"What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?"

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Abstract

Social work supervision is consistently described by professional bodies and academic literature as key to the quality of social work practice. Despite this consensus, there appears an incongruence between models of supervision espoused in the literature and the reality of practice. This incongruence is attributed to pervasive technical-rational approaches to social work practice, synonymous with neoliberalism, which permeate supervision, and leads to the rejection of the notions of uncertainty and complexity, stifling the reflective practice espoused in the literature. This incongruence is further complicated by the paucity of empirical data regarding *what happens* in supervision, and as such the supervision evidence base remains weak.

This thesis is unique as it analyses the contribution of unconscious processes, detailing how anxiety implicit in the social work task impacts the nature of supervision, and contributes to this schism between the rhetoric and reality of supervision practice. Six systemic group sessions are researched with the researcher physically present in half of the sessions, and the remaining half accessed online due to the Covid19 pandemic. A psychoanalytically informed research methodology drawn from the work of Skogstad and Hinshelwood (2000) is employed to explore the emotional atmosphere of the supervision sessions, the anxiety present, and the collective strategies employed by supervision attendees to address this. The subsequent data is analysed through a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Bion's (1962) K and -K models of thought are employed to demonstrate how each group evidences a unique capacity to 'think' in light of its ability to contain the anxieties and frustrations implicit in social work. This demonstrates that when anxiety is not contained, supervision attendees operate social defence systems against anxiety which stifle supervision practice, resulting in a denial of the reality of the social work task. However, this study also evidences how supervision characterised by negative capability, reflexive practice, a non-directive leadership style, and creation of containment can process anxiety, leading to more thoughtful and effective supervision discussions, and more purposeful practice. In doing so it demonstrates how attention to unconscious

processes, and the creation of containment, have critical implications for the functioning of the Frontline Unit Meeting, wider supervision practice and the social work profession.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis aims to familiarise the reader with some of the key theories, debates and phenomena explored in this study, and which are frequently referred to in subsequent chapters. This chapter therefore commences with an introduction to both myself the writer, and the background to this project. The Frontline Organisation is then outlined, as well as many of the debates that surround this organisation and its mission. Following this social work supervision is defined, and a brief outline of the current academic and policy context provided. Having been identified in the supervision literature as a key determinant to the quality of social work practice, reflective practice is then discussed, and some demarcations between its various different forms are established prior to being applied later in this thesis. Frontline's central practice model systemic practice is then presented, providing the reader with a brief historical overview of the key theoretical underpinning of the Frontline Unit Meeting (UM). Following this the Frontline UM group supervision model is then introduced, and its function and purpose detailed. Finally, the research questions posed by this thesis are presented, and the structure of the remaining chapters of this thesis are outlined so as to navigate the reader around this thesis.

1.1 – Background to this Research Project

I qualified as a social worker in 2008, and having initially thought I would practice in any area aside from Children and Family Social Work, found myself working with children and families in a variety of roles and loving the work. Inspired by my lecturers at Durham University, and having come from a family of educators, it then became apparent to me that social work was something that I wanted to teach. I worked with Frontline as a Consultant Social Worker (CSW - the practice educators on the Programme) for two cohorts of participants from 2013, and then joined the organisation as a Practice Tutor (PT – an academic tutor) in 2015. During this time I have sat in

weekly UMs, and inspired by watching the development of participants and hearing the stories of their work with families, I decided to research this aspect of the programme.

1.2 - What is Frontline?

Frontline is a two year 'fast track' Social Work qualifying programme where *Participants* (students on the programme) are educated predominantly in a statutory Children and Family Social Work setting. In year one of the Programme participants are placed in group *Units* usually of four, and each unit is practice-educated by a Consultant Social Worker (CSW) whose role is to hold case responsibility for the families the unit are working with and to formally assess the participants progress against the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW 2022). The Unit work with between four-fifteen families on Child in Need or Child Protection basis over the course of the year, with the unit's caseload rising as the year progresses and the participants' skill and confidence increases. By the end of the first year of the Programme each participant usually holds a caseload of three-four families. Each Unit is allocated a Practice Tutor (PT), whose role is to support participants with their academic development and pastoral care, support and mentor the CSW, as well as monitor the quality of the practice learning setting. Frontline partners with a number of English Local Authorities (LAs) who provide CSWs and placement Units, with Frontline then recruiting and allocating the participants to the LAs.

The *Frontline Programme Handbook* (2018a) describes the Programme as an 'innovative social work course' … consisting of a practice model centring around '… evidence based ways of working, including Motivational Interviewing, Systemic Practice, and a Parenting Programme based on the principles of Social Learning Theory, Attachment, Trauma and Mentalisation' (p.6). The programme starts with a five-week block of teaching in the form of the residential Summer Institute. Once in their Local Authority placements the teaching continues with a further 21 teaching days where participants are taught as a group on a regional basis, and an additional 14 days of visits from a Practice Tutor (PT) to undertake further teaching sessions, manage participant progress reviews, and assist with the application of theory in the Unit

Meetings (UM) (Frontline 2019). The UM therefore represent a crucial element of the Frontline Programme, providing the main supervision forum on the Programme where the theory taught is applied to the families with whom the unit are working. The UM is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.6.

Participants who successfully pass the first year of the Frontline Programme graduate with a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work, enabling them to practice as a social worker in England and Wales. Unlike non-fast-tracked programmes, Frontline Participants receive a generous bursary of up to £20,000, and are guaranteed a qualified social worker role in their host Local Authority should they complete year one of the Programme (Frontline 2020c). During the second-year of the Programme participants leave their Units and enter statutory children and family social work teams where they complete an ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programme, with the option of an additional research module with Frontline enabling them to graduate with a Masters qualification.

Research Context - The plaudits and the controversy

The Frontline Programme has proved highly divisive in the social work community, and is heralded as innovative and derided as dangerous in equal measure (Dartington 2017, Gupta 2018, Maxwell 2017, Murphy 2016). A debate that follows the same fault lines established in the great schism in social work in the 1960s-70s between therapeutic casework and radical social work, and which Higgins (2015) emotively argues should be seen in the context of a wider battle for the 'soul of social work' (Harris and White 2013).

Critics note that the Frontline curriculum is limited and focuses too much on skills at the expense of values (Cartney 2018, Gupta 2018). Thoburn (2017) argues that that the fast pace of the programme does not allow students to effectively integrate theory into practice. Furthermore, Thoburn (2017) and Jones (2019) stress that the child and families specialism in the Frontline Programme, which takes a lead from Narey's (2014) recommendation that greater specialisation should be allowed in social work education, fails to recognise core professional competencies required of all social workers.

Moreover, it should be noted that currently the Frontline Programme is not recognised as a generic social work qualification in Scotland or Northern Ireland (Cartney 2018).

Gupta (2018) raises concerns that the Frontline staff team lack the necessary academic experience, and both she and Jones (2019) argue that Frontline's 2017 decision to deliver its programme 'in-house' and cut ties with a University risks damaging the social work profession's links to its knowledge base. Further concerns are noted by Jones (2019) that Frontline's charity status represents a neo-liberal move to privatise social work education and social work more broadly.

Hanley (2019) argues that the programme is elitist, and that Frontline's larger bursaries and focus on recruitment from certain Universities perpetuates inequalities that are inherent at all levels of the English education system. Hanley (2019) further argues that as the Frontline Programme is made up of 18% BAME students, compared to 38% of the workforce nationally (Skills for Care 2018), this is incompatible with social work's key value of social justice. In contrast however Brindle (2018) argues that as around 55% of the 2018 Frontline Cohort were the first in their families to go to university and 18% were non-white, allegations of elitism are flawed.

Many of the criticisms appear inaccurate however. For example, Croisdale-Appleby (2014) raises concerns that the 'intense programme of 5 weeks of… 9-5 teaching, amount(s) to only 175 hours actual teaching time' (p.28). This point is echoed by Tunstill (2019) who states on p.59 that there are only 'six weeks classroom-based learning in Frontline' and on p.65 that there is a 'five-week residential course'. However, both of the conflicting figures provided by Tunstill, and those provided by Croisdale-Appleby, are inaccurate as they do not consider the 21 days recall day teaching or the 14 days of visits from a Practice Tutor (Frontline 2019). Moreover, Gupta (2017) criticises the content of the curriculum, stating that it focuses too much on behavioural approaches designed to 'fixing problem families', at the expense of approaches that recognises structural inequalities. However, an approach that attempts to pathologise families in such a way would appear wildly inconsistent with any approach to systemic practice (not to mention another of Frontline's practice models, motivational interviewing) to the extent to doubt either Frontline's or Gupta's (2017) knowledge of these theories.

Comparisons with Existing Social Work Qualifying Programmes

Goodman and Trowler (2012) stress that '… there still remains huge concern about the calibre of social work students coming onto (traditional) qualifying programmes, and also the variable quality and content of the teaching on university courses' (p.23), and such arguments are frequently employed in defence of Frontline. Proponents cite Maxwell et al's (2016) and Scourfield et al's (2019) evaluations of the programme, which argue that Frontline participants demonstrated greater practice skills compared to other social work programmes, with Stevenson (2018) noting the programme represents good value for money in light of this.   Moreover, Littlejohn et al (2018) note that as 26% of all social work graduates were not in a qualified social worker role six months after qualifying, compared to 6% from the Frontline Programme alone, that the greater cost of the Programme is justified.

This thesis is not an attempt to settle this argument, or answer these criticisms, rather it is a study of one element of the Frontline Programme, the Unit Meeting (UM), and an attempt to explore its usefulness to Children and Family Social Work more broadly. However, the UM, participants' experiences on the Frontline Programme and this research process should not be seen as removed from the context of this debate, as these considerations can place further pressure on participants and CSWs on what is already a pressured fast-track programme. This pressure on participants is perhaps best captured by Hanley (2019) who, citing social work's commitment to social justice, appears to simultaneously criticise and justify intimidation of Frontline participants:

> … (there is) already evidence that fast-track students can receive a hostile reception from social work teams due to the route that they have qualified through' and while, '… individual intimidation should obviously not be encouraged, it may be unavoidable considering social workers in England have a professional requirement to address oppression and promote diversity' (p.8).

1.3 - What is Social Work Supervision?

'Supervision' in social work can be traced back to the profession's charitable roots in the late nineteenth century and has developed to encompass several distinct professional activities (Kadushin and Harkness 2002, Sewell 2018). In their classic text *Supervision in Social Work*, Kadushin and Harkness (2002) provide the following broad definition of social work supervision which, in encompassing the many elements of this task, is helpful in navigating the reader around the topic:

> A social work supervisor is an agency administrative-staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the job performance of the supervisees for whose work he or she is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor performs administrative, educational, and supportive functions in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor's ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures (p.23).

Such a definition is supported by Carpenter et al's (2013) systematic review of literature regarding supervision in social work practice which concluded that, although the terminology differs, supervision's broad functions are united by the following activities: administrative case management, education, reflecting on and learning from practice, personal and emotional support, and mediation.

Children and Family Social Work Supervision normally occurs either in a dyadic form, between a social worker and their manager, or in a group format often involving a number of social workers or other professionals, in lieu of, or supplementary to, dyadic supervision (Sewell 2018) Group supervision exists in social work in a broad nomenclature including terms such as Balint Groups, Reflective Practice Groups and Work Discussion Groups, with each having distinct and differing implications for supervision practice. However, group supervision is also undertaken in a wide number of disciplines beyond social work, for example: in mental health (Adlam 2019, Bartle and Trevis 2015), education (Hulusi and Maggs 2015, Jackson 2008, Kuh 2016), early years (Elfer 2012), general practice (Balint 1964, Diaz et al 2015), healthcare settings (Carter

2013, Kurtz 2019, Platzer et al 2008), and even the Church of England (Gubi 2016). The task of analysing the literature related to all such disciplines is beyond the scope of this thesis, and therefore this short chapter will provide a brief overview of the practice and policy context of social work supervision in social work. As the Frontline UM is a form of group supervision, and in order to compare and contrast the model with existing models of group supervision, a literature review of group supervision literature can be found in Chapter 2.

Surveillance vs Support and Rhetoric vs Reality

Supervision is consistently described by numerous professional bodies and throughout the canon of academic literature as a key determinant in the quality of social work practice (BASW 2011, Carpenter et al 2013, Hawkins and Shohet 2012, Manthorpe et al 2005, Morrison 1999, Munro, 2011, O'Donoghue and Tsui 2015). Moreover, government sponsored reviews of Children and Family Social Work have gone as far as to postulate that poor supervision practice has led to children being inadequately safeguarded (Lamming 2009, Munro 2011). Indeed, such concerns regarding the perceived quality of Children and Family Social Work supervision practice have culminated in a national policy agenda requiring the assessment of social work supervisors through the *Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors* (KSSPLPS) programme promoted by the DfE (DfE 2015, DfE 2016, DfE 2017).

Despite this apparent academic and governmental consensus, there appears an incongruence between models of supervision espoused in the literature and the reality of practice (Harlow 2015, Turner-Daly and Jack 2017, Wilkins et al 2017). Such an incongruence is highlighted by Wilkins et al's (2017) empirical study with the authors concluding that the supervision they observed was '… at odds with the majority, if not every, theoretical model of what social work supervision is supposed to be' (p.1139). Rather Wilkins et al (2017) noted a common structure evident whereby workers provided an update on case activity in the form of a 'verbal deluge', a problem was then identified, before the supervisor then provided a solution. They observed little evidence

of reflection, and concluded that solutions were framed organisationally, through a '… process of converting the complexity of family situations into institutionally accountable actions' (Wilkins et al, 2017, p.946). Such findings are consistent with Turner-Daly and Jack's (2017) study which noted that more than half of their participants agreed that their supervision prioritised the needs of the organisation above '… time for reflection on relationships with children and families' (p.42). A study by Bourne and Hafford-Letchfield (2011) highlighted similar concerns, with supervisees highlighting a 'dominance of the managerial/administrative role, often to the detriment of the supervisees' need for support' (p.48). The application of the concept of *Reflective Practice* (Kolb 1984, Schon 1983), which is explored in more detail later in this chapter, provides further evidence of this incongruence. Despite being ubiquitously presented in the literature as central to effective social work supervision, the concept appears undefined, under-researched and inconsistently applied in practice (Wilkins 2017b).

Such an incongruence has been attributed to pervasive technical-rational approaches to social work practice, synonymous with neoliberal ideas of New Public Management which, when exacerbated by societal patterns of risk aversion following high profile child deaths of children such as Peter Connolly, have led to a surveillance culture of audit and inspection (Bartoli and Kennedy 2015, Cooper and Lees 2014, Hoggett 2000, Jones 2014, Ruch 2007a). Such a culture has permeated social work supervision, leading to the rejection of the notions of uncertainty and complexity, and resulting in the stifling of the creativity, innovation and reflection espoused in the literature (Beddoe 2010, Harlow 2015, Morrison 1999, Peach and Horner 2007).

Paucity of Research

The picture is further complicated by the paucity of empirical data regarding social work supervision, in particular data drawn from research that accesses supervision practice directly, rather than analysing participants' perspectives through self-reporting mechanisms (Beddoe et al 2016, Sewell 2018, O'Donoghue and Tsui 2015, Wilkins et al 2017). This results in a weak evidence base for supervision, and despite many of the apparently grandiose claims in the literature regarding supervision's importance, in his

realist evaluation of six systematic literature reviews, Wilkins (2019) is led to conclude that:

> … no review or meta-analysis has ever found strong evidence that supervision consistently makes a difference for people who use services, and there is only relatively weak evidence that it makes a consistent difference for workers (p.7).

Such a gap in the literature is starting to be addressed by empirical studies that access supervision directly, such as Wilkins et al (2017), Wilkins et al (2018) and indeed this study, however these studies remain largely small-scale, making their wider applicability to supervision practice problematic.

Summary

The academic literature therefore presents Children and Family Social Work supervision as a poorly researched phenomenon largely dominated by technical-rational practices synonymous with neoliberalism. This appears pervasive and stifles hermeneutic epistemological perspectives in favour of a positivist approach to agency accountability, resulting in a chasm between the rhetoric and reality, within which the tolerance of ambiguity and the application of theory are lost.

1.4 - What is Reflective Practice?

Given the apparent centrality of the concept of reflective practice to the debate regarding the function and effectiveness of supervision in social work, it seems pertinent to explore this contested concept. This proves problematic with many definitions contested and overlapping, and such an endeavour is no doubt beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this subchapter will first explore some of the demarcations between the various definitions of reflective practice, in doing so forming five different categories of reflective practice that will be applied in this thesis.

Several authors note the contested nature of reflective practice, positing it as ill-defined, and incorporating a variety of terms drawn from various disciplines such as reflection, critical reflection, self-reflection, critical self-refection and reflexivity (D'Cruz et al 2007, Iker 1999, Wilkins 2017, Wilson 2013). Indeed, Iker (1999) and Wilkins (2017) both argue the concept is so ill-defined as to become unusable. White et al (2006) note that this confusing picture is further complicated by the many uses of reflection, for example in improving practice, linking theory to practice, and learning about practice, as each of these applications carries with it a set of assumptions regarding the nature of reflection.

Cousins (2013) and D'Cruz et al (2007) both note the current popularity of the term *Reflexivity* in social work literature. D'Cruz et al's (2007) helpful literature review analysing the use of reflexivity in social work divides its application in the literature into three distinct variations.   Firstly, a variation that considers an individual's response to an immediate context and decision making requiring further direction. D'Cruz et al's (2007) second variation builds on the first, employing a self-critical social constructionist approach to question how knowledge is constructed, and the work of Foucault (1977) to explore how power is implicit in this process. Their third variation expands on the second, but stresses the influence of '… the dynamic relationship between thoughts and feelings: how thoughts can influence feelings and vice versa' (D'Cruz et al, 2007, p.80).

Further to my ontological and epistemological positions outlined in Chapter 3.1, such definitions are problematic in that they do not acknowledge unconscious processes. This problem is addressed by Ruch (2000) who, drawing on the work of Van Manen (1977) and Habermas (1973), outlines three models that can be loosely connected to Cruz et al's (2007) outlined above: *Technical*, *Practical* and *Critical*. However Ruch (2000) also adds a fourth category, *Process*, to account for the impact of the unconscious. What follows is a brief attempt to explore Ruch's (2000) four categories, exploring the work of key authors in each field, and the demarcations between them. Two further categories are then added to cover perceived gaps in Ruch's model. Ruch's categories are conceived more as *elements* of reflective practice, to acknowledge that one element of practice might be present in a number of other forms of reflective

practice, for example White et al (2006) would argue that *Critical Reflectio*n would encompass many of the other elements discussed.

Technical Reflective Practice

Technical Reflective Practice refers to instrumental reflection as a mode of problem solving. As Ruch (2000) explains, 'technical reflection is deemed to be the lowest level of reflection and uses "external/technical" sources of knowledge derived from formal theory and research to examine essential skills in order to resolve an identified problem' (p.101). The seminal work of Schon's (1983) 'reflective practitioner' is consistent with the notion of technical reflective practice, outlining how practitioners need to be able to reflect on action and reflect in action. Schon's (1983) model became highly influential in social work and beyond, and was developed by scholars such as Gibbs (1988) and Kolb (1984).

Practical Reflective Practice

*Practical Reflective Practice ac*knowledges the relativist nature of knowledge and the socially constructed nature of meanings attributed to experience (Ruch 2000). Such an approach requires the practitioner to explore personal assumptions and their impact on practice, so demonstrating an openness to new ways of thinking and an awareness of the contested nature of knowledge. Such a model of reflection is consistent with the work of Eraut (1994) who asserted that practice cannot be separated from one's own subjective experience, and that reflection on this is therefore crucial in achieving professional competence. Moreover, it is congruent with the concept of self-reflection outlined by Yip (2006), as it is 'a process of self-analysis, self-evaluation, self-dialogue and self-observation' (p.777).

Critical Reflective Practice

Critical Reflective Practice notes Ruch (2000) 'seeks to transform practice by challenging the existing social, political and cultural conditions which promote certain "constitutive interests" at the expense of others' (p.101). Theobald et al (2017) note that in the literature regarding *Critical Reflection* the word 'critical' is occasionally employed in an analytical sense, 'that is, the capacity to think conceptually and systematically' (p.300). However, they, along with a body of authors such as Fook (2002), Fook and Gardner (2007) and White et al (2006) employ the word 'critical' in reference to critical social theory, which employs the work of theorists such as Foucault (1977) and The Frankfurt School. As Theobald et al (2017) explain, 'critical' in this model involves the 'analysis of existing social structures and power relationships and how these are internalized by individuals and communities. The aim is to increase understanding of these to enable change individually and create a more equitable and just society' (p.301).

Process Reflection

Finally, Ruch (2000) describes the fourth category of *Process Reflection* which draws on psychoanalytic theory to explore the unconscious aspects of practice. The idea that individuals make unconscious attempts to manage anxiety through defence mechanisms such as splitting and projection is central to psychoanalytic theory (Freud 1926, Klein 1946). These ideas were expanded upon by Bion (1961), who noted that without containment anxiety can have the effect of disrupting cognition and fragmenting thought processes. Process Reflection acknowledges such intrapsychic processes and therefore aims to provide containment for practitioners' anxieties, allowing them to make sense of the myriad of emotions they face in their day-to-day work in order to provide effective care for service users (Ferguson 2017, Harvey and Henderson 2014).

Reflexive Practice

The systemic notion of *Reflexivity* straddles the two categories of practical refection and critical reflection, and in my opinion, it requires the creation of a fifth category of *Reflexive Practice*, as neither practical refection nor critical reflection satisfactorily encompass the concept. The concept of reflexivity is bound by the social constructionist ontological position of knowledge being embodied and multiple truths. Here, similarly to the concept of practical reflection*,* knowledge, 'emergence is distinct to the individual… and thus fits with his or her individual discourse, background (and) context' (Jude, 2018, p.47). However, unlike practical reflection there is an increased emphasis on the emotionality of experience and emotional communication with others (Hedges 2010). Reflexivity is therefore 'a stance we take towards the pattern we are cocreating when we communicate as well as being a set of practical skills and abilities we can use' (Hedges, 2010, p.3).

Jude (2018) notes how systemic reflexivity is consistent with critical reflection, as it requires practitioners to be aware of how our practice knowledge is created through our lived experience. However, I would argue that the systemic concept of reflexivity is less aligned with Ruch's conception of critical refection due to the absence of an explicit focus on the manifestation of power in society, empowerment and oppression, as is found in the work of Fook (2002), Fook and Gardner (2007) and White et al (2006).

What is Reflective Practice to me?

Social work is inherently an emotional task, taking place within a myriad of social and intrapsychic influences. Therefore, any process of reflective practice will need to address all five of these categories to some degree. As a result, I subscribe to a model of *Psychosocial Reflective Practice*. This acknowledges the socially constructed nature of reality, as well as accounting for the impact of oppressive the power relations, emotions and unconscious processes outlined in the models above (Frost and Macmillan 2014).

1.5 - Systemic Family Therapy

Before explaining the Frontline Unit Meeting (UM), and Frontline's policies and procedures in respect of this, it is first helpful to explain briefly the systemic practice which underpins it.

From Linear to Circular Causality

Systemic Practice and Family Therapy describe a range of ideas and talking therapies united by a focus on relationships and the systems within which they are embedded, as central to the understandings of individual experience (Borsca et al 2013, Flaskas 2007, Rivett and Street 2009). These ideas stem from anthropologist Gregory Bateson's (1972) pioneering systems theory which synthesised cybernetic ideas with anthropological data to demonstrate how families can be seen as cybernetic systems. Here a key distinction is made between a *linear* cause-and-effect approach to causality, and *circular* causality based on patterns of stimulus-response-stimulus-response. These circular patterns of self-regulating interactions between family members, their wider networks and context, maintain the system's *Homeostasis*, often resulting in the perpetuation of 'problem' behaviours (Dallos and Draper 2000). Bateson's (1972) approach therefore critiqued existing psychodynamic approaches to mental wellbeing as incorrectly 'focusing on the individual as the "container" of the pathology' (Boscolo et al, 1987, p.4), as this ignored the contributions of the relational context in which the difficulties were manifest. As Bateson (1972) explains:

> When you separate mind from the structure in which it is immanent, such as the human relationship, the human society or the ecosystem, you thereby embark, I believe, on fundamental error, which in the end will surely hurt you (p.492)

As Pendry (2012) notes, 'these ideas were developed into coherent theories about the particular nature of family difficulties… the key idea that is consistent throughout this development… is that… problems are interpersonal, rather than intrapsychic' (p.28). Therefore, if patterns of interactions in families could be explored and changed, so could the 'problem behaviour' (Boscolo et al 1987)

Systemic Practice and Social Work

The past fifteen years have seen a rise in the use of systemic ideas in Children and Family Social Work in the UK, notably in Hackney Children's Services where systemic practice was embedded through the *Reclaim* model (Goodman and Trowler 2012). Research has demonstrated this led to social workers spending more time with families, higher quality assessments, higher levels of skill in direct work with families, increased parental cooperation and fewer children coming into the care system (Cross 2010, Forrester et al 2014). As a result of this success, the *Reclaim* model has now been applied by a number of other Local Authorities (LA) and indeed the Frontline Programme.

Milan Family Therapy

Much of the systemic theory that underpins the *Reclaim* model stems from the work of the Milan Team, and these ideas have heavily influenced the Frontline Unit Meeting. The Milan team were a group of psychiatrists who worked with 'severely disturbed children together with their families' (Boscolo et al, 1987, p.3), originally practicing from a psychoanalytic orientation. However, following a frustration with the slow pace of their therapy and lack of results, they became fascinated by the work of Bateson, eventually rejecting a psychoanalytic approach in favour of working exclusively with family systems (Boscolo et al 1987). Key to the Milan Team's work were the principles of circularity, hypothesising and neutrality/curiousity.

The idea of *Circularity* stems from Bateson's (1972) work with cybernetics and his critique of linear, cause-effect causality. Rather, 'a circular perspective emphasizes cyclical sequences of interactions which interconnect with family beliefs; these patterns of relating and believing may recursively serve to perpetuate dysfunctional behaviours and cognitions' (Fleuridas et al, 1986, p.113). Embracing social constructionism, the Milan Team saw language as constructivist, linear and pathologising, in that it failed to account for the circular causality, resulting in families being trapped in the 'tyranny of the linguistic conditioning of western linear causality' (Boscolo et al, 1987, p.7).

Hypothesising was the Milan Team's technique to understand the logic of family systems and how patterns in family member's beliefs, actions and relationships often maintained difficulties (Selvini et at al, 1980). Hypotheses therefore must be systemic, in that they 'include all components of the family, and must furnish us with a supposition concerning the total relational function' (Selvini et al, 1980, p.3). Here the idea of the *Positive Connotation* became central to the Milan Team's work, positing that 'problems' develop through a process of mutual communication, rather than within an individual, and that the intent of such communication should be perceived as positive, even if the outcome, the 'problem', was not (Hedges 2005). Such a stance moves practitioners away from a position of blame/guilt and towards emancipation from the tyranny of linguistics outlined above. As Boscolo et al (1987) explain the systemic technique of hypothesising 'implicitly proposes the idea of therapy as a research operation engaged in conjointly with the family… (here) there would… be no such thing as truth, only an observer's attempts to construct with the family a working hypothesis that sees the problem as making sense within its context' (p.10). Therefore, hypotheses were not perceived as either *true or false*, rather whether they were *more or less useful* for the family (Selvini et at al 1980).

Finally, the Milan Team identified a third initial concept of *Neutrality* whereby as therapists, they would attempt to free themselves from alignment with individuals within the system, and the approval, disproval and moral judgments implicit in such a stance (Selvini et at 1980). However, the Milan Team later critiqued the idea of neutrality, embracing social constructionism to acknowledge that when working with a family therapists inevitably influenced that system (Cecchin 1987). Neutrality was subsequently abandoned and replaced by a stance of *Curiosity*, that is implicit in the idea of hypothesising, and refers to a professional stance that continuously questions our own and other's premises while being open to multiple and competing perspectives (Cecchin 1997). This move marked the advent of the *Second Order Cybernetic* movement in systemic practice, characterised by a mutually influencing relationship between therapist and client (Mason 2005). Such an approach therefore insisted that therapists recognise how their personal and professional stories enabled them to

privilege certain patterns, while ignoring others, and is analogous with the concept of reflexivity discussed in Chapter 1.4.

1.6 - What is the Frontline Unit Meeting?

The idea of a Unit Meeting (UM) stems from the *Reclaim* model and refers to a model of group supervision incorporating the systemic ideas described above. Frontline's (2020b) *Unit Meeting Practice Guidance 2020* states that the UM is key to Frontline's pedological model, and 'should allow the process of reflective learning and integration of theory to practice to inform interventions and plans with families' (p.1). Although Frontline participants also receive dyadic supervision, this is more focused on personal issues and professional development, and 'individual supervision discussions about families should only take place if these cannot be run through the Unit meeting' (Frontline, 2020a, p.10). As such the UM is the central case/family supervision forum on the Frontline Programme, and all Unit participants and the CSW attend UMs. The meetings are scheduled weekly for three hours and the Unit's PT also attends 12 UMs over the course of the first year of the Programme (Frontline 2020a).

1.7 - Research Questions Posed

The overarching research question addressed in this thesis is: *'What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?'*

The specific sub-questions to be answered are:

1. How does what happens in the UMs compare to what happens in Children and Family Social Work Supervision?
2. How is theory integrated into practice in the UMs?
3. How is reflective practice operationalised in the UMs?
4. How do group dynamics, including unconscious processes, impact upon the UMs?

5. How did the Covid19 Pandemic impact upon the UMs?

1.8 - Thesis Structure

Following this introductory Chapter, a literature review is presented in Chapter 2, detailing the research regarding Group Supervision in Children and Family Social Work settings and how these compare to the UM. Chapter 3 then outlines the psychoanalytically informed research methodology employed in this study to address the research questions outlined above, as well as the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this. Ethical considerations are also addressed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 introduces the psychoanalytic theory employed in this study, in particular Bion's theory of *Learning from Experience* which is key to the analysis of the data in this study. In order that the thematic analysis employed in this study does not fragment the data so that each Unit Meeting loses its *gestalt*, that is the sense of a coherent whole, Chapter 5 presents an overview of each of the six UMs studied, informed by the psychoanalytic observation data.

Chapters 6 to 13 then outline and analyse the findings of this study, employing NVIVO data and extracts from the UM dialogue alongside theory to illuminate 'what happens in the Unit Meeting'. Firstly Chapter 6 provides an overview of the supervision structure that was evident in the six UMs, so as to scaffold many of the arguments that follow for the reader. Chapter 7 then explores the application of systemic practice in the UMs, and how this differed between the two LAs. Chapter 8 then outlines the anxiety present in the UMs, and the various strategies employed by attendees to defend themselves against this. Chapter 9 details how when such anxiety is not contained, parallel process can occur, resulting in isomorphic patterns of behaviour in different subsystems.

Chapter 10 then further explores the contribution of the two Consultant Social Workers (CSW) to the nature of supervision practice in the UMs, detailing how their two contrasting leadership styles influenced the management of anxiety and reflective practice. Here links are made back to the wider supervision literature, and implications for leadership in social work supervision are discussed. Chapter 11 explores

connections between psychoanalytical and systemic theory, with a specific focus on connections between second order systemic practice, reflexivity and the management of anxiety. Chapter 12 then returns to Bion's (1962) theory of *Learning from Experience*, synthesising ideas from the previous six chapters to postulate two models of collective thought evident in the UMs, the implications of which are then discussed.

Chapter 13 explores further isomorphic patterns in the data set and wider social work milieu, further employing Bion's work and Fisher's (2009) *Capitalist Realist* to explore how the thought processes identified in the data in micro are further evident in the macro forces influencing the social work profession. Chapter 14 then concludes this thesis, summarising key findings and their implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

There now follows a literature review analysing the existing literature regarding group supervision models in Children and Family Social Work. This Chapter will first outline the methodology applied in the literature review, before categorising the literature into several groups. Themes across the groups will then be explored, before finally identifying a gap in the literature which this study aims to address, in doing so expanding the knowledge base.

2.1 - Methodology

Systematic Literature Reviews

There are two established forms of literary review, narrative and systematic (Aveyard 2008). A narrative review contains no defined approach to accessing and reviewing literature, which therefore may not mitigate authors' bias (Aveyard 2008). In contrast, systematic literature reviews employ a defined methodology to both identify and analyse literature, allowing researchers to replicate a study and corroborate the authenticity of its findings (Ridley 2012). Undertaking a full systematic literature review does however require teams of researchers to identify and analyse literature, and as such it is beyond the scope of this thesis. But in light of the increased level of rigour provided by a systematic approach, this thesis will endeavour to be underpinned by the principals of a systematic literature review, by providing a defined methodology to explain how literature was accessed and analysed.

Searches

Systematic literature reviews apply two levels of analysis to filter literature. Initially a practical search identifies applicable studies, in that they are relevant to the research question and emanate from a reputable source (Fink 1998). Following this a second quality search of literature identified in the practical search is undertaken. Here the credibility and robustness of the literatures' research methodologies are subjected to a

critical analysis to establish the validity of their findings, and to further analyse the studies' relevance to the research question posed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

When undertaking the searches, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure that only the most relevant and credible literature was accessed:

- Only primary research was accessed.
- Only research related to group supervision in either statutory Children and Family Social Work settings or with students on social work qualifying programmes was included.
- Non-UK studies were included. While it is acknowledged there are significant differences in each country's child welfare programmes, it is recognised that such studies might have a contribution to make in terms of group processes.
- Only research producing empirical data regarding what happens in supervision was included.
- Only studies undertaken after 1989 were included due to the significant changes in Children and Family Social Work introduced by the Children Act 1989.

Practical Searches

Appendix 16.1 outlines the details of the Literature Searches that took place, the terms used and whether the searches were undertaken using the 'TITLE', 'KEYWORD' or 'ALSO SEARCH WITHIN THE FULL TEXT OF ARTICLES' functions. This process identified a total of 14 studies. Due to the small number of articles identified a snowball technique was applied, whereby reference lists were scanned for relevant literature and key authors were identified (Ridley 2012). This accounted for a further 15 articles.

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

CASP is a critical appraisal tool developed by the Oxford University Public Health Resources Unit to analyse literature (CASP 2021a). I employed my own CASP tool in order to develop a consistent approach to my analysis of the studies identified (see Appendix 16.2). As the literature identified consisted largely of qualitative studies, this was adapted from a CASP qualitative appraisal tool and employed in the quality search (CASP 2021b). Following the quality search, four studies were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria, and a total of 25 articles were reviewed (see Appendix 16.1).

2.2 - Findings

In presenting the findings of this review the literature is initially grouped into loose configurations determined by shared theoretical underpinnings and structural similarities. Themes and distinctions are then established within and between these groupings before themes are drawn from all the studies. One limitation of drawing generalisations from this body of data is the varying models of social work from which the data is drawn, and the differing sample groups and contrasting methodologies employed by researchers. For example, thirteen of these studies pertain to the English and Welsh Children and Family Social Work system, with the remaining studies coming from as far afield as Romania, America, and Australia. All of these countries have vastly different approaches to child welfare making the cross-application of these studies' findings problematic. That said, several themes are evident.

Systemic Models

Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019), Bingle and Middleton (2019), Bostock et al (2017), Bostock et al (2019), Cameron et al (2016), Cross et al (2010), Forrester et al (2013) and Wilkins et al (2018), all studied models of group supervision based on the *Reclaim* Unit Model. Such models involved a Unit Meeting (UM) model of group supervision characterised by a focus on generating systemic ideas to apply with

families, a group leader in the form of a Consultant Social Worker who has supervisory and management responsibility, and the occasional presence of a systemic clinician. These studies were amongst the most methodologically robust evaluated in this literature review.

The Hackney *Reclaim* Model

Cross et al (2010) and Forrester et al's (2013) studies both pertain to the original *Reclaim* model. Both studies are large scale service evaluations and produce empirical data from UM observations, alongside qualitative and quantitative data drawn from a variety of sources that shed further light on the UMs. Forrester et al (2013) do not make explicit reference to UMs, however they describe 'case discussions' categorised by the use of genograms and generation of hypotheses, indicating a congruence with the UM model. When comparing the supervision in the Hackney *Reclaim* Model to the other two Local Authorities (LA) they studied, Forrester et al (2013) concluded that, 'the quality of the discussions… were… shaped by the commitment to a systemic way of thinking about and working with families and children… In contrast, there was very little evidence of the use of theory influencing the work of the other authorities' (pp. 94-5). Cross et al (2010) concluded that UMs were seen as '… enabling a more informed interpretation of family dynamic' (p.21), as well as increasing time for critical reflection and ensuring that risk was considered from several angles.

Other Local Authorities employing the Reclaim Model

Bostock et al (2017), Bostock et al (2019), Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019), Cameron et al (2016) and Wilkins the al (2018) all undertook research into UMs with other LAs employing the *Reclaim* model. Bostock et al (2017) concluded that the UMs they studied 'were overwhelmingly regarded as a positive forum for embedding reflective practice' (p.50). Here, 'practitioners… appreciated a safe space to discuss anxieties about risk to children, and actively sought out different perspectives', and '… the opportunity to plan interventions proved one of the most welcomed elements'

(Bostock et al, 2017, p.50). Bostock et al (2019) concurred that a noticeable feature of the UMs was the 'rehearsal space' to plan conversations with families, concluding that UMs were a 'pivotal practice forum for understanding risk to children and planning interventions to support families' (p.516).

The Frontline Unit Meeting

Maxwell et al (2016) undertook a large scale DfE sponsored evaluation of the Frontline Programme. While their study contains observations of Frontline UMs, their findings do not reference it specifically. Maxwell et al (2016) concluded that 'the unit model was regarded very positively by trainees' (p.10). Domakin and Curry (2018) also studied the Frontline UM, undertaking an action research project researching the UMs they attended and analysing these through a thematic analysis. They concluded that the Frontline UM provided rich learning for all attendees, and this pedagogic model had potential to improve social work education.

The 'Bells that Ring' Systemic Model

Partridge et al's (2019) and Dugmore et al's (2018) studies both pertain to the *Bells that Ring* Systemic Model of group supervision, run by a LA Children and Family Social Work team in a partnership with the Tavistock NHS Trust. The model shares much in common with the UM, in terms of a focus on the systemic ideas of curiosity and gathering alternative perspectives, however there are marked differences in the structure of supervision. Here the 'presenter' (supervisee) is interviewed by a 'consultant', rather than simply presenting the case. 'Observers' then listen and provide reflections in a model similar to a systemic reflecting team (Anderson 1987), while a systemic mentor was also present to ensure systemic ideas were present in the discussions (Dugmore et al 2018, Partridge et al 2019).

Dugmore et al's (2018) paper largely discusses the structure of the model, however the paper does provide feedback from mentoring sessions indicating that staff found the model led to '… the development of trust; open and honest discussion; increasing

confidence; and thinking positively about clients and colleagues' (p.10). The authors also identified that the model promoted reflexivity, noting that 'practitioners stated that it was new for them to connect to their own personal stories and link these to their professional identities' (Dugmore et al, 2018, p.10). There is however little indication of how this data was gathered and analysed, and this lack of any defined methodology means that this data should be treated with some caution.

Partridge et al's (2019) study provides some feedback from the authors as to the effectiveness of the model, noting it created 'a safe space where social workers can be held in mind and supported to process difficult and emotive material' (p.326). Moreover, the paper refers to quantitative data from a staff survey which outlined that '80 per cent of staff felt that the reflective group supervision was either always helpful or often helpful' (Partridge et al, 2019, pp.337-8). However, the survey gained only 18.2% response rate, and as the authors give no information as to how this data was analysed, it is again difficult to draw any robust conclusions from their findings.

Tavistock/Work Discussion Group/Balint Group Models

Work Discussion Groups

Lees and Cooper (2019), O'Sullivan (2019), Ruch (2007), and Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) all outline models of supervision based on the *Work Discussion Groups* (WDGs), which have their foundations in Tavistock Infant Observation (Bick 1964, Rustin and Bradley 2008). O'Sullivan (2019) describes how WDGs are methodologically underpinned by 'a belief in the central importance of the emotional dynamics', embodying '…the application of psychoanalytic ideas and methods', through the '…systematic discussion of (the) experience of work' (p.17 -18). Here Bion's (1962) psychoanalytic concept of containment is key in allowing contributors to make sense of emotive social work practice.

Reflective Practice Groups

Lees and Cooper (2019) conducted a mixed-methods, longitudinal evaluation of *Reflective Practice Groups* (RPGs) within an LA Children and Family Social Work department, a model that the authors note shares the theoretical approach of the WDGs. Lees and Cooper (2019) noted three positive outcomes related to the RPGs after a year: emotional support and reassurance, employees gaining more of a sense of the organisation as a whole, and enhanced capacity for reflection and thoughtful practice.

Case Discussion Model

In an expert opinion piece Ruch (2007b) describes a *Case Discussion* model of group supervision based on the Tavistock Infant Observation model. The model appears almost identical to WDGs, with a worker presenting a case verbally, and then stepping out of the conversation while others reflect on the aspects of the content and delivery of the presentation. Like WDGs, Ruch (2007b) noted the model 'legitimizes the emotional responses practitioners can have to challenging situations… confronting and exploring experiences of fear, anxiety, anger and frustration' (p.376). Ruch (2007b) found that the application of this model also fostered curiosity, allowing workers the opportunity to hear diverse interpretations of the work they presented. Ruch (2007b) concluded the model had the potential to improve practice in Children and Family Social Work.

Intervision Groups

Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) researched social work students' experiences of *Intervision Groups*, reflective case discussions based on the Balint Group model (Balint 1964). The Intervision model also shares much with the structure of the Frontline UM, with '…. a participant sharing a challenge, followed by a round of clarifying questions by the reflecting team… (who) then provide feedback by offering hypotheses to which the case presenter then responds' (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2019, p.1258). A discussion then concludes with '… an optional discussion period between all participants (that) focuses on the learning of all' (Staempfli and Fairtlough, 2019, p.1258). The model is

not however explicitly systemic in its theoretical underpinning and could have been categorised as either a WDG or systemic model. Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) concluded that '… for most students, Intervision offered emotional containment, widened their perspectives… enhanced skills that gave them the confidence to partake in Intervision…. (and) had a positive self-reported impact on the students' professional development and practice' (p.1269).

Process-Centred Group Supervision

Bransford's (2009) model of *Process-Centred Group Supervision* shares much with the WDG model in its psychoanalytic underpinning, however the model's unique application of the psychoanalytic technique of free association distinguishes it from other models in this category. Bransford (2009) describes a very structured format, where a verbatim process recording is read by the presenter and during the reading a group facilitator will ask the presenter to stop and encourage other participants to free associate to the case material. Bransford (2009) concluded that '… the process helped students honour a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives' (p.119), and '… increased opportunities to use that understanding to help create more emotionally attuned relationships with clients' (p.126).

Signs of Safety Group Supervision

This Literature Review only found one paper related to Signs of Safety (SoS) Supervision Practice that successfully navigated the inclusion criteria, with many peer review papers and much of the grey literature being excluded as they did not access supervision directly. Rankine's (2013) small scale project, described by the author as a 'reflective writing piece', outlines how the author applied the SoS *Group Consult* model of supervision. The project was small scale with only six participants, and outlines little in the way of a methodology. Rankine (2013) concluded that 'all participants found the feedback from others on their presented case valuable' (p.114).

Peer Supervision Models

Dempsey and Halton's (2017) and Golia and McGovern's (2015) studies were categorised into the rather broad category of *Peer Supervision*, which are characterised by the absence of a supervisor. Dempsey and Halton (2017) researched participant experience of *Peer Support Groups* (PSG). They describe how attendance at the groups was voluntary, and that they were '… intended as a supplement, rather than a substitute, for their individual supervision experiences' (p.5). The PSGs appear to be of an inductive nature with no prescribed structure used. Dempsey and Halton (2017) concluded that PSGs helped social workers acknowledge the feelings and emotions that arose from their work and provided a forum where uncertainties and risks could be safely explored with peers.

Golia and McGovern's (2015) paper explores the potential of peer supervision models in clinical supervision training in the USA. The paper consists of a literature review which is supported by some vignettes from the authors' practice experience. As such the paper should be regarded as 'expert opinion', and there is a notable lack of data to support the authors' findings.

Student Models

Arkin, Freund and Saltman (1999) outline a model of group supervision undertaken in the Haifa School of Social Work. This is an expert opinion paper study that is not specific to Children and Family Social Work, therefore limiting the findings applicability to this study.

Boho et al (2004) undertook a qualitative study of 18 social work students' experiences of a group supervision model. Again, this study's data is reliant on self-reporting measures, an issue that is likely to be particularly acute in relation to this study as the participants were all former students and were having to recall their experiences over a time period of several months. Boho et al (2004) concluded that attending to group processes in supervision could have a significant impact upon supervision practice.

Walter and Young (1999) undertook a qualitative study based on interviews with social work students attending a mixed group/dyadic supervision model. They noted that students 'described… moving from a ''problem solving'' or ''fix it'' approach to a more reflective, empathic model' and also a '… conceptual shift… from a narrower ''child focused'' approach to protect abused and neglected children, to a more ''family focused'' approach' (Walter and Young, 1999, p.80). The authors do not however provide details of how their data was analysed, only that it was qualitative, proving a significant limitation to their findings' validity.

Other Models

The Oradea Model

Oşvat et al (2014) outline a model of group supervision undertaken by a variety of Romanian social workers. The exact theoretical nature of the model is not clear from the paper, however Oşvat et al (2014) describe it as incorporating elements of 'psychodrama, presentations and case studies, clarifying/probing questions, circular and reflective questions, feedback and sharing similar experiences from one's own practice' (p.23).

Supervision Circle

Lietz (2006) *Supervision Circle* is a model of group supervision employed in an American child welfare agency. Lietz (2006) outlines a mixed methods qualitative and quantitative study to establish participants' views on the 'usefulness' of the supervision model. The study has a clearly outlined methodology, with Lietz noting that the 50% response rate may have skewed her findings. The study did have however involve 268 respondents, making it large scale relative to the other papers in this review, therefore increasing the validity of the author's findings. Lietz (2006) concluded that there was a marked increase in respondents' perceptions of the quality of critical thinking in supervision, following the application of the model.

Strengths-Based Supervision

Lietz (2013) also provides a largely descriptive account of a *Strengths-Based Supervision* model applied in an American child welfare agency. The model involves the integration of dyadic and group supervision models, however Lietz (2013) does not discuss the effectiveness of this integrated approach. Aside from some data presented from evaluation forms from training sessions, the paper provides little empirical data to support its argument and it should therefore be seen as an expert account of the model. Lietz (2013) concluded that the strengths of the group supervision element of this model were: to foster mutual aid and support, to utilize group dialogue to support decision making, to enhance critical thinking, and to increase efficiency by addressing common issues with all team members.

2.3 - Discussion

Having grouped the literature into loose theoretical configurations, this literature review will now explore the various themes evident across the studies analysed.

Methodological Concerns

One of the most striking findings of this literature review is that over half of the studies relied on participants self-reporting their supervision experiences, rather than researchers accessing supervision directly. Interestingly, of the nine studies that did access supervision directly, eight fell into the 'systemic group supervision' category, with the ninth paper, O'Sullivan (2019), producing a dialogue of a group supervision session that indicated their presence in the session.

Although self-reporting methodologies have advantages in terms of practicalities, they raise concerns in respect of the reliability of data. For example, participants may demonstrate a social desirability bias, where their responses are consistent '… with their perceptions of the desirability of certain kinds of answers' resulting in a '… gap between (their) stated and actual behaviours' (Bryman, 2016, p.267). Moreover, Bryman

(2016) stresses that the use of questionnaires and surveys with no interviewer present to probe or prompt participants to expand upon responses may result in participants not understanding the precise nature of the question being asked, and pertinent information not being accessed.

Furthermore, six of the self-reporting studies evaluated in this literature review (Arkin et al. 1999, Dempsey et al 2001, Domakin and Curry 2018, Golia and McGovern, 2015, Oşvat et al 2014 and Ruch 2007b) did not present any data in their papers other than the authors' opinions on the supervision sessions they had attended. As such these studies should be regarded as 'expert opinion' literature, and while the data these studies produced is not to be discounted due to the authors' expertise in the area of study, their findings must be viewed as highly subjective and therefore of a lesser validity than the studies that accessed supervision independently. Such issues are be mitigated by applying non-participant observation methodologies, such as those employed by Bostock et al (2019), Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019), Forrester et al (2013) and Wilkins et al (2018), where supervision is accessed independently and directly. It should be stressed that such an approach is not itself without limitations and can result in a potential 'Hawthorne effect', where participants may act differently in light of being recorded, thereby skewing the data produced (Payne and Payne 2011).

Also of note is the number of studies that provide limited or in some cases non-existent methodologies, meaning that the validity of their findings needed to be somewhat qualified when establishing the topography of group supervision practice. While one would perhaps expect this to be the case for the six papers categorised above as expert opinion, this also extended to many other studies, as Dugmore et al (2018), Lietz (2013), O'Sullivan's (2019), Partridge et al (2019), Rankine (2013) and Walter and Young (1999) all failed to provide a methodology explaining how the data they presented was analysed. While this was often the case for the smaller studies in this review, it should be noted that this was not exclusively the case with papers such as Boho et al (2014), Dempsey and Halton (2017), Domakin and Curry (2018), Lees and

Cooper (2019) and Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) all outlining clear and robust research methodologies to strengthen the validity of their findings.

It is also striking that only three of the papers reviewed in this study, Bingle and Middleton (2019), Domakin and Curry (2018) and Lees and Cooper (2019), made any attempt to address the authors' epistemological or ontological positions. Furthermore, despite almost all of the papers extolling the virtues of reflective practice, only two of the papers, Bingle and Middleton (2019) and Boho et al (2014), paid any significant attention to researcher reflexivity.

Funding Equity and Methodological Robustness

It was notable that most of the systemic group supervision papers did not encounter the methodological issues outlined above. For example, Maxwell et al (2016), Forrester et al (2013), Cross et al (2010) Bostock et al (2019), Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019), Wilkins et al (2019) and Bostock et al (2017) all presented clear and at times complex methodologies that involved teams of researchers. In addition, all of these papers accessed group supervision directly and therefore present as the most rigorous studies in this review. It must be noted however that all of these studies, with the exception of Wilkins et al (2019), received DfE funding, addressing the cost implications of their more rigorous research designs. Moreover, all of the large-scale projects in this review studied systemic supervision, raising concerns that other models are marginalised by the DfE. Tunstill (2019) has argued that such a focus on certain theoretical approaches to social work practice represent an attempt by the current Conservative administration to reframe the nature of the knowledge base for Children and Family Social Work, noting that:

> … the nature of this new inter-relationship between service commissioning, evaluation, and practice application risks establishing an intentionally closed and mutually reinforcing system, rather than promoting a model of genuinely evidence-based policy and professional practice (p.57)

In order to establish a robust knowledge base to inform supervision policy, and therefore break this closed systemic orientated system, equality of funding for research into all models of supervision must be regarded by policy makers as an imperative. In the meantime, care must be taken not to evaluate models of group supervision purely on a hierarchy of evidence model when access to such privileged methodologies is born out of gross inequalities in research funding.

How is Reflective Practice Operationalised in the Various Models?

Returning to the five-category model of reflective practice developed from Ruch (2000) in Chapter 1.4, it is interesting to analyse which category each model of supervision outlined in the literature appears to be most congruent with. Again, it must be stressed that such an endeavour is problematic. Firstly, due to the contested nature of reflective practice, and because the authors may not subscribe to the demarcations I employ in this paper. Secondly, as many of the articles provided limited details of the content of the supervision they studied, and therefore it was challenging to ascribe specific forms of reflective practice.

Technical Reflective Practice

All the models studied outlined that a strength of the group supervision format is that it produced multiple perspectives drawn from individual group members, as such providing a source of technical refection. Here the multitude of perspectives avoided getting stuck in the same perspectives drawn from a supervisor-supervisee dyad, a factor the systemic studies noted was consistent with the systemic principle of curiosity (Bingle and Middleton 2019, Bostock et al 2019). Several studies, for example Dempsey and Halton (2017) and Rankine (2013), noted that these multiple perspectives constituted a form of learning for attendees as they processed the different views of others and the rationales that underpinned these. Interestingly however, in their study of the original Frontline pilot Maxwell et al (2016) noted that this was not always the case, explaining how qualitative data drawn from the interviews with CSWs and Frontline

Participants indicated that there was a '… danger of units becoming "stuck in a rut" where the same four voices argued the same perspectives' (p.59).

Practical Reflective Practice

It appears that the systemic models were largely able to operationalise practical reflective practice and/or reflexive practice, with the studies in this grouping noting that practitioners were able to challenge their own assumptions and situate themselves in the material they were discussing (Bingle and Middleton 2019, Bostock et al 2017, Bostock et al 2019, Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester 2019, Dugmore et al 2018, Forrester et al 2013, Maxwell et al 2016, Partridge et al 2019, Wilkins et al 2018).

Reflexive Practice

The two studies related to the *Bells that Ring* systemic model (Dugmore et al 2018 and Partridge et al 2019), alongside Domakin and Curry's (2018) study of the Frontline UM, appeared to demonstrate more evidence of reflexive practice than the other systemic models based around the *Reclaim* model, through an explicit focus on emotions. It is interesting here to reflect on one of the main differences between the *Reclaim* and *Bells that Ring* models considering this point, specifically to what extent supervision should focus on the need to generate actions for social workers to undertake with families. For example, Dugmore et al (2019) suggests that the lack of focus on generating actions in the *Bells that Ring* model is a strength, concluding that 'early indications suggest that one of the noticeable effects is the creation of space to pause for reflexivity and permission to move away from the pressure to act without thinking' (p.12). However, the authors studying *Reclaim* point to the importance of actions, with Bostock et al (2019) going as far as to not classify case discussions as fully 'systemic' if they did not include 'the development of hypotheses into clear and actionable conservations with families' (p.519). I would therefore argue that the explicit focus on actionable conversations, perhaps at the expense of discussing workers' emotions, accounted for the descriptions

of practice in the *Reclaim* models being more akin to practical reflective practice rather than reflexive practice.

Dempsey and Halton (2017) also concluded that participants found their PSGs model helped them to acknowledge 'the feelings and emotions which arose in their work and helped them to integrate their personal and professional values, thereby strengthening their sense of professional agency' (p.17), with the authors adding that the make-up of the group was important in facilitating this reflexive practice and recommending that participants self-select PSGs as a result. Golia and McGovern's (2015) *Peer Support* model also appeared to be conducive to reflexive practice with the authors concluding that 'collaborating with peers served to decrease anxiety related to one's own clinical competence and skills by exposing others' vulnerabilities and concerns' (p.646).

Critical Reflective Practice

Both Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) and Lietz (2006) found that supervisees noted a marked increase in their critical thinking following the application of their models, although the descriptions of 'critical thinking' appeared more consistent with the category of practical reflection, based on the examples cited by the authors.

Process Reflective Practice

The WDG models were alone in being categorised by process reflection where inter-psychic phenomena were discussed in relation to case material (Bransford 2009, Lees and Cooper 2019, O'Sullivan 2019, Ruch 2007b, Staempfli and Fairtlough 2019). Here the focus appeared more upon the workers' experience than the creation of actionable tasks to undertake with families, with an explicit focus on the emotionality of the social work task.

Psychosocial Reflective Practice

None of the studies reviewed in this paper fell into the category of psychosocial reflective practice.

Summary

Exploring the nature of the reflective practice evident in the various models of supervision studies appears to highlight a key distinction between the models, namely whether it in an imperative for a supervision discussion to conclude with the creation of discernible actions to be undertaken, whether supervision should be more focused on exploring the emotional landscape of the social work task, or whether it should focus on somewhere on a continuum between these two outcomes. It is noticeable that the *Reclaim* based models appeared to fall more towards the actions-orientated models, whereas the UM, the remaining systemic models, the WDGs and some of the other models appeared to lesser or greater extents more focused on understanding social worker experience: an apparent dichotomy that appears to get to the heart of the contested nature of the role and purpose of supervision in social work, which will be further discussed later in this thesis.

The Impact of Organisational Context

Several the studies highlighted tensions between effective group supervision practice and the organisational demands of Children and Family Social Work. For example, Cameron et al (2016), Dugmore et al (2018), Lees and Cooper (2019) all noted that supervision attendance became an issue, with tasks such as court work taking priority. A number of other studies highlighted the impact of anxiety on the supervision practice observed. For example, Bingle and Middleton (2019) noted attendees appeared preoccupied by finding linear 'solutions' to the issues being discussed and that the 'social work role is one that desires certainty in order to maximise child safety' (p.402), adding that this resulted in some of the hypotheses generated in the UMs they observed being both linear and pathologizing of parents. Bingle and Middleton (2019) concluded

that this linear thinking served to constrain reflexive practice, in particular the ability of the social workers to situate themselves in their work. Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) also noted the presence of this linear thinking, although they did not explicitly link this to organisational context, noting that some of students who reported not finding the groups helpful explained this was as they did not gain any certainty from the group as to what to do next.

This point is echoed by Oşvat et al (2014) who noted that 'organizational culture exert(ed) a powerful influence on supervisee self-perception and selfimage', to the extent that participants found it 'challenging to perceive themselves as professionals, differently from the way they are perceived at work' (p.24). Oşvat et al (2014) concluded that this made it 'easier for them to "survive" their work' (p.24). Ruch (2007b) takes this a step further, noting that engagement in the WDG based model she applied necessitated the admission of practitioner vulnerability, anxieties that are currently defended against in Children and Family Social Work through omnipotent technical-rational practice that may prevent the adoption of such a model.

O'Sullivan (2019) further stressed the impact of organisational context upon the WDGs she studied, observing a prevalence of persecutory anxiety exhibited by social workers, and noting they 'feared being scapegoated, isolated, vilified, and had an underlying anxiety about being "found out" (pp.20-21). Moreover, organisational defences resulted in vulnerability and weakness being denied by workers, and it appeared that they would psychically withdraw from service users. However, O'Sullivan (2019) describes how the WDG provided a containing environment in which such anxieties and defences could be understood and explored, thereby reducing the impact of this organisational anxiety. Lees and Cooper (2019) also make similar tentative connections between the implementation of RPGs, and an improvement in organisational context, for example, noting how quantitative data at three years showed 'a large reduction in staff vacancies and employment of agency staff' (p.11). Moreover, the qualitative data indicated that '… participants felt that RPGs… represented an important investment in the workforce, which has attracted and retained staff' (p.11).

Links to Social Work Practice

A number of authors studying systemic supervision attempted to establish links between the content of systemic supervision sessions and the quality of social work practice (Bostock et al 2017, Bostock et al 2019, Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester 2019, Wilkins et al 2018). For example, Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019) concluded that 'there is a statistically significant relationship between supervision quality and overall quality of direct practice', and that the quality of supervision 'was also associated with relationship-building skills and use of "good authority" skills' (p.1). Moreover, Wilkins et al (2018) concluded that there was a significant association between systemic supervision categorised as 'support for practice' and practice scoring highly for two dimensions of the practice they observed: good authority and overall practice skills.

In respect of WDGs, Lees and Cooper (2019) note that the quantitative organisational data regarding the number of children subject to a child protection plan, numbers of referrals and number of looked after children, showed downward trends 'indicative of an improvement of services to children and families' (p.12). Again, while Lees and Cooper (2019) are hesitant to make causal links between the RPGs and an impact on practice, the qualitative data again suggested that practitioners correlated '… the "numbers going down" as an indicator of RPG success' (p.12).

Leadership of Supervision Groups

Another theme evident in the literature concerns leadership and facilitation within group supervision. The different models took different approaches to this, for example in the form of a manager, or through a specialist practitioner, for example a systemic clinician or an external social work academic, or having no defined leader or facilitator in the case of the peer models. These differing approaches were described as producing a number of outcomes.

Golia and McGovern (2015) highlight how the lack of a manager/supervisor in the peer supervision sessions they observed contributed to the formulation of a 'holding

environment' (Winnicott 1965). The authors noted that 'collaborating with peers served to decrease anxiety related to one's own clinical competence', and that, '… trainees adopted feelings of interdependence with, and responsibility to, their colleagues, which… contributed to a reduction in occupational stress and isolation' (Golia and McGovern, 2015, p.646).

Bostock et al (2017) and Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019) both noted how the presence of a systemic clinician correlated with an improvement in both the quality of the discussion and the quality of practice with families. Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) also described how the University facilitators in their *Intervision* groups were able to model the application of theory into practice 'which contributed considerably to students' learning about the method' (p.1265). Lees and Cooper (2019) noted that attendees at the WDG groups they studied appeared to judge their experience based on the quality of the facilitator.

Relationships in Group Supervision

The importance of relationships in group supervision, particularly between the supervisor and supervisees, was a further theme evident in the literature. It is striking that the papers that highlighted this mainly employed self-reporting methodologies, indicating a strength to such methodologies when analysing this facet of group supervision. For example, Lietz (2006) concluded that the '… quality of the supervisee/supervisor relationship… were predictors of critical thinking in supervision' (p.41), and that some 'respondents reported they felt uncomfortable with the supervision circle concept due to a poor relationship with their supervisor' (p.44). Moreover, Bogo et al (2004) highlighted the importance of an environment of 'safety' and 'trust', noting that supervisees' previous experiences with each other, perceived competition between students, perceived levels of professional competence and whether some supervisors were seen as having favourites, all impacted on the quality of supervision experience. Bogo et al (2004) concluded that 'group process may impede learning and lead students to feel more anxious if group dynamics are not skilfully addressed' (p.24). Rankine (2013) also acknowledged the anxiety in sharing your work with peers,

acknowledging that one participant felt pressured to present a case when they were not ready.

Cross et al (2010) detailed the importance of relationships in relation to the functioning of a UM, noting that their effectiveness is '… dependent on the precise practices within the unit and… that some units are more successful than others in creating open collaborative environments' (p.22). This point is echoed by Domakin and Curry (2018) who outlined how the relationships developed in the Frontline UM over the academic year were crucial in allowing the attendees to demonstrate reflexive practice. Dempsey and Halton (2017) further echoed this point, noting how practitioners would determine 'which colleagues they feel safe with in moving beyond the technical, rational aspects of child protection social work to consider the often-unspoken anxiety provoking aspects of practice' (p.11).

Arkin, Freund and Saltman (1999) stressed the importance of the group leader in managing group dynamics, arguing that each supervision group was 'a dynamic entity obeying its own self-generating processes' (p.51), and therefore that, '… styles of supervision must… differ methodologically in accordance with… each phase of the group's development' (p.55).

Training for Group Supervision

Numerous authors also noted the importance of training for supervision attendees, in particular supervisors/facilitators, prior to attending supervision (Oşvat et al 2014, Lietz 2006, Partridge et al 2019, Rankin, 2013). With some models training was provided prior to attending supervision, for example Rankin's (2013) SOS model, with other models providing it in supervision through an expert facilitator (Bostock et al 2017, Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester 2019, Domakin and Curry 2018, Dugmore et al 2018, Forrester et al 2013, Staempfli and Fairtlough 2019).

The issue of practitioner training appears particularly acute to the fidelity of the systemic models. For example, Maxwell et al (2016) noted how several Frontline participants reported how their supervisor's lack of knowledge in respect of Frontline's practice

models impacted their experience on the Programme. Other studies of systemic models also indicated that staff may not have received adequate training to undertake systemic supervision. For example, Bostock et al (2019) noted that only 31% of the UMs they observed were categorised as 'systemic' in nature, with the remainder categorised as 'non-systemic' (28%) or 'green shoots' (41%), indicating that the adoption of the *Reclaim* practice model is not necessarily congruent with systemic supervision practice. This point is echoed by Cameron et al's (2016) study which indicated that in one LA adopting the *Reclaim* model, only ten of the 24 assessment social workers interviewed '… said there had been change in practice towards systemic supervision; and the remaining 14 thought there had been no change, or very little' (p.26).

Lietz (2006) posits that the importance of establishing 'trusting relationship', was such that '… group supervision may not be effective', and '… may increase anxiety for supervisees who do not feel respected by their supervisors' (p.45). She therefore concluded that training regarding relationship building for the supervisor/supervisee dynamic should be an imperative.

Shared Learning

The final theme transcending the various models of supervision related to the shared learning opportunities that group supervision represented (Arkin, Freund and Saltman 1999, Boho et al 2004, Domakin and Curry 2018, Lietz 2013, Rankine 2013, Walter and Young 1999). This was particularly evident in the papers pertaining to students. For example, Arkin, Freund and Saltman (1999) concluded that '… group supervision acts as a melting pot for all students and supervisors… becoming the agency by which materials that is learnt in the theoretical classes is experienced in practical terms' (p.57). Domakin and Curry (2018) found the Frontline UM to be a rich learning environment whereby 'everyone, including the CSW and Academic Tutor, could contribute their learning and knowledge, challenge others to consider new perspectives, and learn themselves in turn' (p.175). This point is echoed by Partridge et al (2019) in respect of the *Bells that Ring* systemic model, who observed that the model facilitated a cocreated

reflexive process, whereby 'listening to the reflections sets off their own thought processes in new and unexpected ways' (p.330).

2.4 - Conclusions

The range of supervision models explored in the studies coalesce around a number of the themes identified in this literature, particularly around the importance of relationships in supervision and how these are managed, the various roles that group leaders, supervisors and experts play, and the imperative of training in relation to specific theoretical models. Group supervision also appears to be a site of rich learning, with attendees learning from each other's work, whether they are qualified practitioners or students. It would also appear that technical reflective practice is evidenced in all the various models, with practical reflective practice, reflexive practice or process reflection more likely to be found in specific models depending on their theoretical orientation. These themes will be re-examined in the discussion chapters of this thesis in relation to this study's findings.

2.5 - The Gap in the Literature

Given that none of the studies above employed a psychoanalytically informed observational methodology to analyse the impact of unconscious processes in group supervision practice, and indeed so few studies accessed supervision directly, there is a clear rationale for an original study such as this to enhance the social work supervision knowledge base. Moreover, given that currently one in ten social workers currently qualify through the Frontline Programme and there are currently only two studies identified that have researched the key pedological element of the Programme that is the UM, further research into this model is also clearly warranted (Stevenson 2018).

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

The following Chapter will outline the research methodology employed in this thesis to explore what happens on in the Frontline UM, in doing so addressing the gap in the literature identified in Chapter 2.5. Firstly, the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the project are explored, before the psychoanalytically informed model of observation employed is discussed. Finally, the method of thematic analysis informed by Cooper's (2014a) meaningful interpretative approach employed to analyse the data is outlined.

3.1 - Ontology and Epistemological Positions

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm represents '… a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics)... that defines, for its holder, the nature of "the world"… and the range of possible relationships to that world' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.107). As Kincheloe et al (2011) explain, '… because all observers view an object of enquiry from their own vantage points (paradigm) in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is ever exactly the same' (p.170). Consequently, specific research paradigms necessitate specific methodologies, that in turn influence findings, and in order to make credible claims to knowledge, researchers must outline their epistemological and ontological positions (Gringeri et al 2013, Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Critiquing Positivism

The positivist and post-positivist research paradigms of hypothesis falsification or verification, based on Newtonian laws of cause and effect, remain gold standards for Western policymakers (Ansell and Geyer 2017). However, such positivist assumptions have been critiqued as they risk the exclusion of meaning at the expense of 'fact', fail to account for the impact of the subjectivity of human experience, risk ignoring the impact

of context, and do not account for interdependence of theory and fact (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Critical Realism

While I cannot adhere to positivism as a result of this reductionist worldview, I do share its realist ontological assumption of an objective world that can be accessed and studied independent of human experience. I therefore distance myself from a social constructionist ontology which posits that the world we experience does not exist independently of social processes (Burr 2015). However, I would not go as far as to argue that the subjective nature of human experience and social process do not influence the 'nature' of the world we experience, and address this ontological challenge between physical and social reality by adopting a *Critical Realist* ontology (Bhaskar 2008, Outhwaite 1998).

As Bhaskar (2008) explains, critical realism posits that '… things exist and act independently of our descriptions, but we can only know them under particular descriptions' (p.250). Critical realism therefore '… sees science as a transitive, historically conditioned activity which… is the product of a shifting social domain that reflects the social and material development of human society' (Reed and Harvey, 1992, p.357). Consequently, critical realism shares much with a constructionist position in that it acknowledges the subjectivity of knowledge, and that human interpretation is reified through language and then presented as non-human reality (Alexandrov 2009, Madill et al 2000).

The Stratification of Reality and Generative Mechanisms

Critical Realism argues that reality is stratified into three domains:

- the *Domain of the Empirical*, what we experience, either directly or indirectly
- the *Domain of the Actual*, where events happen whether we experience them or not

- the *Domain of the Real*, the causal level of *Generative Mechanisms* and structures that produce events in the world, and while not necessarily realised or open to direct perception, are *real* (Blom and Morén 2011, Collier 1994, Dore 2019, Outhwaite 1998)

Non-observable *Generative Mechanisms*, that is entities that exist in the domain of the real and explain why observable events occur in the domains of the actual and empirical, are of central importance to critical realists (Blom and Morén 2011, Houston 2001). Such generative mechanisms are however hard to access, in that their powers may exist unexercised, or be exercised unrealised, dependant on auspicious conditions. Generative mechanisms also occur in *Open Systems*, where more than one mechanism may be operating at any one time, producing complex codetermined outcomes (Bhaskar 2008, Collier 2014). Such an ontological approach therefore has profound effects for epistemology, as 'mechanisms operate and have effects other than those they would have in experimental situations, due to the codetermination of these systems by other mechanisms' (Collier, 1994, p.36). This approach to causality is thus inherently multi-faceted and complex, and the prediction of social reality becomes problematic since it cannot be subject to the closed system of the laboratory (Archer 1998). Therefore, '… firm prediction in the social sciences has to be jettisoned in favour of an approach centred on the identification, analysis and explanation of psychological and societal mechanisms and their causal tendencies' (Houston, 2001, p.851).

Ontological and Epistemological Journey

Having explored my favoured research paradigm, it is interesting to reflect upon the genesis of this during this research project. When applying to study for this Doctorate Programme, I initially proposed to train Consultant Social Workers (CSW) in systemic supervision techniques and then compare these to a control group of CSWs, in what I had unwittingly conceived as a positivist study. Such a study assumed that the impact of the training package could be measured against the control group in a closed laboratory system, which took no account of the multiverse of other influences upon the CSWs' practice. Moreover later, while in the process of analysing the data, I found myself

initially prioritising the quantification of qualitative data through NVIVO in a manner that risked stripping it of its context, rather than presenting the qualitative data hermeneutically. Conceivably these actions were influenced by the dominance of positivism in Western culture, and that, in order to present my research as robust, I was drawn to such a paradigm (a phenomenon that is explored in more detail in Chapter 13).

The path of this research was therefore emergent, and in undertaking this research my epistemological and ontological positions shifted as the study progressed. Here I have rejected positivist approaches which posit linear causality by applying reductionist epistemological and ontological frames that assume social entities operate in closed systems. In contrast, by adopting the ontological frame of critical realism which postulate open systems and non-linear causality, I was able take a more inductive approach to this project, and explore the multiverse of influences on the Unit Meetings I studied, free from the restrictions of positivist assumption of the closed laboratory system implicit in my initial proposal outlined above. I have therefore moved away from a positivist epistemological position, and further towards a position of critical realism, as this research progressed.

Psychoanalytic Theory

Having experienced and studied the psychoanalytic processes pioneered by Sigmund Freud, and later developed by Wilfred Bion and Melanie Klein, in a Tavistock Group Relations Conference (Kiel 2017), any outline of my ontological position would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of the unconscious. As Alexandrov (2009) explains, in light of such knowledge:

> the optimistic perception of the human subject as an autonomous, rational, monadic entity has to be left behind for a more sophisticated and humble idea of man as an embodied, emotionally driven, and culturally contingent being, entangled in a complex web of meanings and relations (p.41).

A psychoanalytically informed ontology therefore postulates research subjects as 'defended subjects', influenced by an array of unconscious phenomena, a position that has clear implication for researcher's research strategies (Hollway and Jefferson 2012).

Summary

In undertaking this research, I ascribe to a critical realist ontological position, which acknowledges the existence of causal structures that exist independently of human experience, while also acknowledging both the constitutive role of discourse and the unconscious.

3.2 - Research Strategy

The following section outlines some of the fundamental ideas that, considering my ontological and epistemological position outlined above, underpinned my approach to this research.

Accessing the UMs

Much of the existing research into supervision relies on self-reporting mechanisms, via interviews and questionnaires (Beddoe et al 2016, Wilkins et al 2017). While this has advantages in terms of practicalities, it raises issues regarding the reliability of data (see Literature Review Chapter 2). Therefore, in order to produce the most robust analysis of what happens in UMs, a research strategy was adopted that accessed UMs directly.

Qualitative vs Quantitative

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) outline how qualitative research comprises interpretive practices that illuminate phenomena by studying them in their natural settings. As this project sought to understand 'what happens' in the UM, this is a qualitative study which

looks to explore the qualities of entities and processes, rather than a quantitative study that studies entities in terms of quantity, intensity, frequency, or cause-effect relationships (Allen-Meares and Lane 1990).

Positivist claims of poor reliability in the qualitative research are countered by a process of triangulation, whereby results are substantiated when multiple methods of research converge to provide mutual confirmation (Mandill et al 2000). Moreover, as following my critical realist ontology, I believe objective reality cannot be captured independently of descriptions of it, a triangulated approach also mitigated against this subjectivity (Bhaskar 2008). This process of triangulation was achieved through employing observations and audio recordings of the UMs.

Psychoanalytically Informed Research

Psychosocial studies refer to a cluster of methodologies concerned with the relationship between the individual and their environment, often employing psychoanalytic concepts to move beyond the purely discursive and consider unconscious processes (Clarke and Hoggett 2009, Stamenova and Hinshelwood 2018). In light of my acknowledgement of unconscious phenomena, and given this research is 'practice near' in that it brought me close to people in emotive, visceral and psychic ways, there was a clear rationale for employing a psychoanalytically informed methodology in this study (Cooper 2009, Hollway 2009).

There is no universal methodology for psychoanalytically informed studies. However, Stamenova and Hinshelwood (2018) note that '… the instrument for the investigation of the human unconscious can only be another human unconscious' (p.4), and all these models, like the clinical psychoanalysis that inspired them, are united by the idea that the researchers' countertransference and emotional responses are credible research data (Parkinson 2017).

3.3 - Research Questions and Research Objectives

In undertaking qualitative research, research questions can be more open ended, with an associated risk of loss of focus (Bryman 2016). To guard against this, specific sub questions and objectives are outlined below.

Research Questions: The overarching question is: *'What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?'*

Specific sub-questions to be answered are:

- How does what happen in the UMs compare to what happens in Children and Family Social Work Supervision?
- How is theory integrated into practice?
- How is reflective practice operationalised?
- How do group dynamics, including unconscious processes, impact?
- How did the Covid19 pandemic impact upon the UMs?

Objectives:

1. To understand what happens in the UM through the study of transcripts of UM dialogue and psychoanalytically informed observations.
2. To understand how reflective practice, and other theories, are operationalised in the UM.
3. To experience the emotional landscape of the UM, how group processes impact, and understand how this might impact on group supervision more broadly.
4. To understand whether there is merit in the UM supervision model being applied to Children and Family Social Work
5. To understand the impact of Covid19 upon supervision attendees.

3.4 - Research Methodology

The following section presents the Research Methodology employed in this study. This information is also presented schematically in the Research Timetable (appendix 16.3).

Psychoanalytically Informed Observation

In order to access unconscious processes in the UMs, this study employed Hinshelwood and Skogstad's (2000) psychoanalytically informed observation methodology. This involved the non-participant observation of the UMs, an approach influenced by the psychoanalytical infant observation model of Bick (1964) and Miller et al (1989). The model shares much with ethnography, in that it is a 'naturalistic' methodology, entailing immersion in others' experience (Cooper 2017). While this method has limitations in respect of positivist hypotheses verification, it is well suited to hermeneutical studies such as this. While I have not received formal psychoanalytical training, I have undertaken such an observation as part of my doctoral studies. Therefore, in undertaking this research my position was more akin to a researcher employing psychoanalytic ideas, rather than a trained psychoanalyst.

Hinshelwood and Skogstad's (2000) methodology posits three elements of experience to be observed:

- objective events happening
- emotional atmosphere
- researcher's inner experiences

Skogstad (2018) states that when undertaking such an observation, researchers must employ Bion's (1970) idea of approaching clinical work 'without memory or desire' to guard against the potential for the data to be influenced by the researchers' preconceptions. Rather the observer is '…to tolerate not-knowing… in order to come to a deeper understanding' (Skogstad, 2018, p.113). Therefore, in order to avoid pre-interpretation and missing valuable data, field notes were completed after each of the observations, and written in a manner that avoided premature theoretical interpretation.

Skogstad (2018) argues that, in order to guard against subjective interpretations, such field notes are most effectively analysed in a group format. To enhance the data's validity, the fieldnotes, as well as sections of transcriptions, were therefore analysed in bi-monthly Work Discussion Groups (WDG) with fellow doctoral students, and reflections captured in WDG notes (Elliott et al 2012).

Recording and Transcription

To achieve triangulation of the data, the UMs were also audio recorded and transcribed. The same protocol Frontline employs for recording direct observations of students' practice was applied to this study (Frontline 2018b). Recordings of all six meetings (virtual and non-virtual) were undertaken using an encrypted mobile telephone, and then immediately uploaded to a secure password-protected server and deleted from the mobile telephone. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, in order to provide accuracy (Lapadat 2000).

Data Analysis

Bi-monthly 90-minute WDGs took place to support analysis of the data corpus. Supervision sessions between myself and my dissertation supervisors facilitated further data analysis. The data corpus was then analysed using a thematic analysis (see below).

3.5 - Psychosocial Reflexivity

In light of my epistemological position that acknowledges both the influence of the unconscious, and that the world as we know it cannot be accessed independent of human experience, I abandoned the idea that I am a '… knowing subject contemplating the studied object from a privileged and detached perspective' (Alexandrov, 2009, p.35). Researcher reflexivity was therefore imperative to the validity of this study, and

psychoanalytic and systemic theory were helpful in addressing the 'psycho' and 'social' elements of this respectively.

The *Second Order Cybernetics* movement in systemic practice is defined by the mutually influencing relationship between therapist and client(s), acknowledging Giddens' (1984) methodological concept of *Double Hermeneutics* as it sees the researcher's relationship with the researched as mutually influencing (Sayer 1992). I must therefore acknowledge an investment in Frontline, having worked with the organisation for seven years in which I have frequently attended UMs. It would therefore be disingenuous to claim to be a detached observer from the object of study. As outlined in Chapter 1, Frontline is a controversial programme and researcher reflexivity was imperative in ensuring that this debate did not influence the analysis of data.

Alexandrov (2009) critiques the notion of double hermeneutics, arguing that the acknowledgement of unconscious phenomena requires it to be 'enriched and transformed in the triple hermeneutics of psychoanalytically informed critical theory' (p.46). Therefore, even disclosure of aspects of myself would be inadequate in understanding my 'unconscious contribution' to this research. Consequently, I employed a methodology that illuminated such processes between the researcher and the researched, and their impact on 'findings' (Frosh and Saville Young 2017, Stamenova and Hinshelwood 2018).

Reflexivity was addressed through the presentation of data extracts, the models outlined in Chapters 6-13 and my personal reflections in WDGs with fellow Doctoral students and tutorials with my supervisors. Here my views were scrutinised and alternative opinions were sought, bringing new perspectives into the data analysis, and guarding against the impact of my subjective experience.

Dreamwork Data

Towards the middle of the project I experienced a vivid dream, and in the spirit of my ontological position that acknowledges unconscious processes, I explored its meaning through dreamwork (Freud 1992). The thoughts here are drawn from a WDG and

provide an example of how fellow doctoral students supported the analysis of my data, in this case the dream.

The dream occurred as follows. Having attended a UM in LA1 I am called by the CSW and asked why I did not follow up a vital safeguarding task that was allocated to me in the meeting. Immediately I experienced visceral anxiety which woke me from my sleep. I then preceded to enact the dream, getting out of bed to address the issue, before realising that it was only a dream. Two weeks prior to the dream LA1 CSW had emailed me asking when she would be able to access the findings of this study, and the WDG theorised that this email sparked the dream. Here I was concerned for the CSW's welfare, as their practice in the UMs might be interpreted as suboptimal, resulting in persecution from their LA. Persecution no doubt influenced by the impression I had of a more performative LA environment. I have written previously about my own experiences of persecutory anxiety in Children and Family Social Work, and the visceral experience I had as a result of this which resulted in my repeated vomiting at work (Smith 2019). The WDG suspected the experiences were triggered by fear for the CSW, a research participant I sought to defend from the persecutory forces I experienced, and which I identified in LA1, mobilizing a similar anxiety response that I experienced in the dream.

3.6 - Sampling and Recruitment

Terry et al (2017) argue around ten hour-long focus groups are suitable for a thematic analysis PhD project, and that when sampling, the quality of data should be the primary consideration. Given a UM is a group meeting similar to a focus group, and is approximately three hours long, this project researched six UMs in total. I observed two Frontline Units over a three-month period, situated in two different Local Authorities (LA). Considering this study's intention to explore 'good practice', this project employed 'purposive sampling', and both the LAs subsequently recruited were previously rated as 'good' by OfSTED (Bryman 2016). In my role as a Practice Tutor I had no previous experience working with the Units, LAs or CSWs, other than delivering lectures that the participants had attended.

Once identified, I approached the LAs to participate in this study. LA management, CSWs and Frontline participants were provided with a Study Information form (Appendix 16.8). LA management provided agreement via email (Appendix 16.7). Consent forms were then gathered from all attendees (Appendix 16.9).

There are limitations to the wider applicability of this study in light of such a restricted sample. However, this approach is pragmatic given the small scale of this project. Moreover, given that I came close to six rich and unique data sets, there was value for the illumination of similar research areas (Cooper 2009).

Covid19 Pandemic

As a result of the Covid19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown three of the UMs (LA1 UM1, LA1 UM2 and LA2 UM1) took place in person, and three UMs (LA1 UM3, LA2 UM2 and LA2 UM3) virtually. The meetings took place virtually and were accessed via Zoom. In light of this an amendment to the Tavistock Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) was made requesting ethical approval to access these meetings (Appendix 16.7). This was granted on the 1st April 2020.

Data Collection

Following Hinshelwood and Skogstad's (2000) model, observation of the three non-virtual meetings involved me sitting in the UMs and recording the sessions as attendees undertook the meeting. For the three virtual UMs, I observed the meetings via Zoom.

Unit Meeting Demographics - LA1

LA1 was a small rural Local Authority (LA) in the South of England. At the time of the research it was rated as 'Good' by OfSTED. There was one Frontline Unit present in the LA, the unit which participated in this study. The Unit consisted of the following individuals who were present for all three meetings. Note that specific demographic data

was not gathered from UM attendees, meaning the data below should be treated with some caution:

CSW – Female, mid-thirties. Had over three years experience in the CSW role

P1 - Female, White British, mid-forties

P2 – Female, White British, mid-thirties

P3 – Female, White British, mid-forties

P4 – Male, British Asian, late-twenties

In addition to this there was another non-Frontline student present as a guest throughout the whole of LA1 UM1, and two guests present in LA1 UM3, both who were qualified workers and who attended sections of the meeting.

The Unit's Practice Tutor (PT), (female, White British, early-thirties) also attended LA1 UM3.

Unit Meeting Demographics – LA2

LA2 was a large LA in the South of England consisting of both rural and urban areas. At the time of the research it was rated as 'Good' by OfSTED. There were four Frontline Units present in the LA and one of these units participated in this study. The Unit consisted of the following individuals:

CSW – Female, mid-thirties. Had over three years experience in the CSW role

P1 – Female, White British, mid-twenties

P5 – Male, White British, late-twenties

P6 - Female, White British, late-twenties

P7 - Female, White British, late-twenties

As a result of CSWs being on leave in two of the other Units in LA2, participants from these units (P2, P3 and P4) all attended LA2 UM1. In addition to this there was another

non-Frontline student present as a guest throughout the whole of LA2 UM1. The Unit's Practice Tutor (PT), (female, White British, early-thirties) also attended LA2 UM3. Again, note that more specific demographic data was not gathered from UM attendees, meaning this data should be treated with some caution.

The UMs in each LA took place between January and April 2020, meaning that each of the participants was approximately halfway through the first year of the Frontline Programme. All of the participants had also passed their second Progress Review, meaning they had each successfully navigated the End of First Placement Level of the Professional Capabilities Framework, the professional capabilities against which they are assessed (BASW 2022).

3.7 - Data Analysis

Following the process outlined above a data corpus consisted of the following data sets:

Figure I – Data Corpus

Data Set 1	Audio recordings of UMs (DS1)
Data Set 2	Transcriptions of UMs (DS2)
Data Set 3	Written psychoanalytic observation field notes (DS3)
Data Set 4	Written WDG reflective notes (DS4)
Data Set 5	Reflective Research Diary (DS5)
Data Set 6	'Deep Dives' into each recording (DS6) (see details below).

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe Thematic Analysis (TA) as a methodology for identifying and analysing themes within data. TA is renowned for its flexibility, and in

contrast to other qualitative methodologies like discourse analysis, is not adjoined with *a priori* theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke 2006). TA therefore represents more of a meta-analytic technique and is therefore well suited to analysing a varied data corpus such as this (Terry et al 2017).

TA analyses data through the identification of codes, which through iterative levels of analysis are developed into themes that capture the meaning of data. Coding can be *Deductive* where codes representing existing ideas and concepts are drawn from existing theory. Alternatively, they can be *Inductive* where codes are strongly linked to the data independently of pre-existing thematic codes and ideas. The hermeneutic nature of this study lent itself to this inductive approach, however it would be a fallacy to assume that data is coded in a theoretical vacuum, and therefore some deductive coding occurred, to identify key theoretical ideas, such as systemic practice.

While Boyatzis (1998) argues that employing multiple researchers to code the same data guards against subjectivity and improves validity, I would concur with Terry et al (2017) that 'inter-rater reliability can only show that two coders have been trained to code the data in the same way, not that the coding is somehow "accurate" (p.20). Therefore, I alone coded the data.

'Counting' in Qualitative Research

Given there were two LAs studied in this project, and that certain UMs occurred online while others were face-to-face, a certain amount of comparison in the data analysis was inevitable. Indeed, as the research developed and clear distinctions between the two LAs were identified, such comparative data became important in the process of hermeneutics. Bryman (2016) posits that comparison in qualitative research risks anecdotalism by employing imprecise terms such as 'more' or 'frequently' when analysing data. This was avoided by a process of 'counting' using NVIVO software. Here specific occurrences of codes were tallied and compared across UMs, producing numerical data. I would agree with Maxwell's (2010) assertion that the use of numbers in qualitative data did not make this study de facto mixed-methods, rather this use of

numbers gave precision to statements about the frequency or typicality of qualitative phenomena, and therefore enriched the qualitative data.

Such an approach did however have limitations. For example, the three UMs in each LA were not of equal length, ranging from 187.48 mins (LA1 UM3) to 120.02 mins (LA1 UM3). The UMs in LA1 were also on average 25% longer than in LA2, however UMs in LA1 contained more breaks, a section on shared learning that lasted up to 30 mins and a longer 'check in', meaning that on average around the same amount of time was spent in each LA discussing families. Such variation in timing and structure across the data corpus did however make precise comparison impossible.

Sandelowski et al (2009) stress that numerical data's cultural association with scientific rigor has led researchers to convert qualitative data into quantitative while glossing over the assumptions and compromises involved. This argument is advanced by Martin (2014) who notes how, far from transparent, such a process of counting is instead '… a richly contingent activity entailing categorical judgments' (p.923). Therefore, rather than assuming that entities of interest to researchers are there in the world waiting to be counted, objects and entities are constituted, and *a priori* assumptions reified, through the analytical process (Martin 2014). However, given the very identification of a code in TA represents the formulation of such a category, I would argue that this process of reification happens prior to any 'counting'. Indeed, Bryman (2016) argues that TA involves a degree of implicit quantification as '… a theme is more likely to be identified the more times the phenomena it denotes occurs in the course of coding (and) this process may also account for the prominence given to some themes over others' (p.630).

Cooper's Critique of Qualitative Methodologies

Cooper (2014a, 2017, 2018) highlights two limitations of such TA projects. Firstly, deductive approaches to coding, often inscribed in the theory laden structure of research questions, can introduce a priori assumptions into the analytic task that risk obscuring the very phenomena studied. Secondly, TA risks atomising and fragmenting

the data corpus into coded sections of data. This, argues Cooper (2014a), runs counter to some inherent principles of psychoanalysis where processes '… are assumed to have internal coherence… and meaning that are likely to be… lost if the record is broken down into isolated units of "meaning" that are decontextualised' (p.3).

Cooper (2014a, 2017, 2018) addresses these quandaries by adopting a *Meaningful Interpretative Approach* to analysis that is neither primarily inductive nor deductive. Here researchers may initially notice patterns in the data. These can be named, and perhaps connected to other patterns in the wider literature to provide a basic analysis. As the analysis develops, it is strengthened by locating a 'theoretical or conceptual framework that "fits" … the data and renders them "meaningful" within a wider context', therefore moving '… beyond any hypotheses or hunches inscribed in the research questions that drove the project at the outset' (Cooper, 2017, p.193). Therefore, such an approach to data analysis generates preliminary ideas and themes in the light of their research questions, but also new ideas not anticipated in the research questions (Cooper 2014a). Both these preliminary and unanticipated ideas are then translated into a series of questions that are then put to the data corpus. This avoids the fragmentation outlined above and allows for the exploration of the data as a coherent whole.

This study therefore followed the 6-step guide to TA by Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined below, synthesised with the approaches to data analysis outlined in Cooper's (2014a, 2017, 2018) critiques, as outlined above.

3.8 - Data Analysis Methodology

The following section outlines how Cooper's (2014a, 2017, 2018) 'meaningful interpretative approach' was integrated with TA to analyse the data in a seven-stage process.

1. Familiarisation with the data:

The six audio recordings (DS1) were transcribed by myself (DS2). Each recording was then listened to once more to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. During this process initial codes and ideas were capture using the comment function on Microsoft Word. The field notes (DS3) were written up immediately after the UMs. Following the WDGs, reflective notes were taken (DS4).

2. Generating initial codes:

The data corpus was coded using a mixture of inductive and deductive coding for patterns that appeared with regularity (Cooper 2017). Using Microsoft Word, first cycle codes were added in an additional column to capture early analytic observations.

The Transcriptions (DS2) were then uploaded to NVIVO software for further analysis. During this process a second cycle of coding took place, and codes were refined and recoded where appropriate (Saldana 2018). Here UM attendees were also coded using the 'case' function to allow a cross analysis between the codes and attendees. The final code book of codes applied in this study can be found in Appendix 16.4

3. Searching for themes:

Using NVIVO software, the codes identified were synthesised into wider groups and themes that represented patterned meaning within the data set. This was undertaken using the 'Set' function on NVIVO as many of the codes were present in more than one theme (Jackson and Bazeley 2019).

4. Reviewing themes

The identified themes were reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data corpus, generating a thematic 'map', that captured both the uniqueness of the

data, and its relation to the literature (see Appendix 16.5 for coded structure) (Cooper 2017). Following this process, the following themes were identified:

- Quality of Systemic Practice
- Displays and Responses to Anxiety
- Apparent Causes of Anxiety
- CSW Leadership Style
- UM Structure
-

5. Generating questions to ask the data

Following Cooper (2014a), the following questions were identified from the themes in the data and the initial research questions:

- How is the UM structured?
- What unconscious processes are evident and how do they impact on the UMs?
- How is systemic practice employed in the UMs?
- What form of reflective practice is evident in the UMs?
- How do the various leadership styles of the CSWs impact on what happens in the UMs?

6. Asking questions of the data

To capture the *gestalt* of each UM, each recording was then listened to a further time and the questions in Step 5 were asked of the data. Information in response to these questions was captured in 'Deep Dives' (DS6).

7. Producing the report:

This written thesis was produced. Chapters 6 to 13 present and analyse the findings of this study, employing NVIVO data and extracts from the UM dialogue alongside theory

to answer the research questions posed. Conclusions of this study are then drawn in Chapter 14.

3.9 - Limitations of Psychoanalytically Informed Research Methodologies

Frosh and Saville Young (2017) stress that it is important to recognise psychoanalytically informed methodologies' limitations, arguing that as such research is by definition dependent upon the subjective exploration of one individual by another, findings will be determined by, and therefore differ between, the various individuals involved. Indeed, a systemic second order perspective would argue that the presence of an *observer* in the UMs would inevitably lead participants to behave as if *under observation*: something likely to be exacerbated by my role at Frontline, where I assess participants and line manage Practice Tutors, and a factor that represented a limitation to this study (Cooper 2017).

Foucauldian critiques of psychoanalysis are concerned with how knowledge is employed through discursive practices and institutional apparatuses to perpetuate power dynamics and regulate individuals' conduct (Foucault 1972, Hall 2001). Therefore, arguably psychoanalysis represents a narrative that is reified through its own linguistic and cultural practice, evidenced by the cultural embedded nature of terms such as 'repressed' or 'neurotic' (Parker 2005). Here psychoanalysis's focus on the individual's psychic development perpetuates the neoliberal construct of individualism at the expense of collectivism, resulting in damaging political and social consequences (Parker 2005). Moreover, Parker (2005) further claims that psychoanalytic research methods are oppressive in that they position the researcher as 'expert', applying ideas from a knowledge base inaccessible to the researched.

However, if we acknowledge the existence of the unconscious as *a priori*, in light of the universal acceptance that the unconscious can only be studied through the meeting of a minimum of two minds, to dismiss psychoanalytic research on such grounds would be to dismiss research of the unconscious entirely (Stamenova and Hinshelwood 2018). Moreover, even if it is accepted that the understanding of psychoanalysis requires a

level of training, surely to deny its usefulness to individuals who may be influenced by such factors creates further exclusion and oppression.

There are however credible debates surrounding the validity of such methodologies, and the findings of studies can only be regarded as provisional (Price and Cooper 2012). A high degree of reflexivity and methodological rigour was therefore essential to this study in order to mitigate against such concerns.

3.10 - Ethics

This research project involved collecting data from and writing about people, therefore raising several ethical considerations (Cresswell 2014). Consideration was also given to the impact of this study on the two LAs, the Tavistock, and Frontline, and ethical approval was sought from all four bodies. Researcher reflexivity was also a key ethical consideration and is covered earlier in this Chapter.

The following Ethical Consideration where therefore addressed:

- Confidentiality was addressed through the anonymisation of all attendees, families and institutions involved.
- Consideration was given as to whether the report's contents risk harm to the participants and institutions, and therefore whether information should be excluded.
- Information pertaining to the families discussed in the UMs is presented in the final report in a manner that ensures their anonymity.
- All data was stored on a secure, password protected server, which only I could access.
- Institutions and attendees were each provided with a Study Information form (appendix 16.8) allowing them to give informed consent.
- All attendees were informed of their right to withdraw consent to participate in this study at any time.

- Should practice that contravened the BASW (2018) Code of Ethics have been identified, LA whistleblowing policies would have been followed, and Frontline Management would have been informed.

Chapter 4 – Psychoanalytic Theory

Before exploring the findings of this study, it is first pertinent to outline the psychoanalytic theory through which they were analysed. What follows is not an attempt to comprehensively or succinctly describe this rich and varied discipline, rather to provide the reader with an overview of the key theorists, before each of the psychoanalytic theories employed in this thesis is outlined.

4.1 – The Theorists

While each of these theorists' ideas have their own unique applications and nuances, they are united by a focus on Sigmund Freud's seminal work regarding the unconscious mind. Freud's work therefore provides the theoretical basis for all the psychoanalytic theory employed in this thesis. Freud's insights were then advanced by Melanie Klein, whose pioneering work psychoanalysing children led to a further understanding of the early development of the unconscious mind, and the formation of both British Object Relations theory and play therapy (Hinshelwood and Fortuna 2018). Wilfred Bion was subsequently heavily influenced by the work of Klein, and her theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions is fundamental to his work regarding the unconscious in groups and individuals' mental development. Two theories that are central to the ideas in this thesis, and which are outlined below.

Donald Winnicott, a paediatrician and psychoanalyst, was a contemporary of Bion at the Tavistock, and like Klein was interested in the unconscious mind of children and their mental development. Like Bion, he was influenced by Klein's ideas, although his disagreement with Klein's emphasis of the destructiveness of the paranoid-schizoid position distinguishes him from a purely Kleinian object relations perspective (Hinshelwood and Fortuna 2018).

4.2 – *Learning from Experience* **(Bion 1962)**

In his theory of *Learning from Experience* Bion (1962) employs Freud's (1911) concepts of the *Pleasure and Reality Principles* and the work of Klein (1946) to posit a theory of mental development. Klein's (1946) theory of the *Paranoid-Schizoid Position* theorises a stage of early infant development mobilized when the self is under threat, and where splitting of both self and object into good and bad occurs (Hinshelwood and Fortuna 2018). Here the infant employs projective identification as a mechanism for unburdening the psych of unpleasant stimuli, whereby anxiety-arousing perceptions and feelings are projected out by the infant and identified in the 'bad breast' (or carer), which is subsequently experienced as persecutory and threatening (Klein 1946, O'Shaughnessy 1981). Bion (1967) argued that such a process of projective identification represented the most primitive form of thinking, whereby 'thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts' (p.111). Therefore, 'thinking' is developed as an apparatus for managing unpleasant 'thoughts', and 'thoughts' must be regarded as epistemologically prior to 'thinking' (Bion 1962).

Containment and Alpha Function

Bion (1962) described these unmetabolized intolerable thoughts as *Beta Elements* which, under optimum conditions, when projected into the carer are subsequently processed through the carers' *Alpha Function* and returned to the infant as tolerable *Alpha Elements.* Through this process the carer *Contains* and modifies the infant's projections, before returning them in a tolerable form where they can be introjected through a process of what Bion (1962) described as *K Activity*, a process that represents the very first mode of communication between infant and carer (O'Shaughnessy 1981). Subsequently the introjected alpha elements can be symbolised by the infant and are available for dream thought and unconscious waking thought (Bion 1962). However, if the carer is unable to tolerate the infant's projections, a failure of containment occurs, and the infant continues to employ projective identification with increasing force and frequency (Bion 1962).

K Activity as Learning from Experience

This ongoing process of projective-interjective K activity between infant and carer then is subsequently internalised by the infant leading to the capacity to process beta elements internally. Instead of evacuating unpleasant stimuli through projective identification, as consistent with Freud's (1911) theorisation of an ego functioning under the pleasure principle, a new reality ego is internalised by the infant, with the capacity to tolerate the frustration associated with the reality principle (O'Shaughnessy 1981). As Bion (1967) explains:

> .... if the capacity for toleration of frustration is sufficient… an apparatus for "thinking" is developed. This initiates the state… in which dominance by the reality principle is synchronous with the development of an ability to think and so bridge the gulf of frustration between the moment when a want is felt and the moment when action appropriate to satisfying the want culminates in its satisfaction' (p.112).

This primitive container/contained model of K activity, and the capacity to tolerate frustration that it entails, provides the basis for a lifelong model of learning from experience (Youell 2006).

-K: Evasion, Omnipotence and Omniscience

Bion (1965) draws on the dichotomy between Freud's (1911) pleasure principle and reality principle to postulate a dichotomy between the emotional experience of *Love/Hate* and the emotional experience of *K*. Here powerful intrusions of love/hate obstruct the urge to know, resulting in what Bion terms *-K* (Fisher 2006). Fisher (2006) argues that such tension is central to human development:

> the developmental dynamic lies in the… conflict between these impulses… in the dynamic of the tension between the 'K-impulse', which seeks to know, and the

L/H impulse, which is to feel good or avoid feeling bad. In other words, it is the ongoing tension between the pleasure principle and the reality principle (p.1225)

Bion (1962) theorised -K activity taking two forms. Firstly, when an emotional experience is found by an individual to be too painful they may '… attempt either to evade or to modify the pain according to the capacity of the personality to tolerate frustration' (Bion, 1962, p.48). Here, drawing on Freud's concept of the ego functioning under the pleasure principle, reality is denied, and such a psychic manoeuvre is intended to misrepresent the emotional experience so as to 'appear to be a fulfilment rather than a striving for fulfilment' (Bion, 1962, p.49).

Secondly, Bion (1962) noted that when the intolerance of frustration is not so great as to activate mechanisms of evasion via the projective impulses outlined above, yet too great to bear dominance of the reality principle, an alternative model of -K activity dominated by omnipotence occurs in order to evade frustration. Here phantasies of *Omniscience* take place, where tolerance of frustration is so limited that K activity is jettisoned and substituted for an approach to learning that 'consists of 'having' some 'piece of' knowledge and not in what (Bion) called K' (Bion, 1962, p.65).

4.3 – Basic Assumptions (Bion 1961)

In his influential work *Experiences in Groups* Bion (1961) noted that in light of the complexities involved in the life in a group, individuals can regress to employ Kleinian (1946) defences of projective identification and the paranoid-schizoid position, in a process similar to learning from experience. Bion (1961) notes that every group is formed for the undertaking of a specific primary task, and here he made a distinction between two forms of group. Firstly, the *Work Group* wherein the activities in the group are geared to its primary task, are rational in nature, and are related to reality. Secondly however, when faced with emotions of intense fear, anxiety, love or hate, often driven by the group's primary task, group members can unconsciously partake in *Basic Assumption* behaviours. Here:

Work-group activity is obstructed, diverted, and on occasion assisted, by certain other mental activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drives. These activities, at first sight chaotic, are given a certain cohesion if it is assumed that they spring from basic assumptions common to all groups (Bion, 1961, p.146)

Although *Experiences in Groups* predates Bion's theory of learning from experience, and therefore contains no reference to the unprocessed beta elements characteristic of -K, Symington and Symington (1996) have argued that beta elements are analogous with the emotions of intense fear, anxiety, love or hate outlined above. Therefore, I would argue there are parallels between the work group and K, as they both process emotions and operate under the reality principle, and the basic assumptions and -K, as they are evasive of emotions and operate under the pleasure principle.

4.4 – Negative Capability

Bion (1970) employed Keats' (2002) notion of *Negative Capability* as a stance in his analytic work. This refers to the capacity of the analyst to tolerate the frustration and pain associated with '… uncertainties, mysteries (and) doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats, 2002, p. 41). Keats (2002) argued that such a stance necessitated 'remaining content with half-knowledge' (p.42), and therefore encouraged resistance to premature understanding and interpretation, and the urge to categorise (Cornish 2011). Such a stance towards therapeutic work therefore requires the tolerance of ambiguity and doubts, and here one must not prematurely reach for a truth, if one wishes to find one (Adlam 2014, Eisold 2000).

Simpson et al (2002) employ Needleman's (1993) concept of *Dispersal* to describe the breakdown of the receptive state required for negative capability. Here, when the anxiety faced when encountering the unknown cannot be born, individuals tend to disperse into explanations, emotional reactions or physical action, the very antithesis of negative capability. As Simpson et al (2002) explain, 'the pressures to disperse can be

great when faced by one's ignorance and sense of incompetence. At such moments, under the pressure to act, dispersal (can)… be emotionally hard to resist' (p.1214).

Such a process of dispersal can be manifest in the form of *Heuristics,* that is, 'intuitive forms of knowledge or rules, drawn from people's past experiences… helping them to think about ambiguous and confusing situations in the present' (Yerushalmi, 2019, p.294). In respect of psychotherapeutic therapy, Yerushalmi (2019) notes that heuristics are not in themselves a negative phenomenon. However, when 'employed defensively by clinicians to regain control of the clinical process in the face of the anxiety… they have the capacity to interrupt creative therapeutic work, especially when they lose their dynamic and flexible nature and become dogmatic' (Yerushalmi, 2019, p.296). Here heuristics risks the distortion of clinical data by interpreting it through existing theories and assumptions.

4.5 - Good Enough Parenting and the Holding Environment (Winnicott 1953, 1965, 1971)

Winnicott's (1965, 1971) conception on an individual's *Holding Environment* represents the *sine qua non* provisions in an individual's environment that facilitate their *Maturation Process* through childhood and into adulthood:

> There are genes which determine patterns and an inherited tenancy to grow and to achieve maturity, and yet nothing takes place in emotional growth except in relation to the environmental provision (p.187)

The holding environment argues Winnicott (1965), originally represents the infant's need to be held both physically and emotionally by their carer, initially in the womb and then in the carer's arms. Here, through the attunement of their carer, the infant's anxiety is contained. Similar to Bion's (1962) theory of K activity, this experience of attunement from others is then internalised, enabling the infant to be self-reflective, to self-regulate, and to have a sense of efficacy (Hyman 2012). Key to Winnicott's (1953) theory is the notion that a carer should not be perfect, rather 'good-enough' in creating such an environment that is not overprotective and allows the child to develop:

> The good-enough mother ... starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure. Her failure to adapt to every need of the child helps them adapt to external realities (p.94)

Winnicott (1960, 1965) stressed that an individual's maturation process is ongoing, and that even as adults, we seldom reach full maturity. An individual's holding environment therefore needs to adapt into adulthood, and it follows that the CSWs, Unit, Frontline and LA context would all be key in supporting attendees, in providing a holding environment that felt neither unsafe nor overly protective.

4.6 - Enactment

The terms *Enactment, Acting Out* and *Living Out* refer to a variety of behaviours united by the unconscious processing of repressed emotions in different situations and relationships, often involving the repetition or representation of the repressed emotions. While analysing the wide canon of literature to provide a definition of these contrasting and overlapping constructs is beyond the scope of this thesis, providing a brief explanation is helpful in aiding the analysis of this study's findings.

In relation to his seminal study of Dora, Freud (1914b) defined *Acting Out* as the analysed's unconscious urge to process repressed emotional experience through the repetition of the past via transference, in a repetition that replaces remembering. Therefore 'acting out implies a regression to a prereflective, pre-verbal level… and a desperate need to get a response from the external world' (Bateman and Holmes, 1995, p.195). Such a formulation therefore draws parallels with the somewhat over-inclusive umbrella term *Enactment*, a term first coined by Jacobs (1986) to describe behaviours linked to transference and countertransference in psychoanalysis, that 'in its most restricted sense… refers to those acts or series of acts that are a substitute for remembering' (Bateman and Holmes, 1995, p.195). Blum (1976) however distinguishes between acting out, which he defines purely in relation to psychoanalytic process, and

Living Out, which can be seen in the psychopathology of everyday, while acknowledging that no sharp boundary exists between the two.

Due to the phenomena in this study taking place outside of the psychoanalytic relationship it could be argued that Blum's (1976) formulation of living out is most appropriate for this study, however the explicit reference to psychopathology appears too specific to be of use. Therefore, and with a slight reticence, this study will employ the broad term of enactment, to describe behaviours demonstrated by attendees in the UMs that appear unconsciously motivated by the processing of unremembered or repressed emotional experiences.

4.7 - Parallel Process

The psychoanalytic concept of parallel process, identified by Searles (1955) and later developed by Ekstein and Wallerstein (1958), is helpful in exploring isomorphic patterns in the data, whereby processes in one relationship or set of relationships appear repeated in other relationships. In relation to the supervision of therapists, Searle (1955) succinctly describes the theory as when:

> processes at work currently in the *relationship between* patient and therapist are often reflected in the *relationship between* therapist and supervision (p.199) (original emphasis)

In relation to social work supervision, parallel process therefore occurs when a pattern in the relationship between a social worker and service user becomes manifest in the relationship between that same social worker and their manager in supervision.

In respect of dyadic psychoanalytic supervision, Sarnat (2019) posits that parallel process occurs when a dynamic 'arises in one of the dyads that is too ''hot'' to handle within that dyad… (and is) carried by the common member into the second (supervisory dyad), in an unconscious quest for discharge or resolution' (p.310). Jarmon (2009) highlights the function of anxiety in this process noting how such re-enacted experiences in supervision 'reflect core unconscious, anxiety-laden aspects of

significant relationships for one or more of the participants' (p.196). Parallel process therefore has similarities with the concept of enactment outlined above, as both represent unconscious attempts to process repressed emotional experience.

Chapter 5 – Unit Meeting Gestalt and Psychoanalytic Observation Data

In light of Cooper's (2014a) assertion that the coding process in Thematic Analysis (TA) risks atomising the data and losing the *gestalt*, that is the organised whole of each Unit Meeting (UM) that is more than the sum of its coded parts, the following Chapter provides an analysis of each UM informed by the psychoanalytic observation data (DS3).

LA1 UM1 (non – virtual)

When I arrived, the attendees had finished a 'self-care' lunch break. One of the participants had cooked biryanis and another chocolate cake. The meeting felt warm and cosy, and I was struck by the laughter in the room. This appeared infectious and I found myself grinning and laughing during the UM. At the end the attendees anxiously turned to me and asked me how they did. Without thinking I neglected my researcher role and told them they seemed happy and that they were enjoying their work.

Most of the communication in the UM was dyadic CSW–participant–CSW, and there was little evidence of the participants challenging one another's thinking. That said, the meeting was efficient, if very fast paced, and the Consultant Social Worker's (CSW) style of chairing the meeting ensured a great deal was discussed. Even though I was there for three hours, the time passed quickly. I felt interest in the Unit's work and my mind rarely wondered. Throughout the meeting the CSW recorded large amounts of information. It was not clear why this was, and the meeting must have produced reams of data.

LA1 UM2 (non – virtual)

I felt anxious at the start of this UM, and wondered if this might be attendees' projections, particularly from the Practice Tutor (PT - the Frontline academic who

supports the Unit) who perhaps felt under scrutiny due to my presence and role as a manager in Frontline. As the session progressed the anxiety subsided and I became engrossed in the UM. The UM felt noticeably slower than LA1 UM1, although this changed towards the end of the UM when the Unit tried squeeze in a final family discussion. Here my mind began to wonder more; the football, a mysterious bill I received.

The presence of the PT in this UM appeared to have a significant impact on the quality of the systemic practice, and there was far more evidence of second order practice. Except for the PT, attendees had their laptop open throughout the session, and these appeared to represent defensive shields in front of their faces. Their eyes frequently met their screens, although they did not interact with the keypad. I wondered what they were looking at and whether this behaviour was avoidant.

LA1 UM3 (virtual)

This UM started as normal with a check in, and scaling questions were employed by the attendees. Here attendees scored themselves on a scale of one to ten to represent their wellbeing. Despite each talking about how worried they were by the Covid19 pandemic, each attendee scored themselves surprisingly high. I wondered how meaningful this check in was as their scores appeared very defended.

While observing the meeting I experienced several periods of anxiety. Initially, when the Unit discussed how Covid19 would impact the Frontline Programme, I felt part of the problem, contributing to the anxiety of the participants as Frontline had not confirmed how they would respond to Covid19. Later these feelings of anxiety become more paranoid in nature. The CSW remarked that she was 'typing furiously', the exact words that I used to describe her typing in the previous UM. Later still I felt anxiety, wondering if I should have preceded with my research in light of the pandemic and I found myself distracted, with a constant urge to check my phone. The last hour of the meeting became tedious and I started to feel annoyed that the meeting was still progressing.

To a certain extent the UM appeared focused and purposeful. The genograms were excellent, and the manner in which they were shared focused the discussions on systemic practice. However, without the PT present there was little evidence of second order practice. It was also noticeable that the hypothesising was very positive, for example with many participants noting that the Covid19 lockdown would strengthen a mother and child relationship, despite describing their relationship as being characterised by conflict and violence.

LA2 UM1 (non-virtual)

Accessing this UM was initially challenging as the CSW did not confirm my attendance until shortly before it was due to start. This, coupled with the fact that I was coughing frequently as a result of recovering from Bronchitis in the context of the Covid19, led me to feel anxious that my presence might not be appreciated.

I felt warm and relaxed as the meeting progressed and the pace was notably slower than in LA1, with attendees communicating in a slow and methodical pace. There was little laughter in the session, and it appeared thoughtful and systemic. I found myself drawn into the discussions that took place, sharing an interest in the families. My mind occasionally wandered to lunch or the wider project, but only occasionally. The CSW was very calm, both in their speech and movement. This calmness conveyed a maternal impression, and I felt comfortable in her presence sat next to her, protected and contained.

LA2 UM2 (virtual)

The participants appeared in good spirits but were clearly very anxious about their placements considering Covid19, and the UM started with a discussion regarding whether the Frontline Programme would continue. Again, this led me to feel anxious that I could not provide attendees with the information they needed to end their anxiety, and my research felt like an indulgence.

Throughout the meeting attendees were trying to find a placement for a child due to conflict with his mother. This meant a participant and the CSW were in and out of the meeting, talking to the child's family, school, and management. This proved problematic in light of the Covid19 lockdown, and the Unit, faced with the options of accommodating him in a Police Cell or hospital bed, eventually gained management approval for support workers to attend the family home as a safety measure. This situation did not appear to disrupt the Unit model, rather the UM was used as a tool to explore the mother's conflicted feelings towards her child, and despite the crisis the CSW allowed the participants to lead much of this discussion. This seemed to make them more confident, and when the CSW left the call, the remaining attendees appeared focused, and the quality of the systemic practice did not suffer.

Again, the CSW was warm, calm and collected. She made me feel comfortable, settled and at peace as I observed the meeting. I felt contained and my initial anxiety dissipated as the meeting progressed. I then found myself becoming engrossed in the online content free from distraction.

LA2 UM3 (virtual)

The PT was present in this UM, and spent the first 15 mins discussing the implications for the Frontline Programme of Covid19. Again, at the beginning of the session I felt anxious. Thoughts passed through my head such as what if the recorder does not work? I reflected that I felt anxious for my research, complicated by knowing that the CSW was leaving her role the following week and this was my last opportunity to observe her.

The PT and the CSW worked in tandem to facilitate a high level of second order practice in the UM and the participants were again comfortable challenging one another. Impressed with their practice, I found myself relaxing as the session progressed and my mind rarely wandered. Towards the end of the session I felt almost euphoric; I had now captured all six of my data sets despite the pandemic. My project had survived.

Chapter 6 - How is the Unit Meeting Structured?

In order to scaffold the reader's understanding of the Chapters that follow, this Chapter will explore the structure of the Unit Meetings (UM) that was evident in the data.

6.1 - Attendees

UM attendees were made up of the unit's Consultant Social Worker (CSW), Frontline participants, and occasionally guests who were invited to share a piece of work. This is with the exception of LA2 UM1, where, as a result of CSWs being on leave, attendees were made up from the four Frontline Units in LA2. Practice Tutors (PT – the Frontline academic who supports the Unit) attended one meeting in each LA (Local Authority).

6.2 - Check Ins

UMs in each LA started with a 'check in', where attendees were encouraged to describe how they were feeling. In LA2 this would typically be a short process, lasting for little more than five minutes. In LA1 however this process would typically take around ten mins, and would involve creative approaches, for example attendees describing a song that represented their feelings:

> P4 – erm… I feeling a bit Bohemian Rhapsody, a bit all over the place (LA1, UM1, 00.02.00)

LA1 also incorporated a section entitled 'shared learning' where attendees shared a piece of learning, for example from attending Guided Profile training. This typically took around 20–30 mins.

6.3 - Family Supervision Discussions

The remainder of the UMs consisted of Family Supervision Discussions (FSD). The Frontline Unit Meeting Practice Guidance describes an FSD as a case supervision

discussion, the structure and timings are outlined in the model below (Frontline 2020b). All the FSDs observed across the two LAs broadly followed this model.
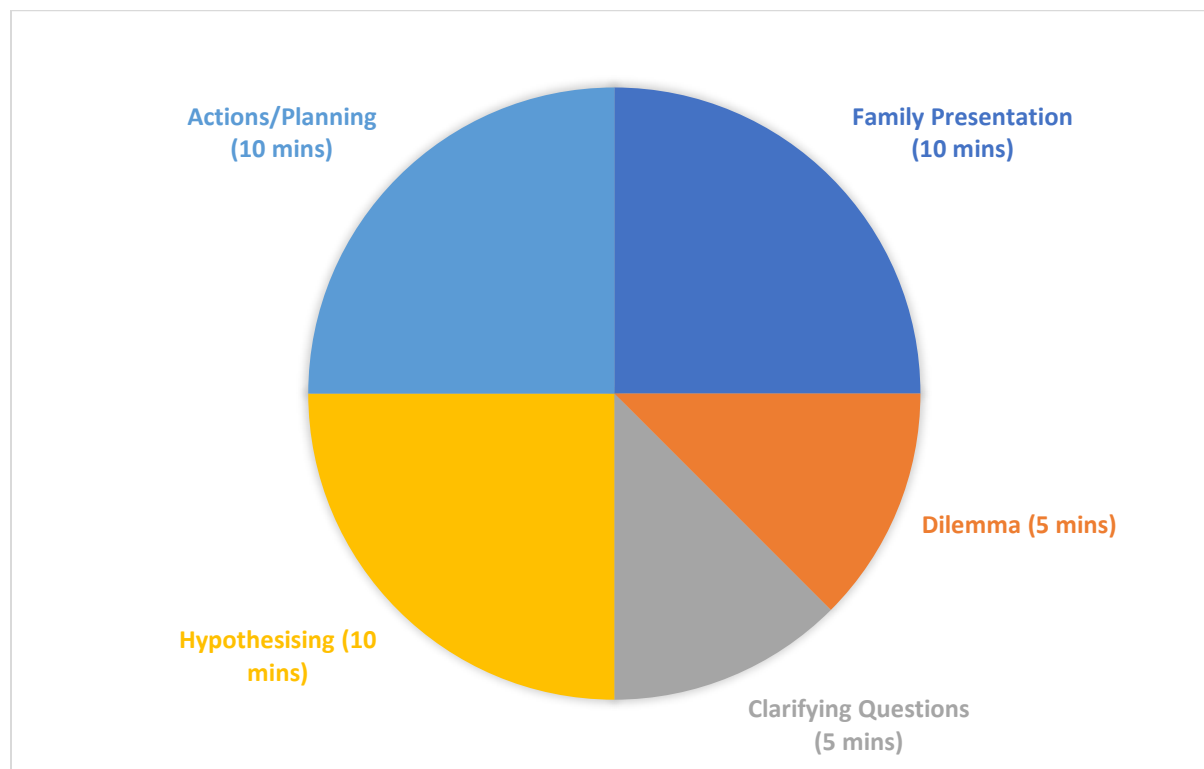
Figure II 'Family Supervision Discussion' – Structure and timings

6.4 - The Family Presentation

Every FSD started with a family presentation by an attendee. Here the case presenter would talk for between five to ten minutes, usually without interruption, presenting an update on their work with a family. In all of the family presentations systemic genograms were used, which supported attendees to identify systemic patterns in the family:

> P6 - I feel really like sad for her like looking at all the things that she's been through, and the fact that she's going through this constant toing and froing …

> P5 - I was looking erm at the generation above K as well there's a lot of broken relationships there (LA2, UM2, 00.40.30)

Burnham's (2012) systemic mnemonic GRRRAAACCEEESSS was employed alongside genograms to explore identity and difference.

6.5 - Reviewing Previous Actions

While the model of FSDs were broadly similar across both LAs, they did differ in how they incorporated reviewing previous actions. LA2's UMs contained an additional stage at the start where the CSW would check to see the outcome of the previous systemic actions. This facilitated a process where attendees were proactive in ensuring continuity between UM discussions:

> CSW – right five minutes off you go update and dilemma

> P6 - … so I'd chosen a hypothesis around S's past experiences and how erm her learned experiences about how to manage her own emotions have been passed on to K, and he's learned how to regulate emotions for her. So, my actions were to explore more about S's childhood and things… I've been doing some sessions with her but she's been really guarded about opening up about things and I've found that she has quite a lot of barriers up about talking about her vulnerabilities. So, I wanted to talk about what (it) might be like (for her) being vulnerable and opening up to me (LA2, UM3, 01.42.00)

In contrast, LA1 reviewed previous actions at the end of each FSD, and here the focus was on the wider social work plan, rather than systemic actions:

> CSW - So if we were to think around our actions before we go for a comfort break erm.. from last time cos we can see whether cos obviously the situation has changed significantly so we can see if these still feel relevant ones, (LA1, UM1, 01.13.00)

6.6 - Dilemma Formulation

Following the family presentation, a dilemma was agreed, a quandary that attendees held regarding the family's behaviour or the Unit's work with them. In LA1 UM3, when an attendee is stuck as to what their dilemma could be, the CSW provides an explanation of this element of the UM:

> CSW – it could be anything… we tend to use the word stuckness, so it's something that you might want a bit of curiousity with. So it might be why a particular change in a family might not be happening, it might be something that kind of invites you to think differently about a certain member of the family and why they might be behaving in a certain way (01.33.00)

The choosing and wording of the dilemma represented a crucial element of the FSD, as, if the FSD was confluent, the dilemma represented the starting point for hypothesising, which in turn led to the actions to be undertaken with families.

6.7 - Clarifying Questions

Following the formulation of the dilemma, attendees were given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions of the case presenter:

> P4 – was there any clarifying questions
>
> (pause)
>
> P3 – no I don't have any
>
> CSW – let's take that as a no (LA2, UM3, 00.32.30)

6.8 - Hypothesising

Next, attendees created a number of systemic hypotheses that aimed to offer explanations to the dilemma, while the case presenter sat out of the discussion and listened. In LA1 UM1 and LA1 UM3, hypothesising took place individually and in silence, with attendees typing their hypotheses and emailing them to the CSW, who

read them out anonymously. This was with the exception of LA1 UM2 where the PT insisted that attendees shared their own hypotheses. In contrast the hypothesising process in LA2 was undertaken as a group, with attendees taking turns to share their hypotheses. These contrasting approaches appeared to have various advantages and disadvantages. For example, the typed hypotheses in LA1 allowed ideas to be clearly formulated and disseminated, whereas in LA2 attendees would often lose their train of thought and their ideas risked being lost:

> P3 – he's being patient with the family in giving them all that he can, but its not enough for her so it creates, I don't know where I'm going. I'm going to stop talking I don't know what I'm saying (pause) something about power (LA2, UM3, 00.35.30)

LA2's model did however allow for the cocreation of ideas between attendees, as well as supporting attendees to challenge one another's ideas:

> P1 – well I guess we've talked about language but we haven't actually talked about ethnicity
>
> P6 – mmm
>
> CSW – mmm
>
> P1 – so if this was a white family (pause) how might it be different (LA2, UM3, 01.23.30)

The hypothesising process was almost always regarded as helpful by presenters, who shared how it had helped create new perspectives in respect of their work:

> P6 – which hypothesis are you choosing
>
> P7 – I actually really like the influence of new partner... (they) see J as the cause of previous relationship breakdowns… I haven't really thought that (LA2, UM2, 00.45.30)

And;

Guest 2 – thank you really helpful process, actually not to go to my automatic cos'… it has helped me identify that there are more strengths than I was actually seeing. I was just seeing the problems quote unquote (LA1, UM3, 02.47.00)

6.9 - Actions

Following hypothesising, one or more hypothesis was chosen to be 'tested' by creating actions that could be undertaken with a family. These actions nearly always involved talking to a family, and often took the form or systemic questions to explore hypotheses with them. For example, in LA1 UM1, following a hypothesis being selected about emotions not being discussed in a family, the following questions were generated employing circularity to support a parent to explore the hypothesis:

P1 – How would she feel if the boys did cry what (typing sound) how would she deal with that what would she do

CSW – or what does she think they would think of her crying…

P2 – or how does she think she should be feeling (02.11.30)

On occasion a hypothesis might be named with a family. For example, here a participant named with a service user the hypothesis that they might struggle working with a student:

P7 – I acknowledged to her that yes I (am) a student. I might not always get things right and there might be times that she can help me by letting me know what I can do to support her (LA2, UM2, 00.21.30)

On other occasions, actions were more akin to actions that, while informed by the systemic hypotheses they were generated from, were not necessarily systemic in nature.

6.10 - Which Families are Discussed?

In LA1, the selection of which families to discuss appeared planned in advanced, rather than being influenced by attendees' need to discuss them on the day:

CSW – do we know our families for next week

P2 – do you want to tell me the families and I'll put it in (LA1, UM2, 2.30.00)

In contrast, families were selected in LA2 based on attendees' need on the day:

CSW – is there a case anyone's got in mind that erm they really would like some help with today (LA2, UM3, 01.15.30)

6.11 - Recording

In both non-virtual UMs in LA1 there was an emphasis on recording much, if not all, the information that was discussed, and these UMs were characterised by the sound of typing which could be heard throughout almost all of both recordings. Indeed, the Unit appear so preoccupied by recording that in LA1 UM2 it appears that P2 is having to record the clarifying questions that she is answering while delivering the family presentation:

P2 – what did you ask me

(typing sound)

P1 – when did she last go to the doctors

(typing sound)

P2 – any other clarifying questions (02.30.00)

In LA1 UM3 it is unclear whether this recording was happening due to the 'mute' function on Zoom which meant only the attendee talking could be heard.

Chapter 7 - How is Systemic Practice Applied in the Unit Meetings

Throughout all the UMs attendees discussed the issues families faced by exploring patterns of communication between family members, family histories, familial relationships and wider contextual factors. Despite this there were marked differences in systemic practice in the two LAs, which is explored in this chapter.

To establish whether attendees' contributions were congruent with systemic practice, two sets were created in NVIVO; 'Systemic' and 'Non-Systemic' (see Appendix 16.5). When the occurrence of 'Non-Systemic' behaviours were mapped using NVIVO, this indicated that attendees' practice in LA1 was far more likely to be incongruent with systemic practice ($n = 35$), whereas such practice was unusual in LA2 ($n = 7$). Interestingly, it appeared that while the presence of the PT in LA1 UM2 did increase 'systemic' behaviours, it did not mitigate against 'non-systemic' practice, with this UM making up nearly half the occurrences of 'Systemic Incongruent' behaviours ($n = 19$). On the other hand, the NVIVO data demonstrated that occurrences of 'Systemic' behaviour were almost exactly evenly distributed across all six UMs.

7.1 - First and Second Order Practice

There was also a clear demarcation between LAs regarding the application of second order systemic practice, and in order to establish where this was evident in the UMs, an NVIVO set was created consisting of data coded 'second order practice', characterised by attendees situating themselves or other attendees in their work. This indicated that second order practice was evident in all of the UMs in LA2 ($n = 32$), with attendees regularly situating themselves in their work and exploring how they influenced the family systems they worked with. For example:

> P6 – cos' she might tell you that she finds it ok and that might help you to feel better about it
> P1 – that's true

P5 – cos' some of these anxieties might be your anxieties (inaudible)

P1 – erm yeah that's true (LA2, UM2, 01.19.30)

It is however striking that in the LA2 UM1, where attendees were from a mix of units, there was markedly less second order practice ($n = 3$), than in LA2 UM2 ($n = 11$) or LA2 UM3 ($n = 19$).

In LA1 however, second order practice was only evident in LA1 UM2 ($n = 11$), a statistic likely born out of the presence of the PT who frequently encouraged attendees to situate themselves in their work. There was no evidence of second order practice in LA1 UM1 and UM3, and rather than situate themselves in their work, there were ten occasions in LA1 were attendees instead situated Children's Services more broadly in their work:

CSW - next hypothesis, social work involvement has acted as a reminder of emotions of loss and grief, both in regard to S passing, but also in relation to B as a child… The allegations that were made against him have been a difficult process, but has allowed the family time and space to talk about things (LA1, UM2, 00.41.00)

7.2 - Hypothesising

The qualities of attendees' hypothesising were coded by various demarcations in systemic practice outlined in Chapter 1.5, as 'Linear', 'First Order', 'Second Order' and 'Circular' hypotheses. Hypotheses coded as either 'Second Order' and 'Circular' were further collected in an NVIVO set 'Advanced Systemic', as they represented more advanced forms of hypothesising. Examples of these various hypotheses can be seen in the table below.

Hypotheses Codes

Hypothesis Code	Description	Level of Systemic Practice	Example
Linear	Postulate explanations in terms of linear cause and effect relationships. Wider familial patterns of communication and meaning, circular patterns of causation and the impact of attendees joining a family system are all disregarded	Non – systemic	P4 – 'I feel like this is a bit harsh but I'm going to go with it anyway. C doesn't believe in E's diagnosis and thinks that she is displaying these behaviours because she is a difficult child. Therefore she thinks that she does not need to adjust her parenting styles as E is acting like this for attention and there are no real needs. C sees this in comparison to her own epilepsy and seizures, and can't see any physical symptoms for E and therefore doesn't feel it is an issue that needs addressing' LA1 UM2
First Order	Postulate explanation in terms of patterns of family communication and multi-generational family belief systems. The impact of a family's contextual environment	Basic systemic	CSW – 'T has felt resentful that she's had to parent K on her own and K is aware of this. K believes that her father does not care for her or see her as important as other children and she has

	may also be acknowledged, as might the impact of CSC involvement, however circular patterns of causation and the impact of attendees are not acknowledged		heard this said. She wants to develop more of a relationship with him but she is scared that if she does this will hurt her mother and she could then be left with no parent, as she believes her father would not have her to live with him' LA1 UM1
Second Order	Postulate explanation in terms of patterns of family communication and multi-generational family belief systems. The impact of a family's contextual environment might also be acknowledged, as might the impact of CSC involvement. The impact of individual attendees make upon the family system when they interact with it is explicitly acknowledged, however circular patterns of causation are not acknowledged.	Advanced systemic	P5 – 'maybe there's something in P6 from her own experience from her own mother. If kind of when she was a child things were dealt with by brushing them off, so when er when S does it to T she doesn't quite know er in her new position as a social worker what boundaries she has to push her, to allow her to feel a bit more uncomfortable and understand and uncover what is going on' LA2 UM3
Circular	Postulate explanation in terms of patterns of family communication	Advanced systemic	CSW – 'P3's function within the family is mostly helpful but what help looks like for

	and multi-generational family belief systems. The impact of a family's contextual environment might also be acknowledged, as might the impact of CSC involvement, and the impact of individual attendees make upon the family system when they interact with it. Circular patterns of causation are also explicitly acknowledged		each couple is helping to shift the blame onto S. However they also see that M is trying to… hold a balanced alliance. So the more curiousity you show the more they need to double down on the evidence and the narrative of S being the problem' LA1 UM2

There is an existing coding framework for the quality of systemic group supervision outlined by Bostock et al (2019). This framework was however identified as having several limitations in the analysis of the systemic practice present in the unit meetings. Firstly, the six domains of systemic group supervision identified and applied by Bostock et al (2019) make no mention of the central systemic concept of circularity, meaning that there was a risk that non-systemic linear hypotheses could be classified as 'systemic' using this model. Secondly, the model does not classify supervision practice as 'systemic' unless it was 'characterised by a move from hypothesis generation to clear and actionable conversations with families' (Bostock et al, 2019, p.519). This rather linear formulation of systemic practice risked much of the second order systemic practice evident in the Unit Meetings not being coded as 'systemic', as while it allowed attendees to explore how they joined and co-influenced families, it did not necessarily lead to a discernible action to undertake with families. Moreover, such a formulation risked categorising first and second order practice together, which in my opinion would have risked obscuring some of the major findings of this study.

Figures III and IV visualise the breakdown of these different forms of hypothesising by LA, and demonstrate that circular and second order hypotheses were more likely to be applied in LA2 than LA1. Conversely the UMs in LA1 were more likely to contain non-systemic linear hypotheses.
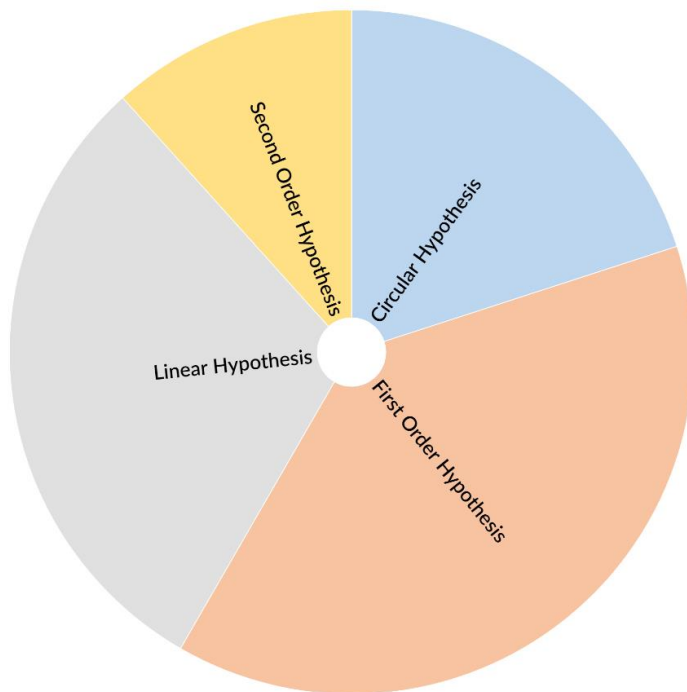
Figure III - Occurrences of hypothesising type in LA1
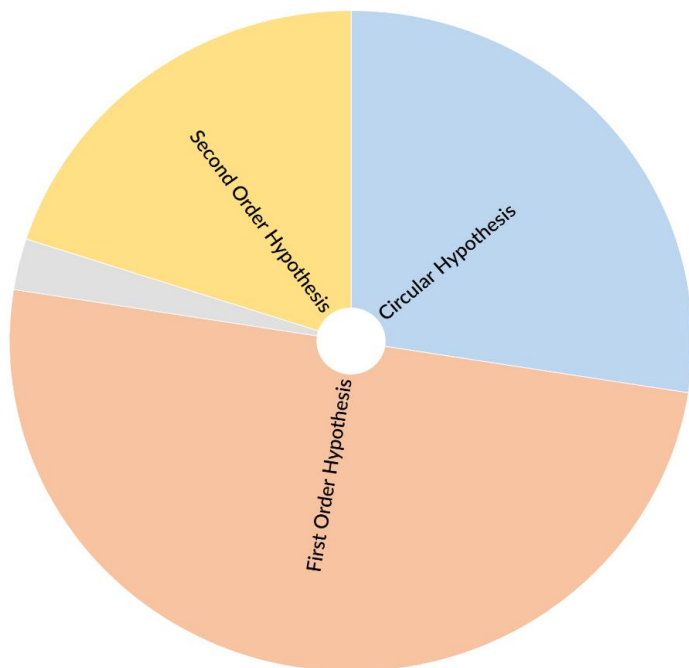
Fig IV - Occurrences of hypothesising type in LA2

7.3 - Vague Actions and Inconfluent Discussions

In LA1 UM1 and UM3 there was a pattern of the UM shifting directly from description of the problem to an agreed action, appearing to ignore the hypothesising in between. For example:

- in LA1 UM1 FSD1 old actions were discussed, rather than actions that led from the chosen hypothesis.
- In LA1 UM3 FSD2 the CSW discussed one of their own ideas not mentioned in hypothesising, and then listed what appeared to be the existing actions.
- In LA1, UM3 FSD3 the actions appeared to link more from the dilemma than the hypotheses.

This pattern was not identifiable in three out of four FSDs in LA1 UM2, and here the actions appeared to flow from the hypotheses, which were in turn drawn from the dilemma. Again, I would postulate that this was influenced by the presence of the

Practice Tutor (PT), as the NVIVO data in LA1 UM2 indicated eight incidents of the code 'PT ensures Systemic Actions'. Similar patterns of incongruence were not evident in LA2.

Moreover, in LA1 there appeared a pattern of actions, particularly systemic actions, appearing somewhat vague with all the data coded 'vague intervention', 'vague systemic intervention' and 'vague CSC plan' in LA1. For example, there are several references to 'ongoing genogram work', or 'explore family history', without any clarity about the exact nature of this work or what it aimed to achieve:

> CSW – so (pause) actually in terms of the actions… (pause) anything else that we feel like we need to be doing
>
> (pause)
>
> P2 – Carry on the genogram work with K and erm er sorry with T, and an ecomap with K just to explore a bit more about her you know (LA1, UM1, 2.43.30)

Chapter 8 - Anxiety and Defence in the Unit Meetings

Anxiety was evident in all six UMs to lesser or greater extents, anxiety that is well documented in the literature regarding Children and Family Social Work (Cooper 2014, Cooper and Lees 2014, MacAlister 2021, Munro 2010, Munro 2011). This Chapter will outline how and when this anxiety was manifest, as well as exploring some of the defences employed in the UMs to manage this.

8.1 - Anxiety in the Unit Meetings

Anxiety related data was coded into two main sets using NIVIO; 'Displays or Responses to Anxiety', and 'Apparent Causes of Anxiety' (see Appendix 16.5). 'Displays and Responses to Anxiety' represented attendees' behaviours that were perceived as either a display of, or a response to anxiety. Data coded in the set 'Apparent Causes of Anxiety' represented where that anxiety was perceived to have stemmed from. This meant that the same section of transcript would usually be dual coded for each set, and 'Apparent Causes of Anxiety' was never coded in the absence of 'Displays or Responses to Anxiety'.

For example, if an attendee had spoken with an anxious tone in their voice while talking about a piece of work they were undertaking with a father, as in the dialogue below, this was coded as 'Anxious Tone in Voice' (Displays and Responses to Anxiety) and 'Anxiety – fathers' (Apparent Causes of Anxiety):

> P2 - Dad comes across as very much blame N. N is the one who needs to change, we wouldn't need the plan if it was just me N erm (pause) (anxious tone in voice) I'm I'm I'm it's hard to build up that relationship at the moment (LA1, UM2, 2.33.00)

This next section of dialogue was coded as 'Anxiety Giggle' (Displays and Responses to Anxiety) and 'Anxiety – Fear for the Child' (Apparent Causes of Anxiety):

> CSW - He also shared that on two times at the age of twelve he was attacked by a gang of lads, one time they striped him naked in the street. I was quiet a

divulgence of (anxious laugh) quiet a lot of difficult information from him for quite a young age and he's pretty much said its been like that since he was ten (LA1, UM1, 45.00)

And finally, this section of dialogue was coded as 'Anxiety Voice Breaks' (Displays and Responses to Anxiety) and 'Anxiety – Fear for Parent' (Apparent Causes of Anxiety):

> P1 – so when I went to see her initially she was really, really scared… she wasn't sleeping at all. She believed that he was going to come and kill her (anxious tone in voice) because she believed that if N hadn't walked in when he was strangling her that he would have (anxious tone in voice) killed her erm (pause) (LA2, UM2, 1.04.30)

It is important to stress that it was not until I listened and transcribed the UM dialogue, months after attending the meetings, that the evidence of anxiety emerged, and such findings make a compelling case for adopting a methodology that analyses transcripts of dialogue alongside psychoanalytic observation. As a result, this coding was of an inductive nature, and therefore the codes below are not drawn from any academic material. Figure V outlines the occurrences of codes in the set of Displays and Responses to Anxiety across all UMs.
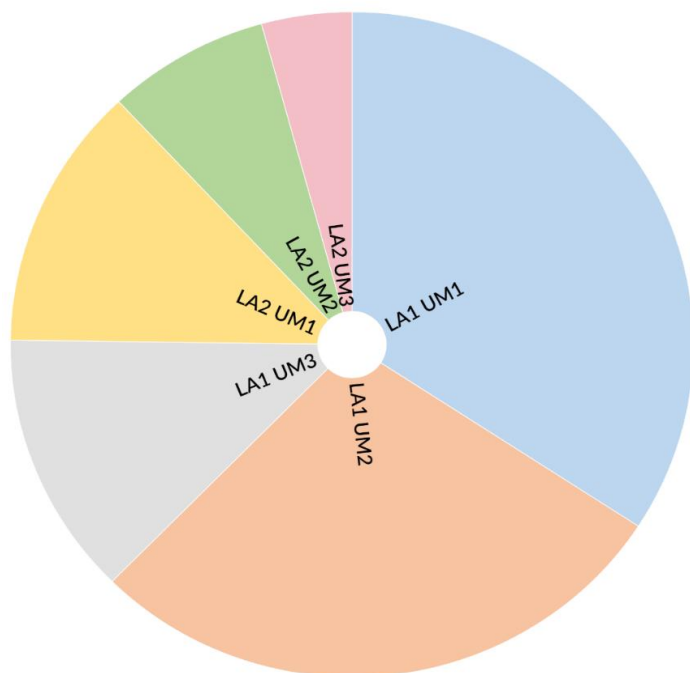
Figure V – Displays and Responses to Anxiety by Occurrence across all UMs

There was therefore a pronounced increase in anxiety in LA1. However, there is also heightened anxiety prevalent in LA2 UM1, which is striking compared to the two other UMs in LA2 which were virtual. Indeed, the three non-virtual meetings (LA1 UM1, LA1 UM2, LA2 UM1) contained 75.2% of the displays of anxiety, indicating that anxiety was more likely to be displayed in the non-virtual setting. Moreover, employing NVIVO it is striking to compare the dual coding of codes in the set Displays or Responses to Anxiety coded against each CSW, which indicates that LA1 CSW ($n = 28$) appeared to be demonstrating significantly more anxiety than LA2 CSW ($n = 2$).

8.2 - Apparent Causes of Anxiety

Figure VI shows 'Apparent Causes of Anxiety' across all UMs. Unsurprisingly this indicates that some of the more emotionally challenging elements of the social work

task, such as having difficult conversations with service users and working with fathers, appeared to lead to 'Displays or Responses to Anxiety' from attendees.
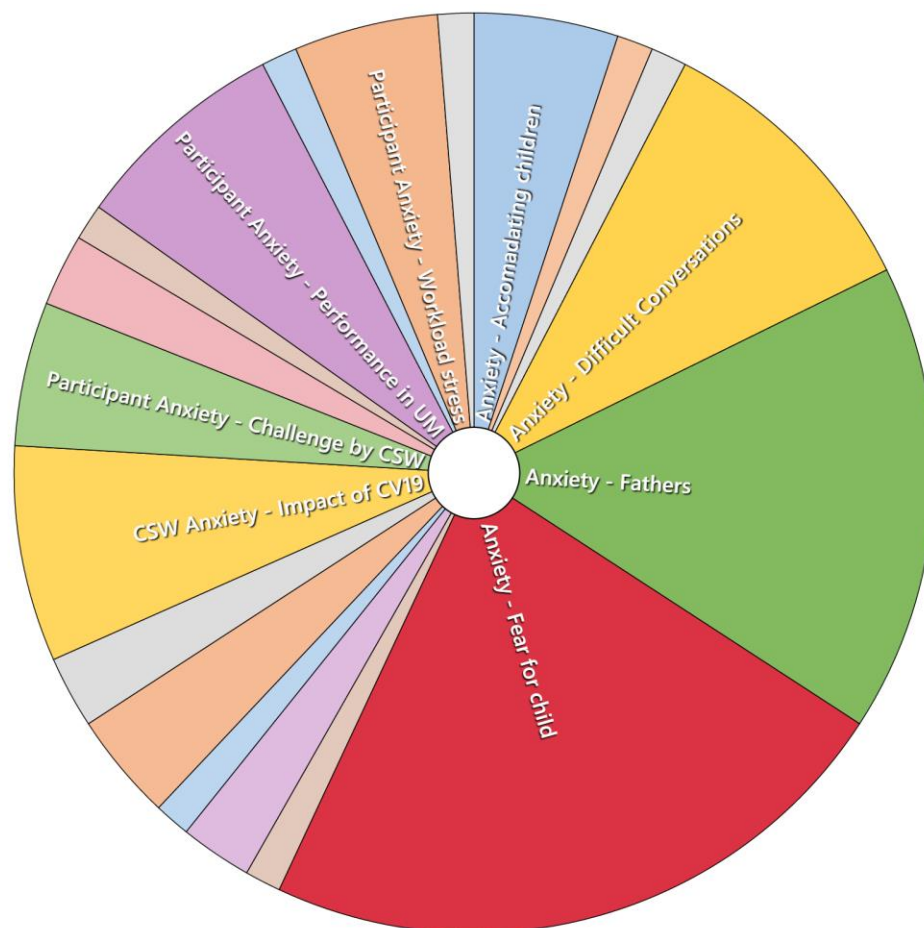
Figure VI – Apparent causes of anxiety coding by coverage across all UMs

What is striking however is that anxiety also appeared to be generated from the UM process itself, for example from having ideas challenged by a CSW or by having to perform in the UM. An example of this is when LA1 are discussing sharing their hypotheses:

> P2 – have you emailed them to me…
> CSW – that's (inaudible) a happy face P1
> P1 – I'm just looking at it thinking do you have to read it out (LA1, UM2, 02.43.30)

Indeed, codes indicative of 'UM Generated Anxiety' were only evident in LA1, indicating that attendees in LA1 appeared to experience anxiety as a result of UM processes, whereas attendees in LA2 did not.

8.3 - Do you wear a mask at work? Social defences against anxiety

The data highlights that in LA1 in particular, there were a number of strategies employed by attendees to evade the anxieties associated with the social work task. Indeed, such defences appeared enacted (see Chapter 4.6) in the 'shared learning' section of LA1 UM1 when, as part of the check in, P3 suggests the unit undertake a task entitled 'do you wear a mask at work'. The exercise appears a metaphor for much of what follows in the three UMs in LA1, in terms of the unconscious attempts attendees made to defend themselves against anxiety:

> P4 – The activity says…. We all tell versions of our lives, how does how you appear at work differ from how you really feel. This activity is designed to help colleagues know how you really feel and discuss how you can bring your true self to work. Using the mask handout… ask individuals how they like to be perceived at work, and on the back write how you really feel (pause) and then (pause) we share them with each other and read out (00.04.00)

Hopper and Weinberg (2011), building on the pioneering group analysis of Foulkes (1964) and Jacques (1955), posit the existence of a *Social Unconscious*, that is 'the existence of social, cultural, and communicational "arrangements" of which people are "unaware" (Hopper and Weinberg, 2011, p.xxx). A group's social unconscious, whether it be a society or a UM, therefore contains collective assumptions regarding social reality, disavowals, and social defences against anxiety (Weinberg 2007). Through the application of the social unconscious it becomes possible to 'postulate the existence of a group 'mind' in the same way as we postulate the existence of an individual mind' (Foulkes, 1964, p.118).

Menzies Lyth (1959), in her classic organisational observation of a hospital ward, built on these ideas describing how nurses collectively employed Kleinian (1946)

unconscious defence mechanisms of splitting, projection and introjection in order to protect themselves from high levels of anxiety generated by the nursing task. Menzies Lyth (1959) observed how the nurses' collective defence mechanisms were externalized in an organisational culture that served to protect nurses through processes of depersonalisation, denial of emotions and ritualised complex decision making. Whittaker (2011) has posited the existence of such social defence systems in Children and Family Social Work, and such collective defences were observable in this study.

8.4 - Denial and Disavowal

The defence of denial, first highlighted by Freud (1927) in respect of fetishism, and later further developed by his daughter Anna Freud (1936), is a defence mechanism, operating under the pleasure principle, where the ego 'refuses to become aware of some disagreeable reality… and substitutes for the unbearable reality some agreeable delusion' (Freud, 1936, pp.79-80). Strategies of denial were evident in several forms in the UMs, particularly in LA1. For example, data coded as 'avoidance', characterised by attendees brushing over apparent risks in order to focus on strengths or ignoring apparent risks altogether so as to deny an unpleasant reality, was far more likely to be coded in LA1 ($n = 12$) than in LA2 ($n = 3$).

LA1 UM3, took place virtually shortly after the Covid19 lockdown, and contained significant evidence of denial. Here it was striking how optimistic many of the hypotheses were, despite the challenges of the pandemic. For example, when considering how a mother and child's relationship, described as fraught with conflict and violence, will be impacted by the pandemic, and particularly with both parties being at home more, an attendee's hypothesis focused on the benefits this may have despite there being little to no evidence to support this. Such a theorisation appeared to deny reality:

> P3 - C (child) is not worried about it and has heard that younger people are less affected… as the days pass and the weather gets nicer she will become agitated staying at home and C and T (mother) will find fun and creative ways to pass

time and do activities together this will include leaving the house together for fresh air (00.51.00)

Freud's (1927) writings on denial referred to the German word 'disavowal', which when translated into English as 'denial' perhaps loses some of its more nuanced disassociative qualities. Disassociative strategies appeared to be employed collectively in LA1 to deny the very involvement of the participants in their work. For example, the absence of second order practice in LA1, and a subsequent propensity to analyse the impact Children's Services had upon family systems served to deny attendees' involvement in their emotionally challenging work. Moreover, the anonymised method of hypothesising employed in LA1 served to deny the participants' need to own an opinion on the challenging issues faced by families, rather presenting these ideas as the responsibility of the group. The importance of this defence to the fragile collective ego of the UMs in LA1 is evidenced in LA1 UM3, where, despite previously acknowledging the Practice Tutor's (PT) concerns in LA1 UM2 that the anonymised system served to stifle their development, they reverted to this anonymised system.

The 'check ins' in LA1 UM1 provide a further example of disavowal. Here, despite nearly all attendees reporting being busy with the dual demands of Frontline and placement, crisp flavours are employed as a metaphor for wellbeing and the resulting discourse seemed meaningless and to deny reality:

> P4 – I feel like pickled onion monster munch, just that I feel like firm little shapes of like monster hands and I'm in a good mood so that's how I feel like monster munch

> P1 - I feel like salt and vinegar squares, little bit crunchy little bit salty but classic

> (LA1, UM1, 00.00.30)

The disavowal implicit in this process is later captured by P4:

> P4 - when we're doing a check in everyday I do just find myself saying something random (giggles) erm and its kind of like what I'm feeling but not as much I suppose (LA1, UM3, 00.19.00)

A particularly illustrative example of this disavowal is observable in LA1 UM3. The meeting took place virtually, shortly after the announcement of the UK Government Covid19 lockdown, and it was striking how little behaviours indicative of Bion's (1962) notion of K are evidenced in this UM. At one point the CSW detailed how they are finding ways not to think about the virus, in a manner which appeared consistent with the disavowal of reality:

> CSW – what I'm finding is a lot of the conversations I'm having are about the virus, and whilst we do need to have those conversations I've also been doing stuff (inaudible)… we're doing like random facts, so learning a fact about an animal, so I can then talk about that… so I was wondering whether we could… take turns to do joke of the day or random fact of the day just so we're also letting our brains do something else (00.21.00)

Earlier the CSW was explicit that the UM might not be the forum for discussing emotions in relation to Covid19, instead inviting participants to meet with them outside of the UM to discuss this. Here scaling questions were employed where attendees were invited to score their wellbeing between one and ten to demonstrate how they were feeling, and it appeared that there was an awareness that the social unconscious of the UM cannot process the emotions raised by the Covid19 pandemic:

> CSW - (use) scaling cos we don't have to go into depth about why we are there. But it might be it would be giving a bit of permission setting for me to, you know what I mean, if someone is a four but normally they're a six, then say can I give you a call after (LA1, UM3, 00.18.00)

Returning to Bion's learning from experience, it appeared the social unconscious in LA1 was unable to manage the frustration implicit in the emotions generated by practising during Covid19, and instead evasive thinking characteristic of -K occurred.

8.5 - Turn on, Log in, Tune out – Online disavowal

One striking finding from the data is that the three non-virtual meetings contained 75.2% of the code 'Displays of or Responses to Anxiety'. In the two virtual UMs in LA2, this reduction in 'Displays of or Responses to Anxiety' corelated with the presence of systemic practice, reflexive discussions and confluence. This would appear to indicate that there was little anxiety in these meetings, and what anxiety was present was processed in the meeting. Conversely, while there were less 'Displays of or Responses to Anxiety' evidenced in the virtual meeting in LA1 (UM3) relative to the other two UMs in this LA, there were a number of inconfluent case discussions, and a higher prevalence of avoidant behaviours. It therefore appeared that there were less visible forms of evading thought at play in this meeting, and I would argue that social unconscious processes again represented a further example of disavowal here.

Turkle (2016) notes the prevalence of divided attention in meetings, where it is commonplace for workers to check email and phones. Such an approach, where as much attention is given to email traffic then as to the meeting itself, 'give the illusion of collaboration with all the drawbacks of distraction' (Turkle, 2016, p.258). Such a culture appeared evident in LA1, with attendees sitting in front of open laptops throughout the two non-virtual UMs. However, if we apply Bion's theory of thinking to such a phenomenon, such a process of technological distraction does not perhaps present as such a drawback to attendees. Here, by dividing their attention to their laptops, attendees demonstrated a collective disavowal of their involvement in the anxiety rich social work task. I would therefore postulate that anxiety in LA1 UM3 was managed by the defence of disavowal by distraction that is outlined above, leading to the fragmentation of case discussions as attendees disavowed themselves from the emotionally challenging content of the UMs. Moreover, such a theorisation is consistent with the levels of distraction I experienced when observing LA1 UM3, compelled as I was to check my phone. Here it appeared I was drawn into a social defence against anxiety unconsciously employed by the unit. Such a defence mechanism would appear consistent with the disavowal evident in LA1 UM1 and UM2, as both strategies allowed attendees to disassociate from their emotional involvement in the social work task.

Wider research has highlighted the strengths of online education in social work, noting this enhances diversity and equity among social work students, and students' satisfaction rates are similar to on-campus teaching (Afrouz and Crisp 2021, Rushton et al 2017). Indeed, Afrouz and Crisp (2021) argue that opponents' claims that professional identities, practical skills and interpersonal relationships might not develop online are often ideological and lack an evidence base. However, the data in this study would indicate that the anxiety present in the social work task leaves the profession vulnerable to the divided attention highlighted by Turkle, that facilitates defensive disavowal. Indeed, such an urge must be particularly acute during the Covid19 lockdown, where social workers have been forced to use online platforms for visits and meetings (Ferguson et al 2021). Here, with anxiety heightened by the global pandemic, the urge to remove oneself from anxiety rich work through the distraction of emails, phones and web browsers is only a covert click away. Such a theorisation therefore urges caution to social work leaders promoting the advantages of remote working (Burke 2020).

8.6 - Humour as a Social Defence Against Anxiety

In LA1 there was a frequent presence of humour that correlated with the management of anxiety in the UMs. For example, 80% of the data coded as 'Laughter as a Coping Strategy' occurred in LA1, indicating that attendees appeared to be using humour as a defence mechanism to defend against anxiety. Moreover, the presence of 'Anxiety Giggles' (an attendee giggling in an anxious manner when describing an apparent cause of anxiety) provided further evidence of this, with LA1 containing 75% of this code.

Jordan (2019) outlines five varieties of humour; Superiority, Developmental, Social Subversiveness, Incongruity, and Humour as a Psychosocial Mechanism for Managing Emotions. It is these last two forms of humour, both in my opinion united by the management of anxiety, that are of relevance when exploring the humour evident in this study.

Incongruity Humour

Gilgun and Sharma (2012) note how incongruity humour arises when individuals, 'find themselves amused at a gap between their expectations of how things are supposed to be and what happens in particular situations' (p .562). This appeared pertinent to much of the humour evidenced in the UMs, in particular in the 'check ins' when this gap between the expectation and reality of the social work task was often highlighted:

> P5 – erm I'm just wondering about how I am going to fit everything in… D asked if we can go and see them so just wondering how we're going to fit (pause) all of that in (laughter) (LA2, UM1, 00.08.30)

And then later:

> CSW - if there's a particular pressing case that you want to look through
>
> Unknown – all of them
>
> (laughter) (LA2, UM1, 00.09.30)

As such it can be argued that this use of incongruity humour was born out of anxiety generated by the social work task, and the gap between the description of the role, as perhaps espoused by the LA and Frontline, and the reality of being a participant on the Frontline Programme working in a Children and Family Social Work team.

Humour as a Psychosocial Mechanism for Managing Emotions

Jordan (2019) highlights how it is widely accepted in the cannon of literature regarding humour, that just because someone is laughing they are not necessarily happy, or find something humorous. This would certainly appear indicative of much of the 'humour' evident in the UMs, in particular the 'Anxiety Giggles' in LA1 which did not appear to be linked with any humorous discourse or events, rather anxious ones. Freud (1905) argues that humour, like dreams, offers denied emotions a release from the mind. Humour is therefore primarily social and its satisfaction stems from anxiety implicit within it being shared by an audience (Jordan 2019). In respect of humour in social work, Moran and Hughes (2006) note the usefulness of this social aspect of humour,

noting such a use of humour may help social workers obtain social support, which in turn reduces anxiety and stress. However, Bown (2017) contests this, arguing that 'laughter cannot be said to eradicate or ''deal with'' anxiety and that laughter can be unsettling precisely because it contains anxiety and indicates its continuing threat' (p.164). Therefore, humour '… does not remove anxiety since it also contains a threatening ''signal'' of the anxiety from which it came… (and) reminds the subject of the unconscious anxiety' (Bown, 2017, pp.167-8). Therefore, it follows that the use of humour and anxiety giggles were not necessarily processing and eradiating anxiety in the UMs, rather displaying it socially and perpetuating it. As such the use of humour can be perceived as maladaptive, particularly if the anxiety is not processed through containment.

Such a theorisation would account for much of the 'humour' evident in LA1. Here, when anxiety was not processed in the UMs through containment, it was instead managed through a maladaptive use of humour. Following Bown's (2017) theorisation outlined above, the findings of this study demonstrate that 'Anxiety Giggles' correlated with anxiety provoking subject matter, and only severed to perpetuate the anxiety by reminding other attendees of the anxiety others were experiencing. Again, like the forms of disavowal outlined above, this use of humour appeared collective, with all attendees in LA1 frequently displaying 'Anxiety Giggles'. Moreover, the psychoanalytic data indicated that I was again drawn into this defence, as I initially perceived the group as happy and enjoying their work, which I shared with them, prior to further investigation of the data. It therefore appeared that the use of humour in LA1 was employed by the unit's social unconscious as a social defence against the anxiety present in their work.

8.7 - Basic Assumptions in LA1

There was a striking contrast in the leadership styles displayed by the two CSWs, and it is interesting to explore this in light of the task related anxiety that attendees in LA1 were experiencing and Bion's theory of basic assumptions outlined in Chapter 4.3. In order to evidence these leadership styles, two sets were created in NVIVO containing codes indicative of the CSW being directive, or the CSW being non-directive and

allowing participants to lead the UM (see Appendix 16.5). When the NVIVO data coded in these twin sets is correlated to the two CSWs, the following data is produced.
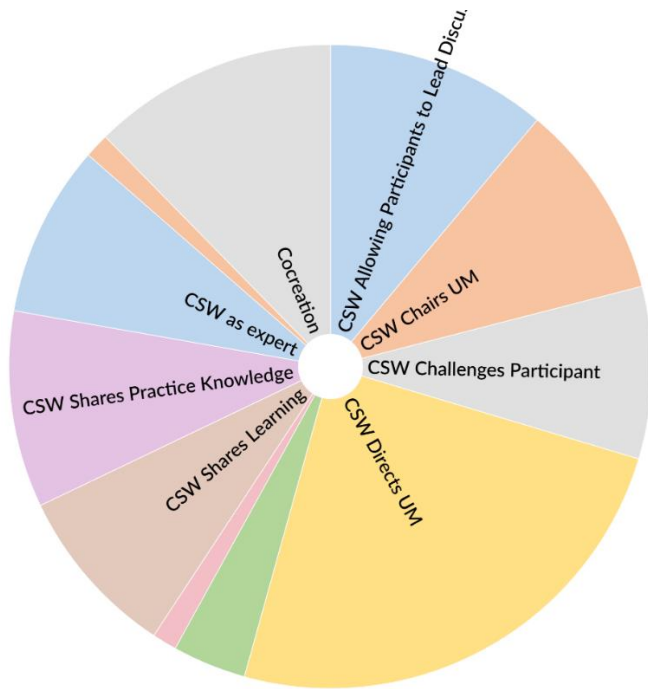
Figure VII - LA1 CSW behaviours
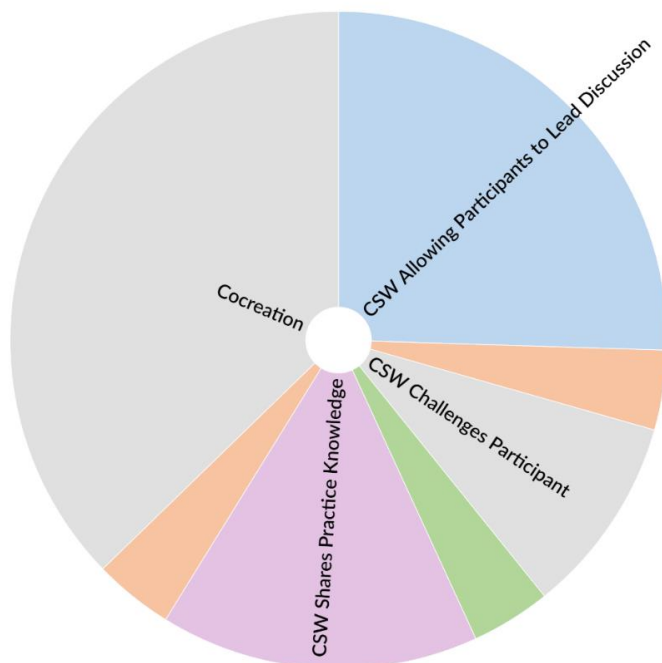
Figure VIII - LA2 CSW behaviours

The data clearly highlights two contrasting styles of leadership. LA1 CSW was over three times more likely to employ directive leadership ($n = 61$) than non-directive ($n = 20$). In contrast, the LA2 CSW was twice as likely to employ non-directive ($n = 34$) than directive leadership ($n = 17$). An excellent example of this non-directive leadership style, and its impact on participants' ability to challenge other attendees in LA2, occurred in LA2 UM2. The participants suggested applying a model where they change a family's GRACES to consider the impact of dominant and subjugated discourses on their work, and despite being faced with the crisis of accommodating the child in this family, the CSW allowed the participants to lead the discussion which informed their decision making:

> P6 – it says to identify the social graces, so the first one was about… if C was a single mother discussing around that
>
> CSW - so for example we might say erm if A was a male victim
>
> P5 – yeah

CSW – how might this be different…

This model challenged P1's thinking:

P1 – yeah, I think I probably am conscious of what she has told me and what the children have said about their father… I'm advocating for the children to stay with her and to try and keep them safe as a unit

P5 – is that because she's female

P1 – yeah probably, also that if it was a father and his two children in an abusive relationship would I (pause) be more understanding of the need for contact with both parties (01.22.30)

These contrasting leadership styles were also evident in the NVIVO data regarding who was applying systemic practice in the UMs. In LA1 it is largely the CSW who was making the connections between the material discussed and systemic practice ($n = 21$), with the participants providing few links to systemic practice ($n = 2$). In contract, the participants in LA2 made comparatively more links to systemic practice ($n = 10$) compared to the CSW ($n = 25$). Moreover, the NVIVO data demonstrated that behaviours coded as occurrences of participants challenging the CSW or one another, were far more likely to happen in LA2 (n = 17) compared to LA1 (n = 1), and typified how reflection in LA2 was a group process, rather than a dyadic process between the CSW and a participant, as in LA1. Indeed, the discourse in LA1 was largely CSW–participant-CSW, and often consisted of the CSW being positioned as the expert in the group and providing answers to participants questions.

Returning to Bion's (1961) theory of the basic assumptions, it appears that, faced with the anxiety outlined above, LA1 attendees resorted to a strategy of *Basic Assumption Dependency* (BaD) that defended them from such anxiety by placing the CSW in a position of expert leadership. Bion (1961) describes how groups operating under BaD are characterised by the elevation of one individual as a leader, to which the other members of the group are dependent upon for survival. Here benefit is 'no longer thought to come from the group, but from the leadership of the group' (Bion, 1961, p.79), and there is a subsequent assumption that individuals cannot learn from anyone

other than this leader. Rather they sit back and wait for the leader to act with authority in order to solve all their problems.

Such a phenomenon of BaD, drawn from an evasion of anxiety was consistent with LA1 CSW taking a more directive leadership role in the UMs, making more links to systemic practice and the CSW–participant-CSW nature of the dialogue. Indeed, BaD would also account for attendees not wishing to read out their hypotheses, as presumably to do so would be to undermine their dependency on their leader by implying agency in the creation of ideas. Interestingly, such a phenomenon is also consistent with Whittaker's (2011) and Menzies Lyths's (1959) studies, who both noted how the anxiety present in the social work and nursing tasks respectively, led to the upward delegation of decisions by workers as a social defence.

Therefore, BaD protected attendees from an anxiety rich experience of learning, and as such the UMs in LA1 were more indicative of *dyadic supervision in a group* format, rather than *group supervision*, with the CSW being unconsciously placed in the expert role. Indeed, following Bion's theory of basic assumptions it is important to assert that LA1 CSW had not wilfully taken on this role, rather she had been placed there by the group unconsciously.

By contrast LA2 appeared to largely operate under Bion's (1961) formulation of 'work group', whereby the activities of the unit were related to the reality of their social work practice and the issues that the families discussed were facing. There was however a period in LA2 UM1 where BaD was also evident. Here LA2 CSW appears preoccupied in providing a discernible action for P2 to undertake with a family, and they briefly abandon their non-directive leadership stance that promoted the cocreation of ideas in favour of an expert position similar to that displayed by LA1 CSW. The following section is edited from a three-minute period of the UM:

> CSW – trying to think what else

> P2 – as you say drawing on the skills that he has held and how he coped with that in the past.

> CSW – or potentially you could look at drawing on how actually he has lots of strengths and experiences of parenting…
>
> P2 – for J or …
>
> CSW – so have you ever talked to C about D's history of her children being removed? Could you maybe go back to some of that and look at what this might be bringing up for them? (LA2, UM1, 1.35.00 – 1.38.00)

It is interesting to note that this isolated incidence of BaD in LA2 occurred in LA2 UM1, which had attendees from several units, and which was characterised by relatively high levels of anxiety compared to the other two UMs in LA2, where the attendees were familiar with one another. I would therefore postulate that the higher levels of anxiety prompted this BaD, as in LA2 UM1 the anxiety was not contained as effectively as in the other two UMs in LA2. The connections between the familiarity of attendees and levels of anxiety displayed in the UMs is explored in more detail in Chapter 11.2.

8.8 - Hyperactivity as a Defence

> P1 – right, ready, steady go. This is the K family (LA1, UM1, 00.39.00)

The quote above is taken from the beginning of a UM in LA1, and highlights another striking difference between the two LAs in respect of the pace of the UMs. The UMs in LA1 appeared to run at a much faster pace with little to no periods of silence. Hoggett (2010) postulates the defensive qualities of such hyperactivity in front-line welfare teams, noting 'such front-line teams often… (have) a manic edge of busyness… but it is precisely this busyness which also protects workers from thinking about what they are doing' (p.203). Employing Hoggett's (2010) idea, the pace of LA1's UMs, with little silences and fast dialogue, appeared to prevent the emotional engagement with the material discussed. Moreover, the insistence on recording large quantities of information appears to be similar barrier to such emotional engagement, a point echoed by Ruch (2007) in respect of her Case Discussion model of group supervision, who stresses how this defensive urge to take notes represents a tendency to 'do' at the expense of the

ability to 'be' emotionally engaged with emotive child protection work. This is highlighted in LA2 UM1 when the taking of minutes appears to lead to P2 struggling to think:

> P2 – I'm struggling to think at the minute because if I start thinking I'll stop minuting (00.48.30)

It therefore appeared that the pace of the UMs in LA1, coupled with the at times manic propensity to record information, was motivated by the avoidance of emotional engagement with the Unit's primary task. Such a theorisation would explain Forrester's (2016) observation of the child protection as a:

> paradoxical system that is very busy, but where it is often unclear why various activities are being done. This is the zombie social work… it moves, but is it genuinely, truly alive? (p. 8-9)

Summary

It therefore appeared that the anxiety associated with the Units primary task of supporting vulnerable children and families was at times, in LA1 in particular, too great to be tolerated. Here learning from experience was jettisoned in favour of a variety of approaches united by an evasion of such anxiety, and subsequent evasion of the reality of the social work task.

In LA2 however such a pattern of defensiveness was not as evident, and instead the emotional nature of the social work task facing attendees was acknowledged and discussed. A good example of this comes in LA2 UM2 where P5 is discussing his work completing a court report. Here P5 demonstrates anxiety in relation to potentially recommending a child does not reside with a parent:

> P5 – I guess one problem in my mind as well is erm (pause) I don't know where this comes from but I think (pause) it will be difficult for me I, I don't know (talking quickly) I think one of the dilemmas I've come up with is… (anxious tone in voice) I don't feel that the concerns were so great for both of the children to have to be taken from D (02.22.00)

However unlike LA1, here the emotions related to P5's work are discussed, and his involvement in the work is not denied. Rather the CSW and other attendees support him to explore his practice and its impact upon him in a second order manner:

> CSW – does it feel like removing R from D

> P5 – erm I guess, because I'm getting from each of the parents that they want the child to stay with them (pause)

> P6 – cos I think for me I would find it difficult to say to D whose been caring for the boys that now R's going to live with his dad, when he would be safe with her. I'd find that difficult

> P5 - mmm I think maybe that's part of the reason I'm thinking that (02.24.00)

Chapters 10 and 11 will explore how the holding environment in the LA2's UMs facilitated this acknowledgement of emotion, highlighting the importance of a non-directive form of CSW leadership, second order practice, negative capability and the acknowledgement of emotion.

Chapter 9 - Parallel Process and 'Hot' Dynamics

There are a number of occasions where isomorphic patterns were observable in the data, that is where patterns appeared repeated between the attendee-family and UM subsystems, and interactions between attendees and families were re-enacted in the UMs (Kadushin and Harkness 2002). These patterns appeared to correlate with UMs characterised by higher levels of anxiety, and this short chapter will explore this correlation through the lens of Bion's *Learning from Experience* (see Chapter 4.2), and parallel process (see Chapter 4.7).

Parallel process was evident in LA1 UM1, and here, when describing a case held outside the unit, the participant presenting the family shared that he did not think the mother was able to have conversations with her grandson about his sexually inappropriate behaviour. But on analysis of the data there appears little evidence that attendees or other social workers have had these conversations either. Moreover, attendees also appeared to be avoiding discussing the issue of the child's sexually inappropriate behaviour, and more time is spent discussing the age of the mother, with the presenter P3 even leaving the room to get this information. The following section is taken from a five-minute section of dialogue:

> P1 – how old was S when she died I can't remember
>
> P3 – I'm not sure (pause) 30 something
>
> (typing sound)
>
> P3 – erm (pause) 35. 38 I think she might have been 38
>
> CSW – so (inaudible) 38 is 14 bad maths, no it is
>
> P3 – so add a few more years to that I guess
>
> (laugher)
>
> P3 – I'm not sure cos the genogram I did with P erm she actually put the ages…
> if they were alive today in brackets

CSW – do you want me to have a look on here cos it will have, so I'm looking for S's date of birth aren't I…

P2 – was S an only child

CSW – just looking on our system (pause) and she has a (pause) she has a date of death but not a date of birth

P4 – that's strange

P3 – and how old was P when she had S…

CSW – we can find it out very quickly

P3 - I will be back in one second

(sound of door opening)

(laughter)

P2 – do you know when B went to P's (typing sound) how old he was…

(sound of door opening)

P3 – bear with me I'm just going to try and find the genogram

(typing sound)

P3 – there you go… ok

P3 – S (pause) would be 35 now (LA1, UM1, 01.50.30)

Here attendees appear to be enacting the dynamic whereby the grandmother is avoiding discussing the anxiety provoking topic in supervision by also avoiding the anxiety provoking topic and instead focusing on the age of the child's mother.

This family are again discussed in LA1 UM2 and here the unit identify that the work has become fragmented, with different professionals apparently undertaking uncoordinated work with the children. This fragmentation appeared to be preventing professionals from addressing the index issue of the child's sexually inappropriate behaviour, in a manner that avoided the anxiety associated with having to address it. The unit then took 16

minutes to form the dilemma, in doing so mirroring this fragmentation, and further avoiding the index issue of the child's sexually inappropriate behaviour. Here the CSW raises that the nature of the sexually inappropriate behaviour might be a factor in the Units behaviour, however this is not discussed in any detail by the unit. Instead the 'hot' emotions appear unprocessed and are discharged in the UM through the repetition of the fragmented and uncoordinated behaviours. This is evidenced in the following dialogue, taken from a 16 minute section of the UM:

> CSW – what would feel helpful for you, for us to discuss getting to those next steps
>
> P3 – erm maybe it would be helpful talking about erm what role P can have erm longterm erm in helping the sibling relationships…
>
> CSW – have we held that dilemma before
>
> P1 – yeah I think we've done something similar (00.13.30)
>
> …
>
> CSW – I'm just wondering how we use this space (pause) in a way that feels helpful
>
> P3 – yeah
>
> CSW – difficult isn't it (00.20.30)
>
> …
>
> CSW – and is there something about the referral information being uncomfortable meaning we've drifted away… or is there something uncomfortable about holding dilemmas around grief and those behaviours that feels uncomfortable
>
> P3 - I think its because there's so many people involved because there's more than one person involved that has also allowed certain workers to have focus on certain children (00.26.30)
>
> …

P2 – so for clarity purposes what exactly is the dilemma

CSW – what impact has (pause) social care involvement (pause) (typing sound) had on the family

PT – sometimes the dilemma process is a painful one but (00.30.00)

9.1 - Containment and the Disruption of Parallel Process

Sarnat (2019) notes how containment can help disrupt parallel process, describing how 'when supervisees experience the containing function of their supervisors' minds in response to something they are enacting in the supervisory relationship, their own capacity to contain increases as they learn from experience' (p.320). Such a process was evident in an example of parallel process in LA2 UM3. Here P5 anxiously describes a service user's behaviour who is resisting their systemic intervention aimed at supporting the service user to reflect upon their situation, and is instead insisting that P5 commit himself to certain opinions in writing. P5 then mirrors the service user's behaviour by presenting his dilemma, and then stating that he would not find exploratory hypothesising useful, rather it is 'advice' that he is seeking. While not explicitly naming 'parallel process', this pattern is identified by the CSW who reflects this back to the Unit, in order that it can be explored rather than to continue to be enacted:

> CSW – they're kind of asking him to be prescriptive, asking him to be directive erm and I guess in a way we're seeing that reflected back in what P5's doing in coming to unit meetings and saying I need something prescriptive and directive (00.28.30)

The attendees then discuss how P5 is being positioned by the family and the Practice Tutor (PT) explicitly mentions the avoidance of learning:

> PT – if we helped you resolve how to manage this kind of situation, unless we kind of get you to think about things that CSW's just been talking about in terms of positioning, do you think that this situation is probably going to arise again (pause). There's going to be something else that you either have to write or do

> with this family erm and they're going to try and position you in the same way
>
> unless we try to think about the function erm behind it (00.29.30)

Here LA2 CSW, supported by the PT, allows learning from experience to take place, and the anxious, 'hot' dynamic to be explored and contained in the UM, interrupting parallel process.

It appears therefore that skilfully handled, awareness of parallel process offers the supervisor a window into what occurs between social worker and service user, through its replication in supervisory interactions (Kadushin and Harkness 2002, Sarnat 2009). It appears therefore that attention to parallel process, as a process approach to reflective practice would demand, could provide supervisors with an additional, and perhaps vital, lens on the service user-social worker dynamic.

9.2 - Upward and Downward Bound Parallel Process

The examples described above relate to 'upward bound' parallel process, where patterns from interactions with a family are repeated in supervision, however Kadushin and Harkness (2002) stress that parallel process can also be 'downward bound', in that patterns in supervision are repeated in interactions between social workers and families. While such downward bound parallel process was not identified in this study, hypothetically it could be argued that such processes raise grave concerns regarding the impact of the overt focus on managerialism in Children and Family Social Work supervision on social work practice. For it follows that such overt managerialism has the potential, through a process of downward bound parallel process, to become manifest in the social worker-service dyad. Indeed, such a theorisation could be a contributing factor to the adversarial child protection system outlined in the MacAlister Review (2021). Such a theorisation therefore demands the creation of containment in supervision, if such patterns are to be interrupted.

Chapter 10 - Leadership in Unit Meetings, the Impact of the Holding Environment and the Creation of Containment

The real difficulty, the difficulty that has baffled the sages of all times, is this: how can we make our teaching so potent in the emotional life of man that its influence should withstand the pressure of the elemental psychic forces in the individual? (Einstein, 1950, cited in Calaprice, 2011, p.105)

'for reflective practice to be possible, the appropriate physical, mental and emotional space — containers — need to be provided' (Ruch, 2007, p.664)

As outlined in Chapter 8 it appears the levels of anxiety present in the UMs, and the subsequent employment of social defence systems against this, impacted on the nature of the supervision discussions, a phenomenon particularly evident in LA1. Employing on Winnicott's conception on an individual's *Holding Environment* and *Good Enough Parenting* outlined in Chapter 4.5, this following chapter explores how the various behaviours exhibited by the CSWs and wider contextual factors, influenced the impact of such anxiety.

10.1 – CSW Containment

When the codes indicative of CSWs providing Bion's notion of containment are collected in a set through NVIVO, behaviours typified by the CSWs naming and exploration of emotions in the UMs or speaking in a calm tone, such behaviour was disproportionally exhibited by LA2 CSW ($n = 18$) rather than LA1 CSW ($n = 12$). Moreover, this data is consistent with the psychoanalytic data, which indicated that I also experienced LA2 CSW as containing. This containing behaviour is typified in LA2 UM1 when P1 appears exhausted and unsure what to do next. Here LA2 CSW responds in a calm manner, typical of their practice:

P1 - something happens, it could be anything she seems to have managed to find something every single day that drives her into a completely inconsolable state… its just a really dire situation really

CSW – (calm tone) what came to mind when you are talking is these… kind of feedback loops these cycles of things happening… and maybe it would be helpful to look at what

P1 – how could we break them

CSW – well and what could be changed or done differently (01.45.00)

By the end of this case discussion P1 appears to have found the case discussion helpful and appears far more positive about her work:

P1 – yes, erm I feel like this is kind of may have been a little bit of a light bulb moment (01.57.30)

10.2 - Negative Capability and CSW Leadership

It would appear from the data that LA2 CSW was far more adept at applying the stance of negative capability (see Chapter 4.4) than LA1 CSW, something evidenced by LA2 CSW's frequent use of silence in the UMs to allow participants to make sense of the discussions. An excellent example of this occurs in LA2 UM3 when P5 is considering their recommendations for a Section 7 report. Here LA2 CSW leaves pauses between 20 – 30 seconds long, before offering an opportunity to discuss emotions:

P5 – I don't know how to word that a bit better but (long pause) so its just like managing their expectations while also staying erm (pause) (resigned tone in voice) I can't think of the words

(long pause)

CSW – when you get these calls… what kind of feelings is it bringing up, if you feel able to talk about that now or maybe you want to talk about that separately

P5 – erm more recently I'm just losing my patience with it a little bit and I know that sounds really bad (pause) … so when they first send the email I messaged to say I'll call you tomorrow to discuss this. Then I had like three other texts from D saying have you had a chance to respond to this email yet…

CSW – and why do you think that is

P5 – I don't know

(long pause)

CSW – ok, shall we maybe have a think about that then and you could listen to some ideas about why the family might be behaving or functioning in this way

(00.25.30)

What is also striking here, and in the wider data, is LA2 CSW's reluctance to provide an 'answer' or 'solution' to P5's predicament, and their ability employ a stance of negative ability is further evidenced in their willingness to both allow participants to lead the UM and surrender the expert position. Here LA2 CSW demonstrates a capacity to sit with the anxiety implicit in learning from experience, resisting the urge to use dispersive heuristics (see Chapter 4.4). In this space attendees are able to explore the emotionality of their work enabling deeper, second order thinking consistent with learning from experience.

By contrast, LA1 CSW was more likely to employ dispersive heuristics, evidenced in their propensity to lead the UM discussions as an expert providing an answer, the dyadic CSW-participant-CSW nature of the discourse in LA1, and the lack of challenge evident. It is important to stress that LA1 CSW did not *place herself* in this leadership role, rather following the BaD discussed in Chapter 8.7, this positioning and subsequent dispersion was a defensive group process. Here, by being positioned in the expert role that provided attendees with the 'answers', LA1 CSW was perhaps behaving as the *perfect* rather than *good enough* carer theorised by Winnicott, and through this unconscious process the unit were shielded from the anxiety implicit in learning from experience, resulting in a shallower depth of thought and ideas.

10.3 - Negative Capability and Organisational Context

Simpson et al (2002) note that the development of negative capability is particularly challenging in the context of anxiety rich organisational cultures dominated by defensive

systems of control and performativity. Such a context is indicative of social care organisations defended against the anxiety implicit in their work, and in light of this it is interesting to reflect upon the impact organisational context might have had upon the contrasting CSW leadership styles.

While this study is limited in that it did not access empirical data in respect of organisational context, some information can be gleamed from the data that does illuminate this. This would indicate that, while attendees in LA2 appeared to be undertaking more complex and high-risk work, evidenced by the frequent references to child protection and court work, LA1 represented a more anxiety rich and performative environment. For example:

- LA1 CSW was exhibiting significantly more displays or responses to anxiety than LA2 CSW.
- The UMs in LA1 contained significantly more UM generated anxiety, indicative of the presence of performance anxiety described in Chapter 13.4.
- There was significantly more evidence of defences against anxiety in LA1 compared to LA2.
- There was more indication of a preoccupation with KPIs in LA1. For example, families were chosen for discussion before the UMs, which was perhaps influenced by agency ICS priorities of ensuring that cases were supervised regularly.

10.4 - Dreamwork Data

Cooper and Lees (2014) note that when practising in such an environment the dominant source of anxiety can stem from accusations of failure, and as such 'paramount anxieties concern threats to the self, not to the other… "persecutory anxiety" in Kleinian terms' (p.244). As highlight in Chapter 3, towards the middle of the project I experienced a vivid dream, which was explored with the support of a Work Discussion Group (WDG) through dreamwork (Freud 1992), and provided some data in respect of the organisational context in LA1. In the dream I was concerned that the LA1 CSW's welfare, worried that she might experience persecution from her LA as a result of what

might be perceived as their suboptimal performance in the UM data I was studying. Such a formulation was no doubt influenced by the impression I had of a more performative LA environment in LA2, and as I described in Chapter 3, chimed with my own visceral experiences of such anxiety.

10.5 - Containing the Container

Toasland (2007) and Smith (2010) have both argued that while it is imperative that social workers experience containment from their supervisors, it is also vital that their supervisors themselves experience containment, as without this supervisors may be unable to bear the anxious projections of supervisees and management and subsequently fail to contain staff they supervise (Toasland 2007). I would therefore theorise that the contrasting organisational environments influenced the leadership styles of the two CSWs. In LA1 there does not appear to have been adequate containment to process the CSW's anxiety, and this anxiety in turn stifled negative capability and wider supervision practice. These findings would appear to tally with several of the studies analysed in the literature review which highlighted the negative impact an anxious organisational context could have upon supervision practice (Bingle and Middleton 2019, Cameron et al 2016, Dugmore et al 2018, Lees and Cooper 2019, Oşvat et al 2014, O'Sullivan 2019, Ruch 2007b). This creates a quandary for social care organisations, as the management of risk requires raising thresholds of uncertainty, and negative capability is demanded in order to effectively manage this uncertainty (Simpson et al 2002). However, the anxiety implicit in managing that risk compels leaders into dispersive action, negating negative capability. It would therefore appear crucial that effective containment is in place to manage the anxiety, otherwise it risks repressing the negative capability necessary for the management of risk.

10.6 - Implications for Leaderships in Group Supervision

Given the systemic theory employed in the UMs has fundamental underpinnings of safe uncertainty (Mason 1993) and curiousity, negative capability would therefore appear

crucial in the fidelity of systemic practice, and therefore effective UMs. However, in such an anxiety rich environment such as Children and Family Social Work the pressure for dispersive action is strong. Indeed, my own learning from a Tavistock Group Relations Conference (Shapiro and Carr 2012) undertaken during my doctoral studies was that when faced with the psychologically primitive love/hate functioning of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position manifest in the large groups, I resorted to dispersive activities such as use of humour or heuristics (Kiel 2017). Indeed, the psychoanalytic observation data indicated that at times I felt compelled to provide attendees with a dispersive 'solution' to the problems brought by the Covid19 pandemic. Here again the urge for dispersal in the face of anxiety is great, and where dispersal perhaps tallies with a professional self as a 'helping' social worker hoping to free others from the anxiety they face, such an urge is exacerbated. It therefore appears that maintaining a stance of negative capability in Children and Family Social Work may represent a significant challenge.

10.7 - The Role of 'Leadership' in Supervision

All of which provides a fascinating context to explore the role of the 'leader' in supervision, and the impact various conceptions of this have on supervision practice. Indeed, the literature review in Chapter 2 highlighted several different approaches to 'leadership' in group supervision. These ranged from:

- a 'leader' in a case manager role (dyadic supervision, Signs of Safety models)
- a case manager and a trained clinician providing leadership (Reclaim models)
- a 'facilitator' or 'consultant' who does not have a case management role as the leader (Bells that Ring, WDGs based models)
- an academic as the group's leader (Intervision)
- a model defined by having no leader (Peer models)

It is striking that the models characterised by not having a 'leader' in the form of a case manager alone, tended to correlate with the models less focused on 'actions' and more focused on reflexivity and process, and such a correlation is interesting when compared to the findings of this study. These indicated that the UMs in LA1 where the Practice

Tutor (PT) was not present, and where the only 'leader' present held case responsibility (the CSW), were also focused more on actions, at the expense of the second order practice demanded by a focus on process and reflexivity. Indeed, when the PT was present in LA1 this had a significant impact on the quality of systemic practice, similarly to the findings of Bostock et al's (2017) and Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey, and Forrester (2019) in their studies of systemic groups supervision models in respect of the presence of clinicians. However, the data from this study also indicates that in LA2 attention to process in the form of second order practice, and a higher level of systemic practice, is achievable without a clinician with the provision of the correct holding environment. Such findings would appear to tentatively indicate that in high anxiety environments, the presence of a professional other than a case manager may aid the focus on the process and second order practice necessitated for more advanced forms of reflective practice.

Chapter 11 – Connections between Systemic Practice and *Learning from Experience*: the implications for reflective practice

The following chapter will explore connections between systemic practice and Bion's (1962) *Learning from Experience*. The chapter concludes with some thoughts regarding the nature of reflective practice evident in the UMs. This is not to say that systemic practice and psychoanalytic theory are consistent, and it should be noted that systemic therapy emerged from a historical opposition to psychoanalysis (Flaskas 2007). However, in light of my ontological position, I would argue that the integration of such approaches can form a more holistic, complimentary *Psychosocial* model, that views an individual as the person in situ (Preston-Shoot and Agass 1990). As Ferguson (2017) explains, such a model incorporates:

> sociological, psycho-dynamic and systemic perspectives to frame social work practice as a product of the interplay between social workers' lived experience, emotional lives and the effects of the organisations and systems they work in (p.1008)

The data demonstrates a clear correlation between the quality of systemic practice in the UMs, and the levels of anxiety present, with the UMs characterised by high levels of anxiety also characterised by systemic incongruent practice, inconfluent case discussions and vague actions. Building on Bion's (1962) *Learning from Experience* it therefore seems reasonable to postulate a relationship between the nature of 'thinking' in the UMs, and the quality systemic practice of evident.

11.1 - Curiousity and the Emotional Experience of K

These connections between systemic and psychoanalytic theory evident in the data indicate parallels between the Milan Team's notion of *Curiousity* and Bion's notion of *K*. Indeed, Bion (1965) was explicit in 'associat(ing) K with curiosity' (p.67), theorising curiousity as key to learning in the psychoanalytic experience, and stressing that '…

strong feelings of love and hate affect ability to discriminate and learn' (p.70). Here Bion (1965) returns to the dichotomies between Freud's (1911) pleasure principle and reality principle, and -K and K, arguing that powerful intrusions of love/hate obstruct the urge to know, and stifle curiousity. Therefore, it follows that when anxiety is high, the systemic notion of curiousity is stifled. Such a theorisation would account for the correlation between high levels of anxiety and systemic incongruent behaviours outlined in the data, with the stifling of curiousity leading to the less advanced systemic practice evident in LA1.

11.2 - Second Order Practice and Containment: *K and -K Supervision States*

Perhaps the most striking finding from this study however is the correlation between second order systemic practice and the levels of anxiety evidenced in the UMs. For example, LA1 UM1 and LA1 UM3 were characterised by high levels of anxiety with both meetings also displaying a marked absence of second order practice. In contrast, LA2 UM2 and LA2 UM3 were characterised by second order practice, confluent case discussions, and low levels of anxiety.

However, there are superficially exceptions to this rule. For example LA1 UM2, where the Practice Tutor (PT) was promoting second order practice by ensuring that attendees situated themselves in their work, was also characterised by high anxiety. However, following further exploration, it is notable that there was an absence of data coded as 'Anxiety Giggle', or 'Laughter as a Coping Strategy' in this UM, despite their high prevalence in the other two UMs in LA1. It could be argued that the presence of the PT led attendees to consider such humour as inappropriate, however if this was the case surely my presence, as a manager at Frontline known to all attendees, would have had a similar effect in LA1 UM1 and UM3. I would therefore argue that the presence of second order practice did not necessitate attendees using humour as a defence against anxiety, as second order practice was supporting attendees to process the anxiety as a form of containment. Moreover, much of the anxiety evident in LA1 UM2 that appeared related to the PT's request that the anonymised approach to hypothesising, which I theorise as a further defence against anxiety, was removed:

PT – thing is there's real benefits from how you do hypothesising in terms of diversity and practically in terms of minute writing, but I do miss hearing… what people's hypotheses are 'cos I as your tutor get to see the development of your hypotheses

CSW – shall we read out our own

P4 – Oh (sounding uncomfortable)

P1 – I think that's a really good idea

Unknown – I don't know about that

(laughter)

The second anomaly is evident in LA2 UM1, which was also characterised by a higher level of anxiety and a relative absence of second order practice relative to LA2 UM2 and LA2 UM3. A distinction between LA2 UM1, and LA2 UM2 and LA2 UM3, is that in LA2 UM1 attendees were drawn from several Frontline Units. It therefore seems reasonable to postulate that the unfamiliarity of attendees contributed to these outcomes as attendees did not feel comfortable situating themselves in their work with people with whom they were unfamiliar. Such a postulation would appear consistent with much of literature surrounding group supervision highlighted in Chapter 2. For example, Partridge et al (2019) and Dugmore et al (2018) highlighted how a sense of trust between attendees facilitated the sharing of personal stories, and Dempsey and Halton (2017) described how the capacity to explore the anxiety provoking aspects of practice relied on being with others whom workers felt comfortable with. Moreover, numerous other studies highlight the importance of the quality of relationships between supervision attendees as a key determinate to the quality of supervision practice (Bogo et al 2004, Cross et al 2010, Domakin and Curry 2018, Lietz 2006, Rankin 2013). It would therefore appear that such relationships form a crucial part or the supervision holding environment, and attention needs to be given to the development of these in order facilitate more advanced forms of reflective practice characterised by reflexivity and process.

It therefore seems plausible to tentatively theorise the following relationship between second order practice, containment, and anxiety. The data outlined above indicates that practicing in a second order manner is containing and reduces anxiety. Following Bion (1962), I would describe this as a *K Second Order Supervision State*, in which anxiety is contained in supervision through second order practice. Following the analysis of the data outlined above, it would appear that the containment created by second order practice facilitates an environment where situating yourself in your work becomes less anxiety provoking, and therefore containment is perpetuated. Therefore, the K Second Order Supervision State functions in a self-regulatory process of homeostasis.

However, situating yourself in your work *is in itself* anxiety provoking as it requires social workers to consider the emotional impact of distressing child protection work, and perhaps traumatic events which they may have experienced and that might influence their work. Indeed, this study has highlighted several defences operating to defend UM attendees from such anxiety provoking material. Therefore, a degree of containment is helpful in facilitating second order practice. This would explain why in LA2 UM1 participants did not practice in this manner, as they were with attendees with whom they were unfamiliar, and why in LA1 UM2 participants appeared anxious when prompted to situate themselves in their work by their PT. I would argue therefore that there is a second *-K First Order Supervision State*, whereby reflexive/second order practice is ignored, due to the anxiety that situating yourself in your work entails. Here technical reflective practice and first order practice dominate, and the subsequent denial of the emotionality of the social work task perpetuates anxiety. Again, this creates a self-regulating process through which anxiety is created as the system maintains homeostasis. These two models are outlined in Figure IX below.

Energy/Information
Input into Supervision
System

Reflexive
/ 2nd
Order
Practice

Technical
/First
Order
Practice

Bifurcation
Point

Containment

Anxiety

K Second Order State
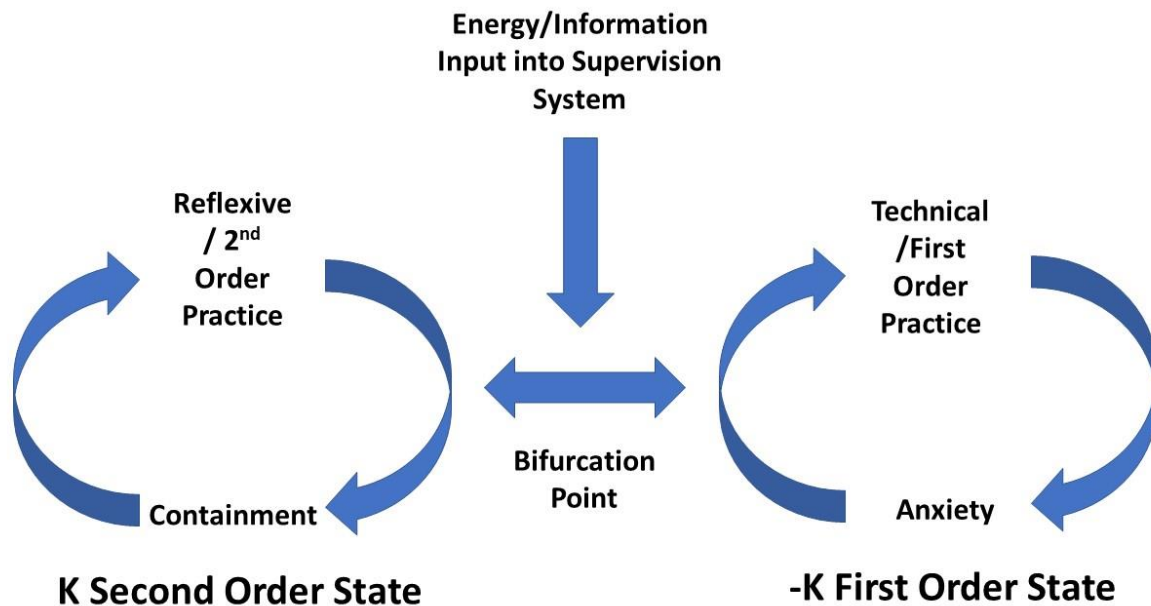
-K First Order State

Figure IX - K Second Order Supervision State and -K First Order Supervision State – The relationship between containment and 2nd order systemic practice

Ideas from Complexity Theory are helpful in illuminating this process, particularly how supervision practice can move between the two supervision states. Complexity Theory, drawing on mathematics, in positing non-linear systems that are opposed to Newtonian cause-and-effect causality, theorises the existence of *Bifurcation Points*. As Byrne and Callaghan (2014) explain:

> The bifurcation point in a mathematical description of a non-linear system is a point at which future trajectories of the system diverge dependent on shifts in the values of input parameters (p.19)

Therefore, in accordance with complexity theory, and as outlined in Figure IX above, when specific energy/information enters the supervision systems, whether they be in the -K First Order Supervision State or K Second Order Supervision State, the system is perturbed and a bifurcation point occurs. Such bifurcation points can therefore be conceived as when the PT in LA1 requests that attendees' practice in a second order manner, perturbing the homeostasis of the system and moving it from a -K First Order

Supervision State towards a K Second Order Supervision State. A further bifurcation point occurs in LA2 UM1, when input from the system in the form of a mixed group of attendees, perturbs the homeostasis of the system, this time moving it from a K Second Order Supervision State towards a -K First Order Supervision State.

11.3 - Second Order Practice *as* Containment

Numerous scholars have theorised how social work can call forth aspects of a worker's personhood, creating powerful emotions that result in blind spots as workers view service users through the lens of the assumptions, beliefs, values, and schemas that constitute their own web of reality (Mandell 2008, Howe 2009, Ingram 2013, Reupert 2009). Indeed, research has highlighted how social workers' personal experiences impacted how they worked with families and the interventions they chose (Kwan and Reupert 2019). A second order approach to social work supports workers to recognise and explore how the powerful emotions attached to their personal and professional stories can lead them to privilege certain explanations at the expense of others, resulting in certain actions and interventions being undertaken. Moreover, this study evidences that second order practice, produced in the K Second Order Supervision State, is containing as it supports workers to disentangle the powerful stories and accompanying emotions that influence their work. Second order practice therefore would seem highly applicable to social work, in particular the emotionally laden nature of child protection work. In light of this, it is imperative that social work supervisors and supervisees strive to ensure that supervision practice remains in the K Second Order Supervision State and are attentive to information/energy that might create a bifurcation point and move supervision practice to the -K First Order Supervision State.

11.4 - What form of Reflective Practice is Evident in the Unit Meetings?

Returning to the five categories of reflective practice outlined in Chapter 1.3, it appears evident that in order to practice in a manner consistent with practical reflexive practice, process reflection, reflexive practice or psychosocial reflexive practice, all of which

demand social workers situating themselves in their work, supervision will need to function in the K Second Order Supervision State. Furthermore, attempts will need to be made in order to create sufficient containment, so as to foster the second order practice necessary for the K Second Order Supervision State.

In light of the processes outlined above, the supervision evident in LA1 was largely in the -K First Order Supervision State and the reflective practice evident subsequently largely consistent with technical reflective practice. This is evidenced by attendees reflecting *on action* regarding their work with families, but often failing to situate themselves in their work and at no point acknowledged the unconscious aspects of practice. There was however significant evidence of practical reflective practice in LA1 UM2, which was prompted by the PT's contribution to the UMs. There were also examples of attendees exploring the impact of existing social structures and power relationships that appeared consistent with critical reflective practice. For example, when attendees applied Social Role Valorisation (Wolfensberger 2000) theory to a family in a 'shared learning' discussion, or when attendees explored how professionals' perspectives on families in receipt of benefits had been influenced by dominant societal discourses.

By contrast the supervision practice in LA2 was largely functioning in the K Second Order Supervision State and as a result the reflective practice evident was most consistent with reflexive practice, in that attendees frequently situated themselves in their work, appeared attuned to the emotionality of their work and explored dominant discourse through ideas such as Burnham's (2012) GRRRAAACCEEESSS, this later point also being indicative of critical reflective practice. While unconscious processes were never discussed explicitly, there was an example of the CSW identifying parallel process that was consistent with process reflection.

Chapter 12 - 'Group Think': Models of collective thought in the Unit Meetings

Figure X - Word Frequency Cloud – all Unit Meetings

Employing NVIVO, Figure X represents the frequency of words above four letters in length in all six UM transcriptions. The graphic demonstrates that 'think' was the most common word spoken by attendees, often to indicate they were thinking, had thought and were now sharing their thoughts, or to encourage others to think. Thinking, or the verbal representation of thoughts, therefore appeared of central importance to what happened in the UMs. In light of this and Bion's theory of thinking outlined in Chapter 4, this Chapter will connect many of the arguments found in the previous seven Chapters, to explore the nature of 'thinking' evident in the UMs, and the impact this had on supervision practice.

In order to provide an overview of the nature of the thinking that was taking place in the UMs, two NVIVO sets were created; 'Non-thinking' and 'Thinking' (see appendix 16.6). The 'Non-thinking' set contained codes that represented behaviours and processes indicative of the evasion of the emotional experience of learning characterised by -K. Codes in the set 'Thinking' however contained codes that represented behaviours and processes indicative of thinking characterised by Bion's (1962) notion of K. These tended to focus on the acknowledgement of the complex and emotional nature of the social work task. This data demonstrated that over two-thirds of the non-thinking behaviours ($n = 106$) were found in LA1, compared to LA2 ($n = 46$). Conversely over half of the thinking behaviours ($n = 78$) were found in LA2, compared to LA1 ($n = 53$). This indicated that attendees LA1 were more likely to demonstrate behaviours consistent with -K thinking, whereas attendees in LA2 were more likely to be demonstrating behaviours consistent with K thinking.

Employing Bion's (1962) theory of thinking to the data highlighted in Chapters 5 – 11, it then becomes possible to theorise these two models of collective thinking evident in the UMs. The family presentations in the beginning of each family supervision discussions (FSD) contained much of the data coded as 'Displays of or Responses to Anxiety', indicating the presence of raw and unprocessed emotional material, indicative of a projection of beta elements. Here attendees would talk for several minutes without interruption, sharing information about *what* had happened, rather than *why* it had happened, in manner consistent with the 'verbal deluge' outlined by Wilkins et al (2017) in their study of dyadic supervision. Depending on the mode of group thought operating in the UM, these beta elements were either processed by the group and returned to the attendee as alpha elements, in a thinking process analogous with K activity, or the anxiety implicit in this process was too great and reality was to be evaded, analogous with -K.

12.1 - -K Supervision

Figure XI outlines *-K Supervision* processes where the group operate under Freud's pleasure principle, and the anxiety implicit in reality is such that reality is to be evaded.

Here the participant in the top left of the picture shares their family presentation with the Unit, and beta elements are projected into the supervision system. However, the anxiety present in these beta elements is too great for the social unconscious of the UM, and they are defended against by the various group defences listed to the left of the CSW and participants, in a process analogous with -K activity. The beta elements are therefore returned to the presenting participant, and remain present and unprocessed in the UM. Following the return of the beta elements, and the lack of learning from experience present, the supervision outputs are characterised by vague interventions and systemic incongruent practice. Such a process is influenced by the lack of containment present in the organisational context, as listed to the right of the diagram. Returning to the data, it appears that collective thought processes indicative of the -K Supervision was more evident in LA1.
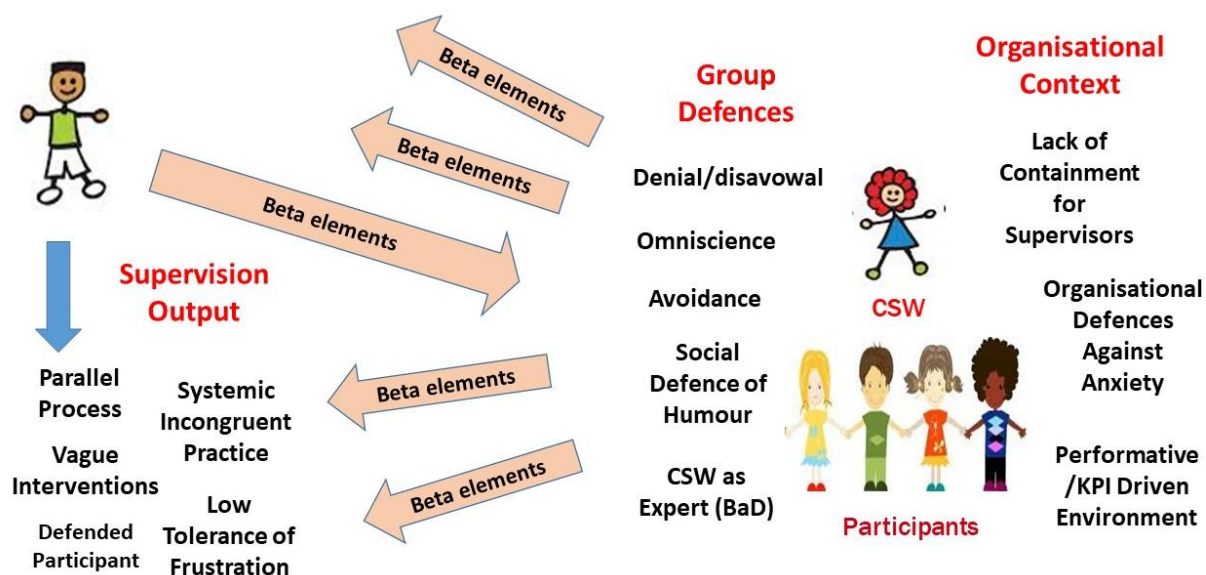
Figure XI - -K Supervision

12.2 - K Supervision

Figure XII outlines K Supervision processes where the group operate under Freud's reality principle. Here the participant shares their family presentation with the Unit, and

beta elements are projected into the supervision system, however beta elements are processed by the Unit's alpha function, supported by the factors listed to the left of the CSW and participants, in a process analogous with K activity. The beta elements are therefore returned to the participant sharing the family presentation as tolerable alpha elements that can be held and symbolised by the participant. Following the learning from experience present in this process that does not seek to evade reality, the supervision outputs are characterised by systemic congruent practice delivered by a contained participant. Such a process is supported by the containing organisational context, as listed to the right of the diagram.
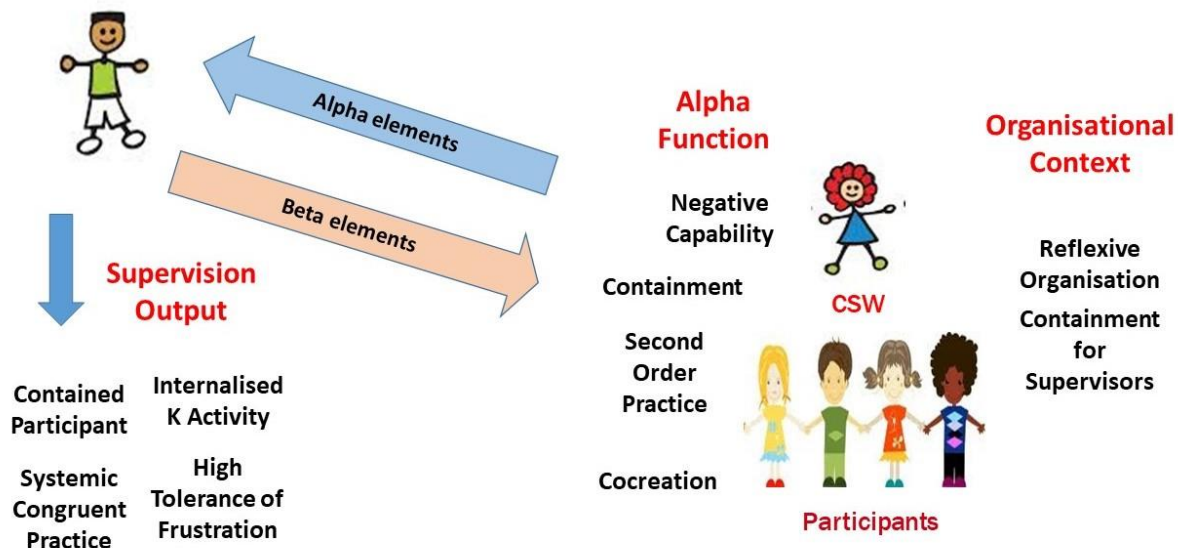
Figure XII - K Supervision

Again, returning to the data, it appears that collective thought processes indicative of K Supervision were more evident in LA2.

## 12.3 - The Introjection of K as Critical for Reflexive Practice

Applying Bion's (1962) theory of the introjection of K Activity by the infant following experiencing it with their carer to the models above, it can be argued that these two

methods of supervision will be internalised by attendees, having ramifications for their tolerance of frustration. Such a theorisation therefore has critical implications for an individual's capacity for reflexive practice, and indeed the standard of social work practice in the profession. For it follows that if an individual's capacity to tolerate frustration is low, then they will practice in a -K thinking state and evade the reality of the social work task.

Ferguson (2017) notes how 'child protection professionals experience intense emotions, from their own experience of anxiety, fear, sadness, hope, despair and the feelings of rage, hate, love, gratitude and so on that are projected into them by services users… (and) what is crucial is whether… they are managed in containing ways that promote clear thinking (p.1011). In the same paper Ferguson (2017) describes how when observing an experienced social worker on a home visit, presumably experiencing such emotions and managing them through a -K strategy, the social worker inexplicably neglected to see the two children in the family. An omission even more startling when you consider they were being observed by a leading social work academic. The vignette demonstrates the capacity of the unconscious mind to manipulate reality so as to avoid anxiety when in a -K state, as evident collectively in LA1. As Ferguson (2017) notes, 'invisible children', like those described above, 'are those who become "unthought" about and are not "held in mind" by workers and systems' (p.1010). The potential risks of such practice provide a compelling rationale for the prioritisation of containment in supervision practice as evidenced in the K Supervision State, so as to support practitioners to manage such emotions.

Chapter 13 – Linear Fractals: Patterns of linear causality in the data set and beyond

'We assume that the psychotic limitation is due to an illness… but that of the scientist is not' (Bion, 1972, p.14)

Throughout the data corpus and beyond there are numerous examples of isomorphic patterns of perceived linear, 'cause-and-effect' causality, be they demonstrated by UM attendees, families or organisations, that appear to create a resistance to the multiple perspectives required for systemic practice. This following chapter will employ ideas from Complexity Theory and Mark Fisher's (2009) *Capitalist Realism*, alongside Bion's ideas outlined in Chapter 4, to explore this phenomenon and its impact.

Complexity Theory refers to a systems metatheory, developed primarily within the social and natural sciences, which incorporates ideas from thermodynamics, mathematics and chaos theory, to propose a model of entities as *Complex Adaptive Systems* in constant flux, shaped by the open exchange of information with their environments (Byrne and Callaghan 2014, Morin 2008). It must be stressed that these patterns of linear causality are the very antithesis of the ontological frame of complexity theory, which, like systemic practice, is instead characterised by nonlinear causality. Here, in contrast to Newtonian cause-and-effect causality synonymous with positivism, complexity theory posits that causal factors are interactive rather than additive and that events occur in a constant flux of interactions and feedback (Hood 2014).

In his six-part BBC documentary *Can't Get You Out of My Head* (2021) Adam Curtis provides a Foucauldian (1972, 1977) critique of complexity theory, asserting that such knowledge is privileged by the ruling hegemony as it indicates the global capitalist model of economic governance is so complex that any change to it becomes impossible. Here notes Curtis, the knowledge of complexity theory leaves us trapped in an ontological inertia perpetuating capitalist hegemony, and, citing the work of anarchist anthropologist David Graeber, perpetuates the 'ultimate hidden truth of the world… that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently' (Graeber 2021).

However, I would argue that complexity theory does not argue that things cannot be changed, rather that the process by which they do change is likely to be non-linear, unpredictable and contain unintended consequences. Indeed, to postulate an ontological frame that denied such an approach to causality would surely reinforce capitalist hegemony by proposing unworkable linear solutions to complex problems. I would therefore conceive complexity theory as conducive to the hermeneutics demanded by this study, and indeed the wider social sciences.

Complexity theory's concept of the *Fractal*, a concept drawn from computer graphics to explain repeating patterns in data, is helpful in exploring these isomorphic linear patterns (Byrne and Callaghan 2014). A fractal is a repetitive shape or pattern that can be observed at several levels from micro to macro within a system or entity (Stevens and Hassett 2007). As Kincheloe et al (2011) explain 'while not *determining* human behaviour… fractal structures possess sufficient order to affect other systems and entities within their environment' (p.171). This thesis will now proceed to highlight how these fractal patterns of proposed linear causality are evident at several levels of the data and beyond, often resulting in further anxiety that creates additional strain upon the Children and Family Social Work task.

13.1 - Fractals of Fear - Linear fractals and -K

This process of linear thought often appears driven by a preoccupation with reducing complex multi-faceted phenomena into simpler cause-and-effect explanations. As such it shares much with Bion's notion of -K, as it evades the frustrations implicit in engaging with the complexities of the multi-faceted and anxiety provoking phenomena that can result in harm to children. I would therefore postulate that such a presence of anxiety influences the tendency for linear thought. Such a process of evading the anxiety is captured by LA1 CSW in relation to Covid19:

> CSW – and in a world full of uncertainties we probably glue ourselves don't we to the ones that could become certainties (anxious giggle) (LA1, UM2, 00.06.30)

Further examples of attendees and families attempting to simplify complex emotive issues are also observable in linear fractals throughout the data. For example, there are 19 coding references to the code 'Family Linear Perspective' in the six UMs, LA1 ($n = 12$) compared to LA2 ($n = 7$), where attendees described how family members had presented linear perspectives regarding to the issues they faced. This often took the form of pathological thinking by family members that labelled an individual as the 'problem':

> Dad comes across as very much blame N. N is the one who needs to change…
> we wouldn't need the plan if it was just me (LA1, UM2, 02.33.00)

Or alternatively a family wishing for Children's Social Care to 'sort' the 'problem' by providing a linear solution:

> CSW – I think they're expecting us to solve it where actually we're expecting
> them to solve it (LA1, UM2, 1.28.00)

At times this drive towards linearity appeared at odds with the systemic intervention which the participants were attempting to deliver:

> P1 – they don't expect that process to have… ups and downs they just want it to
> be a straight forward bureaucratic process
>
> PT – so when P5 is trying to be relational what's happening
>
> P1 – they don't understand the purpose or the function of it and they just want to
> answer questions that make sense to them (LA2, UM3, 00.33.00)

However, when an NVIVO data set is created containing codes representative of 'Attendees' Linear Perceptive', i.e. where attendees are postulating linear causality, it is striking that such fractals are also observable in attendees' discourse. In the set 'Attendees' Linear Perceptive', LA1 ($n = 25$) is overrepresented compared to LA2 ($n = 7$). This would indicate that the attendees in LA2 were significantly more able to resist the pull to explore families' perspectives through a lens of linear causality than attendees in LA1, which would explain why their practice was more congruent with the systemic practice, which demands a non-linear approach to causality. Building on the

theory of group thinking outlined in Chapter 12, I would postulate that the containment evident in LA2 allowed the family's linear descriptions of problems to be deconstructed and reformulated into more multifaceted formulations. Whereas in LA1, upward bound parallel process resulted in such linear descriptions being repeated in the UMs due to the absence of containment.

13.2 - Organisational Omniscience and the 'As If' System

Such an urge to simplify complex and emotive data into more linear cause-and-effect explanations can also be observed at an organisational level in Children and Family Social Work. Here, in an attempt to evade the anxieties inherent in complexities of protecting children, the system resorts to a collective mode of defensive psychic-functioning, consistent with the social defences against anxiety observed by Menzies Lyth (1959), that serves to reduce this complexity to linear components (Smith 2019). This leads to the creation of a -K omniscientific technical-rational system that defends itself against anxiety by fragmenting the complexity of the social work task into supposedly predictable component parts such as visit records, meeting records and assessment timescales (Smith 2019). Hoggett (2010) expands upon this arguing how the outputs of this defensive omniscientific system, often in the form of quantitative data such as records of meetings or when children were seen, represent a virtual 'auditable surface' of KPIs. Here in an attempt to avoid anxiety, this auditable surface becomes confused with the reality of the social work task, representing an 'as if' system that managers, practitioners and policy makers interface with, rather than complexity of the social work task itself. As Hoggett (2010) explains, in the 'as if' reality, 'image and reality have become increasingly confused…. (and) behind the virtual reality… of performance indicators (lies) an actual reality of increased social suffering' (p.210). Here fractals of the anxious drive to linearity are observable within the KPIs and proxy auditable surface that dominate Children and Family Social Work.

13.3 - Capitalist Realism and Anxiety

In his critique of neoliberalism in *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher (2009) identifies how such patterns of linear causation are also perpetuated by the positivist ontological frame promoted by the current capitalist hegemony. Fisher (2009) provides the example of the present mental health endemic in Western society, noting how such an ontological frame 'denies any possibility of the social causation of mental illness' (p.37). This, argues Fisher (2009), serves two purposes in reinforcing capitalist hegemony; first it serves to individualise society by identifying the problem as internalised to individuals (low serotonin), and secondly provides a lucrative market for pharmaceutical companies through the commodification of the perceived linear 'solution' (SSRIs). This therefore ignores the non-linear complexity of a socio-political explanation of the endemic of mental ill health, in favour of a linear individualised and reductionist cause-and-effect response (taking medication). Moreover, Fisher (2009) notes how the marketisation demanded by the Western neoliberalist hegemony synonymous with New Public Management, serves to further simplify non-linear causality. Here through tools of the KPI and league table, complex data resistant to quantification is forcibly quantified, and in turn simplified. Combined with anxieties inherent in the UK Children and Family Social Work system however, and following Bion's theory of thinking outlined above, the urge Fisher (2009) identifies to reduce complex emotion laden information into simplified data is exacerbated to become a defensive organisational imperative. Here capitalist forces and anxiety interact to influence Children and Family Social Work from micro to macro levels, and as a result linear fractals can be observed at levels beyond the discourse and practice evident in the UMs, resulting in the current preoccupation with performance indicators, a culture of audit and inspection, and the focus on management and elimination of risk that pervades supervision practice (Bartoli and Kennedy 2015, Cooper and Lees 2014, Hoggett 2000, Jones 2014, Ruch 2007).

13.4 - Performance Anxiety

Fisher (2009), citing Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, notes how this surveillance culture of KPIs and targets is internalised by workers, leading them to act

as if they are constantly being observed. Cooper and Lees (2014) note how this can create further *Performance Anxiety* for workers as they are forced not only to manage the anxieties inherent in keeping children safe and to meet families' needs, but also in meeting the timescales and achieving the targets of the bureaucratic 'As if' system. As such this relationship between anxiety and bureaucracy appears circular, and perpetuates further anxiety as the performance anxiety generated as a result of bureaucracy interacts with anxiety generated by the primary social work task, as figure XIII demonstrates.

Performance
anxiety
interacts with
primary task
generated
anxiety

Primary task
generated
anxiety

Performance
anxiety
generated by
bureaucratic
response

Bureaucratic
response
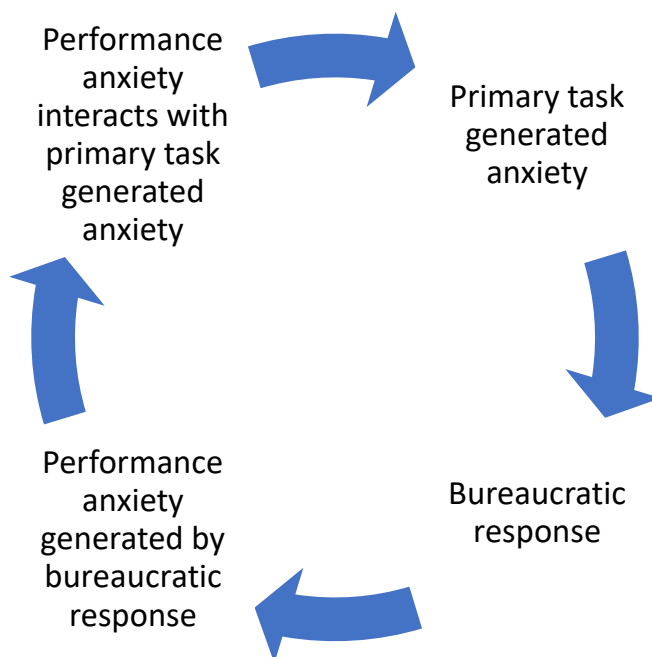
Figure XIII – Cycles of Anxiety and Bureaucratic Response in CSC

Such forces could account for both the high levels of 'UM Generated Anxiety' evidenced in LA1 and the disproportionate displays of anxiety exhibited by LA1 CSW highlighted in Chapter 8.2. Here, when discussing their work in an environment with limited containment, attendees were exposed to levels of this performance anxiety that permeated the UM, accounting for the anxiety they demonstrated.

13.5 - Anxious-Linear Fractals - The Solution Imperative

A further pattern of linear fractals observable in the data relates to the apparent imperative to find a linear 'solution' to the 'problem' dilemma postulated in the UMs. While the 'solution' provided often took the form of a systemic action, there did appear to be a pattern whereby the imperative to find a 'solution' in the form of an action to be undertaken by attendees, whether it was systemic or not, appeared somewhat linear in nature. Often this appeared to be driven by the need to 'do something', when faced with the anxiety provoking situations where families or children were at risk of harm, and as such this phenomenon shares much with the dispersive forces outlined in Chapter 4.4 as both appeared influenced by the management of anxiety.

This imperative appeared particularly acute for the CSWs, presumably amplified by working with anxious participants looking to their expertise for 'the answer'. While in LA1 this was manifest in the CSW's position as the expert as a result of BaD (see Chapter 8.7), there was also evidence of such pressure impacting LA2 CSW. For example, in LA2 UM1 they appeared preoccupied in providing a discernible action for P2 to undertake with a family, and were reluctant to conclude the discussion before this has been agreed. The following section is edited from a three-minute period of the UM:

> CSW – trying to think what else
>
> P2 – as you say drawing on the skills that he has held and how he coped with that in the past.
>
> CSW – or potentially you could look at drawing on how actually he has lots of strengths and experiences of parenting…
>
> P2 – for J or …
>
> CSW – so have you ever talked to C about D's history of her children being removed? Could you maybe go back to some of that and look at what this might be bringing up for them? (LA2, UM1, 1.35.00 – 1.38.00)

Indeed, the solution imperative can also be observed as linear fractals in social work supervision more broadly. For example, in Wilkin's et al's (2007) study of dyadic

supervision observed how the '… process of converting the complexity of family situations into institutionally accountable actions' (p.946) was observable at the absence of reflection. Again, Staempfli and Fairtlough (2019) also noted the presence of this solution focused linear thinking, noting that some students in their *Intervision Groups* reported not finding the groups helpful unless they gained certainty from the group as to what to do next.

This begs the rather philosophical question, what is an action? And perhaps more importantly in relation to this study, which actions are important in supervision? Returning to the themes in the literature review, this highlights a demarcation in the literature, with the Work Discussion Group (WDG) based models and the *Bells that Ring* model both stressing the creation of space for workers to reflect on the emotionality of their work is of primary importance in the supervision process. By contrast many of the *Reclaim* based models cite the importance of 'turning hypotheses into actions and rehearsing conversations' (Bostock, Patrizoa, Godfrey and Forrester, 2019, p. 8), with Bostock et al (2019) even going as far as to not classify case discussions as fully 'systemic' if they did not include the creation of discernible 'actions'

It appears that the two UMs studied in this thesis sat on a continuum between being 'process' or 'action' orientated, as outlined below in Figure XIV *the Process-Action Supervision Continuum*.
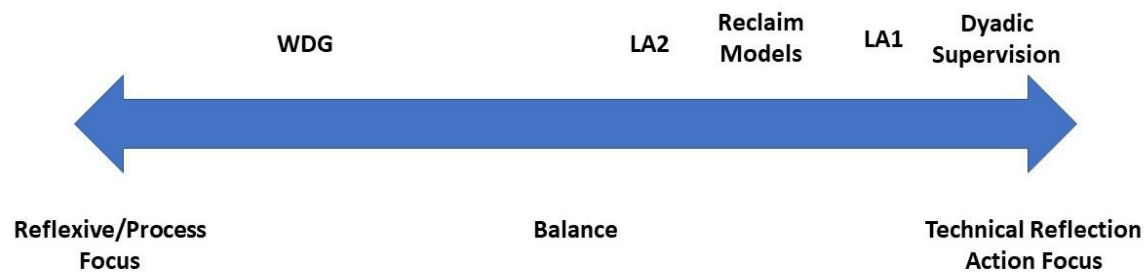
Figure XIV - *The Process-Action Supervision Continuum*.

For example, LA1's anxiety rich UMs were largely 'solution' orientated, and without their Practice Tutor present contained little in the way of attention to attendees' experiences of their work, a phenomenon also outlined in much of the research concerning dyadic

social work supervision (Beddoe 2010, Wilkins et al 2017). By contrast LA2's UMs frequently explored attendees' emotional experience of their work, which appeared more balanced with the need to find a 'solution' in the form of an action. Indeed, at times it appeared that the highest priority in LA1 was that supervision took place, and that evidence of this was captured so as to confirm this, evidenced by the manic propensity to record information. Moreover, the inconfluent case discussion evident in the anxiety rich case discussions in LA1 UM3, where dilemmas did not flow into related tasks and actions, further indicated that the priority appeared to be that this process had occurred, rather than it generating anything meaningful. Here it appeared producing data to meet the demands of the 'As If' system was the priority, and during periods of high anxiety in LA1 it appeared the UMs existence appeared somewhat linear, a dispersive action that was to be undertaken that represented a somewhat superficial response to complex issues.

13.6 - The Solution Imperative as Incongruent with Systemic Practice

James Fisher (2006) connotes this apparent search for a 'solution' (in Fisher's terms an 'answer'), with the dichotomy between Bion's theorisations between K and -K, postulating that such a search for a 'solution' as diametrically opposed to 'curiousity'. Here it is worth quoting Fisher (2006), discussing this in relation to psychoanalytic practice, at length:

> … one of the most subtle and pervasive forms of −K which affect our day to day clinical work is the answer… I suggest that there are two kinds of answers… recognizable by the emotional experience sought and the emotional experience accompanying the answer. One kind of answer aims at the pleasure of bringing the questioning to an end, the end of the need to seek to know, and in effect brings curiosity to an end as well. The other kind of answer keeps the curiosity alive (pp.1233 – 4).

Therefore, in the presence of high anxiety and under the operation of the pleasure principle, thinking consistent with Bion's notion of -K occurs and a dispersive and linear

'solution' is sought that ends the anxiety inherent in curiousity and learning from experience. The linear solution imperative therefore appears incongruent with the ontological frame of systemic practice, which Dallos and Draper (2000) stress should liberate us from trying to 'get it right'. However, it appears that in LA1, attempts to 'get it right' influenced by an anxious drive towards linear causality were part of the problem, as they were incongruent with the ontological frame of systemic practice that demands multiverse and circular causality. The findings of this study therefore appear to tally with the conclusions of Bingle and Middleton's (2019) study of a UM, with the authors concluding that the context of child protection influenced workers need to find the 'right answer' which both limited hypotheses and stifled second order practice.

Moreover, Bingle and Middleton (2019) stress that this linear solution imperative is also observable in social work policy more broadly, noting that application of hypothesising in the governments *Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Practitioners* is far removed from a systemic conception that views families as experts in their lives. Conversely, here the social worker is positioned as the expert:

> Expectation is that (hypothesising) will help lead to effective and timely decision-making, making use of evidence and professional judgment to protect children… The emphasis here is on action: the need to hypothesise arising from the need to intervene, creating an emphasis on getting it right (Bingle and Middleton, 2019, p.398-9).

This solution orientated misconception of hypothesising is again present in Cameron et al's (2016) study. However, it appears unclear if the authors are aware of this incongruence when they describe how a social worker, when interviewed, noted the usefulness of hypothesising as enabling workers to visit a 'family with a clear hypothesis of what is going on and plan for change' (p.20). Again, this application of hypothesising appears to situate the social worker as the expert working with a single hypothesis leading to a linear solution. An approach far removed from the Milan Team's application of hypothesising where clinicians explored multiple hypotheses with a family to establish whether they fitted for them (Selvini et al 1980).

13.7 - Solution Imperative Anxiety

Such an imperative to find a solution appears driven by the dispersive urge to 'do something' when faced with the anxiety inherent in the social work task. However, it appears that a linear formulation of social work's purpose, in that it exists to provide solutions in the form of actions to problems, is likely *in itself* anxiety provoking. For if one agrees that there is an action to be found and something that can be done in order to support families, protect children and alleviate suffering, the pressure to fulfil one's professional role and find it becomes intense.

The check in during LA1 UM3, shortly after the announcement of the government Covid19 lockdown, provides an excellent example of the solution imperative, and the further level of secondary anxiety it generates. Here LA1 CSW describes the anxiety of not being able to be part of the 'solution' of safeguarding children and families, and how if she was to be (i.e., to undertake her role as normal and undertake home visits) she would likely spread the virus and be part of a greater 'problem':

> CSW - I have realised is its very, very important to me to feel helpful and feel part of the solution and I've had a lot of complicated feelings around working from home and not being out there catching the virus (anxious giggle) … I don't know, after training to be part of the solution realising that you are part of the problem and the best thing you can do is stay home it's like an uncomfortable roller-coaster (anxious giggle) (00.04.00)

Here it appears that not being able to be part of the 'solution' is anxiety provoking, and indeed appears to represent a significant challenge to LA1 CSW's professional identity as a 'helping' social worker. Again, like the performance anxiety outlined above, this relationship between anxiety and the solution imperative appears circular and to perpetuate further anxiety as the solution imperative generated anxiety generated interacts with anxiety generated by the primary task. As figure XV demonstrates:

Solution imperative generated anxiety interacts with primary task generated anxiety

Primary task generated anxiety

Solution imperative generated anxiety

Solution imperative
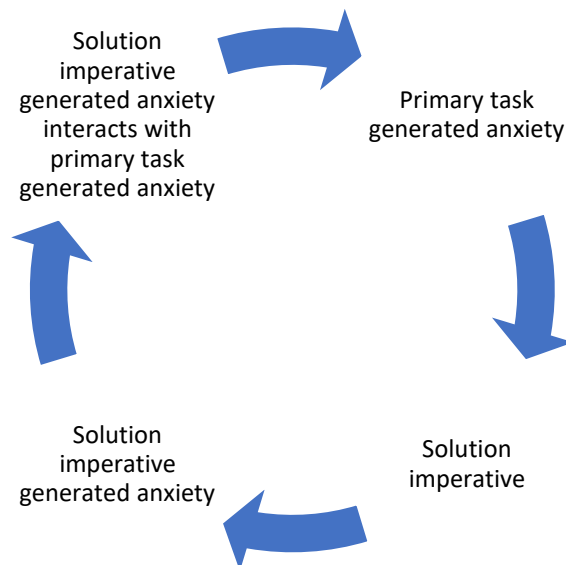
Figure XV – Cycles of Anxiety and the Solution Imperative in CSC

13.8 - Children's Social Care *as* the Solution Imperative

Cooper (2014) theorises the existence of the UK Children and Family Social Work system in terms of a dual primary task. Firstly, the overt task serves to protect vulnerable children from harm and abuse, a purpose few would contest. However, Cooper (2014) also posits a second 'covert' task, that being 'to protect the remainder of society from exposure to anxiety provoking "dangerous knowledge" about the prevalence of child maltreatment' (p.271), as such it represents a social defence against anxiety. A failure in this second covert purpose argues Cooper (2014), accounts for the moral outrage and subsequent government reviews that have followed high profile deaths such as Peter Connolly. Here the Children and Family Social Work system failed to keep this dangerous and anxiety provoking knowledge from the public consciousness, resulting in outrage as the social defence failed and the anxious reality of children's deaths and suffering was experienced. Taking both Cooper's arguments above, and the theorisation of anxiety driven solution imperative responses to its natural conclusion, perhaps the Children and Family Social Work system's very existence can

be perceived as a linear response. A 'solution' that protects the public from the anxiety implicit in the harm adults can do to children.

13.9 - The Solution Imperative - DAB

These linear-fractals observable in the solution imperative, and the influence anxiety plays in their formulation, can also be observed in the recent academic debate surrounding Disorganised Attachment Behaviour (DAB) (Granqvist et al 2017, White et al 2019). Several scholars had posited a causal-linear relationship between the observation of disorganised attachment behaviours in children, and their maltreatment (Shemmings and Shemmings 2014, Wilkins 2012), indeed, ideas that myself and colleagues have previously applied in our work. Such assertions have been subsequently critiqued by a group of prominent attachment theorists (see Granqvist et al 2017), leading the initial proponents of this causal relationship to latterly reject it (Wilkins 2020). Upon reflecting upon this, Wilkins (2020) captures the attraction to such linear idea:

> The idea of DAB as a way of 'seeing' maltreatment was a magnetic one… If only the social world were that simple, that human relationships in all their wonderous complexity and messiness could be understood via a small handful of theoretical positions – or even just one (p.219)

What is perhaps missing from Wilkins (2020) humble description is the influence of the anxiety rich context of child protection, in the context of which it is easy to see how such linear ideas that negate the complexity of society and human relationships, in favour of a linear 'solution', become 'magnetic'.

13.10 - The Ontological Frame of Social Work Policy

These fractals of linear causality can also be perceived in the ontological and epistemological frame of current policy debates in social work, and indeed the wider policy frame that regards positivist research, with its focus on Newtonian laws and

hypothesis falsification or verification as the gold standard for policy makers (Ansell and Geyer 2017). For example, this urge to reduce the complexity of Children and Family Social Work to simplified models of linear causality can also be observed in the current 'What Works Agenda', a government policy agenda aimed at producing and disseminating 'best evidence' research to inform public service policy decisions (What Works Network 2014). Such an approach aims to adopt the 'evidence based' medical model of commissioning employed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in respect of health, in other fields such as crime, social care and indeed social work. The motivation for such a policy agenda is captured by Dr David Halpern (What Works National Adviser) who describes the attraction to the linearity and certainty offered by this medical model:

> When your doctor prescribes a medicine, you have good grounds to trust that it will be effective…. But when you drop your child off at school, or turn to the police to keep you safe, the evidence base standing behind the education and crime interventions being used has until recently been much weaker (What Works Network, 2014, p.6)

In respect of such a policy agenda's application in social work, the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care's (WWCCSC) website states that the centre aims to 'generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve… outcomes… for children and families' (What Works Centre for Children's Social Care 2021a). A further delve into the organisation's website provides further details of what the organisation considers to be 'best evidence', with a job description for a Senior Researcher post noting that the following knowledge and experience is essential:

> The Senior Researcher will need a high level of expertise in analysing quantitative data for impact evaluation.

> Experience in leading randomised controlled trials and/or quasi-experimental evaluations in children's social care (What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, 2021b, p.4)

No reference is made to qualitative research in the job description, and moreover, the job description further details the WWCCSC's epistemological frame when it outlines the following as one of its four research principles:

> Studies have to be useful… while there is certainly value in more exploratory research, this is not part of the Centre's mission and objectives (What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, 2021b, p.6)

It therefore appears that the 'best evidence' and 'useful studies' required by the centre are of a quantitative and positivist nature. Here I would argue that the capitalist and anxiety driven forces outlined above influence policymakers in social work, resulting in attempts to quantify data resistant to quantification, and the prioritising of positivist research methodologies that offer supposed certainty, at the expense of qualitative studies. While such positivist methodologies are well suited to the closed system of the laboratory, they do not acknowledge the complexities of families, society or the social work task, a point Chapman (2014) illustrates:

> One way to visualise the difference between the mechanistic, linear approach to policy and the holistic, systemic approach is to compare the results of throwing a rock and a live bird. Mechanical linear models are excellent for understanding where the rock will end up, but useless for predicting the trajectory of a bird – even though both are subject to the same laws of physics. To the degree that social and organisational systems… show adaptive behaviours they are better regarded as similar to live birds than lumps of rock (pp. 19-20)

In the case of the positivist policy context described above, it appears that the approach to ontology and epistemology attempts to tie the bird's wings in an attempt to make it behave as much like a rock as possible, to the extent that risks making their findings redundant. Indeed, in relation to the quote above, it is striking that neither Dr Halpern, nor the What Works Network's website, explore what might differ between the disciplines of medicine (the stone) and criminology (the bird), and it is assumed the epistemological frame of the former can seamlessly be applied to the later. Rather, influenced by the anxiety implicit in such complexity, and influenced by the dispersive solution imperative and the urge to 'do something' as a response to high profile child

deaths, a -K strategy is adopted by policy makers that seeks to evade such anxiety through the adoption of reductionist epistemology that fails to acknowledge such complexity. As a result, linear fractals become observable in the policy agenda and its output.

These linear fractals in respect of epistemology can also be observed in the behaviour of my organisation Frontline. Faced with the barrage of criticism highlighted earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 1.1), the organisation can appear preoccupied with finding 'evidence' to justify its existence, evidence that can make linear-causal connections between their practice models and outcomes for families. Moreover, such anxiety is likely exacerbated by Conservative politicians overtly proposing Frontline as the 'solution' to the challenges faced by the Children and Family Social Work sector, for example highlighting their investment in fast-track schemes when asked by BBC journalists to respond to the findings of the MacAlister Review (*World at One* 2021). Here the organisation becomes the 'solution' and is exposed to the same solution imperative anxiety experienced by UM attendees described above, further influencing the organisation's need to justify itself. Indeed, the presence of such solution imperative anxiety produces further linear fractals that can also be observed in this research process. For example, I felt myself drawn towards positivist methodologies that offered 'robust' linear-Newtonian formulations to the challenges of supervision practice. Moreover, when analysing the data, I felt myself again drawn the presentation of charts and graphs offered by NVIVO, which at times risked oversimplifying the data, negating the complexity of the qualitative data in favour of data that perhaps offered a more simplified, linear formulation.

Perhaps a word of caution is needed here, it is not that I am arguing that there is no 'solution' to child maltreatment and families' suffering, and as such advocating a *laissez faire* approach to welfare policy. Nor do I wish to appear to dismiss the work of the WWCCSC in its entirety, as much of its output has a great deal to offer social workers in terms of the analysis of various approaches to social work practice and which, unlike most social work research, is free to access for social workers. Rather I am arguing that the ontological frames of systemic practice and critical realism to which I subscribe

argue that such issues are the result of complex, interactive and unpredictable processes, and that attempts to address them within a positivist frame are likely to be both ineffective, and as is the case with the 'As if' system described above, fraught with unintended consequences.

13.11 – Chapter Summary

It therefore appears that when not contained, the anxiety implicit in the social work task impacts upon the social work system influencing its structure and behaviour. This, particularly when interacting with capitalist positivism, leads to a preoccupation with linear causality and the imperative to create a 'solution', which can be observed as linear fractals throughout the data set and wider milieu. Such fractals create a significant resistance to the ontological frame of systemic practice, leaving systemic social work practitioners with the challenge of practicing systemically in a linear world. These forces appeared particularly evident in LA1, where the presence of higher levels of anxiety can be theorised as disrupting attempts at systemic practice.

Chapter 14 - Conclusions

This chapter concludes this thesis, summarising the key findings identified and their implications for social work policy and practice. Future directions for research are then discussed, before limitations of this study are identified. While in the spirit of the ontological frames of both critical realism and complexity theory the findings of this study have been emergent and non-linear in nature, this Chapter will also return to the research questions and explore the usefulness of the Unit Meeting (UM) model for wider social work practice.

14.1 - Implications for Policy and Practice

This study has demonstrated how supervision practice can be disrupted by unconscious processes to a point where it becomes sub-optimum, and has the potential to become avoidant of the emotive issues associated with the social work task, and therefore potentially dangerous. Here, as highlighted in Chapter 12, -K Supervision stifles reflective practice and risks children and families becoming 'unthought', as individuals and organisations strive to defend themselves from anxiety. In light of such a theorisation, it easy to see how reviews of the child protection system have highlighted how poor supervision practice can lead to children being inadequately safeguarded (Lamming 2009, Munro 2011). The difference between the two UMs studied in this thesis is testament to the generative impact of unprocessed anxiety, accounting for why two sets of supervision meetings supposedly following the same format transpired to be so different. The strength of such unconscious forces is demonstrated by how I, the researcher, assimilated into the social defences against anxiety evident in LA1, for example the use of humour and distraction, and how I only became aware of these phenomena sometime after the UMs when analysing the data with the support of my supervisors and peers.

There is increasing popularity of group supervision models in wider social work with such models employed in a number of practice contexts (Forrester et al 2017, Goodman and Trowler 2012, Kadushin and Harkness 2002, Sheehan et al 2019, Tsui 2005). The

literature review in Chapter 2 and the findings of this study have both highlighted how group supervision has many benefits for social work practice, specifically in respect of generating multiple perspectives necessary for curiousity. However, this study has also demonstrated that anxiety has the capacity to stifle this, and following the basic assumption BaD highlighted in Chapter 8.7, supervision practice LA1 was more akin to dyadic supervision in a group format, rather than group supervision, and the benefits of multiple perspectives were lost.

This study has also highlighted how unprocessed anxiety can impact the quality of the systemic practice, and one of the most striking findings was the correlation between the presence of anxiety and the less advanced forms of systemic practice. These findings tally with Bingle and Middleton's (2019) study which noted how the high levels of anxiety present in the UM they studied in a Children and Family Social Work setting appeared to stifle systemic practice. Given the current popularity of systemic practice, attention to the disruptive presence of anxiety appears to be imperative for practice leaders.

Chapter 8 of this thesis has demonstrated the capacity for unprocessed anxiety to move between the social worker-service user dyad and supervision sessions through parallel process, and here anxiety provoking phenomena remain unthought and are unconsciously repeated. I have further argued how such processes have the capacity to influence social work organisations at many levels, as anxiety moves between subsystems through upward and downward parallel process; a theorisation that indicates for the implementation of K Supervision to be successful and anxiety to be contained in organisations, it will need to be implemented at all levels of organisations. Otherwise the anxiety in one 'hot dynamic', perhaps for example in a senior leadership team, has the capacity to transfer into other levels of the organisation. Such a theorisation appears to tally with Lees and Cooper's (2019) study in respect of Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs), who noted that the containment of anxiety appears related to a number of positive outcomes for both social workers and families, but that RPGs need to take place at all levels of the organisations in order to be effective.

This study has also identified that, when not processed through containment, anxiety is defended against through the creation of a performative 'As If' system of KPIs and

performance indicators that are substituted for the reality of social work practice and service user suffering. Such a theorisation can account for the schism between the rhetoric and reality of social work supervision outlined in Chapter 1, where the good intentions of reflexive supervision are jettisoned in favour of defensive bureaucracy that cannot handle the frustration and anxiety implicit in the social work task. Rather this creates a -K proxy system which only serves to perpetuate anxiety. Indeed, when applied to the macro, Children and Family Social Work system, such processes account for the overly bureaucratic and risk averse system highlighted by both the Munro (2011) and MacAlister (2021) reviews.

Attention to the disruptive power of unconscious process must therefore be an imperative for supervisors, social work leaders and policy makers, and it is key that staff at all levels of social work organisations are trained in psychosocial theory, so that such disruptive processes can be identified and guarded against. Considering the findings of this study, training Consultant Social Workers (CSW) in such theories would appear to be a priority for Frontline. Furthermore, the findings of this research indicate that attention to such unconscious processes would be of benefit to the DfE's (2015) *Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors* programme; which while it discusses how 'emotionally intelligent practice supervision' (can) '… identify emotional barriers affecting practice and… support individuals' (p.6), makes no mention of unconscious processes.

This study has demonstrated how supervision practice functioning in the K Second Order Supervision State has the capacity to contain anxiety, through a focus on second order forms of reflective practice such as reflexivity and practical reflection, with clear implications for the quality of practice. Such findings strengthen the weak evidence base for the application of reflective practice in social work, and provide empirical data to inform how this could be applied. Indeed, the K Supervision and -K Supervision models outlined in Chapter 12 evidence how the creation of an appropriate holding environment, where workers feel able to discuss such information, can be established. Here this thesis has demonstrated how behaviours characterised by a non-directive supervision leadership style have the potential to create such a holding environment,

and it would appear that adoption of such an approach is crucial to effective supervision practice. Again, training in the adoption of such a stance and the theory that underpins it must be an imperative for the profession in order to allow social workers to sit with the anxiety of learning from experience, and so that supervision practice remains grounded in the reality of practice and service users' experiences.

Chapter 12 has theorised how the experience of the K Supervision might be internalised by workers, with implications for wider social work practice. For it follows that the internalisation of K Supervision thinking supports the tolerance of frustration, enables thinking based on the reality principle at times of anxiety, and therefore supports social workers to make more effective practice decisions. The internalisation of such a model is likely to increase worker resilience as they process the anxiety implicit in their role, rather than relying on the maladaptive defence mechanisms identified in this study that often serve to perpetuate, rather than alleviate, anxiety. K Supervision therefore represents a tantalising model indicating how the much heralded, yet ill-defined concept of reflective practice operates, with implications for social work practice, social worker retention and service user experience.

Conversely, if supervision is functioning as -K Supervision the capacity to tolerate frustration would not be internalised by workers. In relation to Frontline, if the practice evident in LA1 was indicative of the wider programme, this may support research that highlights 29% of Frontline participants from cohort 1 left statutory social work within three years of qualification (Scourfield et al 2020). Moreover, looking at the social work workforce more broadly, such a phenomenon could also account for why the expected working life of a social worker is so short at only eight years, compared to 25 years for doctors and 15 years for nurses (Curtis 2010). Here, when practicing in holding environments that fail to contain anxiety, social workers take the final option in defending themselves from such anxiety, and leave the profession.

14.2 - Directions for Future Research

A recommendation of this study is therefore a need for more psychoanalytically informed research into social work supervision practice, as given this study's small scale, further evidence is needed to corroborate its findings. It would therefore be beneficial to observe other group supervision sessions in a variety of social work settings to establish if the phenomena identified in this study are also observable elsewhere. The literature analysed in Chapter 2 demonstrates the importance of 'relationships' between group supervision attendees as crucial to the effective functioning of supervision. However, this study has identified that this is more nuanced than simply *relationships,* and that it is the analysis of collective unconscious processes that is key to effective supervision practice, and therefore *this* that necessitates further study.

Furthermore, this study has made some connections regarding the behaviours of group supervisors and factors in the holding environment that appear to facilitate reflective practice, and in turn more focused and advanced social work practice. These factors, including negative capability, second order practice and co-creation, are outlined in the K Supervision model. Further research is required in this area to explore the effect of these factors and to further understand their impact on supervision practice, and reflective practice.

14.3 - Can the Frontline Unit Meeting be of use to wider Social Work?

This study has shown that where a UM effectively practises K Supervision, the Frontline UM has a number of benefits that make it an attractive supervision model for Children and Family Social Work. The structure of the UM necessitates multiple perspectives through the application of hypothesising, and this study has evidenced how this helped introduce new perspectives for workers who may have felt stuck. The model also supports workers' learning, as they are exposed to others' practice and can contribute towards this, widening the range of practice experience which they are exposed to.

The UM, if applied with the systemic principle of second order practice, has the capacity to facilitate reflexive practice, and as such supports workers to explore the emotionality of the social work task and how this is influenced by their unique experiences, values, and identity. In turn, this study demonstrates that such reflexivity helps to manage anxiety through the creation of containment, with clear implications for supervision practice and output.

The UM lends itself to systemic social work practice, as it is designed to formulate systemic actions to be undertaken with families, and employs genograms and systemic hypothesising. However, it is not hard to see how it would have wider applicability outside of a systemic context, given its capacity to create multiple formulations and perspectives on social work practice, that lead to subsequent interventions based on a thorough exploration of service users' needs from multiple perspectives. It is striking how, in contrast to much of the existing UK supervision data, there was only a small focus in the UMs on issues such as when children were seen and the frequency of statutory meetings, with only one coding reference evident in all six UMs. It is particularly striking that such a focus was not evident in LA1 despite the high levels of anxiety and performative environment evident there. This indicates that the structure of the UMs, in particular the focus on hypothesising, results in overt focus on meaning-making at the expense of a focus on KPIs or quick conceptual shifts between problems and solutions.

This study has however identified that the leadership style of supervisors, as well as the supervision holding environment and agency context, is crucial to supervision's effective functioning, and the creation of containment so as to manage disruptive anxiety. When such anxiety is not contained, and the UM is functioning in the K- Supervision model, this anxiety has the potential to be defended against by unconscious group process that stifle supervision practice, leading to a style of supervision that denies the reality of social workers' and families' experiences, and instead prioritises the psychic defence of attendees. Here systemic practice is stifled, and the benefits of multiple perspectives are lost.

As such it appears that the Frontline UM model may be of great benefit to social work more broadly, however close attention must be paid to 'what happens' in it, and the potential for unconscious processes to disrupt optimal practice.

14.4 - Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study which, while not undermining its findings, should be considered when analysing its applicability to the Frontline UM specifically, and group supervision more broadly:

- the sample size of two Local Authorities was small, and while this was necessary due to the small-scale of this Doctoral project, the findings of this study are limited to the two organisational contexts, making wider applicability problematic.

- Considering this it is unclear what impact the specific attendees had upon the practice observed, and whether undertaking this study with different groups of attendees might have produced different outcomes. Such a limitation makes a compelling case for further such studies.

- This study is limited in that it did not access data in respect of organisational context, such as interviews with attendees, information that would have deepened the analysis in respect of the holding environment explored Chapter 10.

- As described in Chapter 3, researcher subjectivity inevitably influences psychoanalytic observation methodologies such as this. In order to prevent this, two researchers could have undertaken the psychoanalytic observations and their findings compared, however such an endeavour was beyond the scope of this Doctoral project.

- The Covid19 pandemic had a significant and unanticipated impact on the research process, creating a notable change in practice context, and requiring the UMs to move online. Further research is therefore required into both online and face-to-face meetings to corroborate the findings of this study.

14.5 – Concluding Thoughts

This study has highlighted how the Frontline Unit Meeting is one of a growing number of group supervision models applied in social work that have been shown to support reflective practice, generate new perspectives, encourage learning, and move supervision practice beyond a focus upon agency priorities such as KPIs. The model is particularly suited to a systemic model of social work practice in light of its use of hypothesising and systemic genograms, however it is easy to see the model's appeal to wider social work contexts.

This thesis has detailed how the application of a psychoanalytically informed observation methodology to explore group supervision practice has the capacity to shed light on the unconscious processes that impact on supervision practice, making the study unique in the canon of social work supervision literature. This has identified that the anxiety which numerous authors have argued is pervasive in UK Children and Families Social Work, also pervades the UM. Here, if learning from experience does not take place and a subsequent failure of containment occurs, unprocessed anxiety stifles supervision and subsequent social work practice, in what I have theorised as -K Supervision. This study has demonstrated how in such circumstances supervision attendees collectively operationalise defence systems to protect themselves against anxiety, resulting in the denial of the emotionality of the social task, and children and families becoming unthought. Moreover, there is tentative evidence from this study that when anxiety is not contained, parallel process can occur and dynamics can be repeated across different subsystems within social work. This has deeply concerning implications for the quality of social work practice, and if the managerialism that dominates social work supervision practice becomes manifest in the social worker-service user dyad, this would account for service users' frequently highlighting the adversarial nature of their experiences with social workers (MacAlister 2021).

This study has also made some connections between the application of reflective practice in supervision and the management of anxiety, demonstrating how the two conjoin and how, in the correct holding environment, the creation of reflexive and process approaches to reflective practice are containing and reduce anxiety. Conditions

I have theorised as operationalised in the K Second Order Supervision State. Such a relationship is however complex and there is evidence from this study that reflexive and process approaches to reflection are in themselves anxiety provoking, as they require the exploration of potentially distressing material as workers consider intersections between their lived experience and their social work practice.

The impact of reflexive and process approaches to reflective practice upon the containment of anxiety also highlights the importance of a balance when focusing on creating actions to undertake with service users in supervision, alongside reflexive practice and a focus on process. It appears that a focus upon reflexive practice and process leads to the creation of actions, and therefore social work practice, that are more confluent with the material discussed in supervision. The lack of containment and inconfluent case discussions in LA1 UM3 demonstrate that when reflexive practice and therefore containment are not present, anxiety becomes disruptive to the extent that case discussions become unfocused, creating worrying implications for subsequent social work practice and service user welfare.

The findings of this study indicate that in order to facilitate K Supervision, attention to the holding environment is key. This includes the behaviours of supervisors in group supervision, and stances of negative capability, containment and co-creation appear crucial if learning from experience is to take place and anxiety is to be contained. A theorisation that indicates for a social worker to be a skilled supervisor, they will need much more than simply extensive practice experience. This study has also made some tentative connections between the wider holding environment within which supervision takes place, and whether this provides adequate containment to allow supervisors to practice in this manner. It appears that in high anxiety environments, the presence of a professional other than a case manager in supervision may be helpful in order to create a focus on reflexivity and process.

This study has also identified how the drive to simplify complex information evident in micro in -K Supervision, coupled with capitalist ontology identified by Fisher (2009), results in the presence of fractals of linear causality throughout the data set and wider milieu. This results in a proxy 'As If' system of KPIs and visit records that social workers,

managers and policy makers interface with, rather than the anxiety rich reality of suffering and complexity of social work practice. Such linear fractals appear to influence the ontological frame of social work policy and create a significant resistance to the ontological frame of systemic practice.

These knowledge claims are based on the findings of what is a small-scale research project, and caution should be take when considering their wider applicability. However, this study has provided a fascinating insight into how reflective practice functions, the conditions necessary for this and its potential impact on social work practice: findings that deepen the social work supervision knowledge base and necessitate further psychosocial studies in this area in order to strengthen the evidence base and potentially corroborate these findings. Indeed, the findings indicate that containment of anxiety is key to the capacity for reflective practice, the effective functioning of both group supervision, and the wider Children and Families Social Work system. Its establishment must therefore represent an imperative for policy makers.

I will conclude this thesis with some final reflections on the journey of this research. As outlined, this path was emergent, and I certainly did not conceive the outcomes highlighted above when I initially proposed a positivist research project that assessed the quality of systemically trained CSW's supervision practice against a control group (see Chapter 3). Indeed, in undertaking this project I have encountered and grappled with the same forces of anxiety and capitalist ontology that I have theorised exist in the UM and wider social work, and which perpetuate positivist linear causality. So, perhaps the key piece of learning from this research journey has been the importance of adopting a more hermeneutic approach to research that does not attempt to prematurely assume linear causality by applying a reductionist epistemological and ontological frame that assumes social entities operate in closed systems. Rather, by adopting the ontological frames of complexity theory, critical realism and indeed systemic practice that postulate open systems and non-linear causality, I was able take a more inductive approach to this project and the data analysis which allowed me to get closer to what I really wanted to know more about. What makes great social work supervision.

Chapter 15 - References

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Chapter 16 – Appendices

16.1 – Literature Review Searches and Studies Analysed in this Literature Review

Figure 1 - Literature Searches

	Database, search function and date	Search Terms	Results (papers)
Search A	Discovery – Title – 3.10.2019	'group' 'supervision' 'children' 'and' 'family' 'social' 'work'	0
Search B	Discovery – keyword – 3.10.2019	'group' 'supervision' 'children' 'and' 'family' 'social' 'work'	**221,164**
Search C	Discovery – keyword – Removed expander 'Also search within the full text of the articles' 3.10.2019	'group' 'supervision' 'children' 'and' 'family' 'social' 'work'	973
Search D	Quality Search of C		10
Search E	Discovery – keyword – 3.10.2019 Removed expander 'Also search within the	'group' 'supervision' 'child' 'and' 'protection' 'social' 'work'	**486**

	full text of the articles' 3.10.2019		
Search F	Quality Search of E		O in addition to D
Search G	Discovery – Title – 3.10.2019	'peer' 'supervision' 'children' 'and' 'family' 'social' 'work'	0
Search H	Discovery – keyword – Removed expander 'Also search within the full text of the articles' 3.10.2019	'peer' 'supervision' 'children' 'and' 'family' 'social' 'work'	242
Search I	Quality Search of H		1
Search J	Discovery – Title – 3.10.2019	'peer' 'supervision' 'student' 'social' 'work'	0
Search K	Discovery – keyword – Removed expander 'Also search within the full text of the articles' 3.10.2019	'peer' 'supervision' 'student' 'social' 'work'	397
Search L	Quality Search of K		3
Search M	Snowball Technique	reference lists scanned for relevant literature	16

		and key authors - then filtered through inclusion and exclusion criteria	
Total			29

Studies Analysed in this Literature Review

Search D Results – 10
Bingle, L. and Middleton, A. (2019) 'From doing to being: the tensions of systemic practice in social work – group reflective supervision in child protection'

Bostock, L., Patrizoa, L., Godfrey, T., and Forrester, D. (2019) 'What is the impact of supervision on direct practice with families?'

Bostock, L., Patrizoa, L., Godfrey, T., Munro, E. and Forrester, D. (2019) 'How do we assess the quality of group supervision? Developing a coding Framework'

Davis, B. (2002) 'Group supervision as a learning laboratory for the purposeful use of self in child protection work'

Jackson, E. and Warman, A. (2007) 'Recruiting and retaining children and families' social workers. The potential of work discussion groups'

Lietz, C. (2006) 'Implementation of group supervision in child welfare: Findings from Arizona's supervision circle project'

Oşvat, C., Marc, C. and Makai-Dimeny, J. (2014) 'Group supervision in social work: |

A model of intervention for practitioners'

Partridge, K., Dugmore, P., Mahaffey, H., Chidgeyc, M., and Owend, J. (2019) 'Step by step, side by side': the quest to create relational artistry through systemic practice within children's social care'

Rankine, M. (2013) 'Getting a different perspective: piloting the 'group consult' model for supervision in a community-based setting'

Wilkins, D., Lynch, A. And Antonopoulou, V. (2018) 'A golden thread? The relationship between supervision, practice, and family engagement in child and family social work'

Search I Results – 1

Dempsey, M. and Halton, C. (2017) 'Construction of peer support groups in child protection social work: Negotiating practicalities to enhance the professional self'

Search L Results – 3

Golia, G. and McGovern, A. (2015) 'If you save me, I'll save you: The power of peer supervision in clinical training and professional development'

Staempfli, A, and Fairtlough, A. (2019) 'Intervision and professional development: an exploration of a peer-group reflection method in social work education'

Vassos, S., Harms, L.   and Rose, D (2018) 'Supervision and social work students: relationships in a team based rotation placement model'

Search M Results – 15

Alschuler, M., Silver, T. and McArdle, L. (2015) 'Strengths-based group supervision with social work students'

Arkin, N., Freund, A. and Saltman I. (1999) 'A group supervision model for broadening multiple-method skills of social work students'

Boho, M., Sussman, T. And Cioberman, J. (2014) 'The field instructor as group worker: managing trust and competition in group supervision'

Bostock, L. Forrester, D., Patrizo, L. Godfrey, T. Zonouzi, M. Antonopoulou, V. Bird, H. and Tinarwo, M. (2017) *Scaling and deepening the Reclaiming Social Work Model: Evaluation report*

Cameron, C., Elliott, H., Iqbal, H., Munro E. and Owen. C. (2016) 'Focus on practice in three London boroughs: an evaluation'

Cross, S., Hubbard, A., and Munro, E. (2010) 'Reclaiming social work London borough of
Hackney children and young people's services: independent evaluation'

Dempsey, M., Halton, C. and Murphy, M. (2001) 'Reflective learning in social work education: scaffolding the process'

Domakin A, and Curry L. (2018) 'Partners in practice: Developing integrated learning opportunities on the Frontline child and family social work qualifying programme'

Dugmore, P., Partridge, K., Sethib, I. and Krupa-Flasinskab, M. (2018) 'Systemic supervision in statutory social work in the UK: systemic rucksacks and bells that ring'

Forrester, D., Westlake, D., McCann, M., Thurnham, A., Shefer, G., Glynn, G. and Killian, M. (2013) *Reclaiming Social Work? An Evaluation of Systemic Units as an Approach to Delivering Children's Services*.

Lees, A. And Cooper, A. (2019) 'Reflective practice groups in a children's social work setting - what are the outcomes, how do they work and under what circumstances? A new theoretical model based on empirical findings'

Lietz, C. (2013) 'Strengths-based supervision: supporting: implementation of family-centered practice through supervisory processes'

Maxwell, N., Scourfield, J., Le Zhang, M., de Villiers, T., Hadfield, M., Kinnersley, P., Metcalf, L., Pithouse A. and Tayyaba, S. (2016) *Independent Evaluation of the Frontline Pilot*

O'Sullivan, N. (2019) 'Creating space to think and feel in child protection social work; a psychodynamic intervention'

Ruch, G. (2007) 'Thoughtful' practice: child care social work and the role of case discussion'

The following studies were latterly excluded from the literature review as further analysis during the Quality Search established that they did not meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined above:

- Alschuler et al (2015) - This paper provided no empirical data
- Davis (2002) - Again, this paper provided no empirical data
- Jackson and Warman (2007) - This study was not set in a Children and Family Social Work context, rather a mental health project in secondary school and a children's residential home.

- Vassos et al (2018) - The authors refer to the students in this study undertaking group supervision, however this is not discussed in any detail in the findings.

16.2 - CASP Tool Questions (CASP 2021b)

1 - Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? Yes - Can't tell - No

☐ What was the goal of the research?

☐ Why it was thought important?

☐ Its relevance

2 - Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? Yes - Can't tell - No

If the answer to either of the above two questions was 'no', these articles were rejected

☐ If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants

☐ Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?

3 - Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If the researcher has justified the research design (E.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)?

☐ If the researcher has clearly outlined their epistemological position

4 - Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected

· If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study

☐ If there are explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria (Fink 1998)

☐ If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

☐ Are there concerns with selection bias or membership bias (Fink 1998)

5 - Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If the setting for data collection was justified

☐ If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)

☐ If the researcher has justified the methods chosen

☐ If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews were conducted, or did they use a topic guide)?

☐ If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why?

☐ If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc)

☐ If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

☐ Are their issues in respect of Instrumentation (Fink 1998)

6 - Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during

(a) Formulation of the research questions

(b) Data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location

· How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

7 - Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained

☐ If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study) ☐ If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

8 - Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process

☐ If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?

☐ Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process

☐ If sufficient data are presented to support the findings

☐ To what extent contradictory data are taken into account

☐ Are their issues in respect of attrition or response rate (Fink 1998)

☐ Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

9 - Is there a clear statement of findings? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ If the findings are explicit

☐ If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researchers arguments

☐ If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)

☐ If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

10 - How applicable is this study to the research question posed? Yes - Can't tell – No

☐ Does the research discuss supervision in a Children and Families Social Work Setting?

☐ Does the research discuss supervisees' and supervisor's experiences of supervision in a Children and Families Social Work Setting and does it make analyse what is/is not effective practice in such a setting.

16.3 - Research Timetable

Stage #	Task	Details	Target Start Date	Target End Date
1	Research proposal	Consolidate research proposal following receiving mark and feedback.	June 2019	July 2019
2	Ethical approval	Apply to the Tavistock and Portman Ethics Committee.	July 2019	September 2019
3	Ethical approval	Apply to the Frontline Ethics Committee.	September 2019	September 2019
4	Study Information form	Draft Study Information Form.	September 2019	September 2019
5	Participant recruitment	Approach LAs judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and Frontline Units to see if they would be willing to participate in this study.	October 2019	November 2019
6	Ethical approval	Apply to the relevant LA's Ethics Committee.	November 2019	December 2019
7	Literature Review	A comprehensive systematic literature review will be undertaken.	November 2019	December 2020
8	Data gathering	Six three hour UMs will be observed and recorded (DS1). They will then be transcribed (DS2). Field notes will be completed after each UM (DS3). Following the completion of this the field notes will be sent to participants and their feedback gathered (DS4)	December 2019	May 2020

9	Data analysis	Bi Monthly WDGs will be undertaken with fellow doctoral students to aid analysis of the data. Notes will be taken of this (DS5).	December 2019	December 2020
10	Data analysis	Coding extracts of the Data Corpus will take place.	December 2019	July 2020
11	Data analysis	Codes identified above will be collated into Themes	July 2020	August 2020
12	Data analysis	Themes will be reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire Data Corpus.	August 2020	November 2020
13	Data Analysis	Themes will be further defined and named	December 2020	December 2020
14	Report Production	A written report is produced, focusing on analysis of the data in the context of the research question and literature.	December 2020	June 2021

16.4 - Code Book

Code	Description	Theme	NVIVO Sets
Actions Appear Incongruent with Dilemma	The actions discussed do not appear congruent with the dilemma		Non-Thinking
Actions Appear Incongruent with Hypothesis	The actions discussed do not appear congruent with the hypothesis		Non-Thinking
Anxiety - Accommodating Children	A discussion takes place where accommodating children is considered	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	
Anxiety – Anxious tone in voice	An attendee speaks with an anxious tone in their voice	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Anxiety – Case closure	An attendee indicates anxiety at the prospect of case closure	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Decision making	An attendee indicates anxiety at the prospect of having to make a decision in respect of service users	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Difficult conversations	An attendee appears to express anxiety in relation to the prospect of having difficult conversations with a service user	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety - Fathers	An attendee appears to express anxiety in relation to contact with a father	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Fear for child	An attendee displays anxiety apparently linked to the risk to a child	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety

Anxiety – Fear for parent	An attendee demonstrates anxiety as a result of fear for a parent	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety Giggle	Giggle or laughter that appears connected to an anxiety provoking situation	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Anxiety – Owning opinion on family	A participant appears anxious due to owning an opinion on a family	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety UM Generated Anxiety
Anxiety – Participant challenged by service user	A participant displays anxiety as a result of being challenged by a parent	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Sexual abuse	Anxiety appears to be generated as a result of discussing sexual abuse	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Social worker power	Anxiety appears to be generated as a result of the power that is manifest in the social work role and/or its application	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Anxiety – Voice breaks	An attendee's voice breaks in an anxious manner indicating they are anxious	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Avoidance	Seemingly key issues are ignored and other less pertinent issues discussed	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Circular Hypothesis	A hypothesis is circular in nature	Systemic	Advanced Hypotheses Systemic Congruent
Circularity	Circular patterns are identified in family process		

Cocreation	Ideas are co-created between attendees	CSW Non-Directive	CSW Non-Directive
Contextual impact acknowledged	The impact of wider context on a family is acknowledged	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
CSC (Children's Social Care) in hypothesis	CSC are situated in hypothesis	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
CSW acknowledgement of emotion	CSW acknowledges the emotional nature of social work		Thinking
CSW allowing participant to lead discussion	CSW allowing participant to lead discussion	CSW Non-Directive	CSW Non-Directive
CSW Anxious to Provide Solution	A CSW appears anxious to provide a solution to an attendee		Non-Thinking
CSW as Expert	CSW takes an expert position	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Chairs UM	CSW is chairing the UM	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Challenges Participant	CSW challenges participant views or perspective	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Denies Emotions	CSW denies the emotions they or others are feeling		Non-Thinking
CSW Directs UM	CSW directs the UM	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Ensures Actions	CSW ensures that actions are taken forward from the UM discussion	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Encourages Systemic Actions	CSW ensures systemic actions		Systemic Theory Link
CSW Fosters Containment	CSW is proactive in creating a space in the meeting to discuss emotions and well being		Thinking

CSW Fosters Reflection	CSW fosters refection (in any form)		Thinking
CSW Names Emotionality of Work	CSW is explicit in discussing the emotional nature of social work		Thinking
CSW Names Risk	CSW is explicit in sharing information that explains the risk to a child	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW - Parent Perspective Mentalised	CSW encourages the mentalisation of parental perspective		Thinking
CSW Provides Solution	CSW provides a solution to attendees		Non-Thinking
CSW Scaffolds Participant Learning	CSW creates an environment to support participant learning	CSW Non-Directive	CSW Non-Directive
CSW Shares Practice Knowledge	CSW shares practice knowledge	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW Shares Learning	CSW shares learning	CSW Directive	CSW Directive
CSW - Systemic theory link	CSW makes a link to systemic theory		Systemic Theory Link
Defensive Participant	A participant appears to be acting in a defensive manner		Non-Thinking
Defensive Practice	The practice described appear intended to defend CSC		Non-Thinking
Dilemma Incongruent with Discussion	The dilemma chosen does not appear congruent with the previous case discussion		Non-Thinking
False Positive Effect	An attendee presents information in a positive manner despite it appearing negative	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Non-Thinking Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Family as Expert	The family are perceived as the experts in their situation and this is reflected in the case discussion	Systemic	Systemic Congruent

Family Linear Pathology	A participant describes a family as describing their situation in a linear manner which pathologises an individual		
Family Linear Solution	The family are described as presenting a linear solution to their problems		
Family Scripts	Family Scripts are identified	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
First Order Hypothesis	A hypothesis is first order in nature	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Fragmented Dialogue	An attendee's dialogue is fragmented	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Non-Thinking Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Freudian slip	Freudian slip	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Genogram as Intervention	A genogram is employed in work with a family	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
GRACES	A family's GRACES are discussed	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Lack of Systemic Understanding	An attendee's comments indicate a lack of understanding of systemic theory	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic
Laughter as a Coping Strategy	Laughter is employed as a coping strategy		Non-Thinking
Leap to Action	Actions are considered before hypothesising		Non-Thinking
Linear Hypothesis	A hypothesis is linear in nature	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic Non-Thinking
Logical Connotation Missing	Logical/positive connotation for behaviour presented as negative is not explored	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic
Logical Connotation	Logical connotation applied	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Missing Participant Reflexivity	Missing participant reflexivity		Non-Thinking

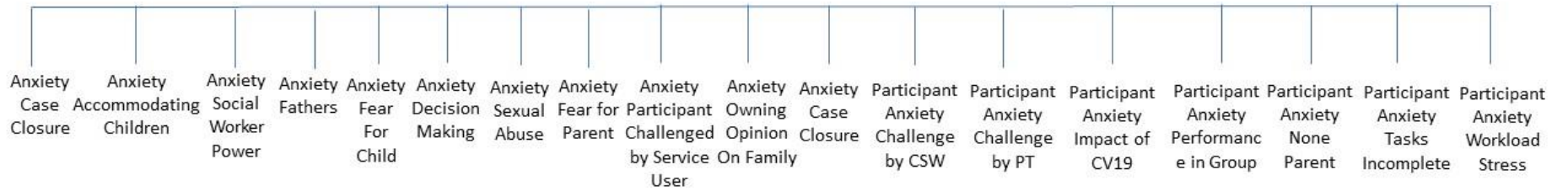|			
Omniscience	Behaviours indicative of Bion's notion of Omniscience are displayed	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Non-Thinking Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
Overly Positive Hypothesis	A hypothesis appears overly positive in light of the information shared		Non-Thinking
Participant Anxiety – Challenge by CSW	Participant indicates anxiety having been challenged by CSW	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety UM Generated Anxiety
Participant Anxiety – Challenge by PT	Participant indicates anxiety having been challenged by PT	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety UM Generated Anxiety
Participant Anxiety – Impact of CV19	Participant indicates anxiety as a result of the impact of CV19	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Participant Anxiety – None parent	Participant expresses anxiety due to not being a parent	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Participant Anxiety – Performance in group	Participant displays anxiety based on having to perform in the group	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety UM Generated Anxiety
Participant Anxiety – Tasks incomplete	Participant displays anxiety based on appearing to have not complete work allocated to them	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety
Participant Anxiety - workload stress	Participant displays anxiety based on workload stress	Apparent Causes of Anxiety	Apparent Causes of Anxiety

Participant Challenges CSW	Participant challenges CSW		
Participant Challenges participant	Participant challenges participant		
Participant Denies Emotions	Participant denies the emotions they or others are feeling		Non-Thinking
Participant Encourages Systemic Actions	Participant ensures systemic actions		Systemic Theory Link
Participant Fosters Emotional Containment	Participant is proactive in creating a space in the meeting to discuss emotions and well being		Thinking
Participant Reflection	A participant demonstrates refection		Thinking
Participant Linear Pathology	A participant describes a family's situation in a linear manner which pathologises an individual	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic Non-Thinking
Participant Linear Perspective	A participant describes a family's situation in a linear manner	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic Non-Thinking
Participant Names Emotionality of Work	A participant is explicit in discussing the emotional nature of social work		Thinking
Participant Parent Perspective Mentalised	CSW encourages the mentalisation od parental perspective		Thinking
Participant Risk Minimisation	A participant appears to minimise the risks when discussing their work		Non-Thinking
Participant Systemic Theory Link	Participant makes a link to systemic theory		Systemic Theory Link

Problems Embedded in Family History	Problems are described as being embedded in family history	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Problems Framed Relationally	The problems faced by a family are situated in relationships	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Projection	Projection appears employed by an attendee	Displays of and Responses to Anxiety	Non-Thinking Displays of and Responses to Anxiety
PT Acknowledgement of Emotion	PT acknowledges the emotions implicit in the Unit's work		Thinking
PT Fosters Reflection	PT encourages attendees to reflect upon their work		Thinking
Racism	An attendee describes a family as experiencing racism		
Relational Reflexivity	The systemic idea of relational reflexivity is employed	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Researcher anxiety	The researcher experiences anxiety		
Safe Uncertainty	The systemic idea of safe uncertainty is employed	Systemic	Systemic Congruent Thinking
Second Order Hypothesis	An attendee situates themselves or another attendee in a hypothesis	Systemic	Advanced Hypotheses Systemic Congruent Thinking
Second Order Position	An attendee situates themselves in the family's issues that they are discussing	Systemic	Systemic Congruent Thinking
Structural Family Therapy	Ideas from Structural family therapy are shared	Systemic	Systemic Congruent
Technical Rational Focus	Focus on technical rational focus of the Children's Social Care's (CSC) role		Non-Thinking

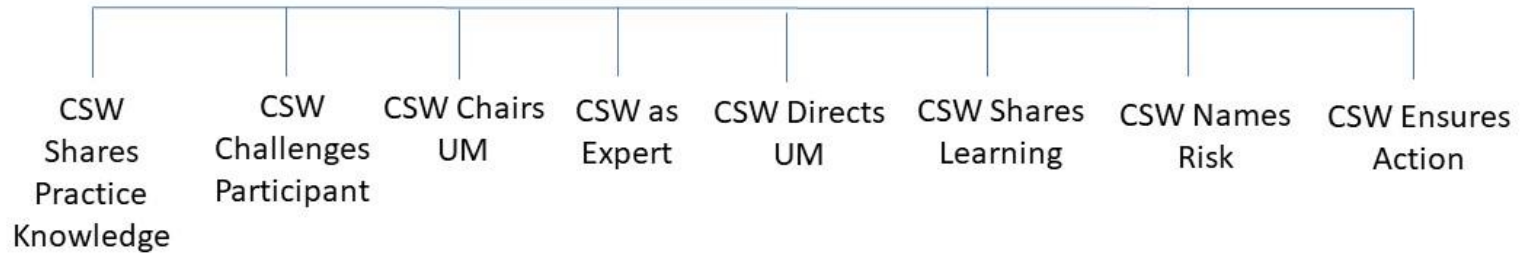|			
Vague Children's Social Care plan	CSC plan appears vague		Non-Thinking
Vague Intervention	Interventions discussed appear vague and nonspecific		Non-Thinking
Vague Systemic Actions	Systemic actions agreed during unit meeting are vague and not linked to hypotheses – ie 'genogram work'		Non – Systemic Non-Thinking
Wedded to Hypothesis	An attendee appears to have one fixed hypothesis as to what is happening in a family	Non-systemic	Non – Systemic

16.5 - Code Themes/NVIVO Sets

Apparent Cause of Anxiety

| Anxiety Case Closure | Anxiety Accommodating Children | Anxiety Social Worker Power | Anxiety Fathers | Anxiety Fear For Child | Anxiety Decision Making | Anxiety Sexual Abuse | Anxiety Fear for Parent | Anxiety Participant Challenged by Service User | Anxiety Owning Opinion On Family | Anxiety Case Closure | Participant Anxiety Challenge by CSW | Participant Anxiety Challenge by PT | Participant Anxiety Impact of CV19 | Participant Anxiety Performance in Group | Participant Anxiety None Parent | Participant Anxiety Tasks Incomplete | Participant Anxiety Workload Stress |

Displays of Anxiety and Responses to Anxiety

Avoidance | Avoidance Risks Not Explored | False Positive Effect | Fragmented Dialogue | Anxiety Anxious Tone in Voice | Anxiety Freudian Slip | Anxiety Voice Breaks | Omniscience | Anxiety Giggle | Projection

CSW Directive

CSW Shares Practice Knowledge

CSW Challenges Participant

CSW Chairs UM

CSW as Expert

CSW Directs UM

CSW Shares Learning

CSW Names Risk

CSW Ensures Action

Non-Systemic

| Wedded to Hypothesis | Logical Connotation Missing | Linear Hypothesis | Vague Systemic Actions | Participant Linear Pathology | Participant Linear Perspective | Lack of Systemic Understanding |

Systemic

Circular Hypothesis

Contextual Impact Acknowledged

CSC in Hypothesis

Family Scripts

1st Order Hypothesis

2nd Order Practice

2nd Order Hypothesis

Genogram as Intervention

GRACES

Relational Reflexivity

Logical Connotation

Safe Uncertainty

Family as Experts

Structural Family Therapy

Problems Embedded in Family History

Problems Framed Relationally

16.6 - 'Thinking' and 'Non-thinking' Code Sets

Non-thinking Code Set	*Thinking Code Set*
Omniscience	Second order position
Linear hypothesis	CSW acknowledgement of emotion
Projection	Second order position
Fragmented dialogue	CSW – parent perspective mentalised
CSW denies emotion	CSW fosters reflection
Laughter as coping strategy	CSW fostering containment
Defensive participant	Participant reflection
Defensive CSW	Second order dilemma
Technical rational focus	Participant fostering containment
Participant linear perspective	CSW names emotionality of work
Participant risk minimisation	Participant acknowledgement of emotion
Leap to action	Participant – parent perspective mentalised
Defensive practice	Safe uncertainty
Participant denies emotion	PT acknowledgement of emotion
CSW anxious to provide solution	PT fosters reflection
Actions appear incongruent with dilemma	Participant names emotionality of work
Vague intervention	Resistance to linear pull
False positive affect	
Missing participant reflection	
CSW provides solution	
Actions appear incongruent with hypothesis	
Dilemma incongruent with discussion	
Overly positive hypothesis	

16.7 – Ethical Approval Confirmation

My ref: Research Request

Your ref: Research Request

Date: 23 JULY 2020

To: Henry Smith,

This letter is to confirm that you may proceed with your research project in partnership with the ███████████████████████████████████████

Please liaise with the Service Manager, ███████████████, during the duration of your research.

Once you have completed your project, please provide a link to your thesis to share with the Safeguarding Service.

Regards,

████████████████

██████████████████████

Henry Smith

Frontline

Via email   **Date: 21/11/19**

Dear Henry

I am writing to confirm that we are happy as a Local Authority to engage with your research project, "What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?"

Yours sincerely

Ethics Approval - Message (HTML)

File   Message   Help   Tell me what you want to do

AB   Allan Brownrigg   Henry Smith; Lisa Hackett

Ethics Approval

09/07/2020

You replied to this message on 09/07/2020 11:11.

Hello Henry

Re your Professional doctorate research element entitled: What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?

I can confirm that you have met the standard for ethical approval and this has been agreed by the research ethics panel I chaired.

Good luck Henry.

Best wishes

Allan

Allan Brownrigg
Head of Region (North East)

FRONTLINE
CHANGING LIVES
M.07776455695

Hoults Yard, Walker Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 2HL
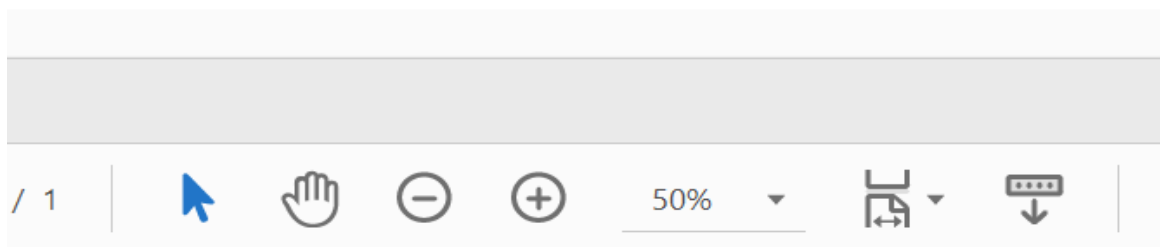
The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Henry Smith

By Email

9 January 2020

Dear Henry,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

<u>Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.</u>

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Best regards,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

16.8 - Study Information Form

Researcher: Henry Smith

Research Question: What happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting and can this model be of use to Children and Families Social Work?

Who am I and what am I wanting to research?

My name is Henry Smith, and I am a trained social worker, employee of the Frontline Organisation and Doctoral student studying at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am interested in studying group models of supervision in children and families social work.

As part of my Doctoral Research I want to study Frontline Meetings, this will entail me directly observing them by being present in them, making audio recordings of them and finally making transcriptions of the recordings. I am therefore asking your permission to observe you and record you while you undertake the Unit Meeting. I am not interested in assessing your performance as a student or CSW, nor am I interested in detailing the issues faced by the families you are working with. Rather I want to discover how cases are discussed in a Unit Meetings and how this differs from traditional models of supervision, how theory is applied and how group dynamics, including unconscious processes, impact on what occurs in Unit Meetings. Here are the questions I hope to answer:

6. How does what happens in UMs compare to what happens in children and families social work supervision?
7. How are families discussed, and how does this link to agreed actions?
8. How is theory integrated into practice?
9. How is reflective practice operationalised?
10. How do group dynamics, including unconscious processes, impact?

Why do I want to study Frontline Unit Meetings?

Supervision is widely regarded as a key determinant of the quality of social work practice, something that is outlined by numerous professional bodies and academic papers. Indeed, several reviews of the English CFSW have highlighted how poor supervision practice can leave children at risk of harm (Lamming 2009, Munro 2011).

Despite this apparent consensus regarding supervision's importance, disagreements persist about supervision's purpose and content. There appears an incongruence between models of 1-2-1 supervision espoused in the literature and the reality of practice, which the literature reports is often dominated by a culture of risk management and KPIs at the expense of reflective practice. The picture is further complicated by the dearth of literature that researches supervision practice directly, rather than analysing participants' perspectives through self-reporting methodologies, or proposing best practice models of supervision.

Research into group supervision models in Children and Families Social Work, such as models based on *Reclaim* or Work Discussion Groups (WDG), have however produced intriguing findings regarding the quality of supervision practice, particularly in relation to reflective practice. This raises the question of whether the under researched Frontline Unit Meeting may also have something to offer. By illuminating 'what happens in the Frontline Unit Meeting', this study therefore aims to address whether this model might have something to offer social work more broadly, by studying it directly.

How do I plan to study Frontline Unit Meetings?

In conducting the research, I will directly observe and audio record six Unit Meetings by being present in the meetings. These audio recordings will then be transcribed by myself, and analysed for themes. While observing the Unit Meetings I will attempt to monitor unconscious processes between participants, employing a model of psychoanalytic observation to analyse how this might impact on the discussions. In practice this will entail

me sitting in the UMs in a non-participatory observer capacity and monitoring these three areas:

- objective events happening
- emotional atmosphere
- researcher's inner experiences

Notes will then be compiled after each UM of my experiences, and these will form part of the data I analyse. Again, I am not interested so much in individual's responses here or the background of families, rather it is the group dynamic and its impact on supervision that I am interested in studying.

What ethical considerations have been taken in this study?

This research will not begin until it has been granted ethical approval from the respective ethical boards of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, Frontline and the Local Authorities participating.

Please be assured that all attempts will be taken to ensure that anonymity of all participants in this study, as well as the families discussed. All reports will therefore be anonymised, and a high level of care will be given to how the report is presented to ensure that families cannot be identified. Given the limited number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone might recognise a CSW or student despite anonymisation.

The same protocol Frontline use for recording direct observations of students' practice will be applied to this study. Recordings will be undertaken using an encrypted mobile telephone, and then immediately uploaded to a secure password protected server and deleted from the mobile telephone. As such it will be GDPR compliant.

And remember, your involvement in this study is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at anytime.

If you do have any concerns about the research, or my conduct please contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance at the Tavistock and Portman (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Any further questions?

If you do have any further questions do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

T/C - 07969911192   email   –
henry.smith@thefrontline.org.uk

16.9 – Participant Consent Forms (all UM attendees)

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

CONSENT FORM

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The lawful basis for this?

The lawful basis for recording the meeting is 'consent' which means I ask you to agree to the recording in advance but I must provide you with enough information so you can make a fully informed decision.

How will I keep the recordings secure?

The audio recordings are captured onto a mobile device provided by Frontline, all devices are encrypted (scrambled) and have a remote wipe feature. This means if the device was lost or stolen it will not be possible for an unauthorised person to listen to the recording, and I will ensure the device is wiped of all data. Additionally, I will follow a procedure to upload the recording within 24 hours to a secure area managed by Frontline. The recording is then deleted off the mobile device.

What are your rights under GDPR?

At any point while I am in possession of or processing your personal data, you have the following rights:

- Right of access – you have the right to request a copy of the recording providing it does not infringe the privacy of others
- Right to be forgotten – you can ask for the recording we hold about you to be erased
- Right to restriction of processing – you may have a right to stop the use of the recording
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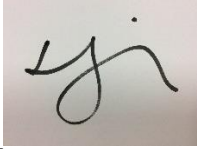
Consent checklist:

- I have read and understood the information above

- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I am happy with the answers

- I agree to the meeting being observed and audio recorded as part of Mr

Smith's research

- I agree that the audio recording and subsequent transcription of the Unit Meeting will be part of the case notes and as such can be made available to all parties if requested.

- I agree that Mr Smith will be present at the Unit Meeting as an observer only, for the purpose of research, and will not be invited or requested to comment on the meetings observed by any of the parties attending.

- I agree that this audio recording can be used for research purposes

- I appreciate that although the report generated in this study will be anonymised, given the limited number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone might recognise a CSW or student despite anonymisation.

- I understand that I can change my mind at any point without giving a reason, and can contact henry.smith@thefrontline.org,uk to withdraw my consent

- I understand that if I do have any concerns about the research, or Mr Smith's conduct I can contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance at the Tavistock and Portman (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

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████████████   25.03.2020
_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____Henry Smith _____25.03.2020

____ _____ _____
Name of Person taking consent   Signature   Date   The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
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__01/04/2020__ ███████████_____ _____ Name of
Participant   Date   Signature

_____Henry Smith _____1,4.2020

____ _____ _____

Name of Person taking consent   Signature   Date

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██████████   21/01/2020_____ _

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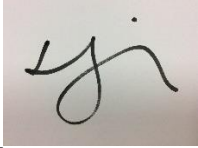
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01.04.2020 ███████_____   Name of Participant   Date
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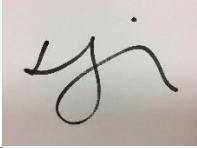House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF Tel 0303 123 1113.

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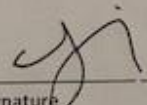-

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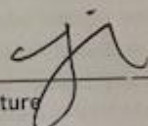
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