The Experience of Relationship Dissolution during Counselling Psychology Training – A Thematic Analysis

Richa Basra
U1216587

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“Hearts will never be practical until they are made unbreakable.”
– The Wizard of Oz

Abstract

Most studies addressing the experiences of trainees in the field of counselling psychology have focused on the different components and stresses of the profession; the literature has rarely explored trainees’ intimate partner relationships. This study, however, looks at the experience of a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training. Drawing on transformative learning theory and models of relationship dissolution, the following research questions are explored: (1) How do trainees experience a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training? And (2) how does training influence the relationship dissolution?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants in British Psychological Society (BPS) accredited counselling psychology courses from across the United Kingdom. Thematic Analysis (TA) using a dual inductive-deductive approach was applied to capture both the theoretical framework and the subjective experiences of the participants. Four themes and six subthemes developed; “I can feel the change day by day”, “the course indirectly influenced the break-up”, “the blurring of personal and professional boundaries”, and lastly, “the paradox of endings”. The findings are discussed in terms of their theoretical and clinical implications: firstly, adding possible new insights into the model of breakdown, and secondly, providing suggestions on how to support trainees and prospective trainees to the BPS, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), and those involved in the training process.

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List of abbreviations

BPS	The British Psychological Society
GT	Grounded Theory
HCPC	The Health and Care Professions Council
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
NA	Narrative Analysis
TA	Thematic Analysis
MFT	Marriage and Family Therapy
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UEL	University of East London
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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The Experience of Relationship Dissolution during Counselling Psychology Training - A Thematic Analysis

There are currently 14 universities in the UK that provide doctorate-level courses in counselling psychology, with an approximate total of 800 trainees in counselling psychology in any given year. Studies show that a significant number of such trainees report that their training has a moderate to severe impact on their personal life (Guy, 1987).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a base of literature that seldom acknowledges the field of counselling psychology. Although there is an increasing research interest in the impact that practising psychotherapy and counselling has on those who have qualified or are training in similar professions, there is still limited research on trainee counselling psychologists, specifically the experience of a relationship dissolution whilst in training. Previous research focuses primarily on the general experiences of trainees (Kumari, 2011), the stresses they experience (Kumary & Baker, 2008; Truell, 2001), and the impact of this stress on family and friends (Ford Sori, Wetchler, Ray & Niedner, 1996). Furthermore, most research uses quantitative methods to analyse the data (Kumary & Baker, 2008; Williams, Coyle & Lyons, 1999), and as such, there is little exploration on the subjective experience of the trainee.

This thesis aims to bridge this gap in the literature by exploring trainees' experiences of a relationship dissolution whilst they are pursuing a course that primarily focuses on the "formation" of strong relationships (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.32). Using a qualitative approach, namely Thematic Analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2013), the trainees’ experiences are explored in-depth, and existing theories are leveraged to piece together a patterned understanding of that experience.

The context of the research and key concepts

What is counselling psychology?

In order to understand the experience of a relationship dissolution in counselling psychology, it is imperative to understand what counselling psychology is and how the profession developed. The British Psychological Society (BPS) established the Division of Counselling Psychology in 1994, and it is the society’s third largest division (British Psychological Society, 2019a). Counselling psychology is a distinct profession within counselling and psychotherapy, and its focus is on the “application of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory and research to clinical practice” (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.5). The BPS Qualification in Counselling Psychology Handbook states that counselling psychology “goes beyond the traditional understanding of human nature and development as passive and linear and views human beings and their experience as inherently dynamic, embodied, and relational in nature.” (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.5). Placing great emphasis on relational practice, counselling psychology considers therapeutic relationships “to be the main vehicle through which psychological difficulties are understood and alleviated” (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.5).

Why intimate partner relationships and relationship dissolution?

The BPS outlines that, to qualify as a counselling psychologist, a trainee must “be in a position to use their own personal insight, life experiences, personal therapy and clinical supervision to facilitate the formation of a strong therapeutic relationship that is founded upon [their] personal qualities and the core conditions of empathy, acceptance, and authenticity" (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.32). As the personal and professional are thus not mutually exclusive in this context (Elton-Wilson, 1994), it is pertinent to explore trainees' personal relationships. Counselling psychology also emphasises the development of relationships, both with clients and other professionals. Indeed, the quality of the therapeutic relationship ultimately influences the client outcome (Lambert & Barley, 2001; Martin, Gorske & Davis, 2000). The way in which trainees experience personal relationships, therefore, as well as the quality of these relationships, are influential factors in trainees' development as professional counselling psychologists.

Love and intimacy are part of human nature (Maslow, 1943). It is a reciprocal process that involves giving and receiving and, as relationships are fluid, they may shift as a result of personal changes. A training course, for example, may cause one to feel and think differently due to self-reflection, behavioural change, and individual life experiences, which may cause conflict within intimate partner relationships (Meehan & Levy, 2009).

Considered through the lens of transformative learning (Stevens-Long, Schapiro & McClintock, 2012), training in counselling psychology promotes self-reflection and self-awareness; both qualities entail intense introspective self-examination of the different roles played in different personal relationships (Mezirow, 2000). As a result, the mutually dependent and equally reciprocal nature of the intimate partner relationship may shift and even break down. It is for this reason that intimate partner relationships, particularly those that have dissolved, are of interest in this research study.

Definition of key terms

"Trainee" is defined as an individual undergoing training for a particular occupation or a role (Collins English Dictionary, 2019). In this research study, the trainee refers to the counselling psychologist in training, unless otherwise specified in the literature being explored.

The term “relationship dissolution” in this study is used to refer to the ending of an intimate partner relationship. When exploring the different literature on relationship dissolution, the terms “relationship dissolution”, “breakdown”, and “break-up” are used interchangeably. This mirrors the language used in the relevant research studies.

“Intimate partner relationships” refers to a relationship between two individuals consisting of physical and emotional intimacy. The term is used interchangeably with “romantic relationships” and reflects the terminology used in the relevant research studies.

Overview of chapters

The first chapter is a critical review of literature relating to the research topic, specifically the literature that explores the influence of training on the intimate partner relationship, as well as research on the training experience, and literature and theories on relationship dissolution.

The second chapter considers the methodology. Particular attention is given to the theoretical framework that serves as a foundation for this research study, the epistemological position, and the rationale for choosing TA. This chapter describes the method and considers the process of data collection, interviewing, the conducting of analysis, and ethical considerations.

The third chapter examines the findings, exploring a total of four themes and six subthemes. Each theme is supported with extracts from interviews with the study's participants.

The final chapter discusses each theme, drawing on existing literature. It highlights new insights into the experience of a relationship dissolution whilst in training and considers the theoretical and clinical implications. Limitations of the present study are also explored, as well as directions for future research.

As reflexivity is at the core of the research project, reflexive comments are seen throughout the thesis and can be observed in italic lettering. This practice is explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

Search strategy for the literature review in Chapter 1

The search strategy for the literature review in the next chapter consisted of researching key terms on the database "EBSCOhost". "PsychArticles" and "PsychInfo" were the primary filters for articles, however if few articles were found, the entire database was accessed. The search included the following keywords: trainees, training, impact, experience, counselling psychology, counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, relationships, intimate partner relationships, romantic relationships, interpersonal, personal life, relationship dissolution, break-up, relationship breakdown, relationship disengagement, stress and divorce. Key elements of counselling psychology training were also included in the search; "personal therapy" and "personal and professional development". All of the terms were combined and used interchangeably to improve the relevance of search results. Unpublished literature, such as dissertations and theses, were searched using “British Library EThOS” and University of East London’s (UEL) institutional open access repository, “ROAR”. Due to the sparse literature available on trainee counselling psychologists, literature was also sourced from other psychotherapeutic professions to expand the literature search. If the literature included the experience of training, relationship dissolution, and impact of training on relationships, it was deemed relevant. Reference lists from such articles were also explored to deepen the search.

Chapter 1: Literature review

The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical overview of the relevant literature exploring trainees' experiences of a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training. As such, it seeks to assess and contextualise this research study whilst justifying the importance of the research aims and objectives. The main body of the chapter is comprised of three sections. The first section reviews literature that addresses the influence of training and the counselling profession on intimate partner relationships. The second and third sections respectively examine studies focusing on trainees' experiences whilst on a training course such as counselling psychology, and literature and theories on love and relationship dissolutions. The chapter ends with a brief overview, highlighting the relevance of the research topic to the discipline of counselling psychology.

The influence of training on the intimate partner relationship

The purpose of this section is to explore research that addresses the influence of training on intimate partner relationships. Although a large number of studies have looked at the impact of training on relationships in general, very few have examined intimate partner relationships, relationship dissolutions specifically, and how training or practising as a counselling psychologist may influence relationship dynamics.

The impact of training on the couple and the trainee

Previous research shows that a shift in perspective may influence intimate partner relationships (Fiammenghi, 2015; Guy, 1987). It is noted that the rapid internal changes that trainees experience may strain relationship dynamics (Guy, 1987), and moreover, individuals' awareness of their personal growth may lead to issues within interpersonal relationships (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Seashore (1975, p.2), for example, describes that "learning how to better use oneself in the helping process is likely to change one's basis for self-esteem, and alter what it is one values in oneself or others. This produces a significant amount of conflict among those who liked you for what you were, not for what you are becoming." He demonstrates that students who embark on an intensive programme of professional development, such as that promoted by counselling psychology, experience radical change that spills over into other aspects of their lives, including personal relationships. In other words, as trainees struggle to integrate internal changes into their styles of relating, conflict may emerge within interpersonal relationships. Guy (1987) extends this premise to suggest that the intense introspection promoted when practising counselling can lead to a change in expectations, which can result in relationship growth or relationship dissolution.

A large-scale study in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) on the impact of graduate training on married students and their families was published by Ford Sori et al., (1996). The researchers investigated stressors and enhancers associated with being a trainee MFT therapist. An adapted version of a questionnaire produced by Wetchler and Piercy (1986), which measures stressors and enhancers of MFT therapists, was completed by 145 couples. Both the trainees and their spouses reported that the experience of being on a graduate programme was more enhancing than stressful. This is an interesting finding given that graduate programmes are often considered to increase stress levels within students (American Psychological Society, 2013). Having less time and energy to spend with their spouse and family was the most frequently reported stressor, expressed by both the student and spouse. Another reported stressor was the perception that, as the student was developing at a faster rate than their spouse, the latter felt "left behind" (Ford Sori et al., 1996, p.266). Personal and professional development were amongst the factors reported as enhancing participants' experience of being on the programme. According to the spouses, the most significant enhancer for the relationship was the students' acceptance of their part in disputes and of taking responsibility for their actions. This was followed by the students' increased awareness of their own humanness and the rejection of the idea that they are superior to their partner.

As Ford Sori et al.'s research study is over 20 years old, it is difficult to judge whether it is applicable to the experiences of current trainees, specifically those training in counselling psychology. Nonetheless, it is one of the few studies that demonstrates both the positive and negative ways that students' relationships are impacted whilst in training. Furthermore, by investigating from a spousal perspective, it offers an alternative understanding of the impact of training on the intimate partner relationship.

Like Ford Sori et al.'s (1996) study, Legako and Sorenson (2000) investigated the spousal view, however, they found that training had a detrimental effect on student marriages. The study consisted of interviews with twelve spouses of students on a Christian graduate psychology programme. As a result of being on the programme, the students had become more emotionally expressive, changing the communication dynamics within the relationship. Their spouses reported dissatisfaction with the marriage due to stress carried into the marriage by the student. They also feared that psychological explanations for everyday issues would overpower theological or spiritual ones, and this fear lead to anxiety around the stability of their partners' Christian beliefs.

The spousal view was similarly researched by Dahl, Jensen and McCampbell (2010). According to this more recent study, the demands of MFT training impacted the relationship, and as found by Ford Sori et al. (1996) and Legako & Sorenson (2000), the spouses felt "left behind" in the process of personal development. The trainees also became more expressive as a result of increased self-awareness, a quality that was promoted on the course. Fiammenghi's (2015) work on trainee clinical psychologists also supports these themes, as it demonstrates that changes in trainees' values, perspectives, and priorities lead to most relationship-related difficulties.

Truell (2001) interviewed six graduates of a UK counselling course and found that the stresses of studying counselling significantly affected their relationships. The graduates reported having fewer friends and re-examining their existing relationships. Moreover, all participants reported a more focused communication pattern in their intimate relationship, with five reflecting that their new perspectives caused relationship difficulties. The difficulties reported were "mistaken beliefs that they could resolve all the problems in their relationships; changing interests that they previously had shared with their spouses; alienating their spouses by using psychological jargon/techniques, and expecting their spouses to change at the same rate they were changing" (Truell, 2001, p.77). One participant described feeling inadequate when he was unable to solve a relationship issue; he held the belief that, as part of his professional role is to work through problems with his clients, he should have all the answers when facing problems with his partner.

Limitations of literature on "the influence of training on the intimate partner relationship"

A notable weakness in the literature reviewed is the paucity of research on the relationships of trainee counselling psychologists. Other psychotherapeutic professions – such as MFT and clinical psychologists – are examined, however, there is a lack of research that specifically addresses the experience of trainees in the field of counselling psychology and the influence of this training on relationships, particularly relationship dissolutions.

Although it can be argued that these professions are different in their ethos and values, some aspects of the programme may be similar. For example, both clinical and counselling psychology deal with a range of mental health difficulties and overlap in the areas in which they work (British Psychological Society, 2019b). It can be argued that training is also similar within these disciplines. In order to gain accreditation for both counselling psychology and clinical psychology, the trainee must be able to carry out a psychological assessment and formulation which uses “accessible language, are culturally sensitive, and non-discriminatory” and must be able to revise these formulations “in light of ongoing feedback and interventions” (British Psychological Society, 2019c, p.17; British Psychological Society, 2019d, p.13). Counselling psychologists, clinical psychologists and marriage and family therapists must also be able to provide psychological therapy interventions to individual adults, couples, families, groups and organisations (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2019; British Psychological Society, 2019c; British Psychological Society, 2019d). The disciplines explored in the literature are all helping professions; providing psychotherapeutic services to clients. As a result, although the literature on counselling psychology is sparse, literature on other therapeutic disciplines can help contextualise the present study and the need for the research in the field of Counselling Psychology.

A systematic understanding of how training impacts intimate partner relationships is presented, however, this is limited to the spousal view. Although this perspective offers an alternative understanding of the impact of training (Dahl et al., 2010; Ford Sori et al., 1996; Legako & Sorenson, 2000), the experience of the trainee is largely ignored. From a critical realist position, it can be argued that there is no one truth and, as such, the spousal view is just as valid as the trainee's view. However, the spousal view can only offer limited insight, as it is the trainee that experiences the full impact of the course.

The issue of validity is also a concern in the study by Ford Sori et al. (1996). The questionnaire implemented by the researchers was an adaptation of one produced by Wetchler & Piercy (1986), meaning that validity and reliability claims relate to the original, thereby making it difficult to replicate the later study. Whilst the adaptations may have been reasonable, the researchers do not make reference to the extent of these changes or whether the changes were adequately piloted.

Similarly, the study by Legako and Sorenson (2000) is limited by the quality of the research. The researchers sought to test a hypothesis, however, qualitative research is not fundamentally designed for hypothesis testing; it is designed for the exploration and understanding of a particular topic (Willig, 2013). As it is unclear what epistemological stance the researchers possessed and the objectives of the study, their use of hypothesis testing is ambiguous. It is also possible that there is a significant religious element behind the stress and dissatisfaction experienced by the trainees, as the study's focus is on Christian students. For example, relationships grounded in religious beliefs could be prone to different types of relationship issues, such as the divergence of beliefs and heterogamy within the relationship dynamic (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Heaton & Pratt, 1990). Nonetheless, this study is one of the few published that offers insight into how training might impact upon intimate partner relationships.

The training experience

In order to become a counselling psychologist in the UK, an individual must complete either a doctorate in counselling psychology or the independent route guided by the BPS (British Psychological Society, 2018a). The BPS requires trainees to complete a minimum of 450 hours of clinical work towards professional development and an additional 40 hours of personal therapy for the purpose of personal development (British Psychological Society, 2018a). These requirements, alongside academic deadlines and other stresses of the course, may put a significant level of pressure on individuals (Kumary and Baker, 2008) and their relationships (Truell, 2001).

This section draws on the literature that explores the different experiences of training, specifically personal and professional development, as well as the experience of mandatory personal therapy, and general stresses reported by trainees.

Personal and professional development during training

Personal and professional development is seen as an integral part of counselling psychology training, as counselling psychology emphasises reflective practice and self-development (British Psychological Society, 2018a). Transformative learning may therefore be a dominant feature, as trainees must challenge their belief systems, their values, and their assumptions in order to develop personally and professionally (British Psychological Society, 2018a; Stevens-Long et al., 2012).

Professional development involves the acquisition of skills and the implementation of techniques and theories, whilst personal development refers to the personal qualities and attributes that the individual acquires in becoming a competent counsellor, such as authenticity, interpersonal engagement, self-evaluation, and self-awareness (Elton-

Wilson, 1994; McLeod, 1996; Wilkins, 1997; Gillmer & Marckus, 2003; Hughes, 2009). Whilst the demands to progress on the course can be stressful and intense, the training itself facilitates increased self-insight and the ability to form mature interpersonal relationships (Fiammenghi, 2015; Guy, 1987).

Studies have shown that interpersonal experiences in both personal and professional life may significantly influence professional development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003), suggesting that there is a relationship between the two. Foss-Kelly and Protivnak (2017) found a similar association between personal and professional boundaries. According to the researchers, professional growth extended beyond the classroom and into individuals' personal lives, particularly in terms of relating to others. Another researcher, Haenisch (2011), concluded that personal therapy had influenced professionalism through self-awareness and enhanced support. Similarly, by exploring student experiences in counsellor education, the present study supports the idea that personal growth may be a by-product of studying counselling psychology.

Mandatory personal therapy

Personal therapy is a mandatory requirement of counselling psychology training (British Psychological Society, 2018a), though this is subject to ongoing debate. Indeed, other counselling professions have different requirements (Rake & Paley, 2009; Moller, Timms and Alilovic, 2009). Mandatory personal therapy has been favoured for its contribution to personal development (Norcross, 2005) as well as for its role in helping develop professional attributes such as empathy and reflexivity (Grimmer and Tribe, 2001). Furthermore, personal therapy has been known to benefit trainees as it enables them to observe clinical interventions from the perspective of the client, can alleviate the stress of clinical work, and helps them to separate personal issues from professional issues

(Grimmer & Tribe, 2001; Williams et al., 1999). Generally, personal therapy is seen as a positive experience due to its function of addressing and processing personal issues, thereby increasing self-understanding (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013). In some cases, however, personal therapy may have notable negative implications for trainees (Sherman, 2000).

A systematic, meta-synthesis review of literature addressing mandatory personal therapy during training developed three positive and three negative themes (Murphy, Irfan, Barnett, Castledine and Enescu, 2018). Personal therapy was seen as helpful for trainees as it increased self-awareness by providing the tools with which to separate personal issues from issues presented by clients. Trainees also reported emotional development and increased resilience. Personal therapy enabled them to work through past and present difficulties and, in addition to improving their social life, personal therapy improved their self-esteem. In addition to this, feelings of overwhelm, stress and vulnerability describe some of the negative influences of personal therapy, as well as an impact on client work.

Macaskill and Macaskill (1992) conducted a survey of psychotherapists' experiences in personal therapy; out of 25 trainees, 21 declared that personal therapy was obligatory. The positive effects reported included increased self-esteem, increased self-awareness, and a reduction in negative symptoms. Although reported by only two trainees, the negative effects involved psychological distress and stress within their marriage and family. As such, this study, alongside Murphy et al. (2018), is one of the few to highlight the negative experiences of personal therapy.

Similarly, Moller et al., (2009) found that trainees were able to recognise the benefits of personal therapy whilst also viewing it as a burden. From interviews with 11 clinical psychology, 13 counselling psychology, and 13 counselling trainees, the authors analysed perceptions of personal therapy using TA. Two main themes developed: “personal therapy helped trainees become better practitioners” and “personal therapy costs”. Amongst the benefits were personal growth and protection for clients and themselves. In addition to financial cost, however, negatives included the potential to “open up a can of worms” (p. 379) and to leave trainees feeling anxious and vulnerable.

Focusing primarily on counselling psychologists, Williams et al. (1999) found that 88 percent of their study’s 192 participants were in favour of personal therapy as part of training, whilst 27 percent reported negative issues, such as being preoccupied with personal issues. Similarly, Kumari (2011) reported that mandatory personal therapy was a valuable additional experience in personal and professional development, but that it also increased levels of stress. In Kumari’s study, analysis of eight trainee counselling psychologists found personal therapy to be a helpful tool that enabled trainees to face personal challenges. Gaining courage and strength to face personal issues in addition to a better understanding of themselves were some of the positive elements reported. However, tension between self-care and providing treatment to clients was reported as a contribution to stress because participants felt that their preoccupation with personal issues prevented them from giving clients their full attention. Participants also reported the cost, the pressure to complete 40 hours of therapy, and concerns about their readiness to attend personal therapy as amplifying their stress.

Stress experienced in counselling psychology training

A significant amount of evidence suggests that working and training as a psychologist, psychotherapist, or counsellor can be stressful (Jensen, 1995; Cushway & Tyler, 1996; Truell, 2001; Halewood & Tribe, 2003; Kumary & Baker, 2008). Indeed, counselling-related professions have been described as a “hazardous” (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 1993, p.47) due to its immense negative repercussions. Likewise, psychology trainees report high levels of stress and distress during training (Kumary & Baker, 2008), which challenges the status quo of training as something that encourages vulnerability in order to assess trainees' resilience and promote personal and professional development. This tautological experience has been reported as affecting personal relationships (Truell, 2001).

The study by Truell (2001) highlights that graduates' interpersonal relationships were significantly affected during training. Participants expressed feeling increased pressure from unrealistic expectations placed on them both by themselves and by those around them since starting the training. For example, the expectation that trainees should be able to "fix" (p. 81) themselves and their clients led to participants reporting feelings of depression and guilt when they were unable to achieve this. Other stresses included the difficulty of integrating theory into practice, fear of harming the client, and concerns about self-disclosure.

In addition to feeling incompetent and inexperienced, the number of hours a student works has been reported as a potential negative stressor (Polson & Nida, 1998). Likewise, oscillating between multiple roles, such as student, researcher, and therapist, has been known to cause a significant amount of stress (Schwartz-Mette, 2009).

Foss-Kelly & Protivnak (2017) argue that debt increases levels of stress, and indeed, counselling psychology trainees in the USA reported that debt stress impacted their personal relationships (Olson-Garriott, Garriott, Rigali-Oiler & Chao, 2015). Due to financial pressure, trainees reported isolating themselves from peers, resulting in feelings of resentment. This in turn affected trainees' wellbeing and stirred up negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety. Due to cultural differences, it is unclear whether these results are equally representative of the UK trainee population; however, as both training programmes are independently funded, it is plausible that similar financial stresses may be experienced by counselling psychology trainees in the UK.

Kumary and Baker (2008) reflected on financial stress as part of their research on UK trainee counselling psychologists. Stressors and psychological distress reported by 109 trainees demonstrated high stress scores in three domains: academic, placements, and personal and professional development. This research is particularly useful because it reveals the stresses specifically experienced by counselling psychologist trainees.

Limitations of literature on "the training experience"

Despite the extensive literature on trainee experiences, its direct relevance to the field of counselling psychology – specifically the experience of training on intimate partner relationships – is limited. Much of the research acknowledges an overlap between different disciplines in psychotherapeutic training, implying that the experience of the counselling psychology trainee is no different. However, given the importance of the relationship and the use of the self in relationships with clients in counselling psychology, this particular intersection is worthy of research.

Although studies that address counselling psychologists provide information on the trainee experience, the experience itself is diluted as it is shared with other disciplines (Moller et al., 2009). Whilst it can be argued that it is not necessary for counselling psychology to be researched separately from other psychotherapeutic professions due to similarity between the disciplines, each discipline has its own level of training, financial attributes, ethos, and philosophical underpinning, which provide an alternative understanding of the trainee experience. For example, the HCPC Standards of Proficiency state that counselling psychologists “must be able to critically reflect on the use of self in the therapeutic process” (Health & Care Professionals Council, 2015, p.12). This criterion is not required for any other practitioner psychologist. Similarly, the BPS does not mandate personal therapy for clinical psychology trainees, nor is clinical psychology training self-funded. As a result, mandatory personal therapy, financial strain of academic fees, and loss of earnings during training are experienced far less in clinical psychology trainees when compared to other counselling professions (Jensen, 1995).

Considering the research by Moller et al. (2009) specifically, the combination of the three disciplines offers insight into the experience of personal therapy and is further strengthened by the use of a diverse sample. A disadvantage, however, lies in the lack of clarity surrounding the research objectives and aims. When using TA, it’s imperative to specify a research question in order to provide a rich and coherent analysis in an attempt to answer the question. Throughout the paper, however, the researchers make no reference to their research questions. This raises concerns about the analytical process, thereby putting the credibility of the paper into question.

Publications that focus on trainee counselling psychologists more frequently adopt quantitative methods of analysis (Kumary & Baker, 2008; Williams et al., 1999). Although quantitative methods contribute immensely to the field of research, they are limited insofar as they do not include certain types of information, such as an in-depth individual subjective experience of the trainee.

The study on counselling psychologists in the USA, although informative, may not be representative of those training on a UK course (Olson-Garriott et al., 2015). Counselling psychology was established as a profession in the USA in 1946, whereas in the UK, the structures of the discipline were only formed approximately 35 years ago (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2008). As counselling psychology is beginning to be recognised globally, the principles taught in the UK are likely to be similar to those taught in the USA, for example, the scientific, yet reflective focus (Pelling, 2004) as well as the fact that both training programmes are self-funded. That said, there are important cultural, social, and historical differences between the UK and the USA, and as such, the trainee experience may not be the same. In fact, it may be more likely that there are greater similarities between UK clinical and counselling psychologists than there are between UK and USA counselling psychologists (Kinderman, 2009). However, even then, cultural, social, and historical difference between the two disciplines may be visible.

Although it focuses on counsellor education, the strength in Foss-Kelly and Protivnak's (2017) research is that it covers a wide sample in an attempt to gain access to as much rich data as possible; the qualitative study explored 224 masters students' experiences of training. Qualitative research studies are known to produce rich data, which is difficult to achieve in a large sample. In fact, a sample as broad as this is often associated with quantitative studies, as large samples are necessary to conduct meaningful statistical analysis that can be generalised to the wider population (Bausell, 2015). However, despite the researchers' attempt to justify the appropriateness of using a large sample – giving the reason that it is acceptable if the purpose is broad or explanatory in nature – conducting a qualitative inquiry of this scale raises questions about the quality of the study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar & Fontenot, 2013).

Relationship dissolution

All relationships end with either separation or death. Whilst the majority of literature on grief and loss focuses on the death of a partner, very little has looked at separation. This section, therefore, covers a broad spectrum. It draws on different theories, such as the evolutionary perspective and stages of development and attachment, to highlight the importance of relationships. Key findings on theories of love and relationship dissolution are also addressed to contextualise the process of a relationship dissolution.

The importance of relationships

It is part of the human condition to connect with others and to feel loved (Maslow, 1943). Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective, there are several reasons why individuals enter a union. Evolutionary psychologists, for example, define love as an emotional investment that features reproduction, fitness enhancement, and gene replication; in particular, romantic relationships develop for sexual reproduction and bonding to care for offspring (Chang, Lu & Zhu, 2017). Though the case may be made that this is common to many mammals, unlike all mammals, human cultures and societies have some form of marriage (Weisfeld & Weisfeld, 2002), a strong indication that the need for love and bonding is central to human existence.

Insights into lifespan theory and the development stages provide crucial explanations as to the importance of building relationships. Erikson (1968) established eight psychosocial stages of development and that at each stage, there is a psychosocial crisis of two conflicts. Given that the average age of entering training as a psychologist is 27 (Roth, 1998), the stage of early adulthood (20–39 years) is explored here. During this stage, there is a conflict of love, intimacy, and isolation. Following on from the previous stage of identity formation, Erikson argues that young adults strive to fuse their identity with others in the form of intimate relationships.

Erikson's stage of early adulthood is comparable in complexity to the stage described by Levinson in his publication *Seasons of a Man's Life* (Levinson, 1978). Levinson describes two key concepts in early adulthood: the stable period, where critical life choices are made, and the transitional period, where the end of one stage leads to the beginning of the next. Although influenced by Erikson's work, Levinson advanced the concept of adult development beyond Erikson's by separating it from psychosocial themes. Early adulthood (17–40) is understood over four phases: "early adult transition" (17–22) where life choices are made; "entering the adult world" (22–28), where decisions in love, career, social values, and lifestyle are deliberated; "age 30 transition" (28–33), a period where momentous change may occur in an individual's life structure, often resulting in an stressful crisis; and "settling down" (33–40) where an individual has established their place in society. As such, though Erikson lays the foundation of understanding development in early adulthood, Levinson progresses the concept. Both theories nonetheless provide valuable context for the experience of building relationships at this age and the potential for crisis when conflict is involved.

Whilst lifespan theory features general development stages, attachment theory brings internal conflicts into focus. According to theorists, attachment occurs throughout the life stages and informs an individual's style of relating. It is characterised by an emotional bond with a significant other whose role is to offer a safe and secure base for the individual (Bowlby, 1988). In childhood, for example, the attachment figure is typically the mother or the primary caregiver; in adulthood, a romantic partner often becomes the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1989).

Drawing on concepts from both ethology and development psychology, attachment theory was popularised after the release of the *Attachment and Loss* trilogy (Bowlby 1969; Bowlby 1973; Bowlby 1980). Bowlby suggests that infants develop internalised representations of the self and others based on the availability of the primary caregiver and their responsiveness to its needs. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) explored this further and identified three main patterns of attachment: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. Broadening the theory, Bartholomew (1990) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) established four adult attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant.

Over the past 35 years, theorists have argued that romantic love is essentially an attachment process characterised by the formation of an affectionate bond between individuals (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Though other factors also influence the choice of a life partner, individual attachment style plays a key role (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997; Collins & Read, 1990).

Theories on love and relationships

Before proceeding to examine relationship dissolutions, this section attempts to understand theories of love and relationships. A well-known theory that is often cited in research on love is the triangular theory of love by Sternberg (1986). According to Sternberg, love is composed of three things: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Intimacy consists of closeness, connectedness, and bonding with another. Passion is characterised by the drives that lead to love, such as physical arousal and emotional stimulation, and lastly, commitment is the decision to commit to the other individual. Sternberg and Grajek (1984) concluded that, in addition to these key components, love must include: (a) desire to promote the welfare of the loved one; (b) experienced happiness with the loved one; (c) high regard of the loved one; (d) the ability to rely on the loved one in times of need; (e) mutual understanding with the loved one; (f) sharing self and possessions with the loved one; (g) receipt of emotional support from the loved one; (h) giving of emotional support to the loved one; (i) intimate communication with the loved one; and (j) valuing the loved one in one's life (Sternberg, 1997, p.315).

Expanding the idea further, Stenberg introduced the duplex theory of love (Sternberg, 2006), which integrates the triangular theory with the concept of love as a story (Sternberg, 1998). In this, Sternberg describes stories of love as a creation of interactions between personal attributes and the social context, often based on life experiences. Having a certain kind of "love story", such as one that is depicted on television or in parental figures, can lead to certain types of expectations of relationships. The theory suggests that there is a greater chance of relationship survival if the partner's story is similar to their own. Each individual's love story incorporates complementary roles that are desirable in romantic partners. If their story is not similar to their partner's, their partner must have roles that complement the individual's idea of love.

Theories on relationship dissolution

There are two main models of relationship dissolution and several theories that embrace the concept. Knapp's model of interaction speaks of relation development as a process consisting of two phases and ten steps (Knapp, Vangelisti & Caughlin, 2014). The phase of coming together addresses initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The phase of coming apart addresses differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and lastly, terminating (Knapp et al., 2014). As such, this theory incorporates the development stages of a relationship as well the steps in which it can break apart, positing that each relationship fluctuates along a continuum of closeness and intimacy, and that these stages manifest at different times in a relationship.

Another theoretical model of relationship dissolution is the model of breakdown by Rollie and Duck, 2006, which demonstrates the different stages that comprise the ending of relationships. Rollie and Duck (2006) propose five stages of a relationship breakdown: the intrapsychic stage focuses on the couples' cognitive process; the dyadic stage consists of the individual attempting to resolve the problem by discussing it with their partner; the social stage is when the couple shares the relationship dissolution with their close social circle; the grave-dressing stage occurs when the couple makes sense of the relationship and its dissolution; and the final stage – the resurrection stage – involves a period of self-reconfiguration in preparation for new relationships.

Pioneers in the field of relationships, Gottman, Gottman & Silver (1995) write about the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" in their book *Why marriages succeed or fail and how to make yours last*. Each of "the four horsemen of the apocalypse", they describe, is a warning sign of a relationship descending towards dissolution. The first horseman, criticism, involves attacking the personality or character of the partner, fuelled by blame and shame. The second horseman is contempt, which is differentiated from criticism in that its intention is to insult the partner. The third horseman is defensiveness, which involves one partner behaving contemptuously and the other reacting defensively. In this situation, both individuals feel victimised by the other whilst denying responsibility of their part in the disruption. The fourth and final horseman is stonewalling: when one participant mentally removes themselves from the conversation. The act of stonewalling is powerful, as it conveys disapproval of the partner. According to Gottman, the arrival of this fourth horsemen predicts the demise of the relationship.

According to the stress spill-over model (Neff & Karney, 2007), symptoms of stress experienced outside the home, such as negative mood, “spill” into one’s personal life. An increase in the number of hours spent outside the home has been known to put a strain on personal relationships, whilst occupational stress contributes to the act of withdrawal from spousal interaction. As a consequence, such stresses increase the chances of a relationship ending (Story & Repetti, 2006).

Attachment theorists find secure attachment to be linked with a more intimate, satisfied, and balanced relationship. Insecure relationships, on the other hand, are more likely to go through a relationship dissolution (Hepper & Carnelley, 2012). Finzi, Cohen & Ram (2000) found that securely attached couples reported low divorce rates, and where divorce did occur, the couple were able to end the relationship with little conflict. This almost harmonious divorce could be explained by genuine self-sufficiency, which results from a secure base (Belsky and Cassidy, 1994; Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer & Florian, 1997). Divorce in other attachment styles is due to partner withdrawal (Parkinson, 1987), issues surrounding interdependence and dependence, caregiving (Feeney, 1996), power struggle, enmeshment, the need to minimise intimacy (Senchak & Leonard, 1992), and lastly, violence.

The self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron & Norman, 2004) proposes that it is part of human nature for people to expand their potential efficacy and for this to be achieved through close relationships. According to the theorists, close relationships help to shape an individual’s identity through two principles: motivation, which promotes the idea that people seek to expand their self, and secondly, the inclusion of other in the self, which refers to the way in which people use close relationships as a resource for this expansion. Considering attachment through this lens, it can be understood that individuals who are securely attached are comfortable with the idea of including others in their narrative of the self. As a result, individuals are able to accept others into their lives without an anxious response from their partner. Anxiously attached individuals are similarly motivated to want to include others in the self as they want to build a "secure" base. On the contrary, those with avoidant attachment styles may look for other ways of self-expansion that do not include others. Indeed, Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone & Bator (1997) found that pairs of avoidant individuals became substantially less close and included others in the self substantially less often than any of the other pairings.

Another theory that encompasses relationship dissolution is social exchange theory. First introduced by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), social exchange theory consists of two main properties: self-interest and interdependence. In this context, self-interest is "the act of considering the advantage to yourself when making decisions, and deciding to do what is best for you" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). Interdependence theory, which developed from social exchange theory, describes how the ideal relationship is characterised by low levels of cost and high levels of reward (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The concept of dependence is therefore crucial, and fulfilment lies in what others provide for the self. According to interdependence theory, the attractiveness of a relationship depends on its stability; couples calculate reward and cost in terms of whether or not being in that relationship is beneficial to them.

To return to an evolutionary perspective on relationships, neoclassical economic theory posits that the sharing of duties at work and within the home between partners promotes stability as each partner fills a complementary role (Becker, 1981). Indeed, some gender scholars suggest that when heterosexual couples violate the traditional view of the male as the “breadwinner”, the relationship can become strained and couples are more likely to terminate the relationship (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Contemporary feminism, however, marks a shift away from the traditional breadwinner/homemaker model towards a more egalitarian model in which marital stability is not based on which gender provides economic status (Schwartz & Gonalons-Pons, 2016).

Empirical research on relationship dissolution

Turning now to empirical evidence, existing research specifically addressing relationship dissolution focuses on predictors, coping strategies, and personal growth.

The impact of relationship dissolution

The experience of a relationship dissolution is often viewed as one of life’s most distressing events (Frazier & Hurliman, 2001). Examining the impact of relationship dissolution on mental health and life satisfaction, Rhoades, Kamp Dush, Atkins, Stanley & Markman (2011) found that the experience is upsetting even for the initiator. Investigating unmarried 18–35-year-olds over a 20-month period, the researchers reported that couples undergoing a break-up experienced an increase in psychological distress and a decline in life satisfaction. During a relationship dissolution, individuals may experience anger, sadness, and anxiety, which have been compared to symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Chung et al., 2003; Mearns, 1991; Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

Predictors of relationship dissolution

Research highlights that economic and work strain can influence relationship stability (Williams, Cheadle & Goosby, 2015). Indeed, contextual influences such as low income, and work stress can place a substantial burden on the functioning of a relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Karney, Story & Bradbury, 2005).

Religion (Knoester & Booth, 2000; Larsen & Goltz, 1989), the modernisation of society, and economic assets (Giddens, 1990) may also influence the decision to terminate a relationship. Firstly, religious beliefs have been known to be one of the most important preventers of divorce (Knoester and Booth, 2000), whilst couples who do not practise religion or have very little religious commitment are at higher risk of divorce (Larson & Goltz, 1989). This could be due to the interpretation of certain religious texts as condemning the act of divorce, such as "'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel" (Malachi, 2:16). Secondly, modernised cultures and countries, characterised by more liberal norms and a higher degree of individualisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), are more likely accept the decision to divorce (Giddens, 1990). The modernisation of society can equally mean that women may be less dependent on their husbands for financial support; separation is thus no longer bound by earning stability and economic assets (Bodenmann et al., 2006).

Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn and Mutso (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of predictors in nonmarital relationship breakdowns from 37,717 participants over the course of 33 years. Relationship factors such as love, commitment, dependence, and inclusion of the other in the self were found to be stronger predictors of relationship dissolution than individual factors, such as attachment and personality traits. Feelings of ambivalence, alternatives to the relationship, and relationship quality were also strong indicators. Conflict was a small predictor of relationship breakdown. Notably, there were clear differences between genders. Whilst satisfaction, adjustment, and ambivalence predicted dissolution for males, closeness, self-disclosure, dependence, relationship quality, and conflict predicted dissolution for females.

Traditionally, literature on predictors of relationship dissolution has focused on heterosexual relationships. However, in 2005, the UK approved the right for individuals to change their gender legally, and same-sex couples were given the right to form civil partnerships (The Civil Partnership Act, 2004). Almost a decade later, in 2014, England, Scotland and Wales legalised same-sex marriage (Marriage [Same Sex Couples] Act, 2013), though as of yet, Northern Ireland does not recognise either same-sex marriages or civil partnerships. Recent developments in sexual studies have recognised the vast variety of genders and sexualities, from the traditional cisgender male and female to the increasingly recognised transsexual, intersex, bigender, and agender (Jones, 2017). Sexuality is also increasingly seen as a fluid concept and ranges from being heterosexual or homosexual to being bisexual, asexual, or pansexual (Lenning, 2009). Indeed, the aforementioned terms for both gender and sexual orientation are not a comprehensive list, a fact that itself showcases the complex nature of the two concepts.

Over the past two decades, major advances in the acceptance of lesbian, gay, and homosexual relationships have allowed researchers to explore relationship dissolution more widely. As with research on heterosexual couples, interpersonal issues in same-sex couples that predict dissolution include low levels of positive affect, high levels of conflict, and low levels of communication (Kurdek, 1991, Kurdek, 1996). Irrespective of these predictors of dissolution, Kurdek (1998) found that same-sex couples reported fewer barriers to leaving the relationship as, at the time, there were no legal barriers preventing them from doing so. However, although this study was conducted before the change in legislation, researchers have found that there are no differences in dissolution rates between legalised same-sex couples and those who have not legalised their relationship (Balsam, Rothblum, Wickham, 2017). Furthermore, when comparing same-sex couples to heterosexual couples, recent studies have found very little differences in predictors of commitment, relationship quality, and stability (Kurdek, 2006; Gottman, Levenson, Swanson, Tyson & Yoshimoto, 2003; Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, & Bégin, 2003). Similarly, although literature on asexual relationships have seldom addressed relationship dissolution, like with heterosexual and homosexual relationships, asexual individuals experience full and varied lives including romantic relationships and there is very little evidence to suggest a 'deficit of intimacy' in asexual relationships (Dawson, McDonnell & Scott, 2016). It can therefore be assumed that the experience of a relationship dissolution may too, be similar.

Similarly, traditional research focuses on Western ideologies where romantic relationships are often monogamous and endogamous. However, it is known that different cultures experience relationships in a variety of ways. For example, the West considers a relationship between two cousins to be incestuous, however, in other cultures such as Bedouin culture and Yąnomamö culture, cousin to cousin marriage is widespread and even preferred (Gonzalez, 2011). Where western societies push a more monogamous narrative (Witte, 2015), non-western cultures are open to polygamy. Polyandry, although rare, exists in some Himalayan regions of Bhutan, India, Nepal & Tibet (Gonzalez, 2011). Similarly, polygyny is popular within the Yąnomamö culture (Hames, 1996). Research on divorce and relationship dissolution on such relationships are limited, further highlighting the lack of diversity in this field.

Looking at relationship dissolution and divorce in non-western societies, financial independence for woman, a weakening of traditional beliefs, changing attitudes in marriage and divorce are contributing factors to the ending of relationships in Hong Kong and predominantly Chinese couples (Irving, 2002). In Asia, divorce rates have gone up considerably over the past 30 years and has been linked to ideational changes (Wang, 2001), the extent of social support given to divorced women (Das Gupta, 2010), increasing education for women (Wang & Zhu, 2010), changes in participants of women's labour force (Ono, 2006), changes in religious and civil laws regulating divorce, changes in life expectancy (Dommaraju & Jones, 2011) and changes in age at marriage (Caldwell, 2005).

Bromfield, Ashour and Rider (2016) explored divorce from arranged marriages in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Reasons for divorce for both female and male participants included a lack of respect in the marriage, marriage at an early age, poor communication skills, financial issues, and interference of the extended family. Some themes were more common amongst women, such as the desire to have known more about the spouse before marriage, whilst problems caused by polygynous marriages contributed to divorce for men.

Healing and coping strategies

Following a relationship dissolution, individuals report a number of ways that they heal from and cope with the ending (Emmers & Hart, 1996; Perilloux & Buss, 2008), as well as the experience of self-development and personal growth (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003; Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). How individuals heal from and make sense of personal relationship dissolutions is crucial to counselling psychology research as it displays resilience, an important trait that enhances clinical work (Wicks, 2008). Similarly, most research on loss and grief showcases the importance of coping strategies. Attig (1994), for example, noted that those who are grieving have control over the process. They choose how they focus their attention, as well as where, when, and also if, they choose to grieve.

In the transactional model of stress and coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explore ways in which individuals cope with stressful situations. For example, appraisal-focused coping strategies involve denial, that is, individuals distance themselves from or see the humour in the situation as a way of modifying their thought processes following a stressful experience. Problem-focused strategies include seeking information, taking control, and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the situation, whilst the emphasis of emotion-focused coping is to change the meaning of the stressor or to divert attention away from it by engaging in methods such as escapism, avoidance, accepting responsibility and blame, and positive reappraisal.

By focusing on relationship disengagement and coping rituals as well as the differences between those who chose to leave a relationship and those who were left, Emmers and Hart (1996) discovered that “leavers” rely on self-enhancement and avoidance techniques during the disengagement stage. Reflecting on the relationship and the way in which it ends, “leavers” turn to friends and family and become more introspective. The “lefts”, on the other hand, gain more emotional scars. They rely on a social support network to aid them through the process of disengagement, simultaneously questioning their self-worth. During the stage of coping, the “leavers” engage in more self-enhancement techniques, such as self-improvement and empowerment. More focus is given to changing their own perception of the events and the anticipation of a new beginning.

Coping strategies based on who initiated the relationship dissolution was further explored by Perilloux and Buss (2008). According to their findings, both genders employ a variety of coping strategies, ranging from discussing the dissolution with friends to, at the other end of the spectrum, threatening suicide. Coping strategies deployed by both genders amongst the rejected partners included discussing the relationship dissolution with others and avoiding the ex-partner.

Self-development

According to crisis theory, negative events are likely to promote personal growth (Caplan, 1964). Tashiro and Frazier (2003) investigated the prevalence of and correlation between stress and personal growth after a relationship dissolution. Based on 92 undergraduates, they identified, on average, five types of growth that might improve the individual's future relationships. Positive changes in the self – particularly personal growth – were reported most often. In this context, personal growth was defined as changes in specific behaviours, rather than personality traits. For example, individuals became able to accept and reflect on their part in the relationship dissolution, rather than formulate a fault in their personality as contributing to the ending. Environmental growth was the second most common type, with participants reporting an improvement in familial relationships as well as better performance at university and work.

Building on the concept of personal development, Lewandowski and Bizzoco (2007) investigated 155 undergraduates and their views on the positive outcomes experienced after a relationship dissolution. Implementing the self-expansion model (Aron & Aron, 1997), the researchers found that ending a relationship that was low in self-expansion led to greater amounts of growth after the relationship ended. The findings of this study were consistent with the stress-relief pathway established by Tashiro, Frazier and Berman (2006), which suggests that ending a relationship that is low in quality results in less stress and new opportunities for personal growth.

Limitations of literature on “relationship dissolution”

Though broad, the publications on relationship dissolution has its limitations. For example, intersectionality alleges that racism, sexism, and heterosexism do not work in an “additive” fashion (Spelman, 1988, p.1221); individuals that are the same race and gender will have different experiences depending on the other forms of oppression they experience in society (Spelman, 1988). It may be understood, therefore, that culture, gender, and sexuality all play an important role in relationship dissolution and the different influences on the breakdown of the relationship. These complexities are not sufficiently addressed in the existing literature, as demonstrated below.

Furthermore, at the time the lifespan development theories (Erikson, 1968) were first purported, men were generally considered to hold a privileged position in society. Although women entered the workforce during the First and Second World Wars (Shipton, 2014; Summerfield, 1984) and despite the surge of second-wave feminism in the 1960s (LeGates, 2001), it has been demonstrated that Erikson depicted a masculine psychology in his stage development theory (Gilligan, 1993). Gilligan, for example, noted that although Erikson recognised a different pattern of development for women – one that depended less on autonomy, separateness, and independence – these characteristics were not implemented in his theory (Gilligan, 1993). It is possible, therefore, that development theories were primarily developed with men in mind, suggesting that such theories may not be applicable to women. Indeed, the title of the book *Seasons of a Man’s Life* by Levinson (1978) points starkly to this exclusion.

Gender and cultural differences have also been overlooked in the models of relationship dissolution (Knapp et al., 2014; Rollie & Duck, 2006). According to the theories, all individuals will go through each step and experience the same motions regardless of gender and relationship formation. However, this does not take into account how males and females may engage in different strategies (Perrilloux & Buss, 2008) and that those in arranged marriages may hold different views from those in love marriages (Bromfield et al., 2016; Akhtar, Khan, Pervez & Batool, 2017; Batabyal and Beladi, 2002).

Analysing studies that expand over 33 years gives the illusion that recent developments and theories on relationships have been considered (Le et al., 2010). However, new ways of forming relationships have not been studied. For example, although online dating has been practised for over 20 years (Eichenberg, Huss & Küsel, 2017), Le et al. (2010) fails to include insights regarding this phenomenon. Indeed, such social changes may alter the way in which relationships are constructed and deconstructed and may themselves be a contributing factor to the dissolution of relationships. Therefore, whilst this study provides an overall understanding of predicting relationship dissolution with an overwhelming amount of data, it is debatable whether all aspects of this research are still relevant today.

Another limitation of this study by Le et al. (2010) is a lack of investigation into the relationship between different variables. For example, it is likely that the variable of closeness interacts with that of attachment, and the effect of this particular variable is dependent on the level of the other. However, this was not considered in the analysis process. This omission raises concerns about the validity of the statistics provided, as it suggests that the researchers were masking the possibility of statistical heterogeneity.

The research exploring the “rejecters” and “rejected” (Perilloux & Buss, 2008) and the “leavers” and “lefts” (Emmers & Hart, 1996) may be viewed as separatist. The researchers do not, for instance, consider relationships that ended by mutual agreement, as neither research study provided the option to declare a mutual ending. Furthermore, although both studies explore the experiences of each side, the researchers failed to consider other influences that may affect the decision to leave, and instead focused primarily on the labels of "rejecters/rejected" and "leavers/lefts". Research has shown, however, that individuals can develop labels into self-fulfilling prophecies by adopting the label and conforming to its cognitive process (Merton, 1948). As a result, it is possible that the participants' experiences were influenced by the label provided by the researcher, contributing to participant bias and thereby impacting the data.

Overview of the literature

The existing body of literature suggests that the experience of training, although stressful, encourages personal development. There is a recognition that learning may influence interpersonal relationships as individuals become absorbed in training and may therefore be less available in their personal lives. It has also been observed that, on occasion, this impact may lead to a relationship dissolution. Despite these findings, there remains a paucity of research on the combination of these topics.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology of this research project. It begins by stating the research aims and questions, before exploring a theoretical framework in order to provide context. The epistemology of the study is discussed, followed by a rationale as to why TA (Braun and Clarke, 2012) has been chosen as the method of analysis. Finally, the chapter explores the process of analysis, before ending with a section on reflexivity.

Research aims and rationale

Counselling psychology maintains an interest in the human experience (British Psychological Society, 2014). It emphasises the importance of an individual's experience of life events and how these experiences shape one's psychological self and personal and professional identity. It is known that, in training, psychotherapists from across disciplines experience similar stresses (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Olson-Garriott et al., 2015; Kumary & Baker, 2008; Truell, 2001) and simultaneously develop both personally and professionally (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Elton-Wilson, 1994). However, the specific experience of the counselling psychologist in training going through a relationship dissolution is unknown. The significance of this experience lies in the importance of the "self" and the "relationship" in the core values of counselling psychology (British Psychological Society, 2018a).

The literature explored in the previous chapter highlights that training may contribute to stress, and stress may contribute to disruption within the trainees' personal lives (Ford Sori et al., 1996; Legako and Sorenson, 2000; Truell, 2001). Equally, literature and theories on relationships emphasise stress and change as common contributors to the dissolution of relationships (Williams et al., 2015; Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Story & Repetti, 2006).

The Division of Counselling Psychology Handbook states that a counselling psychologist must "initiate, develop, maintain and end a purposeful therapeutic alliance and be able to work therapeutically at relational depth" (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.33). Building relationships is thus at the core of counselling psychology, including the use the "self" in the therapeutic process (British Psychological Society, 2018a, p.36). The rationale of this study, therefore, is to better understand the trainee experience of a relationship dissolution whilst participating in a course that primarily focuses on the development and appropriate endings of relationships.

Research questions

The research questions designed to address these aims are "open", thereby enabling an exploratory approach to understanding the experience of the individual, rather than homing in on specific hypotheses.

The research questions are:

1. How do trainees experience a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training?
2. How does training influence the relationship dissolution?

Theoretical framework

Theorists have already explored the complexity of counselling training and the nature of relationship dissolutions. This section looks at two theoretical concepts that emerge from this work: transformative learning theory and the theory of relationship dissolutions. Both theories are examined and serve as the theoretical foundation of this study.

Transformative learning theory

Developed by Mezirow, transformative learning theory acknowledges adult learning and the use of critical self-reflection to challenge underlying assumptions and beliefs about the world (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow describes the theory as an "an epistemology of how adults learn to think for themselves, rather than act upon the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings and judgements of others" (Mezirow, 2003, p.1). Central to this theory is critical reflection on social influences such as power, ideology, race, class, and gender (Mezirow, 2003). Like epistemic relativism, under the umbrella of critical realism (Archer et al., 2016), the theory proposes that adults cannot fully trust what they know or believe to be true as there is no fixed truth (Mezirow, 2003). As such, the theory encourages news ways of seeing and understanding power and its influence on oppression. It encourages educators to critically reflect on different viewpoints and underprivileged people to take appropriate forms of action against social and political oppression (Mezirow, 1998).

Theoretical orientation is imperative in transformative learning as, without the educator, the theory is merely an educational tool with no clear goal. That said, transformative learning has multiple theoretical orientations that go beyond the original suggested by Mezirow, and these fall under two frameworks (Taylor, 2008). The first framework pools theoretical orientations that concentrate on personal transformation (Mezirow, 2003; Daloz, 1986; Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Keegan, 1993; Cranton, 2000). In this case, transformative learning is described as a process that facilitates a deep, lasting change in the learner, viewed as a developmental shift (Stevens-Long et al., 2012). The interaction between psychoanalytic, psycho-developmental, and social emancipatory approaches in training explains how cognition, affect, and behaviour change within the individual (Stevens-Long et al., 2012; Taylor 2008). Furthermore, reflective process is a common component and it consists of questioning assumptions and appreciating diverse perspectives in order to develop intrapersonal maturity (Mezirow, 1991; Stevens-Long et al., 2012). In this framework, Mezirow (2012) speaks about many phases involved in transformative learning: self-evaluation; critical reflection of assumptions; acquisition of new roles, knowledge, and skills; and reintegration of the new perspective. Mezirow (2012) coined the term "disorienting dilemma", which refers to a dilemma in which the individuals' experiences do not match their current beliefs, an issue created by the self-reflective and directive nature of learning.

The second theoretical framework sees transformative learning as a combination of both personal transformation, as described above, and social change, thereby linking the individual and social transformation (Freire, 1984; Tisdell, 2003; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). Here, there is a crucial focus on ideological critique, through which students develop an awareness of power and greater agency. By developing a political consciousness in this way, there is scope for transformation both at the personal and societal level.

Considering the framework of counselling psychology (British Psychological Society, 2018a), some of these factors are significant for those in training. For instance, both the self-reflective nature of the learning experience and the application of theory to practice reported by Stevens-Long et al. (2012) are similarly experienced in counselling psychology training.

Theory of relationship dissolution

The two commonly used models of relationship dissolution are by Knapp et al., (2014), and Rollie and Duck (2006). As the model of breakdown (Rollie & Duck, 2006) conceptualises both psychological and communicative approaches, this model has been favoured in the present study. However, as these approaches are limited to how partners interact with each other, “the phases of coming apart” from Knapp’s model of interaction (Knapp et al. 2014) are also included to examine the individual’s internal conflicts that lead to a relationship dissolution.

The original model by Duck (1982) emphasised psychological state, with communication patterns and the resurrection phase introduced later (Duck, 2005; Rollie & Duck, 2006). The model proposes that relationship breakdowns involve five individual processes: intrapsychic, dyadic, social, grave-dressing, and the resurrection stage. The dissolution begins with the intrapsychic process, during which one partner, or both, reflect on the state of the relationship. The dyadic process follows, involving a discussion between the partners about the relationship, resulting in the decision to resolve or dissolve it. If opting for the latter, the couple’s social network is notified and the individuals develop their own version of the ending, thereby controlling how they wish to narrate the story to others. This experience prepares them for the next process: grave-dressing, which involves reflection on the initiation and the termination of the relationship. The final process is the resurrection stage whereby a new “self” emerges. This new “self” looks forward to relating and building on a new relationship with another partner.

Knapp et al., (2014) explore relationship dissolution in their model of interaction. The model is divided into two phases: the phase of coming together and the phase of coming apart. As the latter directly relates to relationship dissolution, this phase is explored here.

Knapp et al. (2014) separate the phase of coming apart into five stages: differentiating, circumscribing, stagnation, avoidance, and lastly, termination. The process of differentiating refers to the couple disengaging from one another. During this stage, couples begin to become independent and individualistic in their attitudes, noticing how each partner is very different to how they initially experienced them. A rapid lack of communication leads to the second stage: circumscribing. The couple's topics of discussion during this stage are generally on "safe" topics that have very little contextual depth and breadth. At the stage of stagnation, the partners feel trapped in the relationship and the communication becomes increasingly limited. Avoidance often follows this stage, as the couple restrict communication and the individuals become separate from each other in all domains. The final stage is termination, at which point the couple decide to end their unsatisfying relationship due to physical and emotional separation, growing socially or psychologically apart, or the death of one partner.

Intersections between transformative learning theory and theories of relationship dissolution

Much like the transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 2009), the experience of a breakdown as described by Rollie and Duck (2006) and Knapp et al. (2014) consists of self-reflection and the development of a new self. Meanwhile, counselling psychologists acquire new knowledge through the experience of training. This knowledge and change in perspective may create a tension between themselves and those around them (Guy, 1987).

Indeed, the process of becoming a counselling psychologist is multifaceted. Simultaneously developing the personal and professional self while needing to acquire new knowledge and demonstrate intrapersonal reflection may encourage the trainee to reach the intrapsychic process, where there is a re-evaluation of the relationship.

The constructs of personal growth following a transformative learning experience and its potential influence on intimate partner relationships guides this research study. The experiences of training and relationship dissolution can, however, be difficult to articulate. TA is therefore a useful way to explore these experiences and, ultimately, to reveal the complexities of the interaction between training to be a counselling psychologist and the experience of a relationship dissolution.

Counselling psychology and research

Research can be classified as a method of inquiry, that is, a way to find answers or to understand a particular topic (Brew, 2001). Guba and Lincoln (1994) view research as being guided by a set of beliefs, otherwise known as a paradigm. A research paradigm is a way of thinking about the world with belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. Ontology discusses beliefs about the nature of reality, epistemology examines the construction of knowledge, and methodology is the systematic method through which knowledge is discovered. Ponterotto (2005) organised the major paradigms identified by Guba and Lincoln (1994) into four groups: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism-interpretivism, and critical-ideological. Positivism has a realist ontology, which applies hypothetico-deductive methods to test and confirm theories. Positivists believe that truth is objective, static, and measurable and that this truth comes in the form of quantitative methodology. Post-positivism moves away from this position slightly by identifying with a more critical realist ontology. Subscribers to this paradigm try to make sense of what they believe to be an objective reality, though they may not necessarily have access to it. This objective reality can come in the form of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Interpretivism-constructivism, on the other hand, has a relativist ontology. Here, the aim is to search for meaning rather than truth, as it is believed that truth is subjective and there may be many multiple constructions of reality that are influenced by social interactions and influences. This meaning is pursued in the form of qualitative methods, such as narrative and phenomenological methods. The last paradigm, critical-ideological, agrees that multiple realities exist, but that these realties are related to power and oppression. Typical methods of research under this paradigm is qualitative, such as discourse analysis.

Quantitative methods of inquiry rely heavily on large samples of data to develop statistics that can be generalised to the population of interest (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2010). Historically, counselling psychology, like other psychology disciplines, has been dominated by quantitative research following the positivist and post-positivist paradigms. However, over the last 40 years, there has been a move towards qualitative research inquiry (Goldman, 1976; Maione & Chenail, 1999; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Qualitative, in contrast to quantitative, methodology is concerned with obtaining data and understanding by way of observations and analysis (Willig, 2008).

The epistemological perspective adopted in this research is critical realism, which sits between realism and social constructionism. This position acknowledges that "an external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understanding" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.16). Critical realism entails an acceptance of the existence of external reality but that, as with social constructionism, people interpret this reality differently (Joffe, 2011). The idea that concepts in society may be socially constructed through interaction and discourse is also accepted within this position (Burr, 2015), and as a result, this perspective enables exploration into identifying and understanding "the structures and mechanisms that cause events to happen" (Taylor, 2018, p.218), objectives that are suited to the research aims.

Analytical framework: Thematic Analysis

Encapsulating the theoretical framework whilst acknowledging the participants' individual experiences of their relationship dissolution resulted in the decision to choose TA as the method of choice.

TA is a qualitative method of analysis that identifies and connects a range of themes from a data set. Unlike other qualitative approaches, TA is a method and not a methodology. The TA framework suggested by Braun & Clarke – discussed later in the chapter – specifies phases in the process of analysis rather than data collection (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). They believe that "the search for, and examination of, patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p.120). This approach is therefore theoretically flexible, allowing the use of small data sets and complementing a range of epistemological positions. Moreover, themes can be created in a number of ways: inductive, deductive, semantic, latent, realist or essentialist, and constructionist. Themes can also be generated by a dual inductive-deductive approach, whereby themes are guided by previously conceived theoretical concepts whilst simultaneously allowing for themes to be generated independently of constructs (Joffe, 2011).

Rationale for using TA

To date, studies investigating relationship dissolution have used quantitative methods to produce correlations between variables, such as gender differences and who initiated the relationship dissolution. Although these studies highlight the various stresses of relationship dissolution, the individual experience itself is limited. In addition, with quantitative methods it can be difficult to understand the context of the topic that is being examined. A quantitative method would therefore be inappropriate for this research study. Instead, qualitative approaches were considered when selecting the method of analysis, namely interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), narrative analysis (NA), and grounded theory (GT).

Although IPA and TA are known to be similar in that they both set out to identify and analyse patterns of meaning, it is theoretical flexibility that separates them. IPA is phenomenological in its approach and focuses on participants' lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It also often comes under the epistemology of social constructionism. In addition to phenomenology, IPA gives particular attention to hermeneutics and idiography, which involves close inspection of each participant's experience and the exploration of phenomena before considering configurations across the data set. However, although experience is a research aim in this study, and this is indeed consistent with the IPA approach, IPA was rejected due to its focus on the making of meaning and its idiographic nature.

Originally, this research project was established in line with the IPA approach. However, on close inspection of my analytical process, I recognised conflict between what I imagined I was doing and the reality of what was being done; it thus became apparent that my understanding of IPA was blurred with that of TA. As the two are very similar in their aim to understand experiences and seek patterns across the data set, it came to my attention that, since I was guided by a theoretical framework whilst searching for new themes, I was in fact implementing a more dual inductive-deductive TA method of *analysis. Given that I intended to observe the influence, if any, of training on the relationship dissolution, I similarly became aware that I was adopting a more critical realist position rather than one of social constructivism. As a proponent of the former, Taylor (2018) states that "the researcher can contextualize aspects of the objective world as well as constructs from the social world that influence or determine the link of causation" (Taylor, 2018. p.218). This perspective closely matches the research aims and the second research question and was lacking in the previous epistemological position. As a result, I restructured the research and repeated the analysis to align with TA.*

As with IPA, NA comes under the epistemological position of social constructionism and was similarly considered for this research study. NA is interested in ways of organising and bringing order to experiences through the form of storytelling (Riessman, 1993). The NA researcher positions themselves so as to analyse and understand the stories people create, engaging in an inquiry of how and why topics are presented. As such, the approach aims to understand how people represent themselves and/or their experiences. Whereas TA allows for the generation of themes based on participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006), NA generates insights into how participants present these experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As the aim of this research study was to understand participants' experiences of the relationship dissolution, with little interest in the way the story is narrated, this approach was eliminated.

Another potential method was GT. GT aims to develop a theory inductively from the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In practice, researchers seek out difference and aim to obtain a diverse range of ideas to explain and name a particular phenomenon. GT often addresses research questions with a focus on meaning and process (Charmaz, 2006). This approach is similar to TA in that both methods are flexible yet systematic in their approach, however, unlike TA, the end product is the development of a theory. As creating a theory was not considered an aim of this research, GT was not deemed a suitable approach.

Compared to these approaches, TA is not bound by any particular theoretical framework and is suitable for examining the entire sample's perspective and understanding of the experience under inquiry (Joffe, 2011). In addition to being described as one of the most systematic and transparent methods of analysis (Joffe, 2011), TA is viewed as a foundational method of analysis because the findings provide context for further research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the lack of research surrounding relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training, this point was particularly pertinent when deciding on this approach.

Due to its flexibility, there are a number of different approaches that TA could follow based on epistemological and theoretical stance. For example, a thematic analysis could be interpretivist, constructionist, phenomenological, a thematic discourse analysis with particular attention given to language (Braun & Clarke, 2006), or an applied thematic analysis, which combines a variety of theoretical considerations (Guest, Macqueen & Namey, 2012). TA allows for a comprehensive and broad exploratory analysis of the participants' experiences of a relationship dissolution whilst training to be a counselling psychologist, with emphasis on meaning across the whole data set rather than on each individual's lived experience. A critical realist thematic analysis is therefore implemented for this research. Complementing the epistemological stance of critical realism, TA is consistent with the study's aim of exploring the trainees' experiences of a relationship dissolution whilst acknowledging how the individuals understand the relationship dissolution and how the broader social context of following the course may have imposed on this experience.

Limitations of TA

TA has often been criticised for being a technique employed by a range of qualitative methodologies rather than a method in its own right (Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, an increasing number of researchers view TA as a stand-alone method that incorporates a systematic and transparent in-depth exploration of any given data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a result of its flexibility, TA's generation of themes has also been judged as creating inconsistent and incoherent results (Holloway & Todres, 2003). This concern can be minimised by explicitly stating one's epistemological position in an attempt to underpin the study's claims (Holloway & Todres, 2003).

Assessing quality and credibility in qualitative research

As explained, qualitative approaches such as TA are flexible in nature (Shinebourne, 2011); there is little rigidity and a greater input from the researcher. Due to this flexibility and the inability to generalise the data as a result of the limited sample size, quality and credibility cannot be sourced in the same way as in quantitative methods.

Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a 15-point list of criteria that outlines the components needed for a good thematic analysis. The checklist was followed in this research study and can be found in Appendix 1.

Addressing issues of credibility in qualitative research

As counselling psychologists identify as scientific-reflective practitioners (British Psychological Society, 2005), it is paramount to assess credibility in research relevant to the discipline. Yardley (2000) formed evaluative criteria that improve the credibility of qualitative research. The characteristics these criteria describe are: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. Sensitivity to context addresses the researcher's involvement in the data and the context in which it was derived, for example, the relationship between researcher and participants and the balance of power and ethical issues. Commitment, rigour, transparency, and coherence are assessed by observing the data collection with acknowledgment of the recommended sample size and the process of analysis through the use of an audit trail. This process also includes reflexivity, whereby the researcher is continuously reflecting on their perspective and interest in the research process. Lastly, impact and importance are concerned with the practicality and the theoretical utility of the research project.

Reflexivity is at the core of this research project, as seen through the italicised commentary throughout. Sensitivity to context is addressed through this reflexivity and part of this is scrutinising the relationship with participants and commenting on any power and ethical dilemmas. Commitment, rigour, transparency, and coherence are explored in the second half of this chapter in the discussion of data collection. Finally, impact and importance are addressed in Chapter 4.

Method

Participants

The participant criteria included trainees at any stage of study on a BPS-accredited professional doctorate in counselling psychology. It was necessary for the participants to have experienced a relationship dissolution whilst on the course and have the capacity to reflect on this experience. No strict criteria prescribed the length of the relationship or the level of commitment, however, the participant needed to acknowledge that it was an intimate relationship with a significant other as defined by them. There were also no criteria referencing who decided to terminate the relationship nor were there any restrictions regarding age, gender or ethnicity, as neither were relevant to the research question. Due to the close nature of the cohort across the years and to avoid any prior preconceptions, participants were not recruited from UEL.

TA theorists offer guidelines on sample size based on the size of the research study. For a medium-sized project like a UK professional doctorate, Braun & Clarke (2013) suggest a minimum of ten participants. It is unclear how they arrive at this number, however, it is concluded that sufficient data must be present to demonstrate patterns. Sandelowski (1995) states that sample size should be small enough to manage the material but large enough to provide “a new and richly textured understanding of experience” (p.183). Considering these insights, a strict sample size was not set, but the aim was to recruit a minimum of ten participants.

Table 1 below provides the basic demographic information taken from each participant prior to the interview and Table 2 provides the relationship information that was elicited from the interview. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants’ identity, and the names of the universities have been omitted to reduce the risk of identification.

	Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Age**	**Ethnicity**	**Course of study**	**Academic year**
1	Beth	Female	28	White Other	Full-time	3rd Year
2	Cathy	Female	34	White British	Full-time	2nd Year
3	Kiran	Female	26	Asian British	Part-time	3rd Year
4	Eva	Female	36	White Other	Part-time	5th Year

5	Ziza	Female	26	Black Caribbean	Full-time	1st Year
6	Alya	Female	23	Other	Full-time	1st Year
7	Justina	Female	33	White British	Full-time	3rd Year
8	Ruby	Female	31	White British	Full-time	1st Year
9	Tom	Male	33	White Irish	Part-time	4th Year
10	Saskia	Female	34	White British	Part-time	4th Year

Table 1: Participant demographics collected prior to the interview.

	Pseudonym	**Length of relationship**	**Type of relationship**	**Who initiated the dissolution?**	**How long before the interview was the relationship dissolved?**
1	Beth	2 years, 1 month	Heterosexual, monogamous	Partner	3 years and 3 months
2	Cathy	6-8 weeks	Heterosexual, monogamous	Partner	1 year
3	Kiran	4 years	Heterosexual, monogamous	Participant	1 year
4	Eva	11 years	Heterosexual, monogamous	Participant	4-5 years
5	Ziza		Heterosexual, monogamous	Partner	1 year
6	Alya		Heterosexual, monogamous	Participant	2 weeks
7	Justina		Heterosexual, monogamous	Mutual	2 years
8	Ruby		Heterosexual, monogamous	Partner	4 months
9	Tom	8 months	Heterosexual, monogamous	Participant	3 months
10	Saskia	4.5 years	Heterosexual, monogamous	Mutual	2 years

Table 2: Participant’s relationship information elicited from interview transcripts.

Initially, I sought to recruit only from years one and two as, based on my own preconceptions and from discussions with the research supervisor, I felt most changes would occur during this time. However, due to a lack of interest amongst these years, I decided to extend the criteria to cover all stages of training.

The decision not to define the type of relationship persisted with the critical realist epistemological position and, by allowing the participants to define the relationship as well as which intimate partner relationship they wished to discuss, the experience was maintained as theirs.

Although age, gender, and ethnicity are not relevant to the research aims, their potential influence on the participants' experiences are reflected on in Chapter 4.

Recruitment

The recruitment process entailed the distribution of emails to course leaders in universities across the UK that held accredited (or accredited at the time of recruitment) training courses for counselling psychology. These were: Glasgow Caledonian University, City, University of London, London Metropolitan University, the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, the University of Manchester, Regent's University London, the University of Roehampton, Teesside University, the University of the West of England, and the Metanoia Institute.

The email (see Appendix 2) consisted of a request to circulate the recruitment letter and the information sheet (see Appendix 3) to trainees on the course. Simultaneously, participation requests were posted on social media websites such as Twitter and the Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP) Facebook group. An advert was also placed in the BPS monthly e-newsletter, as well as psychology student forums in other disciplines, such as www.ClinPsy.org.uk.

Data collection

TA promotes the use of verbal interview data and it is common for this to be collected through the medium of semi-structured interviews (Wilkinson, Joffe, & Yardley, 2004). Semi-structured interviews were therefore chosen to explore the participants' experiences. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with some interviews shorter than others due to the natural ending of the interview.

The interview schedule (see Appendix 4) consisted of 11 questions and three probing questions, all of which were open-ended. The interview schedule was created by the researcher and revised by the research supervisor. It began with general questions in an attempt to ease the participant into the interview process and to build a rapport.

A pilot interview is considered useful to evaluate the flow of the interview process (Turner, 2010). Therefore, once ethical approval had been obtained, a pilot interview was conducted to assess the suitability of the interview questions and adjust any that were unclear or difficult to answer. Two trainees at UEL took part in the first and subsequent pilot interviews due to their keen interest in participation. These pilots, however, have not been included in the analysis to comply with the criteria mentioned in the previous section.

The initial pilot interview highlighted a few discrepancies in the interview process. For instance, the interview schedule appeared incoherent and difficult to follow, as the participant would answer incomprehensibly. Considering whether the problem lay with the participant or with the interview questions, a discussion with the research supervisor resulted in a re-evaluation of the interview schedule. Once the questions were reformatted, a second pilot was conducted through the video-telecommunications software, Skype. This was to trial both the second interview schedule and the use of Skype, as this method of interview was offered to participants who faced difficulties in travelling. The structure and fluidity of the second pilot interview was better received, and for this reason, this interview schedule was implemented with subsequent participants.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a mutually agreed space at UEL or in the participant's home. Skype interviews were conducted on request. The location and method of the interview for each participant is indicated in Table 3.

	Pseudonym	**Interview method**	**Location of interview**
1	Beth	Skype	N/A
2	Cathy	Face to face	Home
3	Kiran	Face to face	UEL
4	Eva	Face to face	UEL
5	Ziza	Skype	N/A
6	Alya	Face to face	Home
7	Justina	Skype	N/A
8	Ruby	Skype	N/A
9	Tom	Face to face	UEL
10	Saskia	Face to face	UEL

Table 3: Interview method and location of interviews

I was aware of the strengths and limitations of using Skype to conduct qualitative research (Sullivan, 2012), and, following the success of using the software for the second pilot, I did not expect it to create any issues. However, during subsequent Skype interviews, there were various pauses and interruptions due to weak connections, which interrupted the flow of the conversation. Although the interviews were continued, I am mindful of how this may have impacted the exploration of what the participants were trying to convey.

Cathy and Alya asked for their interviews to be conducted at their respective homes. After a lengthy discussion with the research supervisor, and a thorough risk assessment, this was agreed upon. Whilst I was apprehensive about the potential issues, the research supervisor and I devised a safety plan of notifying her of my whereabouts both before and after the interviews. Both interviews went relatively well, and there were no signs of risk to either myself or the participant. I do not feel the location impacted the data produced, however, I am aware that the participants' experience may be influenced by this social context.

Analytical process

The TA method implemented in this study is a dual technique, using a combination of both "inductive" and "deductive" approaches. This seemed most appropriate as, due to the theoretical framework, certain concepts and ideas were preconceived, however other themes were still sought from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Joffe, 2011). As themes are foundational to TA, it is important to state the different types of themes that can be developed. In TA, themes result from the coding process, and codes can be latent or manifest. Manifest coding directly observes and describes the experiences shared with the participant, which suits a realist epistemology. Alternatively, codes can be latent, which moves beyond the descriptive and focuses on the underpinnings of the experience. This fits the constructionist approach. As this study adopts a critical realist position, both have been adopted in this project. Indeed, TA often draws on both latent and manifest content as “even when the manifest theme is the focus, the aim is to understand the latent meaning of the manifest themes observable within the data, which requires interpretation” (Joffe & Yardley, 2004, p.57).

The analysis followed the six-phase approach to TA suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) which is explored below.

Phase one: Familiarising oneself with the data

The first phase was familiarisation with the depth and breadth of the data. This involved reading the data a number of times in an active way, continuously searching for meaning and patterns throughout. In conjunction with data familiarisation, handwritten notes were taken to mark any potential codes. An example of this can be seen in Appendix 5.

Phase two: Generating initial codes

The second phase consisted of the production of initial codes. The codes were both manifest and latent and used a dual inductive-deductive approach. A list of the codes can be seen in Appendix 6. Codes from each transcript were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and then organised into meaningful groups to enable a generation of potential themes and patterns (see Appendix 7). Extracts of text were then matched to the codes in a separate Excel spreadsheet, in which some extracts overlapped with other codes (see Appendix 8).

Phase three: Searching for themes

Once the coding of data was complete, potential themes were generated from the grouped codes. Each code was made into a "mind map" to help classify overarching themes (Appendix 9). This process involved thinking about the relationship between the codes, the themes, and the different levels of the themes, such as the overarching themes and the subthemes.

Phase four: Reviewing themes

The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the themes. Careful consideration was made to either combine, refine, separate, or discard the initial themes. Two levels of review were involved in this process:

Level One: This level involved checking the themes in relation to the coded extracts whilst considering any observable pattern formation. Themes were arranged and re-arranged from overarching themes to subthemes to formulate a "thematic map" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91) (see Appendix 10).

Level Two: This level also considered the themes, though in relation to the entire data set. The initial thematic map was re-arranged after re-reading the data to identify any other themes that may be been overlooked.

Phase five: Defining and naming themes

Once a satisfactory thematic map had been developed, the final themes were defined (see Appendix 11). This step involved providing theme names and clear definitions to capture the essence of what was said.

Phase six: Producing the report

The final phase was the development of the report, as seen in the next chapter.

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at UEL before recruiting participants and interviewing (see Appendix 12). An information sheet (see Appendix 3) was given to the participants, outlining the title of the study and a brief description of the research aims. Participants were also asked to complete a demographics form (see Appendix 13). A consent form (see Appendix 14) was provided prior to commencing the interview to ensure that participants were happy to continue. The form outlined that no identifiable information would be used and all names would be pseudoynmised. Information was also given regarding the storage of the data and how long transcripts would be kept for. Participants were reminded that they should not feel pressured to take part in the study and that they could withdraw from the study any time and without justification. However, once the analysis had begun, they would lose their right to the data.

The research abided by the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2018b) regarding the protection of research participants. If the participant became distressed, the interview would be terminated, however, this did not occur. A list of agencies, such as Relate, The Samaritans and BPS, were provided in the debrief sheet (see Appendix 15), which was given to the participants once the interview had ended. This was to provide participants with the opportunity to contact such agencies should any difficult feelings arise from the interview process. Details of the supervisory team were also included, giving the participant the opportunity to raise any concerns or complaints regarding the process.

After revisiting the ethics approval forms, it came to my attention that explicit ethics approval to interview participants in their home had not been sourced. Since noticing this *oversight, I contacted supervisors and the ethics committee to seek rectification. Following advice from both, this has not been considered a serious ethical breach due to the honest mistake. As a risk assessment was done, the interviews proceeded successfully, and no complaints were made, the ethics committee have accepted the use of the participant data in the analysis process as they would have granted the minor ethics amendments if I had correctly applied for it.*

I have since struggled deeply with the severity of the possible implications. Ethics approval is obtained to reduce the risk of harm to the researcher and the participants. As such, not obtaining ethical approval can increase the risk of harm and implicate the research study. The severity of risks could range from unexpected guests arriving in the home to physical and emotional harm to and from the participant, as well as malpractice on my part as a trainee counselling psychologist. As a practitioner, I have experience in home visits for assessments, and I am aware of the set protocols for safety. Though these skills are transferrable to my role as a researcher, I remain mindful of the potential ethical implications this oversight could have caused to the participants, the research, and my role as a professional.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity within TA enables the researcher to be more aware of their own feelings and the possible impact these could have on the data produced. By directly engaging with them, the researcher can understand and actively work around any issues in a neutral way. Although it is assumed that reflexivity is only necessary during the data collection and analysis, Finlay and Gough (2003) suggest that it is essential at each stage of research.

Personal reflexivity

At undergraduate level, I was first influenced by positivist ways of working. As this paradigm is arguably at the forefront of contemporary research, however enthusiastic I was about developing good qualitative research, my early understanding of research was grounded in quantitative methods. Further education developed my knowledge of different paradigms and epistemological approaches that complemented my beliefs about the world. By firmly stating my epistemological position and how this guides my research, I hope to convey coherency and transparency.

Being reflexive about my interests in this research project, as explored below, enables me to move freely and identify any material within the data produced that may be the result of my own experiences. Hence, in doing so, I am acknowledging and accepting any prejudices that may arise by helping me better understand the experience of the participants. Throughout the data collection and research project, this was achieved with a reflexive journal, examples of which can be seen in Appendix 16. Reflexivity is also demonstrated in italicised commentary throughout the paper.

I am a 31-year-old British Indian cis-female of a middle-class background, and I am a trainee counselling psychologist at UEL. As a trainee counselling psychologist, I am torn between being a reflective practitioner, a scientific practitioner, and a researcher, constantly reflecting on my processes while attempting to develop theoretical understanding. As a practitioner, I help the client understand and make sense of their experience to facilitate change, but as a researcher, my role is to try to understand the participant's experience in order to develop patterned themes across the data set. Although this tension may be seen as a positive way of bridging the gap between the research and practice community (Yanos & Ziedonis, 2006), special attention was given *to the potential ethical and role conflicts that could come from this. For example, during the interviews, I occasionally found myself wanting to be a practitioner and facilitate change rather than explore the participants' experience. Being aware of and noting this tendency as quickly as possible allowed me to be mindful of this whilst returning to the role of the researcher.*

The genesis of this thesis can be traced back to my first year of training, during which I experienced a change in my intimate partner relationship. I had noticed that I felt like a therapist in this relationship, being more attentive and empathic. I recognised that I wanted to practise my therapeutic skills on him and test whether I could change or fix the difficulties he would share. In parallel to this, I noticed that my then-partner would want to confide in me at a different depth than he had done previously, and that he would ask me for advice regarding his mental health difficulties. It also occurred to me that my then-partner and I were spending less time together due to the financial and time restraints of the course.

In addition to the change in the dynamics of the relationship, I noticed a difference within myself and how I related to those around me. Developing a more independent identity with a new-found passion for critical thinking and intersectional feminism, I became more aware of my prejudices, my positioning, and my own understanding of the world.

Although at the beginning of the research project I was still in a committed relationship, in late spring 2016, my partner and I ended our 10-year relationship due to infidelity on his part. Upon reflection of the relationship ending, it became apparent that, although the infidelity was the deciding factor, some of the reasons mentioned above - like personal change - contributed to the dissolution.

Considering my position in relation to the participants – I am a trainee of a similar age and have also experienced a relationship dissolution during training – I cannot assume that my own life experiences mirror, or are in any way the same as, those of the participants. However, as a result of these similarities, there are occasions when participants present patterns that are comparable to my own. An advantage of this is that I am able to make use of my personal understanding to gain an insight into the participant material, however this makes it more challenging to mask my own assumptions. Furthermore, although my personal experiences correspond to those of the participants in terms of experiencing a relationship dissolution, I may have arguably more in common with those whose partner initiated the break-up. This may have created a discrepancy in my position as a researcher, as the recruitment criteria did not require participants to disclose who initiated the relationship dissolution, yet I had more in common with these participants.

The ways in which I perceive similarities between myself and some participants are based on the content of the interviews and how participants disclosed and spoke of their experiences during the interviews. Although I connected on a personal level with participants on certain topics, such as the experience of the course shifting the intimate partner relationship dynamics, I am aware that my experiences are different to those of the participants based on social, historical, and cultural contexts, as well as the power structures that are unique to each participant. With this in mind, I remain reflexive throughout the analytical process in order to minimise the impact of my own personal experiences on the data.

Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter outlines the findings of this research study. A TA of the interview transcripts developed a total of four main themes and six subthemes, as shown in Table 4. Individual themes and subthemes are discussed using extracts from partcipant interviews.

Theme		Subtheme
1.	"I can feel the change day by day"	Positive change
		The process of change influencing the relationship dynamic
2.	"The course indirectly caused the break-up"	
3.	The blurring of personal and professional boundaries	Occupying the professional space
		Being the therapist in the relationship
4.	The paradox of endings	Professional development and personal growth
		Enhanced personal relationships

Table 4: Themes and subthemes

Some extracts have been edited to improve fluency, indicated by '(…)'. Alterations were made if extracts were excessively long and did not contribute to the understanding of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The extracts end with a reference in brackets, indicating the pseudonymised name of the participant and line number to show where the extracts can be found in each transcript, i.e. (Beth, 122–125).

During the shift from an IPA framework to using TA, I decided to re-analyse the transcripts. The process of re-coding and developing themes highlighted many similarities with the previous set of themes, however, the new themes have been categorised to complement the thematic pattern found across the data set.

Theme 1: “I can feel the change day by day”

This theme recurs throughout the data and is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme encapsulates the transformational changes experienced as part of the course, all of which have been viewed positively by this group. All participants spoke of how they experienced change, with some sharing their experience of specific parts of training that transformed them positively. The second subtheme captures the interaction between the changes reported by the participants and their personal relationships, specifically their romantic relationship. With particular attention given to personal therapy, participants shared that self-awareness and change shifted their perception of their partner.

Positive change

Amongst the participants, change is recognised as a prominent feature of training to be a counselling psychologist. Many of the participants describe change as a positive aspect of the training. They report noticing these changes early on in the course and observe how change continues for the duration of training:

> “I just, I can feel the change day by day, urm and I, and it’s such a positive change.”
> (Alya, 266–267)
>
> “It is an ongoing process that different things will come up because of the type of course you do, because you are constantly learning.”
> (Ziza, 463–465)

Ongoing change is reported by both Alya and Ziza. They describe change as a continuous part of their journey and learning as constant. Their opinions on change are positive as it does not limit them or restrict their learning:

> “The course has been like an emotional doctorate rather than academic doctorate because we have to have therapy err pretty much all the way through, and we have a lot of group work, urm, a lot of experiential stuff going on. We have fishbowl

> activities and things like that, so err, the learning, the personal development that I've gone through throughout the course was exceptionally positive."
> (Eva, 51–56)

Describing the course as an "emotional doctorate" communicates the variety of experiences on the course that extend beyond the academic remit. Fundamental experiential components of the course, such as fishbowl activities, reportedly resulted in personal development which, as Eva shares, has been an exceptionally positive experience, thus supporting the theme of positive change since being on the course.

Some participants illustrate positive change when discussing new learned ways of relating to others:

> "I think the whole process has really been really positive, in like me and how I've changed as a person. Urm, like I actually think my whole attachment style has kind of changed in the way I relate to people."
> (Saskia, 33–36)
>
> "I think it's made me a lot more assertive. Urm, it's made me urm say how I feel, what I want, urm what I need to, urm, it's really given me the confidence to be able to speak out."
> (Justina, 159–161)

Saskia reports how the way she relates to people has changed as a result of developing a new attachment style. A similar understanding is expressed by Justina, who shares how changing as a result of the course has developed confidence in asserting her needs to others.

As such, the experience of change appears to be twofold: on one hand, the participants are learning about new ways of interacting with others, and on the other hand, they are understanding more about themselves and the way in which they relate to others:

> "It's a process where, obviously, you learn a lot about other people, theory and that kind of thing, but you learn quite a lot about yourself, and yourself in relation to other people, as well. So yeah, I mean, those things have been enormously valuable."
> (Tom, 97–100)

Tom confirms the positive perception of change and how it has helped him to develop a greater understanding both of himself and himself in relation to other people. He describes the change as a process, reaffirming the transformational journey participants experience on the course.

Change was anticipated by some participants:

> "They told us, 'you're going to change, you know, whether you like it or not'."
> (Alya, 264)
>
> "I think someone said, 'Oh, the course should come with, like, a health warning'."
> (Saskia, 111–112)
>
> "Our tutor said, this course will change your personal relationships, and you'll find that if you're in an intimate relationship, then it, you know it might lead you to be stronger or it might just cause you to break-up."
> (Kiran, 226–229)

Alya and Kiran share how members of the course team had warned them of potential changes associated with becoming a counselling psychologist, whilst Saskia describes how another trainee verbalised that the course "should come with (…) a health warning". As such, it appears that at least some training institutes are aware of the changes trainees may go through and that they consider such changes to be inevitable.

All of the participants in this study reported the experience of positive change, albeit experiencing a relationship dissolution. This paradox is explored further in Theme 4. Indeed, in the extract above, Kiran shares how one academic tutor specifically mentioned that the course will change personal relationships. This is explored further in the next subtheme.

The process of change influencing the relationship dynamic

This subtheme captures to what degree the changes experienced by participants may have influenced their intimate partner relationships. Some participants report experiencing individual development, whilst others report that personal self-expansion resulted in partner exclusion. The process of change also involved participants recognising how they are different from their partner, whilst carrying hope that their partner would change with them.

Since experiencing change on the course, participants highlight differences they have observed in their partner:

> "I think before the course, I thought everything was fine, and once I got onto the course, I kind of started to examine our relationship a little bit more, and realised that urm that he wasn't providing me with the, the kind of support and the emotional support that I needed."
> (Justina, 274–278)
>
> "I think he was anxious about the course, because he kind of, I think he sensed that, like, I was changing a lot, urm and so I think he, underneath it, he was very anxious that I was moving away from him or changing in some way (…) because on many levels he, we had such a good, we had the same values, but it was like the, what, what I thought intimacy was and what he thought it was, which is totally, we're becoming so different."
> (Saskia, 206–243)

Both participants reflect on the journey of their relationship before and after they joined the course. Justina discloses how her partner was not providing her with the support that she needed, whereas Saskia affirms that change made her aware of her and her partner's differences. They appear to link a shift in their relationship dynamic with a greater self-awareness of their personal needs.

Having access to reflective spaces as part of training – such as personal therapy, reflective exercises, and theory – gives participants the opportunity to develop independently of their partner. Some participants made reference to this influencing their view of their partner and altering their relationship:

> "So personal therapy kind of opened a can of worms, in a sense, to make me urm, to make me think a little bit more about the relationship and where it was going."
> (Justina, 454–456)
>
> "I'd begun to reflect on what's going on and what's happening, and feeling that there's something missing, there's a real gap, and, then eventually realising that, actually, what's wrong is that we're not compatible as, as far as personalities go (…) and the person I'm with does not have the capacity to, to reflect on himself and to develop his own sense of self."
> (Eva, 199–205)
>
> "Actually we never even had a conversation about it, because I don't think he was capable of it."
> (Saskia, 312–313)

Using the metaphor "can of worms", Justina expresses how personal therapy made her think about the relationship and its future. Similarly, the experience of the course and the changes that accompany it reportedly led Eva and Saskia to recognise a difference between their personalities and their partners'. Eva and Saskia express that, unlike their partners, they have developed the capacity for self-reflection since starting the course, which suggests the concept of isolated development.

Training to be a counselling psychologist encourages learning about different theories to promote awareness and understanding of clients. Ziza describes how identifying with the course material aided self-reflection:

> "You sit there and you learn about attachment and everything, I developed an expectation within a relationship of what I want a relationship to look like and I was able to think (…) how my family, you know, plays out certain things and how my parents play out, urm, their roles within their relationship and that is my, was my ideal relationship."
> (Ziza, 403–413)

Ziza comments that this learning made her aware of her ideal relationship, further changing her and her partner's role in their relationship. She describes how the theory learned on the course directly applied to her understanding of relationships beyond the course. Speaking about theory and its impact on her understanding of her family dynamics, she explains how she developed an ideal view of a romantic relationship. Ziza continues to reflect on how her increased awareness and desire to have particular meaningful conversations with her cohort was not received well by her partner:

> "It influenced, I think a little bit on my relationship as well cos I became more vocal and wanted to have that conversation which was different than before (…) I was having the conversation with other people he was like 'people are gonna think you're angry, they're gonna think this, they're gonna think that' and I am like 'well that's not what I am' and it was difficult to kind of communicate that a little bit as well."
> (Ziza, 244–250)

Developing independently of their partners meant that participants were experiencing a journey of change alone. Some participants communicate a yearning for their partners to develop and change with them:

> "There was an element of me holding this hope that, like, he'd become a different person. Urm. So, for example, because I was becoming more in touch with myself, like, talking about my feelings and stuff like that, I kind of got frustrated when he wouldn't do that (…) I thought we'd kind of might change together."
> (Saskia, 209–238)

> "I was like I know this is my stuff and know I need to work on many other things and urm I'd like to do that with you, just you know just slowing the whole process down but I'd like you to be you know on my side with me."
> (Beth, 254–257)

> "Because it, you see your own self in that don't you, in terms of what my issues are and my defences and my attachment and all of that and then the schema work (…) you can see yourself in it. But I just desperately wanted him to see, for him to see himself in it."
> (Cathy, 451–456)

Participants express that, prior to the relationship dissolution, they were aware of how their development was influencing their relationship and hoped that their partner would change with them. Saskia sheds light on the experience of development being isolated: participants become increasingly self-aware, whilst their partners do not have access to the same personal development. Similarly, Beth speaks about wanting her partner to be present through her personal journey of working through her "stuff", whilst Cathy describes desperately wanting her partner to reflect and identify with the course material in the same way she had.

The idea that change experienced on the course culminated in a re-organisation of their priorities is demonstrated amongst participants:

> "The experience of the course has made a, a big shift and also err, the experience of the course made me look at life very differently have different priorities in life, a different take on people, relationships and stuff like that."
> (Eva, 59–62)
>
> "I think I probably prioritised the course a little bit more over the relationship."
> (Justina, 229–230)
>
> "Err, so I was working full-time hours, had a process report to do, which required a recording and then I hate process reports, because they're such a lot of work, urm and I just kind of got to a point where I thought, 'I can't handle the stress of this and the stress of our relationship at the same time. Something's got to give', and I'd kind of been thinking about how the relationship wasn't really working for a while."
> (Tom, 261–266)

Participants express how the experience of the course shifted their priorities, resulting in the course taking precedence over the relationship. By re-evaluating what mattered to them, participants put themselves first and realigned the priorities in their lives. Although participants do not explicitly say their priorities have changed as a consequence of changing on the course, the experiences shared depict that a change in their schedules and the intensity of the training influenced the relationship dynamic.

Theme 2: "The course indirectly caused the break-up"

Whilst transformational change is seen as a by-product of the course by all participants, some make a connection between the course and the relationship dissolution. Whether through identification with the course material, the intensity of the course, or the stresses that come with the course, they feel that the course indirectly led to the decision to terminate the relationship. This theme captures the way participants made this connection.

As previously explored, Kiran had been informed by the course team that training to be a counselling psychologist "might just cause you to break-up" (Kiran, 228–229). Participants reflect on this link when making sense of the relationship dissolution:

> "I wouldn't say that the course had directly influenced, err, the break-up. The course had indirectly influenced the break-up. The course has urm, developed my sense of self, and in there my confidence began growing in what I thought of my ex, how we weren't compatible and how all that, that relationship was actually quite toxic for me (…) I don't think I would be able to kind of conclude on that without doing the course."
> (Eva, 356–370)

Eva talks about how the course developed her sense of self, built up her confidence, and provided her with the awareness to recognise that her relationship was toxic and that her and her partner were incompatible. She reflects on how a combination of this learning, through the medium of the course, indirectly influenced her decision to end the relationship.

Personal therapy appears to be another avenue that indirectly influences the relationship dissolution:

> “Especially in personal therapy, you’re kind of ripping yourself to shreds, kind of pulling yourself apart and looking at what’s right and what’s wrong in your life at the moment, and urm I suppose that was a bit of a catalyst as well for the relationship, because I began to look at that in therapy, and how that was affecting me on the course, I suppose, and vice versa.”
> (Justina, 238–243)

Although Justina does not explicitly say so, using the word “catalyst” to describe the interaction between “ripping [herself] to shreds” in personal therapy and her relationship gives the impression that the course may have indirectly influenced the relationship.

Justina continues to reflect on the stress and intensity of the course and how juggling the different components left little room for the relationship:

> “I think also, though, my attention and urm err was was entirely really on the course, and urm with all the kind of stress and emotion that comes with that.”
> (Justina, 236–238)

> “Urm I was, I was urm at placement most of the time, and when I wasn’t at placement, I was at work, and when I wasn’t at work, I was doing academic work, you know, sitting behind a laptop doing my assignment, so I think urm that took quite a, a hit for our relationship. I think also in the financial strain of, of the course as well, we were constantly think, worrying about money and how I was going to fund urm my next year.”
> (Justina, 216–225)

Referring to the course as “all-consuming” (Justina, 111), Justina describes the different components of the course “hitting” the relationship, adding elements such as financial worry to the mix. Such worries are similarly expressed by other participants throughout the interviews:

> "There was the financial risk. I, you know, I wasn't sure how I would get through one year to the next or, and as time went on it became less than one year to the next, it was kind of month-to-month what was going to happen."
> (Ziza, 37–40)

> "The stress about what to expect for my assignments, you know, thinking about if I would be able to, like, do well (…) thinking about all the assignments and everything that's expected of me on the course."
> (Alya, 107–116)

> "Well it was urm difficult it was writing the coursework because we were pressurised at like from the very first minute on we were told urm we need to have the 60% at the end of the year otherwise we could not proceed into second year and we were always pushed and pressured like and it was set up to such a high level that it was really really difficult for me."
> (Beth, 114–118)

> "I think there's just not enough time, yeah, it's more the time aspect of it. Because, because you know we're all in like jobs as well, and urm then personal therapy, placement, supervision."
> (Kiran, 151–153)

> "Just general stress around money, time urm, you know, I I I tend to find that I'm a lot more tired a lot more of the time, urm it means that hobbies that I like to keep up with, I don't have the energy for and things like that."
> (Tom, 162–165)

Although participants do not explicitly connect these stresses to the relationship dissolution, the substantial amount of stress reported highlights the possible spill-over of these feelings into the relationship. For example, Tom reports that he did not have energy and that this was a key reason for later ending the relationship.

For some participants, the stress experienced whilst on the course resulted in an acceleration of the termination of their relationship:

> "I don't think it would ever have worked. It's just that it came to the surface a lot quicker with me on the course."
> (Justina, 434–436)

> "So because of the stress, I think I came to that decision more quickly than I might have done otherwise."
> (Tom, 266–267)

Tom expresses how it was the stress of the course that brought forward his decision to end the relationship, whereas Justina remarks that it was the overall experience of being on the course that accelerated that decision. Whilst, as seen in the previous theme, other participants recognised differences in their relationship dynamic due to personal change, Tom and Justina initiated the termination and were able to connect the influence of the course on the relationship with its dissolution.

Theme 3: The blurring of personal and professional boundaries

A common pattern identified in all of the transcripts is the blurring of participants' personal and professional boundaries. The main feature of this theme is participants' experience of their personal difficulties seeping into the professional realm, as well as parts of their professional life seeping into their personal domain. The first subtheme reveals participants "occupying the professional space" as a means of escaping from their relationship difficulties. Looking at how clients and the course assist the process of healing, participants express using the professional avenue as a distraction from their personal difficulties. The second subtheme addresses participants' reports of "being the therapist" in their romantic relationship, in other words, bringing their professional identity into their personal life.

Occupying the professional space

Many participants position the professional space as something that is shared between themselves and their clients. Theoretically, the therapeutic space is recognised as belonging primarily to the client, however, some participants speak about occupying that space and utilising clinical work and other elements of training to benefit themselves during their relationship dissolution.

Participants share their view of client work as a form of escapism and distraction when the stressful experience of the relationship dissolution was overwhelming:

> "When I wasn't with clients, I was thinking about the course and my job, finances, urm my partner, all of those things was just constantly on my mind. So then the moment that a client walked into the room and the door closed for those 50 minutes, it was about them. It wasn't about me, so it was a little bit of a form of escapism in some way, just kind of putting my stuff to the side and, and, and focusing on the client, and I think I really do feel that that's kind of what got me through."
> (Justina, 309–319)
>
> "I might have been using that a little bit to maybe get away from the relationship that was going on, and I think I might have been doing the same sort of thing with urm the relationship after it broke up because actually, sometimes working with clients can sort of feel like, actually, it's a, a space that you can create for somebody else to shut out everything else in the world, but you get to occupy that space too."
> (Tom, 619–624)
>
> "And client work in that time was the only thing that saved my life. Because I could go and I could focus on the client for an hour, it wasn't about my shit, it was just about their problems and you know I could leave my stuff outside the room and could pick it up then."
> (Beth, 364–367)

The experience of working with clients and the therapeutic space can be described as twofold: the space exists for clients, yet participants report using that space to escape their personal lives. Client work thus appears to be "saving" participants from dealing with their negative emotions. Indeed, participants are aware of the duality of the situation and of their use of the therapeutic space to manage their own feelings. This notable shift in clinical work, repairing the self rather than the client, highlights a blurring of personal and professional boundaries whereby the professional space is used to escape from the personal issues, albeit inadvertently.

The course as a means of healing was another common topic amongst the participants. It became apparent that, not only were the participants using client work as an escape from their reality, but other components of the course – such as the academic work, supervision, and personal therapy – also helped the participants:

> "I was doing some work, I didn't think about him for about an hour or two hours. Whereas before all the time, still now I think about him you know. But it's not, it's not bloody, you know distressing. Urm. But yeah, uni was probably a saviour actually."
> (Cathy, 514–518)
>
> "So my research supervisor urm was very supportive, very helpful (…) other teachers they were quite supportive as well, they, some of them suggested take a year off but I didn't want to do that because then I wouldn't have anything anymore like the course was my only, urm what's the word? Like the only thing that was left more or less."
> (Beth, 321–327)

As with client work, absorption in the course is described as an escape from the overwhelming thoughts and feelings associated with the ending of a relationship. University appears to be the "only thing (…) left" and a "saviour" following the relationship dissolution, highlighting the impact of the ending of the relationship. Occupying the supervisory space, for example in supervision, also benefitted the participants; a space that is dedicated to discussing client work opened up as an avenue for self-reflection.

In addition, participants spoke about how, following the relationship dissolution, the professional arena and their mental presence on the course was impacted:

> "I could not focus at all. I would be sitting in the library and my phone would be on and I would just keep checking (…) in the course, I would be listening and then I would just, like, kind of, my thoughts would go towards that (…) doing the tasks that I needed to do like the recordings of the sessions was very tiring to me (…) I wouldn't have the motivation to study or open my books (…) so I was very tired also during the course."
> (Alya, 435–453)

> "It definitely did affect me academically. There was an essay due in sort of soon after he started talking about it, and I just couldn't focus on it at all."
> (Ruby, 282–284)

> "I couldn't separate the thoughts. I would often be sitting in class daydreaming about the relationship and all those kind of things."
> (Justina, 366–368)

> "I was on the course thinking about it."
> (Saskia, 273)

The participants' experiences of their relationship difficulties thus appear to override their level of concentration on the course. However, some participants speak about how, following the dissolution, they could identify with the course material. Although their levels of concentration were not always high, participants used the taught theory to understand and think about their own personal situations:

> "All the lectures were about urm relationships and stuff you know, especially with like the psychodynamic ones are about it, but I just, yeah, for a long time I really struggled, struggled with doing the work."
> (Cathy, 423–425)

> "I would space out sometimes a bit, you know, darn those, those lectures. And then there were times when I was tuned in, when all I could think about was 'well how does this play out in my relationship?' you know, 'what am I doing, what is he doing?'"
> (Ziza, 427–431)

Eva, on the other hand, specifically refers to the dissolution impeding the way in which she could relate to people on the course:

> "Err, it was quite unsettling, it was also a bit shameful because I couldn't tell, I did not feel like I could tell my err, kind of classmates and I also feel that, err, at

> the time, my own process was such that I was not easy err in terms of making interpersonal connections with people, so I was a really stand-off kind of person, urm, and I did not feel like I could rely on other people to share what's going on, because I just did not feel it was safe enough for me to talk to somebody. So it was quite intense."
> (Eva, 235–242)

As such, Eva describes how the relationship dissolution impacted her belief system in terms of relationships. This in turn influenced the way in which she interacted with classmates as she feels she became a "stand-off" person, preventing her from connecting with and forming relationships with her cohort.

One participant took appropriate measures to prevent the relationship dissolution from interfering with her role as a professional:

> "So urm the break-up happened towards the end of the first year and then that just brought me right down in to a deep hole and urm so I decided to to do to second year part time (…) I needed to to take some time off to deal with that personal stuff."
> (Beth, 76–80)

Other participants, however, did not take such steps and recognise how their relationship dissolution impacted their client work as a result:

> "I think immediately after as well, just generally, I know my, what's the word, empathy, completely, it felt like it disappeared entirely. Urm, like there was clients coming in complaining about a small thing and going crazy about it, and I was just like, 'oh' in my head, obviously. I hope it didn't come out but I just remember thinking, 'oh, wise up. Just get over it, get on with it. You know, there's bigger things happening in life.' Urm, so I think I really struggled with perspective, I guess, as well, cos obviously it was a big thing for them in their life, which is why they were going (…) my perspective really suffered in the immediate aftermath."
> (Ruby, 461–470)

> "I remember someone, one of my clients talking about a difficulty that they had in their relationship, and I think she was having difficulty in her marriage, and at that time I had just been through the break-up and I was feeling angry and it must have been you know a transference or countertransference of both her and my anger urm, and I don't know whether at that time I was thinking, or all men are idiots or whatever, and I felt that I was agreeing with her. Urm, but then I caught

> myself doing that, urm, and, you know, having to bracket that cos I knew it was my stuff."
> (Kiran, 597–604)
>
> "I was working with a client who was also re-evaluating their relationship with their partner, and I suppose I was kind of identifying with with some of the things they were saying (…) I felt that I had to be a little bit more guarded about it, because I had quite a bitter sense urm of of of my relationship at that moment."
> (Justina, 326–331)

Participants express that the relationship dissolution impacted clinical work with clients as they identified with them and, in some cases, belittled their problems. Ruby, for example, expresses a lack of empathy immediately after the relationship dissolution, which hindered her ability to build a therapeutic relationship with clients. Kiran, on the other hand, describes over-identifying with her client and reflects on the effect this could have had on their therapeutic work together. Although all three participants accessed supervisory support following these incidents, these extracts highlight the extent to which the personal issues momentarily occupied the professional space.

Meanwhile, Justina and Eva narrated the struggle of being "fit" to practise and being mentally available in the therapeutic room:

> "You know, my relationship breakdown occurred at urm kind of towards the end of Stage One, and that was really quite difficult as well, and trying to keep yourself urm, you know, fit for for working with clients was sometimes a struggle."
> (Justina, 112–115)
>
> "With clients, it made, in that period of time, it made it hard to work very, very hard to make myself available in the room, because I was really struggling myself."
> (Eva, 560–562)

Although Alya did not have experience in a clinical setting, she similarly describes struggling during practice skills sessions at university:

> "It it it it's selfish, but I would be sitting as a therapist and then my my classmate would be the client and she'd be talking to me about her problem, and I would, like, I would kind of not be so focused on what she was saying, because I was thinking of what I was going through."
> (Alya, 444–447)

These extracts suggest that the experience of a relationship dissolution impedes professional work in a variety of ways. It is therefore important to consider its implications in terms of the personal life seeping into the professional realm, interrupting clinical work, and limiting participants' progression.

Being the therapist in the relationship

Many participants make reference to an internal conflict between identities, namely their professional self and their personal self. Participants speak of moments in which they would be therapists in the relationship; they would start seeing their partners as clients, further blurring the boundaries between their personal and professional identities.

Awareness of being a "therapist" in their romantic relationship is articulated by some participants:

> "You know, I started wanting to, you know, him to talk to me more and check up on me more and us to have that time to reflect on both of our days but at a deeper level, 'well, what does that mean?' and well 'how did they respond to you and how did you respond to them?' and I caught myself in therapist-mode sometimes, trying to have conversations and I thought it was appropriate and I still don't, and I still don't think that there was anything that was really wrong."
> (Ziza, 298–304)
>
> "Urm, one thing I did learn about urm my relationship with my ex was actually that urm I have a tendency to maybe be a little bit of a therapist in relationships, urm and obviously that's a bad idea to some extent, because you can't really be a therapist in a, in a relationship where you're urm living with each other and that sort of thing."
> (Tom, 474–478)

> "I think maybe it does make you more, like if you're doing psychodynamic or whatever you sometimes can't see out of that can you? Or attachment stuff and schema stuff, maybe I don't know. Whereas he would be a lot more just let it be, just go with it. Whereas I wanted to know well what do you mean? Why aren't you? Why aren't you then? What do you mean by that? Err. Why aren't you responding? You know and analyse everything."
> (Cathy, 351–357)

Ziza and Tom reflect on a similar experience in which they recognise their tendency to be a "therapist" in their relationships. Neither of the participants report this as necessarily being a negative attribute as it provided another level of understanding their partner and the context of their relationship. Like Ziza, Cathy appears to ask her partner questions to gain a deeper understanding. She compares this to the learning experienced on the course, demonstrating a professional outlook on her personal life. Referring to the learning, she reports that you "can't see out of [it]", implying that the course and its teaching are a powerful entity.

When reflecting on making sense of the relationship dissolution and their role in that process, two participants shared how they would analyse their partners whilst in the relationship:

> "Sometimes, I suppose I was analysing him a little bit."
> (Justina, 426–427)

> "In terms of analysing stuff and looking at stuff too deeply (…) But that, he said to stop analysing. Stop analysing emotions and try and you know".
> (Cathy, 342–345)

One participant found it particularly overwhelming to be the therapist in the relationship whilst oscillating between other roles:

> "His urm struggle with the depression and me trying to fix everything and fix everyone and be professional and solve everything that just was like it was a bit overwork for me in it."
> (Beth, 151–153)

> "He needed me as a nurse, as a therapist, as a, as a, a carer, as a, a girlfriend, as a mother, as whatever it was so I had different roles and I could never err get out of because once I stepped out, err, once you stepped out one role I went into a different role and that just happened like constantly."
> (Beth, 475–479)

Beth reveals how her partner was depressed, which resulted in pressure to try to "fix" him, in other words, seeing him as a client and her as his therapist. She felt she needed to be professional within the relationship and, as such, the therapist/client dynamic seeped into the relationship. Beth continues to share how her partner needed her as many things: a therapist, carer, and girlfriend.

As well as feeling overwhelmed, as described by Beth, participants display concerns about the blurring of personal and professional identities, particularly around partners feeling that the participant is "being a therapist" with them:

> "The only thing is, I don't want people to start, like my, my, my, my people like friends and my family, my boyfriend, to think that I'm being a therapist with them."
> (Alya, 544–546)

Alya shares how, since being on the course, she has changed herself. As a result of this change, she expresses concern about being seen as a therapist in her personal relationships.

Training appears to have influenced the way in which one participant relates to others, particularly when examining their personal relationship. Tom explores the connection between the course and his therapeutic thought process whilst with his partner:

> "I wonder if I hadn't been training as a psychologist, would I be thinking like one, about what I'm like in relationships to the same extent that I am, cos I, I, I, find that when I think about questions like that, it's difficult to not think about theory and, you know, if you know stuff about relational psychotherapy, for example,

> why would you not think about that in relation to what you're like in a romantic relationship? So it's a bit like that. I mean, it kind of, urm, muddies the waters a little bit, I suppose."
> (Tom, 462–469)

Tom reports that his thought process is clouded by theoretical information that creates difficulties in separating his therapist identity from his own identity, something he recognised in his personal relationship. His use of the metaphor "muddies the water" supports the concept that the two identities are enmeshed and professional learning spills into the personal life.

Theme 4: The paradox of endings

Although the relationship dissolution was a distressing experience, all participants report a surge of development and growth both personally and professionally following the end of their romantic relationship. This created a paradox: whilst the dissolution itself might have been distressing, the participants did not perceive it negatively. Instead, they focused on the positive aspects gained from it.

This theme is categorised into two subthemes. First, "professional development and personal growth" refers to the development described by the participants in terms of their personal lives as well as in their academic and clinical work since the ending of their relationship. The second subtheme, "enhanced personal relationships", explores how the relationship dissolution influenced participants' patterns in relating to new and potential romantic partners.

Professional development and personal growth

Whilst the experience of a relationship dissolution can be a distressing experience, the participants did not consider it in a negative light. Rather, all of the participants focused on the positive elements gained from the relationship dissolution and understood the experience as a learning curve in terms of their personal and professional development:

> "Well, the break, the breakdown of that relationship. Urm, well, it was kind of like the worst thing, but also a really good thing."
> (Saskia, 122–123)

> "And over the past year I've learned you know, it was devastating, it was life-changing, it was heart-breaking, it was everything that I'd not expected and that I never wish anyone and you know, but I've learned so much from it and I came out the other end."
> (Beth, 707–710)

All of the participants describe the experience of the relationship in paradoxical terms: "devastating" but also a "good thing". Saskia, for example, refers to the experience as being at two extremes on a spectrum. Beth speaks of a similar experience, whereby the dissolution was "devastating" but "life-changing" in a positive way. This paradox highlights both the sensitive, negative nature of the end of the relationship, but also how the dissolution provides a positive learning curve.

Participants share a common pain concerning the ending of the relationship, but this is ultimately processed as a beneficial experience because it provided them with tools with which they could learn about themselves and others. Tom, for instance, understood the loss of his relationship as a way to develop richer awareness of the self, which could be bought forward into future relationships:

> "So my, my attitude is generally, learn what positives you can, and whatever it can teach you about yourself, you can bring into the next relationship."
> (Tom, 496–497)

Participants appear to be gaining this attitude of turning the negative elements into "positives" as a result of their experiences. Tom, for example, reframes the relationship dissolution as an experience that is valuable and useful to his personal growth. Rather than view the relationship negatively, he considered that he has learned from it and prepares to take this into future relationships.

Some of the learning reported by participants also consists of physical activities. Participants explain that the experience granted them permission to pursue activities that they did not have the opportunity to whilst in the relationship:

> "It has, yeah led me to do some more reading about spirituality, go on shamanic courses and stuff and understand more about that which obviously I've enjoyed and it's sort of opened that up again (…) whereas before him (hmm) I was filling my time with friends or with people or whatever just so I didn't have to be on my own. Whereas I can face that now I actually quite like my own company."
> (Cathy, 592–602)
>
> "I'm good, that I am, I'm guessing, happier. And so I've done, started making a few changes, things like going out for walks, joining a fitness club and stuff, so I've seen definitely a change in myself since it happened, for the good as well."
> (Ruby, 325–328)

These two extracts demonstrate the ways in which the ending of the relationship enabled participants to partake in activities of self-development. The personal development Cathy discusses appears to relate to personal activities and becoming reacquainted with her personal interests. She refers to a new sense of comfort within herself – she "quite likes [her] own company" – something that she reportedly struggled with before the relationship dissolution. Ruby shares a similar experience whereby the ending of the relationship has elicited feelings of happiness. Ruby talks about making changes in her life "for the good", such as going out for walks and taking care of herself physically. These extracts therefore suggest that being in the relationship had reduced participants' desire to partake in physical activities and that the relationship dissolution both reignited this and enabled participants to explore personal interests.

In addition to such external attributes, participants explore ways in which the relationship dissolution impacted their internal self, such as awakening a deeper self-awareness:

> "When something's just made explicit, is the idea that the break-up was almost a springboard for developing that relationship with myself, which is, was a really important, was an important, a very important thing for me."
> (Saskia, 574–577)
>
> "And I suddenly became more assertive I learned to say no. I learned too that I don't have to fix everyone that, you know, that I learned where my boundaries are and I learned to you know be free again and urm yeah so I think, what this break-up, positive thing about this break-up is the impact on my personality."
> (Beth, 535–539)

Saskia describes how the break-up was like a "springboard" for developing a relationship with herself, reinforcing the importance of this idea of a relationship with the self. Beth, on the other hand, speaks about how she has become more assertive: she recognises her boundaries and the fact that she can "say no", skills that she reportedly did not possess prior to the relationship dissolving. This is described as happening "suddenly", as if it were an immediate response to the relationship dissolution.

Most participants describe how the simultaneity of participating in the course and experiencing a relationship dissolution led to a greater sense of personal growth and self-development. Others go on to explore how this personal development connected with their professional development:

> "Yeah, because I suppose the, the, the end of that relationship meant that I could develop, the start of developing, being in a relationship with myself, and I think that was the most important thing for the course, for the development through the course, is like the relationship with myself rather than just somebody else."
> (Saskia, 535–539)

Saskia shares how the end of her relationship meant that she could develop a relationship with herself, which she considers to be the most important thing for her development on the course. She suggests that the development of this new self is a fundamental part of the philosophy of becoming a counselling psychologist. Indeed, her description of her relationship with herself as being "the most important thing for the course" highlights the level of self-awareness needed in training.

Ziza builds on this idea, articulating how she uses this experience of the relationship dissolution to her advantage:

> "I definitely, I definitely, I think I'm using it to my advantage urm at the moment and it has, it's shaped my professional development. But truthfully, it's also shaped my personal life you know, so there, there, there, there's the two sides to it (…) so yeah, it, it has shaped me professionally as well as personally and I don't regret it."
> (Ziza, 655–665)

It is thus clear that the participants recognise the relationship between the personal and professional and how both interact with each other. Indeed, participants share how developing the "personal self" since the relationship dissolution resulted in the development of the "professional self":

> "I think that the personal and the professional are kind of completing each other."
> (Alya, 533–534)

> "It's personal and professional, and I think they really kind of link in together, so because I think that the counselling psychology is, you know, it's a lot about bringing yourself in, and I think it's, err, it's really a mixture of, of both."
> (Justina, 186–189)

> "It'll obviously affect me in the professional venue, as such, I think it's more of a personal development that, a personal change that affects a professional."
> (Ruby, 420–422)

> "But the two are linked aren't they? The personal and professional life. You can't separate the two out."
> (Cathy, 720–721)

As such, a key feature of the development expressed by participants is the influence of the personal on the professional, and conversely, the professional on the personal as seen in the previous theme. Some participants used their awareness of this to support and assist their clinical work with clients:

> "Being more patient with them and letting them sort of explore a wee bit more."
> (Ruby, 402–403)

> "I wouldn't be so judgemental if they'd only had short-term relationships."
> (Cathy, 653–654)

> "If a client had been going through the same thing, I would be able to be more empathetic with that, because I had been through that myself."
> (Kiran, 669–670)

> "From my curiosity I think how I explore it a bit more is a bit different because I always said that I had my boyfriend and I could always turn to him too, but when I wanted that deep conversation and I wanted to share, I didn't have that. And it, it has influenced my curiosity I think with my clients especially when they mention their partners (…) I think that my, my break-up and my learning has created a bit of an awareness for me and I'm allowed to use that awareness to add to my curiosity urm, in the therapy room."
> (Ziza, 603–619)

> "I suppose, to my ex-partner, and through learning to be more vulnerable with him that also influences my client work, because I'm more likely to kind of share a feeling that I've got, or, urm just be more intimate with the client."
> (Saskia, 523–526)

In this way, the relationship dissolution appears to have enabled participants to see their clients in a different way: it helped them develop a sense of patience and curiosity when working with clients and to approach clinical work with more vulnerability and intimacy.

In addition to professional development specific to client work in the therapeutic space, participants explore the use of their experience to identify with their clients and tailor interventions to suit them:

> "At the moment I'm working in a, in an organisation urm, with relationship places so people come with relationship issues and I work with you know with very well with these clients I'm sort of, I'm like 'yeah okay it's not the same but I, I understand sort of what you mean by that I can relate to that pain that you describe, it's not, it's not the same pain but pain yeah, I can relate and I do understand you'."
> (Beth, 494–500)

> "I think that with the added experience of going through a relationship going through a break-up, added that much more experience (…) if a client is going through that for instance, urm, I would think okay then they might be feeling this way, but it's actually because I was feeling like that, and it doesn't necessarily mean that they're going through the same thing, so, I think, on, on one aspect, if you've been through an experience that's similar to a client, it can be helpful because of the empathy side of things."
> (Kiran, 667–676)

> "It's life experience and life experience is very valuable. It's actually invaluable in terms of my ability to understand clients (…) I feel like I have such a wealth of experience to give to people."
> (Eva, 496–506)

Although in the previous theme some participants describe that personal difficulties intruded on their therapeutic space, the participants also reflect on how they relate to clients' stories based on their own experiences of a relationship dissolution, strengthening their empathy and understanding and perhaps, by extension, the therapeutic alliance. They see the relationship dissolution as a valuable part of their "life experience", one that helps them empathise with and understand clients.

In this way, participants seem to believe that relationship dissolution is a universal experience that elicits similar feelings and processes amongst those that undergo it. Whilst both Beth and Kiran recognise that their experiences differ from their clients, they imply an overall similarity in experiences which can instigate a deeper connection with clients. Eva uses the term "wealth" to describe her experience, which she feels she can "give to people". This supports the idea that professional development can be elicited from the experience: as identification with clients increases the levels of compassion, it strengthens the therapeutic relationship, benefitting both the participant and the client in and outside of the clinical setting.

Enhanced personal relationships

As a result of the relationship dissolution, some participants developed a greater awareness of personal relationships. Personal development enabled participants to understand, assess, and partake in personal relationships that were more meaningful and complementary to their newly developed self-awareness. They also identified key components in relating that enhanced the types of relationships they were in or wanted to be in.

Since commencing the course and experiencing the relationship dissolution, Eva expresses a change in how she views relationships:

> "There's character compatibility and now I'm aware, very aware of it (…) going through the course and having that structure in place, psychological, of my psychological knowledge, I actually see how his childhood experiences made him the way he is and how mine made me the way I am."
> (Eva, 411–416)

Here, Eva highlights a new awareness of character compatibility. She implies that she only became aware of this since being on the course. This awareness has allowed her to understand and enhance her relationship with her current partner by enabling her to relate to him in a more meaningful way.

Participants who had moved on and into new relationships reflect on and compare the experience with their previous relationships, observing differences particularly in their capacity for self-reflection:

> "Also what helped me as well, that my new partner is equally reflective to me and has that ability."
> (Eva, 396–397)
>
> "The new relationship I'm in as well has been a new phase of learning, because I'm with someone that's very, like, emotionally available and, urm, is totally the opposite, I suppose, to my ex-partner."
> (Saskia, 521–524)

Those participants who were not in new relationships reflect on the types of relationships they aspire to for the future. They share how, due to their development and personal growth since the ending of their previous relationship, they have developed an ideal relationship, entailing key features that they would like in potential partners:

> "It showed me that that's how it should be. Like how you should feel in a relationship. I always thought that's how, that you would just know that you would feel that connected on all these levels and I thought it doesn't exist. But it does exist. That existed and that, although he didn't stick around, urm that's the connection that I feel you should have in a relationship. You know now that I know that it exists, I hope I don't settle for anything less."
> (Cathy, 273–279)
>
> "If I'm going to do this for the rest of my life, I really want to be able to be with someone who can recognise that (…) I'm still on this course, still learning and I just kind of need someone to be able to keep up with that a bit, urm, while recognising that I'm not trying to change the person that I am, you know, I'm just adding to my conversation maybe in a personal way as well as others say I am developing professionally."
> (Ziza, 448–459).

Speaking hypothetically, Cathy and Ziza share hopes for future relationships and reflect on the type of person they want to be with. Cathy shares an idealised situation in which she would not "settle" for a relationship that does not fit her ideal. Similarly, Ziza expresses her desire to be with someone who supports her continuous development and learning.

Whilst some participants vocalised their ideas of ideal relationships, the experience of the relationship dissolution steered some participants away from certain types of people due to incompatibility and the desire to maintain their new sense of self. As such, some participants exercised caution when moving forward:

> "I think it's made me wary about what to look out for so when I'm meeting new people for instance, I know I shouldn't generalise, but if I see some of the, kind of, same traits, I do tend to stay away from them."
> (Kiran, 756–758)
>
> "I hope I'd be more cautious next time."
> (Cathy, 679)
>
> "Well, going into my next relationship, that's something that I want to kind of be a little bit more aware of, and own a little bit more."
> (Tom, 488–490)

Although Kiran is in a new relationship, she hypothesises that she would avoid certain types of people that have similar traits to her ex-partner. Cathy and Tom reflect on a similar feeling, in that they would be wary of future relationships. Exercising such cautions implies that future relationships will be more compatible and better suited to participants' needs in the relationship. By avoiding certain traits or being aware of their own desires, it can be expected that participants' next relationships will be significantly more positive than their previous ones.

Reflexivity

Following my own relationship dissolution, I pre-empted that the analysis process would be clouded by my own experience. For example, like the participants, I reframed the experience into something positive, recognising my own personal and professional *development. Indeed, I accept that, due to the nature of identification, certain themes may have appeared more prominent to me than others. However, by following the process of analysis discussed in Chapter 2 and evidenced in the appendices, and with the evidence of extracts, it is clear that the themes are grounded in the analytical process.*

It is also essential to reflect on the influence that the literature had on the process of analysis as this may inform the outcome. As my interest lies in both the influence that training has on relationship dissolution and the experience of this, and based on the pre-existing literature, I was expecting the experience to be negative overall. I had some inclination that the data collected would be representative of that discussed in the literature, and adopting a dual inductive-deductive approach, I assumed an inquisitive stance on the data whilst maintaining some pre-conceptions. Nonetheless, it came as a surprise that the participants' experience was, overall, positive.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of experiences of a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training. In this chapter, there is an in-depth exploration of the themes drawing on existing literature and the research questions to discuss its findings. Theoretical and clinical implications are explored, as well as how this research contributes to the field of counselling psychology. This chapter concludes with a critical review of issues in quality and credibility, limitations of the study, and possible directions for future research.

Summary of findings and research questions

The findings highlighted how participants experience relationship dissolution whilst training to be a counselling psychologist. Participants discussed the experience of the course as contributing to positive change and influencing their relationship dynamic, with some participants reporting that the course indirectly influenced the relationship dissolution. Participants identified times where the personal and professional boundaries were blurred and they spoke of the experience of the relationship dissolution as paradoxical: despite its immediate negative impact, it led to personal and professional development.

Research questions

1. How do trainees experience a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training?
2. How does training influence the relationship dissolution?

In the next section, these questions are discussed in relation to the themes and the literature explored in Chapter 1 is referred to in order to develop a greater understanding of the participants’ experiences. Direct quotes from the participants are used to discuss the findings and these are referenced in brackets, indicating the pseudonymised name of the participant and line number to show where the extracts can be found in each transcript, i.e. (Alya, 266).

Discussion

One of the most salient themes was the concept of change, particularly positive change experienced on the course and its influence on relationship dynamics. As a result of the course, all participants experienced vast positive change that influenced their patterns of relating to their partners. Participants’ experiences of the course appear to be greatly influenced by what they describe as possibly a transformative learning experience. Descriptions of the change as something experienced “day by day” (Alya, 266) and as an “ongoing process” (Ziza, 442) allude to the change being constant and continuous. This finding is consistent with the psycho-developmental view of transformative learning as continuous, incremental, and progressive growth is central to this view (Taylor, 2008).

Supported by transformative learning theory, the course’s encouragement of new ways of seeing the world through the teaching of psychological theory, such as attachment theory (Saskia, 35; Justina, 461; Ziza, 404), is another contributor to the positive change reported by participants. Equally, in addition to a shift in personal perspectives, participants reported becoming more assertive (Justina, 159; Beth, 535) and vocal (Ziza, 245), which promotes the psychoanalytic view of transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2008). The process of individuation is central to this view, in other words, coming to understand the self through the reflection of psychic structures such as attachment, particularly the structures that make up an individual’s identity (Taylor, 2008). In this view of transformative learning, individuation involves a discovery of empowerment and confidence, attributes mirrored by the assertiveness experienced by participants.

Consistent with Knapp’s model of interaction, participants spoke about “differentiating” as a result of the course (Knapp, et al., 2014). Participants recognised that their partner was not “providing” (Justina, 277) support and that they themselves were becoming “different” (Saskia, 243). Key components of “differentiation” refer to external pressures – in this case the course and “personal therapy” (Justina, 454) – causing individuals to develop independent thinking, separate from their partner. Participants alluded to changing at a different rate to their partners, holding “hope” (Saskia, 210) that their partner would change with them, but ultimately leaving them behind in the process of development (Truell, 2001; Ford Sori et al., 1996; Dahl et al., 2010).

In general, participants spoke about how the course encouraged new ways of thinking and being. As a result, they developed on a personal level, which increased awareness in their relationship. As personal therapy is mandatory in counselling psychology training (British Psychological Society, 2018a), it may be that this new way of thinking is influenced by – though not limited to – the relationship between the trainee and their therapist, as similarly reported by Moller et al. (2009). Although not all participants explicitly allude to this connection, it is possible that the participants were mirroring the experience in the therapeutic room when relating to their partner. Indeed, some participants described regarded their partners as clients, as seen in Theme 3. Supporting Legako and Sorenson (2000), it can be assumed that, due to the expressive nature of training reported by participants and how they are required to reflect on themselves and their processes, this too could have influenced the new patterns of relating within their romantic relationships.

Personal therapy and how it created the space for participants to address personal issues was expressed as accelerating the decision to end the relationship. Justina, for example, spoke of personal therapy as a “catalyst” (Justina, 241) as she would use it to reflect on herself as well as her relationship. It is therefore also possible that personal therapy indirectly influenced their relationship dissolution (Macaskill & Macaskill, 1992; Sherman, 2000) as personal therapy was a mandatory part of training.

Alongside clinical training, participants’ use of clinical work as a form of “escapism” (Justina, 313) from the stressful experience of the relationship dissolution was also referenced in the findings. Participants describe using the clinical work to “get away” (Tom, 620) from the relationship and appear to be “saved” (Beth, 364) by client work; in other words, occupying the professional space to deal with their negative emotions. Indeed, the participants seem to be escaping to a reality in which the client saves the therapist. This shift in clinical work – repairing the self rather than the clients – illustrates the blurring of personal and professional boundaries. The BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018b) states that psychologists should act with integrity and should consider the “avoidance of exploitation and conflicts of interest (including self-interest)” (British Psychological Society, 2018b. p 7). As such, occupying the clinical space to escape from their own personal issues represents a possible conflict of interest.

Discussion of Theme 1: "I can feel the change day by day"

This theme addresses both research questions as, although participants do not specifically discuss the relationship dissolution, they describe the experience of the course, its context, and its influence on their relationship dynamics. While they do not explicitly state that these changes influenced the relationship dissolution, considering the theme in relation to existing literature provides insights into how the experience of training may have inadvertently influenced the relationship dissolution.

Referring to the course as an "emotional doctorate" (Eva, 51), Eva implies that the course extends beyond academia. Evolutionary theorists describe love as an emotional investment and, indeed, the self-expansion model suggests that it is part of human nature for people to expand their potential efficacy through close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron & Norman, 2004). It is therefore possible that the course is providing Eva with a foundation of love that would normally be seen in close relationships. Experiencing this "exceptionally positive" (Eva, 56) change supports this theme as the overall change experienced is positive and, when discussing their relationship dissolution, participants do not "regret" it (Eva, 506; Ziza, 665).

Participants welcome change as a result of being on the training course and do not see this as hindering their ability to relate to others. Rather, the process of learning and positive change is twofold: the change experienced promotes self-reflection as well as how they see "themselves in relation to others" (Tom, 99). This view is consistent with studies on personal and professional development within psychotherapeutic training (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017, Fiammenghi, 2015; Guy, 1987).

It is interesting to note that participants mentioned that course staff had “warned” them of potential changes (Alya, 264; Saskia, 112; Kiran, 226). The Cambridge dictionary defines the word “warn” as “to make someone realise a possible danger or problem, especially one in the future” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). This suggests not only that training staff are aware of the changes experienced by trainees, but that they expect these experiences to be negative. As such, it is intriguing that all of the participants described change as positive, albeit including a relationship dissolution. This paradox is explored more in the discussion of Theme 4.

Even though participants expressed change as something that developed from the course, it is simplistic to assume that the course was the only contributor to this change. Participants were aged between 24 and 36 at the time of the study, and it is common for adult development and change to occur during this stage (Erikson 1968; Levinson, 1978). This fact offers an alternative understanding to the findings, as it is possible that change occurred due to other contributors, such as transition through the development stages or other external contributions that may not have been mentioned by participants. Whilst participants recalled key components of the course, such as personal therapy, contributing to their positive change, the social and cultural context of the participants, including other events in their lives and how these may be interconnected with their experience, were not explored. This study can therefore not provide an absolute claim as to change being derived purely from the course.

As with research conducted on personal therapy, the participants reported increased self-awareness (Macaskill and Macaskill, 1992), a better understanding of themselves (Kumari, 2011), and personal development (Murphy et al., 2018). This points to the second subtheme, in which participants cited change from personal therapy, amongst other experiences on the course, as influencing their intimate partner relationship dynamics.

As part of the experience of change, some participants reported a shift in their personal priorities and re-evaluated these by reminding themselves that, for them, the “course” (Justina, 229) had a higher priority than the relationship. Others recognised how they had different priorities to their partners in terms of “life” goals (Eva, 61). A shift in participants’ personal priorities contributed to the change in relationship dynamics as it highlighted differences between them and their partners. Similar to the theory of “love stories” (Stenberg, 1986), the changes may not complement their and their partners’ original roles in the relationship, thereby possibly decreasing the relationship’s survival potential. This mismatch of new perspectives with old – perspectives that would have previously been accepted by partners – is also consistent with the term “disorienting dilemma” in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2012).

Similar themes of re-prioritisation were found in the meta-analysis by Le et al. (2010), which showed that exclusion of the other in the self, predicted relationship dissolution. Likewise, Fiammenghi (2015) recognised how change as part of the course may lead to relationship strain. As the course promotes personal and professional development (Kumari, 2011), it may be assumed that, through the use of personal therapy (Justina, 454) and the course (Eva, 59; Tom, 261), the participants were able to recognise themselves as a priority and that the course offers more rewards (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and self-expansion (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007) than the relationship, and made changes accordingly.

Considering development stages, the ages of the participants (24–36) highlight the possible tensions experienced at this stage. According to Levinson (1978), this stage in life is crucial as the individual makes life choices that dictate the success of their life. It may be that, as all of the participants were approximately at this stage, the relationship dissolution was a life choice, that is, they chose themselves over the relationship. This can be seen in participants' reference to the course being important to them and choosing the course "over the relationship" (Justina, 230).

Participants also spoke in depth about how personal therapy instigated the change and how it "opened up a can of worms" (Justina, 454). The journey of personal therapy required participants to "reflect" (Eva, 199) on their relationship and led them to recognise that their partners were not "capable" (Saskia, 313) of the same level of reflection. These findings mirror research on mandatory personal therapy by Moller et al. (2009), who similarly found personal therapy to "open up a can of worms" (Moller et al., 2009, p.379).

Discussion of Theme 2: "The course indirectly influenced the break-up"

This theme addresses the second research question. It explores participants' views on how the training influenced the relationship dissolution, albeit indirectly. Participants explicitly shared their experience of their relationship dissolution whilst on the course and made reference to the course influencing their decision to end the relationship. A key discovery is that the participants who initiated the relationship dissolution were able to recognise the influence of the course, highlighting that it was indeed a contributing factor in the decision to terminate their relationship.

In relation to the previous theme, Kiran stated that staff had warned that changes would lead relationships to be “stronger” or “cause” a break-up (Kiran, 229). On the other hand, Eva noted that the course “indirectly” (Eva, 257) influenced the relationship dissolution. Although not all participants made this connection, when reflecting on the experience of the relationship dissolution, participants made reference to the course and its components as influencing relationship stability. Consistent with the study by Kumari (2011) and Moller et al. (2009), some participants referenced “stress” (Tom, 263) and “financial risk” (Ziza, 37) as pressures that may have influenced the dissolution as it was difficult to maintain both the requirements of the course and the relationship simultaneously. Others reported academic work occupying free “time” (Justina, 216) and “expectations” (Alya, 115) from the course spilling over into their romantic relationship (Neff & Karney, 2007; Cushway & Tyler, 1996; Polson & Nida, 1998; Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Olson-Garriott et al., 2015).

Although participants expressed a link between the relationship dissolution and participating in the course, it is important to note that some participants did not choose to end the relationship. Considering those participants who were left by their partners, compared to the participants who decided to end the relationship, it cannot be assumed that the course indirectly influenced all the relationship dissolutions explored in this study. The participants who remarked that the relationship dissolution came “quicker” as a result of the course (Tom, 266; Justina, 434) were those who initiated the ending of the relationship. This alludes to a possible link between those who initiated the relationship dissolution and the recognition of the course as influencing that decision.

Discussion of Theme 3: The blurring of personal and professional boundaries

This theme addresses both research questions as it highlights the impact of the relationship dissolution on the experience of training, both in terms of the difficulties of the relationship occupying the professional space and professional learning impacting the relationship dynamic. Contrary to previous research, this theme highlights the blurring of personal and professional boundaries whilst training to be a counselling psychologist, particularly when exploring relationship dissolution.

In counselling psychology, boundaries are a key element of professional practice. They are established to protect clients from psychological harm amongst other reasons, including providing consistency, appropriately managing ethical practice, and avoiding an overlapping of roles (British Psychological Society, 2017). In this theme, participants spoke about occasions when personal and professional boundaries became blurred and the personal and professional spaces became enmeshed.

Jung (1954), describes psychotherapy as a "dialectical procedure". He places emphasis on the therapist as an active participant in the process of individual development, reflecting on how the whole being of the therapist is involved in the therapeutic process. This perspective provides a possible lens through which to understand how the therapeutic space may be occupied by both the client and the participant.

Literature on the "wounded healer" suggests that "only the wounded physician heals" (Jung, 1963, p.134). As such, the archetype advocates that the power to heal others is facilitated by one's own wounds (Sedgwick, 1994), a concept that is evident in this study. Participants' utilisation of the professional space, particularly client work, expands on this concept by offering an alternative where – in addition to using their wounds to facilitate better relating with clients, as found in Theme 4 – the opposite also occurs, whereby wounded clients assist in healing wounded therapists. Although it can be argued that this concept exists within the archetype, much of the research on the “wounded healer” addresses the decision to enter the therapeutic environment (Hadjiosif, 2015) rather than on those who have become “wounded” whilst in practice.

According to the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), escapism is implemented to divert attention away from the stress experienced. Indeed, participants report using the professional space as a way of coping and moving on after the relationship dissolution. Descriptions of the course as a “saviour” (Cathy, 518) and the only thing “left” (Beth, 326) indicate the high importance participants placed on the course. Escapism and occupying the professional space through both clinical and academic work appear to permit participants to take control of their processing. As well as providing them space to heal, it is possible that client work and the course unconsciously represented a “replacement partner” (Rollie & Duck, 2006), reducing the stress of losing the relationship.

Although some participants took a break before seeing clients whilst seeking support in supervision, the fact that others conducted clinical work to distract themselves from their own pain raises some ethical concerns. Some participants were greatly affected by the relationship dissolution, reporting that they could not “focus at all” (Alya, 435) and that the relationship dissolution affected them “academically” (Ruby, 282). They found that they “couldn’t separate the thoughts” (Justina, 366) and that they would be thinking about the relationship dissolution “on the course” (Saskia, 273). In addition to impacting the academic arena, participants spoke about how the relationship dissolution impacted their clinical work as their “empathy” had “disappeared” (Ruby, 462). Furthermore, participants found that they were “identifying” (Justina, 327) with certain clients, struggling with “perspective” (Ruby, 467), and expressing “anger” (Kiran, 601) when faced with similar relationship stories, making it difficult to be “available in the room” (Eva, 561). This raises concerns about participants’ fitness to practise in a clinical setting as, in the counselling profession, there is no allowance for personal difficulties when it comes to the therapeutic process (Barden & Caleb, 2015). Like Kumari (2011), who found that trainees were preoccupied with their own issues and were unable to give clients their full attention, participants reported difficulties in focusing during their client work. This finding raises the question of how the ethical guidelines of fitness to practise (British Psychological Society, 2018a, 2018b) are being implemented and how strongly trainees are following these guidelines.

In addition to this occupation of the professional space, participants explored how the boundaries between their personal and professional selves were blurred whilst in their relationships. For example, they reported occasions when they would see their partner as a client and their partner would see them as a therapist. Some participants noticed how they would go into “therapist mode” (Ziza, 301) with their partners and reporting having a “tendency” to be a “therapist in relationships” (Tom, 475) which would lead to “analysing” the relationship (Cathy, 344; Justina, 427). It was recognised that this blurring of roles within the relationship influenced the dynamics of the relationship.

Developing personally and professionally whilst simultaneously performing personal roles at home – such as parent or breadwinner – could exert considerable pressure, particularly on female participants (Cushway & Tyler, 1996). One participant, for example, described finding it difficult to oscillate between “different roles” (Beth, 477).

Participants also expressed concern about losing their personal identity due to their new professional identity: Alya explained that she does not want others to think that she is being a “therapist with them” (Alya, 546). Indeed, the participants presented no singular identity: at times, they merged both the personal and professional selves which “muddies the waters” (Tom, 468), whilst also seeking to find a “balance” between and separating the two (Ziza, 120). On the topic of multiple roles and identities, Fiammenghi (2015) states that trainees find it particularly difficult to find a balance between the personal and professional selves when working with clients. The present study expands this and provides examples of how trainee counselling psychologists may not only blur the boundaries within the therapeutic space, but experience blurred boundaries in the personal space, impacting relationships with those around them.

Discussion of Theme 4: The paradox of endings

The first research question seeks to explore trainees’ experiences of a relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training. The findings show that participants considered this experience to be paradoxical: although the experience of the relationship ending was distressing and debilitating, all the participants expressed that, overall, it was good experience as they were able to develop from it.

Whilst literature exists on personal development through the course (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017) and personal development following a relationship dissolution (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), very little has explored personal development following a relationship dissolution whilst in training, particularly surrounding this paradox of using the relationship dissolution to “learn” (Beth, 710). During the coping stage of relationship disengagement, Emmers and Hart (1996) reported that the “lefts” engaged in higher self-enhancement techniques, such as self-improvement and empowerment. Their finding was echoed in this study, as participants described the freedom to engage in activities such as learning about “spirituality and shamanism” (Cathy, 593) and going for “walks and joining a fitness club” (Ruby, 326), thereby improving and empowering themselves and further aiding the healing process. Unlike the Emmers and Hart (1996) study, however, participants who initiated the relationship dissolution also engaged in self-improvement and empowerment techniques. This suggests that these particular techniques are not only pursued by those who did not choose to terminate the relationship.

The course itself promotes self-development (Kumari, 2011; Kumary & Baker, 2008) and may be considered a transformative learning experience (Stevens-Long et al., 2012). Similarly, participants described the relationship dissolution as a “springboard” (Saskia, 575) for developing their relationship with the self, with it having a positive “impact on personality” (Beth, 539). As such, it is possible that a combination of being on the course and experiencing the relationship dissolution contributed to a spurt of self-development for this study’s participants.

Consistent with literature on personal and professional development, participants recognised how these two components “link” with (Justina, 187; Cathy, 720) and “complete” (Alya, 533) each other: the “personal change affects the professional” (Ruby, 421). When sharing experiences of client work, participants explore how the relationship dissolution benefitted client work. For example, the experience enabled them to be more “patient” (Ruby, 402), “empathetic” (Kiran, 670), “curious” (Ziza, 647), “vulnerable” (Saskia, 524), and less “judgemental” (Cathy, 653). In addition, participants explored how they would use their own experience to identify with their clients and “relate” (Beth, 551) to them differently, recognising their “similarity” (Kiran, 675) and using it to “understand” (Eva, 497) their clients. Moreover, the concept of a paradoxical ending – whereby the ending of their relationship meant that participants could develop personally and professionally – conforms to the well-established “resurrection” process as described by Rollie and Duck (2006). This phase refers to how individuals reframe past relationships in preparation for new ones. Although Rollie and Duck (2006) relate this only to relationships, the present research suggests that the experience of the relationship dissolution can also be reframed in terms of personal and professional growth, as participants recognised the positive development that resulted from the relationship dissolution.

In addition to developing professionally, following the relationship dissolution, participants reported greater ability to relate to others in their personal lives, for instance, becoming aware of “character compatibility” (Eva, 411). In particular, new romantic relationships appear to be improved as, compared to their previous relationship, new partners were viewed as equally “reflective” (Eva, 397) and “emotionally available” (Saskia, 523). This finding supplements the study by Tashiro & Frazier (2003) who researched the prevalence and correlation between stress and personal growth following a relationship dissolution. Those participants who were not in a new relationship had a clearer idea of the type of partner they would choose in the future. For example, Cathy described her ideal relationship as being “connected” (Cathy, 276) on many levels and Ziza shared how she would want her future partner to “recognise” (Ziza, 449) her continuous development.

Participants also engaged in avoidance behaviours when relating to others, particularly the avoidance of people with similar patterns to their ex-partner, recognising them as incompatible. Similarly, participants spoke about how they would be “wary” (Kiran, 756), “cautious” (Cathy, 679), and “more aware” (Tom, 489) of the types of relationship they would enter into. Although they only made reference to future relationships and avoidance may indeed be a useful strategy when forming romantic relationships, it is possible that participants may unconsciously avoid working with particular clients due to the same similarities. This possible consequence is hinted at in the previous theme, as some participants lost “empathy” (Ruby, 462), making it difficult to work therapeutically with certain clients. From one perspective, this could be seen to promote ethical practice, as it suggests that participants choose the types of client they work with based on their competence and ability to empathise. However, being selective in the types of client that participants work with may hinder their training, as it would necessarily exclude certain clientele from their experience. As a result, they may be unprepared for situations in which current clients present similar issues, as seen in the previous theme when participants were “identifying” (Justina, 327) with certain clients and expressing “anger” (Kiran, 601) when faced with similar relationship dilemmas. Avoidance thus highlights the potential ethical dilemmas that can arise in therapeutic practice, re-emphasising the importance of engaging in continuous self-reflection whilst in training as well as the significance of working through personal issues before returning to clinical work.

Theoretical and clinical implications and contributions to the field of counselling psychology

This research provides insight into trainee counselling psychologists’ experience of training and its influence on intimate partner relationships. It shows how the transformative learning experienced on the course may facilitate development and self-awareness that could impact upon intimate partner relationships. It also shows how training provides opportunities to process the changes experienced by trainees. The research provides both theoretical and clinical implications, which are explored further in this section.

Theoretical implications

As mentioned briefly in the discussion of Theme 3, the blurring of personal and professional boundaries, and Theme 4, the paradox of endings, this research may add a new perspective to the model of breakdown by Rollie and Duck (2006). The "resurrection" process focuses on how, following a relationship dissolution, individuals have a tendency to replace their loss with another relationship. However, this research shows that, following a relationship dissolution, relationships may also be replaced by a project such as a training course. Some participants implied a dependency on the training and the clinical work, insinuating an element of "partner replacement" whereby the course provided them with the qualities one finds in a relationship. This adds another dimension to the "resurrection" process: namely that replacement partners do not need to be found in other people, but may also be present in intangible experiences.

Another component of the "resurrection" process is the reframing of past relationships to better prepare for future ones. Individuals make preparations for future relationships by reviewing and adjusting their psychological beliefs about the self, others, and past relationships. By being aware of the nature and behaviour of the ex-partner and the self, the individual can prevent any negative effects from recurring in the future. This research proposes that it is not only the reframing of the individuals involved in the relationship dissolution, but the reframing of the situation itself that may help the individual move forward. For example, participants speak of the paradox of endings in Theme 4, exploring the concept of concentrating on the positive aspects of the relationship dissolution by focusing on their personal and professional development; in other words, they reframe the stressful situation so it does not impact future endeavours.

Clinical implications

Relationship dissolution is one of the many issues that may affect trainees during counselling psychology training. Using insights from transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2008, Mezirow, 2009), and the findings from this study, this research proposes continuous assessment of trainees fitness to practise, as well as their psychological resilience in order to pursue training in counselling psychology. In addition to this, the research proposes the introduction of mandatory reflective practice groups by the BPS to assist training institutions in supporting trainees and monitoring ethical practice.

A key finding reflected on the experience of training following the relationship dissolution. The training promotes the simultaneous development of the personal and professional self, but the themes suggest that the interaction between the two may contribute to a blurring of boundaries, whereby participants begin to view their intimate partners as clients and their partners see them as therapists. Part of this confusion also extended into client work, as the participants expressed occupying the professional space to heal and escape from their own issues, as well as personal difficulties making it difficult to work with clients. All of these examples are potentially detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. Some participants continued working with clients regardless of the difficulties they were experiencing, creating a possible ethical issue regarding "fitness to practice" (British Psychological Society, 2018a, 2018b). The process of therapy requires that the therapist is relationally available to the client. To be so, their emotional and physical health is subject to a "fitness" assessment from the trainee and those involved with the process of training (Barden & Caleb, 2015). This research suggests that a considerable amount of attention is required to ensure that such assessments are correctly implemented, as a lack of fitness could potentially impact upon clinical practice and damage the professional identity of the counselling psychologist. In addition to this, there is a recommendation that during the selection process, trainees need to be able to demonstrate psychological robustness and resilience, enough to withstand the challenges that training may bring forward.

One way in which this finding could be reflected is through considerations to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct and the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists, as well as a restructuring of counselling psychology training by introducing mandatory reflective practice groups. Codes of ethics are established to provide structure and ensure safety for every individual contributing to the therapeutic encounter. During training, these are discussed in terms of personal and professional boundaries. It is accepted that psychotherapy does not exist in a moral vacuum. As such, it does not exist without the guidance and influence of other structures, such as the socio-cultural context. With this in mind, this research suggests that the BPS and the HCPC need to consider new and innovative ways of promoting the importance of following guidelines, particularly the importance of "fitness to practice". Indeed, Tribe (2015) found that trainees often view professional and ethical issues in practice as rather boring or commonsensical. Consequently, this research supports Morrissey (2005)'s view that, in clinical training, there is a need for regular input in professional and ethical issues.

Training institutions have a level of responsibility towards trainees in delivering and monitoring ethical practice. Creating a space in which difficulties can be spoken about as a group, for example, may be one useful way to encourage trainees to discuss distressing topics, such as relationship dissolutions. Although some universities offer reflective practice groups, this is not the case for all institutions. One way in which this could be incorporated into the structure of the institution could include the BPS making reflective practice groups – like personal therapy – mandatory. By providing a space within the training environment, tutors would be able to facilitate development as well as monitor trainees' "fitness to practice" and resilience. As with mandatory personal therapy, however, this may present some disadvantages. As seen in Chapter 1, literature on mandatory personal therapy demonstrates themes such as increased stress (Kumari, 2011), being preoccupied with personal issues (Williams et al. 1999), and increasing anxiety and vulnerability during training (Moller et al., 2009). It is possible that similar themes could occur as a result of mandatory reflective practice groups. However, research also shows the benefits of mandatory personal therapy whilst on training, such as becoming better practitioners (Moller et al., 2009), increased self-awareness and self-esteem (Murphy et al., 2018; Macaskill and Macaskill, 1992), emotional development, increased resilience, and an improvement in trainees' personal and social lives (Murphy et al., 2018). It is hoped, therefore, that mandatory reflective practice groups would elicit similar advantages.

In addition to clinical implications for future trainees and educators, the study is also relevant to clients and the patient population. A key finding in the research is that, relationship dissolutions are paradoxical. The ending of a romantic relationship means that the individual may begin to develop a relationship with themselves, prioritising their needs and making time and space for their achievements. For clients and patients in the clinical setting is, this could bring about a greater awareness of the positive consequence of a distressing experience such as a relationship dissolution. Being aware of such an outcome may aid therapeutic work through the use of psychoeducation on relationship dissolutions within the clinical setting.

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that taking on a new project, such as a training course, can influence relationships and ultimately change relationship dynamics. The research study highlights that changes in the professional and personal realm can alter the dynamics of their romantic relationships, which, may not be at the forefront of individuals embarking on a new transformational journey. For clients, this information could assist in the decision making process when contemplating progression into new roles or new careers. Furthermore, as the findings represent trainee counselling psychologists, clients, such as trainees who partake in personal therapy as part of a requirement of the course may also be informed by this research as a precursor to the experience of training and how it may influence their personal intimate partner relationships.

Critique

An important part of research is to assess its quality and credibility. Exploring the limitations of research can support future researchers by identifying ways in which the topic can be further explored with reduced difficulties.

Yardley's (2000) evaluative criteria

Sensitivity to context

This was achieved by critically exploring any literature on trainee counselling psychologists' experiences of a relationship dissolution and citing a variety of studies to strengthen the review. Additionally, the findings were explored in relation to the existing literature to generate a deeper understanding of the topic. The use of reflexivity demonstrated consistent exploration of researcher influence throughout the present study.

Commitment and rigour

This was demonstrated by immersing into the literature and its relevance to the topic. Efforts were made to ensure that the most up-to-date research was explored, and only studies that were relevant were included in the argument. Developing a competent level of awareness and understanding of the methodology of TA, as well as adhering to Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point list of criteria, were also key features in this study.

Transparency and coherence

This was demonstrated by providing a detailed audit trail of the different stages of the analysis process. An example of the process of coding (see Appendix 5), the list of codes (see Appendix 6), and thematic maps (see Appendices 9, 10, and 11) are presented in the appendices. The chapters are clearly headed and contain a brief description of what is being presented in each. The study also includes a thorough discussion of the way theory fits the method used, as well as a clear presentation of the findings using extracts from the interviews to support each theme.

Impact and importance

This was demonstrated in detail by the clinical and theoretical implications and contributions to the field. Suggestions were made as to how this research could extend the model of breakdown by Rollie and Duck (2006), as well as to how the BPS, HCPC, and training institutions could further support counselling psychologists in training.

Limitations

Although the research follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point list of criteria for TA and Yardley's (2000) criteria for quality and credibility, there are limitations to the research.

Following the process of interviews and analysis, it became apparent that the sampling criteria was not robust. The lack of criteria regarding how long participants were in a relationship for or how recently the relationship dissolution took place may have influenced the range of themes. As a result, some participant experiences varied considerably. This was particularly challenging as one participant had repaired the relationship with her partner a week after its dissolution, whilst another participant was unable to explore questions reflecting on the experience of training after the relationship dissolution, particularly with clinical work, as she had not yet experienced clinical placements as she was in the beginning of her first year. As a result, the interviews with these participants were notably shorter. Nonetheless, following the coding process and the analysis, both participants contributed to the development of themes.

The overall positive tone of the themes hints to another limitation: potential bias. The reason for this positive tone is unclear, however, there is a strong sense throughout the transcripts and themes that the participants' experience was positive overall. Reviewing the interview schedule, questions were designed to explore both positive and negative experiences, however, the participants explored the positive experiences extensively. As there was no criterion regarding how recently the relationship dissolution had occurred, it is possible that participants had had longer to reflect on, process, and understand the relationship dissolution, thereby contributing to the positive outlook on the experience. In cases where participants shared that the processing of the dissolution was ongoing, the positive tone could have been masking negative feelings. Furthermore, as they were being interviewed by another trainee counselling psychologist, participants may have unconsciously answered in a way that would "please" the researcher, introducing the possibility of participant bias.

During the recruitment process, the title of the research project was “The Break-Up Course”. Participants may therefore have been attracted to the idea of the course being the prime cause of the relationship dissolution. Although this idea was not evident in many extracts, the theme that addresses the course as an indirect influence on the relationship dissolution (Theme 2) may thus reflect participant bias. Whilst this theme is reflective of the research questions, it is possible that the participants developed this idea through meaning constructed from the original title and spoke in depth about this concept in the interviews as a result.

Although the sample size is adequate for a UK doctorate research study (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and the themes are applicable to the majority of participants, a larger sample could have provided greater representativeness of the findings. Additionally, as the age range of the participants is small and participants are relatively young, the experiences of older trainees was not explored. The findings may therefore not be representative of trainees of different ages. Similarly, as female participants outnumbered male participants, it is unclear whether male trainees can relate to the findings of this research. In the same way, seven out of the ten participants were from a white ethnic background, all of which were in heterosexual, monogamous relationships. As with age and gender, the experiences of different ethnicities and sexualities are markedly different. As a result, although the primary aim of qualitative research is not to generalise its findings, the relatively small sample size and the homogeneity of age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality may not be representative of the wider population. The themes, therefore, predominantly apply to heterosexual females of a Eurocentric population partaking in monogamous relationships which only offers a fractional view of the experience of relationship dissolution during counselling psychology training.

Revisiting the literature on relationship dissolution, dependence, relationship quality, conflict, changes in the female labour force and ideational change predicted dissolution for females (Le et al., 2010; Ono, 2006; Wang, 2001) whilst satisfaction, adjustment, and ambivalence predicted dissolution for males (Le et al., 2010). Due to the homogeneity and the lack of diversity of the sample in this research study, only tentative comparisons can be made between literature and the themes, limiting the findings produced.

Directions for future research

As TA is considered a foundational method providing useful information for further research, the lack of existing research on this topic and its limitations are particularly useful when considering future research. By being strict with inclusion criteria and recruiting a more equal and larger sample based on different ages, genders, ethnicities, and sexualities further research has the potential to strengthen the themes and increase its applicability to the wider population.

Alternatively, a quantitative method of inquiry could further investigate the influence of the course on the relationship dissolution. The use of quantitative measures has the additional benefit of looking at all the different variables that could impact the results, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and who initiated the ending. Testing hypotheses to observe a correlation between counselling psychology training and relationship dissolution is also possible with quantitative analysis. By conducting a quantitative study following this research, there is an opportunity to strengthen the themes by providing empirical statistical evidence to support the findings. In addition, comparisons may be made with other disciplines, such as clinical psychology and counselling, in order to observe whether relationship dissolutions influenced by the course are more prevalent in counselling psychology training.

Conclusion

With little literature considering trainees' experiences of being on a counselling psychology course, and specifically those going through a relationship dissolution, the aim of this research project was to gain insight into this experience, particularly addressing the influence of the course on the relationship dissolution. The usefulness of such a specific topic is in the ethos of counselling psychology. As training in counselling psychology promotes a relational way of working, it is interesting to understand how trainees experience a dissolution of their own relationship whilst maintaining the development of relationships with clients.

This research shows how positive change, personal therapy, and identification in course material influenced the relationship dynamic and, in some cases, resulted in the relationship dissolution. The findings emphasise trainees' vast range of experiences on the course, particularly in relation to the blurring of personal and professional boundaries, whereby the personal life extends into professional life and vice versa. The study suggests that, through the use of self-reflection, intense self-evaluation, and multiple identities, a "change" is experienced by the trainees, which shifts the dynamics of their intimate partner relationships as partners are unable to adapt accordingly.

The study provides a foundation for future research on relationship dissolution in counselling psychology training to strengthen the themes and provide greater generalisability of the findings. Using quantitative measures to explore the correlation between training and the relationship dissolution and addressing the different variables may help reform the research findings and provide further evidence of the themes developed.

Overall, the research provides a set of themes that contributes to understanding the experience of a relationship dissolution whilst training to be a counselling psychologist. It considers how the course may influence relationship dynamics, as well as how clinical work may provide solace to trainees during times of stress, like during a relationship dissolution. It provides possible new insights into the “resurrection” process of the model of breakdown by Rollie and Duck (2006), whilst highlighting the need for the BPS, HCPC, and training institutions to introduce innovative ways of discussing ethics and assessing fitness to practice. The aim of this research study was not to be conclusive or comprehensive. Rather, it sought to highlight the study’s participants’ experiences of a relationship dissolution whilst training to be a counselling psychologist. Ultimately, this research hopes that its findings will assist those in the field of counselling psychology to consider the experience of a relationship dissolution whilst in training and reflect on how a distressing experience, such as a relationship dissolution, may affect the training experience as well as how the training experience may influence intimate partner relationships.

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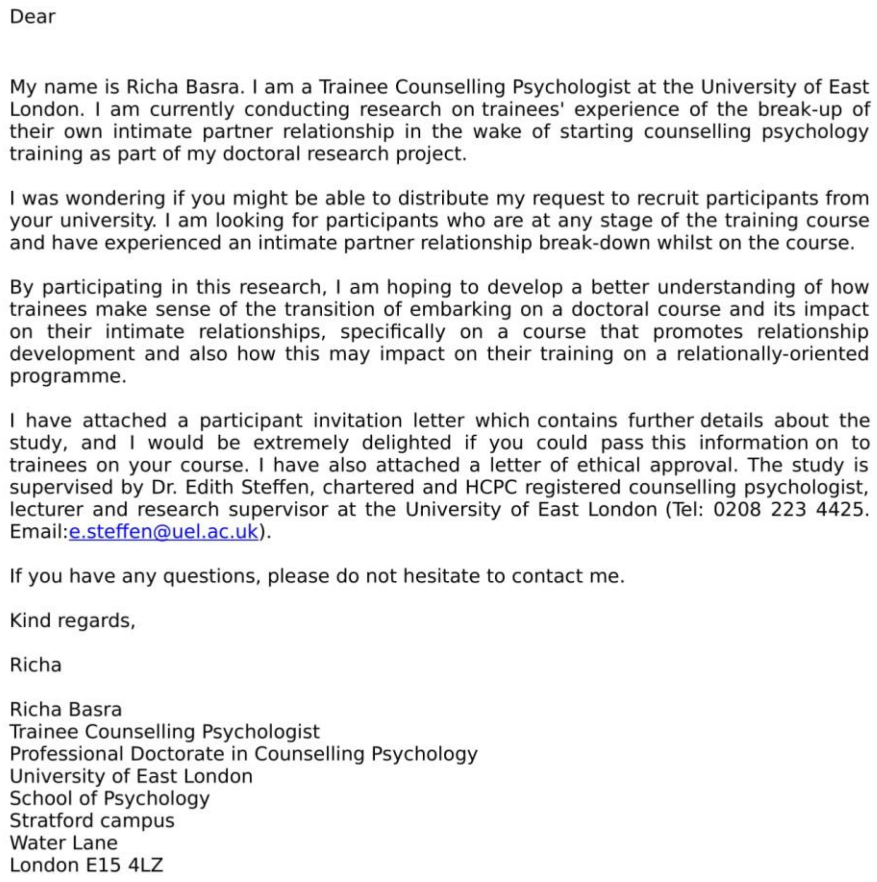
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Transcription	1.	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for ‘accuracy’.
Coding	2.	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3.	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach) but, instead, the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4.	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5.	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6.	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7.	Data have been analysed rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8.	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9.	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10.	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11.	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12.	The assumptions about Thematic Analysis are clearly explicated.
	13.	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14.	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15.	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just ‘emerge’.

(Reproduced from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.37)

Appendix 2: Recruitment Email



Dear

My name is Richa Basra. I am a Trainee Counselling Psychologist at the University of East London. I am currently conducting research on trainees' experience of the break-up of their own intimate partner relationship in the wake of starting counselling psychology training as part of my doctoral research project.

I was wondering if you might be able to distribute my request to recruit participants from your university. I am looking for participants who are at any stage of the training course and have experienced an intimate partner relationship break-down whilst on the course.

By participating in this research, I am hoping to develop a better understanding of how trainees make sense of the transition of embarking on a doctoral course and its impact on their intimate relationships, specifically on a course that promotes relationship development and also how this may impact on their training on a relationally-oriented programme.

I have attached a participant invitation letter which contains further details about the study, and I would be extremely delighted if you could pass this information on to trainees on your course. I have also attached a letter of ethical approval. The study is supervised by Dr. Edith Steffen, chartered and HCPC registered counselling psychologist, lecturer and research supervisor at the University of East London (Tel: 0208 223 4425. Email:e.steffen@uel.ac.uk).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Richa

Richa Basra
Trainee Counselling Psychologist
Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology
University of East London
School of Psychology
Stratford campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

The Principal Investigators

Richa Basra (U1216587@uel.ac.uk). Haneyeh Belyani (H.Belyani@uel.ac.uk)

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this research study. The study is being conducted as part of my Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology course at the University of East London.

Project Title

“The Break-Up Course”: Trainees' experience of the break-up of their own intimate partner relationship in the wake of starting counselling psychology training.

Project Description

The aim of this research project is to gain insight into trainees' personal experiences and understandings of intimate partner relationship break-down in the light of having embarked on a training course with a relational philosophy such as counselling psychology.

You will be interviewed regarding your experiences on the training programme and how, in your view, this may have led to an intimate partner relationship break-down. You will be interviewed on the basis that you are on a Counselling Psychology Doctoral Programme. The sensitivity of the research may evoke emotional responses; however, you will be provided with details of relevant services should you wish to access them.

Confidentiality of the Data

Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. During the transcript and write-up of the study, your name will not be used and you will be referred to by pseudonym to protect your identity and to maintain confidentiality. The transcripts will be stored in a locked cupboard and the audio recordings will be stored in password-protected documents on a laptop that will be kept safe. Audio recordings and transcripts will be read by myself and my supervisor, and the audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Anonymous transcripts will be kept for a further 5 years should I decide to further research on the topic, these will be stored in the same confidential manner as above.

Time and Location

Interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will take place at the University of East London or another alternative confidential location that is convenient for both of us.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study and should not feel coerced. You are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason. Should you withdraw after the analysis has begun, the researcher reserves the right to use your anonymised data in the write-up of the study and any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your participation. Please retain this invitation letter for reference.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor Dr. Haneyeh Belyani, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Tel: 0208 223 4425. Email: h.belyani@uel.ac.uk]
or
Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you in anticipation.
Yours sincerely,

Richa Basra

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

How did you experience the transition from being a non-trainee (previous job/role/position) to becoming a trainee?

Can you tell me about some positive experiences of being on the course?

Can you give me examples of any negative experiences of being on the course?

Can you give me an example of specific parts of the course that have influenced the way you relate to others?

Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of the course before you broke up with your partner?

Can you tell me a bit about the lead up to the break up?

How did you experience this break up whilst being on the course?

How do you make sense of this break-up?

(Can you give me some examples of particular aspects of the course that you feel may have impacted this relationship?)

Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of being on the course after your break up?

(How do you feel being on the course after the separation?)

Can you give me an example of ways in which this disruption may have impacted your personal and professional development?

How do you believe this break up impacted your ability to relate to others?

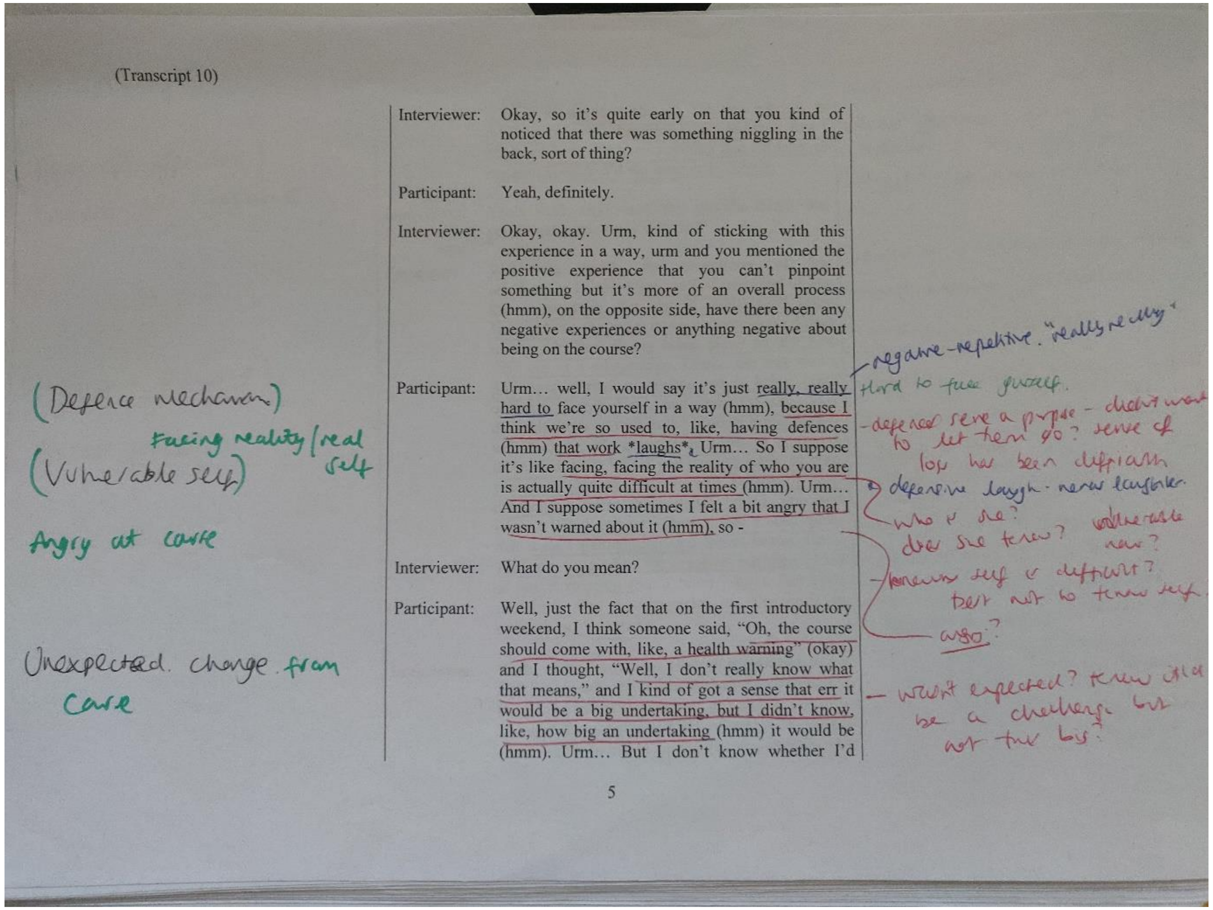
Probing questions:

Could you tell me more about that?

What did you make of that?

What do you mean by that?

Appendix 5: Example of coded transcript



(Transcript 10)

Interviewer: Okay, so it's quite early on that you kind of noticed that there was something niggling in the back, sort of thing?

Participant: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. Urm, kind of sticking with this experience in a way, urm and you mentioned the positive experience that you can't pinpoint something but it's more of an overall process (hmm), on the opposite side, have there been any negative experiences or anything negative about being on the course?

Participant: Urm… well, I would say it's just really, really hard to face yourself in a way (hmm), because I think we're so used to, like, having defences (hmm) that work *laughs*. Urm… So I suppose it's like facing, facing the reality of who you are is actually quite difficult at times (hmm). Urm… And I suppose sometimes I felt a bit angry that I wasn't warned about it (hmm), so -

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Participant: Well, just the fact that on the first introductory weekend, I think someone said, "Oh, the course should come with, like, a health warning" (okay) and I thought, "Well, I don't really know what that means," and I kind of got a sense that err it would be a big undertaking, but I didn't know, like, how big an undertaking (hmm) it would be (hmm). Urm… But I don't know whether I'd

5

(Defence mechanism)

Facing reality / real self

(Vulnerable self)

Angry at course

Unexpected. change from course

negative - repetitive. "really really"

Hard to face yourself.

- defences serve a purpose - didn't want to let them go? sense of loss has been difficult

defensive laugh - nervous laughter.

who is she? does she know? vulnerable now?

knowing self is difficult? best not to know self.

ego?

- wasn't expected? knew it'd be a challenge but not this big?

Appendix 6: List of codes

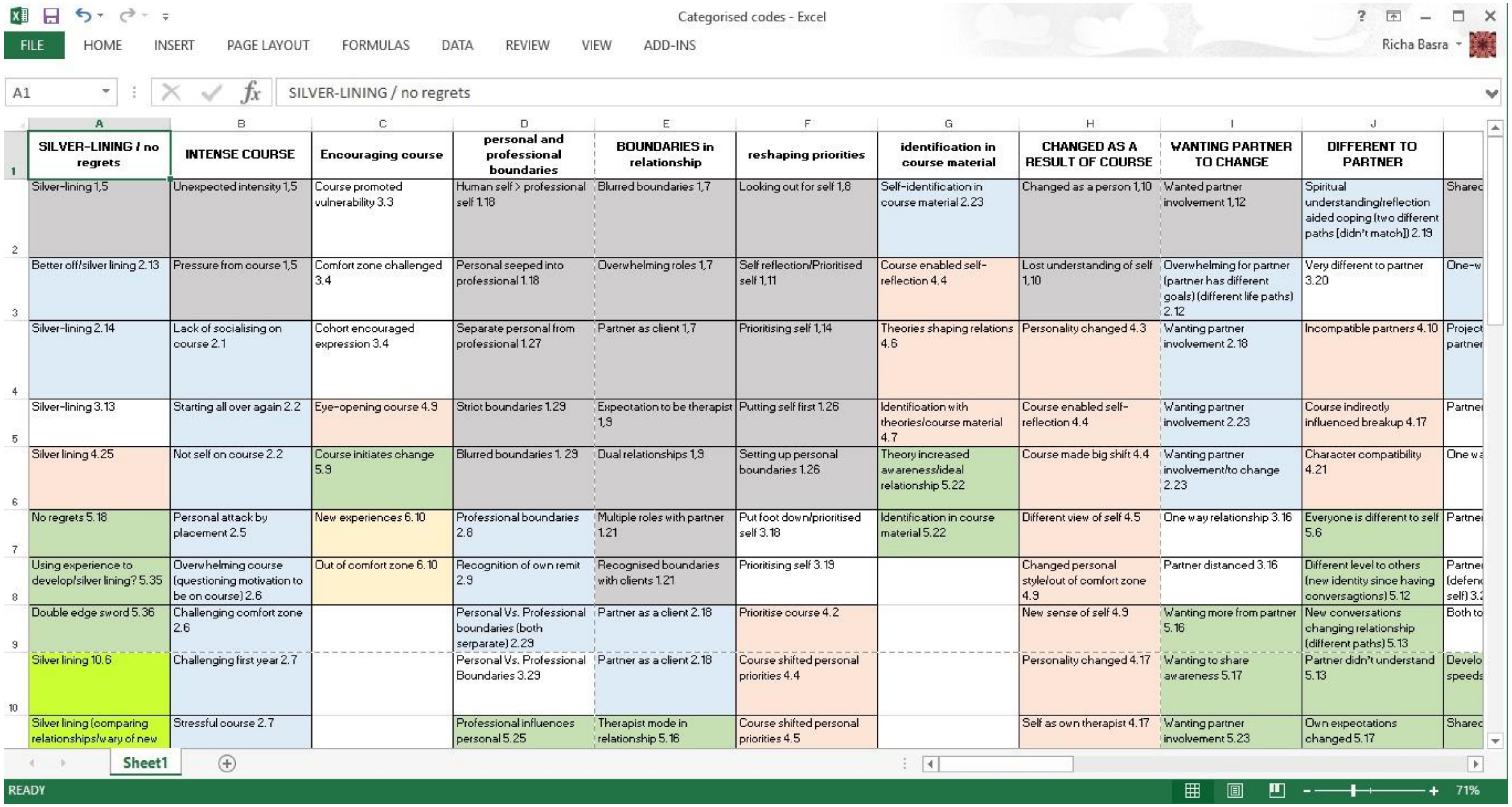
Professional success equates to personal success	Breakup aided professional development	Confidence grew on course	Course is a distraction	Relationship added pressure
Time to heal	Personal influencing professional	Pattern of relating changed (filtered friendship groups)	Fearing the future	Avoidance of processing/delayed processing
Change course due to breakup	Breakup encouraged open-mindedness	Silver lining	Course aided development - frriendships	Incompatible
Personal seeped into academic	Cautious in next relationship	Helped understand clients	Therapist in relationships	Avoidance of closure
Silver-lining	Complex levels to self	Increased empathy with clients	Better relationships with others (personal and professional joined)	Other stuff more important
Unexpected intensity	Uncertainty about future	More real (authentic) in course	Fake interactions (fear of seeming fake)	Personal seeps into professional
Pressure from course	Uncertainty	Personal seeping into professional (client work)	Fear of reaction to change	Learning about "self" in "relationships"
Imposed professional identity	Eye-opening personal therapy	Difficult transition	Quick change	Opposite personalities
Blurred boundaries	Personal therapy provided toolbox	Risk taking	Challenging transition	Cautious of new relationship
Overwhelming roles	Course promoted vulnerability	Financial risk	Challenging the comfort zone	Learn from experiences- new relationships
Burnout	Comfort zone challenged	The unknown is difficult	Same shared experience across cohort (course supportive)	Liberating/free
Partner as client	Cohort encouraged expression	Silver-lining/prioritising self	Course increased self-awareness	Reverting to authentic/real self
Looking out for self	Supportive cohort	New awareness whilst on course	Being transparent self	Personal therapy/course aided reflection
Expectation to be therapist	Course imposed "label"	Life changing course	Exposing vulnerable self	Personal therapy was useful
Dual relationships	Supportive structure helps with chaos	Increased awareness	Confident self after challenging self	Relieved after breakup/free
Self-doubt	Course pressures	Not the same person	Supportive supervision group	Avoidance of processing
Changed as a person	Strict requirements of course	Awareness changes all dynamics (filtered friends) (ability to switch off "new self")	Challenging comfort zone is positive	Parallel process - clients with partner
Lost understanding of self	Course pressure	Everyone is different to self	Course not supportive - could do more	Personal and professional enmeshment
Self reflection/Prioritised self	Time constraints	Develop, not lose self	Shared negative experience across cohort	Client work aided understanding of breakup
Wanted partner involvement	Personality impacting development	Course could do more	Financial strain is stressful	Experience aided relating
Dissociated self	Intense course	Course initiates change	All-consuming course	Putting foot down in new relationships
Reflection aided coping	Personal therapy encouraged acceptance (streenghtened family relationships)	Filter friendships/relationships	Breakup impacted client work	Prioritising self- wanting needs met
Prioritising self	Cautious new relationship	Different level to others (new identity since having conversagtions)	Unsupportive course	New Experience
Course is supportive	Personal therapy reframed breakup	New conversations changing relationship (different paths)	Disconnected from course	Anxious transition
Course as escapism	Personal therapy improved family dynamics	Partner didn’t understand	Stressful course time constraints	Positive Journey
Putting foot down on course	Course warned changes	Self changed (as a result of the course)	Assertive/confident self	Conflicted self
Escapism in client work (not academic)	Shared experiences offered validation	Had an inclination	Experience helping client work	Wanting the best of both worlds
Personal therapy and supervisory support	Cultural boundaries	Self changed, partner didn’t	Asserting own needs	Prior defence mechanisms changed

supervisory support	Cultural boundaries	didn't	Asserting own needs	mechanisms changed
Personal seeped into professional	External influencing internal decisions	Wanting more from partner	Personal and professional development	Changed attachment style
Human self > professional self	One way relationship	Therapist mode in relationship	More assertive in relationships	Making sense through the course
Blurred boundaries from PT	Partner distanced	Prioritised self/meeting own needs	Time strain on relationship	Ignoring gut instinct
Personal Therapy aided understanding	Partner to blame	Wanting to share awareness	Financial strain on relationship	Course increased awareness
Shared blame	Put foot down/prioritised self	Own expectations changed	Course was a priority	Course made it difficult to ignore instinct
Realised own strengths/weaknesses	Very different to partner	No regrets	Changing self/becoming aware	Facing reality/real self
Repeating narrative to cope	Free self	Rollercoaster experience	Identification in course/clinical work	Angry at the course
Multiple roles with partner	External judgment - preconcieved judgements damaging self-worth	Putting self first (getting needs met)	Course is priority	Unexpected change from the course
Recognised boundaries with clients	Sharing = normalising	Course supportive/understanding	Different life paths/needs in relationship	Difficult experience on course
Breakup aided professional development (client work)	Self-doubt on ending	Intimate support from wrong relationship (course)	Aware of needs in relationship	Forced processing
Support from others (filtered friends)	Autopilot defence mechanism (course aided coping - escapism)	Analysing self aided coping	Course enabled reflection	Personal therapist became attachment figure
Self-awareness increased after breakup (course increases awareness)	Supportive cohort (escapism)	Confused ending	Avoidance of processing helped (coursework is a distraction)	Mirrored relating from course to relationship
Changed as a person (free self) (silver-lining)	Escapism	Isolated processing	Questioning course priority	Different ways of relating (not therapist mode with friends)
Vulnerable self	Cultural influence on new relationship	Theory increased awareness/ideal relationship	Blamed self	Change of personal dynamics (family)
Putting self first	Comparing relationships	Identification in course material	Client work as escapism	Changed in all domains
Setting up personal boundaries	Time as an obstacle to ending	Love/hate relationship with course	Identification in clinical work	Unlearning previous education and relearning new
Separate personal from professional	Shared experiences aided understanding	Developing at different speeds (self blame)	Countertransference awareness	Anxious partner
Course as escapism (prioritised course)	Foreseeing future	Ongoing processing	Unclear personal/professional boundaries	Hoping partner would change too
Strict boundaries	Trusting gut instinct	Different level to others	Supportive supervisor	False hope in relationship
Using experience to help clients	Partner felt misunderstood (defending him/ defending self)	Cautious of new relationships	Personal seeped into professional work	Conflicted/confused self
Uncertainty after breakup (wary of new relationships)	Both to blame	Expectation to be a certain way	Self as therapist in relationship	Grew apart (different people now)
Changed person	Personal Vs. Professional Boundaries	Professional influences personal	Course aiding understanding of breakup	Isolated development
Confident self	Cohort is accepting	Wanting partner to develop too	Accelerated ending	Desire to change together
Lack of socialising on course	Avoidance of possible ending	Partner different to self	PT opened up a can of worms	Grew apart
Starting all over again	Experience entering clients work	Cohort is ideal partner	Course theories aided understanding/coping	Isolated development causing drift
Not self on course	Experience helping others	Different to others	Client work aided understanding/coping	Separated course from feelings (PT was helpful)
Supportive course	Changed after experience	Maintaining family relationships	Client work aided understanding	Confused self
Course better as time progressed	Experience aided client work	Improved, not changed, self	Wounded healer?	Course aids reflection
Critical self	Strengthened family relationships	Change by-product of course	Client work helped understand self	Detached self
			Challenging self since	

Critical self	relationships	course	understand self	Detached self
Personal attack by placement	New appreciation for family/relationships	More open-minded/aware	Challenging self since breakup (challenging comfort zone) (new ways of relating)	Isolated experience
Overwhelming course (questioning motivation to be on course)	Comparing past to present	Balancing personal and professional self	Prioritised self - understanding	Boundaries (personal seeped into course)
Challenging comfort zone	Wary of new relationships	Course set foundation to change	Frustrating transition/everyone is different	Sudden realisation ended relationship
Challenging first year	Experience encouraging self-reflection (doubting journey on the course)	Share blame/responsibility	Unwanted caution from course	Idealised relationship increased awareness
Stressful course	Overwhelming/stretching boundaries	Too open in cohort	Frustrated self lead to self-reflection on relating	More reflective than partner
Clinical Vs. Counselling psychology	Prioritise course	Curiosity in client work	Shared negative experience with cohort	Course accelerated awareness which accelerated breakup
Course as a metaphor for life	Stressful transition	Experience aided clinical work	Unexpected breakup	Silver lining (comparing relationships/wary of new relationship)
Real self in professional role	Split in two	Different space over time	Too much change for both (two different paths)	Relief after breakup (freedom)
Professional boundaries	Professional identity crisis	Experience aided academic work	Overwhelming change	Accelerated processing
Recognition of own remit	Emotional doctorate	Getting needs met	Course anger projected at home	All consuming course
Transparency in professional role	Positive personal development	Using experience to develop/silver lining?	Unsafe course space	Prioritised course
Exciting new relationship	Personality changed	Double edge sword	Unsupported course	Self-attunement/Real self
Whirlwind relationship	Course made big shift	Excited and nervous about course (no expectations)	Professionalism over empathy	Kept relationship hidden (free self on course)
Overwhelming for partner (partner has different goals) (different life paths)	Course shifted personal priorities	Slow start	Breakup impacted academic	Real self Vs. False self
Projecting blame onto partner	Course enabled self-reflection	Course needed full attention	Hopeful future/prioritised self-reflection	Ignored instincts
Better off/silver lining	Course enabled re-evaluation of relationships	Unknown expectations	Tired from course indirect influence (both responsible/shared blamed)	Real self
One-way relationship	Different view of self	Isolation is stressful	New way of relating	Risk taking after breakup
Breakup enabled self-refection of future relationships	Theories shaping relations	Course expectations is stressful	Increased patience with others/clients	Authentic relationship and authentic self
Intense relationship (future relationship ideals)	Identification with theories/course material	Uncertainty is stressful	Avoidance of clients/monitoring identification	Fake relationship
Breakup built patience/resilience	Delayed structure on course (theories)	Hiding vulnerability	Avoidance of clients	Uncertainty after breakup
Relationship supported course	Understanding in identification	Foreseeing increased stress	Immediate impact on client work	Silver lining (freeing)
Relationship disadvantaged course (not focussed)	Cultural differences	A lot of new experiences	Increased value for relationships	Parallel relationships
Adapted course around relationship	Eye-opening course	New experiences	Avoidance of client work	Personal and professional mask
Partner as a client	Changed personal style/out of comfort zone	Out of comfort zone	Uncomfortable transition	Being real with clients
Wanting partner involvement	New sense of self	Close to cohort	Course intensity impacted social life	Therapist roles
Placement to blame	Anticipated breakup	On the surface disclosures	Asserting change to cope	New useful ways of relating (comparing relationships) (relating to clients)

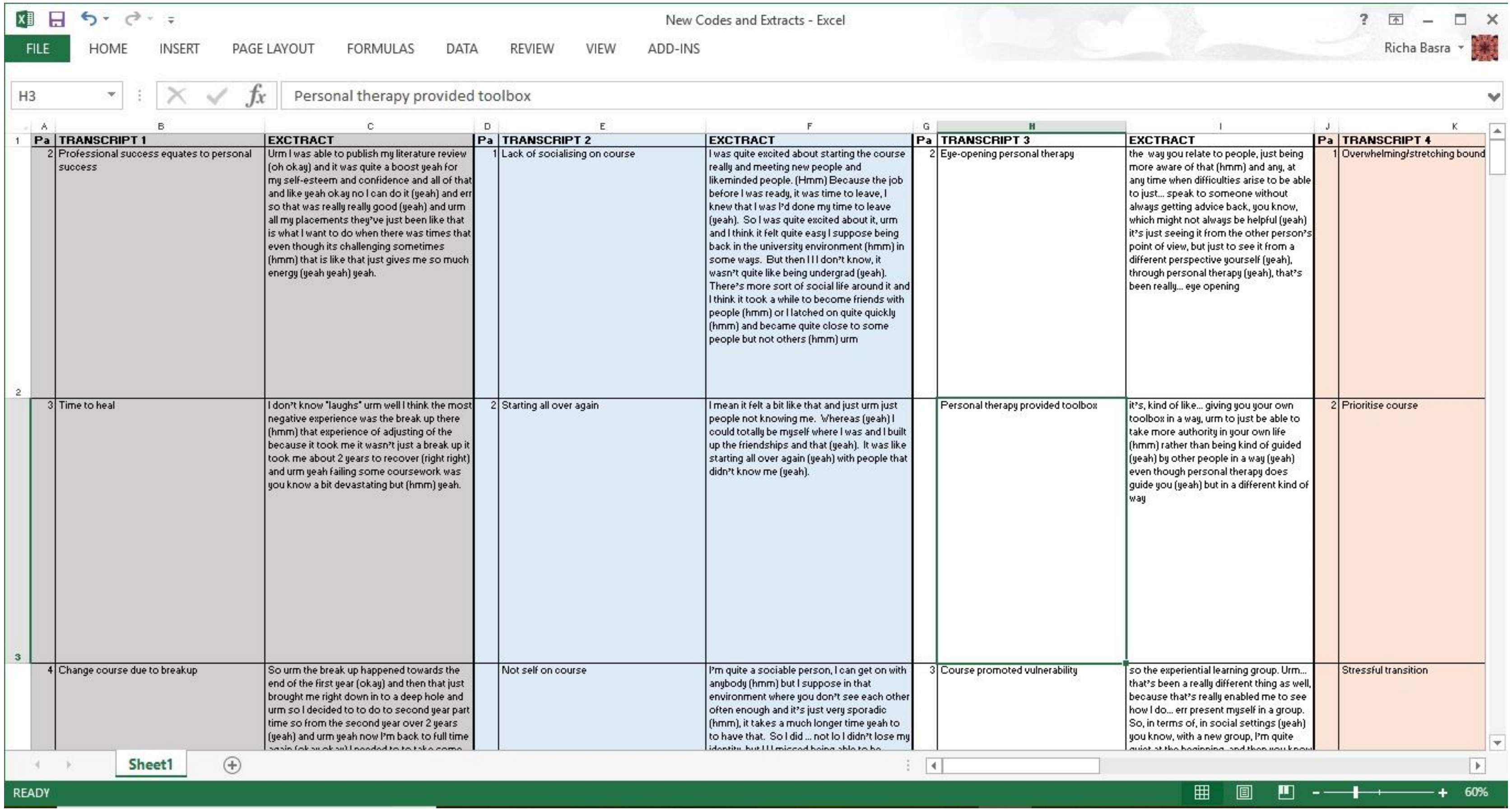
Placement to blame	Anticipated breakup	On the surface disclosures	Asserting change to cope	to clients)
Spiritual understanding/reflection aided coping (two different paths [didn't match])	Incompatible partners	Free self/changed self since course	Course intensity put pressure on relationship	New beginnings
Prioritising self (wary of new relationships)	Children took priority	Course warned change	Filtered friends	Personal therapy as secure base
Developed after breakup	Unsafe course environment/intense after breakup	Fear of losing self (positive change)	Learn a lot about self	Accelerated development
Self-identification in course material	Personal therapy implcated the breakup (not course)	Expected change in relationship (accelerated change)	Course enabled close bonds	"Springboard"
Breakup impacted course	Personal and professional separate/integrated	Self and partner very different	Financial stress	
Course promoting healing	Trickling in background/gut instinct	Wanting partner to change	More tired	
Wanting partner involvement/to change	Accelerated breakup due to personal therapy	Time consuming course	Aware of capacity to make friends	
Client work mirroring relationship (couldn't focus on client work)	Personal therapy as eye-opener	Needs not met (both to blame)	Partner to blame (different people)	
Course placement took energy	Therapist validated instinct	Partner to blame (shared blame) (wanting him to change with her)	Stress accelerated breakup	
Priorities shifted	Relationship mirroring personal therapist relationship	Prioritised self/putting foot down	Course work took priority	
Breakup encouraged open-mindedness with others	Personal therapy helped cope	Changed mind on breakup	Wanting different things in relationship (partner wanted more from relationship(	
Personal Vs. Professional boundaries (both serparate)	Self as own therapist	Foreseeing future induced fear	Anticipated partners expectations	
Breakup influences personal development	Course indirectly influenced breakup	Growing alone	Both needed different things	
Confident/free self	Course aided new communication	Partner doesn't understand work (defending self and career)	Wanting to separate personal from professional	
Self-acceptance	New partner more reflective (comparing relationships)	Hiding professional identity (forseeing future induces fear)	Dual relationships - partner/therapist/supervisor	
Isolation to cope	Course helped understand (new) relationship (comparing relationships) (two different people)	Relationship more important (forseeing future induced fear)	No support in relationship	
Breakup promoted development (silver-lining)	Character compatibility	Censoring self - to protect relationship	One-sided relationship	

Appendix 7: Screenshot of categorised codes on Excel Spreadsheet



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
1	SILVER-LINING / no regrets	INTENSE COURSE	Encouraging course	personal and professional boundaries	BOUNDARIES in relationship	reshaping priorities	identification in course material	CHANGED AS A RESULT OF COURSE	WANTING PARTNER TO CHANGE	DIFFERENT TO PARTNER	
2	Silver-lining 1,5	Unexpected intensity 1,5	Course promoted vulnerability 3.3	Human self > professional self 1.18	Blurred boundaries 1,7	Looking out for self 1,8	Self-identification in course material 2.23	Changed as a person 1,10	Wanted partner involvement 1,12	Spiritual understanding/reflection aided coping (two different paths [didn't match]) 2.19	Sharec
3	Better off/silver lining 2.13	Pressure from course 1,5	Comfort zone challenged 3.4	Personal seeped into professional 1.18	Overwhelming roles 1,7	Self reflection/Prioritised self 1,11	Course enabled self-reflection 4.4	Lost understanding of self 1,10	Overwhelming for partner (partner has different goals) (different life paths) 2.12	Very different to partner 3.20	One-w
4	Silver-lining 2.14	Lack of socialising on course 2.1	Cohort encouraged expression 3.4	Separate personal from professional 1.27	Partner as client 1,7	Prioritising self 1,14	Theories shaping relations 4.6	Personality changed 4.3	Wanting partner involvement 2.18	Incompatible partners 4.10	Project partner
5	Silver-lining 3.13	Starting all over again 2.2	Eye-opening course 4.9	Strict boundaries 1.29	Expectation to be therapist 1,9	Putting self first 1.26	Identification with theories/course material 4.7	Course enabled self-reflection 4.4	Wanting partner involvement 2.23	Course indirectly influenced breakup 4.17	Partner
6	Silver lining 4.25	Not self on course 2.2	Course initiates change 5.9	Blurred boundaries 1. 29	Dual relationships 1,9	Setting up personal boundaries 1.26	Theory increased awareness/ideal relationship 5.22	Course made big shift 4.4	Wanting partner involvement/to change 2.23	Character compatibility 4.21	One wa
7	No regrets 5.18	Personal attack by placement 2.5	New experiences 6.10	Professional boundaries 2.8	Multiple roles with partner 1.21	Put foot down/prioritised self 3.18	Identification in course material 5.22	Different view of self 4.5	One way relationship 3.16	Everyone is different to self 5.6	Partner
8	Using experience to develop/silver lining? 5.35	Overwhelming course (questioning motivation to be on course) 2.6	Out of comfort zone 6.10	Recognition of own remit 2.9	Recognised boundaries with clients 1.21	Prioritising self 3.19		Changed personal style/out of comfort zone 4.9	Partner distanced 3.16	Different level to others (new identity since having conversagtions) 5.12	Partner (defenc self) 3.2
9	Double edge sword 5.36	Challenging comfort zone 2.6		Personal Vs. Professional boundaries (both serparate) 2.29	Partner as a client 2.18	Prioritise course 4.2		New sense of self 4.9	Wanting more from partner 5.16	New conversations changing relationship (different paths) 5.13	Both to
10	Silver lining 10.6	Challenging first year 2.7		Personal Vs. Professional Boundaries 3.29	Partner as a client 2.18	Course shifted personal priorities 4.4		Personality changed 4.17	Wanting to share awareness 5.17	Partner didn't understand 5.13	Develo speeds
	Silver lining (comparing relationships/wary of new	Stressful course 2.7		Professional influences personal 5.25	Therapist mode in relationship 5.16	Course shifted personal priorities 4.5		Self as own therapist 4.17	Wanting partner involvement 5.23	Own expectations changed 5.17	Sharec

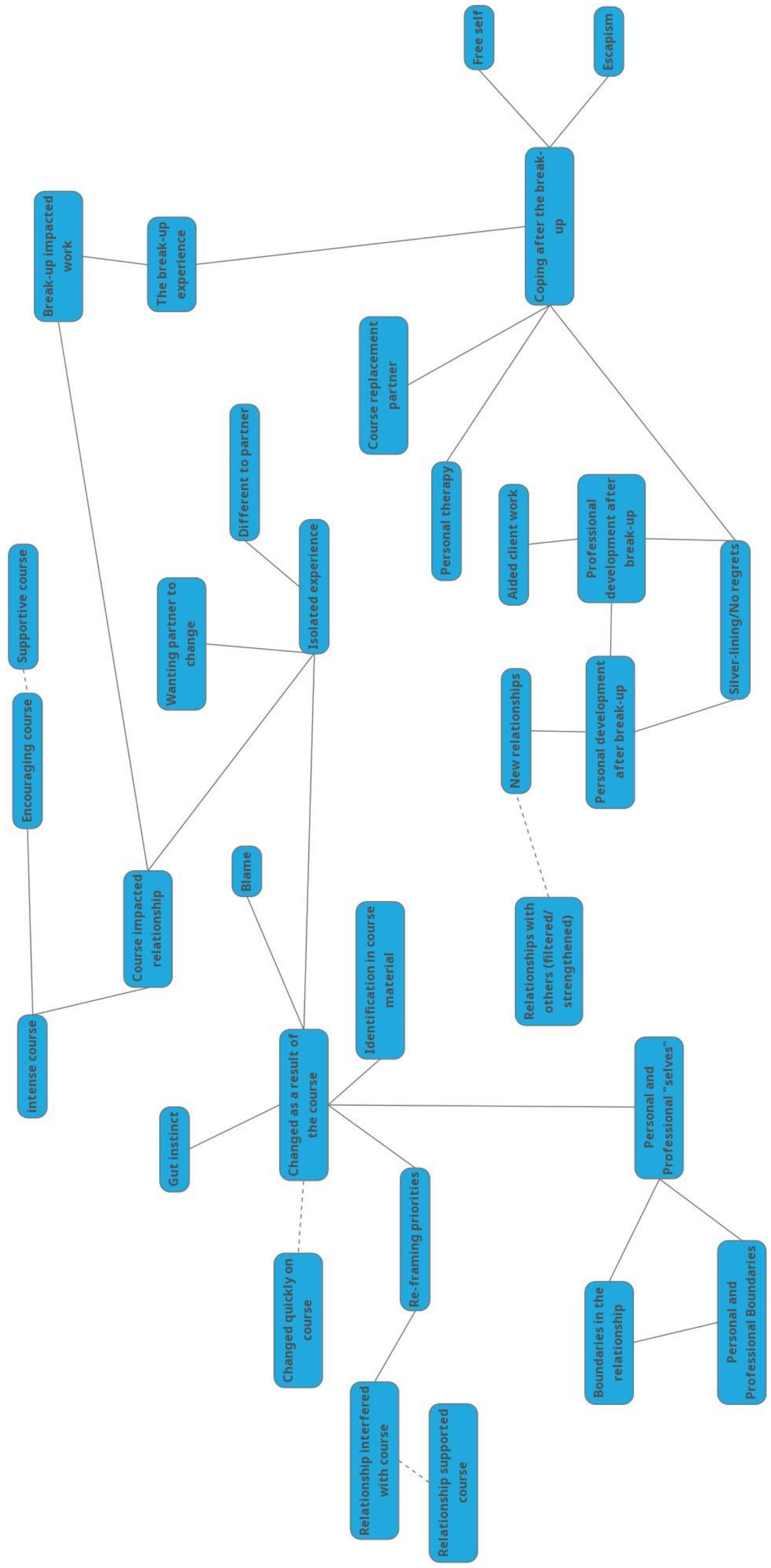
Appendix 8: Screenshot of codes for each theme and supporting extracts on Excel Spreadsheet



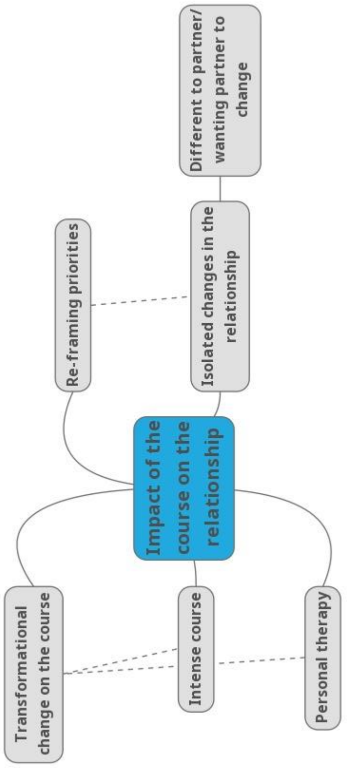
H3: Personal therapy provided toolbox

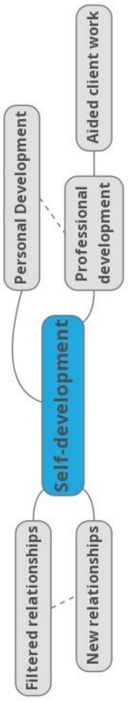
Pa	TRANSCRIPT 1	EXCTRACT	Pa	TRANSCRIPT 2	EXCTRACT	Pa	TRANSCRIPT 3	EXCTRACT	Pa	TRANSCRIPT 4
2	Professional success equates to personal success	Urm I was able to publish my literature review (oh okay) and it was quite a boost yeah for my self-esteem and confidence and all of that and like yeah okay no I can do it (yeah) and err so that was really really good (yeah) and urm all my placements they've just been like that is what I want to do when there was times that even though its challenging sometimes (hmm) that is like that just gives me so much energy (yeah yeah) yeah.	1	Lack of socialising on course	I was quite excited about starting the course really and meeting new people and likeminded people. (Hmm) Because the job before I was ready, it was time to leave, I knew that I was I'd done my time to leave (yeah). So I was quite excited about it, urm and I think it felt quite easy I suppose being back in the university environment (hmm) in some ways. But then I I I don't know, it wasn't quite like being undergrad (yeah). There's more sort of social life around it and I think it took a while to become friends with people (hmm) or I latched on quite quickly (hmm) and became quite close to some people but not others (hmm) urm	2	Eye-opening personal therapy	the way you relate to people, just being more aware of that (hmm) and any, at any time when difficulties arise to be able to just... speak to someone without always getting advice back, you know, which might not always be helpful (yeah) it's just seeing it from the other person's point of view, but just to see it from a different perspective yourself (yeah), through personal therapy (yeah), that's been really... eye opening	1	Overwhelming/stretching bound
3	Time to heal	I don't know "laughs" urm well I think the most negative experience was the break up there (hmm) that experience of adjusting of the because it took me it wasn't just a break up it took me about 2 years to recover (right right) and urm yeah failing some coursework was you know a bit devastating but (hmm) yeah.	2	Starting all over again	I mean it felt a bit like that and just urm just people not knowing me. Whereas (yeah) I could totally be myself where I was and I built up the friendships and that (yeah). It was like starting all over again (yeah) with people that didn't know me (yeah).		Personal therapy provided toolbox	it's, kind of like... giving you your own toolbox in a way, urm to just be able to take more authority in your own life (hmm) rather than being kind of guided (yeah) by other people in a way (yeah) even though personal therapy does guide you (yeah) but in a different kind of way	2	Prioritise course
4	Change course due to breakup	So urm the break up happened towards the end of the first year (okay) and then that just brought me right down in to a deep hole and urm so I decided to to do to second year part time so from the second year over 2 years (yeah) and urm yeah now I'm back to full time		Not self on course	I'm quite a sociable person, I can get on with anybody (hmm) but I suppose in that environment where you don't see each other often enough and it's just very sporadic (hmm), it takes a much longer time yeah to to have that. So I did ... not lo I didn't lose my	3	Course promoted vulnerability	so the experiential learning group. Urm... that's been a really different thing as well, because that's really enabled me to see how I do... err present myself in a group. So, in terms of, in social settings (yeah) you know, with a new group, I'm quite		Stressful transition

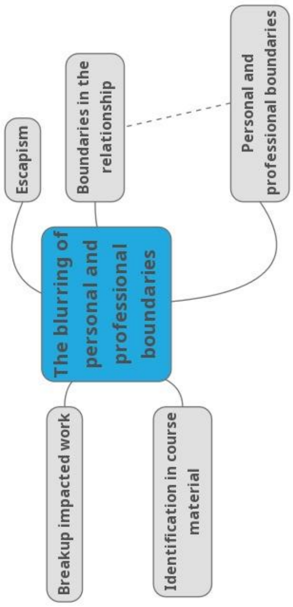
Appendix 9: Thematic map 1


Coping after the break-up
Free self
Escapism
The break-up experience
Break-up impacted work
Course replacement partner
Personal therapy
Silver-lining/No regrets
Professional development after break-up
Aided client work
Personal development after break-up
New relationships
Relationships with others (filtered/ strengthened)
Different to partner
Isolated experience
Wanting partner to change
Supportive course
Encouraging course
Course impacted relationship
intense course
Blame
Identification in course material
Changed as a result of the course
Gut instinct
Changed quickly on course
Re-framing priorities
Relationship interfered with course
Relationship supported course
Personal and Professional "selves"
Boundaries in the relationship
Personal and Professional Boundaries

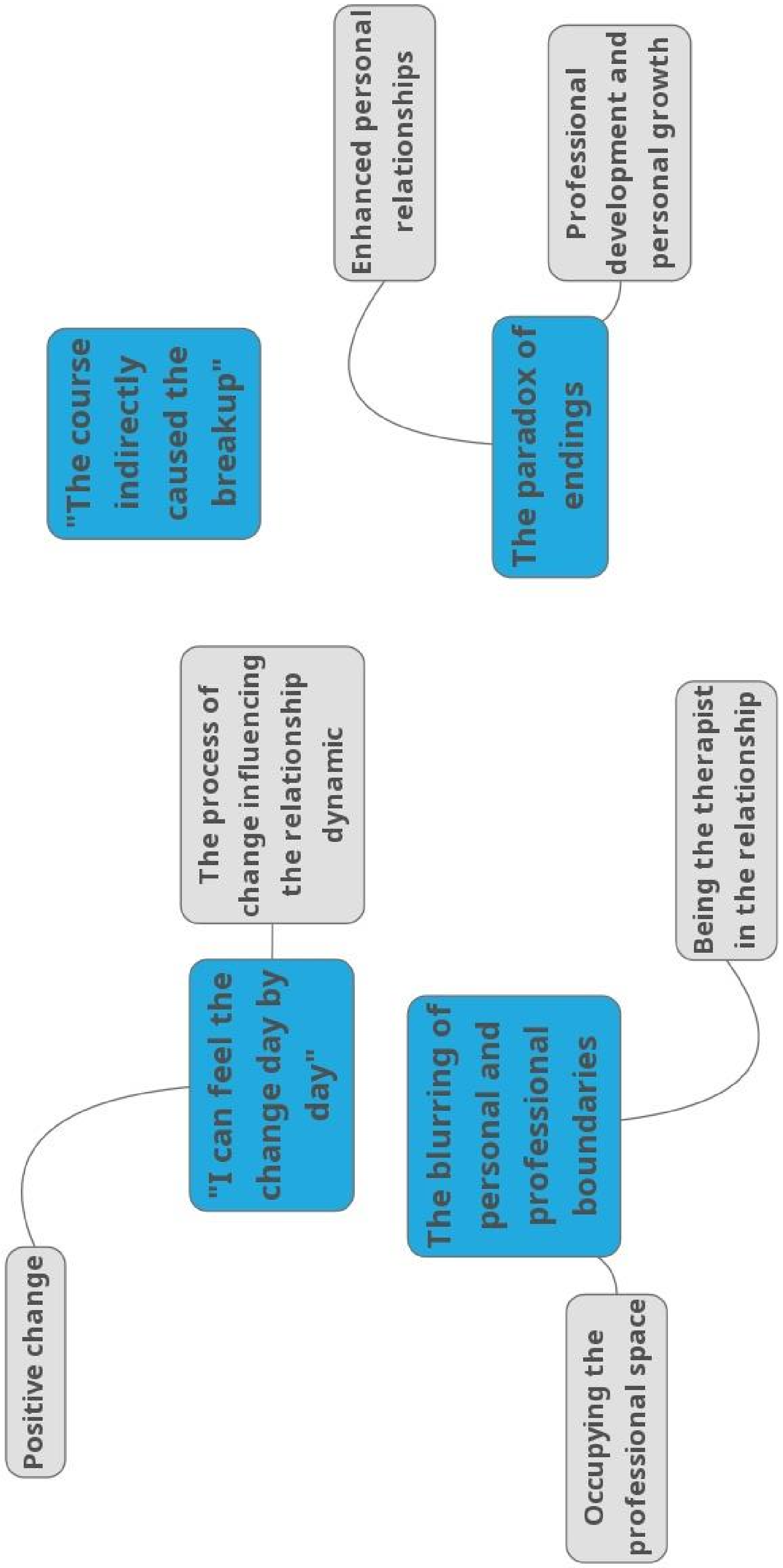
Appendix 10: Thematic map 2


Impact of the course on the relationship
Transformational change on the course
Intense course
Personal therapy
Re-framing priorities
Isolated changes in the relationship
Different to partner/ wanting partner to change

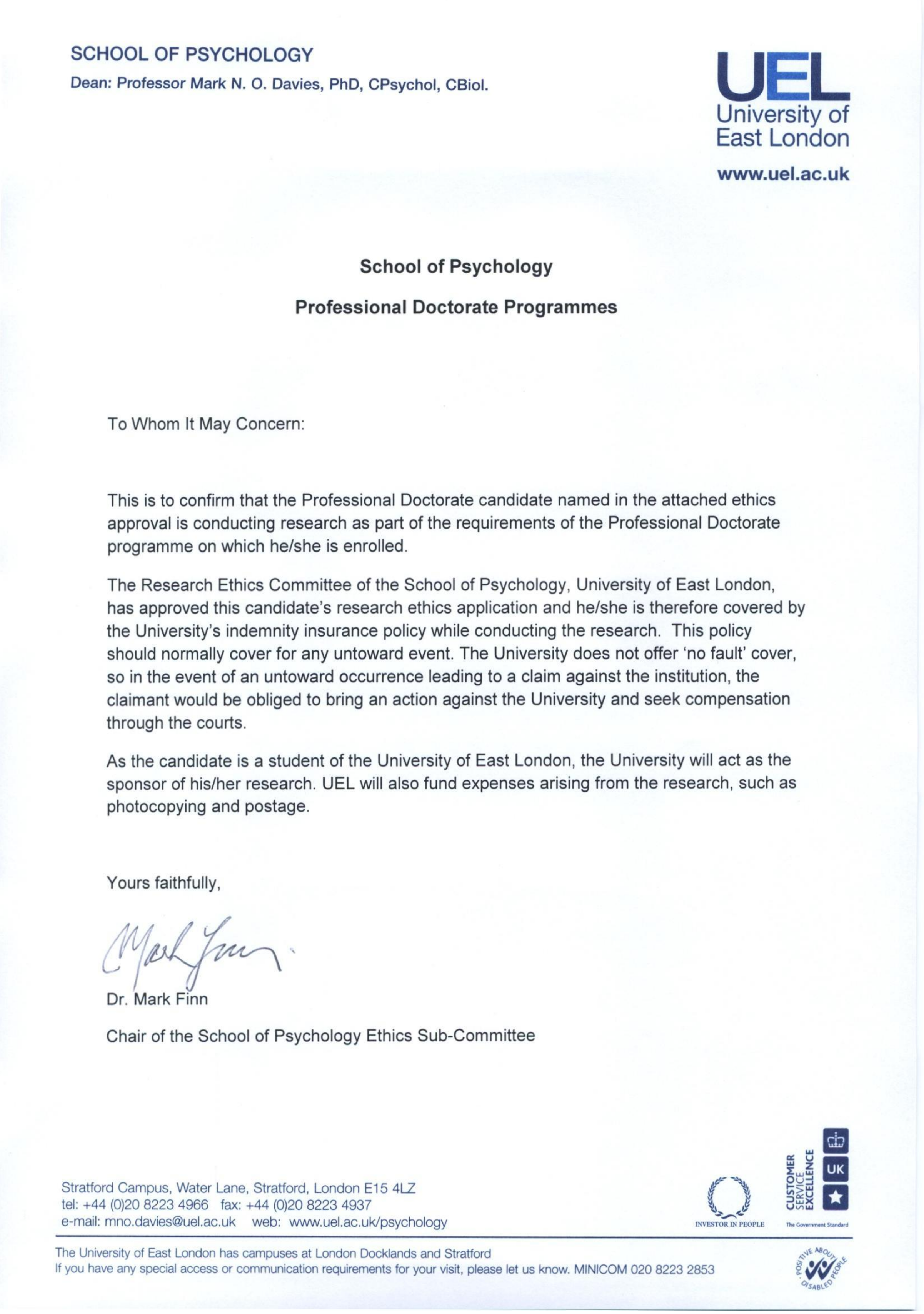

Self-development
Filtered relationships
New relationships
Personal Development
Professional development
Aided client work


The blurring of personal and professional boundaries
Breakup impacted work
Identification in course material
Escapism
Boundaries in the relationship
Personal and professional boundaries

Appendix 11: Final thematic map


"The course indirectly caused the breakup"
The paradox of endings
Enhanced personal relationships
Professional development and personal growth
"I can feel the change day by day"
Positive change
The process of change influencing the relationship dynamic
The blurring of personal and professional boundaries
Occupying the professional space
Being the therapist in the relationship

Appendix 12: Ethical Approval



SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.

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

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The Government Standard

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

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE

ETHICAL PRACTICE CHECKLIST (Professional Doctorates)

SUPERVISOR: Edith Steffen **ASSESSOR:** Dori Yusef

STUDENT: Richa Basra **DATE (sent to assessor):** 05/06/2014

Proposed research topic: “The Break-Up Course”: Trainees' experience of the break-up of their own intimate partner relationship in the wake of starting counselling psychology training.

Course: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

1. Will free and informed consent of participants be obtained? **YES** / NO
2. If there is any deception is it justified? YES / NO / **N/A**
3. Will information obtained remain confidential? **YES** / NO
4. Will participants be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time? **YES** / NO
5. Will participants be adequately debriefed? **YES** / NO
6. If this study involves observation does it respect participants’ privacy? YES / NO / **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? YES / NO / **NA**
8. Is procedure that might cause distress to participants ethical? YES / NO / **NA**
9. If there are inducements to take part in the project is this ethical? YES / NO / **NA**
10. If there are any other ethical issues involved, are they a problem? YES / NO / **NA**

APPROVED

YES	YES, PENDING MINOR CONDITIONS	NO

MINOR CONDITIONS:

REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:

Assessor initials: Dr. Dori Yusef Date: 10the June 2014

RESEARCHER RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST (BSc/MSc/MA)

SUPERVISOR: Edith Steffen **ASSESSOR:** Dori Yusef

STUDENT: Richa Basra **DATE (sent to assessor):** 05/06/2014

Proposed research topic: “The Break-Up Course”: Trainees' experience of the break-up of their own intimate partner relationship in the wake of starting counselling psychology training.

Course: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Would the proposed project expose the researcher to any of the following kinds of hazard?

1 Emotional **YES** / NO

2. Physical YES / **NO**

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

If you’ve answered YES to any of the above please estimate the chance of the researcher being harmed as: HIGH / MED **/ LOW**

APPROVED

YES	YES, PENDING MINOR CONDITIONS	NO

MINOR CONDITIONS:

REASONS FOR NON APPROVAL:

Assessor initials: **Dr. Dori Yusef** Date: 10th June 2014

For the attention of the assessor: Please return the completed checklists by e-mail to ethics.applications@uel.ac.uk within 1 week.

Appendix 13: Demographics Form

Demographic Information

This information is collected to obtain an accurate description of the participant sample group. This information will not be used in conjunction with your interview response and will remain confidential. Please fill in the blank and tick as appropriate.

Age: ………

Gender: ………

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background:
White
1. English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British ☐
2. Irish ☐
3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller ☐
4. Any other White background, please describe………………………………………………………………………………
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
5. White and Black Caribbean ☐
6. White and Black African ☐
7. White and Asian ☐
8. Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe……………………………………………………………
Asian/Asian British
9. Indian ☐
10. Pakistani ☐
11. Bangladeshi ☐
12. Chinese ☐
13. Any other Asian background, please describe………………………………………………………………………………
Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British
14. African ☐
15. Caribbean ☐
16. Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe……………………………………………………
Other ethnic group
17. Arab ☐
18. Any other ethnic group, please describe…………………………………………………………………………………

What university do you attend?
……

What year are you in?……………………………………………………………………………………………………
Is the course:
Full-time ☐
Part-time ☐

Thank you.

Appendix 14: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

“The Break-Up Course”: Trainees' experience of the break-up of their own intimate partner relationship in the wake of starting counselling psychology training.

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw after the analysis has begun, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.

Participant’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Participant’s Signature

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Researcher’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Researcher’s Signature

……………………………………………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………

Appendix 15: Debrief Sheet

Debriefing Sheet

Thank you for taking part in this study.

If you feel uncomfortable or are in any distress as a result of your participation, I would like to advise you to contact the study's supervisor Haneyeh Belyani (Tel: 0208 223 4425. Email: h.belyani@uel.ac.uk)

If any issues have been raised for you by taking part in the research that you would like to have help with, please consult the list below. Alternatively, please get in touch with your personal therapist.

Support Organisations:

Relate
www.relate.org.uk
Tel: 0300 100 1234
Relationship counselling for individuals and couples.

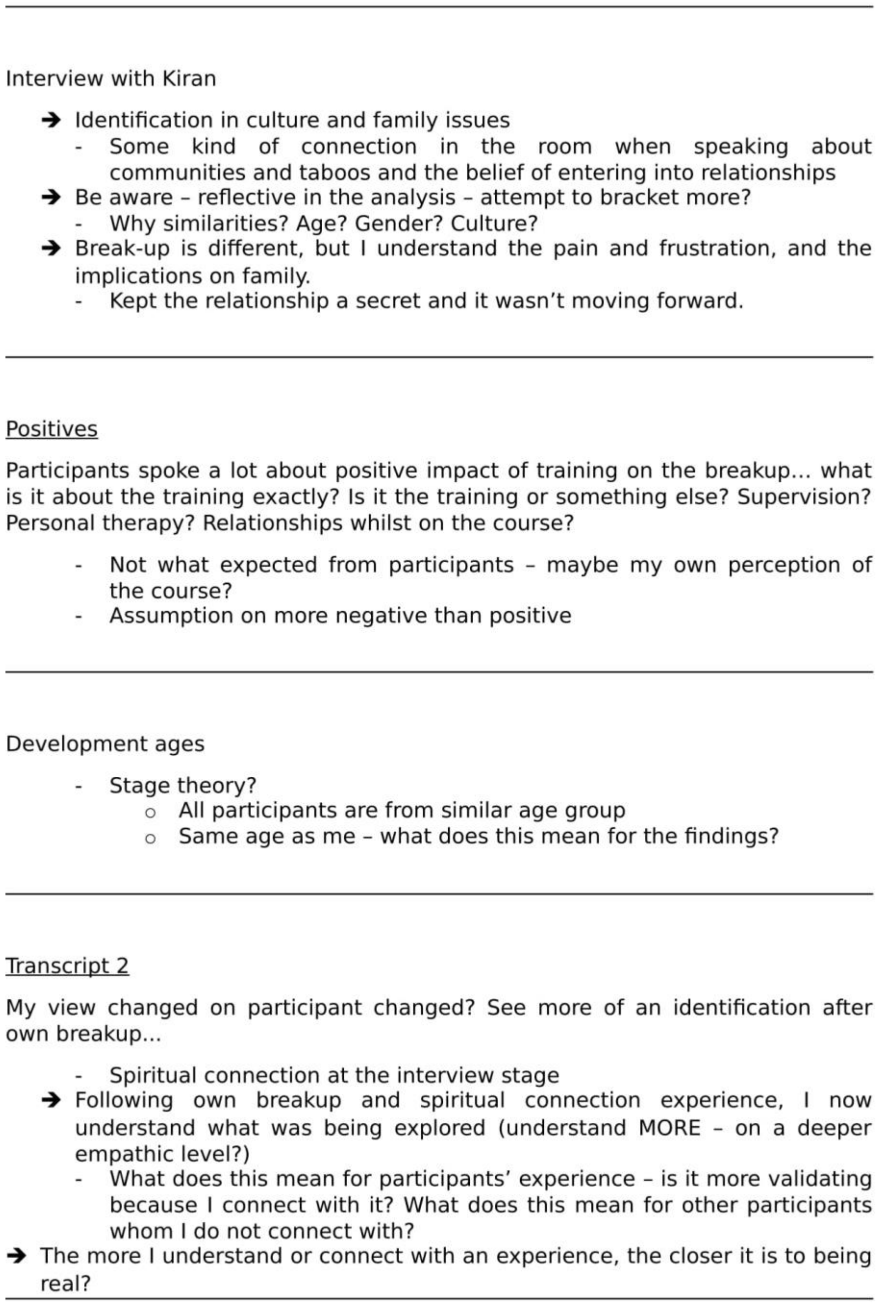
Samaritans
Tel: 0845 790 90 90
Helpline for people in distress.

The British Psychological Society
www.bps.org.uk
Tel: 0116 254 9568
E-mail: enquires@bps.org.uk

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists
www.psycholotherapy.org.uk
Tel: 0207 014 9955
E-mail: info@psychotherapy.org.uk

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
www.bacp.co.uk
Tel: 01455 883300
E-mail: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Appendix 16: Extracts from Reflexive Journal



Interview with Kiran

- ➔ Identification in culture and family issues
  - Some kind of connection in the room when speaking about communities and taboos and the belief of entering into relationships
- ➔ Be aware – reflective in the analysis – attempt to bracket more?
  - Why similarities? Age? Gender? Culture?
- ➔ Break-up is different, but I understand the pain and frustration, and the implications on family.
  - Kept the relationship a secret and it wasn't moving forward.

Positives

Participants spoke a lot about positive impact of training on the breakup… what is it about the training exactly? Is it the training or something else? Supervision? Personal therapy? Relationships whilst on the course?

- Not what expected from participants – maybe my own perception of the course?
- Assumption on more negative than positive

Development ages

- Stage theory?
  - o All participants are from similar age group
  - o Same age as me – what does this mean for the findings?

Transcript 2

My view changed on participant changed? See more of an identification after own breakup…

- Spiritual connection at the interview stage
- ➔ Following own breakup and spiritual connection experience, I now understand what was being explored (understand MORE – on a deeper empathic level?)
  - What does this mean for participants' experience – is it more validating because I connect with it? What does this mean for other participants whom I do not connect with?

➔ The more I understand or connect with an experience, the closer it is to being real?

Appendix 17: Recruitment Flyer

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

Are you on the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology?

Have you experienced a break-up in your intimate partner relationship as a result of being on the course?

We are looking for participants to take part in a research project that aims to gain insight into trainees' personal experiences and understandings of intimate partner relationship break-down in the light of having embarked on a training course with a relational philosophy such as counselling psychology.

Would you be willing to participate?

Eligibility

- You will need to be on a Doctoral course in Counselling Psychology
- You must have experienced an intimate partner relationship break-down whilst on the course
- There must be some reasonable belief that the course has influenced this break-up

Your willingness to participate will be greatly appreciated!

For more information on the study, please contact Richa Basra at U1216587@uel.ac.uk

Richa Basra
u1216587@uel.ac.uk

Richa Basra
u1216587@uel.ac.uk

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u1216587@uel.ac.uk

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u1216587@uel.ac.uk

Richa Basra
u1216587@uel.ac.uk

Richa Basra
u1216587@uel.ac.uk

Appendix 18: Transcript Extract

19Transcript 7 - Justina

only thing that kind of kept me going was that I (hmm) just got so much satisfaction from working with clients (hmm) that urm, yeah, that was like my only enjoyment at that moment in time.

Interviewer: Hmm hmm hmm. What what kind of happened when you were working with these clients? I mean, did it kind of help you forget about what was going on, or what what was, what did that, how did that kind of help you kind of get through this time?

Participant: Yeah, yeah it was. It was like l l l, when I was, when I wasn't with clients, I was thinking about the course and my job, finances (okay), urm my partner, all of those things was just constantly on my mind (hmm). So then the moment that a client walked into the room and the door closed for those 50 minutes, it was about them (right). It wasn't about me (right), so it was a little bit of a form of escapism in some way (hmm hmm), I suppose. And it was just nice to put my my stuff to the side (hmm), urm but to be aware that it was still kind of lurking in the background and that it could pop up at any moment if I identified with something that a client said (yeah yeah). Urm *clears throat* but really, just kind of putting my stuff to the side and and and focusing on the client (hmm), and I think I really do feel that that's kind of what got me through.

Interviewer: Okay okay. Were there any moments with clients that you felt as though, you know there was some kind of, like, projective identification going on or something kind of going up in the room that kind of brought up emotions or brought something up for you? Did anything like that happen at all or?

Participant: Yeah, uh huh there was, I was working with a client who was also re-evaluating their relationship with their partner (right), and I suppose I was kind of identifying with with some of the things they were saying, and urm I had to be careful, you know, not to put my own stuff onto onto them, you know, and I had, I felt that I had to be a little bit more guarded about it, because I had quite a bitter sense (hmm) urm of of of my relationship at that moment, so *laughs*you know, if I was kind of summarising or or saying anything, I had to be really careful that I wasn't using what I identified and popping (right) it into kind of the summary (right) urm. And that was a little bit tricky. I used supervision to talk about that, though, urm because I I found, yeah, there was times when I thought, " Mmm is this my stuff or is it theirs?" (hmm) urm. *clears throat* So yeah, there was there was a one client urm where I where I could identify with what they were going through.

Interviewer: Hmm hmm and supervision was quite helpful on working with that client, because you were able to kind of help, well, you were able to kind of help manage, you know, whether it's your feelings or whether it's the client's feelings and -

Participant: Yeah, definitely urm. With my supervisor, we had a really good relationship because urm when I did break up with urm my partner, urm and I suppose this what what I was saying earlier on about being vulnerable, I actually started to cry in supervision (hmm), and we had a err err talk about it and I thought, "God, this isn't supervision, this is therapy. And she said, "You know what, no, this is part of supervision because it sounds as though that this is really impacting on your professional (hmm) life as well, you know, so let's talk about it." And that was really helpful, so it made me a lot more vulnerable (hmm), it made me urm come out of my professional mode and then it helped for later on when I'm I was working with that client to be able to talk about it, and for my supervisor to already know (yeah) what I was going through (yeah) prior to meeting with that client, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So it sounds as thought kind of like working one-to-one with clients, like the practical clinical side, that was actually, I mean, you mentioned it was almost like a form of form of escapism urm (yeah) but that was something that you were able to kind of address, and you were quite happy with that. It was just urm the other parts of the course, such as like assignments, kind of going to lectures, that was a bit more difficult because you couldn't separate the thoughts, I guess, or -

Participant: No, I couldn't separate the thoughts (yeah). I would often be sitting in class daydreaming *laughs* (yeah) about the relationship and (yeah) all those kind of things (hmm). So and I suppose with clients as well, you know, that's my main passion, to work with clients (hmm), and that's what, that's what I was doing the course for (yeah). It's not about academic grades or anything like that. It's about working with people (hmm). So urm it was the only thing at that moment in time that was giving me enjoyment (yeah) and the motivation to kind of get up and go (yeah) somewhere.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. That was like your will to move forward?

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, okay. Urm, kind of sticking with that a bit more, urm so you found it quite difficult kind of like being in lectures and urm, cos you'd kind of find yourself daydreaming and stuff. How did you kind of eventually manage that?

Participant: Urm, in terms of, say…?

Interviewer: Urm, in terms of kind of like how or when do you remember that it wasn't such an issue for you or you weren't struggling any more, you were able to kind of sit in those lectures and go back to your normal kind of concentration levels, or you were able to kind of focus a bit more. I mean, how did you kind of manage that? Did you speak to lecturers or did you go to personal therapy? I mean, what what, were you kind of doing to kind of help yourself, take care of yourself at that time?

Participant: Yeah, I suppose the the personal therapy helped a lot (hmm), you know. I spoke a lot about my relationship in personal therapy. Urm, I cried *laughs* a lot in personal therapy (hmm) as well. You know, I haven't cried so much (hmm), urm you know, on the course. Urm so yeah, really, really working with my therapist (right) helped a lot. I don't really think I spoke about my relationships with urm my peers on the course (okay). That wasn't really something I did, urm but so it was mainly personal therapy, urm supervision at times, and but mostly it was with urm my mum and my friends urm that I spoke to mostly (hmm). I was able to