INTRODUCTION

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action"

Peter F. Drucker, (1909-2005)

The aim of this thesis is to explore the lived experience of reflective practice (RP) that is to describe and articulate it from the perspective of the trainee counselling psychologist and to explicate the meanings that it holds for them. In doing so it is hoped to develop understanding of the subject and elucidate some of the processes involved in its use and impact on learning and development.

My initial interest in this research began with my own experiences of RP as a trainee. I have been fortunate enough to work alongside supervisors that ensure reflective practice is a priority; frequent reflective discussions took place as I struggled to make sense of the complexities within therapeutic encounters. These discussions helped bring structure to my practice, guiding me through uncertainties and insecurities, providing a framework with which to view and guide the work. They appeared to me to be extremely skilled reflective practitioners. Contrastingly I have experienced environments that are more

positivist and medicalised in approach, conveying an 'expert' stance. This environment did not feel 'reflective' by comparison and my learning felt hindered. This is a position incongruent with how I now see my professional role, values and the relational stance of counselling psychology as a whole. Similarly at University, RP, with emphasis upon speaking and conversing in the first person and drawing on experience, appeared in juxtaposition to academic requirements. When I considered how this approach could be best supported, the process itself did not appear easily articulated. These experiences gave rise to questions about the role of RP and how one becomes a reflective practitioner alongside the influence of training within that. I also wondered about individual and organisational factors that supported reflective practice and the impact of specific training methods upon this.

It also seemed significant to me that very little of the specialist literature and research on RP has come from counselling psychology (CoP), especially with its emphasis on the importance of research and 'the reflective practitioner'. A sense of the disciplines views can be gleaned from its training regulations and guidelines, however there is little published information currently available on how it is understood and experienced, and in particular, from trainees themselves. As a research-practitioner I wanted to embark on a study that remained grounded in practice gaining rich, detailed accounts of personal experiences felt an appropriate way forward.

Reflection and RP are repeatedly referred to in the general education literature and have gained considerable significance in contemporary clinical practice becoming essential components of training and best practice for many professionals who work directly with people (Stedmon and Dallos, 2009; Argyris

and Schön, 1974; Epstein and Hundert, 2002; Moon, 2000). This may reflect some commonalities in beliefs and assumptions regarding the concept. This includes the following; initially, to maintain competence over practice lifetime, learning from experience is essential (Schön, 1983; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). Secondly, reflection provides an explicit approach to integration of development of professional identity and understanding of personal beliefs and values (Epstein, 1999). Thirdly, an active approach to learning that leads to understanding and connecting of new and existing knowledge and finally, all of this may underscore the growth of a professional who is self aware, and therefore able to engage in self-monitoring and self-regulation (Bandura, 1986).

However, RP is deeply personal but also prevalent and much talked about, it exists as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is embedded with social, cultural and historical elements. Despite being portrayed by the Division of Counselling Psychology as central to training and development, the literature remains complex, ambiguous and diverse with a lack of applied studies. Boud and Walker (1998) contend that RP is indicative of the requirement for students to act and think professionally as an essential aspect of learning through study, as opposed to students traditionally learning the theory before engagement with practice. Consequently a growing body of curricula interventions have emerged within education across a variety of professions (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009). However, the evidence to support innovations remains theoretical and it is unclear which approaches may have efficacy or impact (Andrews, 2005).

Regardless of the prevalence of RP, several models, and its seemingly educational importance, there is an apparent lack of guidance to aid educators to facilitate reflective ability in their students (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod,

2009). Further the literature is spread across several fields, study designs, study groups making common terminology and understanding RP complex and challenging (Clarke, 2006). Significantly, the process of RP has not been well studied within the discipline of psychology (Bennett-Levy, 2003), and several scholars have highlighted the need for further exploration of reflection (Hoshmand and Polkinghorne, 1992).

RP requires practitioners to achieve greater self-awareness to identify the experiences and associated assumptions underlying their practice (Imel, 1992). It has been suggested, important as methods may be, the most beneficial impact in the therapeutic endeavour is insight into what is happening inside us as it occurs and the more familiar we become with ourselves, the more assured our therapy becomes (Horvath and Symonds, 1991). Researching experience and understanding of RP and its impact on development will illuminate trainees' experiences and address some of the identified gaps thereby enhancing the body of literature. If RP is essential to CoP's development and critical to ensure provision of adequate therapeutic services, it is imperative that the subjective experience of RP and its impact at an individual level are understood and informed by psychological research.

The focus of this thesis will be RP. The approach employed will be qualitative, and in particular the method of analysis will be IPA. This is a psychological method that aims to articulate and learn from the individuals' personal view of the topic being explored. Significantly, it is appropriate for the study of dynamic, multi-dimensional phenomenon where the individual inter-relates with social and cultural processes with the meaning inherent in the experience as crucial.

While the literature from multiple fields attempts to refine the concept have been advantageous from a theoretical perspective (Ruth-Sahd, 2003), little is known about the counselling trainees' perception and practice of it and the effectiveness of educators teaching of it (Schmidt and Adkins, 2012). The call for clarity in the field, specifically qualitative understandings of the reflective process, have been suggested (Guiffrida *et al*., 2007). Further, using alternative methods and designs may be useful in augmenting the knowledge base regarding RP (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). While qualitative methodologies have been utilised more so than quantitative, IPA specifically has not been employed. Given the complexity of the concept and the need to develop a body of knowledge that accord's with trainee understanding through their personal voices, such exploration is considered most appropriately met through IPA.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Overview: What is reflection and RP?

The concept of reflection as a method for critically analysing practice and enhancing self-awareness first emerged from the education literature and has since become fundamental for ensuring that psychology professionals are prepared to deal with the complexity, uncertainty and challenges faced within professional practice settings (Yip, 2006b; Ruch, 2007). The use of both reflection and RP is well documented in education, nursing and social care (York-Barr, Sommers, and Ghere, 2006; Papell and Skolnik, 1992; Loughran, 1996; Argyris and Scion, 1974; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985; Moon, 2000; Zubizarreta, 2009; Schön, 1983, 1987). However, the use of RP within the field of counselling psychology is less well researched, indicated by the dearth of studies on this topic (Griffith and Frieden, 2000; Hoshmand and Polkinghorne, 1992; Wong-Wiley, 2007).

Within the literature, the process of trainee development has culminated in numerous developmental stage models, which suggest the importance of the supervisory relationship as crucial to trainee growth and development (Griffith and Frieden, 2000; Stoltenberg and Delworth, 1987). However, historically these models have not considered how trainees move through the stages of development (Holloway, 1987). More recently, there has been an increasing focus on the role of reflection in an attempt to clarify the process of trainee development. Studies have demonstrated that engaging in RP has many benefits that facilitate the therapist's professional growth throughout their career (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 1993). These benefits include increased self-

acceptance and professional satisfaction, and reduced burn out (Schön, 1983; Hurley, 1997; Alacron and Lyons, 2011). As a result, it is argued in the current literature that reflection is essential to therapist development (Papell and Skolnik, 1992; Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992; Neufeldt, Karno, and Nelson, 1996).

Despite attempts at integration of the concept of reflection, there remains a lack of agreement in the literature about what reflection is (Cropley, 2009; Ixer, 1999). This challenge concerns the very nature of RP and raises the issue of how one can arrive at a clear understanding of such an elusive, personal, and variable concept.

In a study that explores the lived experience of RP and its impact upon learning and development, it seems fitting to consider concepts of reflection and their contribution to learning before moving on to reflection in practice itself. The majority of reflection theories draw upon Dewey (1933) and Habermas (1971), possibly two of the most influential reflection theorists (Morrison, 1995, 1996). Their ideas have been applied across a wide range of professional fields, leading to a large body of research and theory centred on the interrelated areas of experiential learning, RP and the reflective practitioner (Papell and Skolnik, 1992; Moon, 1999; Schön, 1983, 1987).

Since this study is situated in psychology and education, the review of the literature will consider both fields. A summary of historical philosophical developments and proponents associated with theories of reflection will be presented first. This discussion will be further developed by considering the

role of reflection in practice before concluding with a more focused consideration of the application of RP within counselling psychology.

1.1.1 Development of a theory of reflection: Contribution of Dewey

The understanding of the importance of reflection to the learning process is founded upon the early theory of Dewey (1933), and as such, is directly related to the application of reflective practice to counselling psychology education. Dewey (1933) associated reflection with a continuous process of thinking as applied to learning. He suggested that reflection stemmed from doubt, hesitation or perplexity resulting from experience. This theory was a direct rejection of positivist teaching methods that emphasise outcomes, memorisation, and postulates the teacher as omnipotent. Instead, Dewey (1933) argued that human experience is central to reflection, and reflection is in turn imperative to learning, development and personal growth. Thus, Dewey (1933) proposed an alternative system of education that would make growth a conscious process (Brockbank and McGill, 1998).

Dewey's (1933) suggested approach included five phases that spanned from a 'pre-reflective' phase to an "active experimentation" phase (p. 107), where the original idea would be put to the test by gathered evidence. Dewey (1933) posited that effective learning and authentic reflection could occur when the individual had to deal with material that was perplexing, what he calls "a felt difficulty" (p.3). This principle is of particular relevance to counselling psychology, specifically as it relates to the issue of complexity in practice. The capacity for practitioners in the counselling psychology field to effectively engage in this reflective process requires a range of specific skills, identified by

Dewey (1933), including keen observation, logical reasoning and analysis. In this way, Dewey (1933) also emphasised that an attitude of open mindedness was a necessary condition of reflective learning, suggesting that one needed to develop a "habit of thinking in a reflective way" (1933, p. 33).

Despite its relevance to the practice of counselling psychology, this understanding of reflective thinking as an attitudinal notion that can be learnt and altered with time has received little attention in more recent literature. Furthermore, Dewey (1933) asserted that in practice, learners should be provided with real situations and problems in order to facilitate reflection and real learning, leading to change. Consequently, RP as a learned behaviour is one of the considerations of this study. This research strives through the use of an inductive, data-driven method, to articulate whether such issues are upheld when emphasise is at the individual level, thereby potentially illustrating the processes involved.

Despite Dewey's (1933) valuable contribution of new ways of understanding and facilitating the learning process through reflection, his work has been criticised for its failure to recognise the role of emotion within the reflective process (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). Later theorists have taken up this perceived gap in Dewey's theory, expanding upon his notion of reflective thinking to consider the affective role within this process. As such, it is important to recognise that, in spite of perceived shortcomings, Dewey's early work has since become the foundation for a large body of scholarship put forth by other theorists. One of the theorists whose work has been most closely associated with Dewey's (1933) theory is Habermas (1971; 1974), a philosopher whose theory established a scholarly dialogue with Dewey (1933)

furthering the exploration of the role of reflection in the process of knowledge development. An examination of Habermas' (1971; 1974) contribution to the understanding of reflective thinking follows in the next section.

1.1.2 Contribution of Jürgen Habermas (1971)

Habermas' (1971) understanding of reflection moved beyond Dewey's (1933) conceptualisation of reflective thinking as critical to the learning process to explore the effect that reflection could have in an individual's life. Habermas (1971) identified three separate domains of knowing and learning; the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. Of direct relevance to this study is the connection that Habermas (1971) posited between reflection and emancipation. Viewing reflection as a tool used in the development of particular forms of knowledge, Habermas (1971) saw critical reflection as a form of emancipation. While Dewey's theoretical interest lay in the learning process itself, Habermas (1971) was interested in the way social discourse shapes and constrains the expectations that individuals have about their lives, he was interested in the nature of knowledge and its acquisition. Reflection was seen as one of the processes that underscored the generation of this knowledge.

According to his theory, prevailing ideologies acted as powerful agents of social control, limiting the roles to which certain social classes would aspire (Habermas, 1971). Critical tools such as reflection, utilised to understand the self within the human context, can result in self-understanding and potential transformation. While the specific element of social class is not of particular relevance to this study, the notion of reflection as a freeing process adds weight to the powerful role that reflective thinking can have in one's understanding of their individual and professional role in society. Specifically within the sphere of

counselling psychology, incorporating reflection into one's practice adds an element of deeper awareness that can impact the practitioner and clients alike.

The work of other theorists who followed in the footsteps of Dewey (1933) and Habermas (1971, 1974) has expanded on the understanding of the effect that reflection can have in the learning process, and specifically the relationship between reflection and experience. These notions are discussed in detail below.

1.1.3 Experiential learning

Dewey (1933) and Habermas' (1971) progressive philosophies have influenced the theories and models of learning that aim to explicate elements of the learning process primarily in the areas of training and development in higher education. These models identify reflection as an important component of this process. An example of this can be seen in the concept of experiential learning, an established approach in adult education theory (Miettinen, 2000). One of the first theorists to introduce this concept was Kolb (1984). As other scholars have further corroborated since the foundational work of Kolb (1984), either deliberate or undeliberate reflection is often involved during the experiential process (Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985; Moon, 2004; Miettinen, 2000). Kolb (1984) acknowledges the central role of experience in his definition of learning as a process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). The importance of reflection based on experience is a critical aspect of the learning process that is specifically relevant to counselling psychologists' training. Reflection may be more likely to successfully further a practitioner's knowledge and understanding of his or her role if it is based on experience – i.e. on the concrete experience of the self and counselling a client.

Kolb's (1984) cycle includes four stages: 'concrete experience,' 'reflective observation', 'abstract conceptualisation' and 'active experimentation.' The point of entry is 'concrete experience,' which is the grounding for observation and reflection (Kolb and Fry, 1975), this is next assimilated into a 'theory'. New hypotheses can be deduced acting as a guide to create new experiences for further processing within the cycle. If learning has occurred, a new experience on which to reflect and conceptualise is created in each cycle (e.g., a therapist's enhanced understanding of their client). While the learner may enter the cycle at any stage, the sequence itself must be followed in the order outlined above.

While Kolb's theory of experiential learning is useful for understanding how to encourage reflection in learners, the sequential aspect of stages is potentially problematic. In fact, Dewey (1933) suggested a number of processes could occur simultaneously during reflection. Therefore, Dewey (1933) coincides with the conclusions of other scholars that the rigidity of Kolb's cycle (1984) is too simplistic for unquestioning use in therapist training (Jarvis, 1992; Moon, 2004). One issue of particular concern is Kolb's (1984) lack of consideration of the transfer of learning from one context to another where there are common characteristics (Atherton, 2002).

Given the complex and unpredictable nature of the therapeutic endeavour, the phases outlined by Kolb (1984) of action, reflection, conceptualisation and learning are unlikely to present themselves in neatly defined stages. Moreover, despite the assumed natural connection between reflection and learning, it has been argued that the cognitive assumptions that underlie such models obscure the idea that it is impossible to step outside social experience for reflection

since one is always within the experience itself (Michelson, 1996). Thus cyclical models that divide experience and reflection are difficult to sustain as basic conceptualisations of learning (Seaman, 2008).

Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of explanation of and attention to the details surrounding the process of reflection in Kolb's (1984) work (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985; Moon, 1999). While Kolb (1984) identified action and learning as the main elements of experiential learning, many theorists argue that the process is much more nuanced. Rogers (1996), for example, suggests that learning encompasses more elements than Kolb (1984) contends, such as "goals, purposes, intentions, choice and decision-making" (p. 108).

Desmond and Jowitt (2012), among other theorists, regard Kolb's (1984) model as perpetuating the individualistic paradigm by ignoring more holistic, interpersonal modes of knowledge acquisition. Another study to challenge this overly cognitive and individualistic conception of experiential learning and reflection was performed by Creese (2008) using linguistic ethnographic methodology. Creese (2008) highlighted the profoundly social nature of routine experiential practices, finding the separation of reflection and experience into two distinct phases in the learning cycle problematic. Consequently, the work of Desmond and Jowitt (2012) and Creese (2008) suggests experiential learning as a more fluid and co-constructed, relational and holistic process, a framework that is more representative of the counselling psychology training process.

Reflection and RP are frequently referred to in literature across the fields of philosophy, education, nursing, and social work, and key theorists within these spheres have been discussed thus far. From early explanations (Dewey, 1933;

Habermas, 1971), diverse definitions of reflection have emerged, leading to the development of multiple, varied models, including that of Kolb (1984) among others. Despite the criticism that Kolb's (1984) work has received, his theory of experiential learning remains a beneficial descriptive model of the adult learning process, with many elements that are applicable to the counselling psychologist (Atherton, 2002). In spite of the fact that RP is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that a number of useful models exist, there remains a lack of guidance in the literature to assist practitioners in understanding and developing their reflective practice. Other models that attempt to facilitate additional guidance to reflective practitioners include the reflective judgment model, discussed in the next section.

1.1.4 Reflection in stages: The reflective judgment model

Researchers' understanding of RP becomes more problematic when one considers whether reflection precedes or completes the thinking process, and how this should be interpreted by practitioners. For example, King and Kitchener's (1994) Reflective Judgment Model (RJM) describes a complex developmental reasoning process. The researchers conducted a longitudinal study of students' personal experiences of resolving unstructured problems (King and Kitchener, 1994). Consequently they discovered that postgraduates were more able to demonstrate reflective judgement in comparison with those who had studied at undergraduate level. The RJM suggests that the full capacity of reflection only comes in the final phase of a developmental process, and thus cannot be fully achieved in earlier stages of knowledge acquisition and learning.

The RJM is a stage-based model, the pre-reflective, quasi-reflective, and reflective stages are each characterised by an increasingly complex and effective form of justification. At the most advanced stage, the individual is able to make reflective judgments and work with uncertain knowledge, recognizing that several possible solutions to a given situation exist and that expert practitioners may have competing views. King and Kitchener (1994) also found that age and educational levels impacted how students engaged with the learning process in the RJM. Challenging King and Kitchener's (1994) one-dimensional approach to understanding the role of reflection in the developmental process, Moon (1999) noted that the researchers' focus on one variable to measure epistemological cognition ignored the involvement of other variables that may affect this representation.

Moon's (1999) findings illustrate this need for differentiation between professional spheres and life stages, asserting that individuals' views and approaches to RP can and should vary according to their different academic levels. Other theorists present less rigid frameworks through which to understand at what point reflection comes into play within this process. Mezirow (1981), for example, described a process, which includes different levels of reflection on experience where surface levels are more descriptive and less analytical than deeper levels, which are more difficult to attain.

Moon (1999) in turn, raised concerns regarding the difficulty of separating the process of learning from the representation of that learning. She suggested that this difficulty is common to many reflection and learning studies. Moon's (1999) view suggests the importance of the interpersonal element in reflection,

encouraging individuals to take part in reflective conversations with others to ensure that there is a shared understanding.

Focusing on the same population for their research, Baxter Magolda (1992) used semi-structured interviews to conduct longitudinal studies with college students. The findings support the sequential development of reflective judgement however the students did not appear to progress systematically through stages, but rather to shift between them. The suggested fluidity of this process indicated by Baxter Magolda (1992) agrees with the findings of Desmond and Jowitt (2012) and Creese (2008), reinforcing the understanding of learning as a relational and holistic process. Baxter Magolda's (1992) research consequently challenges the rigidity of the sequentially ordered phases proposed by King and Kitchener (1994) and Kolb (1984). Moreover, this theory appears to support the more nuanced understanding of learning advocated by Moon (1999) that called for acknowledgement of the interrelation of the process and representation of learning, as well as the importance of the interpersonal element in RP.

Overall, these studies suggest that the highest level of reflective ability (i.e., managing unstructured knowledge), cannot be attained by individuals if they are unable to achieve all the stages. Regardless of the order of learning stages or the level of fluidity between them, the aforementioned researchers coincide over the fact that one's reflective ability improves over the course of the learning process (King and Kitchener, 1994; Moon, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1992). Similar to experiential learning as theorised by Kolb (1984), the theory surrounding RJM also sees an individual's developmental growth through a series of stages, advancement through which facilitates greater reflective

capacity (King and Kitchener, 1994). Therefore, differences in the acquisition of knowledge will impact the way an individual learns from an experience.

As a learner becomes more sophisticated in the way that knowledge is conceived, he/she also becomes more flexible in his/her ability to work with that knowledge, and gains an awareness of how others use said knowledge. Consequently, by assessing the supporting evidence, an advanced learner is able to see that issues can be viewed from different frames of reference. Moreover, through progression, the learner becomes more meta-cognitive, enabling them to better understands their own processes of learning. Moon (2005) identified a direct connection in the relationship of meta-cognition with both reflection and critical thinking. Thus this critical thinking aspect enables individuals at an advanced developmental stage to more easily resolve issues of conflict.

It is therefore clear that gaining meta-cognition equips learners with more strategies to address situations that arise in professional practice (Moon, 2005). This particularly pertains to counselling psychology. If a therapist knows what triggers his/her personal distress in client work, for example, they can more easily identify ways to manage the distress. Thus, for counselling psychology trainees, as there is increased knowledge acquisition and advancement through developmental stages—whether progressing forward or shifting horizontally— the capacity for reflection increases. As will be discussed in later chapters, cultivating RP amongst this population is thus imperative in all stages of the training program.

1.1.5 Summary

Stage-based, or sequential approaches, have received much criticism from scholars, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, other theorists have continued to find value in sequential models, while still striving to distance themselves from the mechanistic aspects of Kolb's earlier approach. For example, both Cowan (1988) and Boud and Walker (1985) focused on the processes of reflection and, while drawing from certain aspects of Kolb's (1984) model, refrain from its more rigid, mechanistic aspects, and emphasize the important role played by emotion in this process.

Despite the diversity in methodology, approach, study population, and field, research by Baxter Magolda (1992), Dewey (1910, 1933), Cowan (1998), King and Kitchener (1994), and Moon (2005), illustrate commonality. The work of these theorists suggests that reflective and cognitive activity can function on a range of levels according to how knowledge is generated, developed and processed. Furthermore, the capacity to reflect is viewed as developmental and progressive in nature, which is evidenced by a progression from working with concrete basic knowledge to working with uncertain knowledge. These studies suggest that reflective skills, in part, can be learned through a range of strategies and techniques and then applied to specific situations (Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993).

Regardless, there still exists much confusion and debate regarding RP. Many view stage-based models as formulaic or mechanistic due to their involvement of stages or levels, calling for theoretical approaches that better represent the fluidity and diversity associated with RP (Taylor, 2006; Bolton, 2005; Clegg,

2002). Bolton (2005) contends that RP is a "state of mind, an attitude, an approach and therefore elusive to curriculum planners" (p. 3). Many emphasise the central role played by emotions in the process of reflection (Clegg, 2002). Some even assert that depicting RP in a reductionist way disallows its recognition as RP (Boud 2001). Others see these sequential formulas as providing order and providing valuable frameworks to simplify complex processes.

Current definitions and models encompass broad and varied elements, and RP is acknowledged as a multi dimensional phenomenon involving many processes. As shown, RP has permeated the literature but the meaning has become more disparate (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). This difficulty has been compounded because RP is understood and defined according to researchers own lenses, and experiences (Ruth-Sahd, 2003) This would suggest the benefits of researching context specific views of trainees using an Interpretive Phenomenological approach.

1.2 Reflective Practice

The diverse understandings of reflection have laid the foundation for the emergence of RP. In particular, the work of Schön (1983, 1987) drew from earlier theories of reflection to construct the specific approach of reflective practice. Schön's work (1983, 1987), considers the idea of reflection within the area of professional practice, and his theory has been taken up by various professional and higher education disciplines, such as the health professions (Atkins and Murphy, 1993; Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009), teaching (Hatton and Smith, 1995, Loughran, 1996, 2000, 2006), higher education (Moon, 2000; Rogers, 2001; York-Barr, Sommers, and Ghere, 2006;

Zubizarreta, 2009), and social sciences (Redmond, 2006; Papell and Skolnik, 1992). These reviews have aimed to examine and evaluate RP and its utility, and explore any implications for educational practice and research. Whilst the literature suggests that RP is advantageous (Boud and Knights, 1994), some contend that it is shrouded in confusion and inconsistency (Cropley, 2009; Ixer, 1999; Loughran, 2002). Practical aspects remain under-researched and there remains a lack of clarity regarding the implications of using RP. It is still relatively unknown how different practice and organisational contexts influence a practitioner's ability to practice reflectively (Wilson, 2013). This is particularly problematic within the context of counselling psychology given the emphasis placed upon trainees becoming reflective practitioners.

Complexities inherent in clinical practice require high levels of thinking and reflection and this aspect has been linked to intelligent practice in teaching, reflective reasoning (King and Kitchener, 1994), contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and critical thinking (Moon, 2005). RP can be conceived as a collection of strategies used as a means to encourage professional growth and development (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003). The concept of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) has continued to receive acclaim because of its emphasis upon learning from practice. Since the increasing focus on RP for professional education, demonstrating how the understanding and applications of RP have contributed to trainee counselling psychologists' learning experience is imperative.

1.2.1 Reflective practice and counselling psychology

The work of Schön (1983, 1987) has particular relevance within the field of counselling psychology as it explores the way in which professionals carry out

their practice. Schön (1983) firmly rejects the notion of associating a formula with RP as previously described. His contention that RP is an alternative to technical rationality arguably contradicts literature, which appears to provide more mechanistic, formulaic approaches (Brown and Rutter, 2006; Taylor, 2006), suggesting instead that competent practitioners developed a tacit 'knowing-in-action.' Schön (1983) observed that practitioners had the ability to reflect on this intuitive knowing during the action, thus redirecting practice mid-flow. This concept was termed reflection-in-action as opposed to reflection-on-action, a retrospective account of events.

Schön placed emphasis on 'professional artistry,' refuting a positivist paradigm demanding that expertise be simply applied to practice (Schön, 1987), instead acknowledging that practice was often "complex, messy and unpredictable and not amenable to technical solutions" (1983, p. 42). He described engagement in reflection-in-action as a response to unexpected occurrences that challenge the knowing-in-action which leads the practitioner to alternative responses.

With reference to counselling psychology, Schön's (1983; 1987) critique of 'technical rationality' is seen as embedded within evidence-based practice, which suggests that research will provide definitive answers regarding interventions and treatments most appropriate for clients presenting related symptoms. Clinical practice would thus be reduced to applying established techniques in a rational way according to identified problems. Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) encouraged professionals to take a less 'expert' stance with their clients through a reflective approach which would enable them to be more responsive to their clients' needs. Schön argued that this 'expert' stance dependent upon scientific research should be replaced with a more open,

inclusive position that devolved power back to the client, thus encouraging authentic relationships where the individual contributed to a successful outcome.

These issues are particularly pertinent to the complexity and uniqueness of clinical practice. Some clients' presentation of co-morbidity is exemplary of such complexity. Stedmon and Dallos (2009) suggest that RP is linked with the concept of formulation whereby the client's issue is deconstructed and critically appraised to consider alternative explanations. Schön (1983; 1987) described three 'zones of indeterminate practice' that represented different types of challenges therapists frequently encountered, including 'the unique', 'the unexpected' and 'value conflicts.' Professional challenges including 'indeterminate zones' (Schön, 1983, 1987), and clients' presentation of complex clinical issues and co-morbidity (Stedmon and Dallos, 2009), were characterised by Schön (1987) as the "swampy lowland" (p. 3). These challenging situations, Schön argued, are discovered through experience rather than theoretical knowledge. Thus, the work of Stedmon and Dallos (2009) and Schön (1983, 1987) demonstrate the clear discrepancy that exists between theory and practice.

Arguably, the lived experience of therapists translates into a growing self-awareness within their professional role. The relationship between RP and self-awareness is prevalent in counselling psychology literature as both therapists' use of self and their interpersonal skills are viewed as paramount to the process of therapy (Lambert and Barley, 2001; Horvarth and Symonds, 1991). It is therefore vital that counselling psychologists take the initiative to enhance their levels of self-awareness on an ongoing basis. Hence personal development

and personal therapy are a central focus of training (Woolfe, 2006). Specific accounts of practitioners' reflection-on-practice (Schön, 1983) have identified reflection to be an important process in exploring the 'self' and revealing more effective ways of "being."

Several studies in the field of family therapy have demonstrated the implications of self-reflection on professional training (Lutz and Irizarry, 2009; Aponte, 2000). This training involved a way of conducting oneself as a therapist, including one's awareness of personal experiences and feelings, and how these might interact with clients. The findings reported that the trainees experienced a paradigm shift where personal issues were viewed as less of an impediment, but rather as a means to facilitate more effective use of 'self' with clients. This relates to the development of meta-cognition and the link between reflection and critical thinking identified by Moon (2005), as was discussed in a previous section. The trainees reported that such rigorous exploration of self profoundly impacted their therapeutic orientation, providing an accountability to stay connected with the self and their clients (Lutz and Irizarry, 2009). The study thus demonstrated the valuable nature of RP in counselling psychology training.

While the research and conceptualisations mentioned in this section afford a measure of understanding the notions of reflection and RP, they offer incomplete understandings of the processes involved and the methods used to develop RP and it's impact. Despite the importance of RP within counselling psychology, it continues to be inadequately understood and remains a conceptual and empirical 'blind-spot' within the field (Bennett-Levy, 2003, p. 16). Much remains that defies understanding of RP and a phenomenological approach could be usefully employed to explore more fully the gaps that prevail.

1.2.2 RP as personal and professional development

RP is demonstrated in the literature and viewed by some as the corner stone of development for counselors (Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie, 2010; Hubbs and Brand, 2005; Nelson and Neufeldt, 1998; Griffith and Frieden, 2000). This is because the capacity to understand and conceptualise the complexity of client issues is linked with counsellor competence (Holloway and Wampold 1986). Development from novices to experienced practitioners has been considered within the literature (Hoshmand and Polkinghorne, 1992; Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992a, 1992b; Griffith and Frieden, 2000; Neufeldt, Inverson and Juntunen 1995; Bennett and Saks, 2006). These models have been influenced by both psychological developmental theories, and those relating to the development of expertise (Piaget, 1981; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). The main suggestion of this work is that clinical competence is achieved through reflecting on client work, thus leading to reflection-in-action alongside an element of structure that aids effective reflective processing.

Much of the literature on this topic is purely academic, however, a study carried out by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992a, 1992b) is a notable exception. The researchers conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of 100 therapists ranging from students to professionals with 25 years of experience. The resulting data was analysed in three ways to produce a stage model, a theme formulation and a professional model of development and stagnation (Ronnestad and Skovholt, 2003). The study found that counsellor/therapist development is a complex process that necessitates continuous reflection. Similar to the client-counsellor relationship's strong impact on treatment outcomes (Horvarth and Symonds, 1991) they found a relationship between how therapists address difficulties

within the therapeutic relationship and experiences of professional growth or stagnation. When trainees experience a perplexing situation, there is an imbalance between prior cognitions and the experience, which necessitates a change in thinking. This occurs by refining prior cognitions and a new stage of development is attained (Neufeldt, Inverson, and Juntunen 1995).

Continuous professional reflection is believed to involve three essential elements—ongoing professional and personal experience, an open and supportive context, and sufficient time to reflect on experiences both collectively and individually. Professional development is acquired through the integration of the professional and personal self. Furthermore, there is a risk of stagnation leading to burnout in the absence of continuous professional development (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992a; Ronnestad and Skovholt, 1993). This risk suggests that in order to maintain an engaged and fulfilling professional experience, a practitioner's involvement in a process of consistent self-awareness and reflection linked with personal and professional development is key. Significantly, a later study (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 2001) highlighted the significance of processing and reflecting experiences in all areas of life, in order to grow professionally. The study suggested that this could occur individually, in a dyad or in a group context (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 2001). Reflection is required at all stages of the developmental process, but appears even more critical at sophisticated levels of learning when there is a risk of stagnation and subsequent burnout. These studies demonstrate the important role that RP should play in the training of counselling psychologists, as is discussed.

The suggestion that reflection was a central component to professional development coincides with the interests of this present study. Noteworthy, is the lack of attention given to personal development in Skovholt and Ronnestad's (1992b, 2001) research, which is another area that is addressed in this study. A more idiographic approach to the study of RP may privilege descriptions and interpretations of personal meanings and articulate processes by which participants make sense of this development thereby contributing to the existing studies.

1.2.3 Facilitating RP in training: methods and tool for reflection

Despite the lack of clarity regarding the meaning of RP, a significant body of literature has investigated how it can enhance learning. Research has advocated structured reflection through various strategies in higher education (Loughran, 2002; York-Barr, Sommers and Ghere, 2006). This is particularly relevant to counselling psychology trainees in which there is an expectation that they show evidence of RP throughout their training. Strategies to utilise and enhance RP are likely to be embedded within trainee's experiences and understandings of RP and therefore pertain to this study.

Griffith and Friedman (2000) proposed four strategies for facilitating reflective thinking, including journal writing, Socratic questioning, interpersonal process recall, and reflecting teams. Regarding journal writing, Griffith and Friedman (2000) found that students frequently moved from simple descriptions of experiences to greater complexity of understanding within those experiences, thus demonstrating the productivity of reflective thinking. In a 13-step cultural auditing model constructed by Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie (2010), reflective

processes were evaluated for improving multicultural elements of counselling. The steps denote questions to direct RP mindful of cultural aspects.

Reflective practice groups (RPGs), in particular, are a main method for training competent reflective practitioners (Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby 2010). Whilst RPGs have been known by other names with constituent aspects varying across training courses (Horner, Youngson and Hughes 2009), they are perhaps feasible options for pursuing compulsory personal therapy (Lennie, 2007). However, there is a lack of research on the process or outcomes of experiential groups for facilitating reflective learning (Munich, 1993; Platzer, Blake and Snelling 1997). However, RPGs afford participants the opportunity to learn about and experience group dynamics, which facilitates reflection-on-action, reflection of their impact on others, and reflection about self.

Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby (2010) investigated the personal and professional impacts of RPGs on clinical psychology trainees using an analytic survey design. The majority of participants found the RPGs to be valuable for personal and professional development. However, just under half of trainees surveyed reported distress, with one-sixth viewing the challenges negatively. Knight, Sperlinger and Maltby (2010) concluded that given the ethical issues raised by the mandatory nature of RPG, group sizes should be carefully considered along with appropriately trained facilitators. As Bolton (2010) contends, a reflective facilitator is an educator, not a therapist, although the boundary between the two is not always straightforward. Indeed, it is helpful if mentors and tutors have some knowledge of psychological processes, such as interpersonal dynamics (Garvey *et al.*, 2009). Bolton (2010) has also suggested that a facilitator has responsibility to take counter-transference and projection into account. It is thus

clear that the role of the facilitator or training supervisor is not clearly delineated in many cases, generating confusion regarding their professional role. The influence and position of the facilitator in counselling psychology training and its impact upon trainees is one is an area of interest to this study.

1.3 Rationale for current study and relevance to counselling psychology

Counselling psychology aims to help people understand and reconcile intrapsychic events with interventions that focus on an individual's awareness, the development of self-knowledge, and the formation of an agreeable relationship with the self, achieved through the expression of feelings, needs and motives (Strawbridge and Woolfe, 2003). Within this, there is a focus upon the social context of the individual (Sue and Sue, 2012) and the facilitation of harmonious relationships within this (Woolfe and Dryden, 1996). Importantly, the individual therapist is seen as an essential tool in the therapeutic process, which highlights the importance of the personal qualities of the therapist (Horvath and Symonds, 1991; Woskett, 1999). The capacity to understand client issues is linked with counsellor development and competence (Holloway and Wampold, 1986; Collins, Arthur and Wong-Wylie 2010; Hubbs and Brand, 2005), and this process is guided by continuous professional reflection (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992a).

RP has gained considerable significance in contemporary clinical practice and has become an essential component of training and best practice for many professionals who work directly with people, as has been demonstrated in the work of Schön (1983, 1987), Hurley (1997), and Alacron and Lyons (2011), among others (Stedmon and Dallos, 2009). Indeed, a key aim of counselling

psychology courses (British Psychological Society, 2006) is to train a practitioner who "is competent, reflective, resourceful and informed" and is able to critically evaluate practice, research and theory (Hammersley, 2009, as cited in Woolfe *et al.,* 2009, p. 646). Indeed, the National Service Frameworks has stated that staff development should promote "lifelong learning and reflective practice" (Department of Health, 1999, p. 111), and research by Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992a, 1993) has indicated the importance of integrating the professional and personal self through ongoing professional development involving RP. Furthermore, the aims of the British Psychological Society include "awareness of the limits of own competence," "using supervision to reflect on practice," and "developing strategies to handle the impact of own practice" (1993, p. 3).

Related studies outlined in the literature suggest that clinical competence is achieved through reflecting on client work, which leads to reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987) and ultimately facilitates reflective processing for practitioners (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992a, 1992b, 2001; Griffith and Frieden, 2000). Personal and professional development has thus become of critical importance for counsellors and therapists (Cross and Papadopoulos, 2003, as cited in Sheikh et al., 2007; Hoshmand and Polkinghorne, 1992; Griffith and Frieden, 2000; Neufeldt, Inverson and Juntunen 1995; Bennett-Levy, 2006).

However, the process of RP has not been well studied within the discipline of psychology and several scholars have highlighted the need for further exploration of reflection (Bennett-Levy 2003; Hoshmand and Polkinghorne, 1992). The literature discussed in this chapter identifies RP as a complex field of research in need of further exploration. Wong-Wiley (2007) suggested

there is a dearth of enquiry pertaining to the experiences, processes, practices and prevalence of RP in counsellor education. Moreover, Bennett-Levy (2003) argues that building psychological models of the reflective process to identify when and how reflection is most useful and for what outcomes is long overdue. Arguably the RP is characterised and recognised as a subjective experience and this has important implications for research. This makes a focus upon the phenomenological and contextual influences relevant (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) and goes some way to meet the need for alternative approach to build on existing studies (Ruth-Sahd, 2003):

"*Phenomenological perspectives in psychology offers the possibility of reconsidering many established psychological issues and concerns in ways which are original and illuminating.*" (Preface ix)
(Spinelli, 1989).

The meaning of RP equally needs to be subject to reflective and critical scrutiny, as its definitions and meaning are disparate and confused across different studies and literature (Cropley, 2009; Ixer, 1999; Loughran, 2002). It is argued that RP involves complex processes that allow one to see things in new ways viewed through the lenses of different models for understanding therapy; however, questions arise about how, why and for what purposes RP is appropriated. Thus, the need for clarification of the meaning and application of RP requires research within the context of counselling and psychotherapy (Stedmon and Dallos, 2009).

The evidence to support the innovations of RP remains largely theoretical, and the literature is spread across several fields, study designs, study groups and

professions. Therefore, it is unclear which approaches may have efficacy or impact (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009) or be most attuned to counselling psychology. This study aims to explore the experiences and meaning of RP from the perspective of the trainee counselling psychologist. Increasing knowledge of how RP is experienced within this setting and how this may impact the practitioner may ultimately improve services provided due to the inference that reflection is essential for effective practice (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009). As Bolton (2005) suggests, a purely critical, rational and analytic approach only allows one to access some of the experiences in need of exploring—our most difficult experiences are often hidden from this process (Bolton, 2005). As such, the "messy and unpredictable" sides (Schön, 1983, p. 42) of counselling psychology are deserving of more emphasis through RP approaches to counselling psychology training.

1.4 Aims and Research questions

This study aims to develop a detailed interpretation of trainee counselling psychologist's accounts of RP in an effort to understand the way in which reflective practice is experienced and understood and how this impacts personal and professional development. The research question guiding the study was therefore: 'What are the experiences of reflective practice for the trainee?' The following areas were explored:

How do trainees understand RP?

How is the RP process experienced?

Within what contexts do they engage in RP?

What do trainees learn from reflecting?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

This chapter reviews the researcher's chosen methodology and epistemology, providing a rationale for using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Furthermore, it explains participant recruitment, data collection, and considers how research quality guidelines were met.

2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is defined as a system of possibilities of knowledge (Willig, 2001) and can help us understand the relationship between knowledge and the knower (Ponterotto, 2005). Different philosophical underpinnings of psychological research exist. Within this there are assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology), the process of acquiring knowledge (methodology) and the relationship between the 'knower' and 'would-be-knower' (epistemology) (Ponerotto, 2005).

Positivism, empiricism and reductionism still dominate mainstream psychological research (Krauss, 2005) leading to a focus upon more readily observed and measurable behaviour contrasting with the subjective experience. Positivism asserts that 'truth' that exists, (Willig, 2008) alluding to a naïve realist position of a single objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Post-positivism refers to the idea that there is an objective reality but our understanding of it is flawed, it is 'imperfectly apprehendable' (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

However, counselling psychology is founded upon philosophical ideas that appear incongruent with these paradigms. That quantitative methodology,

rooted in positivist and post-positivist paradigms dominate may be a result of demand to produce 'evidence-based' research (Haverkamp, Ponterotto and Morrow, 2005; Rennie, Watson and Monteiro, 2002). Considering RP within a positivist paradigm may be helpful, for example, developing measures of students' attitudes and motivation towards RP. However, this present study aims to discover a deeper understanding of personal accounts of RP. This aligns with counselling psychology's phenomenological roots embracing a relational and subjective stance where the focus is upon meaning making, understanding and processing (Strawbridge and Woolfe 2003; Manafi, 2010).

After some consideration and assimilation of ideas regarding research paradigms within qualitative research, the conceptual framework of this current study is considered paradigmatically defined and best positioned within an interpretive-phenomenological framework. The aim of the research from a relativist stance suggests that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual and that there are multiple and equally valid realities (Ponerotto, 2005). This research is ontologically relativist.

Within the relativist-realist continuum (Willig, 2008) there are several perspectives. Similar to realism, critical realism accepts the existence of a world that exists independently of our knowledge of it, however understanding and interpretation of it is from an individual level (Sayer, 2000). Critical realism concerns multiple perceptions about a single, reality that is independent from the mind (Hearly and Perry, 2000). From this perspective, the research hopes to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of RP whilst recognizing that the data gathered may not provide direct access to this reality (Willig, 2008).

The present study takes a critical realist stance with an epistemological interpretive-phenomenological framework and is considered appropriate since in seeking a deeper understanding of trainees' experiences of RP, the limitations of a positivist approach are apparent. From an interpretive-phenomenological perspective, the present study is not focusing on the external reality or whether the experiences of participants are true or false, instead it is interested in how they experience the phenomenon of RP. It also acknowledges that the exploration of experience is dependent on the researchers engagement with an interpretation of the participants' account (Willig 2008). .

Methodological choices were therefore thoughtfully and coherently approached keeping the research question in central focus and considering how they might be best answered. The above should ensure an appropriately situated, applied study with academic integrity. This study uses IPA, which fits the research question epistemologically and paradigmatically.

2.2 A qualitative approach

The literature review outlined in chapter one indicated RP is characterised by complexity and ambiguity with a lack of prior research in the area of counselling psychology, it is spread across several fields, study designs, study groups and professions making common terminology and understanding RP complex and challenging (Clarke, 2006). Qualitative research has been identified as appropriate when investigating areas characterised by such complexity (Richardson, 1996; McLeod, 2001). The aim for this study is to obtain detailed descriptions of participants' subjective experiences as opposed to gaining data that will make general claims about a given population (Creswell, 2009). In order to gain understandings sought by this study, the use of qualitative

methods is deemed appropriate since it is a process orientated and concerned with what is happening, how it happens, and what meaning participants' make of their experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). This research does not aim to posit a single truth about the experiences of the subjects in the study but will attempt to give rich descriptions based on the direct accounts provided by various subjects (Creswell, 2009).

2.3 Choosing IPA

A number of qualitative methods were explored when considering this research. However IPA, with the lived experience as its focus, stood out as a methodology most appropriate that would enable in-depth exploration and reasoning behind participants' thoughts, beliefs and behaviors regarding RP. The main premise of IPA is to explore how individuals make sense and give meaning to their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Significantly, it has been contended that IPA has developed an approach to carrying out empirical research in psychology that provides "a theoretical underpinning, a set of methodological procedures and a corpus of studies" (p. 126).

Prior to choosing IPA, alternative methodologies were considered. Discourse analysis (DA) emerged from a different tradition to alternative qualitative approaches and contrasts in attitude to the status and nature of participant accounts and its relationship with the subject under study. DA is skeptical of the idea of the connection between account, cognition and behaviour, preferring to consider how accounts are constructed rhetorically and how language is utilised to serve social and discursive ends. DA can be separated in to two approaches, discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis, with both emphasising the importance of language (Billig, 2007). Discursive psychology

considers the way in which linguistic resources are used in social interactions, and what means they serve within these interactions. Therefore, language is viewed as a form of social action (Coyle, 2007; Smith and Dunworth, 2003). Foucauldian discourse analysis looks at the role discourse has in facilitating and constraining what is said, exploring power relations and those dominant discourses which provide explanation regarding how people talk (Coyle, 2007).

The rejection of a relationship between the participant accounts and their thoughts or feelings toward an object suggests that DA contrasts with approaches such as IPA in its attitude to the importance of the value of the personal description of experience. While perhaps providing insight in to the way language is utilised within RP or the dominant discourses that prevail within the RP experience, it was felt that the aims of the research would not fit with these methods. Further, it would not permit the researcher to give credence to the detailed experiential account of RP for trainee CoP'S. Less focus would be placed upon the individual and their meaning making, and would therefore conceptualise RP in a different way, for example, according to its discursive structures if Foucaludian discourse was utilised, and according to the various constructions of RP in discourse analysis.

Grounded Theory (GT) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) shares similarities to IPA in techniques of data production. However, the focus of the study is not explaining contextualised social processes and building theory, which is exclusive to Grounded Theory. This therefore makes GT unsuitable for the aims of the present study, which instead sets out to gain detailed insight and enhanced understanding into particular experiences of RP (Willig, 2008).

Furthermore, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) contend that epistemology should take a central role when choosing methodological choices in qualitative research. As seen earlier, the researcher adopts a critical realist position, one that is consistent with the use of IPA. The two methods within DA, as well as GT, maintain a social constructionist position (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and again IPA was therefore deemed the most appropriate process to utilise (Potter and Wetherell, 1995; Richardson, 1996). Moreover the contention between hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology provides weight to the argument for epistemological clarity in qualitative research (Madill, Jordan and Shirley 2000) and is born out in Osborne's (1994) emphatic calls for the phenomenological methodologies to reflect the chosen philosophy throughout the research process. I therefore decided upon IPA as the most suitable research methodology since Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) have been explicit regarding theoretical influences of phenomenology, hermeneutics and its ideographic standpoint.

IPA has been particularly useful when researching areas that have received little or no attention, "or where the issues are complex or ambiguous and where one is concerned to understand something about process and change" (Smith and Osborn, 2004, p.230). My decision was also influenced upon my wish to explore in depth the reasoning behind participants thoughts, beliefs and behaviours regarding RP. Given this, I felt that IPA would make a valuable contribution to enhancing understanding of how trainee CoP's experience RP, and the implications of this within this particular context. Therefore since the focus of this present study was to understand and explore detailed lived experiences, meanings and perspectives of how participants experience RP,

IPA was deemed the most appropriate analytical strategy (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

2.3.1 Theoretical underpinnings

The first philosophical principle is that of 'phenomenology'. Phenomenology is concerned with exploring individual human experiences from 'the inside' (Hayes, 1997, p.181) The principle acknowledges that there are several aspects, such as desires, wishes and motivations, which impact upon an individuals perception of reality, and therefore the phenomenon and overall experience (Eatough and Smith, 2008). Husserl's (1931) use of descriptive phenomenology, the starting point for IPA and later developed by Heidegger (1962), emphasizes the interpretive nature of meaning making in phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Therefore IPA has its roots in phenomenological epistemology, as the focus is on understanding the individuals' experience, which can only be accessed through interpretation of these experiences. (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.47),

IPA is underpinned by hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. The researcher therefore takes an 'active role' (Smith and Eatough, 2007, p.36) and immersion into the participants world is encouraged in an attempt to understand their reality. Therefore, the interpretation of the data involves both the participants and the researcher's sense making of the phenomena described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), as a 'double hermeneutic' process. The researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant, who is attempting to make sense of their world. Smith and Eatough (2007) describe this as 'second order' sense making, which is complicated by the researchers pre-existing conceptions, assumptions and experiences. During the analysis process, there

is a dynamic relationship between the whole and its parts. Thus, to understand the whole, one has to look at the parts and to understand the parts; one has to look at the whole (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009)

The third philosophical underpinning of IPA is idiography. Thus, it focuses on small sample sizes to explore the richness of experience by seeing each participant in the foreground of the analysis. IPA is therefore not concerned with making generalisations about large populations but has its focus upon detailed and unique analysis of perceptions and understandings of a small group (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA has been particularly useful when the research focus is complex, novel or about process. The dearth of literature giving voice to trainee counselling psychologists, alongside the gap identified in empirical studies, suggests that IPA is the most appropriate methodology to address these shortfalls.

2.3.2 Limitations of IPA

Lack of space permits a general discussion of the limits of IPA. However, criticism focuses upon suggestions that it is too descriptive, Larkin *et al.,* (2006) argue that this would suggest a lack of interpretation that depicts new insights outside the awareness of participant accounts. Further, Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) contend that an open stance of interviewing allows access to richness of participant experiences despite some criticism that participants themselves are not necessarily able to communicate such depth (Willig, 2008).

2.4 Personal Reflections and Reflexivity

A fundamental concept to qualitative research is reflexivity, which enables the researcher to acknowledge their role within the research process (Morrow,

2005). Reflexivity is particularly important in phenomenological research because the concern with meaning and, hermeneutic interpretation takes a central focus (Willig, 2001). Stiles (1993) suggest that through this process, the researchers understanding and interpretations should change and develop. This allows the researcher to engage with the data and the iterative process of IPA. Personal reflective considerations at various points will be provided to therefore demonstrate how my experience, values and beliefs have influenced the research process. Comments will use italics and first person.

The origins of this study and interest in reflective practice emerged and developed over the course of my training as counselling psychologist. The topic felt particularly salient for me, as I was frequently aware of struggling with the idea of RP. I deliberated over what RP actually meant and how I would authentically demonstrate that I could be a reflective practitioner within my studies. At other times I wondered how I should use RP within the therapeutic relationship, anxious to do the best for my clients. I was aware that at the beginning of training I felt safer sticking to the structure of therapeutic models, keen to be 'doing' therapy with my clients, I wasn't sure where RP would 'fit' with this. As my training progressed I had come to know some important aspects about myself through being reflective in various domains, but I wasn't convinced I was a better therapist or that I was better at RP. My various placement experiences equally both hindered my reflective ability and enhanced it and I remained wondering how RP had evolved, why it was so prevalent and what the evidence was to support it. These experiences inspired the research.

Whilst my personal experiences of being a trainee helped my understanding of participants, providing 'insiders perspective' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I was also mindful that I held my own assumptions and this may have impacted on the research in different ways. However the research process inevitably holds tensions (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006), which I hoped, may be addressed by maintaining an ongoing reflective, open and critical position. This was aided by the use of a reflective diary to ensure reflectivity and self-awareness through the process.

2.5 Participants

In accordance with IPA and its idiographic approach, only a small sample size is required (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). Although some might consider this a limitation, arguably the small size in IPA is advantageous in producing rich data to understand a specific phenomenon from the perspective of the individual experiencing it. Based on this assumption, a purposive, homogenous sample of six counselling psychology trainees, in the final stages of their training were recruited. This potentially leant itself to homogeneity since the common factor was participant's stage of training, the training culture itself, gender, age and ethnicity. Thus the participants are selected because of the insight they may provide into the phenomenon under investigation.

Whilst complete homogeneity is difficult to achieve, increasing homogeneity allows for detailed analysis of the experiences of a particular group and therefore analysis of convergence and divergence. However, as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state, participants are representative of a perspective as opposed to a population. The sampling method employed increases the

external validity of the analysis in reference to the specific group; however, it also limits generalisability to the wider population.

The table below provides an overview of participant demographics. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality.

PARTICIPANT	AGE	ETHNICITY
Rosie	33	White British
Becky	28	White British
Sally	39	White British
Maggie	58	White American
Lorna	46	White British
Kat	31	White British

Table 1: Table to illustrate Participant Demographics.

The researcher recognises that whilst the number of participants chosen must be relative to the purpose and goals of the research, it is necessary for they're to be heterogeneity of participants to ensure the appropriate focus with regard to the research question. The researcher acknowledges that this particular group of participants shares a common culture, which will have implications for the data set. Therefore within IPA, there is more of a focus on the possible transferability of findings from group to group rather than generalization.

2.5.1 Recruitment

Several recruitment methods were considered and implemented. Initially this included advertising through the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP) research pages. At the outset of the recruitment phase, this was considered the most efficient way of reaching a large number of potential

participants. However, in practice, the process was slow and recruitment proved difficult. Subsequently, university counselling psychology departments were contacted directly via email to request help with recruitment. This yielded two contacts, which were then followed up by email and telephone conversation. The 'Linked In' website (used by a number of counselling psychology professionals) and the 'Counselling Psychologists UK' group on Facebook were used as additional means of recruiting participants. Of these various strategies to recruit participants, the 'Counselling Psychologists UK' group on Facebook was the most successful recruiting a further two. The remainder of participants were then recruited through a process of chain referral or 'snowball' sampling (Patton, 1990). Approaching contacts in the field was useful in that two colleagues were in a position to suggest trainees who might be willing to participate in the research. In this case email contact and telephone conversations took place to explain the aims of the research and once participation was agreed, arrangements for when and where the interviews to take place were made.

The lack of uptake in the early stages was disappointing and I took it to mean that perhaps my study wasn't interesting or significant enough to draw attention. On reflection, I had made naïve assumptions about the recruitment process. I worried that I may have difficulties recruiting enough participants. However, talking to colleagues and peers helped gain renewed motivation 'to do what it takes' and I prepared myself to travel further afield. More open discussions of my research proved to be a rewarding experience as interest was expressed and suggestions made regarding possible contacts who 'may know a trainee prepared to be interviewed', I became excited about the prospect of the research moving forward.

2.5.2 Criteria

Inclusion criteria required participants to be trainee counselling psychologists, currently enrolled on UK courses with a RP component. Training courses are currently accredited by both BPS and HPC and stipulate counselling psychologists should 'be able to critically reflect on their practice and consider alternative ways of working' (HPC 2012, p.13). Trainees from the researchers own university were excluded from the study. First-year trainees were also excluded as they were considered to have insufficient RP experience at this stage of training. All participants were in their final year of training to be able to give in-depth descriptions of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

2.5.3 The sample

The participants gave brief demographic details to the researcher prior to the start of the interview. IPA is informed by an idiographic research method therefore the sample consisted of six trainee counselling psychologists (all female) who were currently attending counselling psychology doctorate training. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p52) suggest between 4 and 10 interviews is sufficient for professional doctorate research, since larger sample sizes may inhibit essential aspects of IPA analysis.

I was pleased to have recruited six trainees given the initial difficulties. I was also aware of the previous assumptions and expectations regarding ease of recruitment and made use of my reflective diary to consider expectations I might have regarding similar viewpoints and commonalities prior to interviews, particularly given our shared professional identities. I allowed considerable time

to think about the interview schedule in order to allow deep authentic experiences to emerge.

2.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are present in any kind of research and remained an ongoing process beyond initial ethical approval. Aware that the research process itself creates tension between the aims and the rights of participants' to maintain privacy, an awareness of both potential harm regarding sharing of sensitive material and safety issues, remained paramount. (Willg, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

2.6.1 Ethical Approval

Research ethics approval was obtained from the University of East London's Ethics Board (Appendix 2) and all procedures conformed to the BPS Code of Conduct (2009). The potentially sensitive nature of the area being explored was recognised (Creswell, 2009) and therefore the possibility that participants could have found some questions distressing was acknowledged. Consideration was also given to potential risk of travelling to the participant choice of destination to carry out the interview. Another person was always notified of the researcher's whereabouts and the expected duration of the interview.

2.6.2 Informed consent

As a way of reducing potential participant distress, the information sheet was given to participants prior to the interview (Appendix 1) This introduced both the research and researcher and outlined the study aims and procedures, detailing the steps to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and right to withdraw. Each participant was given an informed consent form to sign and again reminded of their right to withdraw and required no explanation.

Participants completed informed consent forms (Appendix 3), which covered right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality, the recording of the interview, and future publication. It also outlined how the data would be used once collected, ensuring the participants understood the process of data analysis and the possibility of anonymised verbatim extracts being incorporated into the thesis. Furthermore, participants were informed that they were not required to answer any questions that they did not wish to. They were also advised that they could ask to take a break at any time during the interview process. All participants agreed to take part in the interview, agreed to it being recorded and gave permission for use of verbatim quotes.

Concluding the interview, each participant was fully debriefed and given an opportunity to consider the experience of the interview itself. They were advised of appropriate sources of support that could be accessed in the event of the interview being difficult, these included consultation with supervisors, student counselling services, or their therapist if they had one.

2.7 Data Collection

2.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews lend themselves more easily to capturing the complexities of emotions and meanings (Robson, 2003) and are considered exemplary method of collecting data (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Kvale (1996, p. 5) states "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena". They aim to reach a balance whereby they are open enough to gain rich data but contain some structure to feel containing (Kvale,

1996). An initial interview schedule was constructed following the suggestions made by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.61). Broad areas of interest were identified alongside a range of topic areas that were felt necessary to cover with the participant. Furthermore, prompts were also added for each question to obtain further clarity, however, the schedule was not intended to be prescriptive. Participants were encouraged to talk spontaneously about RP with an emphasis on the importance of their experience. Interview questions were modified in response to material that emerged and interesting areas were explored further. Several discussions with research peers and a pilot interview to test appropriateness of the schedule occurred before it was refined and finalised (Appendix 4). Some researchers have argued that a way forward is to ask one broad question regarding experiences to facilitate discussion of the 'essence' of that experience. This then avoids the researcher imparting their thoughts and ideas about the topic of investigation, which in turn may impact upon the remaining research process (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

Interviews were carried at a convenient location and time for the participant. Four interviews took place at the participant's homes and two interviews took place in a pre-booked meeting room at the participant's work place. Interviews lasted approximately between 45 and 90 minutes and were audio taped. Subsequent to each interview, the researcher made notes to record reflections and points of interest on the interview process.

Prior to carrying out the interviews I felt well prepared with topic areas and prompts for discussion (Merriam, 2009). I also felt I had gained listening and interviewing skills during training that I could put to good use. However, I

struggled with the initial interviews. My participants talked openly and enthusiastically but as I listened I was anxious that the information might not address my research questions. Mindful that my participants had been hard to recruit, I did not want to make errors and was tense at the prospect of the interview being unusable. Reflecting on these initial interviews, discussion of RP appeared wide ranging and participants were interested and supportive of the study and appeared to enjoy the chance to share their views. This was RP through their voices and their experiences. I began to realise the importance of semi structured interviewing being participant led and the importance of the phenomenological stance.

2.8 Data Analysis

IPA was utilised to analyse the transcripts (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Furthermore the guidelines for establishing quality in qualitative research also informed the analytic process (Yardley, 2000; Meyrick, 2006). Whilst IPA is not seen as prescriptive, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) provide step-by-step guidelines to approach the analysis. These should be used flexibly since some have argued that this in itself can inhibit creativity (Coyle, 2007. P.27). Smith and Osborne (2003) however address the issue of creativity, arguing that IPA provides an adaptable analytical process.

In keeping with IPA's focus upon the idiographic, each transcript was read several times over by the researcher both with and without the audio recordings in order to become as familiar as possible with the account. Listening to audio recordings again allowed tone of voice and certain emphasis upon words to allow the researcher to gain further perspectives. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin

(2009) states, this is a process that facilitates the researcher's ability to enter into the participants experience and therefore their world.

Following transcription I was overwhelmed by the amount of content and wondered how this was all going to be the basis of my analysis. However when listening to the tapes again and rereading transcripts, my fears were allayed as there appeared much to be gleaned from what was said but also how it had been said. This process helped me recall the dynamics within the interview and add another layer to the meaning of participants' words.

Hand written notes were made in the left hand margin of the transcripts and included researcher comments and any words that appeared to be germane to the participants experience were underlined alongside the initial exploratory notes. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) posits that the researcher's comments may have three different levels of focus; descriptive, linguistic and conceptual.

This stage of the analysis was exciting as it felt that finally the analysis could get underway, I was intrigued and curious at what was emerging. Again I was aware that some of this appeared contrary to my expectations but I was mindful to put these assumptions to one side so as not to simply search for evidence regarding my assumptions but remain true to the participants' experience.

During this iterative process the researcher engaged in the process of a hermeneutic circle (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This facilitates different levels of meaning within the transcripts and is therefore held as a "key tenet of IPA" (p.28). This facilitates the emergence of important issues, inducing a sense of coherence between the parts and the whole.

Subsequently with each transcript 'emergent themes' were determined and refined, recognising that themes could change with further analysis (Appendix 8) The process of transforming the initial exploratory notes to being a more precise psychological idea incorporated and combined both initial notes and the participants' own words thereby remaining grounded in the data (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Smith and Eatough, 2007). With each transcript, themes were subsequently listed chronologically and organized into initial clusters. A process of discarding and reorganising occurred several times. Master themes were identified from these clusters. Details are illustrated in (Appendix 8 and 9)

Following analysis of all six interviews, cross-case analysis began. Similarities and differences in themes between individual accounts were highlighted alongside recurring themes. These were clustered into overarching master themes and their sub-themes, again they were reviewed and reorganised.

The balance between being too descriptive and not interpretive enough was a challenging balance at first, discussions with my research supervisor, reading IPA papers and talking with fellow IPA peers helped this lengthy process and I became bolder and more confident with my interpretations.

2.9 Validity and Quality

An issue that is often taken up as a limitation of using qualitative methods is in relation to validity and reliability. For example, Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000, p.1) write that criticism is directed towards qualitative methods because of the accommodation given to the researchers subjectivity. Qualitative research, such as IPA is therefore contrary with traditional psychological approaches, which

centre on the reliability, objectivity and validity of results. In quantitative research validity corresponds with the study's ability to measure what it set out to achieve, while reliability refers to the consistency found within the study. Some researchers have therefore argued that since both approaches differ in scientific orientations, the notion of validity and reliability are inadequate to address the range of issues that qualitative research may raise (Seale, 1999; Willig, 2001). Moreover qualitative researchers do not claim that it is feasible to replicate research, aware that different contexts will impact upon different researchers (Banister *et al.,* 1994; Buchanan, 1992). That said, there has been ongoing debate on ways to best assess qualitative research. Stiles (1993) addresses the issue of quality and rigour within qualitative research, and believes that reliability and validity within this research paradigm as undertaking the notion of 'trustworthiness'.

Yardley (2000) outlines a number of principles, which help the researcher to assess validity and good qualitative research and how these might apply to an IPA study (Smith, 2011). These have been used to evaluate the quality and reliability of the present study throughout, from recruitment of participants, constructing the interview schedule and being aware of a fit between the underlying interpretative-phenomenological assumptions and the particular research methods and procedures appropriated. Several specific areas were particularly salient to this study as follows: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency, and impact and importance.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outlined the need to demonstrate sensitivity to context from the outset of the research process. Yardley (2000) outlines several contextual elements that include awareness of pre-existing theory and research

which is shown in chapter one, the socio-cultural setting demonstrated in attention given to participant characteristics and in reflective comments throughout this chapter which also shows sensitivity the participant/researcher dynamic. Finally sensitivity is paid to the material obtained from participants through the choice of an idiographic stance and use of semi structured interviews to facilitate participants' experiences through their voice.

Commitment and rigour are demonstrated through evidence of a paper trail and example of an interview schedule (Appendix 4). The accuracy of researchers interpretations is addressed in the present study through the analysis and verbatim extracts presented from the interviews. This allows the reader to check interpretations made and allows checking that the conclusions made are grounded in the data (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Further, an IPA researcher checked for accuracy of emergent themes corroborating clarity thereby indicating triangulation and validity.

I was anxious to be on the right track with the analysis and used various strategies to ensure this, including referring to the literature to enhance my research skills, support gained for research support groups and regular consultations with my research supervisor.

As Meyrick (2006) suggests, transparency refers to the discussion of all relevant aspects of the research process. This has been adhered to throughout Chapters two and three and enhanced by the paper trail. For example, at each stage, the processes undertaken have been clearly described these have been provided within the Appendices. Stiles (1993) suggest that transparency entails the researcher being explicit regarding their internal processes that occur

throughout the research process, which has been demonstrated throughout this chapter. The researcher has ensured that a reflexive stance inherent in IPA has been adhered to, both professionally and on a personal level, throughout.

Yardley (2000) argues that ultimately judgment regarding any research is its impact and utility. The impact of the research is borne out in a number of ways such as its practical use for the community, policy-makers and other professionals or influence upon theoretical understanding. In respect of this present study, it is anticipated that the analysis may provide a greater understanding of how the process of RP is experienced and that this insight may inform training and practice for professionals learning and utilising RP. Therefore, this study could have both a theoretical and practical impact within counselling psychology practice and more generally within the area of training.

Chapter Three: Analysis

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the results of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) with six trainee counselling psychologists who were interviewed about their experiences of reflective practice (RP). Through the analysis, three inter-related master themes and 10 sub-themes were identified (see Table 2)

Master Themes	Subthemes
The Challenge of Reflective Practice	"What is this special thing they do?": Power dynamic
	"It can mean different things to different people": Disparate meanings
	"The dark side of reflection": Intrapersonal struggles
	"Thinking and thinking": Feeling stuck
Doing reflective practice	"Knowing your self before using your self": Self-reflection
	Pathway to RP: Locating feelings in the body
	Pause for thought: Time and place
Impact of reflective practice	"It gives you that 360 knowing": Growth in confidence
	"Was it something to do with me?" Negotiating emotion
	Shaping practice: Building connections

Table 2: Master themes and subthemes.

3.2 Introduction to the themes

The three master themes provide an interpretative account of participant's understanding and personal experiences of reflective practice (RP). The narratives presented aim to capture the quality of the participants 'shared' experience and are presented in the interpretive narrative that follows. Although the master themes were common across the six accounts, attention was given to the range of participant's experience so areas of difference and divergence will also be discussed. They aim to provide a representation of the patterns and connections between emergent sub-themes, and the common experience of RP for the participants. Each theme is then discussed in an interpretive narrative, using supporting participant extracts.

The first master theme introduces the struggles and challenges faced with 'getting to grips' with RP highlighting pervasive feelings of uncertainty, frustration and vulnerability experienced as a result. These feelings are intensified by presence of power dynamics, tension of 'having to do' RP and feeling 'stuck' with the process. There seemed to be underlying tension between these feelings and recognition that RP is an essential requirement. Accordingly, participants expressed a need to attain proficiency to position oneself as a reflective practitioner. There is a sense that participants are placed in a double-bind situation whereby they are informed and acknowledge the importance of RP as a necessary prerequisite in their training yet feel they are left to find their own way. The second master theme summarises participants experiences of 'doing' RP and the related activities they engaged in, which ultimately provide a sense of coming to know RP identified in sub-themes 'Knowing self before using self', 'Pathway to RP' and 'Pause for thought'. These

activities provide familiarisation with the RP process and a way of addressing the struggles and engendered feelings described in theme one. These activities go some way to achieve a sense of proficiency, and demonstrate how participants reconcile and move on from their perceived difficulties. Finally the third master theme links all the previous themes together, describing how the journey of coming to know RP manifests as positive growth, shaping practice, and dealing with emotion the role brings.

3.3 Master theme one: The challenge of RP

This cluster of sub-themes refers to the participants' initial experiences of RP at the start of training, capturing the struggles experienced and emotions engendered. Participants make reference to the paucity of information provided and a sense of not knowing how to engage with the RP process, which leaves them feeling bewildered and perplexed. The transcripts indicate that power dynamics were present and appeared to impact upon the participants' RP process. The emotional element of learning and initial experiences of RP are clearly salient throughout the accounts, which challenges them in various ways and is captured in the second sub-theme, finally the experience of feeling 'stuck' is highlighted as a pertinent challenge for participants.

3.3.1 "What is this special thing that they do?" Power dynamic

This sub-theme highlights participant experiences of bewilderment and uncertainty as they describe a paucity of information and lack of guidance about their engagement with RP. This feeling of something missing leaves them feeling unsupported, isolated and powerless. Kat describes her feelings:

"I used to think that it was a special thing that <u>you</u> had to do in a special time in a special place that I didn't quite understand….

…Yeah what is this special thing that <u>they</u> do and they reflect on things?"

(Kat: 22-24, 367-368)

Repetition of *'special'* perhaps conveys a sense of exclusivity and importance. Here Kat refers to RP using the word *'you'* as in 'one', and then moves to *'they'* perhaps indicating her perceived unassimilated position as a reflective practitioner whereby she is engaged in 'learning the rules' within this new context, but is not yet fully part of it. The extract indicates a sense of isolation as she makes reference to this *'thing'* that *'they'* do conveying exclusion on her part; she is looking from the outside in and does not yet feel like one of 'them', it is as if she does not yet belong as she states she wishes she could do *'that'*. Perhaps this exclusion heightens and elevates the 'specialness' Kat assumes RP has and is indicative of the presence of a power differential at play for her as she differentiates herself as separate from 'them', i.e. others she perceives as adept at RP.

Lorna describes a similar lack of understanding and exclusion to Kat's portrayal. For Lorna, there is a clear sense of her curiosity about the concept indicative of feeling uninformed. This exclusion is felt by participants as confusion and frustration about how they should engage with the process:

"Well to me reflective practice is a strange term really, and I remember when I first started training as a therapist and the lecturers would speak about reflective practice and reflecting on this and reflecting on that, and I

didn't understand… I thought that, yeah, I didn't quite understand the

concept of it."

(Lorna: 24-28)

The implication here is that Lorna felt there were apparent shared meanings about RP but they were implicit rather than explicit. For some, this resulted in apprehension and questions left unanswered. Lorna's language portrays her struggle with the uncertainty and resultant feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, this is perhaps illustrated by her repeating the phrase *'I didn't quite understand'* and use of *'strange'.* Lorna's description and repetition of *'reflecting on this and reflecting on that'* was said with an edge of humour, this perhaps illustrates a defensive stance to downplay the potential frustration and any perceived shortcomings about her ability she may have in that she *'didn't quite understand the concept'* or perhaps whether she in fact saw any value in it. She then goes on to say lecturers speak about RP 'as if' she should know, implying the prevalence of a traditional power relation between 'teacher' and 'student', in this way it feels that Lorna existentially stands out towards what she may perceive as an unsure future. Just as Lorna's extract suggests implicit knowing of RP but lack of clarity, Sally's extract below alludes to something 'missing', which left her feeling similarly frustrated. Sally describes RP as *'just words'* implying a lack of meaningfulness. Therefore, for both Sally and Lorna there is a sense they may be questioning the value of RP:

"For me reflection and reflective practice are just words that are talked
about a great deal in various contexts, but we didn't really have an
opportunity to sort of unpack what it was that we were really trying to get
to grips with"

(Sally: 5-7).

Here Sally's extract conveys the sense of an elusive concept lacking in essence and explanation. Just as Kat shifts from *'you'* to *'they'* in the first extract, highlighting felt exclusion, Sally similarly alternates between past and present tense as if she is still attempting to connect with RP, which has striking similarity to Kat's extract. The quandary for Sally is that RP seems to be both everywhere and yet nowhere; talked about by everyone as described above, yet with an absence of meaning leaving her feeling unable *'to get to grips'.* This suggests she feels somehow detached and separate from its purpose, compounding her incomprehension. There is a sense of Sally's lost *'opportunity'* to explore and deconstruct RP in an experiential way, implying this may have been her path to deeper understanding.

A sense of bewilderment through paucity of information and existence of a power dynamic is apparent in the following extract from Rosie as she refers to reflecting on her practice with her supervisor:

> "*I found that quite difficult actually like trying to know what the expectations are and also to know exactly how much of an active or passive role to take, and because I think my supervisor is quite established in her role and she's got a certain approach knowing how mine fits in with that*"

(Rosie: 319-323).

There is a real sense of Rosie's self doubt and uncertainty regarding her role but that she wants to get her reflections 'right' to ensure her way of doing things

'fits' with her perceived view that her supervisors way is the correct way suggesting the power she imbues her supervisor with. The desire for her approach to be 'right' is again echoed in the extract below:

> *"And I was a bit worried about her response I was quite reassured to know that she'd noticed it too, so it wasn't something that was just imaginary it was something that had happened"* (laugh)

(Rosie: 245-248)

There is a real sense of this being an anxiety-provoking experience reflected by her negative emotions and sense of dependency upon her supervisor and therefore the power she bestows her supervisor. Rosie conveys vulnerability and a need for guidance and support. It appears there is a strong relationship between perceived external judgment and negative impact on her sense of self. Arguably Rosie and other participants did not have the sense of self or confidence to defend and authenticate their reflections, likely to be expected at this stage of training, however, this is exacerbated by the adverse feelings experienced through lack of guidance. Rosie's earlier uncertainty and self-doubt about her ability acts as a catalyst to reflect. There is a powerful sense of honesty likely to feel exposing as she questions whether her shared reflections were *'just imaginary'*. She receives validation suggesting she has taken a risk in being open and honest which appears to restore her confidence, implying this risk of opening up paid off.

As participants highlighted their experience illustrating a lack of information, there is a sense that whilst participants acknowledge the importance of RP they have been left to find their own way. The next sub-theme is intrinsically linked

with this bewilderment and not knowing as participants attempt to explicate their understandings further, which serves to highlight individual meanings.

3.3.2 "It can mean different things to different people": Disparate meanings

This sub-theme, as illustrated in the title quote taken from Maggie's account, captures the participants' voice that various understandings of RP prevail. Despite variation in individual accounts, there was also commonality in participant definitions of RP, and importantly their understandings of RP are both emergent and contingent. They are emergent because they unfold and develop with time and learning, and contingent because they correspond to context indicated by participants theoretical orientation.

Participants conceived RP in two polarized forms; objectively and subjectively. The first perceived form of RP as objective implies RP providing a fact-based, measurable and more observable stance. Contrastingly, the second form suggests a reflective stance based on personal opinion, assumptions, interpretation, emotion and beliefs. Lorna, for example, suggests an objectivist stance whereby there is a greater reliance on structure as illustrated when she refers to RP as a *'tool to aid practice'* (8). This comparison of RP to a solid, stable implement conveys something that is dependable and can be relied upon steadfastly. Lorna is explicit about her use of RP in sessions as part of formulations and assessments and further elaborates that for her, RP occurs:

> *"In a somewhat systematic manner and… umm… with a purpose, what was the goal here what was the point in thinking this over?"*

(Lorna: 11-12)

Here Lorna expresses her understanding of RP conveying it as essentially technical indicated by her reference to evaluation and improvement. This is likely to be intrinsically linked to her preferred CBT approach, a more rational thinking and prescriptive stance. This is indicative of her active, deliberate role intent on brandishing the *'tool'* of RP. This highlights the presence of contextual influences that may serve to either facilitate or hinder the use of RP.

Contrastingly, Becky's account has a noticeable subjective emphasis. She highlights the importance of her experience of self, whereby she uses the experiential information objectively as she is positioning herself as a 'scientist':

"I guess for me, I think of it as in contrast to the scientist practitioner kind of idea, so looking on <u>my experience</u> of learning and <u>my experience</u> in whatever it is I am doing and then reflecting on that and learning from that"
(Becky: 38-41).

The following extract from Maggie again highlights the divergence of perception of RP and has a more abstract tone where the spiritual or higher order feel, *'preaching'* (religious or other-worldly) suggests she sees RP outside the realm of reason and logic, more of a creative process:

"Well first of all I don't think anybody probably… umm, starts studying counselling psychology if you're, if again, you're not already converted, so therefore people are preaching to the converted, so you know…you're probably as a trainee, you're already a person, umm… who is naturally reflective"
(Maggie: 48-51).

Maggie's emphasis on salient personal qualities takes on a non-technical, subjective stance in contrast to Lorna's objectivist stance. This may be representative of her assumption that to be a therapist *is* to *be* reflective, an aspect of the self already present and therefore a reason one might choose such a vocation. There is a sense that her understanding takes on broader issues of personal knowledge. Similarly, Sally expands on her view suggesting an innate quality:

> *"I think that some people are better personal reflectors than others and are more comfortable with personal reflection or more insightful or in tune with themselves, so I think that naturally gives you a strength or an easier kind of way of doing that so it feels more comfortable"*

(Sally: 84-87*).*

All participants linked RP to changing practice, involving looking back and considering new ways of working:

> *"And just looking at my approach and maybe what seemed to work and didn't work more importantly, and then coming up with ideas why it might not have worked and trying something else"*

(Rosie: *30-33).*

Rosie and Sally further highlight a broader picture of how RP could be used in addition to this individual perspective to a more systemic and critical appreciation of issues. Sally feels this is dependent upon a willingness and ability '*to consider self to be in any wider process really or within any wider*

system' (207-208). For Rosie it is clearly important to utilise RP so as to consider how her clients might perceive her and to consider the organisational context within that *'more reflecting on our relationship with society, like the bigger picture' (141-142*), she further adds**:**

> *"So it's quite a big part and certainly for me, an important part of the reflective process, it's about me in the bigger picture and our identity as a therapist within that which is vital I think"*

(Rosie: 144-146*).*

Multiple meanings are evident suggesting the different understandings and the ways participants approach RP. Participants explained context in terms of theoretical approach and its impact whereby RP was perceived as more explicitly conceptualized by particular models. This had an impact upon participants use, or not, of RP. Subjectivity and objectivity were indicative of the ways participants approached RP. All indicated that they understood RP as a way to improve practice but this differed amongst participant approaches. For some this was associated with an objective, more technique way of 'doing' RP, and for others it was more subjective where self and experience came to the fore as a way of 'being' reflective. The wider social remit, its influence upon RP and how it may be utilised is acknowledged and becomes important for some participants in their RP. Further, this may indicate the beginning of participants' understandings of RP, which appear to begin to become assimilated within their identity as therapists and reflective practitioners. The next sub-theme highlights intrapersonal difficulties where the emotional element of RP is clearly salient throughout accounts, whilst felt and addressed in varied ways, commonalities are evident and perceived as challenging.

3.3.3 'The dark side of reflection': Intrapersonal struggles

This sub-theme refers to emotions salient in RP. Particularly, participants talked about fears associated with learning to be reflective practitioners. This related to fear of revealing inner thoughts and feelings, which were associated with vulnerability and anxiety. This seemed to be further compounded by their perceived lack of support. Lorna's utter frustration as a new trainee being asked to write reflectively, seems revealed by her language, which is perhaps indicative of her stage of training:

"I just thought…you know…I don't want to… I don't want to… do that stuff where I have to demonstrate and show you in black and white how bloody rubbish I am at everything"

(Lorna: 51-53)

The powerlessness she experiences at having to demonstrate her RP capacity is conveyed. This is likely to have added to her distress and her perceived feelings regarding her quality as a counselling psychologist. There is a sense that this extract shows more the tension experienced as a result of mandatory course requirements and repetition of '*I don't want to*' indicates an almost childlike refusal. Her use of "black and white'" metaphorically represents polar opposites representing her thinking and seeing of the world, in terms of extremes. If she cannot succeed in this reflective task she deems herself a failure and unworthy like 'rubbish', that can be thrown away and likely to feel a very diminishing experience Her language comes across as if '*show you'* means exposing herself, opening herself up to scrutiny of others which she fears and anticipates will demonstrate her failings and invite criticism. Her exasperated tone is quite childlike, almost regressive and under the pressure of having to demonstrate, she is overwhelmed by her own emotion and has

therefore regressed to primitive *'black and white'* thinking, as if there are no shades of grey. Lorna's extract suggests that she sees RP as a deficit-based activity primarily carried out for others, i.e. as inferred by *'show you'*, and that there is no choice, demonstrated by her words *'have to'*. Whilst said with an air of humour and flippancy, there is a feeling that Lorna is using this to downplay the potential challenges she foresees, an activity she considers at best unhelpful and at worst damaging to her sense of self.

The feelings of vulnerability emanate from all extracts and is highlighted and reinforced here by Becky's comparison of her reflective group work to her client work:

> *"Yeah…I guess its rather like our clients when they first come to therapy, you know that sense of not understanding or knowing what its going to be like, what will I have to say and how helpful will it actually be?"*

(Becky: 95-98)

Becky's compassionate tone evokes a sense of how formidable therapy can feel, conveying how her feelings have helped her to empathise with her client at a deep level of awareness that she likens it to her own RP process. Aware that her experience was similar to a client's, she is able to think in a more reflective way which she is likely to communicate to her clients. Reflecting on the parallels between the RP process and therapeutic process by comparing her feelings of vulnerability to those of her client may prevent her from pushing away her feelings in order to avoid vulnerability, or unwittingly acting upon them in another way. This illustrates the sense of uncertainty both processes can potentially evoke and highlights the negative emotional reactions likely to occur

as a result. Similar to Becky**,** Sally shares this fear of opening up and goes further by emphasising for her it is a 'personal journey':

"It's a personal journey, a personal experience, and I think sometimes for

me (pause) my vulnerabilities and some of my feelings where I might

have been struggling that I wouldn't have wanted to have been

considered elsewhere because I'm not sure that that would have been a

helpful environment for me to do that and I don't think I would have found

that supportive or perhaps would have had quite a detrimental impact on

my progress because it would have affected my own development and

how I felt about things"

(Sally: 115-121)

This extract affords compelling insight into Sally's view of RP is very much about the individual; her emphasis upon *'personal'* conveys something intimate and private. Opening up in what she perceives to be an unsupportive environment, would be *'detrimental'* even harmful to her sense of self. Her extract conveys vulnerability, there is a sense of isolation whereby Sally feels unable to share her feelings or gain support perhaps for fear of appearing incompetent that would leave her feeling exposed and vulnerable. Sally regains some control and manages initial disempowerment experienced by choosing not to open up. This may possibly lead Sally to find alternative outlets for disclosure or avoid processing altogether which is likely to have detrimental outcomes, such as inhibiting learning or increasing feelings of helplessness and isolation. Paradoxically, choosing not to disclose and reflect, in order to self

protect, leads to difficulties and is perhaps evident here in Sally's extract as she conveys a sense of feeling overwhelmed:

> *"I think there's times when you <u>get caught up,</u> as I say, in everything that's going on and feeling quite… deskilled or that you're not really getting where you want to be'.*

(Sally: 54-56)

Sally's use of *'caught up'* suggests feeling trapped, as if lost, signified when she conveys a sense of not being able to get to *'where you want to be'*. There is a sense she is therefore in limbo, searching to get somewhere she is not able to get to, and feeling *'deskilled'* implying a loss of her former knowledge. This may suggest that her choice to not disclose because of her fear of vulnerability, has paradoxically led her to feel vulnerable through the very act of being *'deskilled'*. Difficulty of reflecting openly and honestly and communicating what is occurring was common across the accounts and appeared related to the fear of appearing incompetent. This tension between an awareness of the need to open up, yet wanting to protect oneself would be likely to lead to dissonance for participants. Additionally, not opening up may help reduce feelings of vulnerability but by not taking risks to be open is likely to lead to issues not being processed. Processing and becoming more at ease with emotion is likely to lead participants being more available to client's emotional needs and in turn enhance their own capacity for emotional situations.

In relation to the above Maggie's extract provides a compelling insight into view of RP highlighting the emotions experienced:

> *"Umm, one of the, umm, things that can happen though, is you know, umm and… you know finding what you could do better and looking at it that way and flagellating yourself, umm you know and and, finding everything, every small tiny thing you could have, maybe, possibly have done wrong, umm and, you know that is also a very fine line".*

(Maggie: 52-59)

For Maggie there is a 'right' way to do RP echoed by the fact she perceives there to be severe consequences if not. Her use of *'fault', 'flawed', 'beat'* and *'flagellating'* are vivid and evocative of the significance of the hostility and contentious place she finds herself. Her imagery portraying her experiences stand out in the transcript as distinct and portray an unpleasant experience which communicates a powerful affective aspect to RP where she anticipates dire consequences if not done properly. This fear of getting it wrong appears to hover over Maggie like a judgment on her ability and contributes to a feeling of self-doubt and inadequacy compounded by the threat of appearing flawed. This pressure is likely to cause contention and stress, shaping and defining how she views herself:

> *"And if you cross it to the other side, to the dark side of reflection, then umm, you can I think, you know of course become very anxious"*

(Maggie: 59-61).

Maggie's language appears on the surface to be a warning to others' concerning their RP and how this should be done effectively. On closer analysis, it appears that the way to do RP is aimed at herself as she has described herself as having to become *'extraordinarily reflective'* (42) as a result

of a *'difficult time'* (47*)*. Understanding the covert meaning in this extract allows us to glimpse the tension and fragility that Maggie feels. Indeed, she reveals later in the interview that she suffered anxiety and depression.

3.3.4 'Thinking and thinking': Feeling stuck

This sub-theme relates to the participant experiences of feeling stuck with their reflections, whilst the cause of feeling stuck varied, commonality exists where they remain in a state of ambivalence, feeling unable to move forward.

Participants' question 'am I doing this right?' which suggests that participants feel there is a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way to reflect. This creates a conflict because the pressure felt to do it 'right' is likely to leave participants reflecting unthinkingly and strategically rather than reflecting in more authentic ways that lay open their struggles but leaves them fearful of appearing incompetent. Consequently, they may portray guardedness with the result that their struggles remain unacknowledged and/or they can become stuck, unable to move on.

For Sally her experiences of feeling stuck occur when she felt overwhelmed. Paradoxically her RP ability appears to decline in direct response to her increasing negative and stressful feelings making her less able to reflect constructively, the resource that should help her move on:

> *"So it was just about putting it down, or if I was feeling overwhelmed about something, actually my reflective ability goes down significantly so I'm less able to use that in a helpful way…*
>
> *…If I'm in the right place in my head, absolutely, I saw how that would help me"*

(Sally: 172-174, 176).

There is a sense that RP for Sally necessitates her being in the right frame of mind and likely links with above sub-theme 'Intrapersonal struggles' (3.3.3) outlining the fear of getting it wrong. There is a sense here for Sally that she experiences oscillation from being able to reflect when in '*the right place*' to feeling stuck, unable to move forward. Being stuck for too long may be counter-productive to her self and her learning. For some, feeling stuck was identified as ruminating, likely to impair thinking and problem solving, and in turn driving away support. It is likely that by not engaging in active problem solving and instead becoming absorbed by negative thoughts may become a self-sustaining cycle as Sally alludes to in her extract.

Linked with their fear getting it wrong, as outlined in above theme, and concerns about appearing incompetent, participants become caught up in these conflicting and confusing feelings without any sense of movement towards resolution and feel stuck in a downward spiral. Maggie describes her feeling of becoming stuck:

> "*Umm… and again, here we get into there's a difference between you know, contemplating your navel to the point where you're tunnel visioned, umm… and you know, no reflection at all*"

(Maggie: 204-207)

She initially used this description to describe how trainees should reflect upon their practice by avoiding the '*dark side'*. However, it seems that her account here of her experience of RP was different, '*naval gazing'* might represent her

attempts to resolve internal conflicts but have been unsuccessful indicated by her suggestion it leads to *'no reflection'* and her later reference to her experience of anxiety. This suggests the potential for RP to become ineffective. Specifically her use of *'tunnel visioned'* seems to convey a sense of being stuck or trapped in a cycle with negative repercussions of '*no reflection at all'*. It also links with Maggie's thoughts about the need to find a balance and avoid rumination. As with Maggie, Sally identifies that rumination leads her to feeling stuck as a result of too much focused attention on the issue in hand:

> **"And I think it's easy you know to then end up thinking and thinking and ruminating but not getting anywhere"**

(Sally: 250-252)

Her resultant difficulty and distress are conveyed by the effort she employs but lack of resolution to move forward. This is said with a matter of fact tone, as if resigned to this, there is a sense that her attempts to work out resolution alone and resulting failure leads to a negative downward cycle conveyed by her repetition of *'thinking and thinking'*. As a result, she has not been able to process her strong emotions and has become stuck, likely to negatively impact on herself and client work.

Master theme one: Summary

These four sub-themes that comprise master theme one are representative of the challenges that RP evoke and strategies employed to deal with them.

The initial mystifying experience felt in the absence of information is compounded by underlying tension created by, 'having to do' RP to meet academic requirements. There is a sense that participants acknowledge the

importance of RP but they have been left to find their own way. Salient emotions are evident in the RP process and fear of getting it wrong is associated with appearing incompetent, compounded by lack of support. By evaluating situations when appropriate to reflect and open up, and by engaging in avoidance, participants hope to gain relief from uncomfortable feelings in order to self protect. However, this appears to be a 'catch 22' where these strategies provide relief but are temporary. They act to prevent authentic reflection and may prevent processing difficult material likely to lead to feelings of further isolation and helplessness. Ironically, the disengagement strategy allows breathing space where reflecting on the reasons why they don't want to reflect, eventually acts to aid their RP as participants describe in sub-theme 'knowing your self before using your self' (3.4.1).

3.4 Master theme two: Doing reflective practice

This master theme represents the participants' personal experiences of 'learning by doing' RP. This proceeds sequentially from master theme one, which highlights initial experiences of an absence of information followed by struggles with initial experiences and subsequent feelings engendered. Three sub-themes emerge and capture participants' accounts describing how they experience and use RP. Firstly, participants highlight how coming to know and learn about themselves, through beginning the process of self-awareness is essential preparation for RP. The next sub-theme highlights how participants' talk about the pathway to RP, which further highlights an awareness of bodily feelings, such as a 'gut feeling' that acts as a trigger to their RP. Through coming to know self as outlined in the first sub-theme, participants state they learn to tune into and read their bodily feelings that indicate a 'sense' that triggers their reflective process. The final sub-theme refers to the post-session

processing or meta-reflection that participants engage in to reflect upon their reflections, which appears to be facilitated by both time and space.

3.4.1 Self-reflection: "Knowing your self before using your self" (Rosie: 188)

"Well, there's something about knowing yourself before using yourself in that process to go forward with clients and stuff and just be aware of issues that might come up, I suppose you can't get rid of them, but at least you're aware of them so hopefully they don't put a barrier between you and your client".

(Rosie: 190-195)

This sub-theme, illustrated in the title quote taken from Rosie's account, captures participants views that self-knowledge was an essential precursor to engagement in RP. Self-awareness emerged from the data, alongside a present-focused attentiveness to the experience in the moment that was facilitative of RP. As shown by Rosie above, this reflective stance in practice, and ongoing self-evaluation arises from and is fed back into practice. This heightened self-awareness appears to lead naturally to a critical self-evaluation and is illustrated further as Rosie demonstrates her learning to identify her own fallibility:

"It's going back to that people-pleasing thing again… I was having a lot of anxieties about being patronising, there was so much going on that day, I don't know, so much was at stake I felt so… I had to explore that

> *with my personal therapist so that I could plan how to approach my*
> *supervisor"*

(Rosie: 381--386)

Rosie talks about *'people pleasing'* and is aware how this might impact on her relationships. In this extract she seems to be feeling overwhelmed and anxious shown by her words *'so much was at stake'*. The nature of her anxiety seems to relate to her fear of being misunderstood, it is as if her worry is that she may respond to her supervisor inappropriately, unsurprising given her suggestion she is a 'people pleaser'. Aware of this, she returns to therapy in an attempt to remedy this and to discover the meaning and resolve this internal conflict and dissonance.

Similar to the situation with Rosie, Kat identifies the importance of self-awareness gained through RP within personal therapy; the most explicit example of this is given in the following extract:

> *"I know what it is like to screw up and just be witnessed sobbing and just*
> *to be, just someone see that pain… I know how helpful that is"*

(Kat: 69--71)

Repetition of *'just'* seems to convey a sense of simplicity *'to 'be'* with another, yet the power of this is shown through Kat's experience. Explicit expression of *'be witnessed sobbing'* and *'someone see that pain'* provides a moving insight into how powerful reflecting on her self in therapy was for her. This experience would likely be felt as exposing and for some participants, connects with their fear of opening up as described in Master theme one sub-theme 3.3.3 'The dark

side of reflection'. This extract communicates the significance Kat attaches to the need for sufficient inner space to reflect through distancing herself in order to pause for thought and reflect on her own uncomfortable feelings. This might facilitate Kat's awareness and a more complete understanding of interpersonal dynamics and enhance client work. The following extract is equally powerful and compelling, there is something determined and strong-willed with her use of her language asking others to do what she has done her self:

> "*Then I am asking my clients, 'unpick unpick unpick cry open up'… I feel like I can genuinely do that because I have done it, I have done it, yeah, I know what I am asking you to do is really difficult but I also know that it is a really helpful"*

(Kat: 73-76).

In this extract, Kat identifies the criticality of emotional involvement as essential part of the RP process, and that it needs to be felt both by the therapist and client in order for it to be *'really helpful'*. Rather than just informing client of benefits of RP within the therapeutic process, there is a sense here that Kat 'feels' it, implying the difference between understanding self on a cognitive level and gaining a full-bodied experience of understanding emotionally suggesting that self-reflection in RP has provided her new insights and perspectives towards practice for Kat. There is a sense here of humility, gained through addressing her own issues which appears to enhance her empathic stance. The accounts suggest that all participants recognise the importance of knowing ones own strengths and limitations highlighted as an important feature of RP. Through being aware of, and able to reflect on, their own experience and emotional responses through personal therapy, paradoxically, it appears that

participants are more available to the communications of their clients enhancing their professional capacity.

The next sub-theme is intrinsically linked with this sub-theme 'Knowing your self before using your self', as participants describe how they identify their bodily feelings that trigger something that feels uncomfortable that precipitates the reflective process. This awareness of feelings, manifested initially in physical sensations within critical parts of the body, demonstrates the significance of attunement and knowing the self, providing a pathway to 'doing' RP.

3.4.2 Pathway to RP: Locating feelings in the body

Several participants refer to having feelings in their body, a 'sense' that was an initial trigger to awareness that something was not quite right or didn't appear to 'fit' with content or how they were perceiving the situation they were in. Through words and non-verbal body language, participants demonstrated commonalities and divergences of this initial trigger they experienced:

> *"I had this fidgeting feeling, I couldn't sit still and relax and thought what's this about? And that's when I began to think about the helper role…*
> *…I also get distinct feelings in my body, maybe a tingling sensation, my heart beating a little faster or a churning kind of feeling in my stomach… its really interesting so if I kind of tune in to that…"*

(Rosie: 220-223, 217-219)

Kat recalls a similar bodily feeling that something felt uncomfortable as she describes a difficult final session with a client:

> *"I said Okay well we are finishing now and I have just got so much I want to say to you and I just don't know how to say it, so I am just going to say I wish you all the best"*

(Kat: lines 226-228)

Here Kat feels overwhelmed, she has *'so much I want to say'* but is unable to move forward leaving a sense she feels hopeless likely to cause her to doubt her competency. As she describes the start of the RP process she identifies the physical feeling that precipitated it:

> *"I don't know what that was about it was like I had all these things I wanted to say but it was all stuck in my throat and I didn't know what to say to her"*

(Kat: 228-231)

This physical feeling of words *'stuck'* in her throat signals something was not right about the ending for Kat, she felt prevented from and unable to get her words out. This extract conveys a deep emotional connection to her client and a painful realisation both emotionally and metaphorically that she was lost for words and unable to express what she would have liked to. It appeared her bodily sensation signaled a need for further reflection to make sense of the given reaction, which she does in supervision:

> *"And then I just burst into tears....*
>
> *…All that really raw stuff that you just want to say but you can't because it's not professional, then all the emotion came out that*

needed to come out from that work"

(Kat: 232, 235-236)

There is a sense Kat has had to negate her true emotions in session, holding onto *'all that really raw stuff'* so as not to appear unprofessional. This is likely to feel difficult and tense, subsequently there is a sense of relief for her in supervision. It is as if Kat has lifted the lid, revealing the rawness evoked by unleashing her emotions, something she was unable to do in session. This reflective space allows Kat to process her emotional experience, be heard and supported, in doing so she also becomes aware of her own limit of tolerance with regard to her client work.

Becky shared that she felt a knot in her stomach, and became aware of a change in heart rate:

> *"I was aware of a tightness in my stomach, a knot, then I thought what's going on? As she was talking, what she was telling me, it didn't seem to match how she was presenting, she was relaying this really sad story with such blank expression"'*
>
> (Becky: 372-376)

The extracts suggest that participants place importance upon learning to become aware and read their bodily sensations, which trigger their RP. It is likely that this is related to the third sub-theme: 'Pause for thought', as the need to process their experiences and resultant emotions evoked through being with their clients is identified as a vital part of the process and is integral to their sense self and well-being.

3.4.3 Pause for thought: Time and place

From the accounts, the progression of reflecting concludes with the need for the participant to find a way to reflect and process their experiences, as if the participants had now come to appreciate the need and importance of RP. The participants sought this through external reflection outside the clinical setting or away from the event. For some, this took the form of formal individual or group supervision and personal therapy, two participants highlighted the importance of their reflective journals. For some, time was needed alone to address their experience; for others, it necessitated being heard and supported. Kat highlights the need to spend time processing the experience and elaborates even further by disclosing that the consequence of not having time to process means it will remain with her:

> *"The high level of needs and high level of distress and sadness and you know… tragedy that we see day to day, I don't want to take that home with me, I would end up mentally ill"*

(Kat: 208-211)

Here there is clear identification with the level of her client's distress but recognition of Kat's need to protect herself from the emotional burden that may lead to ill health. In order to protect herself, Kat utilises RP to discover her personal strategies and boundaries. She does not want this to impinge on her personal life. There is a sense of Kat's self-awareness, whereby she knows her limits, recognising how easy it is to absorb the emotional trauma of her work. Kat, as with other participants, demonstrates use of RP to understand and

locate themselves in the context of their role, and importantly to understand how to care for themselves in their role as therapists.

> *"Yeah, it like stabs me in the heart to think about that feeling, and you do that when you are with your patients, you are empathising….*
>
> *….If I try and sit and think about it from her point of view that is heart breaking… shit"* .

(Kat: 265-266, 268)

Kat's use of *'heart breaking'* conveys an intensity of feelings. There is a real sense of Kat connecting to her clients but that this may likely cause her anguish and sorrow. Kat is aware she needs to manage these complex emotional reactions by addressing the emotion through supervision:

> *"If I couldn't have said that, and cried in my supervision where could I have done that?"*
>
> *"…So where do I go with it? If it wasn't for being able to take it to these reflective practice places like supervision and my team, it would undoubtedly go around and around in my mind"*

(Kat: lines 236-237, 217-219)

Her question *'Where could I have done that?'* seems emotive and signifies the importance of being able to process the experience, not doing so means becoming stuck linking with sub-theme 3.3.4 'Thinking and thinking' not able to move forward and unhealthy personal outcomes. The extract perhaps highlights Kat's ethical stance since it appears important for her, despite her sense of anguish, not to simply turn to anyone to gain support and express her emotions.

This may leave her open to the possibility of her distress remaining with her and likely to add further strain in an existing emotional situation.

All participants refer to having reflected on significant experiences away from their client work and upon the event in question. Here Maggie describes a particularly emotive session with a client:

> *"Knowing that I had supervision meant that I could hold onto that for a week…so I held it in my mind thinking I will take it back to supervision, got on with the rest of my life or my week, my clients, my going home, my home life"*

(Maggie: 705-709)

There is a sense here of partitioning, that she does not allow her client work to encroach on other areas of her life which is likely to entail a great deal of discipline. Maggie seems to negate her true feelings and emotions or at least put them on hold until she finds an appropriate reflective space to process them. In this instance, it is supervision. Whilst Maggie is able to wait, Becky and Sally illustrate their need to recount her experiences in written form immediately following a session:

> *"Seeing it in black and white I guess…I don't know if that is just me because I like writing things down"*

(Becky: 321-322)

> *"…A good way to pull it out on paper, get it out of my head and onto the paper and being able to look back at that is much more helpful than that being just an internal thought process"*

(Sally: 177-179)

Highlighting a similar sentiment, Rosie's description of her need to *'debrief'* also suggests a sense of immediacy, a need to revisit the experience and unburden promptly conveying a sense of one-way communication as if the need to share the burden is greater than the desire to resolve the issue:

> *"Then I felt the need to instantly debrief after the session, once the client had left, to mention it to my supervisor because I thought it was important that she knew that I'd been thinking about this because it was the end of the day and we wouldn't have had time to talk about it otherwise… even though it was a bit daunting and I was a bit worried about her response…"*

(Rosie: 238-241)

There is a real sense of the heightened anxiety felt by Rosie and the need to reflect. Her comments suggest the uncertainty and self-doubt in her own ability with client work and, even though daunted by the prospect of talking to her supervisor, her *'need to instantly'* do this overrides this fear and is the catalyst to reflect. The validation from her supervisor gives Rosie courage to be congruent about the dissonance she experiences with her client and serves to reinforce her supervisors support;

> *"She was very reassuring and said think about it and gave me the space to look back and think"*

(Rosie: lines 250--251)

There is a sense of dependency upon her supervisor and a felt need for guidance through a difficult session. Whilst Rosie is empowered by validation from her supervisor, given previous fears of appearing incompetent, she is encouraged to take the 'risk' of finding her own answer and explanation as opposed to being told what worked and why. This need to *'debrief'* after a session, suggests participants' experiences continue to stay with them if opportunity to process them is missing. Similarly Sally highlights her immediate gains from her reflective writing:

> *"To look back and see how much I've learned and how much my thoughts about certain things have changed, but yes it's quite interesting how much I've changed"*

(Sally: 175-176)

This helps Sally to *'get it out of my head'* (177) which suggests that Sally has identified with her clients distress, and needs to manage complex emotional reactions. She gains relief through physically writing out the words as if this distances herself from the distress and is later enhanced by the process of looking back. It is evident that Sally has accomplished positive growth and change form her experience where she has learnt and notices changing thoughts, possibly suggesting different perspectives have been acquired. Positive growth can be inferred by Sally's' buoyant tone of voice and her comment *'it's interesting how much I've changed'*. There is a sense of acceptance and recognition of the importance of RP, which signifies a shift towards reflective writing in particular which has resulted in Sally's change. A

conceptual shift is evident in Sally's thinking as early in her transcript, she talked about the detrimental consequences of reflective writing for her, which left her feeling vulnerable as she perceived its likely negative impact upon her progress.

Space and distance, both in time and proximity, appear to be important factors in RP and processing experiences because of potential detrimental outcomes highlighted by participants. Whilst the above highlights a sense of immediacy, Lorna suggests her processing experiences in a group becomes easier as time has elapsed:

> *"It's hard to step back and see the bigger picture, it's easier thinking about the process of specific groups I've been involved with now that there is some time has elapsed"*

(Lorna: 46-48)

This implies that Lorna experienced difficulty in that she was unable to process at the time, possibly suggesting it was too painful and gaining distance has given her perspective. Lorna also talked about the benefit of 'distance' in terms of proximity within a reflective group setting whereby it allows her time to sit back and become the audience to her own story without the pressure of having to contribute to an ensuing dialogue. It also serves to validate Lorna's emotions. This is illustrated by her comment:

> *"Hearing others talk and discuss my client in the reflective group from different perspectives is really refreshing, it gave me a new sense of perspective as I was feeling particularly worn down by this client. It also*

> *made me feel that some of my thoughts and feelings were real, it was*
>
> *validating in lots of ways*"

(Lorna: 106-110)

Part of the post-session process was having time and internal space to reflect irrespective of outcome. All participants describe how they would take their reflections to alternative reflective spaces if deemed appropriate or to conclude their reflections. The accounts reveal a rhythmical quality to the reflective process experienced, a sense of ebb and flow. This flow between nearness and distance suggests a desire to be close to the experience whilst at the same time at a distance in terms of time and physical proximity. This same pattern is evident in the participants' contemplating their decision to take reflections to another space.

Participants highlight that pausing for thought and time and place are important to help process an experience. This conveys an aspect of RP that evokes affinity with the experience but from a safe distance. It seems likely that this post-session processing is important so as to be heard and supported. Being unable to process emotions leaves participants vulnerable to detrimental consequences.

Master theme two Summary

The three sub-themes that comprise master theme two are representative of the experience and use of RP, there is commonality in activities participants describe which facilitate familiarity and a coming to know the RP process. They describe an experience of coming to know the self, embodied knowing and pausing for thought in order to process experiences, which highlights the need

for participants to reflect upon their reflections, which seems to be achieved and influenced by both time and space. The resulting impact of these experiences of RP is explored in master theme two highlighting participant responses to their emergent RP, which appear to have wide reaching consequences.

3.5 Master theme three: Impact of RP

This final master theme completes the analysis and links all the previous themes together. The themes described thus far have been testament to the emotional experience of, and reaction to, the struggles and difficulties participants encounter. However towards the latter stages of their training, descriptions of growth, readjustment and new perspectives mark a transformation or a new way of 'being'. The participants describe RP in a holistic way where connections are made relationally in personal therapy and supervision, and additional connections are sealed between experience, knowledge and self-awareness gained. This final theme describes how the journey of coming to know RP and reconciling their struggles outlined in master theme one and by 'doing' RP outlined in master theme two, manifests in an essential requirement for growth. Three salient sub-themes were identified conveying how engagement with RP processes enabled the participants to influence growth, address emotion and shape practice.

3.5.1 "It gives you that 360º knowing": Growth in confidence

> *"You kind of relate the **clinical work to the theory** in the reflective*
>
> *practice, and that gives you that 360° knowing of something, that holistic,*
>
> *Yeah now I know what that means, now I understand what the book is*
>
> *talking about"*

(Kat: 357-359)

This sub-theme refers to the increase in confidence and empowerment all participants express relating to their growth. This appears to be a result of an experiential process involving change through which initial feelings of self-doubt their confidence grows slowly 'over time'. This ongoing process of change is facilitated by positive connections to others: *'it was the whole package'* (Maggie: line 533), additionally she says of her personal therapist:

"*There was a lot of shared context and… umm… he was a very kind and empathic person who wasn't afraid to use, of the use of self*"

Maggie:(531-533)

Sally's account infers positive growth as she alludes to her ability to *'greater in-depth thinking'*:

"*I think over time, with everything else, all the other systems that are in place to support, it was about looking at that greater, in-depth thinking of myself, and that greater insight into myself and realising I'd got better at it*"

(Sally: 288-291)

Sally reflects on her RP process as an experiential and ongoing process. This extract is imbued with confirming statements about *'myself'* the fact that Sally's extract includes statements such as *'greater insight'* and *'better at it'* implies positive growth. Previously Sally alluded to her reflective ability declining when overwhelmed. Here, in contrast, she seems more able to manage this process

thereby regaining a sense of control, something she previously identified as absent. This may be because of support and *'all the other systems'* she refers to implying a more holistic experience that has developed through this ongoing process representing her growth.

In all of the above extracts there is a sense of self-assurance and confidence where participants express positive meaning from their experiences of RP. For Kat it solidifies her theory to practice *'that 360 knowing'*, for Maggie it was being in receipt of her therapists *'use of self'* and for Sally it was personal insight. Similarly, in Becky's account there is a sense of having faced something unfamiliar and discovering something new about how she approached her work. A sense that Becky appears to have established enhanced self-awareness and new personal meaning highlights the ongoing experiential process of coming to know RP. Becky talks about what the process of RP means for her:

> *"I was able to look back and reflect on that reflective process and realising that over time it was making me more conscious in my thinking and how I was exploring my responses, my feelings, how I was approaching things"*

 (Becky: 387-390)

Here Becky takes a meta-reflective approach, as if she is able to look from the outside in. She recognises and identifies that growth occurs *'over time'*, a slow process that necessitates an experiential element for it to occur. She is not simply reflecting on the 'here and now' ' but reflecting upon reflections as well as process, likely to deepen her learning and understanding. There is a sense

of Becky's growth in her ever-increasing self-awareness accompanied by enhanced confidence. There is recognition that her reactions and feelings are both present, worthy of exploration and valid in her work. For all participants, this confidence is accompanied by a greater sense of direction with which came several empowering elements. Lorna demonstrates this when she says of RP:

"It reinforces what you have learned as well sometimes or sort of challenges maybe your ideas about the way you should do things and it is always a good thing I think…and I think in reflective groups or with reflecting in supervision, obviously you get somebody else's reflections as well which obviously helps your learning"

(Lorna: 110-114)

Similarly to Sally and Becky, in the above extract, Lorna's change and growth is apparent as she describes benefits of reflecting with others. She appears to gain from validation of what she does know but additionally gains from her ideas being challenged, now seen as *'always a good thing'*. There is a sense that she manages to overcome previous feelings of vulnerability and a fear of incompetency. Lorna now embraces support in RP and it is as if a connection to others is important during this process and appears to bolster her sense of agency and voice highlighted by *'I think'* repeated through the extract.

Kat identifies with the acquisition of greater confidence but describes an additional quality resulting from RP that pervades her work. It appears that what participants recover from previous anxiety and struggles is confidence in what they do know but also confidence in ability to stay with feelings of not knowing:

"I think as well, I gradually became more and more ok with staying with my feelings in sessions, when I wasn't sure what to do…when I felt puzzled… it was tricky because there were lots of silences" (laugh)

(Kat: 455-458)

This thinking seems both facilitated by RP and allows for RP, an internal space to stay with the uncertainty and feeling *'puzzled'* significantly contrasting with avoiding anxieties described in Theme one: 'The challenge of reflective practice'. Inevitably this bought with it its own difficulties as participants struggle with feelings of being uncomfortable in silence. However two participants were explicit about resultant benefits recognising a cyclical process as this silent space allows space for clients to also reflect:

"I know now how useful silence can be for reflecting in sessions but I still have this urge to fill the space but that's definitely about me and how difficult I find it..."

(Sally: 302-304)

Through experiential learning Sally recognises how previous difficult *'silence'* is now useful and familiar as she assimilates the benefits into her sense of therapist identity. She has reflected and looked inwards to discover that the awkwardness belongs to her. However, the caveat for two participants is that the resultant silence is too anxiety provoking and difficult to dissipate. This highlights a sense that some participants may be easily destabilised by difficulties, thus making them more vulnerable. In one sense a struggle persists for some but is now a different struggle. For others, although they face the

same struggle, the aspects of themselves that are assimilated into seem to outweigh the aspects that lead to vulnerability in their RP.

This sub-theme represents participants' resultant growth through RP, the sense of transformation experienced is present in varying degrees in all accounts. Confidence grows and a sense of agency and voice is conveyed through which past struggles are reconceptualised. Increasing their reflective capacity and access to it, carries not only an obvious provision of support, but represents new opportunities and growth. There remains however an underlying tension however in their RP, for example silence evoking difficult feelings, but for most by utilising the process alongside new found confidence enables them to cope with the difficulties. The next sub-theme leads on from this and describes how participants have learnt to negotiate feelings and emotions.

3.5.2 "Was it something to do with me?" Negotiating emotion (Becky: 334)

Common to all participants is the emotion evoked in the role of their work. This sub-theme describes the role RP has in addressing participants' own emotions and those emotions arising from the work. Rather than employing avoidance in order to protect self as described in sub-theme 3.3.3, 'Feeling stuck', RP is utilised so as to manage emotions. Kat describes her feelings following a client session and necessity of RP:

> *"But then of course there is something there…. Emotional… which is about 'oh my God there's these poor children' and it makes me feel like this and I want to say that… I feel so that…*

> *… just being fully there for that person and Just knowing the difference, what's theirs? What's Mine?"*

(Kat, 166-168,138)

Here Kat talks about a range of feelings she has about her client and also the children involved. The intensity of her emotion is conveyed here through rapid speech conveying a heightened sense of anxiety. She speaks as if she is being swamped with emotion all over again. Kat is perhaps conflicted by what she wants to say and what she feels. By reflecting on these emotions, Kat seems to be able to redress the balance between where and with whom the feelings belong, thereby gaining clarity about where her responsibilities lie. RP utilised in this way could be seen to ameliorate and moderate any potential adverse personal impact from the emotion evoked. Becky shares an experience of attempting to work out and manage what occurred in session with a client using RP:

> *"Especially when there are things that aren't said in the room, like why did I feel that I didn't bring that up with somebody, or why do I think that they found it difficult to speak about it, was it something to do with me or was it something to do with them?"*

(Becky: 331-335)

With growing confidence and self-awareness, it appears participants are more adept at recognising and looking for symbolic meaning in what is occurring by considering client's behaviour and actions. With the above quote there is a sense that Becky needed to step back from the affect generated in session to process the dynamics and enhance understanding. The account suggests that

she is able to prevent herself and her client from reacting in ways that are predictable and mirror how others react to the client. This is exemplified in her grapple to discern what is *'unsaid'* demonstrating the complexity of layers of understanding embedded in the explicit and implicit. In understanding her client, Rosie is equally engaged in understanding her self. Rosie shares this experience of trying to place feelings:

> *"Trying to figure out whether it was something on her part because I was so confused I couldn't even put it into place so I was looking at possible anxieties on her part and my part"*

(Rosie 308-310)

Becoming more aware of 'self' means RP helps participants to consider their own personal parameters of emotional engagement leading to greater clarity. Here Lorna highlights how salient RP is for her in addressing her own emotions and those of her client who self harms:

> *"I remember sitting, feeling utterly useless, not knowing what to say or do…I felt really upset inside but could only think about not letting it show…squashing them down...(pause)…in my mind I put it on hold to reflect on later, which I did with my supervisor"*

(Lorna: 128-131)

The tone of the extract conveys a sense of futility experienced in the face of the enormity of her task in managing emotions. Her words *'utterly useless'* convey the depth of her feelings of inadequacy. The tension is apparent as feelings try

to surface and Lorna is compelled to *'squash'* them, the effort of which is implicit in her choice of words, conveying a need to crush as if to extinguish completely, highlighting how intolerable she anticipates they will be should they surface. She gets through this experience by detaching, embracing avoidance so as not to become entangled with the distress. However detaching is only a temporary solution likely to have a negative impact. Strategies to avoid this tension are paradoxically likely to highlight the fact that the tension exists. Additionally participants are likely to behave in a way that they present an outward display of neutrality possibly interpreted negatively by client or supervisor and considered incompatible with clients suffering, intimating lack of empathy. This tension is likely to feel overwhelming and stressful. Lorna goes on to talk about taking this to supervision:

"It was hard at first…my supervisor sort of probed for my feelings (laugh)... but I felt uncomfortable like I was talking negatively of my client… I was upset at the cutting, seeing it, but… umm… also a bit disgusted really…(pause)… how could she do that?"

(Lorna: 133-136)

Lorna describes how her supervisor *'probed'* conveying the effort required to delve deeply to access feelings. Lorna's laugh may suggest attempts to deflect her uncomfortable feelings and is perhaps indicative of attempts to keep shameful feelings of disgust concealed. Reflective processes, prompted by this challenge to her beliefs and values enable Lorna to make personal meaning from the situation, acquiring understanding of how she reacts but also how to navigate emotional challenges in her subsequent session:

"I felt more able because it was, you know, ok...it was ok… I wasn't

obviously happy to know she was cutting…but I felt more at ease, but I

let her know you know how it made me feel and reflected how upsetting

and painful it must be for her too…I think I… in that moment I was able to

empathise and be myself with her and that was good feeling"

(Lorna: 142-146)

The ability to be present and aware of self in sessions appears mediated by RP. This appears a cyclical process whereby participants reflective ability necessitates a display of safety, sensitivity and affect from supervisors, through which feelings are voiced despite a natural reluctance and a desire to distance self from pain as in Lorna's extract. This genuineness allows Lorna then to reflect with her client and offer her own personal feelings and reflections allowing her client to access hers. This links to the next sub-theme, where the experience of RP continues to shape participant's client work through accessing and building connections.

3.5.3 Shaping practice: Building connections

This sub-theme describes the importance that participants feel towards connections made, which enhance reflective ability and shape practice. From participants' previous feelings of isolation at a lack of 'mastery' over RP, a pattern emerges suggesting these connections are a way of coping and dealing with the challenges outlined in master theme one. These connections become a vital source of practical and emotional support shaping participant practice through encouraging their empowerment and autonomy. A common thread

amongst building connections is trust, for example, between participant and supervisor. There is a sense that RP leads to relationships being on a more equal footing resulting from new found confidence highlighted in the previous sub-theme 3.6.2, this acts as a means for participants finding voice and being heard. Rosie's extract illustrates this through her use of supervision, she expressed concern that she had been drawn into a particular role with a client during group work which she reflected was unhelpful:

> "I had to facilitate the space, be a container for the client, and attend to their thoughts….but I found that I was being a helper almost, not a therapist…
>
> …*I made a comment to my supervisor who was there with me facilitating and said 'Oh I really noticed that I was doing this' and I knew that I almost shouldn't be, it wasn't the most effective I could be, and she goes 'oh I'm glad that you noticed that because so did I' and have a little think about what that's about"*

(Rosie: 53-57, 84-88)

Rosie's' language and tone illustrates supervision is a collaborative endeavour. She does not view herself as seeking out answers directly in a submissive, obedient and responsive way indicating her autonomy and confidence. Instead she seeks opinion based on past experience of people-pleasing. Whilst holding this in mind, she questions and evaluates what is occurring for her and her client, as if conscious not to make assumptions. With the aid of her supervisor and through her questioning reflective stance, she opens up the dialogue. Rosie appears to have developed a set of skills, as if a reference point, to know when

to reflect with her supervisor but is secure and trusting within this relationship to voice interpretation and disclose confusion at what was happening.

All participants begin to shape practice in this way where there is a sense of agency and reflexivity in their use of RP facilitated by reflecting with others. This privileges participants a means of gaining control and autonomy over what is previously seen as an unmanageable process. A more manageable reflective process is shared by Kat but takes the form of 'shaping practice' by boundary setting. Following a session facilitating a Men's Group in prison, a client passes a note, her burden and sense of responsibility to do the right thing feels ominous:

> *"All the security checks to get in and get out and I have this note that he had given me and I remember leaving the prison thinking… I was feeling like he was asking me to sneak this piece of paper out and do I announce it to the security guard? Or do I keep it secret and then I am colluding with him?"*

(Kat: 397-400)

This extract communicates the dilemma Kat faces aware that her actions may likely have detrimental consequences for her and her client and she reflects in supervision:

> *"My supervisor's advice, actually it was the best, I needed guidance, without that I would have just pretended it didn't happen and ignored it. That is not therapy"*
>
> (Kat: 411-413)

Even though awareness prevailed, there is a sense here that Kat struggles to resolve this issue alone conveying her need to reflect with another. Her connection with her supervisor is trusting shown in her willingness to disclose an issue that she may perceive alludes to her ineptness. She finds relief through reflecting with her supervisor and similarly to Rosie, uses herself as a reference point. The resultant reflections do not come as a revelation to Kat *'that is not therapy'* said with a confident and knowing tone, but her reflections are validating serving to guide her actions and bolster her therapist identity. There is a sense here of collaboratively re-assembling of boundaries as it appears Kat is never totally unaware of them, they were never really lost, but had been overwhelmed by the circumstances of the situation.

Sally uses her trusted team colleagues to reflect with and also find immediate relief:

> *"My immediate team, so I have had a session something has happened in the session, and say you know, 'My client I feel so bad for them they just told me this story how sad is that?' We hold each other, and without that holding, without me being held by my immediate team, I can't hold my patients, if I wasn't held it would be impossible for me to do my job"*

(Sally: 256-260)

Sally allows herself to be in touch with feelings of engagement, which appear to help her enter her clients' relational world, an experience she sometimes finds painful. This extract conveys that she is expressive with her feelings but notably comfortable here when reflecting on painful experiences. Here she uses her trusted colleagues to help reflect. Equally, emphasis upon the strength of

reaction resonates with her urgency to reflect from where she gains her strength that enables her to do her job.

This final sub-theme conveys the idea that to deal with emotions outlined previously, participants make use of the connections within relationships they have developed and come to see them as essential in their process of RP. Significantly, it appears that the RP experience is relational and participants cope with difficulties by compartmentalising RP, this is influenced by levels of trust they have with the person they choose to reflect with.

Master Theme 3: Summary

This master theme highlights a process where transformation and a new way of being through RP is experienced by participants. The sub-themes link with one another by referring to ongoing personal and professional development. There is a sense of transformation and responding to things in different ways compared with those outlined in previous master themes one and two. Participants convey this as a slow ongoing, progressive process. Previously, the accounts show for example, the way that participants detach and use avoidance when uncomfortable situations arise during RP. This is now experienced by participants more positively and is facilitated by connections with others within their reflective process. These three sub-themes are linked because they represent the positive growth participants experience through RP where they experience enhanced confidence, ability to address emotion and their use of the reflective process to shape their practice.

Whilst all participants experienced the positive impact of RP, several were still aware of the underlying tension and conflict, which surfaced at times. This

suggests the ongoing challenge of the process of RP. The data shows that the process of RP is experienced as an increased confidence that means dealing with uncertainty faced and feeling accepting of this.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

4.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses the analysis presented in Chapter three in the context of the overall research questions. Findings are compared with existing literature and theory. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested that the "it is in the nature of IPA that the interview and analysis will have taken you into new and unanticipated territory" (p.113). Therefore new literature distinct from that previously outlined in Chapter one will be highlighted where appropriate. Limitations associated with the study will be examined. Implications for counselling psychology are considered along with suggestions for future research.

Through semi-structured interviews, six trainee counselling psychologists discussed RP within the context of their training. Transcripts were analysed using IPA and revealed three master themes, providing an account of experiences and understandings of RP and its impact on development.

The main research question under investigation was: What are trainee counselling psychologists experiences of RP? Additionally the following areas were explored:

How do trainees understand RP?

How is the RP process experienced?

Within what contexts do they engage in RP?

What do trainees learn from reflecting?

The following will provide a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions highlighting some of the main issues that arose from the emergent narrative. This is organised under the following headings: 'Certainty versus uncertainty', 'How, when, where and why', 'Feeling stuck', 'Pedagogy', 'Context' 'The nature of the process' and 'Positive growth.'

4.2 Certainty versus uncertainty

In terms of the first research question, the first master theme provided an overview of participants' views of RP at the start of training, capturing the challenges experienced and emotions as well as the conceptual and practical problems surrounding RP rendering its application complex and difficult. Whilst the BPS (2006) endorses the 'reflective practitioner', participants in this study described a bewildering and perplexing experience resulting from the lack of available information regarding the concept and associated processes. Although RP is considered important in professional development, the analysis suggests that a better understanding of the relationship between how RP is taught is required to overcome such obstacles.

Participants detailed underlying tension they experienced from both power differentials and a feeling they 'have to do' RP in order to meet academic requirements. This analysis revealed a striking level of dissatisfaction and frustration about initial encounters with RP, compounded by lack of support. This suggests that engagement with RP can be anxiety provoking and not necessarily a constructive experience. Livtack, Mishna, and Bogo (2010) noted social work student's negative emotional reactions were exacerbated by the absence of helpful support. This is also consistent with the findings of Bennett and Saks (2006), in which the mentor relationship is viewed through the lens of

attachment theory, providing a secure base through supervision to which the student can return "for repair of the inevitable ruptures that occur during the field experience" (p. 671).

Participants in this study conveyed a sense of isolation (3.3.1) compounded by further frustration at missed opportunity for learning about RP. This resonates with Marton and Booth (1997), who suggested that both social and individual interaction to learning have their place. In the present study, lack of clarity alongside lack of opportunity with peers, created a sense of exclusion from the concept itself and from 'others' who participants perceived were proficient in RP. Participants discussed employing strategies to regulate negative emotions, for example emotion-focused (avoidance) coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Further Awasthi and Mishra (2007) suggest that emotion-avoidance coping is used by those feeling loss of control over a situation without skills to make changes. This suggests that the initial struggles experienced by the participants are characterised by feeling overwhelmed and disempowered. Although coping strategies served to alleviate feelings, emotion-avoidance coping increases rather than decreases emotional distress and is positively associated with the perceived severity of the stressor (Felton and Revenson, 1984).

The importance of collaboration with peers as a means of learning and developing draws on the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation, which describes how a community of practice accepts newcomers (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger (1998) suggests that the terms 'peripheral' and 'legitimate' are ways to modify the community. 'Peripheral' refers to the levels of risk, support and potential error making with which the newcomer chooses to engage as they become a 'core' practitioner. 'Legitimate' refers to the level of legitimacy that

established community members offer to newcomers. This resonates with the participant's experiences in this study, with varying levels of participation as newcomers, they develop their skills to become 'core' reflective practitioners within the community and grow in their identity as a counselling psychologist. Participants in this study undertake a journey during their training as they discussed undergoing a change in the way they understood themselves and their learning. This concept provides a framework for development as newcomers and how communities might assist in supporting trainees attempting to understand RP. Particularly resonating with Vygotsky *et al.,* (1978), a learner can be aided by a collaborator who already exists in 'the zone', or as Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, once legitimated, newcomers placed on the periphery can progress to the core as their confidence increases. Participants in the present study reflecting on the early stage of their experience clearly conveyed their lack of confidence however as the analysis showed, this grew with time. This theme therefore outlines the beginning of the participants' journey, they clearly do not feel part of the community they find themselves in, and are doubtful about their ability as a reflective practitioner.

Given the lack of explanation, complexity of the RP concept and lack of opportunity for discussion, it is unsurprising that these complex feelings of isolation and exclusion result in feeling disengaged and anxious as described in sub-theme 3.3.3. For several participants this led to questioning the value and meaningfulness of RP. Furthermore, these feelings may be indicative of both an academic and organisational culture where risk-averse and evidence-based approaches to practice prevail (Roth and Fonagy, 1996; Munro, 2010), and may have a pervasive adverse impact on trainees' outlook towards RP. The accounts portray a strong relationship between perceived external judgment

and negative impact on sense of self. This may be because immersion in such a culture leads to RP becoming a 'tick box' exercise that is contrary to the development of RP and critical thinking, and is likely to frustrate the learning process (Wilson, 2013). This would suggest future research is imperative to explore this further within the training context in order to avoid or address unnecessary anxiety and disengagement.

The sub-theme 3.3.2, 'Disparate meanings' both resonate with and elucidate attempts in the literature to define this multi-faceted concept of RP. Participants' accounts revealed the complexity and individual variety of their experience of RP although commonalities were evident. Rich descriptions of what it was like to experience and utilise RP were given as evidenced in the extracts within the analyses. Qualitative understandings of the process are needed (Guiffrida, Jordan and Barnes, 2007) and these findings may go some way to help facilitate further understanding. Efforts to consider RP in this way are beneficial as distinct from a theoretical perspective as without this knowledge, interventions proposed at facilitating RP are likely to be considerably ill informed (Schmidt and Adkins, 2012). This study has gone some way to understand through participants rich and thick descriptions of what it is like to learn RP and utilise it, as shown throughout the extracts. Therefore, to enable maximum effectiveness of RP, a body of knowledge must be developed that clearly relates to defining and teaching it (Jay and Johnson, 2001) that meets the level of trainee understanding. A commonality for participants in this study was the feelings of uncertainty experienced at the paucity of information, illustrating a lack of understanding regarding the concept of RP, its role and processes at the outset of training. This is echoed in the literature emphasising a phenomenon that "has elusive boundaries" and "is difficult to characterise" (Jay and Johnson,

2001, p. 73). Whilst RP is utilized a great deal in professional discourses, it is viewed by some as "a slogan" (Calderhead, 1989, p.46) and is seen as "a title for an ill-defined process" (Bleakley, 1999, p. 317). This also appears reflected by the data in this present study.

Participants' descriptions in sub-theme 3.3.2 resonate with Schön's (1983; 1987) observations of RP as outlined in chapter one. This involved looking back retrospectively at practice, resonating particularly with reflection-on-action, a deliberate and conscious process utilised to facilitate greater understanding of practice and improve future professional activity. Furthermore, as described in master theme two, 'Doing RP' several participants in this study describe reflecting-in-action in sub-theme 'Pathway to RP' (3.5.2), by locating feelings in their body, which enabled them to reflect in the moment (Schön, 1987), so as to guide what they did next. Typically, participants in this study made reference to this as they neared the end of their training, perhaps having gained experience and confidence. This resonates strongly with Schön (1983), who believed that as professionals gain expertise, they can simultaneously monitor and adapt their practice, possibly even intuitively. The literature suggests that learning through and from experience and gaining new insights of self and/or practice, involves examination of assumptions, being self-aware and critically evaluating responses to practice (Finlay, 2008).

Throughout master theme one, participants revealed their own personal understandings of RP that served their sense-making process, which appeared to unfold as their training progressed and is illustrated in the sequential nature of themes two and three. The 'sense-making' process, often referred to in qualitative research (Smith and Osborne, 2003), of constructing meaning

resulted in their coming to know as they experienced and learnt by 'doing' RP and resultant growth.

Employing IPA helped to illuminate alternative ways in which RP operated as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon emphasizing interrelated aspects such as the personal, contextual and social involved. Participants' construction of meaning appeared to portray a polarity with regard to RP where participants differentiated between 'doing', a more objective view and 'being', a more subjective stance. This is also highlighted in the literature. For example, Dewey (1933) contends that RP must be deliberate and purposeful while Ghaye and Lillyman (2000) outline that RP is not simply an intellectual endeavour but a more complex process involving the whole person. Further, "being naturally reflective" was a common expression used by participants; this perhaps suggests RP is viewed as an internally located innate ability. However, beyond personal constructions of meaning and understanding of RP, discord and dilemmas prevailed resulting in salient emotions highlighted by participants and are discussed in the following section.

4.2.1 How, When, Where and Why

Beyond these broad areas of agreement of understanding RP, contention and difficulty was apparent and outlined in 'The dark side of reflection: intrapersonal struggles' (sub theme 3.3.3). Participants questioned how, when, where and why RP should take place, which manifested in their struggles with getting to grips with the process. A tangle of understandings, misunderstandings and struggles regarding RP were described, notably underscored by power differentials, for example, with supervisors. Initially, it would appear that participants placed in the capacity as trainee in the situated power structure of

their learning institutions, would appear to be a given. However, Foucault (1980) observed that power is not static but continually being modified and reconstituted. This suggests that where there is power, there is resistance. Indeed the participants in this study go on to describe 'Intrapersonal struggles' (sub-theme 3.3.3) where they did in fact inadvertently exert their power by choosing whether or not to engage with the reflective process. This seemingly pervaded themes that represented early stages of training. Miller (1986) highlighted that denying emotion separates people from their moral sense and makes them obedient and adaptable. Thus, a mechanism for repression is denial of emotions, and a form of resistance is expression of emotion. This fits with the participant descriptions of resistance through avoidance, as highlighted in the transcripts, particularly participants Lorna and Sally. This was played out in several ways; avoidance by detaching and not partaking, for example, in groups, and/or choosing to talk about their feelings through other preferred outlets whether personal therapy or supervision and finally editing their reflective journals

Choosing not to engage with RP paradoxically leads to vulnerability, for example, becoming deskilled as described by Sally (sub-theme 3.3.2) and as the literature suggests, over reliance on these behaviours may contribute to further isolation (Yip, 2006a; 2006b). Resultant salient emotions were elicited and underpinned by confusion about when and where it was appropriate to reflect, this heightened participant tension between the desire to align themselves with a RP identity, but not being shown the way or supported. Campbell (1999) suggested this was because of the rationalist nature of most Western educational methods which is potentially at odds with the experiential pedagogy and its affective nature:

"Consequently, academic programs often neglect to support students with the affective aspects of learning." (Campbell, p. 45)

The present study therefore suggests the need for the issue of emotions within the RP process to be addressed and recognised since the accounts clearly showed that some participants managed their struggles by maladaptive coping behaviours. Therapists are encouraged to be reflexive and self aware and indeed attentive to how self can impact upon the therapeutic processes (Yip, 2006a, 2006b; Woskett, 1999). However, there is little acknowledgement of how RP and the process of learning can impact upon the 'self'. This lack of acknowledgement of emotions is likely to leave participants feeling vulnerable with missed opportunity, as the literature suggests, emotions are a key aspect of learning and a central tenant of the capacity to connect with one's own feelings and those of others (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985; Brookfield, 2001). Furthermore research has demonstrated that through understanding and managing one's own emotions, individuals are more likely to avoid depression and burn out, and is a means to both professional and personal growth (Epstein, 1999; Rogers, 1951; Figley 1995, 2002).

4.2.2 Feeling Stuck

A further dilemma experienced by participants within sub-theme 3.3.4 existed where participants describe feeling 'stuck', remaining in a state of ambivalence and unable to move forward with their RP process. Feeling stuck for Maggie and Lorna came in the form of rumination, a process associated with depression, anxiety, hostility and vulnerability (Mor and Winquist, 2002). According to Fogel (2009), rumination is one way of suppressing underlying emotions that creates highly distressing yet absorbing negative thoughts. This

leads to an inability to problem solve which other participants demonstrated and led them to describe feeling stuck (Nolen-Hoeksema *et al.,* 2007). Longer term, it can become a self-sustaining cycle. Perceived inability to problem-solve leading to stuckness, was highlighted by several participants, although Maggie and Lorna were the only participants who explicitly discussed rumination. One proposal to alleviate the spiral of rumination and which can be extended to feeling stuck in RP, is to focus on the underlying negative feelings and access them by a self-awareness that incorporates bodily feelings as described by some participants to facilitate RP. This is discussed further in 'The nature of RP process' (4.5**)** **'**Self-Awareness and Embodiment' (4.5.1).

4.3 Pedagogy

From participant accounts of how RP is taught and learnt, pedagogical issues emerged that addressed several of the research questions including participant experiences and impact upon development. Professional competence appeared another source of tension for participants. This is likely linked to perceived descriptions about getting RP 'right' suggesting a concern with knowledge and skills application associated with a prevailing dominance of the scientific paradigm and scientific modes of knowing (Bruner, 1966). However as observed by Ixer (1999), the nature of critical reflection and reflexivity does not sit comfortably with this approach thus the point of reflection may be missed. Fook (2006, 2007) states individuals are socialised to believe that intellectual knowledge has the highest value, which in Schön's (1987) terminology would be seen as 'technical–rationality', the very thing that RP strives to challenge. The skills gained through action or through socialisation, such as cultural skills are less highly regarded (Collins, 1990). The role of the whole person, including

cognitive abilities and behaviours are necessary, but personal and emotional experience is equally vital to reflection (Fook, 2006, 2007). Given that participants in this study frequently faced uncertain and complex situations, it is likely that they cannot be resolved procedurally (Ruch, 2002; Fook, 2007). Within this study, tension pervades accounts as participants express concern at appearing incompetent, reinforcing their anxiety about not performing correctly (sub-theme 3.3.4) Further, Ruch (2002, p. 202) asserts that anxiety is the most common obstacle to reflection. This resonates with Sally's account (sub-theme 3.3.4): *"if I was feeling overwhelmed about something, actually my reflective ability goes down significantly".* Another participant, Maggie, went further to describe consequences of getting it wrong communicating a powerfully affective aspect to RP through her evocative language of '*flawed*', '*flagellating*' and '*flailing*'. She feels judged and describes the potential to become anxious. This again may relate to the prevailing ethos within academic settings described. Indeed, Fook (2006) highlights that educational experience is often implicitly constructed as objective, theoretical, competitive, adversarial and individualistic. It is unsurprising therefore that participant's in this study felt a range of feelings including anxiety.

Linked with the above anxiety and tension, the participants voiced their concern regarding the mandatory aspect of reflecting and the conflict created by this. These feelings were compounded by perceived inadequacy at not knowing about RP. This may be indicative of participant's developmental readiness given that these experiences were evident at the start of their training (Finlay, 2008) and resonates with the fact that one's reflective ability improves over the course of the learning process as outlined in Chapter One (King and Kitchener, 1994; Moon, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1992). Gordon (2004) showed evidence

that 'novices' by definition, lack 'practical mastery' and inclined to follow models mechanically. Indeed participants in this study also felt they lacked 'practical mastery' as well as a lack of guidance to reflect on their practice, it is therefore unsurprising that this resonates with participant's voices in this study.

Perceived lack of inadequacy at the start of training appeared somewhat mediated by methods employed to help facilitate RP. Whilst not asked directly about reflective writing it became apparent that for some, it was an important RP strategy. Although journal writing is often used as a means to encourage RP, Boud (2001) considers inhibitory factors, such as readership and formal assessment. This resonates directly with participants in this study, for example, Sally was clear that what she revealed depended upon her anticipated audience. Moreover, Tummons (2011) contested the assessment of reflective writing, questioning the validity of the process for tutor marking and student writing. Stewart and Richardson (2000) suggested that assessing reflective abilities could cause tension for student and supervisor alike because of its subjectivity. Honest, critical self-evaluation maybe strategic and restrained in assessment situations (Hobbs, 2007; Smith and Lev-Ari, 2005). Individuals may develop considerable antagonism towards reflective assignments which then have little intrinsic meaning, this appeared to be the case for some participants in this study as they began training, however a notable shift occurred with time whereby they described a number of benefits (sub-theme 3.6.1)

4.4 Context

In terms of the research questions, the following discussion outlines another emergent theme of the experience of RP for the participant's. The context in which reflection, either practice or teaching, occurs has a powerful influence

upon participant experiences of RP. Boud and Walker (1998) suggest it might be "the single most influence on learning and reflection" (p. 196). Further, they argue that context is a dimension of reflective discourse that has been resolutely underdeveloped. They argue this is because of its pervasive nature, which therefore makes it difficult to recognise its influence. Indeed, in the present study, RP was perceived by participants' as being dependent upon context, their theoretical approach, clients presenting problems and level of experience. In relation to descriptions of RP previously highlighted, (sub-themes 3.3.2 and 3.3.1) participants talked about how their theoretical approach impacted on their engagement with RP. For example, the findings suggest that when utilising CBT (Beck, 1976) participants felt there was less opportunity for RP. This is exemplified in the transcript from Becky: "*I was trying to stick to the model as much as I could*" (38-39). However, in contrast with this Maggie contended that RP played a significant role in her CBT practice through formulation and assessment. This also resonates with literature that reflection has been implicitly important although but the language of reflection has been missing (Bennett-Levy, 2006) "the art and skill of therapy are best developed in a therapist who consistently analyses and learns from both positive and negative client feedback and outcome" (Padesky, 1996, p.273-4). Moreover, recent studies have focused more intently on the development of therapist skill through self-practice techniques (Safran and Muran, 2000; Bennett-Levy *et al.,* 2001) and links have been made between CBT literature with that of adult learning literature (Bennett-Levy, 2003). Furthermore, in the penultimate sub-theme of the analysis, (3.6.2) participants talked more about the clinical function of RP such as separating whose feelings belong to who, which appears to reflect a more psychodynamic framework (Lemma, 2003).

Another contextual issue highlighted in the accounts is the importance placed upon reflection at an institutional and/or professional level. As part of training requirements, trainee counselling psychologists routinely complete placements within multidisciplinary teams which involves relationships with clients, colleagues and supervisors to whom they are accountable (BPS, 2006). If the workplace culture is one that is more procedure and regulation based, reflection may not be encouraged. All participants in this study discussed the need for reflection to be valued including the possibility of reflecting upon and processing experiences after events as shown in 'Pause for thought: Time and place' (3.5.3). This was also evident in 'Shaping practice: Building connections' (3.6.6) where participants cited relationships and support from peers, line managers and supervisors as paramount to the process of reflecting. This resonates with the study conducted by Lockyer, Tunde Gondocz, and Thivierge (2004), which suggested that, in order for the work environment to facilitate reflection, a suitable framework must be in place and a process whereby reflection can happen. This implies that RP is the means by which surface learning is transformed to deep learning (Lockyer, Tunde Gondocz, and Thivierge, 2004). RP was also described by some participants in this study as being valued at a more systemic or organisational level, which was important in facilitating the RP process. This resonates with key features of 'productive reflection' espoused by Cressey, Boud and Docherty (2006). The authors propose that RP cannot be isolated from the context and organisational purposes for which it is utilised since work drives reflection and frames what can be completed legitimately; "While individuals will often act, it is to organisational action that productive reflection is directed" (Cressey, Boud and Docherty 2006, p.5).

4.4.1 Tension with self-disclosure

Organisational and environmental issues appeared to present challenges for participants regarding ability to engage with RP. From accounts, disclosing proved a difficult issue, which, resonates with the literature (Maram and Rice, 2002; Hepworth, Rooney and Larsen, 2002). Particularly, the counselling literature cautions against self-disclosure since it appears to breach professional behaviour and appears contrary to the ethos of RP (Wubbolding and Brickell, 1999). Indeed. Participants' in this study talked about fears of appearing incompetent through disclosing material deemed inappropriate within a given context. Conversely, the literature also acknowledges that self-disclosure portrays profound empathy and facilitates change (Webb, 1996). In the present study, disclosing appeared to be context driven, for example, several participants discussed emotionality in relation to RP process in groups. Interestingly, as Fook (2006) contends, self-disclosure can have two different meanings; both to reveal ones feelings and reactions in the shared situation and to reveal ones own experiences (Reid, 1997; Johnson, 1990). The latter is generally discouraged and appears to resonate strongly with participants in this research. For example, Sally talked of her concern at disclosing, highlighting it's 'personal journey, a personal experience' (sub-theme 3.3.3) emphasising potentially, it would be detrimental to her progress. Several participants felt fearful of perceived expectations of disclosure. Becky is explicit about concerns that her RP group may become confused with group therapy, highlighting the dilemma faced through disclosure (sub-theme 3.3.1). The findings in this study reflect the idea that individuals might become inhibited and defensive as a result (Wildman and Niles 1987; Rich and Parker 1995).

4.5 The nature of the RP process

In terms of the research questions, the following addresses experiences regarding the process of RP notably contrasting with their initial descriptions of RP. Firstly several participants identified self-awareness and embodiment as particularly important to their RP process. Secondly, although the participants were not specifically asked about self-care, they described the importance of the reflective space which enabled them to process their experiences which in turn helped coping and maintaining a healthy well-being (sub-theme 3.5.3). Two particular salient themes that emerged from the data will be discussed next; firstly self-awareness and embodiment and secondly, therapist self-care.

4.5.1 Self-Awareness and Embodiment

Becoming self-aware was described by participants as they progressed through training highlighting this as essential preparation for RP and critical to their process as identified in sub-theme 3.5.2 'Pathway to RP'. It also pervades the final theme in the analysis addressing RP and its impact upon participants' personal and professional development. As outlined in Chapter One, this resonates with Kramer (2000), who suggests the fundamental focus is the person of the counselling professional and that the capacity to think about oneself is fundamental to understanding the complex nature of human behaviour. Furthermore what appears necessary for spontaneous and deep self-reflection in RP is open-mindedness (Boyd and Fales, 1983; Atkins and Murphy, 1993) which participants in this study demonstrated as they progressed throughout their training. This was also evident in Chapter one where Dewey (1933) discussed a necessary condition of reflective learning, suggesting that one needed to develop a "habit of thinking in a reflective way"

(1933, p. 33). Evidently for participants in this study, there was a shift from feeling defensive and closed to becoming more open and accepting, suggesting participants' acknowledgement and understanding regarding the meaning of RP. This resonates with Schön's (1987), who stated that a RP includes reflecting on "prior understandings, which have been implicit in his behavior" (1983, p.69). The reflective practitioner therefore engages in a dialectic process of thought and action, which shapes their professional growth (Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993).

Participants described a heightened self-awareness that allowed them to be more in tune with clients and facilitated informed choices rather than reacting in sessions. This resonates with previous literature that has highlighted how self-awareness is related to counsellor ability to be present with their clients (Greason and Cashwell, 2009; Rothaupt and Morgan, 2007). A counsellor's personal reactions and the way, in which they are addressed, are key to therapy process and outcome (Fauth 2006; Gelso and Hayes, 2001; Van Wagoner *et al.,* 1991). Participants in this study evidently used RP to help manage the impact of transference and counter-transference reactions to help understand and manage these reactions and reduce the likelihood of them affecting therapy (Gelso and Hayes, 2007). Van Wagoner *et al.,* (1991) suggested four factors, which facilitated this process. Firstly, as has already been discussed is 'self insight' as discussed and, secondly, 'self integration', which includes ownership of a stable identity and the ability of therapist to separate themselves from the client. Indeed participants in this study begin to demonstrate assimilation of a reflective practitioner identity and utilise RP to consider 'whose feelings belong to whom' thereby separating themselves from their client. Thirdly, 'empathy', which allows the therapist to focus upon client

issues without becoming overwhelmed or act on their own needs and 'anxiety management' which is described by Van Wagoner *et al.,* (1991) as the ability to prevent anxiety from impacting therapist responses as has been discussed above. Further, this resonates with the research previously described that suggests therapist self-awareness is a critical component of skilled clinical practice (Jennings and Skovholt, 1999).

It appeared from participant accounts that self-reflection gave participants in this present study the potential to enhance client work through avoidance of barriers or issues considered detrimental to the client (sub-theme 3.4.1). This concurs with a study by Joireman, Parrott, and Hammersla**,** (2002) linking empathy with reflection. Furthermore, participants in this study showed necessary inner space to distance themselves, address uncomfortable feelings and improve practice (Boyd and Fales, 1983; Schön, 1987). Furthermore, the participants show that through reflecting on their own experiences, they are more available to their client's communications. This is congruent with counselling psychology's relational, phenomenological approach (Strawbridge and Woolfe, 2003), whereby practice prioritizes the therapeutic relationship (Manafi, 2010).

Several participants talked about an awareness of bodily sensations within their RP process. The exploratory nature of IPA allows for the emergence of unexpected findings as the researcher attempts to set aside any pre-existing assumptions. Whilst there was a distinct focus on the cognitive and affective aspects of the RP process, somatic responses appeared an important source of information and a trigger to reflect. It appeared that physical sensations were full of information. However, as Mace (2008) observes, psychodynamic

approaches have traditionally given little attention to bodily contributions with more emphasis placed upon emotion, cognition and relationships. Furthermore, whilst research has explored somatic reactions during therapy, the focus has typically been the client (Shaw, 2003; Kepner 1993). Radley (1998) suggests "embodiment rather than the body is central to psychological life and to social relationships" (p.13). In a sense, this is a rejection of the mind-body dualism and emphasis on the importance of the 'lived body' as experience. This has clear connections to authors who have discussed the phenomenological aspects of the body (Leder, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968). However, as the participants in this study voiced (sub-theme 3.4.1) "knowing yourself before using yourself", to be aware of experience and in order to then reflect upon experience, it is necessary to have self-awareness (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

In clinical studies, Fogel (2009) demonstrated that paying attention to bodily feelings rather than thoughts led to a decrease in rumination, a stance linked to higher self-esteem and empathy; this would be particularly important for trainees. It can be postulated that guiding participants to focus on bodily sensations in the moment (tightness in muscles and awareness of breath) can increase ability to reflect in the moment. Bleakley (1999) referred to "holistic reflexivity" where he described reflection that has "body, passion, sensitivity to context" (p.321). This moves reflection beyond purely introspection, to consider context by suggesting that cultivating an awareness of self, it is possible to widen attention further around the self.

In a study by Shaw (2004), therapists used their somatic experiences to help them navigate intricacies of the therapeutic encounter and highlighted their bodily perceptions as important, reporting uncomfortable sensations. Similarly,

the participants in this study also highlighted their uncomfortable bodily sensations in relation to RP process. It may be possible to contend that as Leder (1990) suggested, "the body becomes prominent when impaired in some way" (p.160). It is noteworthy that some authors suggest that listening to ones body can be disturbing (Smears, 2009) as it demands engagement in the unconstructed. This occurs because giving language to an unknown experience necessitates attention to subtleties of the lived body and compliance to being open to chaos (Halpren 2003; Hartley 2004). In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that only some participants in this study reported a capacity to be aware of their bodily responses.

Smears (2009) suggest the more that body awareness is reclaimed alongside therapist's awareness of thinking and attending, additional means of communication are available to them. Furthermore, through describing the process of reflection-in-action, Van Manen (1995) makes reference to being able to "see what is going on" which he described as "non-cognitive, practical knowledge that belongs phenomenologically more closely to the whole embodied being of the person" (p56). He goes on to discuss the reflective person as someone able to reflect moment-to-moment, aware of self and to have a sense of immediate bodily knowing as well as the world around the body. This contrasts with a more structured process of reflection (Van Manen, 1995). This appears to reflect how participants described their experience of embodiment in their RP process, a less structured, indeterminate action.

This theme provides an important illustration that development of skills to access embodied knowing may be a critical resource for RP. Additionally communication is enhanced with self, clients and other professionals. The

importance of this finding is that despite this significant contribution to the RP process, these ways of working are not addressed in training. It is clear that for some participants in this study, the body is used as a means to trigger and facilitate the RP process and appears to be an important area for further investigation.

4.5.2 Therapist Self-Care

The second salient theme incorporated within the 'nature of the RP process' is the need for participants to process their experiences by reflecting upon their reflections. This was described as vital for participants to ensure self-care. At this stage, the importance of RP is now acknowledged and significantly, detrimental consequences of being unable to reflect, are described by participants.

The challenge of the therapeutic endeavour with the need to be fully present with clients physically, emotionally and mentally on a regular basis is demanding and, participants in this study described RP as a vital to facilitate their ability to do this. This strongly resonates with Rogers (1961) assertion that therapists can only support an individual's growth to the level that they have maintained their own. The analysis showed the ways in which the participants deeply identified with their clients and the wider impact of working with clients who experienced a range of emotions on a daily basis. Sub-theme 3.5.3 in 'Pause for thought: Time and place' clearly acknowledges that by not adequately addressing negative emotions and unintentionally withholding thoughts from client work, may result in illness, burnout, loneliness and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995). In a study by Shapiro, Brown and Biegel (2007) significant reductions in stress levels, negative affect, rumination and

anxiety were found in therapists in training who practiced 'Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction' techniques. An increased ability to regulate emotions was associated with increased compassion for self, leading to more compassion for clients.

Participants highlighted ethical and confidential issues that prevented them from sharing their experiences with supportive others, this served to emphasise the importance of availability of a reflective space. Participant accounts highlighted various ways they sought this reflective space through supervision, personal therapy and reflective writing. As Warren *et al.,* (2010) argues, by prioritising and attending to self-awareness outlined previously, alongside self-care, participants are able to maintain clinical effectiveness and personal well being (Warren *et al.,* 2010).

Participant descriptions of withholding confidential matters echo those of Skovholt (2001), who stated the ability to share the work outside the professional context as "a way of reducing work stress gets greatly compromised" (p.91)*.* This is likely to contribute to the participants' sense of isolation (sub-theme 3.5.3). Pennebaker (2007; 2004) found in his research that with holding traumatic experiences increased risk of illness. Should participants not have this opportunity to process and address difficulties, their wellness is likely to be undermined and in turn contribute to impairment (Venart, Vassos &, Pitcher-Heft, 2007) thus the role of RP becomes ever more crucial.

4.6 Positive Growth

 In relation to the research question, the final master theme afforded an understanding of the ways RP impacts participants' learning and development.

Participants in this study described the experience of coming to know RP, a journey of both personal and professional transformation as discussed in the literature, for example, King and Kitchener's RJM (1984) suggests that the full capacity of reflection only comes in the final phase of a developmental process. Further, Crossley (2000) contends that when an individuals' understanding of identity and sense of self-worth are disrupted, their life narrative may be reorganised in order to reconcile lost entities in light of new circumstances. This process resonates with the findings of the present study. Towards the latter stages of training, participants portray descriptions of growth, readjustment and new perspectives, which signify a transformation or a new way of 'being'. RP is described holistically (sub-theme 3.6.1) and becomes more collaborative rather than individualistic shown by the relational connections made in personal therapy and supervision (sub-theme 3.6.3)

Kiley (2009) presented a paper that explored threshold concepts in relation to doctoral research candidates, suggesting that they had undergone change in the way they understood their learning and self as learners. The changes inferred that the individual had encountered and crossed a threshold, transforming their ways of perceiving knowledge and themselves. Prior to crossing the threshold individuals can become stuck, described as being in a liminal state, which may manifest as depression and hopelessness. Similarly, participant experiences in this study could be understood in terms of 'thresholds' and 'states' and may imply the participants have also experienced this as part of their process. Threshold concepts research (Land 2008; Meyer & Land, 2006) provides a useful means to examine learning and one that is critical for a learner's further understanding of a discipline, in this case learning to be a reflective practitioner.

Interestingly, as training progressed, participants identified that RP allowed them to deal with silence and uncertainty (Bolton, 2010) in therapy (sub-theme 3.6.1). This is noteworthy given that it takes time to be comfortable with silence and likely entails knowing themselves. Wilmot (2011) argues that sitting with uncertainty leads to learning and development and describes how a safe, containing space in supervision allows the individual to let go of certainty and facilitates reflection. Moreover, defending against vulnerability can also inhibit learning (Wilmot, 2011) resonating with the participants in this study who highlighted that supervision contained their anxiety when they felt overwhelmed (sub-theme 3.6.2). Through positive connections, which facilitated their RP, participants developed capacity to contain their own anxiety, regain a sense of control and acquire 'greater in-depth thinking'. Participants also described a more holistic systemic approach to RP (Desmond and Jowitt, 2012; Creese 2008) in contrast too more individualistic and notions as outlined in the literature review. This allowed them to embrace the challenges posed to them and increased confidence was acquired which in turn was fed back into their practice.

Schön (1987) described a third type of reflection: reflection on reflection-in-action, which involves revealing understandings whilst in the midst of interactional process. Indeed several participants in this study demonstrated how they tried to discover cognitive and affective motivations whilst with a client, in a sense, demonstrating meta-awareness likely to deepen learning (Moon, 2004; 2005). As stated in the literature, many models suggest this requires individuals to have attained advanced levels of cognitive development

to think and act in these dialectic ways This stance described by participants stands in clear contrast from the previous surface level reflections intimated by participants' avoidance and other strategies employed to protect self.

Further, participants employed RP to consider different perspectives through understanding values and beliefs of others, which they described as shaping their practice. This concurs with the research by King and Kitchener (1994) who believed that this quality only exists in the higher stages of reflective judgment. Furthermore, the literature suggests increased empathy towards clients is gained as a result of increased perspective taking (Bowman and Reeves, 1987; Neukrug and McAuliffe, 1993).

4.7 Summary of main findings

The participants' accounts revealed the complex and distinctive nature of their RP experience. At the start of training, participants experienced challenges, salient emotions as well as conceptual and practical difficulties rendering learning and application of RP problematic. This was compounded by paucity of information, power differentials and underlying tension of mandatory requirements and fears of appearing incompetent. Maladaptive coping mechanisms were employed to self protect and provided temporary relief but may paradoxically, lead to detrimental outcomes; managing ones own emotions may avoid depression, burnout and is a means to professional and personal growth (Epstein, 1999; Rogers, 1961). However, there is little acknowledgement in the literature regarding the detrimental impact of RP and, the process of learning often considers the intellectual and cognitive as opposed to affective aspects (Dirkx, 2006a, 2006b). The accounts suggested that the context had a powerful influence upon learning and RP but the analysis showed this is

mediated by building connections, and the presence of a relational aspect to RP. Further, as participants progressed through their journeys they leant by doing and identified important aspects of their RP process, such as embodiment, that facilitated this, which in turn assisted client work and their self-care. Towards the latter stages of their training, descriptions of growth, readjustment and new perspectives mark a transformation, a new way of 'being' by coming to know RP.

4.8 Clinical implications and further research

Since RP is considered essential to therapeutic practice within counselling psychology, the findings of this study are particularly relevant. The participants' accounts illuminate the ways RP is experienced and its impact upon them personally and professionally. This is particularly valuable in regard to training. A number of practical implications for professional practice are suggested from the study and which are supported by the literature. Given the vital importance of RP, training needs to consider how RP can be effectively taught and nurtured. Therefore there is a need for the professional training of supervisors and trainees to include an awareness of the process of reflection with its initiation being triggered by an issue or felt bodily sensation. As the process described by the participants appears to be encouraged by a supportive environment, it is essential that supervisors and trainers acknowledge the importance of providing an environment whereby the trainee feels safe to begin the process of reflection by disclosing difficulties or issues experienced during the therapy or supervision session. Remaining in an unsupportive environment will potentially have a major impact upon the trainees' learning to be a counselling psychologist. Course providers therefore need to provide clarity

regarding expectations and provide ongoing monitoring of their trainee placements to encourage learning and development.

Definitions in the literature remain contested and with so many nuanced ideas regarding RP, it is unsurprising that participants in this study should also indicate that meaning making should be so diffuse. Whilst there is a need to build a body of knowledge to facilitate teaching and learning, one uncontested meaning is likely to be unachievable and even objectionable from the perspective of an academic curriculum (Tummons, 2011). However, It would appear important to acknowledge that a shared meaning and way of assessing RP is problematic alongside an acceptance of the multiplicity of meanings that students and tutors will make regarding RP (Tummons 2011). Acknowledgement of issues regarding the mandatory nature and assessment of RP may go some way to alleviate participant fears of appearing incompetent, this in turn may avoid maladaptive coping behaviours. Since assessment presents an interesting dilemma for educators and trainees alike, this area would benefit from further research. The analysis would suggest that participants might have experienced a less anxiety-provoking situation through acknowledgement of the complexity of the RP task, and opportunity to discuss the concept more openly with provision of appropriate guidance. Opportunity for consideration permits students to question and be questioned (Finlay, 2008). Such acknowledgement may go some way to enable participants in this study to have managed anxiety about uncertainty and to access appropriate support sooner. Importantly, students need to recognise from the beginning that practice is frequently embedded with uncertainty and answers are less than definitive.

Given the struggles outlined and the potential for RP to be emotionally damaging, there is a need to adequately prepare learners for the challenges of RP. In line with this, there is a need clarify with learners the purpose of RP relative to its context, for example, professional learning as specific from personal therapy. Despite specific conceptual or theoretical debates that surround RP, time needs to be allowed to acknowledge its complexity and problematise what RP entails, as opposed to accepting it as 'self-evident' and 'fact' without question (Finlay 2008).

The literature overwhelmingly supports the necessity to create a safe space for RP so students experience a secure base from where they can build and critique knowledge to facilitate decision-making (Danielowich, 2007). Furthermore, since a supportive context has been shown to be optimise reflective thought (Fischer and Pruyne, 2000), establishing a non-threatening, reflective culture conducive to this is paramount. This should encourage personal agency as opposed to individuals feeling restricted by perceived inadequacies but may stand in contrast to the familiar, traditional educational context (Fook, 2006; Griffith and Friedman, 2000). RP is reliant upon conscious or unconscious disclosure to facilitate learning which, may necessitate an alternative educational climate from the traditional educational context. Future research would be useful with regard to further experiences of environments conducive to RP.

The tension of self-disclosure could be attended to through discussion and clarity of its use. Alongside this, it would seem necessary for facilitators to model appropriate self-disclosure, which balances risk and potential learning. As discussed, the relationship between learning, reflection and emotion is

important so it may be helpful for a distinction between 'private' and 'personal' self-disclosure to be made explicit, the latter being related to abilities and qualities and the former connected to situations and contexts (Maram and Rice, 2002). This will go some way to help define the limits of what, when, and how to share in RP.

A way forward for participants in terms of learning RP may be collaboration with peers who are further into their training which aligns with the idea of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky *et al.,* 1978, p.157) whereby development is acquired through collaboration with another more competent individual, who guides this development of becoming a reflective practitioner. This would be a useful area for further research. Although some participants experienced the RP group as challenging at the beginning of training, group learning may be useful if some of the challenges are addressed. Some of the earliest social psychologists wrote about the collective consciousness and the 'group mind' (Le Bon, 1960). The idea being that the existence of the group is greater than the collection of individual thoughts contained within it. However, again, the presence of safety within the group is essential to its success. Further research would be beneficial to consider optimal conditions for facilitation of RP in-group work. In-depth interviews would be advantageous to consider the nature and role of distress groups evoked and strategies which other trainees employ to utilise the challenges faced, It would be valuable for other RP methods to be evaluated in similar ways to build a knowledge base of alternative methods to be available for professional training. In this way, the manner in which RP is learnt and taught may be more constructive since the findings reflect the idea that individuals who experience stressful situations might become inhibited and defensive as a result (Wildman and Niles 1987; Rich and Parker 1995), possibly

hindering the RP process and therefore inhibiting learning and professional development.

An important finding emerges from this study regarding embodiment that makes a significant contribution to the RP process. The author contends that it may therefore be useful for therapists to acknowledge their bodily contributions. This may not necessarily be a simple undertaking, given that less than half of the participants discussed this aspect of their reflective process. However, it appears to be an omission in participants training and suggests that including exploration of the nature of embodiment and the management strategies that therapists use in their practice lives is pertinent to the training process (Shaw, 2004). In Shaw's grounded theory study of therapists' somatic experiences during therapy, a number of themes emerged that could be usefully drawn upon, providing a grounding for body curriculum within training; body as a receiver, embodied styles of working, and body empathy (Shaw, 2004). This is likely to require further research because as Shaw (2004) points out, therapists' need to be aware that through use of psychotherapeutic discourse, they are at risk of reifying subjective phenomena. Nevertheless, this present study appears to highlight the utility of attunement to therapist's own bodily senses which serves to remind us that the internal experience of the participants in this study is more than their counter transference, defined as their response to the clients interpersonal pull (Lemma, 2003).

If RP is to be utilised effectively and ethically, it makes sense to ensure that at the start of training, therapists should address what to do with thoughts, feelings, and experiences encountered. Practitioners engaging in RP need to be aware of risks and potential areas of conflicts of interest alongside the

associated emotional impact. Being informed of this and encouraged that evoked emotion does not indicate personal weakness but can lead to transformative learning, would be valuable. The detrimental aspects of RP would benefit from future research to inform practitioners of this more clearly. Brookfield (1990, p.178) states that questioning assumptions is difficult, "like laying down charges of psychological dynamite…hence, educators who foster transformative learning are rather like psychological and cultural demolition experts" (p.178). This also links with the issues self-disclosure discussed earlier.

Despite participants' misgivings at the start of their training, when reflection is appropriately facilitated and nurtured, RP was experienced as beneficial in personal and professional development. The ability to reflect appears to be amenable to development over time and with practice, alongside the influence of facilitators or mentors as illustrated by this study. Future research would benefit from exploring experiences of RP from the perspective of the educator.

To conclude, as well as the aforementioned recommendations, future research needs to continue to build upon existing studies since RP is under researched (Ruth-Sahd, 2003), this should include exploring RP from more holistic, multicultural perspectives that take into account the affective element of RP that emerged from this present study.

4.9 Critique of the Research

The particular strength of this research lies perhaps in the perspective it affords into the subjective experiences of participants' RP. The participants provided rich accounts of their experiences highlighting and reinforcing its multi-

dimensional and personal nature in a way that enhances existing research. However, it is important to note several limitations of this study. Firstly and similar to other qualitative studies, the findings may or may not be representative of other trainees' experiences of RP. The sample neither represented ethnic or racially diverse perspectives nor did it represent an equal balance of gender perspectives. Moreover, the analysis is drawn from interviews with participants who may have a particular interest in RP and therefore may have reported more negative experiences than a different sample population. The post-hoc aspect of the participant discussions may have impacted upon the results as participants spoke retrospectively about their journey of becoming a reflective practitioner from an existing more positive position. When participants described their reflective processes, there was a focus on difficult experiences, which may suggest that those that elicit the most emotion are the ones that are recalled easily or, as this research found, that RP entails an emotive element to the process. Furthermore, whilst the interview guide aimed to provide flexibility for in depth exploration of issues with hindsight, the focus may have been particularly focused on trainees' negative experiences. A future consideration would be to possibly decrease the amount of questions and focus more on following-up interesting leads. This may lessen the researchers influence on the aspects of the experiences that were described. This may relate to the researchers inexperience of interviewing. Future research would address these limitations.

Volunteer participation is likely to influence the accounts portrayed and consequent analysis. It is possible that participant's agreed to take part in the study as they had a story to be told regarding experiences that had been particularly pertinent, both for positive and negative reasons. The study may

have provided safe outlet to discuss their experiences. For example, following the interview Maggie took considerable time to discuss how she found the experience of participating interesting and how she had felt somewhat unburdened by the process. The views expressed may therefore not be reflective of trainee counselling psychologists as a whole. This is a factor that should be considered and recognised when considering the themes that arose from the analysis.

The rich and in-depth material gained would have been difficult to acquire with a larger sample therefore providing support for recommendations of IPA that utilise a small sample. Additionally, this approach is congruent with counselling psychology values which endeavour to position the client's experience as central (Jacobs, 2010) with an emphasis on relational practice (Manafi, 2010) and collaboration, prioritising the clients experience and meaning (BPS, 2008; Strawbridge and Woolfe, 2003). However, the research lacks breadth and this may be an avenue for future research where a larger sample completing a quantitative study would add value. Furthermore, research within multiple settings would extend and refine these findings and contribute to promoting more reflective education and practice

Conclusion

The present study set out to explore trainee counselling psychologists' experience and understanding of RP and its impact upon their personal and professional development. The participants were six female trainee counselling psychologists, currently enrolled on UK courses nearing the end of their training. The research questions the study aimed to answer were: how do

trainees perceive and understand RP; how is the RP process experienced; what contexts do they engage in RP; and what do trainees learn from reflecting. Using IPA to allow in-depth and idiographic exploration of the participants' lived experiences of RP provided a valuable insight into RP that would have not been accessible using quantitative methodology.

The analysis resulted in three master-themes: 'The challenge of RP', 'Doing RP' and 'The impact of RP'. This served to illuminate insights into how trainees make sense of, experience and manage their RP and its impact upon development. Given the lack of research exploring RP from the perspective of the trainee CoP, it is hoped that this study has made insightful contributions to the existing body of literature.

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Appendix 1: Participant Recruitment Letter

UEL

**University of
East London
Stratford campus, University House, Water Lane
London E15 4LZ**

University research Ethics Committee

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact the project supervisor.

Dr Kendra Gilbert
Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of East London
Tel: + 44 (0) 20 8223 4993 E-mail: k.s.gilbert@uel.ac.uk

The Principal Investigator

Claire Collins
Tel: 07900 404119
E-mail: Claire.collins.gb@googlemal.com

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about this research study, in order for you to make an informed choice about whether or not to take part.

Project Title:

Trainee Counselling Psychologists' experiences and understanding of reflective practice and it's impact on personal and professional development

You have been invited to participate in this postgraduate research project, which will be submitted as part of the thesis for a Doctorate qualification in Counselling Psychology at the University of East London.

You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. However before you decide whether you wish to take part, it is necessary for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information. **Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (my contact details are given below).**

What is the purpose of the study?
The main purpose of the study is to explore the nature of reflective practices of trainee counseling psychologists through participant descriptions of their lived experiences and meanings attached to those experiences of becoming a reflective practitioner.

What will I have to do and how long will it take?
1) If you decide to take part the researcher will contact you by email or telephone to arrange a convenient time and place for an interview. The researcher aims to fit in with your schedule as much as possible in order to reduce any inconvenience to you should you chose to participate
2) The semi-structured interview will last approximately and hour and will be tape-recorded. Some verbatim quotes may be used in the final write up of the study.
3) Transcribed interviews will be sent for you to check for accuracy.

Do I have to take part?
No. Participation is completely voluntary.

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?
The study and interview will ask about your experiences of reflective practice whilst as a trainee counseling psychologist and although it is not anticipated that this will cause any distress, it could possibly evoke some uncomfortable issues for you. Should you feel the need, appropriate places to obtain support will be provided

Are there any advantages to taking part?
There is no direct benefit of taking part in this study. However it provides valuable information and any opportunity to provide feedback regarding your experiences as a trainee counselling psychologist.

Where will my information be kept and who will have access to it?
All data associated with the study, including name, contact details and transcripts will be kept in locked cabinets in a secure location at the researchers home. As outlined, the only people who will have access to the information will be myself, Claire Collins, and my research supervisor Dr Kendra Gilbert. Following the study, the material will be kept and destroyed in accordance with UEL guidelines.

What shall I do if I wish to participate?
If you decide to take part please contact me to arrange a convenient time and venue for the interview. Please indicate your preference on how to be contacted (telephone or email).

If you would like more information, or have any concerns about participating in the study, please contact me**: Claire Collins (Trainee Counselling Psychologist)** u0911691@uel.ac.uk **Tel: 07900 404119.**
Thank you for reading this information sheet.

(Sept 2012)

Appendix 2: University of East London Ethical Approval

ETHICAL PRACTICE CHECKLIST (Professional Doctorates)

SUPERVISOR: Aneta Tunariu   **ASSESSOR:** Amanda Roberts

STUDENT: Claire Collins   **DATE (sent to assessor):** 02/11/2011

Proposed research topic: Self in the therapeutic relationship: A qualitative mapping milestones in the felt-acquisition of becoming a reflective practitioner

Course: Prof Doc Counselling

1. Will free and informed consent of participants be obtained?   YES

2. If there is any deception is it justified?   N/A

3. Will information obtained remain confidential?   YES

4. Will participants be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time? YES

5. Will participants be adequately debriefed?   YES

6. If this study involves observation does it respect participants' privacy? NA

7. If the proposal involves participants whose free and informed
   consent may be in question (e.g. for reasons of age, mental or
   emotional incapacity), are they treated ethically?   NA

8. Is procedure that might cause distress to participants ethical?   NA

9. If there are inducements to take part in the project is this ethical?   NA
10. If there are any other ethical issues involved, are they a problem?   NA

APPROVED

YES

Assessor initials: AR   Date: 10/11/11

RESEARCHER RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST (BSc/MSc/MA)

SUPERVISOR: Aneta Tunariu   **ASSESSOR:** Amanda Roberts

STUDENT: Claire Collins   **DATE (sent to assessor):** 02/11/2011

Proposed research topic: Self in the therapeutic relationship: A qualitative mapping of key milestones in the felt-acquisition of becoming a reflective practitioner

Course: Prof Doc Counselling

Would the proposed project expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of the following kinds of hazard?

1   Emotional   NO

2.   Physical   NO

3.   Other   NO
        (e.g. health & safety issues)

APPROVED

YES

Assessor initials: **AR**   Date: 10/11/11

Please return the completed checklists by e-mail to the Helpdesk within 1 week.

UEL
University of
East London

www.uel.ac.uk

School of Psychology

Professional Doctorate Programmes

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ
tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966   fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937
e-mail: mno.davies@uel.ac.uk   web: www.uel.ac.uk/psychology

The University of East London has campuses at London Docklands and Stratford
If you have any special access or communication requirements for your visit, please let us know. MINICOM 020 8223 2853

Appendix 3:   Consent Form

Title of the project:

Trainee Counselling Psychologists' experience & understanding of reflective practice & its impact on personal and professional development

Name of the researcher: Claire Collins
Name of research supervisor: Professor Rachel Tribe

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason

I agree for the interviews to be recorded and for the recording to be transcribed

I understand that the recordings and transcripts of my interview will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researchers home, in accordance with Data Protection Guidelines.

I agree that anonymised extracts from the transcripts of my interview may be included in the final write-up.

I understand that I can obtain further information from the researcher at any point in the process.

I understand that the recordings will be destroyed and shredded at the end of study

I am willing to take part in the above study.

Name of researcher   Name of participant

Signature   Signature

Date   Date

Appendix 4 :   **Initial Interview Schedule**

Overall statement: I am interested in your experiences and opinions about 'reflective practice'

What is your understanding of the concept of reflective practice?

- Give examples?
- Respondents' definition and/or interpretation/what do you believe the term 'reflective practice' to mean?
- How do you consider it when you hear the term?
- How does reflective practice make you feel?
- What images or practices come to mind when you hear the term reflective practice?
- Do you think it is possible to learn to be reflective?

Development of reflective practice

- Do you use a model of reflective practice/how did you learn RP?
- If so can you expand on this?

Experience of reflection on clinical practice

- How does the respondent see it-formally, informally etc
- How is it contextualized?
- How does the participant use it? In what situation? Alone or with others? When/where/how etc.
- What is it used for? Problem solving/in supervision/to debrief/to discuss cases?

Impact of using reflective practice on professional and personal development

- How do you think reflection might impact upon your sense of self both personally & professionally? Can you give any examples?

Is there anything that you can contribute to being asked about reflective practice?

Appendix 5:

Illustrative quotes for master theme one and sub-theme (3.3.3)

Master theme 1: 'The challenge of RP'

Sub-theme: 'The dark side of reflection: Intrapersonal Struggles'

Kat:

"…So I know what it is like to screw up and just be witnessed sobbing and just to be, just someone see that pain (69-70)

"Yeah it was really hard, and it was in the in between places as well because we were being marked on it, do know what I mean? Sometimes I felt like even though we weren't marked on our reflective practice on our own ability to reflect on our own process, sometimes I felt that we were in a funny way" (108-112)

"But sometimes I felt like if you had too many issues you might be judged, if you didn't use that space and didn't talk enough about your personal issues you might be judged" (115-117)

"you know I would stand in that moment and go 'oh my God now I realize why this moment is so important for me, it is because this person represents my dad who has never…' crying in front of people because it is like my unconscious coming through and you don't realize it until you are in the space" (85-89)

Sally:

"…and I think initially there's that thinking about, is that just going to be another additional task that needs to be done" (21-23)

"…So it felt like another thing that I needed to do and kind of contributed at times to those feelings of being overwhelmed" (70-72)

Maggie:

"*it's interesting of course, you know other people umm may accuse you of not having been reflective at all but they may be because you've come up with an answer for yourself that they don't like"* (210-213)

"Yet as I say I'm not beating myself up I I don't think I did something wrong, I don't think I deserve punishing, you know thumb nails in the basement, umm but, you know I could perhaps do better with this (93-96)

Lorna:

"…, *It's annoying like I said that they want all that really personal angst stuff to prove you can sort of do it"* (65-66)

"…I think the problem comes because its often problem-focused, almost pathological... that we only reflect when there's a problem to be dealt with "'yeah I did that well, but I could have done that better" (159-161)

"You know that constant looking for ways to improve which inevitably takes in the personal so it I guess feels like constant self-criticism a lot of the time, but being aware of that helps, maybe prevents that downward cycle" (169-171)

"I think RP is about the emotional and professional boundaries its really important because the nature of our work is emotional and it's an emotional job, you hear horrific things but it's all about your reflections" (244-247)

Becky

"It was difficult because I felt like we were second guessing in a way and there's that thing where you want to get things right don't you? And you're eager to do your best but I guess I felt I had started off on the wrong foot by not knowing" (103-106)

"But I still found it quite difficult to start doing it, being really aware of doing it because I think it was one thing thinking about things and it is another thing thinking about things and then it reflecting and learning on them as well (125-126)

"And I always tried to do that (RP) and then it got really busy and I was like I am just going to see this patient straight after this one or whatever and then actually realising that actually it was quite difficult to do" (134-137)

Really difficult and I don't think healthy either, its important to process that stuff otherwise you end up…well….In feeling bad and you take that stuff with you into another session (140-142)

Rosie

"It and also an anxiety about asking for clarity, something I suppose, almost like I didn't want her to feel that she hadn't been good enough… it's going back to

that people pleasing thing again, but almost I didn't want her to feel that I was criticising her or patronising her " (379-383)

"And I'd explored maybe what that was about and just reassured that I didn't have anything to worry about it was just all up here" (427-429)

"With supervisors and work colleagues and I think when they're going through certain issues and I've not felt I could approach them that's prevented me from talking with them about it and I suppose made me go inwards and think maybe they've got an issue with me" (493-497)

Appendix 6: Example Transcript Analysis

Emergent Themes		Participant Maggie	Exploratory Comments
		Transcription	
		..understanding of reflection and reflective practice is?	Naturally reflective if CoP?
Innate reflective ability?		P: well first of all I don't think anybody probably umm, starts studying CP if you're, if again, you're not already converted so therefore people are preaching to the converted, so you know…you're probably as a trainee you're already a person umm	Preaching/godly
Already reflective			
Fine balance		who is reflective, umm, one of the, umm, things that can happen though, is you know, the fine line	Warns of the fine line between reflection and rumination – meaning? Downward spiral
Difficult process		between reflection and rumination, umm and the	
Stuck?		fine line between, you know finding what you could	suggests fine balance/ easy to get it wrong
Finding ways to improve practice		do better and looking at it that way and flagellating yourself, umm you know and and, finding	The detail of RP-feels like monitoring?
			Dark side/feels ominous
		Everything, every small tiny thing you could have,	Differentiates between improving/finding better ways and flagellating yourself
Dark side of reflection		maybe, possibly have done wrong, umm and, you know that is also a very fine line and if you cross it	Dire consequences if wrong-compares this to client
		to the other side, to the dark side of reflection then	Important to be focused
Evokes anxiety		umm, you can I think, you know of course become	
Emotion		very anxious and you know perhaps end up as	Have a goal/a point
		almost, you know as *babbling off* as one of your	What could be done better/differently/why this outcome
Intense experience		clients. So you know its important to focus on what	
To be focused		the point of this is, the point isn't to flagellate	

	yourself umm and beat yourself up at every turn, the	Sense of meta reflection-stepping outside-is this objective?
Improve practice	whole point is to consider your practice and you	
	know what could I improve? What could I do	What could be done better/differently/why this outcome?
New perspectives	better? Could I have done anything differently here?	
	Or why did this turn out like it did? Stepping	
	outside of the situation, Umm you know I've had	Aware of client/transference/projection
Meta reflection/meta cognition	situation recently where essentially the client has,	
	and I love this term from CAT, " recruited me"	
	umm and and I've fallen right into it, you know,	
RP to consider unconscious	even though I'm intellectually aware of it. Umm,	
	there was there was a session where I got quite	
	directive in my questioning, It was, I mean the	
RP-guided discovery	supervisor said it was guided discovery but it was	Guided discovery-use of supervison in RP
	strongly guided and it was because I was being	
	recruited I was right there with the client because,	
	he's recruited me into, he's very domineering, and	
	he's recruited me into "well back atcha" and I think	Reflecting on client issues and unconscious process?
	this has a lot to do with how he perceives in the real	
RP impact in therapeutic relationship	world, umm, which may of course be part of his	
	issues. But you know I…in in thinking about this at	Issue of time given and needed for RP
Time needed for RP	length, umm, you know, I I figured some of this out	
	and the thing is, its not that I think I did something	
	wrong, it wasn't *wrong* exactly, but anyway umm	Wrong v right
	its not that it was *wrong* but its that umm it would	
Need to be constructive	be much more helpful to the client umm if I could	
	find away to get unhooked as Saffron and Segal say,	
	from umm from his army, umm and it would also be	

Mutual benefits		more helpful for me because I'd come away feeling	
		a) that we'd made more progress and b) that umm	Interesting use of words-as if this represents the enormity of the task-army and unhooked
		that I wasn't being recruited, that I wasn't allowing	
RP positive		that …umm, so that right there is I feel a good use	
		of reflection, you know there was something going	RP for mutual benefits
		on there and you know thinking it through, talking it	
		through I figured it out, umm, or as near as damn it	
Improving practice		to what it probably is and yet as I say I'm not	Something going on-start of the reflective process
		beating myself up I I don't think I did something	
		wrong, I don't think I deserve punishing , you know	Trying to find answers and solutions
		thumb nails in the basement, umm but, you know I	Issue if 'get it wrong'
Goal orientated		could perhaps do better with this so that's what RP	Tone and strength of words noticeable
		is for	Is this defensive?
		R: ok, **so you talk about a stepping outside and**	
		thinking about your practice and what you might	RP to improve practice
		do differently, can you tell me more?	
		P: Mmmm, yes, in a somewhat systematic manner	RP structured and ordered
Improve practice		and umm with a goal, what was the goal here what	Its about goals / sub goals
		was the point in thinking this over? Well to improve	
		my practice is the overall goal. You have to have a	
		goal of some kind in mind umm and you know	Tone is strong –has this been her experience?
		perhaps some sub goals and in this case, how can I	Doesn't know what this looks like
		do differently with the client and umm to be honest	
		I'm not sure what that's going to look like exactly	
		because he's still a very domineering person	
		(laughs), umm but, so you know somewhat	
		systematic in that respect umm not just wildly, I'm	

		going to think about this, because, you know, if you don't have structure to reflection for yourself then umm its also very easy to fall into the all the reasons I was right, umm as well. And you know all the reasons why this client is difficult to work with and you know its *his* problem not mine and you know you could fall into that too	Knows what RP is in theory but difficulty with practice element
			Comparison with a structured approach
			RP to gain new perspectives and avoid blame

Appendix 7: List of emerging themes: Rosie Interview

EMEMERGING THEME	LINE NUMBER
Looking back at an experience	8-9
Continuous self monitoring (particularly use of rjnr)	12-16, 18-20
Questioning: what went well/what didn't go well? What to do in future	10-11, 248-249
"Get it out of my head and onto paper"	21-22
Time=change	23-24
Improving practice	36-37
Addressing counter and transference	40-41
Looking at the relational	43-46, quote 49-52
Discomfort initiated RP in supervision	50-53
Realization as we talked about it	53-54
In the moment reflection hard	54-55
I became the helper =counter Transference/projection	59-63, 68-72, 92-97
RP as meaning making	73-75
RP as holistic understanding	73-77
RP as understanding self and the impact on TR	77-79
Time gives meaning	85-86
RP enabling clarity	85-88
Internal awareness	94-95
Relational	96-99
Deconstructing the situation jointly	98-99
PT important	110-111, 211-212

Compartmentalising RP	122-123 (useful to put in different Boxes)
Previous RP experience	
Reflection within experiential group work	145-146
Consistency and cohesion in group important	149-152
RP difficult uncomfortable process	156-157, 159-162, 193-197
Vulnerability	158-159
Reflecting in interview using immediate speech	159-164
I learnt about myself	162
Exploring our relationship with society	177-180, 185-188
RP as political (NHS affecting clients)	188-191
IDENTITY	185-191
Learning through the experience	202-204
Learning about self	206-209
Intense self experience	209-212 (Quote)
RP is about personal change	217
RP allowed for new perspectives	214-217
Time essential	225-226
"Didn't think I needed it but vital to facilitate reflective Process" (KT also said this)	229-232
Knowing yourself before Processors using yourself	234-239
Process; explore what just happened between us before the act	242-246
Facilitating a hypothesis	248-250
Feelings	251-253
To improve practice-therapeutic relationship	247-249, 253, 262-263

Appendix 8: Initial clustering of themes from all interviews

Tension/conflict	**Shaping practice**
Having to	A safe space
Assessment	Trust & confidentiality for clients
Academic v reflective work	Consider powerful/personal issues
Expectation to disclose	impact client
Not knowing purpose/aim	In session reflecting
What's ok to bring/too personal?	Acceptance of painful aspects to enable
Power differentials	positive therapeutic relationship
Avoidance	Dealing with endings
Defense mechanism	Empathy for clients
Authentic/inauthentic RP	Boundary setting
Editing reflections	Containment
Some issues but not too many	Who do these feelings belong to?
Attempts to find balance	Accepting difference
Feeling stuck	Ethics and values
Challenging thinking about self	Other perspectives/question assumptions
Feeling unsafe at times	Empowering clients
Contribution v stepping back	Questioning stance
	Vital for therapeutic relationship
	Gives 360° knowing
	Holistic
	Formulation
	Action and outcomes
	Avoiding ruptures
Self awareness	**Becoming reflective**
RP to consider feelings/projections	Natural/unconscious process
Self-reflection part of process	Learnt it as I lived it
Cornerstone	Initially resistant
Importance of awareness of own process	Realizing it's a process
Path to self knowledge	Time has given meaning
Awareness coming to the fore	Filling the gap between theory & practice
Internal awareness	Facilitates openness/transparency
Awareness of unconscious/conscious	Mutual learning benefits
Genuineness in sessions	Ongoing/long term
Knowing self before using self	
Attending to feelings	

Not knowing/knowing	**Vulnerability**
Mystery/special thing How? Referred to but not explained Implicit/explicit	Not easy process Dealing with complex issues Fear of opening up Honesty Outcomes not always comfortable Facing fears scrutinizing self Dealing with primitive feelings
Strategies/methods	**Emotion**
Personal therapy Groups Significance of supervision PT to address painful issues of self To be witnessed & understood Validity of research Inconvenience of PT Benefits and costs	RP to address emotion in work Validation What's there's what's mine? Invaluable as emotional preparation Holding/containing Powerful feelings evoked/connections with clients Facilitates empathy/understanding Raw emotion Intense self experience
Different meanings	**Taking care of self**
Being reflective Innate/natural A tool Changing practice Looking back Subjective/objective Taking other perspective	Avoiding burnout from distress/sadness Separating professional/personal world Transference/counter transference Impact of client work Release of emotion Being there Naming emotions to let go Continuous self monitoring
Relational	**Context**
Supervision Sharing ideas & information Groups Peer support Team support	Groups as an in between space Organizational support Occurs informally/formally Team context Wider picture/system Taking issues to appropriate places Involves PD Value of reflective writing Time and place Exploring relationship with society

Why? Role?	Impact
Sense making Meaning making Deconstructing Unpicking To be fully present for client Avoiding collusion Support & ventilation Checking in with client responses Safeguarding/protective Planning sessions Encourage creativity Theory practice links Part and parcel of learning process	Challenging but valuable RP is everything Theory of therapy Its part of who I am as a therapist Confidence Growth RP as empowerment Personal change To see the bigger picture Understanding therapeutic process Essential/invaluable Enhancing identity Professional development Camaraderie
How? Theory and experience Reflection in the interview Experiential learning Being ok with less structure Experience as frame of reference Questioning Discomfort Time essential In the moment reflection difficult Intuition as prompt RP as self directed Relational (talking/exploring/uncovering) Supervision Reciprocal Inner dialogue Bodily feelings/embodiment Internal process Dyadic Isolating	

Appendix 9: Second clustering of themes from all interviews

Tension/conflict/vulnerability	Shaping practice
Having to	A safe space
Assessment	Trust & confidentiality
Academic v reflective work	Transference/counter transference
Expectation to disclose	Reflecting in the moment
Not knowing	Dealing with endings
What's ok to bring?	Empathy
Power differentials	Boundary setting
Avoidance	Containment
Defense mechanism	Accepting difference
Authentic/inauthentic RP	Ethics and values
Editing reflections	New perspectives
Some issues but not too many	Empowering clients
Finding balance	Essential
Feeling stuck	Holistic
Challenge of thinking about self	Formulation/action/outcome
Unsafe	Personal therapy
Contribution v stepping back	Groups
Mystery/special thing	Supervision
Referred to but not explained	Validity of research
Implicit/explicit	Sense making
Not easy process	Meaning making
Complex/primitive feelings	Deconstructing
Fear of opening up	Being fully present
Honesty	Support & ventilation
Uncomfortable outcomes	Safeguarding/protective
Facing fears	Creativity
Benefits/costs	Theory practice links
Isolating	A learning process
Self awareness	**Becoming Reflective**
Projections	Natural/unconscious process
Self-reflection essential	Learnt it as I lived it
Cornerstone	Initially resistant
Path to self knowledge	Process
Awareness coming to the fore	Time gives meaning
Internal awareness	Openness/transparency
Awareness of unconscious/conscious	Ongoing/long term
Genuineness in sessions	Being/doing
Attending to feelings	A tool
Supervision	Looking back
Sharing ideas & information	Subjective/objective
Groups	Taking other perspective
Peer/team support	context
How?	Organisational support
Experience	Occurs informally/formally
Experiential learning	Team context
Being ok with less structure	Systemic

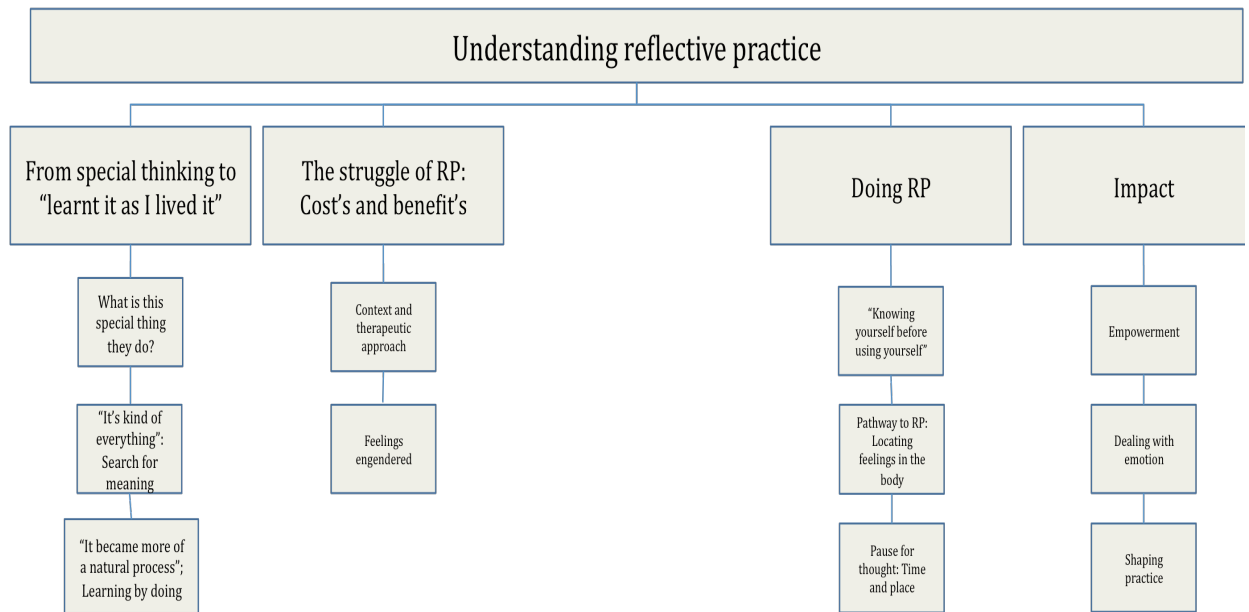|	
Questioning Discomfort Time essential Reflecting in the moment Intuition Self directed Relational Reciprocal Inner dialogue Bodily feelings/embodiment Internal process Dyadic	**Impact** Challenging but valuable RP is everything Theory of therapy Its part of who I am as a therapist Confidence Growth RP as empowerment Personal change To see the bigger picture Understanding therapeutic process Essential/invaluable Enhancing identity Professional development Camaraderie Self care Avoiding burn out
Taking care of self Avoiding burnout Professional/personal world Transference/counter transference Impact of client work Release of emotion Being there Naming emotions to let go Self monitoring Validation What's there's what's mine? Invaluable emotional preparation Holding/containing Powerful feelings Addressing intense self experience	

Appendix 10: A graphic representation of findings

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                    │          Understanding reflective practice           │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
         ┌──────────────┬──────────────────────────┬──────────────────┐
┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ From special │ │ The struggle │        │   Doing RP   │ │    Impact    │
│ thinking to  │ │ of RP:       │        │              │ │              │
│ "learnt it   │ │ Cost's and   │        │              │ │              │
│ as I lived   │ │ benefit's    │        │              │ │              │
│ it"          │ │              │        │              │ │              │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
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From special thinking to "learnt it as I lived it"	The struggle of RP: Cost's and benefit's	Doing RP	Impact
What is this special thing they do?	Context and therapeutic approach	"Knowing yourself before using yourself"	Empowerment
"It's kind of everything": Search for meaning	Feelings engendered	Pathway to RP: Locating feelings in the body	Dealing with emotion
"It became more of a natural process"; Learning by doing		Pause for thought: Time and place	Shaping practice

Figure 1. A graphic representation of the results of an IPA study into trainee's experiences of reflective practice.

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Appendix 11: FINAL MASTER THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Master Themes	Subthemes
The Challenge of Reflective Practice	"What is this special thing they do?": Power dynamic
	"It can mean different things to different people": Disparate meanings
	"The dark side of reflection": Intrapersonal struggles
	"Thinking and thinking": Feeling stuck
Doing reflective practice	"Knowing your self before using your self": Self-reflection
	Pathway to RP: Locating feelings in the body
	Pause for thought: Time and place
Impact of reflective practice	"It gives you that 360º knowing": Growth in confidence
	"Was it something to do with me?" Negotiating emotion
	Shaping practice: Building connections