to do it, separated into groups without someone allocating groups,

DB: and what did you notice?

P4: I noticed but there was a lot of professionals shouting at each other, someone was standing on a chair, erm, that the two facilitators, erm sort of staff on the course, one of them was shouting, erm, above the noise level had gone so highly that the woman, thes, the female facilitator was having to shout above the noise, erm, to let, she seemed very (sigh), worried she just, she seemed to panic, it seemed like she was panicking, erm, the… it became chaotic so quickly, it seems chaotic actually that was something that I just didn't expect because, I don't know, you think these, these most thoughtful people and they're so educated and thoughtful, erm, and it just, it takes just being told to get into groups and you've got people shouting and, erm, and then what happened is there's a group left behind.

DB: right

P4: erm, some people, there's a group of people who said that they'd had enough of thinking about things, they wanted to do,

DB: mm hm

P4: so that became the theme of the doers the thinkers and the doers decided that they didn't want to think about how they'd split into groups, they wanted to just get into groups, then someone said I'm going to get into a group downstairs in this room, and if you want to then join me and, erm, some
people followed, and then there, it kind of sparked panic amongst the group,
the whole group that - oh God I'm not going have anywhere to go. So it just
kind of became chaotic and people were shouting and then everyone just left
and it was mad dash and it wasn't thoughtful at all and people just went into
groups, went into rooms, and then there was a group of, erm, n., a fairly large
number of people left behind who didn't have a territory,

DB: yep

P4: and, erm, I think coming back to the man who was so disappointed, I
think, there were, each smaller group held, held in role for the larger group
and the group left behind which sort of kind of ended up being referred to as
the refugee group, erm, held something. There was also a group of people
who were of ethnic minorities and they considered themselves, they
perceived that they had asked for other people to come and join them and no
one wanted to and that had really kind of, erm, hit a nerve for them and they
were wondering what it was about that, they felt really rejected and dejected
and the man who on mond, on the first day had expected it to be, er, a
conference was in that group. And I just thought I would God, he's got the
short straw again and he's, erm, low, yeah...

DB: what was that like for you, that experience?

P4: well, for me it was really helpful, the having, the, the buildup to the
conference, having erm, had a few minutes, not that long but, some, session
set aside, to think about it, what we wanted to share and what we wanted to
do and I had decided that, erm, I was going to be quite protective of myself.
Erm, I could see that it was something that I could find upsetting, erm, that I, I
could… That is, is an environment that I could find quite, er, uncomfortable, but not just uncomfortable, I think I could get really hurt in that environment.

Erm, so I, I'm glad that I had some time to think about what I was going to share, what, whether, what roles I would be experimenting with, erm, and to use it as a learning opportunity, not take it too seriously. So, if for example, in that situation when we went into groups, I said I was gonna go into one group and then last-minute I went into a room which had already selected their own group. They're are already a group and so I came in and they were already a group sat down with a facilitator and I came in and said can I join yours,

DB: mm hm

P4: erm, knowing, I suppose knowing that they didn't want me there, because they'd already formed a group, erm, but in a way I was then, erm, I then p, protected myself, erm, because I I was I, I think by doing that I was, I knew I wouldn't be wanted so I was in a position of knowledge and I could use my kind of psychology to think about the group and, and new that they probably wouldn't say no but they'd be wanting to say no and, erm, kind of looked at it with a bit more of a - this is interesting, whereas if I think I'd been in a group where, if I'd gone into a group with friends that I knew already then I might get a bit more, I'd be a bit more vulnerable to getting hurt...

DB: okay, you said you use your knowledge of psychology, what were you thinking?

P4: erm, well I had, erm, a, erm, not very extensive knowledge of group rel. relations and group dynamics but I have read up on it and, erm, I know how groups work and I have work, I have done a lot of psychodynamic, erm, , erm,
ex, erm, training. I have worked in a lot of psychodynamic places and worked psychodynamically in institutions, so I’m able to use that, I was able to use that to think about that. Erm.

DB: can you remember any things that you did think about in that sense?

P4: yeah I mean I've been part of experiential groups before, erm, when I've been thinking about the work, erm, in, erm, disturbing behaviours that I've seen during work when I've been working with children, erm, or thinking about the emotional implications of working with challenging children. So, I feel, I felt really confident, how to express myself in a facilitated group. Erm, and also I know that when I am able to s. think of myself a little bit removed, because I know that when I'm annoyed with the person, I'm not actually annoyed with them as a person, I'm annoyed at thing that they've done and I'm able to really, I really, I'm able to recognise that in other people that I don't dislike them, I wish they hadn't done that thing, so equally I could see people will cross at me. Erm, it's because of what I've done, it's not me as a person. Erm, which I suppose you don't need psychological background but once you read up on all the theory about it and you sort of confirmed in… But in, but also then maybe a defensive thing because I could then think how they don't like me because I come in late rather than they don't like me because they find my personality annoying...

DB: okay, erm, I think what I'm going to ask next he is something that we might have touched on in some ways, erm, and it's a question about your personal learning, erm, and if you'd be happy to share any thoughts about what you learned about yourself during the group relations conference.
P4: erm ... I learnt about myself that, erm, once, once I have decided upon a role, that I am quite able to play that out, erm, I found it a lot easier to be in groups where I didn't know anybody, erm, I found it quite, er, fun and interesting to play around with how I acted, erm, I made a conscious choice not to being groups with people from my course, erm, although I did end up in one group with somebody else from my course but erm,

DB: what was your thinking there?

P4: I was thinking that I'm going to be with people on the course for the next three years, I want to stay friends with them, they're a nice bunch. I don't want to mess that up by annoying somebody or being, er, find myself in a situation when I disagree with them and one of us has to win and, at the time we were very new into the course and it was still at that stage of trying to build relationships and I didn't want to scupper that by showing them (laughs) what I could do...

DB: what do you mean?

P4: I think that the g. important thing that I learned was that it was again and I saw it as a game and when it were it became a bit too real I tried to bear that in mind, I'm a, it was a learning experience, erm, but I was aware that some people experienced it differently and also that indicate, it hi, the hit on, it touched on things that was so sensitive pertinent to individuals and I, erm, in., some people were genuinely very hurt, and, erm, I, I didn't want to hurt anyone but I knew that it was an environment where it would be very easy to hurt somebody, because such sensitive things were being brought to the fore, erm,
DB: could you give any examples?

P4: well for example group that perceived them, that nobody had joined their group because of their race. Erm, in a reflective group in the end of the day, erm, somebody from that group was, erm, spoke to us, and it's quite hard to talk about this, I don't want to, I want it to remain anonymous, who that person was.

DB: sure, absolutely

P4: erm, because I don't think that it would be nice for it, because it was kind of confidential space, and I don't want to kind of identify them

DB: please don't feel pressured to, it's quite all right not to, and we can move to another question.

P4: no that's okay, but the point is, let's, if I talk about it more generally

DB: yeah

P4: Erm, I know that there were some people who'd experienced, erm, huge levels of racial discrimination in their lives and to have been able to move past, move on, move past it and it had brought up for them, erm, memories of the past, erm, about their race, which is just such a huge thing, and I think the level of distress was quite heartbreaking. Erm, and I think, you know, you can't play a game, that's not playing the game, that's real life and it didn't sit quite right with me, cos I felt like we were tapping into feelings that, I
wondered how they were being managed really, and was taking responsibility
for bringing up or letting that emerge and then what happened to that. Erm, I
think it did bring up issues that (sigh), we are generally protect ourselves
against and I just kind of (sigh), I felt like we’d been warned, and I felt like
some people hadn’t.

DB: yeah

P4: and I was all happy to see it as a game until I saw people crying, then I
thought this isn’t a fun game, this is upsetting people, and I just wondered
what kind of support they had, once they'd re-engaged with something, so
painful memories of whatever it is. Erm, it doesn't have to be the example I
gave, it can be loss or it can be feeling victimised or feeling, erm, you know,
erm, excluded. And then you bring it all up, and then what happens?, Do you
know what it was?, What happened? Christmas happened.

So what's that, what's that about? I think that, that's when I felt uncomfortable
about it, and that's when I made a decision to protect myself and see it more
as a game, because I could see myself getting hurt, I did, I did get upset on
the first, and so after the first day, decided to change my plan and protect
myself.

DB: could you talk a, your choice, would you be willing to talk a little bit more
about that choice that you made, that decision?

P4: I think, professionally, you've got yourself in role, and personally, you've
got yourself and if somebody says something to me as a professional I'm able
to understand and think about what it is that they're erm, feeling negative
towards. Me as an EP or me as a [describes previous work role] for me as a woman, me as a, erm, young person. You know, what is it that they're angry at and I can sort of then understand it and deal with it and I suppose I use quite cognitive part of my brain that thinks, I see they are across at me as a professional because they feel that I'm not doing enough. Erm, then there is a personal part of you and, and I think, erm, that's a lot more vulnerable and if someone is negative towards me b. for my being, that's, er, I would take that a lot more personally, you feel a lot more vulnerable to that, erm, I think the first day I took things, erm, as if they were, I, I, I, was too sensitive to thinking it was about me as a person, but I think then from Tuesday onwards was able to, or decided to think of myself as a role in it as a professional and how they saw me. Erm, I'm saying that I'm a doctoral student and trainee educational psychologist, you know, that what they see when they see me and what, how I felt I was was different.

DB: how did you make sense of that?

P4: erm, I think, what do you mean by how did I make sense of it?

DB: that kind of choice you made, erm, to act in role, is that right?

P4: mm, yeah

DB: erm, just wondering if you have any reflections on that decision?

P4: I'm glad I did. I could see that it was a week that could potentially open a can of worms and I didn't want any worms (laughs) released, erm, I can see how upset I got on the first day, I got, I did get really upset. When I got home I
was very upset and it brought up things from my personal life that I was struggling with that I was, that hadn't entered the Tavistock building and then I, then, but then I was able to kind of think to myself they don't know any of that, they were annoyed at me because I said something that they found annoying, and so then I thought, then I was able to think about right, well, they perceive we as someone who is gonna say annoying things, that's fine, I, and I can kind of take, I can take that.

DB: mm hm

P4: and having worked with children who've, erm, got difficulties in the area of emotional and behavioural, erm, area, areas that I know when they will cross me, it wasn't because of what, whatever was going on with my personal life, it's because I've asked them to do some work, erm, and, and when I, when I was being sworn at everyday, never wants would I cry. So when someone said it to be in a really sort of eloquent, erm, educated way from an adult it, it hurt me because, I don't know, I was thinking of myself as myself rather than in role. I think it was then helpful to remember, it's just like being at, when I was working in schools, erm, so in a way it makes you stronger, but I, it made, but it was hard because some people were still being themselves and I then really didn't feel like I could play a game or kind of be immoral and say oh I don't like what you are saying because they are still being beggars themselves, and I can't, they may be not got that front, erm, so, I think by the end of it us as the, erm, course, we would meet at break and lunch and kind of talk quite animatedly about how what, how we were going, what we would do, what we were experimenting with and what kind of psychological principles we would bringing it in and isn't it interesting that this happens and it, but it, for all of us it didn't sit quite comfortably because we thought well we
are looking at it as a interesting, and some people are experiencing real pain,
I don't know, but then I did as well.

DB: I'm just going to return to that question about your personal learning,
anything you might become aware about yourself in the group relations?

P4: I found myself sabotaging a lot of the groups. Erm, like for example where
they'd already formed a group and I went in, and they said oh, we're called
whatever and I said well I don't want to be called that they are based sort of
looked at me and I could tell they were thinking about God it's not fair, you
can't come into a group that's already established, we've already got a day,
and then what's you're in, you then decide to change the group name. That's
the sort of thing that would really annoyed me.

DB: right

P4: so, but I did it. And I, and nobody said it, no one said it out loud, so I just
bought okay go this. Erm, I'd, in another group, erm, I said, I was saying that
there needed to be a leader, but I didn't want to be the leader, but I insisted
that there should be one, and then eventually when they said I should be
read, erm, I said I'd only be leader with someone else and I just sort of was
being quite ambivalent you could see it, or difficult you could see it as. I
wondered if I did it in by, in other things as well, I think it brought it to my
attention that this is something that I do.

DB: could you say a bit more?
P4: erm, I think, I mean, fro in one group someone upset me, then I refused to speak at all.

DB: mm hm

P4: and people, and I could tell it was... irritating other people, but I did it anyway. I suppose it made me aware of, that I can do that. Erm, but also, I know that some people think that when I was talking to them about it, that it, that's maybe quite an egotistical way of looking at things.

DB: how did you make sense of it?

P4: erm, I think it, I think, I made sense of it in a brought to my attention something that I do generally, and that group relations was able to, because it was such an artificial situation and such an intense situation and c. er, concentrated time that, erm, one of, it brought to my attention that I have been doing in the broader scheme of my life.

DB: yeah, what kind of things?

P4: well like that, erm, and this sort of in role, out of role vulnerability, erm, protecting myself against vulnerability, feeling, feeling very vulnerable and, erm, strategies I use to overcome that. Not wanting to get in touch with that feeling, erm, yeah.

DB: how do you reflect on that now?
P4: I think it was useful learning experience, erm, and also I think it's useful to be able to reference it because sometimes you can say, oh I'm a really outgoing person, or sometimes I think like I speak for other people, cos they don't want to say things are like that's a kind of general comment that now I can say, oh well I went on a conference and, and we thought about this and, and learned from that, that I speak, erm, for people, I speak when other people don't want to speak, or, and I say things that other people don't want to say. Erm, sometimes I like (laughs), I like to sabotage things. Erm, but it feels like referencing that makes it bit more, it, it gives you a week to really think about your roles, your role and what you do and how you are as a person.

DB: and I'm just going to come back (unclear), you talk about roles to something that you started on, erm, in terms of some reflections you, you mentioned in terms of gender, ethnicity, I wondered if you had any more thoughts in that regard? Or about your experience of the group relations conference?

P4: as a group outside of the group relations conference, there is ten of us and we're all girls or female, and, I think I noticed the genders and how the men took leadership positions and that irked me, erm,

DB: how come?

P4: well, I sort of already just spoke about it. I think that sometimes you think that, erm, with moved past that. You know we are all, we are all educated and thoughtful people and, not that you have to be educated, but we've, we have thought about it a lot and that the year 2012 we, we're equal and equality’s
arrived. And then I think, just see it played out like that, where people from
ethnic minorities felt disempowered, erm, and women were saying, oh I think
that that man is the reason that we've elect., we've think about him as a
leadership qualities is because he's got them, it's not because we've put
them, put these qualities into him. I was thinking, how can you say that as a,
erm, sort of, thoughtful person in 2012. But, yeah and I think it came up, like,
there was a lot of talk about Nelson Mandela, because he had j., just died
during that time. And there were some people that stood out from the as
people who I admired, er, individuals, individual characteristics I admired and
that I would sort of like to work towards being more like those individuals,
erm,

DB: individuals from within the

P4: from within the group, yeah, erm,

DB: could you go a bit further with that thought?

P4: well there was a woman who spoke about Nelson Mandela and, she, so
eloquent and good at speaking out and confident and thoughtful and able to
get her thoughts across, erm, so. I suppose that's something I also learned
from it, was that I'd like to be a bit more, like that (laughs).

DB: ok, thank you, erm, we're approaching the end of this conversation, erm,
were there any other thoughts that we haven't touched on that you think might
be worthwhile sharing, about your experience of the group relations
conference?
P4: erm,

DB: there doesn't have to be.

P4: just thinking. I think it was really, I learned a lot from it but, I think it was very unique and that I think that some people's experiences would be very different and I'm interested in, I would be interested in hearing what people thought about it who hadn't had so much preparation and warning about what to expect.

DB: what did you take from that preparatory work?

P4: I think somebody spoke about a hard hat, well I know somebody, one of the members of staff talked about a hard hat and wearing a hard hat and I really took that on board because on my, after, after I had been really upset on the first day and I'd cried, I thought about the hard and I, sort of put the hardhat on Tuesday. And I'm glad that I was sort of prepped for that.

DB: you're glad because?

P4: I think I could have got upset, like quite profoundly upset.

DB: would you like to say any more of that?

P4: no

DB: okay I think we are going to stop there, because we got to stop somewhere.
P4: mm, yep.
Follow-up interview: participant 1

DB: okay, it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations conference, since then have you made any links to that experience?

P1: erm, yeah, yeah definitely, erm, I think when we last spoke it was very fresh in the mind, erm, and I think since then I've not, it's not really been at the forefront, but it's definitely been there, so, and I think even just seeing visual reminders, seeing people who attended the conference, I mean even up until last week I bumped into someon, and it just brings it all back again. Erm, I suppose in terms of links, erm, I've seen it in terms of, erm, thinking more dynamically, so group dynamics, erm, group dynamics in schools that can happen, erm, group dynamics within teams within, erm, my EPS service, erm, and how people work together really, erm, and I suppose come to a solution, so I suppose what I'm thinking of was, erm, there was a case I was working on in school and, erm, I mean the referral came to me in terms of this child may have some, a specific learning difficulty and we may need you to assess. Erm, his attainment scores didn't meet the criteria for assessment so it was more around consultation work, erm, but when I met with mum, who met with me and the school, mum was very persistent on the dyslexia assessment and school kind of colluded with her. So I really felt, erm, I'd been trapped in a corner and I think that kind of brought back the group relations mentality where, erm, fight, fight for survival, but do it in a professional way. Group relations was very raw and very, you know, erm, I think especially thinking back to the experience when I was part of a, a group who had been left out essential, essentially. Erm, we were all asked to get into groups and go find a room and complete a task and there wasn't a room made available for us, so, so I'd felt like I'd been pushed on the outside. And I think with that meeting in school and the mum, that similar experience had occurred where I'd
been pushed on the outside, I'd walked into something I hadn't anticipated, and it
gone a totally different direction, and especially being a trainee I'd felt, erm, quite
incompetent in terms of being, erm, undermined by mum and then undermined by
the school to say, but your supervisor does that, and your supervisor can do dyslexic
assessments and I was like, (sigh), so it was erm, yes so that and I think reflecting
back on that was very much seeing the dynamics there, that group dynamics
particularly, how mum was such a powerful figure, erm, she was quite passive
aggressive, erm, but I could see that she just wanted the best for her child really, so
she was pushing that forward and I think school were put into a position where they
weren't quite sure what to do and they thought it was best to align with mum so it
was, erm, yeah (laughs).

DB: yeah. And you made some connections it sounds like with group relations
conference?

P1: mm, so in terms of being pushed so, being in a group setting, erm, a group
setting where there's different professionals and being the one that was pushed out
and feeling sligh, and feeling incompetent basically and I think I've fel, I don't think I
felt it as much in group relations, but reflecting back on it, erm, a lot of the
professionals there were qualified for quite a while, you know, they were quite high
up in their profession and I was just beginning as a trainee, so still trying to discover
my role, and you know, what it means, I hadn't even gone out to placement at that
point, erm, so yeah, so I think, just really realising my position and where that fits in
with the group. Not only as a professional but also as a trainee. And I think that came
about then in that school meeting, that I was going in as a professional, but also as a
trainee. And I was challenged on both those levels, so, yeah. (Laughs) I'm not, I'm
not pushed out so obviously like group relations, but to see how easily that can
happen.
DB: what's your reflection on that, kind of connection you made?

P1: mm, what you mean?

DB: it sounds like you're making some links with the group relations experience and you've given an example, erm, in your role in practice, just wondering what sort of reflections you might have about those connections that you're making?

P1: okay ... I suppose I was thinking, erm, in my role how, how easy it can feel to fit as being quite incompetent and maybe it might be easier for others to challenge that, because you're not so, I don't know, I wasn't so confident in my thought or my experience, erm, especially in terms of saying no to the dyslexia assessment. Erm, I mean I had to go back and, you know, just clarify with my supervisor and get some evidence just to back that up so I could go in again and say I can't do it, and these are my grounded reasons why. Erm, so that was with that particular example and I think with group relations, erm, being a trainee I didn't feel I suppose as, I don't feel as confident in myself to assert myself fully, to say no I shouldn't be thrown out and, you know, I felt myself kind of going along with it, feeling the anger, but not really being able to express myself. Erm, and that's what I found in the meeting I was, you know, I was, obviously the anger was being brought in me where I was being challenged and I kind of felt woah, where has this come from (laughs), which was similar to group relations it was just, come out of nowhere. And then where that left me or where it didn't leave me I supposed to challenge that in that particular moment in time. And having to go away and reflect and think back on it, and I think what the difference was, I could go back into the school and discuss that further. In group relations I couldn't, I had to live with it and leave that as it was, there wasn't an
opportunity to go back and say this is what happened, and this is how I personally felt, so, yeah.

DB: thank you. Any other kind of thoughts that you might have linked with your experience of attending the group relations conference in the sort of 6 / 7 months since then?

P1: mm … I think, erm, I think also being, linking onto that experience and I suppose the rest of the experiences, so having the experiential groups where you had your voice to talk and the review groups afterwards, so more of the smaller groups, erm, being given that space to reflect and think, I think I really value that in my work both in CAMHs and EPS. Erm, and allowing parents a space to speak and think, erm, and I've had two opposites I suppose with parents. One where a parent, erm, her English was very limited and although we had an interpreter she didn't speak as much, and I don't know whether it was a confidence thing or it, we'll never know but, erm, it was really allowing mum to have that opportunity there to, erm, express her needs, express her concerns. And appreciating that from group relations, the space that you need for that and, erm, I suppose the containment aspect to that as well, erm, and on the other end having a different mum who just wanted to get everything off her chest and really trying to contain that meeting, so I was able to elicit the information that I needed as opposed to letting her run-off with the meeting and not being a very productive session. Erm, so looking at it from two angles that there can be people who will talk loads and they need that type of containment as well and to try and really manage and funnel that. And I saw that especially in our, erm, review meetings where that was managed quite well by the facilitator, by allowing everyone the opportunity to talk and really think about their thoughts. Erm, and then I was able to take that then and do that work with the mum, so letting her talk and then really trying to reflect back on, okay, so what are you saying here and what are the needs, what
can we do to help support your son. And then on the complete opposite to that with
the mum who didn't talk as much, also containing her anxiety as well, perhaps,
around not being able to reflect so much, but then eliciting more of a response in
terms of asking her lots more questions I suppose and trying to contain it that way.
So, erm, yeah.

And reflecting that back to the experiential group, where there were the periods of
silence and sometimes they were needed to really allow that time to reflect, so, see
how two different groups can work in real life situation with, and you come across so
many different types of people, so

DB: two different groups?

P1: so sorry, the review group which was facilitated and then the experiential group
which although there was a facilitator it was more left up to the group how we ran it,
how much we spoke and didn't and some input from the facilitator.

DB: I see

P1: so not as structured is what I'm saying, yes.

DB: yes, thank you that's helpful. I noticed you mentioning the facilitator as you
described those kind of experiences, erm, and perhaps, well just wondering if you
had any other thoughts about the group relations conference and subsequent
experiences outside, perhaps related to facilitators?

P1: erm, I mean I've seen them around, I've seen my review one around, quite a few
times, erm,
DB: I guess I'm wondering through your description, was there something that you were taking from watching them and being part of the discussions with the facilitators to other work that you've been involved in?

P1: yeah, yeah, I think so, I think taking that, erm, objective viewpoint, so being within the group but still on the outside, yep, and, erm, like the mediator approach, so yeah I'm seeing that used within the facilitators.

DB: what do you mean by that?

P1: erm, so, maybe I haven't used the right word, erm, but mediating the group so just ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to speak, everyone had the opportunity to think and reflect and having to use that, erm, in meetings, especially school meetings were I'm meeting a SENCO, a class teacher, and parents and really having to manage three different lots of thoughts and view points and opinions and, erm, yeah and conflicts as well (laughs), which can arise, yeah.

DB: what's that been like?

P1: interesting, (laughs), erm, interesting in terms of where you can have some parents who really aren't sure and where the school are very focused and very directive and yes, we know this, this and this and parents who can sometimes be - oh I thought she was fine, or yeah I know she struggles a little bit but I didn't think it was that hard, erm, but I think with those particular parents the case was a lot more complex where there was, erm, it was a child protection case, and so, erm, upon reflecting back on that meeting I understood a bit more why parents were quite reserved, because they'd been going through all the social services and so forth, and
they were very skeptic of professionals. Erm, but just in that meeting, not having that prior information, erm, trying to manage and really illicit parent responses and containing schools desperate need for this child's learning and she was really struggling, erm, and sometimes noticing, like in a different meeting how, it was a team around the child meeting, and some professionals were just so blunt and I suppose insensitive to where parents were in the room. And, and m, from my point of view, I think I just felt, they're still humans and they still have feelings and, and I know you're doing the best you are for, for their children, but there is a way, I don't know, so, yeah.

DB: and did you make any connections in your mind at that kind of time or subsequently to experiences at the group relations conference?

P1: erm, yeah, yeah I think so. Not, I don't think I'd had at the time, but I think thinking back to it now and especially thinking back to my experiential group which carried on, everyone was very sensitive to one another so no one, and I, remembering other people saying oh, there were arguments and someone was so rude and we never had that, and I think I appreciated that because everyone was, there was that professionalism there in the room, which allowed the space for people to really open up and be honest and feel more trusting in the group as opposed to feeling if you open up, you will be attacked. Erm, which is what I think is what happened in some of the groups, erm, so I think really appreciating the delicacy of language and how much it can take for someone to be so open and honest, erm, especially when we're dealing with cases in our work and the delicacy around that and how much it can take for a parent to be honest and actually for themselves to realise the needs of their own child and what that can mean for them. And the impact on that, on them, erm, and how others just aren’t aware sometimes of that’s their
child and their dealing with that. It's not another pupil and, you know, difficult, so yeah

(laughs).

DB: okay, thank you I also heard you mention, erm, some links or experiences that
you might have linked up with your educational psychology service that you were
placed with, and wondered if you might be happy to share any thoughts on that?

P1: erm, yeah, (laughs), it's an interesting service they, erm, I've noticed they all
work quite individually so they've all got their own style, so it's difficult to ascertain
whether it's a consultative type of service although use lots of psychometric assess, it
is very much based on an individual EP and how they choose to work, as opposed to
an overall service way of working. Erm, and it's interesting in the sense that they're
still all a team, but I'd, I ha personally I haven't seen much of that team working going
on. Erm, yeah.

DB: what tells you that?

P1: er, well from my, erm, from shadowing and so forth, so shadowing different types
of EP’s and the different work they do, erm, attending team meetings and their CPD
days, erm, you know, where one particular EP has taken a different stance, another
one has taken a different stance, erm, I haven't seen any joint working, or haven't
seen much project work going on at all there. Erm, I mean there may be, but it's not
been so evident.

DB: I see, have you made any links with your experiences at the group relations
conference in that sense?
P1: it kind of reminds me of, erm, the event were they said everyone get into a group, 

erm, but don't speak to each other,

DB: right

P1: so it was like this room of strangers and they all, you all have your own individual 
ways but you were just put into a group together, it kind of feels like that, everyone’s 
their own individual, but they were in a group together. (Laughs). It could be different, 
but that’s, but then I'm there on Friday’s, so there's not, there's some EP’s there, 
there’s some aren't.

DB: sure

P1: but even on my block placement weeks, where I've been there for two, three 
weeks at a time it's, erm, yeah, everyone seems to be very much in their own way of 
working or their own individual casework.

DB: what's that like for you?

P1: mm, it was quiet, I found it quite difficult because I'd come from working in an 
EPS and working very much as part of a team, erm, especially with the psychology 
assistants, so there were six of us, and four based in one area, so we were all very 
close to a lot of group work, erm, a lot of working together, and a lot, and there was 
lots of projects going on in that EPS so lots of EP’s were working together with 
different EPs and seeking supervision from each other, so peer supervision. Erm, so 
this was very different where I felt very much on my own and if I, and I, and anything 
I had to do, I had to do on my own merit so it would h, be up to me to go out and 
seek the shadowing and, you know, rearrange that, erm, you know, rearrange
meetings with schools and so forth, there wasn't much direction there. I mean I found it very difficult to settle in at first, erm, it was a different style of supervision I wasn't used to and, erm, I very much felt thrown in at the deep end. So that was, erm, quite difficult to contend with.

DB: yeah

P1: yeah (laughs) yeah

DB: okay I'm going to ask, erm, a question which I think we've very much begun to think around, erm, and it's this: have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee EP?

P1: (laughs), erm, yeah I suppose, er, I really think the competence level comes into it, the competencies, so being consciously competent and unconsciously... yeah, so, consciously competent and consciously incompetent and so forth the, the diagram,

DB: yeah

P1: (laughs) erm, I, and I think I can see links back at the time in group relations where there were some groups where I was, erm, consciously aware of how much I could contribute to the group, erm, how much I could (sighs), so contribute in terms of feeling confident enough to speak out in the groups, so in the smaller groups and larger groups, erm, and also really thinking about some of the things I was saying and why I was saying them, erm, an thinking back to my profession as well I suppose, erm, I'm thinking more in terms of our small experiential group, there was one example where they started talking about everyone's professionalisms and I think I was a trainee and then there was a social work trainee, and everyone else
was quite highly qualified, erm, and someone mentioned that there was, because
there was a consultant did that make her the lion of the group, or something,

DB: right

P1: and for me, I think I, it was an uncomfortable saying, erm, that didn't sit very
comfortably with me, because I know I was only in the early stages of my training,
but then did that then mean that I wasn't good enough I suppose to fit in with the
qualified people, and where did my role as a student come in and as a professional,
and I think I really, erm, yeah, I really contended with both those ideas because I,
being a student and being a professional felt very separate in group relations where
people were either referring to them as I'm a student, or oh I'm a professional, and
people would ask you, oh so you're a student, so you had to come (unclear),
whereas I'm a professional, I took my time out, I paid for this, that very much became
a part of it as well, so, erm, yeah.

DB: and are you making any links with that kind of experience to your experience as
a trainee educational psychologist since then?

P1: erm, yeah, yeah, I think, erm, I think in my CAMHs placement I felt very
supported, erm, as both the student and a professional, erm, so my supervision has
very much been links to the teaching and the practice, so being able to put both
those links together, whereas in my EPS it's very much been a more about the
practice as opposed to the teaching, I've had to kind of consolidate that teaching
myself, erm, in terms of feeling in the pecking order, it very much has felt like that,
especially in my EPS, where, erm, sometimes I've felt because I'm still a trainee,
have I been, is it okay for me to challenge certain things, especially to a senior and,
erm, am I coming from it, is what I'm saying valid enough, because I'm a trainee?
And I'm challenging a senior over something, and I think that's been a challenge (laughs), and I think it's probably going to be a challenge for the next two years and however long, erm,

DB: what's that like?

P1: difficult, difficult because I want to express myself, but really trying how to do that, how to do that safely as well, erm, and fortunately for me I had the opportunity to express that here at the Tavistock in one of our lectures, erm, where we get into small groups and do consultation type work, so, it kind of got brought up there, erm, and I was able to explore that more with one of the lecturers here to, erm, really think about how I can make my feelings of not feeling very confident and competent known, erm, because my supervisor really saw me as quite competent so I think there was that juxtaposition, erm, and I think when that was finally brought to the forefront, so I had to explain, I think we had like a midway review and I wrote that in there, that I didn't feel as confident, she was quite taken aback, so when we discussed that and because I didn't want to say oh, I'm a trainee and you're a supervisor, but I think what you're doing is wrong (laughs), or you're not teaching me enough, or you kn, because I think she felt I was okay enough to go out and do whatever where as I really felt I need more support from you, and it was difficult to, to elicit that, erm, so, I, yeah, so then, by bringing that into the review and discussing why I didn't feel so confident and, erm, because I was really, you know, trying to still grasp transitioning from a psychology assistant to a trainee and a trainee in education setting firstly and then going into a placement and the placement that was very different to my other placement, erm, and I think that brought about a massive change. So the supervision changed, the level of support changed, and my confidence grew with that. So, so the relationship got a lot better, I felt, yeah.
DB: how come?

P1: erm, I think it was having that opportunity to reflect here at the Tavistock, just how much of an impact it was having on me. And how I was struggling, and being able to have those conversations in a safe manner here, erm, and then taking that back to the EPS, feeling confident enough to reflect that back in a professional way I suppose, erm, and then seeing that being taken on board with some of my more complex cases as well so yeah (laughs).

DB: I see

P1: yeah, I didn't feel so much as being thrown in at the deep end any more, I felt more supported, I felt it was more a two-way supervision as opposed to me talking the whole time, so,

DB: and again I'm just wondering and I am interested in your thoughts about any links with group relations conference in that example you've given?

P1: mm

DB: there doesn't have to be

P1: yeah, I'm thinking, erm, I'm thinking back to our three, o, not three-way, sorry, just made that up (laughs), erm, our review, the review groups at the end, erm, and how that felt like mini supervision, erm, it was group supervision but facilitated by one person and, erm, on the four days we had it, being allowed to explore different ways of your thinking and feelings, so one day doing drawings, and one day talking and
can't remember the rest, something, something else, I think there was more drawings

(laughs)

DB: sure

P1: erm, so feeling, so having my anxieties and thoughts and, erm, feelings from the
day contained in that space, erm, but being allowed to explore it in a safe way, in a
safe way with the group and the facilitator, and in different formats, so and I think that
shows with my other supervision it doesn't just have to be a, a, typical one-way thing,
there's different ways to explore thoughts and feelings and be reflective, erm, so the
drawings were really helpful, you know, talking about through different things,
different experiences, erm, yeah so I think I've really appreciated that, yeah.

DB: are there any other links you've made, erm, following attending the group
relations conference to your work in role, as a trainee EP?

P1: I think, erm, definitely taking on board the multidisciplinary working, erm, working
with lots of different professionals who have different thoughts professionally,
personally, erm, and trying to, I suppose work together, so thinking of my CAMHs
work, erm, you, the whole office is open office, and there's lots of different teams. So
I've had lots of opportunity to work with different professionals, which has been really
helpful because it's allowed me the opportunity to gain their perspectives on a case
and bring my own perspectives into it, and thinking about our team meetings where
it's lots of different professionals involved. Erm, kind of reminded me a little bit of our,
one of the groups where we were cho, we could choose ourselves who to get into
groups with, so I chose to be part of the MDT group as such, erm,

DB: MDT?
P1: so, multidisciplinary team, and that was, erm, and that was quite interesting because it was all female, and its predominantly female in our role in CAMHs and EPS, erm, but it was e, there was a lot of tension and it was, it wasn't bought to the forefront, but it was very difficult for the group to gel and come up with a similar idea. Everyone had their own individual ideas and their own, erm, I mean it took us ages just to come up with the first ta, I can't remember what the first task was, but it took us ages to come together and the, whoever we'd appointed as the leader, she just couldn't contain the group, she couldn't manage it, she couldn't lead it very well, but no one else stepped into lead, people tried to take over but they weren't really leading as such, and she'd been appointed through choice, everyone else had a fair choice, you know, it wasn't like she'd said yep I want to, everyone was happy with that, but it was erm, I think it went to show that there needs to be someone, you need to have that strong leadership there or, or it needs to be very clearly defined who is going to manage the meeting for example, and I think, erm, seeinat team meetings and, yeah, team meetings both in EPS and CAMHs, it's very clear who's managing the lead, who's managing the meeting which has made it run a lot more smoothly. But also allowing the opportunity for people to talk and, erm, in the group relations it was very difficult to manage lots of people talking at the same time, lots of things were getting lost, where as I think seeing it in a professional team meeting space, you get the opportunity to really talk about caseloads and discuss a child, and soforth, so, and any needs or concerns that are brought up. So it needs that structure and I think that's what was missing from group relations. And I think thinking back to it now, (laughs) there was hardly any structure in group relations at all which is why there was probably a lot of problems and I think that's probably what I've appreciated quite a lot in my work placements, that clear structure that's there, and when it's not there, like I said at the beginning of EPS, I felt I was thrown in to the deep end and I think that's why I really struggled, because I didn't know where to go, what to see
and, erm, you know, what do I do next and, you know, I know I've been in an EPS before but it's just totally different ballgame now and yeah.

DB: and you mention the was some kind of experiences there for example the MDT, that reminded you of group relations conference?

P1: mm

DB: you were talking about, well, just wondered what it reminded you of?

P1: I think it was, erm, just the fact that there was a room of so many different professionals, you had to work alongside them really on different tasks and that, thinking back to that is a true reflection of what happens in the workplace, especially our work, erm, and thinking back to it now, especially thinking forwards in terms of education, health care plans and really working alongside lots of different teams, erm, observing SEN panels that you (unclear), you will clash with some people on certain things, but at the end of the day you've got to all come up with some outcome because this is a ch, and I think perhaps maybe that's where the different lies betw, in group relations there wasn't an actual life child's life in your hands and their future, whereas in the workplace that's somebody's life that you are essentially contributing to and determining where it's going to go, so yeah...

I think that's maybe what, I think that's what may have been lost and I think I saw that when we were part of that displaced group, that we were the ones, I think someone had said it as well, this is what happens with children who, erm, get lost in the system, they, you know, get passed around and sometimes you could just easily get lost in the system and we were the group that got lost in the system and no one wanted to take ownership of that, and passing the buck onto everybody else, yeah.
DB: what reflections have you got on that?

P1: erm, it was still, I mean it's still quite, I don't know, I, I know at the time and even for a long time afterwards it was, it was still quite a difficult experience I suppose to really reflect on, erm, because there was so many different aspects to it in terms of, how all the groups just merged together and ran off and did their own thing, and you with just le, it felt like a whirlwind, and everything else was happening around you and you had no control over it. And I think that can easily happen to children in the service or and parents as well, especially parents who ma perhaps may not be as articulate or affluent, and, erm, don't fully understand everything. So, yeah. And, and I think, for me, erm, what I really valued this year is really trying to put myself in the child's shoes, especially writing reports and thinking from the child's viewpoint, and that's what my supervisor has really, you know, put into me (unclear), to think from the child's point of view, you are the voice for the child and ha, and I hadn't really made that link before to that experience, but, I think it really, so obviously something in that, of being part of that displaced group left something in me to really think, I really want to put myself back into these children's point of view, and how can I then a voice that for them, yeah. (Laughs)

DB: any other reflections on, on those kind of links you are making?

P1: mm ... yeah I suppose just being, being put in the outsiders shoes, because it's very easy to say I can, well it's very easy to think well I can sympathise with you, and I think especially for myself where, erm, I'm sure I'll be challenged - you don't have children, how do you know what it feels like, or, you know, and so forth. Erm, an I've ha, and I've had the challenge of you're a trainee, we can't take you into this school and, erm, so there's work I was doing in the school and the head teacher was very, it
was traded work and she wanted a maingrade EP and so forth, and so through the principal, we managed to negotiate our way of working into that, erm, yeah, I suppose coming up, being faced with challenges and difficult challenges, erm, like that pressure from the, the teacher and the parent, erm, thinking back to group relations and being put into that challenging position of that group and not being able to voice my opinion, my personal opinion as much, as a group we could but I think individually it was very difficult given the amount of people in there and the lack of time (unclear) conference.

DB: and help me to understand the link with the subsequent experience, in terms of that case around dyslexia?

P1: okay yeah, so, erm, being, I suppose, thinking now about mum's position and perhaps why she may have been so pushy, feeling as the one on the outside, and everything else being done to her child, but she was on the outside there and she, and maybe that was why she was coming in from a passive aggressive viewpoint, really pushing for that assessment, which I completely understood, erm, so her feeling like that dis, like how I'd felt in the displaced group and, but all she wanted to do was represent for her child so, yeah.

DB: okay thank you, have there been any other times since, since attending the group relations conference that you've been reminded of what happened in the conference in your work as a trainee EP?

P1: ... erm, I can't think of many, yeah I think, I think, because they have been the biggest, some of my biggest cases, erm, or are thinking all my cases really I've managed to reflect in some way whether it's been a meeting with a SENCO, or a group meeting, or representing the child's views where they've not been able to s,
give their own view, erm, yeah, so holding the child in mind, yeah, and w, the whole
systemic psychology and bringing that into it as well, so, erm, thinking of the systems
around the child, systems in the school, how they all come together, the dyna, group
dynamics, parenting dynamics and how (laughs) all of that was reflected with group
dynamics in group relations and the systems within the systems so the yeah the fa,
the facilitators the participants and so forth and the systems of students and
professionals, and how that worked together.

DB: could you say a little bit more about systems within systems?

P1: erm, oh… I think what I was thinking was, erm, that you have, you have the
group relations as a system, but it was still encompassed in the Tavistock is a
system as well, so there was no, I mean th, they called it an external event or
something, and pretend like the tavi’s not the tavi, but it, you can't (unclear) the fact
that it's still what it is, erm, yeah, and, and I think what I mean by the systems it's
possibly the different groups, so you had the directors doing, and everyone kept
themselves very separate, so the directors, the facilitators, the, oh what are they
called now? Like spies, but they weren't really, I can't remember now what they were
called, they were part of the group, but they were still part of the, the team the, the
yeah. (Laughs) oh never mind.

DB: sure

P1: and then there were the participants.

DB: yeah
P1: so, who we were, and then within the participants, you have the professionals, you have the students, and all the different gr, subgroups within that as well, so I suppose just thinking there was lots of systems, yeah,

DB: yeah, yeah and you, it sounds like perhaps have made some connections with other systems beyond the group relations conference in your work?

P1: mm, yep, so systems, school systems and the groups within the schools, erm, the dynamics of the head teacher with the SENCO’s, SENCO’s with teachers, erm, parents, where parents come into that and the differences with more pushy parents and parents who are bit more passive, erm, the children, and then you've also got the systems around your EPS service, or your CAMHs service and the different teams you're working you and your local authority, or your NHS, erm, yeah the community as well, the community bases, so yeah, there's lots of different professionals, groups, systems that you have to work with especially as a EP and, in training what I've learnt is really taking account of all those different, just how many different systems can be involved in a particular child or a case, and the impact that can have on your work as well.

DB: what you mean by that?

P1: erm, so the impact in terms of thinking around that, erm, team around the child meeting, there was a good seven - eight professionals there, erm, and it was a family, erm, and I think all five children, three had been diagnosed with [names diagnostic category] and two were diagnosed with [names diagnostic category], so it was very difficult for parents to handle, erm, and, I'm losing my train of thought now, sorry, erm, so the systems, there, I m, I think just thinking about that one particular family and their five children, and how many groups of professionals and systems
were focused around one child and how that grew then when they included them as
a whole family and what that meant, and that impact, an, I mean this particular
meeting was for the family to gain extra support and care and there were difficulties
because the children were treated individually, and individually the parents didn't
meet the threshold, but as a whole it was very clear that they met, they could access
support so it was, it was a meeting around that and to try and access that support for
them, but, and I think from me, even as a trainee, I was just going there to feedback
about some work I'd done with the eldest child, so I wasn't fully aware of what the
meeting was around and so forth, erm, it was quite overwhelming then to hear all the
different professionals viewpoints, their opinions, their strong thoughts, and this is
where I meant by them not being so sensitive either to parents, where they could be
quite blunt, erm, around this one family so, yeah.

DB: what's your reflection on that experience, and being part of that experience?

P1: erm, really I think put, erm, just seeing how, how much the parents have to
content with, in terms of the number of professionals in their lives for their children,
and how overwhelming that can feel, I mean, I was feeling overwhelmed so poor
mum and dad were, and mum expressed that towards the end, that she really was
feeling stressed, erm, and the frustrations that can bring out in the system about
whose responsibility is it to take it forward and t, and to ensure that something is
done with this so, erm, and I think that can easily be, the buck can be passed
between people yeah.

DB: yeah

P1: yeah, which I suppose brings back to the group relations where, the displaced
group, it was just passed between people, and there was loads of other groups
around, no one wanted to take that overall responsibility until one group stepped up, and said yep okay we'll take you in. So, yeah.

DB: what do you think about those kind of connections you've made?

P1: erm, I suppose where does that leave me in my role then, and where does my responsibility lie, and to what extent for these children, or for the children we’re working with. Erm, and the EHC plans not being so clear as yet and where will that, and who that will lie with in the future and, because I know in my EPS, it's still not very clear, and they're not quite sure who's going to take overall ownership of it all. And, and I haven't got a clue what's going to go on in my next EPS placement, erm, so I think it's just bringing to the forefront who takes that responsibility and where is it in my role, erm, maybe not my role so much as a trainee, but at least to reflect that back in my supervision, if I was in another meeting like that, would it be my place to step up and say I'll take that responsibility, I'll email so and so, because I think it was a head teacher of a school that did that in the end, erm, yeah. I think it, I think it comes back to that lack of structure again, and when you're placed in a situation where there's not much structure, where does your role fit in then and how much authority do you have to, erm, to take that responsibility.

DB: what do you think about that?

P1: erm, in an ideal world (laughs), I think everyone should be, erm, equally responsible, but I think, erm, see I think as EP’s, erm, see I feel a lot of the responsibility lies upon us as well, because you're not just doing, er, cognitive assessments or so you're not just doing am, you're not just doing that one-to-one work with the child, you’re also eliciting information from the school, from the parents, so you're doing a lot of that, erm, the ground work and building your own particular
case for this child and I think having sat on SEN panels and read through quite a few
papers, erm, other professionals have done something similar, but I don't think it's
been two, in quite as much depth, I suppose, erm, because they're focused on a
particular, like physio might just be focusing on the particular aspects of that child,
and 0T and so forth, where as I feel our role, and especially in, er, at the Tavistock
and our e, trainee EP, erm, training, it's child, community and educational
psychology, it's not just educational, or just child, so you're looking at everything as a
whole, so erm, so I think a lot of the responsibility would lie on us, but then, where
would you elicit that and take that forward, and I think that's, erm, so with that
particular TAC meeting, erm, I fed back my results, back to the principal, so it was
kind of filtered upwards and then for them to take that overall responsibility. It was
quite a complex case. So yeah.

DB: and you talked as part of that description about responsibility, and taking up
authority, if I'm right

P1: mm, erm, in terms of bein, taking up the authority to make a decision I suppose,
so, you, responsibility in terms of your responsible for what you write in your reports,
your recommendations, sorry, and, erm, you know, the work that you do with the
child, with the parents and the school, erm, and I think the authority bits comes into it
in terms of the power then you have and to, how far forward you can take that and it's
very difficult as a trainee, there's only so much further you can go, I mean, you have
to have all your reports countersigned, which is fair enough but it's, it just shows that
power dynamics again within a syste, within the EPS system and, you know, you are
reminded again that you are still at the bottom, but, in my experience this year even
though, erm, you know, I'm seen as the trainee, I haven't fully felt like I've been the
trainee, or been treated like the trainee, it's been more trainee/ maingrade. So yeah,
so there's been that.
DB: and you talked about power there as well?

P1: mm, so who, who would have the, erm, how, yeah so how much pow, how much authority you have within your service I mean in, in my current service the seniors very much are, have a lot of the decision-making and the principal. I don't see much of the maingrade EP’s. I don't know, I don't think it's more, I feel there's more, the power dynamics lie more in the seniors and the principal, erm, and I can't, and I don't see much of a, a joint working or a, or equal level working, if that makes sense, where as I suppose in a previous service it did feel quite equal and you know, erm, there were seniors but they didn't, they weren't the ones seen to make all the decisions I suppose. Yeah, it was, or maybe, or maybe it's just on the days that I'm not there (laughs), I don't know, but, yeah.

DB: sure, sure, okay thank you, and going to ask again that, that question in terms of your experience of the group relations conference and subsequently now as a trainee educational psychologist, any kind of connections that you've made?

P1: mm, I think that's everything, yeah.

DB: what's stood out to you in terms of the connections you have made?

P1: mm, I think talking to you today, I've no, I think since our last meeting, I've not really, erm, sat and thought explicitly about the links made, erm, I was aware they were always there and it would have an influence but I think having sat now and spoken about it, especially thinking about the child in mind and being the one in the displaced group and trying to voice that and maybe that has had some reflection on my desire to really voice the child's opinion, an, come at it from a different point of
view and seeing them on the outside and all these decisions being made around them. I think that'll be really important as well when, erm, doing the education, health care plans, erm, because it's very person focus, person centered and how much of an influence that will have. Yeah.

DB: yeah, that's one thing that stood out in your description, are there any other things that have stood out, any connections that you've made?

P1: erm, yeah, the group dynamics as well, I was always aware of them, so the different group dynamics I experienced in group relations, just on the different group levels, erm

DB: what you mean by that?

P1: so, (unclear), group dynamics in terms of how everyone gelled as a group, as a large group, erm, how they struggled to form the smaller groups, hence the displaced group, erm, the smaller experiential groups, the review groups, uh, that little MDT group I was part of as well. In the different dynamics within those, how some worked well and y, we all got on together, and some didn't work so well and there was that underlying tension.

DB: what was that like for you?

P1: erm, interesting, I think that was manageable, erm, because I had expected somewhere along the line, it's not all going to be as easy-going or as free-flowing as the experiential groups were going, and the review groups were quite structured. So I think that MDT group was quite an experience in terms of seen when you're not, when you're left to your own devices (laughs), and everyone's got such different
opinions, how much of it actually works and how much can you elicit your opinion
and be listened to fully when there’s two other conversations going on there and the
leader can’t control what’s going on and yeah (laughs).

DB: what was that like?

P1: (laughs) it was chaotic, yeah it was very chaotic, it was difficult, um, to sit with, I
remember the next day thinking I really don’t want to go back to this group, erm, but I
think a lot of people then had time to reflect on that, the day before, so it, erm, so it
seemed to be a lot more comfortable, erm, a lot more relaxed I suppose. And the day
before it was towards the end of the day, whereas the next day it was the morning
group, so, yeah.

DB: we talked about a few things that have stood out to you, erm, in terms of
connections that you’ve made, are there any others that you haven’t mentioned or
that do, do stand out to you, in your role as a trainee at the moment?

P1: er, I think what I spoke about at the beginning, about the competence, the
competency and, erm, my role as a trainee and where that sits in an EPS, erm, and
having, and remembering back to that discussion in the, in the group relations where,
erm, everyone went round talking about their professionalisms, and it was like oh so
the consultant is at the top, er, it was just, so it’s that idea that - do I need to wait to
I’ve qualified to feel on the same level, or, I don’t know, it was just yeah, I m’, do, is
that something I have to sit with now, erm, or, or just, it’s so difficult to tell because I
don’t know what it’s going to be like in the next, in my next placement, and that’s
going to be the biggest part of my training. Erm, but from my experience so far in this
year, erm, I’ve en, I’ve enjoyed being that trainee, but I, it has been difficult at times
as well, to be put in at the deep end – and am I expected to be taking on this much,
is this normal or, erm, or should I be getting more supervision, more support and so forth, so, and having had those conversations as well, which is, erm, I think leading back to it's, erm, I, it's not just me in my placement, y', I am still part of the Tavistock, and this is still my training, so it's something I could bring back here, which I was able to and that then helped me take it back to the placement and deal with difficulties.

DB: and there's something there that you're describing about being a trainee and different professionals, erm, and something about, if I'm right in listening to you, does that change when you become qualified?

P1: yeah (Laughs)

DB: what were you thinking in that sense?

P1: erm, just in, I suppose, how you're viewed as, how people view you, as a trainee, do they think that you're competent enough, you're confident enough, is it something you have to give off? Erm, you know, to, for others to perceive that or, or is it just that's your title so they must be like that, they mustn't be that competent or, you know, or they're a tr, they're an actual main grade EP so they must know it all and they, erm, and having discussions with different people, you know, you get, you get to understand that you can be a main grade for so long and still not know everything and still be taking questions back and so forth, erm, so, yeah.

DB: yes, how do you make sense of that now, how does that seem to you as something you've thought around?

P1: erm, that you will forever be learning (laughs), erm, and I think for me having known the kind of supervision that works well for me, that I would like, and that I

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learn best with, erm, I think that, that is what I would look to progress, not only as a trainee, erm, but also as a qualified EP.

DB: and what would that involve?

P1: erm, I suppose a two-way supervision, so it's not just me talking the whole time, having the input from my supervisor in terms of, erm, discussing the case in different ways, different, erm, things I could do, different scenarios and so forth, erm, taking, taking my cases as a dilemma I suppose and looking at it from different angles and also having had input from my supervisor in terms of perhaps their experience of something similar and how they've learned to deal with things or different strategies they've tried, erm, and as a trainee I really valued linking the theory to practice, erm, so in my CAMHs that's being really helpful, when I bring cases and then we talk about the psychology involved around that, and linking, erm, linking that and being reflective about that and also, erm, me being quite reflective as well on, how these cases may impact on me and how I'm feeling doing this work and so for, I think that's really helped, erm, binged, bring to the forefront my competence and confidence in some of the cases. Yeah.

DB: thank you, erm, and just going to give one last question, erm, which again is any, any other reflections that perhaps we haven't touched on, or that you'd like to pick up on again, in terms of having attended a group relations conference and what it's like for you as a trainee educational psychologist?

P1: ... I think that's everything, yeah. Yeah.

DB: sure, okay, I'm going to stop the tape recording there then
Follow-up interview: participant 2

DB: it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations conference, since then have you made any links of experience?

P2: erm, yeah I think I have, I've, erm, trying to, I was thinking recently about the course as a whole as we were in the process of evaluating the first year and, erm, and I was reminded that the first year has an individual focus, second year has a group focus and the third year has a systems focus. Erm, so that, erm, made a lot of sense to me actually, because I felt that in our, erm, in my thinking it wasn't perhaps as explicitly addressed, erm, and maybe on the course content in terms of teaching and, erm, integrating that understanding, so a lot of it so far has felt, it's been quite, I don't know, informal, kind of impromptu basis. And I think I had some, my first maybe links were, erm, my, I think my first link was, was when I did, erm, a joint staff consultation with a colleague of mine, fellow trainee. Er, we actually did two, erm, and I think that's where I started making links to group relations, erm, thinking about, erm, firstly even just kind of the positioning of the staff in the room and, erm, the, er, special, the SENCO's, erm, involvement or semi-involvement in that case, kind of coming in and out, er, representing where her maybe relationship or where she was in relation to that staff, that group of staff, it was, erm, in a children's centre,

DB: right

P2: the first one was a nursery room consultation and, erm, and even just kind of level of seating and then how the staff were sat, I found how they were sat in line with, almost their opinions or where they stood or, in relation to us as trainers as well, because the wasn't, the seating wasn't directed (unclear), so, erm, and I think and in
conversation, just thinking about where conflict lies and, erm, and how certain people take on different roles and one person might be at the receiving end of a lot of that conflict. Erm, thinking about the position of being a scapegoat for example in a group. Erm, and the kind of class teachers, erm, ro, hierarchical roles, within the staff team, within that one class for example.

DB: yeah

P2: and that really, erm, I felt informed our thinking, cos I, I was talking about it with my colleague afterwards, informed my thinking, in, in, and made a lot of sense in relation to their responses that they were giving us and, erm, which shaped our facilitation and our, erm...

DB: could you say bit more on that?

P2: erm, yeah, mm, it was quite a long time ago so perhaps, erm ... for example, erm, the class teacher, erm, seemed to have this role of, erm, recognising the strengths of the support assistants in the classroom and that came out, cos, we were asking for collective feedback, ul c, we were having a group discussion, erm, the, the s, the kind of SENCO’s role in, in naming the anxiety that she feels with working with certain children almost on behalf of some of the other staff members that were there. And being able maybe to articulate that or, erm, recognise it's, it's, erm, er, an acceptance of it perhaps, erm, and, er, and for example this one staff member that was at the receiving end of quite a lot of conflict from a parent, erm, she kind of sat really close to us (laughs), as trainees and kind of really took on the role of, erm, I guess her, e kind of having kind of a worrying role erm, and being really erm, anxious about her performance in a way (laughs), er, I don't know if that e, explains it a bit.
DB: and you were linking some of that kind of experience with the group relations conference?

P2: yeah so, erm, I guess in the group relations conference, erm, I’ve, I related that in a sense, thinking of hierarchies maybe, erm, it was a multi-professional event, erm, and there were people from lots of professions and there s, there seemed to be, there almost was a bit of a hierarchy in those professions. So for example, the psychiatrists were at the top (laughs) of the pecking order. Erm, and, erm … the erm … and were perhaps more able to articulate some of the things on behalf of the group, erm,

DB: what do you mean?

erm, so for example, erm, being able to ar, to articulate a worry, or an anxiety, or express it without fear of being, erm (laughs), may be persecuted for that as much or, erm, almost having a, a bigger voice, erm, and I think I related to it in that kind of consultation wh, where we thought that perhaps the, the assistant staff that were maybe lower down in the hierarchy were more fearful of expressing weakness or, erm, and yeah.

DB: the weakness?

P2: oh, erm, perhaps a one, a weakness in, which might be an anxiety or a worry or about the performance or a question about their own abilities for example.

DB: and you mentioned a bigger voice?
P2: yeah, erm, so that was quite interesting because in this particular consultation the special needs coordinator, which in a way was seen at the top of that hierarchy in the consultation did a lot of the talking (laughs), when she was there, erm, you know said she was only going to come for a little bit but then stayed, and almost, erm … erm, I guess, kind of, it made us aware of that, erm, maybe being a danger of suppressing other voices or, erm, and simply because of this, you know, hierarchy, erm, and, and I mean perhaps more may be confident or critical than other members of staff would, erm, feel that they could, er, question that or, erm, confront, not confront, challenge it, yeah. That was one example.

DB: yeah thank you, erm, and just going to ask one more time around that, that bigger voice, who were you referring to? Who were you thinking of?

P2: erm, so I was thinking of the professionals at the top of the hierarchies in the systems that they're working in.

DB: yeah

P2: so, erm, th tend to be ones with perhaps more experience or more training or more qualifications or (unclear) around for longer. So, and that was quite noticeable in the group relations conference, there were, erm, group, (laughs), I'm going to name the psychiatrists who had, erm, were, had spent more time training and, erm, they often ended up taking these kind of quite, well, ta, taking and been pushed into perhaps, into these almost leadership roles within a group, erm, yeah.

DB: and what reflections have you got from your experience, erm, that you've described there?
P2: erm ... so for example I felt that ... erm, making these links helped me in my training in my understanding of what role I could take in that, so if I was facilitating a consultation, erm, you know, my role in, in, ensuring that everyone feels they’re able to contribute and have an equal voice and almost, erm, mana, manage, erm, maybe voices that are perhaps too dominant and taking over (laughs), erm, and, erm, yeah kind of being almost an advocate for the, those lower down the hierarchies (laughs), erm, in the way that you might advocate for a child or a staff member that might be struggling in a team or, erm,

DB: what was that like?

P2: erm ... (laughs), I don't know, I think a lot of the thinking came afterwards because we were preoccupied with our actual, erm, responding to what was being said at the time, erm, but I think it informed, for example, our next consultation which was in the same children's centre, but with another group of staff, erm, an a and,

DB: in what way?

P2: it was with my, it was with my j. joint (laughs), fellow trainee we were in the same placement and it almost prepared us a little bit for it, so we were thinking about it a bit in advance, we were thinking, er, where as in the first consultation we hadn't really considered it so much so it brought it to our awareness so the next consultation we were, erm, er, maybe less preoccupied by it (laughs) ourselves as trainees. Or, or maybe, erm, how else did it? Erm ... yeah I, I'm not sure (laughs), I'm not sure.

DB: okay, erm, I'm just going to repeat that kind of opening question in terms of since the group relations conference, erm, have you made any links with that experience and any, anything subsequently?
P2: erm, yeah I felt, erm, although this is, I’m going to be even more vague with this
one, but I felt there was a lot of relevance with, er, my CAMHs placement, so the
multiagency team I was working with, erm, it almost felt more explicitly relevant
because a lot of the same professionals in the group relations, not the same adults,
sorry, the same roles,
DB: yeah
P2: were present in this multiagency team I was placed in. But I do feel that the kind
of size and the, of the team, and my, you know, one day a week involvement meant
that I didn’t, I didn’t reach an understanding of this really complex system and how it
worked. Erm, but I did feel that there were, erm, definitely some links there. For
example, erm, I was able to attend two whole team meetings where are all the staff
was there, erm, and again it was interesting to see, erm, the pr, the leadership roles,
the professionals, how this affected almost their input to the meeting at the time.
Erm, and this related to kind of I think gender and age issues as well, it touched on
those issues cos there was, there’s quite a female dominated team and, erm, that a
kind of more middle-aged, senior gentleman that was probably the only one there at
the time, initially, if I hadn’t of known who was who would almost seem like the team
leader (laughs), like they were kind of in, leading the meeting initially, erm, I mean
that was partly related to them presenting something at the beginning which is a
rotor, which works on a rotational basis, so I don’t, if it was just coincidence, erm, but,
er, I guess it made me think of, erm, when you are in a, in a meeting full of all these
professionals, how they are all giving their diff, they’re giving a, a perspec, a different
perspective to a situation so the topic, whatever the topic of discussion is, erm, I
noticed that in group relations you could almost distinguish their professions from the
way they were reflecting on the topic of discussion, erm, and, erm, yeah and just kind
of a more awareness of, er, maybe members that are quieter. Again I, I keep thinking
about hierarchies for some reason (laughs), I don't know why but professional hierarchies, erm, and members of staff that were quieter, erm, it prompted thinking in me and why that was. Erm, what else was you know, going on behind this, erm, where this is a massive team, where is the conflict? (laughs) but I guess within group relations one of the kind of realise, well realisations or, I almost felt that a conclusion was drawn that there, there was conflict in the systems somewhere, and almost had to be, erm, but I couldn't really see it the whole time (laughs) I was there. Erm, but then I thinking that, in those two meetings I started noticing from the way staff interacting with each other, there might have been some issues there, er. Might have been some conflict of there, but quite healthy conflict that helped, you know, enriching the discussion, er in their teams.

DB: could you say a bit more on that?

P2: erm ... er, so for example that if there is a team and there is conflict, it's not necessarily a bad thing because it sometimes pushes the team forward into thinking of more, it pushes their thinking I guess. Erm ... I think ... erm, for example the team leader at the multiagency, at the CAMHs team I was working with just towards the end of this year was resign, resigned actually and left, erm, and, and then how they almost, erm, that made me question how did the team relate to that event and h, and, erm, that perhaps some kind of these feelings were then projected onto the team manager who was (laughs) leaving, erm, in order t, t, to protect the team that remained (laughs). Erm, but that's, that's also kind of linking in with other parts of the course, our experiential groups that we've had over the year, these are things that we've thought about within our group. Erm, and I think that almost, it, it, it, merges a bit with group relations because it was one of the most similar aspects of the course related to that, erm, and so I'm almost can't, not able to distinguish any more whether
that's come from the group relations conference or the experiential, com, an
amalgamation of both.

DB: could you say a little bit more about that amalgamation?

P2: erm ... so ... erm, so I think ... if group relations, if the event potentially triggered
some thinking, erm ... I think in our experiential group, erm, some of those thoughts
were able, to, to, erm, maybe develop a little bit and we were facilitated by a
professional who helped us in our thinking as well (laughs), erm and, you know,
almost it helped us maybe gave us some potential explanations for why these things
were happening. Erm, and, and I just felt that because the, the, the processes were
so similar, I'm not sure where that thinking, you know, it's rooted from (laughs), it
merged, it merged in my mind.

DB: okay, erm, bearing that kind of subtlety in mind, I'm going to ask a second
question here, erm, I'm interested in your thoughts, have you made any links
between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee
educational psychologist?

P2: mm. Yeah, so thinking, I think it, erm, again started a process of thinking about
our role in our EPS placements and, erm ... how in a trainee position, erm, I guess it,
I guess it c, more take, it's about taking up our role as a trainee educational
psychologist, erm, how am I going to expand on that? (Laughs), erm...

DB: it's your choice

P2: yeah (laughs), erm, so thinking about for example, erm, if we go back to
hierarchies, for example, when you enter a service, erm, you'll have, you'll have a
principal educational psychologist, you'll have senior educational psychologists, erm, 
and thinking about, that you're, e in, experiences of trainees maybe entering, erm, 
maybe just below an EP role, before the, erm, an educational psychologist, so in a 
kind of lower hierarchy, but perhaps above administrative support or assistant 
psychologists. Erm, and taking into account, erm, we've had some discussions in 
preparation for next year, thinking about services that sometimes treat their trainees 
as fully qualified educational psychologists. Erm, and our role in reminding them of, 
that we are still training and still need supervision support and take longer to do 
things (laughs), and a facilitation in understanding, erm, that's about the same 
(unclear) hierarchies.

DB: yeah, and you talked about, in terms of any links between attending the group 
relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist, 
something there about yourself in role?

P2: mm, yeah so, erm, I think in group relations, brought up a lot of discussion about 
being a professional (laughs) and, erm, our separate or in intertwinednesses with 
your personal development, erm, and so taking up a role of a profession, erm, I think 
it brought to the surface a lot of thinking about, an awareness of how much of that is 
personal (laughs), erm, and how much, erm, it's hard to separate as being 
professional and your personal, (laughs), your personal kind of being, erm,

DB: have you got any thoughts on that?

P2: yes so for example, in the conference, although I had a role I was a, you know ... 
actually, although we were, I was there as a trainee educational psychologist, a lot of 
my behaviours, were behaviours that I would do in any context and that weren't 
specific to my, the professional, me being you know, professional role. Erm, and,
erm, I think I remember we had a discussion in, in our experiential group following that about, well what is being professional and is it any different from being, you know, genuine to yourself and following your kind of instinct, erm, and, erm, you know,

DB: what do you think about that?

P2: erm, yeah I felt, I felt it was quite (laughs) enlightening from me in the sense that, er, I spent a lot of, erm, my career separating (laughs) the two, erm, purposefully trying to keep them separate and for me it brought about, erm, almost an, an appreciation that my personal qualities are those that enhance my professional qualities. So that was quite erm,

DB: could you say a little bit more on that?

P2: (laughs), erm, so I think an example we, we discussed in experiential was about, erm, our playfulness and being creative and how, erm, and how as trainees, we felt that some, that sometimes we were more creative and playful outside of our professional roles, and I think the question was raised, well why is that not brought to the professional role, because actually it can really develop your work and it can really make you a better (laughs) professional. Erm, so, erm, that almost freed us up, well it freed, maybe freed, it felt it freed me up to, t, to erm, t, perhaps be more playful and more creative in my role as an EP, or in learning to take up this role (laughs).

DB: yep, yeah, I'm just going to repeat that question, erm, one more time, in, in terms of have you made any other links between attending the group relations conference and your experience a trainee EP?
P2: mm, yeah, I w, l, I found that, erm, it, erm, it encouraged me to think about systems, erm, so again it, I felt as well as the experiential group, the group relations really, erm, was integrated with the systems taught module that we've had and those principles, erm, in thinking, erm, about as a training course, we've, we're in the middle of a lot of change, we have big staff, erm, we've had a lot of staff changes over the last six months or over the last year, the year, the courses historically for the last few years has had a lot of staff changes and, erm, erm, I think it, I think group relations help, helped me, als, ins, began some thinking about us as a group, as a training group and how we respond to that, and how, erm, and how for example we pr, protected almost our year group and, erm, projected, erm, feelings of you know, anger and maybe abandonment onto the staff, onto kind of management, erm, er, in response to, to these changes and, erm, just an awareness of, of how all this stuff, however (laughs), it's kind of made me realise that it's, it's, it's not personal to people but it's the whole group that feels these anxieties about who is coming in next and, erm, what's going to happen next year, and who are we going to have, erm, it, it's really encouraged me to think almost less individualistically and more, more with the group's mind, erm, or a recognition that the group has a mind (laughs), erm, which was something I hadn't really appreciated before.

DB: could you talk a bit more about that kind of idea?

P2: erm ... erm, I think a sense, a sense that like, for example in any group or in any consultation, when one person speaks of an anxiety or a worry, or a feeling of anger, erm, they speak on behalf of everyone in the groups, that almost, erm, almost, erm, recognising that everyone has an element of those feelings and, erm, some might not, and some might disagree, and that's how your conversation moves on, but, erm, how one person speaks, can speaks on behalf of a group or a system. Yeah.
DB: and you mentioned some thoughts around systems and, and principles from thinking systemically?

P2: yeah, I think, erm, again I, I, it feels a bit informal but in my work with families for example, erm, thinking of a family as a system, I remember working with one boy, erm, and then s, erm, at some point during by intervention/assessment, erm, by the time I got to, I got to the final consultation with parents and SENCO again, the concern had shifted from this boy I was working with to his sibling, erm, and just really won, 's, erm, wondering why that happens and how that happens, and I haven't got the answers yet (laughs), but I think it's, it's made me think of that, it's made me, erm, be more curious, perhaps.

DB: okay thank you, I'm just going to offer a chance for any other, other reflections around attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist since.

P2: mm, I think because we have end of year evaluations at the forefront of our minds at the moment as we're ending, erm, there has been a bit of discussion, erm, around this conference being unique to our course and, erm, thinking about how that might affect, erm, affect our training in comparison to other trainees on other courses and how EPS's might receive us differently or, erm, with or without an understanding of these experiences, erm,

DB: do you have any thoughts on that?

P2: erm, no I think, I think it's the group relations conference is not very known, erm, amongst other training courses, and any attempt to explain it (laughs) just gets, gets me into a muddle anyway, erm, I think if you have services where there are Tavistock
trainees there might be, erm, there might be more of an awareness of it, erm, but I think perhaps it's something that as trainees we we're, we're holding as quite a unique experience and, erm, we're, I'm kind of hoping that more of the, erm, learning from that will become more explicit in the next two years as we think about groups and as we think about systems and, and in the future, erm, so, erm, th,

DB: what does it mean to you for it to be unique, to this training course?

P2: er ... I don't know, erm, what does it mean for me,

DB: just wondering if there was any other kind of reflections that followed on from that kind of recognition?

P2: er ... yeah, I don't know, I feel like, erm, at one level ... you know, it's, I don't know, I'm completely stumped by that question actually (laughs)

DB: should I move onto another would you like a little bit more time to think?

P2: mm, I think move on (laughs)

DB: okay, erm, I was also interested when you said, as you might try and explain the group relations conference, how that can become something of a muddle, erm, just wondered if you have any thoughts on that front?

P2: erm, yeah, I think it's quite, erm, I, I think that's linked with me generally finding difficulty in expressing, erm, one of my areas for development (laughs), is expressing the, erm, a, explicit psychological frameworks and the kind of application and naming, you know, these terms that support my work and, erm, so I think it's
something to do with my difficulty in expressing that, erm, but, also, it, I think it might be related to, to not, erm, not knowing the full impact of it yet (laughs), er, I think it's, erm,

DB: what do you mean?

P2: so I feel that, that, erm, links, or I anticipate that links will continue to come up as we’re encouraged to think more about groups and systems and so, next year we're going to be running a group in our EPS’s, erm, and I’m thinking that might bring some things back to the forefront. We’ll be writing assignments that are thinking more about groups and systems over the next two years, so it might, erm, I think that will help me articulate things better and link it to theory, erm, a bit better, but at the moment it, it does feel like I'm holding onto kind of experiences, and erm, and I've still got to bridge it to the theory because during that week we had a lovely long reading list which I didn't manage to get through, erm, but I think, erm, as has happened so far you have these moments, memories of these links, of these kind of experiences that you, that you link to your work and eventually hopefully link back to theory.

DB: I see, and is that important for you to link back to theory?

P2: I think for me it is, I think, erm, that helps my understanding of it, erm, I think it, erm, I think the theory helps me, yeah helps me understand it, articulate it, express it better, which I think goes parallel with my, erm, with my erm, my depth of understanding, yeah.

DB: okay, thank you, erm, just coming to the end of our conversation, erm, just the last opportunity to, erm, offer any, any reflections in terms of, since the group
relations conference that you attended, any kind of links to your experience subsequently as a trainee EP?

P2: mm … I think because it has, erm, because one of the first links I made was with my CAMHs team, with a multiagency team, I think if the profession is moving to multi-professional teams again, multi-agency teams, that, erm, because it almost it replicate, it felt that it replicated that, erm, I think it would be really, really valuable in that context, if, if, I, erm, after graduating (laughs) erm, applied for roles, erm, in, in CAMHs teams or in, erm, in bigger teams like that I think it, I think that would be quite a valuable experience to bring to that. And also, an al, erm, in my multiagency work in it, through the local authority as well (unclear) equally.

DB: and you say a valuable experience to bring to that, what are you thinking?

P2: so I’m thinking at, erm … that perhaps it would be an advantage, erm, in entering a complex team, erm, in that, erm, what I think they said at the conference which still sticks out in my mind is, erm, an awareness of these processes frees you from those processes. So it means you’re not restricted, erm, by that which in theory enables you to work better and not be, erm, yeah, not be bound by these group processes that might prevent a team functioning, erm,

DB: what you think about that?

P2: erm, er, I think, erm, I think an awareness starts within you from the process but I, er, I do feel that linking it to theory and deepening my understanding of it would free me a bit more (laughs), from it. Yeah.
DB: okay, erm, have you got any other comments, any things that we haven't
mentioned that you wanted to pick up on?

P2: erm ... I just think making your point of all the different levels it can, erm, it can
affect so you know, a, as small as a, even just a, a family as a system where a lot of
the, erm, principles apply, just as, just as well as a, a massive, erm, a massive group
of organi, a massive organisation even, you know maybe nationally, erm, and I just
think it, it doesn't blow my mind a bit about the potential (laughs), erm, the concept of
groups.

DB: how come?

P2: erm, I think I, I mentioned this in my last interview, that I just, group processes
was something I avoided quite actively (laughs), until now and, erm, just the, what
feels like infinite, erm, possibilities of application. Er, as, you know, as much as my
mind will let me access.

DB: and you say, perhaps, you might have avoided it to some extent previously, how,
how does that feel now?

P2: erm, I think, er, well I remember during the conference, questioning whether not
understanding it, or I think this is something I said in my last interview, not
understanding it, erm, because that limits really, you know, understanding only a
fraction of it, does that limit its potential? Erm, and I think it, it raises the question of
timing and, erm, for me, I think, you know to, now is the time to do it, and to address
this because it, it can be really influential in my r, in, in my role as an EP, erm, but I
do think that this is the kind of stuff, these are the kind of processes that would be
really helpful to me as, as a, in my previous roles as a [describes previous work role]
as a, erm a, you know a, erm, [describes previous work role], erm, but I just don't think I was ready for them at the time, so I think there's something about the timing of it.

DB: what about now?

P2: erm, now?

DB: you say you didn't feel that you were ready, I just wondered how it feels now?

P2: yeah I think now it feels (laughs), it feels, I feel a lot more ready, and a lot more, I think it feels really appropriate because it was done in the context of my year cohort which, erm, because we attended it as a group, erm, we are each other's support network through that, where as if I'd attended it as an individual, I don't know, I can't even imagine attending it as an individual, erm, so I think there's a maybe, valuable in attending it with your fellow trainees, erm, because then you can explore its potential together a bit more and,

DB: and what's it like imagining it as an individual?

P2: erm ... isolating? (Laughs)

DB: I'm just picking up on one of the things you mentioned in terms of how relations conference, if I'm right in hearing you could influence you in role, just wondered if you had any comments on that front?

P2: mm, I think an awareness of, of the importance of the role of an EP of being external to the systems that you're entering in and out of on a daily basis, erm, and
that's was reminded to us by the conference by the, the facilitators, erm, that will, b,
but will perhaps allow you to, to be aware of more of the processes if you, as, as
being kind of an independent, erm, individual that's supporting the system that's
external to the system, erm, which I think makes me think about a lot about the
potential of being an EP based in a school for example, or, erm, attached to, erm,
working in a school and the pros and cons of being part of a system and being
outside the system, so I think that was, I think some of the thinking it provoked.

DB: okay, okay, erm, I'm going to stop there, erm, because we got to stop
somewhere.
Follow-up interview: participant 3

DB: it's been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations conference, since then have made any links that experience?

P3: erm, I think one explicit link that was made was erm, discussion of paper on groups and gangs in one of our modules, erm, and I've had to present that paper I think that a lot of examples that I used I drew upon, from the group relations experience. So that was quite nice, and because it was a shared experience it helped us to think about the paper collectively, and so...

DB: could you tell me a bit more about, about that?

P3: erm, I can try, I can't really remember the paper that much at the moment, erm, but it was just about the underlying principles

DB: I guess I'm interested in any links with the group relations conference...

P3: yeah, I think it was the underlying principles and I think because I was, remember the last time I talked about group relations, how I was in a group that, erm, was left without what they called a territory. And that was a space to work in, erm, and how we would told by the group, by conference facilitators that, erm, we had to be based in one of those rooms, otherwise we couldn't, we weren't recognised as part of the system and so I likened that to a gang and it being something outside of the system almost, and but as a group at the, at the time we very much felt that we wanted to stay together and we had that shared mindset but that made us I guess strong in some ways and weak in others, and but I linked that to the paper because it, it talked about, erm, shared mindsets and no exploration of difference and that
being, erm, pretty much like a gang, and so I guess even though we appeared to all have the same idea and agreement, erm, in effect we kind of reflected a gang, which I felt, I mean, I felt like that anyway so, but it was nice to be able to tie it to literature and have an experience to go with that, experience that I had had myself, but also it wasn't real, but it was real in a sense, if you know what I mean, so yeah, it was nice to share that experience.

DB: and through that what reflections did you have about any links that you were drawing?

P3: erm, I guess, what I was, one of the things I was thinking about was, erm, that we were quite a large group and we appeared to all share the same viewpoint, erm, but from reading the literature, the fact was that we probably didn't. But what would've happened if we had verbalised or articulated differences within the group and had, and were forced to explore differences, erm, and I guess in the paper it was talking about the conflict that arises when you start to explore differences, erm, and then if the group is able to work with those differences and function alongside it, or if it disbands the group and, erm, so I guess I was reflecting upon I mean, what would have happened if we had felt secure enough or (unclear) to show how, or to show what we didn't agree on, erm, because we didn't but no one said anything so...

DB: have you got any thoughts on that?

P3: I think it was more about at that time, I think, I mean, I described the experiencing in quite a survival mode way. Erm, I think it was more about, it was safer to stay together at that point, erm, and so we didn't, like, expose who we were in effect. So then I was thinking about gangs and the security in gangs. Erm, you don't expose different or who you are as an individual but rather who you are as part
of a group. And its, it appears to be safer because, so I guess I was just thinking
about I don't know (laughs) I don't know really just erm, just little thoughts, I didn't
really think too deeply into it I just touched on the surface of the links and…

DB: okay thank you (I'm just going to open a window for us)
P3: please, thanks yes it's quite, it is quite hot.

DB: I'm just going to ask that question again, erm, in terms of, since you attended the
group relations conference, any links that you've made to that experience?
P3: mm, I think being a member of my cohort as well, I think we've explored it a little
bit, erm, we have experiential groups and in the early months we were told by our
facilitator that we were too nice to each other and that we appear to all like each
other or share the same, erm, perspective on things but that wasn't correct. And I
remember we disagreed with the facilitator on that and you know, we thought that
she was just trying to almost force us to have conflict, but what I noticed in, in us as a
group, erm, towards the end we were quite verbal with how we disagreed with each
other and there were conflicts within the group, within our experiential, erm, sessions
and they were okay, and I think we explored that a lot more and I think that's
something that thinking about the group relations, er, conference where I've just said
we didn't explore difference, erm, and were able to stay together as a collection of
people in my cohort we have explored difference and had disagreements, and we're
still together as a collection of people. Linking it back to that paper that I said I'd read,
one would be called a group, one would be called a gang. Erm, but we're both still
together, just one seemed to be more healthier than the other, so I guess that's
another reflection, erm, that is linked in three ways to now. Erm, but now I think as a
member of that group, that cohort I am more willing to I guess express things that go
against what the collective group says, erm, or explore that even, and feel more free
to be myself erm, within the group. Er, yeah, I don't know if that was what you were
looking for, but yeah, that was just something that came into my head when you
asked the question again, so... mm

DB: I'm not sure what I'm looking for

P3: yeah okay (laughs)

DB: I am interested though in that comment you made in terms of, if I'm right, more
able to be yourself?

P3: mm, yeah because I think as I got to know, I don't know if it's as I've got to know,
I felt, I felt more comfortable to, I think I know enough about the place here, about the
course, about the group, erm, and about myself to be able to then confidently share
that, knowing that the could be, erm, conflict or consequences, but that's okay. And
it's, so it's almost that safety that I can just explore and experiment, erm, and it's not
gonna be something that's going to have a detrimental effect, because, collectively
we are a group and that our commitment is to the course and to be that group. So
there is a kind of I guess a commitment outside of just us as a group, erm, and so
that is a kind of security, erm, that allows me to bring myself really, I don't, I don't
know but I think I've just, I personally have developed, erm, since the conference but
also being on the course as well, because obviously you know, whatever I
experienced at the group relations conference, erm, ran, runs parallel to me
developing on the course as well so I guess it's hard to say what has been a ongoing
thing through the course and what started or was contributed by the conference in
itself, so... erm, or if they're just interwoven the whole way through, you know, I
mean our tutor said to us that in 20 years time will have those 'a-ha' moments where
we'll see something and relate it back to group relations. So, in f, we'll never know re,
really if it was that or just the course because they're two, they, they started so close
together really. The impact has been throughout so...

DB: and as the tutor spoke to you about the 'aha' moments, I just wondered what
your thoughts might be on that?

P3: I had a few, like, like the one I said before about reading that paper and, you
know, linking it to our group experience, erm, and then I guess realising the
experiential group that we were able to explore conflict and be different, and it was
okay, and also recognise when we disagreed. So I guess those were all those
moments, erm, and I guess as I continue to practice as well and train, erm, I'll have
more, I think, but I think that's generally about all experiences in life and you know,
little, those experiences that stand out, erm, as significant those once-in-a-lifetime
things, it's later on that you realise, oh yeah that's because I did that back then, erm,
so I guess it's one of those really...

DB: you mentioned personal development

P3: mm

DB: just wondered if you had any sort of reflections in relation to the group relations
conference?

P3: ... I guess maybe in my thinking, erm, about groups I guess, erm, just been able
to think about, I mean I said that last time as well, I said that it made me think about,
erm, groups on the outside of society and thinking about what goes on, erm, in the
infrastructure and the communication between them, because obviously I said that I
was in a group that was classed as a gang or an outcast group, erm, but within our
conversation we very much felt that we were strong and united and we felt that we
had a purpose and vision, erm, but it wasn't seen by anyone else and when I heard
about how that group was described outside of our group, it was like as refugees as
homeless people and we didn't see that and so we didn't know we were called that.
And so I guess in terms of personal development, development, erm, it makes me think
about the groups that I work with young people for example, erm, and how I might
have seen them before and now how maybe how I see, or want, would like to see
past what is presented on the outside because I'm more aware that there are
intricate details that are not seen.
Erm, and so I guess that's, that's one way that I think I've develop personally and just
my ability to be able to think past what, erm, b, passed what how, past how society
frames particular groups and think, and think to what's going on underneath that,
what is actually the reality, rather than just what is just presented to you.

DB: have you got any further reflections on that front?

P3: ... No (laughs) I don't.

DB: okay. I'm going to ask a, a different question, erm, now, and it's this, have you
made any links between attending the group relations conference and your
experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P3: well I think everything I just described was, links between me in enrolled as a
trainee educational psychologist and the conference, erm, cos I think, like I said
before, like developing on the course alongside the experience of group relations, it's
been kind of, erm, a clo, like building closer links or, between my personal and
professional life so (unclear), to the point where I am who I am, I am myself, and I am
a psychologist in one and so any links that I make are linked to me personally and
professionally, cos personally because of my thinking, and then professionally
because it's the output of my thinking, erm, and the expression of my thinking so for
example going back to what I just said about the thinking about groups now in a
different way, that would be my personal development, my thinking, but then how
that would then practically look would be expressed professionally through my role
as a trainee educational psychologist and so I think, yeah just every link that I've
made is then expressed or impacts what I do in role as well…

DB: can you think of any times where you've made those links, erm, between the
group relations conference and yourself in role?

P3: … I can't really think of, erm, explicit examples, erm, I think it's more likely to be
that my thinking has been challenged or changed, and then it's just, you've just seen
the effect of it in my work, erm, erm, …

DB: maybe if we take those in turn, the, the effect on your thinking?

P3: … what about that, what do you mean, what about it?

DB: I'm just interested in any links that you might have made since, since attending
the group relations conference, erm, you mentioned perhaps an influence on your
thinking and perhaps on yourself in role. Just wondered if there were any kind of
connections that you might have made?

P3: … I'm not sure, erm, I'm just tr, I was just trying to think back to the conference,
see what could I remember of it, erm, and I'm struggling to remember it to be honest
but I think little, at different times in the training, erm, different memories of parts of
the conference will come up that will be linked to something that is current, erm, so I
guess those would be the times when I recognise it but I think right now I'm just
struggling to remember like and just to make links, erm, yeah, it's just a bit hard to
think about the moment, I don't know I guess it's because it's just I don't know, I
suppose busy outside, yeah, erm, I think because also I'm at a point in the course,
cos the end of term that there's no time for thinking, you've just got to do, to finish
everything in time, so having to think right now is quite hard (laughs), sorry (laughs).

DB: that's okay, that's really okay

P3: but, erm, but I think often, I think the experiences of the conference, maybe
they're not always at the conscious level, maybe they just, a lot of it is unconscious
and you wouldn't realise until afterwards that there was a link, and so I've described
like explicit links that I've been able to see now but I think maybe over the next few
months or even if I am reflecting on the year again at a time when it's a bit less
stressful I might think of things and that it will trigger a memory or a link back to the
conference. But I definitely think that it, it did have a big impact, erm, but I think it
varies at different times as to, you know, how much of that impact is conscious.

DB: Yeah

P3: ... and I think I'm thinking about it, in terms of groups, erm, as a whole rather
than individuals, there were pockets of individuals or that stood out in the group, in
the wider group, but I'm thinking about applying it in terms of groups as a whole and
as a trainee I've not yet dealt with groups. I mean the focus for, erm, the three years
here is that you work on, it's mostly individual work in year one, groups in year two
and organisations in year three, so I, maybe in year two after having lots of
experience of working with groups I may be able to make more links between my
experiences then and I might be able to see things more explicitly then, er, yeah.

DB: and you mentioned something there perhaps about individuals and groups?

P3: mm, cos a group is, is a collection of individuals isn't it, so, and I think in the
conference there were times where you saw an individual which stood apart from the
group, maybe they were louder or they seem to carry all the thoughts of the group,
erm, other times you just saw the group as a whole and they didn't, you didn't really
notice them, they're just a collective group. Erm, and I guess that's linked to like
when we have experiential groups and our facilitator always used to say that, so
when someone speaks, they speak on behalf of the group unless they're challenged
or someone presents another viewpoint, erm, and so I guess that's a link as well,
erm, because linking back at the conference there were loads of people there, but I
could only tell you a few I remembered, erm, and the ones that I can't remember the
faces of, were the just ones that blended into whatever group they were with, erm, so
I didn't recognise them as individuals, so I guess that's something in, someone
speaks out or does something and it's not challenged or opposed or there is not an
alternative viewpoint then it does speak for the group.

DB: what are your thoughts on that?

P3: oh, I think, I think I agree with that because, erm, nothing else has been
presented and people can't tap into the unconscious thought of the group or the
conscious thoughts of the group, it's what's expressed, erm, and I guess, it's so, like,
for, if I go back to experiential groups, erm, and one person's speaking, if it was
something that myself or the others felt strongly against, then we would challenge it,
if not, if we didn't challenge it, or couldn't be bothered, then on some level we were
willing to accept it enough that we felt that we didn't have to change the way things were going, so, that's accept, even if you accept it a little or a lot you're still accepting, erm, so I agree with that, erm, speaking on behalf of the group. But also, erm, they talked about people carrying things on behalf of the group as well so if they were negate, well, we say negatives and positives, it's not really the opposites, but, if erm, if a viewpoint was presented, it wasn't that it was that person's viewpoint it was that that was part of the viewpoint of the group that was being expressed through that person, and so we explored that, erm, which was nice to get an understanding about, because I guess working in schools at the moment and in the clinics, it helps me to not locate things within one person, and so I guess to understand that what is being shown or what's being expressed is just being channeled through that particular person but it's you know, it's, it's pretty much a system feeling or idea or viewpoint. Yeah, I can't remember the question (laughs).

DB: that's okay … I think the question really was just very interested in any links, any connections you might have made between that group relations conference experience and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist subsequently?

P3: mm, so I did kind of answer it.

DB: one of the things that you mentioned that I was interested in was this idea of the personal and professional, wondered if you have any other thoughts on that?

P3: mm I think that was more development through my, through the course, erm, rather than from the conference itself, erm, I don't think it, yeah didn't, it wasn't something that the cour, unless, well like I said the conference impacted on my thinking, but that was on the personal level, erm, and then I guess as I practice, that's
where it meets the personal and professional. Erm, but that's pretty much developing throughout the course. Erm, yeah...

DB: okay ... I'm just going to offer the question, erm, in terms of any other links that you might have made since attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P3: ... I learnt to manage anxiety in different lev, in a different way. That was something that came out of the cou, er, out of the conference. Erm, or manage, erm, like difficult internal feelings, erm, which I guess is personal, and professional, erm, and that then allowed me to think about that when I was going into schools and being able to manage difficult meetings when I was taking them personally, but having to act professionally, and how to manage those two faces really. Erm, like for example one part of the conference, erm, involved sitting in a group and it pretty, it pretty much was like an experiential group, it was pretty much, it pretty much went how it was, how it went really, there wasn't any agenda or any plan. Erm, and so there were a lot of sil, there were a lot of silences in the group, which I was used to anyway from having our own experiential groups. But they, the anxiety of the others was (excuse me) projected on to other individuals so we were picking up a lot of other people's anxieties, erm, which is like working as a trainee educational psychologist, you pick up the anxieties of the staff you work with and also some of the patients, erm, but I was aware of that and I was aware of what I had, or how to kind of deal with that, erm, so that was something from the conference that then because of that I could then work on outside. I think one, one experience, I can't remember what it was, I don't remember, but I think I was angry in one of the sessions, erm, because I think that I'd asked a facilitator a question and he'd ignored me, and everyone was like, everyone had been there, and I was really embarrassed and angry and I felt really like heated and I was like livid, and I just, erm, and but then I, I noticed how that
blocked me from accessing the rest of the session and realised when I came out that
if, that I will probably get angry working in schools, erm, with some of the comments
that staff can make or, you know, but how do I deal with that and how, and how do I
work without becoming disabled, erm, but still able to practice effectively and
manage my own feelings. So that was something that I then worked on, erm,
professionally, so in context, but also outside in my personal life, erm, doing that.
And it was about finding ways to channel like the emotion, so that's a link that, going
back to your personal development question, erm, that could probably be relevant
there. Erm, and how to manage difficult feelings in context. Erm…

DB: what's your thoughts on that?

P3: on what?

DB: well, if I'm hearing you right there was some reflections there about managing
that internal kind of emotions, erm, and it felt like you were making some links with
the group relations conference and perhaps subsequently. I just wondered if you had
any, if you could speak a little bit more about that?

P3: erm, I could say it again and maybe it'll come out in a different way, I don't know,
erm, so just, er, just being aware that, erm, about the impact of certain feelings and
how that made me at that time, erm, unable to almost function really, it kind of
disabled me, erm, and knowing, but recognising that because I, we had, you know, I
personally went back to reflect on each day and made notes, erm, on what I felt I had
learnt and wanted, what I could take away that could work, you know, towards my
personal development. Erm, and the management of emotions in a prof, in a
professional context was one of them. Erm, because obviously in a personal context
you can shut down and deal with it later, you can release all the emotions and you
know, kick-off. But in a professional context you can't so it was a, but, but I've noticed that I was being, that I'd felt disabled and I knew that that wasn't effective so it was just about working on ways to be able to manage that. And I mean it, I, I have erm, I have developed in that area. So for example working, erm, as a trainee in one of the ser, in one of the services, had a difficult meeting where a member of staff didn't want me to work in the school because I was a trainee, erm, and I knew I'd been asked to do work there and the SENCO had a very difficult morning and so she'd been shouted at, and so she shouted at me. Erm, but in that moment I was able to take all that in and still do the work. And I, you know I was able to offer her and say okay well, I'll go away and have discussions but what I can offer you now is this, would you like to accept it? And they accepted, erm, then I went away and screamed about it, but the point was that in that moment, in the professional moment I could contain myself, contain the other professional and practice, take that away and then personally deal with it. Probably needed some shaping as well but I was able to take it to the right place, I was able to call friends and say this is what's happened and just talk things over. Erm, in a, on a personal level and then, then take it to professional supervision and say this is what's happened, so we deal with it. So I, by that point I'd learnt how to take things to the right places. Erm, and I guess that can all link back to me feeling disabled emotionally in that room at the group relations conference. Erm, and knowing that this can't, I can't continue like this because it's not effective. Erm, so that was a learning that I was, yeah, in the area of personal development, you know, knowing where things go I guess, navigating that personal-professional interface I guess. Actually I like that phrase (laughs) yeah.

DB: the personal-professional interface?

P3: yeah, just where they meet. Erm, which is in meetings like this where there's, you know, it's a professional context but you're very much present and you're
experiencing it and you're involved in it and it's running through you, and you're running through it. Erm, but then there are aspects of say your personality or your character which is inappropriate to bring into the context because it just is not effective, so, but that's, that's where things are playing out, and so it's at those times that, erm, you're actively managing almost both worlds if you like, erm, cos I was offended in the meeting, and I knew I was offended but I was able to put that aside for a second, deal with it professionally, and then take it away and say can you believe what they actually said to me? But I knew I was conscious enough, erm, to be able to manage both sides and where it played out was in I guess in the management or the interface is the management of the both I guess. Erm, yeah, I could write a book on that actually, it was quite interesting. But yeah, that's, so that's one thing that I think, erm, well another thing that I think, you know how, what, how it impact, how the conference impacted me.

DB: and what was it that interests you in terms of that interface as you described it?

P3: because I go into schools, erm, and I see the conflict amongst staff, I was in a meeting a couple of weeks ago and, erm, with two SENCO's and just seeing the conflict between them and speaking to them individually and they were gossiping about each other and it was a really ineffective way to function professionally. Erm, they were working together but they were backbiting and they didn't agree with each other's practice but they never talked about it, erm, and so I guess seeing that, I was able to see how when you don't manage the personal and professional interface it's just a bit difficult and you don't move forwards. This school has actually become stagnant, erm, it's got a high level of need, erm, advice has been given, nothing has been done because of the conflict. And so I guess being able to see that, and knowing it starts but you have to do it in yourself as an individual first before you can do it, erm, with others. Erm, but because it's somewhere that I feel I'm sort of getting
to I can see it in others, but also I can support others in developing, you know, that, erm. So if I was ever in there because of the conflict amongst the staff, I would feel confident that I could talk from personal experience and talk about, erm, ways that they could move forward to develop managing the personal and professional appropriately. Erm, and just talk from experience, and I'm not talking from expert position because I still feel like it's still something that I go through, but I think that I could talk about it with enough knowledge and experience that could at least encourage other people to explore it further. Erm, yeah.

DB: and you spoke there about exploring within yourself and

P3: with others

DB: yeah

P3: because I guess, erm, my realisation is that I felt, or how I manage myself now is managing how I feel personally and almost filtering what can come through into the professional context, that's all within person. Erm, someone like the SENCO that I spoke to who offended me, or, I mean it's to the point I don't even know if she offended me, it should have offended me, but I guess because I managed it so well it didn't, but she was unaware that all of this was going on inside me, so I had to deal with it within person before it could be experienced, you know, outside. And then if we did ever have a conv, ever have a conversation about it, we could talk about, well what went on with her personally, she'd had an argument beforehand and this is how it came across professionally, she'd then put it all on somebody coming into the school, so we could have had a discussion between person about what was going on within, but there would have had to have been that understanding first of all, where as I could see what happened within me. I'm not sure if she saw what happened
within her, so our conversation may have been, void, because, well unless we'd both
had that realisation really. So, yeah…

DB: okay, thank you I just, sort of, final offer, erm, as we come to the end of our
correspondence, any other things that perhaps you haven't mentioned or that you'd like
to build on, erm, in terms of your experience as a trainee EP and that experience of
attending a group relations conference?

P3: … er, one thing I was just thinking about just now was, erm, something that I
didn't do, erm, and it was about questioning the way things are presented, erm, so
every day we had to do certain things like sit in a certain way, erm, do this at a
certain time and, you know, there was a point that I think was on one of the days
where we'd always sat in a spiral, sometimes we sat in a circle, one of the days, they,
the chairs were everywhere, some were in groups, some were just on, on their own
and we sat like that and somebody said this is really uncomfortable, erm, and then
the facilitator said we're surprised you didn't move the chairs back, erm, they'd had a
rush before the meeting, they just randomly allocated them everywhere, but
everyone sat in those places because they felt, and no one questioned it, I mean I
moved mine anyway because, I just did that, I can be a bit of a rebel sometimes, but
the point was that we assumed that's the way it's supposed to be and it was like that
for a reason and then we questioned as a group, should we challenge it, are we
allowed to? And then it turned out that it wasn't there for, it wasn't like that for a
reason, we could have moved it, people were surprised that we didn't and it just
makes me think about when I go into schools or when I work with, erm, patients, do I
always accept what I'm presented with, or do I have the f, the insight to question and
think, well actually why do you all, why is it always done that way or why is it
presented like this or why do you think that's happening, is that okay, and, and even
if it is okay, is there another way? and so I guess that's something, thinking about
now that I could take with me to think about when I go, erm, into the field, into fieldwork, just, erm, questioning and always being open to other ways of doing things rather than accepting exactly what's given. And I guess like in this profession, it is a lot about change, erm, and you can't have change whilst doing everything in the same way. So I guess having those questions, what could be done differently? Should always be in my mind anyway because we’re always looking for things to be different. Erm, even if it's a small thing but, erm, there should always be like a question outside the box I guess.

DB: yeah

P3: yeah, that's my final reflections (laughs).

DB: okay, erm, unless there is any other, other thoughts that you'd like to share we can stop there on recording.

P3: … yeah, I think that's it.

DB: okay, thank you very much.
Follow-up interview: participant 4

DB: okay, been approximately 7 months since you attended the group relations conference. Since then have you made any links to that experience?

P4: I have made links. Erm, but I think that seven months, you know, that has been a really busy seven months, erm, and I think professionally I have developed hugely in those seven months. Erm, thinking about December, now, it just feels like you know so much has changed and I haven't even done any assessment in December and now I seem to feel much more confident (unclear), so, it has been a big kind of a learning curve in the last seven months. Erm, I do, I have b, I have sort of had it in mind though definitely. Erm … and I do kind of think back to it sort of fairly, fairly frequently. In terms of making links,

DB: mm, any thoughts, any thought?

P4: erm, I think it's, I don't know if I can think of some specific examples but more that it definitely is like influenced how I feel about the Tavistock and, as I've like formed, erm, my ideas or like as my thoughts have been, sort of like deepened and developed about Tavistock as an institution, educational psychology as a profession, erm, assessment, consultation, all these sorts of things. Erm, I think that the group relations conference has influenced that thinking. Erm,

DB: in what kind of way?

P4: erm, I think particularly working in a placement as a trainee EP, I'm, meet, erm, other trainees from different institutions and it really does feel more, erm, I don't
know, like kind of a bigger deal that we had that. Now that I'm working amongst other
trainees who haven't had group relations it kind of really shows, differentiates the
Tavi as a training course. Erm, and it,

DB: in what kind of way?

P4: erm, oh, I think because, you know I was talking to someone, a UEL trainee and
she was talking about, well some dynamics in their train, in their, er, within their
training course and, erm, I was sort of saying, oh well, don't you, how, how do you
talk about those dynamics you know. Do you have an experiential group? Do you
have, all these things and they have, they don't. And I was thinking oh right, okay,
I've taken for granted that we have lots of group discussion forums for us to talk
about us, ourselves as individuals within the group and how we go from there and,
erm, I thin, I think you don't realise what you've got until you compare it to elsewhere.
And I realise that I think that our experience has been quite different to other, if I'd
gone to UCL or UEL or else other places.

DB: what is it that you realise you've got in that sense?

P4: I think that there's a lot of structured opportunities to think about our role, as a
trainee, as opposed to a fully qualified EP. Er, as a trainee EP and, um, as ourselves
as individuals within a group of a cohort, erm, and b, by being given a formalised
space, I'm not really referring to group relations, but I think it kind of, well so, by goin,
by being given a formalised space on the training course, it really encourages us to
think of ourselves as the tool, rather than having a toolkit. And I think that relates to
group relations because I think the group relations event put that, er, sort of
philosophy of learning there, at the forefront of our minds, right at the beginning.
DB: philosophy of learning, what do you mean?

P4: I think like, experiential learning and, erm, speaking explicitly about group dynamics, which I'm sure as psychologists, people, you know, our skills are being analytic and thinking about ourselves and thinking about ourselves in groups and so on. But I don't think the other training courses might have that opportunity to speak so explicitly, like, you've got an hour to think about it or you've got a group relations conference to think about it.

DB: and so when you're making that comparison, from your experiences to other training courses, what sort of reflections of you got on that?

P4: erm, I'm really glad that we have that opportunity actually, cos I think in (sighs) let's put, let's call it real life, you don't get that opportunity.

DB: sorry the opportunity of?

P4: to talk about yourself in a group, in a safe and structured environment.

DB: and by that, just to clarify, are you thinking of group relations conference, the experiential groups, or?

P4: I'm talking about both, because although the group relations conference was just for a week I think, I think it kind of set the scene for a way of thinking which we are encouraged to use.

DB: could you say a little bit more about the way of thinking?
P4: erm ... I think as a psychologist you, there's a way of thinking, which could be
that you have a toolkit, erm, and you, so you, when you were to meet a family or
client you would, you've got a t, a sort of, it's a, it's not a literal toolkit, but you've got
a kind of mental toolkit to use, erm, and I feel that the tavi, tavi trainees instead of
having this toolkit, well we have a toolkit but it's more of like thinking of ourselves as
the tool, so we, I'm, can approach a family and I know that I have a kind of way of
thinking which, erm, I can use to help that family. And I think that I've developed that
through being part of the, I think part of the group relations conference has helped
me because it made explicit things which I maybe didn't, I had only thought about on
a, not unconscious, but on a level where I wouldn't, it brought to the fore those things
that I haven't thought about explicitly before.

DB: could you give an example?

P4: erm ... so say I'll be in a meeting with a hard to reach family and, erm, the parent
is feeling angry towards me, erm, and I'm feeling, oh God I don't know what I'm
doing, erm, I think referring back to things like group relations in conjunction with
reading and, erm, other experiences, I can think about - do I actually not know what
I'm doing, or am I par, am I sort of part of a relationship that's happening when,
where I'm, where feelings are being projected into me of I don't know what I'm doing,
and to think about that, and to use that and to, I mean the ideal would be to be able
to say something helpful at the time, erm, in a helpful way. And I don't know, I think
I'm yet to master that skill, but I think that that is a really useful skill and I think that
the group relations conference did help me to think a, it's a kind of way of processing
at the time, to sort of stop, think how do I feel, I wonder why I feel like that and how
can I express that in a helpful way so this meeting can be better run and better sort
of facilitated.
DB: and is that linking to your comment about you using yourself as a tool?

P4: mm, yeah. It does, because say, I suppose like if someone is being, if a, if, if a client is being, isn't, is, if you're in a difficult meeting with a client, family, child, teacher, whoever it is and, you felt like the toolkit was external to you, you might start thinking oh what can I do, what strategies can I use? Oh I can start using this strategy, oh that's not working, let's try using this strategy, oh God that's not working, but if to, I think to be more self reflective you can, it, you're relying more on a kind of internal skill, skill set really that you could use. Erm, and so you're not kind of so reliant on things because when the strategies run out you, you're stuck. But if, if you can sort of use what you're given and the processes which are happening within the meeting, I think that the group relations conference sort of helped me become more aware of the processes which are happening in a meeting which aren't written down on a piece of paper in front of you, you know, what's not being said, who's leading this meeting, who is really leading the meeting, erm, you know, why do I feel like I want to cry? Is it they, are they my feelings am I, am I holding this for the group? Erm, and also I suppose group relations conference taught me that I'm prone to feeling like this, feeling like that, so when I'm in a meeting and I'm feeling like I'm going to cry, is that because I'm, that's the role that I often take and realising my own, what I bring to the meeting as well.

DB: what's that been like?

P4: er, what's what being like?

DB: the description you gave there of, what you're doing in for example those kind of a meetings, just wondered what your reflections have been in terms of what that's been like for you personally?
P4: erm, I suppose that kind of keyword in that question is personally. And I think there's a lot of sort of, what's professional what's personal? Erm, and how to keep the two separate? Erm, where the boundaries are and how you as a person want to work those boundaries. Erm, so all of that's definitely come into play as I'm, as I'm kind of going through the training to become a psychologist, because I suppose it's, can you switch it off? Erm, and,

DB: what do you think?

P4: what, can you switch off being a psychologist? Erm, I think that you can definitely, erm, go into, I'm out of role now. Erm, but I think, you know, once you've learned something it's hard to unlearn it. Erm, so ... I think part of a psychologist is being able to know, is being able to pick and choose, you've got all the knowledge and you can then decide what you think. Erm, like the psychodynamic elements of the course, I feel like I'm comfortable enough now with the theory to have an opinion on it. I can use it if I'd like to, if I think it's appropriate and I can have it in the back of my mind if I'm, erm, working with somebody if I want to and it's good to have knowledge of a theory and then not use it is much preferable to sort of have no knowledge of it and not know what you think about.

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

P4: yeah and I mean I suppose that was one of the hardest things of the group relations conference because I think that it muddied up that boundary, erm, and meeting people professionally now that I had initially met whilst in the group relations is tricky, erm, because group relations kind of ... you were out of role, as in out of
professional role, you were in a different role. Erm, so I think when you meet
somebody, erm, you know, if you're working in a team it's, it can be difficult because
you know, when you're working in a team you keep to polite conversation and you
wouldn't talk about anything except for the task at hand and so on, and I think having
kind of had a different knowledge of somebody, erm, in your initial meeting is quite
difficult. Depends on what the meeting was but you can form quite strong bonds, but
depends really, how, how things were and

DB: yeah

P4: I think that you're very vulnerable in the group relations actually. Erm,

DB: what's that been like for you since?

P4: what?

DB: that kind of reflection you mentioned there about being vulnerable in the
conference, meeting other people subsequently who were there, just wondering what
that's been like?

P4: erm, I haven't really encountered it that much but, erm, … I think, I think, I mean,
I ha, I actually haven't, but if I had I think I would have found it, I wouldn't, I think I
wouldn't have liked it at all really. Erm, I expect I will do more as well, erm, but maybe
it's a sort of thing where what happened at group relations stays at group relations, I,
I imagine that would be how I would deal with it. You just, you both know that you
saw each other playing this particularly odd game where you're going from room to
room with some territory, what was it territory, and you're not allowing the homeless
group to come into your territory and all this sort of thing, you, but in the real world,
outside of group relations conference it sort of doesn't really, don't know if it has so much of a place to be spoken about really, don't really feel it would be appropriate.

DB: okay I think we've touched on this question but I'm going to ask it, erm, now in terms of - have you made any links between attending the group relations conference and your experience as a trainee educational psychologist?

P4: erm, … well, yes, I don't know what you, what you're after as an answer, but

DB: I'm not sure I do.

P4: erm, I think the links that were made have been when I'm working in a group after group relations, I have thought about it differently to having been t, t, to before it. So if I'm in a group situation where I'm, where I'm thinking about it analytically, I will have in the back of my mind the group relations conference and how people act in groups. Erm,

DB: what kind of things will you have in mind?

P4: … well, I suppose in terms of professional roles, erm, how people act under different situations, erm, there was a sort of splinter group from the main group, at group relations, who called themself the action group, and I found that interesting and I guess I've been mindful of that, erm, as a psychologist working with other professionals, that I don't, erm, I try not to create in somebody else the, m, the d, the desire to become a kind of action group person. It, I, it's quite hard to explain, but I think that psychologists could come across as being all talk, talk, talk and not anything useful, you know, and then maybe as, when I was working as a teacher I would si, be feeling like oh it's all right for them they can come in and give me all
these suggestions and then off they go and they leave me to do all the hard work.

And I think that was replicated in the group relations conference because there was a lot of talking and talking about how we feel and, you know, everything was like really talked about which created some people to feel like - this is ridiculous, I just want to go and do s, do the task.

DB: right

P4: so I think that kind of doing and thinking divide has really epitomized the group relations. Like, people who wanted to do, stood up, said, had enough of this, I'm going to go and do something, and then they went, and that was, I guess I'd always known about that feeling, but it was made really clear. So, and I'd always been on the do'er side of it.

DB: yep

P4: and now I, group relations I realised I was on the thinker, erm, side of the continuum, erm, but, so if I'm talking to other professionals and they're looking at me in a way, er, that makes me think - she's talking so much and she's not been very helpful, I do try and bear that in mind. That they're, they're of the, they've been kind of made to feel like the action group, that they've disengaged and they'd, they don't feel that this talking was helpful.

DB: and have you noticed yourself making any different choices in that sense?

P4: erm, it's hard to dis, distinguish it really, because I don't think I could attribute any choices, changing choices to group relations.
DB: okay, okay,

P4: I think it, I've learned so much this year, that I don't think any choice that I've made has been, could be directly linked to group relations.

DB: okay, are there any other ways since attending, erm, and thinking about yourself in role as a trainee EP, erm, are there any other times where you've made any links with group relations conference and yourself in role?

P4: … erm, I suppose that I've got a deeper understanding of my colleagues on my course, since we all were in it together. Erm, and we all had different experiences, but we all experienced the group relations. So, I think that probably brought us together, but I think we're all very careful to make sure it brought us together.

DB: right, so, you're drawing some links with yourself as a member of your training cohort.

P4: mm

DB: could you explain that a little bit more?

P4: erm, I think, well, once you've done, I think that the group relations brought us together as a group of, on my training cour, cohort. When we started the week we were all quite separate and went, did a kind of, erm, played it in a individualist way, but we all met at break time, lunchtime, to kind of touch base, erm, and by the, I think, I feel like at the end of the conference, when we all sat together over the centre of the spiral as, we realised we were, an, an eighth of the people there, we had quite a strong voice and it was quite empowering in that way. Erm, I think we all played it a
bit as a game, erm, we were quite resilient, and I suppose it ... it ... I don't know,
maybe it kind of reminded us that we were 10 very, on, embarking, you know, we’re,
we are 10 quite resilient people who are, can sit together, can be apart then but we
could kind of rely on each other and things like that.

DB: you mention resilience?

P4: yeah, I think we, I think we were able to support each other, and in having each
other we were able to be a bit braver. I think if I had done that conference as a, on
my own, without knowing anybody I would not have been as brave as I was with
knowing that the was nine people that if I got myself into trouble they'd back me up.
Erm, so that was quite good to sort of have that feeling. Erm, I think we’re probably
quite careful as well, I think we all wanted to make sure that we end, we came out of
it still a working group of colleagues. Erm, we made sure that we, that you know
when we kind of went into little subgroups that we all pr, pretty much, erm, went into,
like we, what's the word? Like separated into, so that we weren’t with each other. So
that we could be our secure base back at break time, kind of thing, rather than them
seeing, for me, like, the nastier side, or the vulnerable side, or the whatever. Erm, but
we, I think we all played it more as a game than some people who were there, were
upset. So, and it's quite nice to have a kind of common framework, that we've each
got like a kind of thing in common now, that we can all say oh God, do you remember
that thing? Group relations, that was so crazy.

DB: mm hm, so you've noticed, or made some kind of links with the training cohort,
P4: mm, like a sort of initiation process. Into the tavi world (laughs).
DB: and what, sort of following that, have you noticed, erm, about that, as a member of that group? Are there any other links that you've made?

P4: I don't think so.

DB: okay. We thought about, erm, linking that group relations conference to yourself as a member of that year cohort, erm, here, was there, just interested in going back to any other reflections that you might have about yourself in role as a trainee educational psychologist, and again any links to experiences of the group relations conference that come to your mind?

P4: I think group relations conference made me think about myself as, okay let, let me say again. So, when I read something about a person, erm, however, I guess I, I suppose it's easier to think of a person as like the other, so, you know, you read about attachment theory and you're like oh that's like a child I've worked with and their, their attachment, but group relations made me think oh okay I am also have attachment relationships that I also, erm, you know, play into dynamics and so it's that kind of, ref, reflexivity or like the self reflection that obviously I know that I have attachment, erm, relationships but group relations really really makes you realise that you have attachment relationships, or, I mean, and relationships with other people and peer relationships and you are a person in role and dada dada da. But erm, that kind of experience just you can, you cannot, you can no longer think I'm a professional you're a client. You've, it's been very acutely demonstrated that you're also a po, a potential client, you know, you're also a person who is in society and in groups and, and I think that's, that's really good because when you're working in a school, you think - oh you know I'm, I'm totally impervious to any, any of this silliness, but actually like, you know, it takes you three days of group relations and you're going bonkers so d, it's only t, between you and a difficult friendship peer, peer
relationship, difficult learning environment, a difficult behaviour, all of those things that it's easy to put into the other, it's only a couple of days and you're acting just the same. And it is a kind of microcosm and I guess working in schools you see all this stuff and you think oh children, that's children, but it's not. You know, it's adults as well and it doesn't, it's not very long before we're acting like children in a playground being mean to other children, forming cliques, erm, being bullies, being bullied. Segregating ourselves, erm, being rude to teachers or the equivalent and (laughs), you know, I think it's quite good to be given that bit of a reality check that actually we were all very capable of being just like children in a playground. And so that's quite good.

I suppose one of the other things would be that, what do you do with that? Once you've got that kind of awareness, erm, so it's quite easy to, like I mean, it's good to, I really think it's good to kind of be reminded that, but what do you do with it? And once you're made aware of it, maybe, I think you might feel things more acutely, erm, you read into things more, sometimes you might read into things too much, erm, and, you know…

DB: I'm interested in your question about - what do you do with that? Erm, should you have an awareness, any thoughts? Or maybe a particular example might help?

P4: it's really hard because I know that you're, I'm, don't want to be quoted, I'm trying to be, I don't want and sort of don't want to give an example, but let's, erm,

DB: we can certainly ensure anonymity to
P4: I know, but there's only like four of us isn't there, and were all from the tavi, so
(laughs), it's going to be one of the four, so, let's think about something more
general, erm, okay so let's say you're, erm,

DB: only what you're comfortable with

P4: yeah I know, I know that, thank you, erm, so say attachment and then you're
thinking, erm, like group relations people are like - oh well you feel abandoned
because, oh it's like the mother-child relationship dada dada da, but if... you've never
really thought of it like that before, and then next time it, a, er, something happens
when you, a, e, a similar thing happened in, er, for example professional rel,
professional relationship previously you'd have just thought oh that's just, erm, a
thing, now you're thinking – oh, maybe they're abandoning me, I've got feelings of
abandonment, does this relate to my, to some sort of, erm, early childhood
experience or what does this mean, you never felt abandoned before, but because
like, you know, a, a colleague is leaving, you previously wouldn't have felt
abandoned but now you're wondering what the meaning is behind it and it aban, and
so now, you, you've got all, its kind of opened up a Pandora's box of, that you, of,
which, you wouldn't have felt before. So,

DB: what's opened up a Pandora's box?

P4: well I think, I suppose, I mean, it's maybe not explicitly group relations, but, a
kind of way of thinking an, psychoanalytically, of which group relations is quite a key
aspect. Erm, so maybe you would ... you're, maybe it was kind of, maybe you were
sort of blissfully unaware before (laughs), I don't know. You know, what you do with
it? Once, once you think – oh maybe I feel this because of this, then, then what?
DB: have you got any thoughts on then what?

P4: well that's when I get a bit critical of the whole thing really because I think that it's, I think there's ethical responsibility about it that I don't know if they really uphold. I don't think it's really thought about, I feel like they do s, it is, it does sort of play with your mind a bit and I don't know if it's really contained well enough. I mean there was a lot of other people who were very upset, like I mean I mentioned it in the last interview we had, but I'll never forget, like that person crying and crying because she felt that someone had not liked her because of her race and it was just heartbreaking and she had had such, she had lived for her whole life without feeling that and then been made to feel that. And I guess it's just a question of the ethics of that, you know... I know that racism exists, how ethically fine is it to make somebody realise that people are, think badly of her and it may be to do with her race, like, how, how is that, how is that okay, you know, I think that it's, it's dodgy. Erm, and it does make me feel uncomfortable. And I do think there should've been more of a disclaimer about what people are letting themselves in for, because I felt like we had had a really good preparation and other people hadn't and it was like kind of going into big brother or something and everyone was very vulnerable and to rai, to mentioned very difficult topics like race, like, erm, power and all these things, and then just leave people to, to kind of go and cope with it, I don't think that's okay. It's alright if you're, I mean we're very privileged bunch because we've got supervision, we've got, erm, tutors that I feel comfortable going to if I felt that something was inappropriate, but if I had gone the year before I went, when I was working as a [describes previous work role], or a couple of years before, and I would have been, I would have been a mess. And some of the people there, social workers, erm, erm, some other professions, they didn't have supervision or anything like that, what do they do with that? Then they go back to work on Monday, and they've got back to like child protection and all of that. Then, you know, what was that? What do they do with all of those feelings
that have been stirred up? And, it was a compulsory part of their course, they didn't have any choice about it, I think it's, (sigh), I think you've got to be robust to do things like that, and I don't know if everybody was, I don't think everyone was warned and I think the ethics of it are, I'm not, definitely not 100% comfortable with it. And I wouldn't recommend it to anybody I knew, who I didn't know was very robust and comfortable and secure, cos, no, no, none of my friends and family would I suggested it's a good idea, because I think it could be really upsetting.

DB: so you certainly got some, I think, thoughts that you shared there in terms of some critical thinking about the group relations conference, some questions about ethics, erm, as part of that experience,

P4: mm I guess, I think it also reinforces a stereotype about the tavi that maybe we could do without.

DB: what do you mean?

P4: erm, I think p, when you meet people out in the field and they s, when you say you're tavi trainee and they sort of, they always ask - oh did you go on this crazy week where you all did that, you know, sit round in a circle, whatever. And, I think it does kind of, may alienate us as a teaching institution. Not alienate us, erm, differentiate us in a negative way.

DB: okay, how come?

P4: cos it's all ivory tower stuff I reckon, I think, you know, it's such a luxury

DB: what do you mean by the ivory tower stuff?
well it's kind of all this sort of ... you know, it, a person, a friend or family member of mine, who works in a job where they have to work for a certain number of hours and they get paid a certain amount of money and they don't get to sit around and talk about this and think about this and (sighs), I think there's, there is a potential perception of psychologists and psychological profession that we don', we do a lot of, we don't do a lot, or we're not, we get paid a lot, an, to not do much, o, I mean I don't think, I don't agree with that obviously, but think there is, there's potential for that and I think if you were to say this psychiatrist gets paid (laughs), God knows what, and this week they got paid this amount of money to sit around and play, play games about territories and, erm, you know, if it was a politician there would be an outcry, erm, I think, I just

DB: why?

P4: cos I think when cuts are being made and the, you know, to the NHS, and people are get, you know, hard-working people are getting paid not very much and we're all being paid by the NHS to spend a week doing that, I wondered if you add, you know, added up all of everybody's salary plus the, however much entrance fee, it's a lot of money going into that and there's a lot of people losing their jobs for, for less money. And, I don't know, I don't really believe it, what I'm saying, but I do think it's something that should be thought about. I mean I believe what I'm saying, but,

DB: what should be thought about?

P4: is it a good use of resources and time?

DB: what do you think about that?
P4: erm, find it very hard to reconcile my two sets of beliefs. And it's all very nice now that I'm a trainee EP and I've got this luxury to sit about thinking about thinking, erm, and, you know, I can sit and discuss anything, but when I was working (laughs) previously, erm, I saw really, I, I worked really hard for very little money and I got sworn at daily and physically assaulted and I was all doing it for the, you know, really because, you know, I, I w, a, for various reasons, but I was working really hard and if you had said to me, when I was working that hard, that some people are sitting around doing that, I would have been really angry that that's how some people are using NHS money. Er, I mean I do think it's important that people think, but I wonder if you need four days or whatever it was, five days, I can't remember, and whether you need it to be so full on, I guess that's what the action group were all about really, because it was great for us because the alternative for us was to sit and be lectured to which is also very nice and comfortable and lovely, and aren't we lucky, but if those other people working there were thinking – oh God, there's a child protection case that I've had to delay by a week in order to do this, I'm not surprised they are angry or, you know, so…

DB: and you said the was, sort of, on the one hand those kind of views about the use of time, was there another view that you hold as well?

P4: what do you mean?

DB: I think, you said something along the lines of there's two views that you hold…

P4: oh, right, yeah, well they're sort of contradictory,
P4: so, if you think about that, what I said before, like at the beginning of this, I think it's really important to do all this thinking, and someone needs to do all of this thinking because you can't have everyone just doing all the doing, cos (laughs), things don't work very well. You need somebody doing the thinking, erm,

DB: why?

P4: (laughs) well because I've worked in institutions where there's not a lot of thinking happening, it doesn't function very well at all and the more stressed out you get, the more, the less thinking that happens. And the more doing that happens, mm, everyone's doing stuff and nothing is being done, erm, so I do appreciate the need for thinking. But the other half of me questions, I don't know, maybe it's about balance, maybe it's about resources, maybe it's about the way it was done, probably bit of each.

DB: I'm just going to finish with one last question and, which is just I think to offer the same question again in terms of, erm

P4: (laughs) links

DB: yeah any links from your experience as a trainee EP to attending the group relations conference?

P4: ... mm ... well, there's just so many, I, I don', I, I don't know ... I go, I just do wonder what it's, what it's like going to the other training courses and, yeah.

DB: what do you think it might be like?
P4: (laughs) you learn a bit more, and you do less sitting around talking.

DB: what do you mean learn a bit more?

P4: (laughs) erm, well, we, we do do a lot of, we do do a lot of learning, erm ... I don't know, I just wonder about, I don't know how long they'll still do the group relations conference, I've got a feeling it won't last very much longer, I think that we're going in a trajectory where it's not going to be high priority or if, valued, or

DB: what's your reflection on that?

P4: erm, maybe they've got a point.

DB: how come?

P4: ... erm, I think the course is going in a different direction and, I don't know, I'm of, I'm of mixed, I've got very ambivalent feelings towards it really. Erm, I think it's a good, I, I, I don't know I really am completely divided in my mind about it.

DB: and I think you've given, and articulated that really well

P4: (laughs)

DB: are there any final comments, erm, that you'd like to make?

P4: no, I don't think so.
DB: okay, erm, we'll stop there and I'll say thank you.