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Person-centred research supervision

Facilitating encounter with researchers and enquiry

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Person-centred research supervision: Facilitating encounter with researchers and enquiry

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Abstract

Aims: Drawing upon Schmid's invitation to develop congruence in practice, training and research within the person-centred approach, this study presents a theoretical model for counselling and psychotherapy research supervision. This is contextualised through the author's early-career academic experiences, particularly a lack of training, literature or guidance in pedagogical frameworks underpinning research supervision for psychotherapists.

Method: This study conceptualises research supervision using person-centred theories, in line with critical realist methodologies. Two case studies are presented in which person-centred research supervision model is implemented.

Findings: Themes emerged that corroborated the person-centred research supervision model proposed and its underpinning literature, which had growthful and challenging dimensions. This highlighted the aspects of vulnerability in supervisory relationships, abdicating expertise as research supervisor and integral congruence between researcher and research project.

Conclusion: These findings indicate there is merit in further research being conducted evaluating this person-centred research supervision model, in order to further develop or challenge its efficacy in practice.

KEYWORDS
encounter, pedagogy, person-centred approach, psychotherapy, qualitative research, research supervision

Research supervision in the subject area of counselling and psychotherapy is a nebulous and ill-defined practice. The generation of this special issue, if nothing else, corroborates that my perception, that there is a dearth of theoretical or practical understandings of how to facilitate the research efforts of students and trainees coming into the counselling profession, is shared amongst my colleagues. It is my view that if no guidance is offered from those who have come before, I believe it worthwhile to strive towards formulating working theories for myself, with hope that

knowledge gleaned through that process can be shared through dialogue and collaboration. Such conceptualisation, tested in application, is necessary for the development of praxis; I believe research supervisors are and will continue to be hamstrung in their facilitative capacities without a theoretical framework to engage with. Furthermore, if we do not generate practice models that are congruent with our foundational psychotherapeutic theories, in my case the person-centred approach, we risk un-aligning our work as practitioners from our work as researchers. Schmid (2003,

p. 117) posed a challenge to elaborate more congruent theory and philosophy within person-centred work, which I undertake now as I have done previously (Hauser, 2023); unifying our teaching relationships with our psychotherapeutic theories is part of the project of developing a more congruent way of being person-centred practitioners.

This article will reflect on my experience of lack of training and resources for delivering research supervision in counselling and psychotherapy. I undertook conceptualising research supervision through the person-centred approach because of a lack of guidance, both in terms of training offered through working in higher education institutions and from resources in the literature. I argue that knowledge generation is a way of living; I model this in my work too, by sharing my lived, primary experience of the disabling nature of lacking training or guidance, and how it helped to generate the subsequently detailed theory. In doing so, I must highlight absences or systematic issues that have necessitated undertaking conceptual process, despite my rather limited experience as a research supervisor. I view this as an extension of Rogers' (1961) curious paradox, which identifies the route to becoming different is through acceptance of how one is now. Likewise, we as academics must consider the experiences of those undertaking the supervisory role and supporting training materials as they are, including inadequacies, if we are to foster growth in our ability to theorise and deliver research supervision.

After considering the experiences of support through training, literature review and colleagial consultation, I reflect a conceptualisation of person-centred research supervision developed for my own work, based primarily on a person-centred conceptualisation of learning rooted in Rogers' (1961) *On Becoming a Person* and Schmid's (2003, 2019) ideas of the encounter position and qualities of person-centred presence (2003). I consider two research supervision relationship cases in which I applied this model, before reflecting on arising themes and how we might further elaborate on this theory.

1 | NECESSITATING A MODEL: EXPERIENCING GAPS IN GUIDANCE AND LITERATURE

While absences or inconsistency in training or support for research supervision is a consistent theme in the literature (Lee, 2008; Melin Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Pearson & Brew, 2002; Qureshi & Vazir, 2016), especially in the counselling and psychotherapy subject areas (Bager-Charleson et al., 2023), I think it important to highlight what exactly this can look like in the higher educational setting. It can be isolating, frustrating and bewildering to seek support and help to try to find answers, and ultimately end up somewhat empty-handed, especially in a practice that is long-established as essential to the endeavour of undertaking research for a post-graduate degree. The subjective experience of working in these environments, if a person-centred understanding of research as I will later propose

Implications for Practice and Policy

- This study offers a tentative theory for how person-centred psychotherapists might practice research supervision with students in counselling and psychotherapy subject areas.
- The presented theory provides a clear relational means by which to conceptualise and facilitate the process of research supervisees becoming researchers, congruent with person-centred theory.
- This research considers cases in which this model was applied, inspecting themes arising and their implications for research supervision, as well as highlighting areas for further research to be conducted relative to the proposed model.
- This article highlights inadequacies in the provision of research supervision training in higher education institutions and the need for training outlining pedagogical and relational aspects of research supervision. In doing so, this article provides theoretical material that might help guide training of new academic staff in counselling and psychotherapy subject areas.

is to be accepted, will naturally be implicated into the work that we, and by extension our students, create, as well as have a palpable impact on the sustainability of such work. Tending and honouring these experiences allows a contextual understanding of research generated (as later case studies will evidence too), but I hope will also allow for routes of critical engagement from colleagues and invite them to evaluate my theory from their experiential lenses too.

Ultimately, in sharing these experiences, I seek to own that I would not have created this model if there was clear framing for how to conduct research supervision in the counselling and psychotherapy subject areas; the absence necessitated that I independently theorise my approach to this relationship, and it was fortunate that this frustration could be channelled productively. I believe others, with greater wealth of experience and perspective in counselling and psychotherapy research relationships, are likely better suited to improving and articulating such theories—but I did what I could with what I have of perception, feeling, understanding and effort. However, I imagine other new starts may not feel similarly able to work in such a manner; the absence of support structures likely impacts their ability to continue in advancing research in our field and supporting their supervisees in completing their immensely valuable projects. In the course of generating research, we often speak of the gaps that are present in a field—but the experience of encountering such a gap feels fundamentally different and more urgent when the knowledge absent is requisite for the execution of basic instructional responsibilities that we have with our students. In this sense, I hope not just to fill a gap in theory by proposing my own but to offer some experiential sense

of how it is for early-career researchers when they encounter such gaps in research while working in counselling and psychotherapy educational institutions. In doing so, I hope the impetus becomes clear for more of our colleagues to engage critically and offer their own effort and experience in elaborating this essential part of generating research knowledge.

1.1 | Professional training for research supervision

The training offered by my university focusses on employment-based practicality. Consisting of one compulsory session attended before offering doctoral research supervision and renewed every 5 years, it outlines evaluation check points and allocated work hours for supervisory relationships. I was not informed of this training before starting with supervisees; I only discovered its existence in the second year of my contract, indicating attendance is likely not meaningfully audited. This training is requisite for doctoral supervisors, but those supervising master's level research work do not have required courses for research supervision.

The training's emphasis was to ensure any risk of non-completion was flagged as early as possible, that contact time was offered within provisioned workload allocations and to clarify structural processes for auditing of supervisees, such as annual reviews. There was no information regarding the quality of the relationship, or pedagogical underpinning of research supervision.

Certainly, institutional boundaries are useful to be aware of, but the training avoided the substance of research supervision. This felt inadequate; I imagined how unprepared students might feel on our programmes if we described the counselling relationship only using factual features of the therapeutic arrangement within a specific context (e.g. a weekly frequency, 50-min session and cancellation policies), without any mention of relational qualities that facilitate personal growth. Dissatisfied, I asked for an explanation of pedagogy or relational aspects of research supervision and was informed that it would not be covered in trainings. Some technical aspects of supervisory tasks, which might belie the nature of my role (e.g. 'How much research should I be doing on a supervisee's research area if I do not already have expertise in that subject/methodology?'), also were not meaningfully engaged with. Finally, when I asked for the literature resources, I was further disappointed by vague suggestions (no specific authors, books, etc.), which were not related to counselling and psychotherapy.

1.2 | Consulting colleagues' perspectives

Subsequently, I turned to colleagues for support. This enquiry also, unfortunately, yielded limited results. When asked about their supervision approach, discussions with staff tended towards past difficulties or departmental dynamics. Most challenges reported involved differences between the supervisor's research experience and the supervisee's research paradigm. Two colleagues shared

online training modules (these covered similar content to the training course). Many colleagues scavenged and repurposed past positive experiences of research supervision in new relationships, but there was not great consistency in what was positive in their model relationships. The best piece of guidance was from a senior colleague who, after cajoling him into discussing the matter over a drink at his local, summed up after sharing some experiences: 'Well, research supervision really is just facilitating someone. You're a therapist, so – you'll be fine at that'.

While the reflection was not detailed (and perhaps was intended to be partly flippant), it was a starting point to consider how one could *be* a research supervisor. Unlike the operational model presented by the professional training focussing on thesis completion, this comment implied a way of being with research supervisees and a theory base I could look to conceptualise this process—the person-centred approach.

1.3 | Reviewing the literature

After this, I researched the appropriateness of applying person-centred theory to research supervision. Here, I found more purchase for defining the research supervision relationship. I was relieved that some scholarly work had been made on research supervision—however, it mainly was outcome-focussed, practically oriented or lacked theoretical underpinning.

The pedagogical role of the supervisor as striving to increase knowledge, competence or practical skill in the supervisee was consistent amongst sources (Melin Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Pearson & Brew, 2002). The learning for supervisees is greater than technique or factual knowledge and includes how one meets gaps in knowledge bases as an independent scholar (Pearson & Brew, 2002, p. 139–140). Melin Emilsson and Johnsson (2007) acknowledge two approaches to the enterprise—problem-solving and processual-relational—establishing precedent for applying psychotherapeutic theory to research supervision. Lee (2008, 2018) elaborated on this further in what they call five 'approaches' to research supervision, including functional, enculturating, critical thinking, emancipatory and relational. I found Lee's work useful in considering potential characteristics of research supervision, but somewhat unsatisfying in addressing these aspects' necessity, interrelations or priority. Research supervision is often regarded as complexly multifaceted, with Qureshi and Vazir ascribing the qualities of 'instructor, mentor, coach, advisor and councillor amongst others' (2016, p. 96).

A recurrent theme in the literature is the significance of the quality of relationship between research supervisor and supervisee. Ives and Rowley (2005) in their study found this to be a higher priority amongst students than expertise in a particular topic or methodology. Relational breakdowns, whether regarding research conceptualisation (Brew, 2001) or interpersonal connection (Salmon, 1992; Taylor & Beasley, 2005), were associated with negative student experiences and poor completion rates. Relational alignment and

connection are associated with positive outcomes in research supervision, though *how* that happens is not described often. Based on these conclusions, I felt it appropriate to explore a person-centred relational theoretical approach to research supervision.

2 | TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL THEORY OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION

I have argued previously (Hauser, 2023) critical realism's applicability to person-centred practice, training and research; likewise, I formulate this research effort from a critical realist ontological and epistemological positioning. Critical realism holds foundational tenets of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality; this is held together coherently through an understanding of 'truth' being distinct and separate from 'knowledge'. Applying this to social science requires a conceptualisation of critical naturalism, maintaining an understanding of social interaction as an open, ever-changing system that still has intransitive, transfactual characteristics made compatible with individual experience through stratified ontological realms of Real, Actual and Empirical existence (Hauser, 2023, p. 9). This research effort, therefore, strives to generate knowledge that might get closer to describing or uncovering transfactual relational processes which may be at play in research supervision relationships, to ultimately be supported or challenged by further research and dialogic evaluation.

Weizenegger (2023) reflects that there are no methods of knowledge generation which are inherent to the critical realism. Nevertheless, critical realism epistemically implies that 'Coherent methods for critical realism must accommodate the use of pre-existing theory. This is because it is not within the empirical data that we search for mechanisms, but, rather, within the ontological depths of the Real' (Weizenegger, 2023, p. 65). I agree with this view; I do not believe coherent and effective approaches to research supervision will arise by simply getting in the room with supervisees, unbound by theoretical positioning. Instead, I tentatively conceptualised research supervision first, taking up Schmid's (2003, p. 117) 'ongoing challenge' to explicate theories congruent with the person-centred approach, expecting re-evaluation from the experiences of relational encounters.

2.1 | Methodology: Conceptualisation and case study

Frauley (2017) expounded on the suitability and significance of conceptualisation in a critical realist framework:

> Conceptualisation is an important yet neglected methodological procedure within explanatory social science … Metatheories and metatheorising have a clarifying role for practice, whether this practice concerns the construction of analytic concepts and explanations, the scrutiny of data, or the practice of sociology more generally.
>
> (p. 301)

I contend that this utility applies to developing practices within counselling and psychotherapy as in sociology.

Developing theory for pedagogical approaches to counselling and psychotherapy is essential for enacting effective and robust practice. My impression is that research supervision has not been well-theorised in our subject area—and recent research corroborates this (Bager-Charleson et al., 2023). If my academic milieu is at all representative, which does seem supported by the literature (Lee, 2008; Pearson & Brew, 2002; Qureshi & Vazir, 2016), common supervisory practice is largely developed based on personal experience of research supervision. In explicating the need to challenge the so-called common-sense solutions, Collier (1994, p. 15) insists conceptual efforts create in-routes for theoretical critique and development within practice. Pearson and Brew (2002, p. 146) similarly remark that, 'What is important, however, is not simply reflecting on past practice, but reflecting critically in the light of research evidence and theoretical frameworks derived from a knowledge of literature on supervision'. This evidences the importance of presenting even a tentative theoretical basis for approaching research supervision. I accept such an attempt is inevitably prospective, and redevelopment will be necessary based on reflexively engaging with my supervisory experiences in conjunction with the research supervision literature. I present two such experiences as case studies to that end in this article.

Admittedly, this approach is not as methodologically developed as I would have liked. This theoretical effort was never intended as a formal research effort but a means of seeking to converge practice and theory applicably to get me through my teaching fellowship's beginning. Lofty hopes of detailing this for developing praxis in research supervision for counselling professionals was nowhere in mind; I ask the reader to forgive the rough research design given the circumstances.

While conceptualisation was opportunistically motivated rather than stemming from optimal design, using case studies to evidence this conceptualisation was more strategic. Case studies are established as a means of generating knowledge and testing theoretical statements. Flyvbjerg (2001) notes that case studies, when contextually chosen for their critical, illustrative nature, can depict the complex nature of reality, in all its ambiguity, beyond what more general or randomised methods can. Their use in evidencing and formulating theory is evident from history—from Galileo to Marx. They also serve as an excellent means of falsifying hypotheses or theories, as described by Karl Popper. Flyvbjerg notes falsifications rigour, that, 'if just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 76–77). These qualities make case studies a serviceable method of engaging with a theoretical proposition regarding research supervision for psychotherapeutic disciplines.

Some alternatives were entertained for acquiring and analysing experiences of research supervision. Most notable of these would be the option of interviewing the research supervisees, and analysing transcript material in relation to the proposed person-centred research supervision model. I dismissed this option for the time being, however, as I felt more attention needed to be drawn to the supervisor's experience in relation to implementing the model, with an understanding that supervisee experiences could potentially be engaged with at greater depth in future research. Other methods of data generation through self-experience, such as autoethnography, are less desirable as such methodologies often entwine the act of storying self-experience with a potential for accessing constructed, culturally entangled truth; this, and similar constructivist self-research approaches, is difficult to integrate with critical realism's separation between truth and experience epitomised by Bhaskar's (1998, p. 27) 'epistemic fallacy'. As a result, I settled on incorporating my experience of selected research supervision cases evidenced by concrete communication (such as emails) where possible, reviewed and approved by the participants. These case studies are presented with an understanding that conclusions drawn from them are tentative and limited in what knowledge claims they can generate, but I hope it can be a starting point for further research to carry on acquiring more supporting, challenging or confounding evidence from different perspectives or methodological approaches.

2.2 | Conceptualising person-centred research supervision

Generating a working conceptualisation of research supervision for counsellors and psychotherapists was a practical effort, and, in the interests of evaluating research design, it is essential I outline my process for how I implemented this method in this study. Precision relative to absolute truth was less important than congruence with my approach as a person-centred practitioner. This prioritisation is reflective of my critical realist position; getting access to truth directly is impossible in this model, so my conceptual efforts must instead stem from what knowledge I do have feasible access to. I imagined this process as creating a 'conceptual-jig'. A jig, in trade work, is an improvised device designed for a particular tool-based job, which increases the accuracy or speed of a tool application relative to a controlled/fixed frame of reference. While creating and using a jig does not guarantee accuracy to the specification of the task, it does guarantee consistency in how it is executed. For example, making a jig can allow one to easily drive a nail at equidistant 16-inch intervals along a wall—but does not guarantee that there is, in fact, a stud present every 16 inches behind that wall. In other words, I am aware that I cannot be certain the applicability of person-centred theory to the research supervision relationship is accurate from conceptual process alone; my hope is that presented case studies and future research can critically evaluate through other means whether I have, indeed, driven the proverbial nail through the stud.

The known frame of reference in my conceptual-jig is the founding theories of the person-centred approach. I extend these theories to the research supervision relationship, based on four main underpinnings: (1) Researching is but another way of being a person, using Rogers' (1961) work; (2) researching, as a way of being, necessarily includes encounter, as described by Schmid (2003, 2019), if it is knowledge-generative; (3) the role of the research supervisor, therefore, is to facilitate the supervisee's capacity for encounter with their research; and (4) this facilitation can only be achieved through the genuine, empathic, unconditionally positively regarding relationship (Rogers, 2007) between supervisor with supervisee, with the quality of presence Schmid's (2003) work describes. I explain each of these propositions presently.

2.2.1 | Researching is a way of being

This proposition is, fortunately, easy to justify using the person-centred literature I had on hand while exploring critical realism's application to person-centred psychotherapy (Hauser, 2023). Rogers (1961) formulated in *On Becoming a Person* what he called a 'New Integration' of science and experience. Rogers (1961, p. 223) states that 'Science is not an impersonal something, but simply a person living subjectively another phase of himself'. Given how Rogers interrogates 'science' as a concept and process, it is difficult to contest that this term would include the practice of research. Researching, therefore, is a way of being.

2.2.2 | Researching necessarily involves encounter

Mason remarks, 'Qualitative researchers should be intrigued by the world they are investigating; they should be fascinated, puzzled and enquiring about it. No qualitative researcher should feel they know the answer already and are simply conducting research in order to gain evidence to substantiate it' (Mason, 2018, p. 10). I wholeheartedly agree; research is about meeting the unknown when done in good faith. Research involves asking questions in which, at the outset of the project, there is not or cannot be a discernible answer. It demands *genuine* wondering by reaching towards uncertainty's threshold with irrevocable ignorance of what might be discovered. This pursuit requires not only strategy and expertise in research design but also bravery—knowledge revealed may contradict our beliefs about the world, the Other and even ourselves. To conduct research with true openness, it ultimately asks one to be open to being changed themselves.

This position is resonant with the person-centred concept of encounter. Schmid (2019) associates encounter with Buber's work and acknowledges its integration through Rogers into person-centred practice. Schmid defines encounter as, '*an amazing meeting with the reality of the Other… [E]ncounter means that one is touched by the essence of the opposite*' (2019, p. 205). 'Other' refers to any entity (not just a person), meaning encounter is not necessarily

mutual, but is defined by experiencing difference from self. The *en*-counter formulation signifies this opposition; the Other stands counter to me, and in meeting this difference, the aspects of both myself and the Other are discovered. Encountering means the self is completely open to acknowledging, being surprised. It means abdicating assumptions regarding the Other, instead being valent to what is proffered from the Other. Schmid writes, 'we try to understand the Other by opening up to whatever they show, experience, communicate, reveal' (2019, p. 204). Only through this can therapist learn through and with our clients what self-healing or actualising is for them.

Encounter is not an instrumental technique, nor exclusive to the counselling relationship—it is a genuine way of being, inherent to revelation. Schmid (2019, p. 210) attests that encounter, 'does not only make sense in the relationship to other humans... We need to encounter the world and its challenges and to respond existentially, not to approach it with an agenda and try to fix pre-identified problems'. This means it also applies to how we conduct research; to ask questions, openly listen and generate understanding of enquiry's subjects demands encounter.

2.2.3 | Research supervisors facilitate supervisees' encounter process

If the encounter position is requisite for genuine research, then the role of the research supervisor must necessarily involve facilitating their supervisee's encounter process. Schmid (2019) considers commitment to the encounter position an ethical obligation. Clark (2018, p. 238) adapts this in knowledge-generative contexts: 'My responsibility is to examine and loosen the conditions of my situatedness which inform *what* I know while trusting that the continued effort to explore *how* I know develops my capacity to create space to encounter the other'. I contend that the responsibility Schmid and Clark describe also lies with our supervisees as they engage in research enquiry. Lee (2008, 2018) acknowledges that research supervision is enculturating; research supervisors help introduce the research supervisee to their academic or professional community. I believe, therefore, the research supervisors ought to model encountering and facilitate supervisees' cultivation for encountering capacity so that they may meet ethical responsibilities as person-centred researchers and practitioners.

Beyond the responsibility to encounter, the qualities of the encounter process are essential for research to occur. Speaking of encounter groups, Schmid (2015, p. 102) describes, 'A genuine interest in the views of the other [and self]... a creative and experimental atmosphere evolved among us, a feeling of a common process of searching... [this quality] became a core characteristic of a person-centered way of learning for us'. Research is a learning process, and I strongly believe that these qualities of explorative, spontaneous consideration of the Other facilitate enquiry—in regard to self, person-Other and also Others, which are objects of research. It is reasonable, then, that part of the research supervisor's role is to

offer open invitation to such qualities, and welcome them into the research supervision relationship.

2.2.4 | Facilitating encounter happens in a present relationship embodying the necessary and sufficient conditions for personality change

The previous points posit *what* of the research supervision relationship—what research is personally, what positioning (encounter) is required for genuine research, and what the supervisor and supervisee's responsibilities are relative to that positioning. Now, I address *how* research supervision allows potential for supervisees to encounter their subject of enquiry.

I posit that facilitating encounter manifests through *relational* qualities of research supervision, rather than organisational, technical or instrumental characteristics necessitated by the university-industrial complex, because researching is a manner of *being*. Therefore, I argue research supervisors must offer the necessary and sufficient conditions for personality change (Rogers, 2007), embodied by person-centred presence (Schmid, 2003); I base this assertion on Rogers' ideas regarding learning and Schmid's formulation of the fundamental *we* implied in Rogers' work, corroborated by the research supervision literature.

Rogers' writing on learning and its relational aspects is essential in formulating a person-centred conception of research supervision. Rogers (1961, p. 280) made clear that genuine learning is something that is not just about the knowledge accrual but that learning creates personal change in the learner. Learning changes who someone is; this underpins the earlier reflection that genuine encounter of the Other changes the self. Rogers (2007, p. 241) suggested that personality change is a strictly and fundamentally relational process, belying the necessary and sufficient conditions of personality change. Schmid (2003, p. 110–112) developed this further in formulating the idea of a 'fundamental We'; the person-centred concept of human and the human condition is essentially circumscribed and inherently defined by being in relationship, rejecting possibility of an a-contextual, a-historical human unit. 'I' is developed and defined through the perspective of Other (e.g. *Thou-I*). This logic implies the capacity to encounter is manifested in this order through a relationship—one *is encountered* co-perspectively and co-experientially before one *can encounter*.

I tentatively claim that research supervisors must encounter the research supervisee if they are to potentially develop a capacity for encounter in their research. Encountering the supervisee means offering a relationship that embodies Rogers' (2007) necessary and sufficient conditions; the research supervisor strives to relate to the research supervisee, offering perceptible genuine empathy and authentic positive regard for them and their way of being/researching. This relating must offer 'presence', in Schmid's (2003, p. 114) usage, embracing non-directivity towards the supervisee's research process, meeting the research process at its presenting stage of development, encountering the Other/

supervisee in their difference, authentically engaging counter-positions and regarding the supervisee as an expert in their independent research process. Since research can require instrumental resources, offering these qualities in research supervision naturally requires materials be made accessible to learn and discover autonomously. This includes acknowledgement of and access to the relevant salient literature and technical equipment, as Rogers (1961) did in his foray into person-centred teaching, without judgemental or directed instruction on what is best or right for the supervisee's enquiry.

This genuine encountering, in my conception, is not contingent on a particular presentation on the part of the supervisee in terms of their research paradigm. In person-centred psychotherapy, there is no assumption that the person-centred approach is only efficacious if the client has a similar conception of humanity, relationships, identity, self, living, faith, culture, etc. Indeed, I would contend that the opposite is true: the person-centred approach assumes existentially fundamental alien difference and individuality between people, especially between the practitioner and the myriad of clients to which they will offer empathy and unconditional positive regard aligned with their congruent experiencing. Likewise, the research supervisee need not share ontological or epistemic foundations with the supervisor for a genuine, accepting, empathic encounter to occur. I propose supervisees may arrive to the supervisory relationship from any kind of research paradigm (positivist, constructivist, social-constructionism, critical realist, etc.) and still be facilitated through genuine relationship embodying Rogers' necessary and sufficient conditions. In fact, this quality of difference can make the relationship more fruitful through the 'counter' quality of encounter; the supervisee can more clearly define their particular research position in sharp relief through the genuine meeting with the Other's (the supervisor) different conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, etc., and how they might be sought methodologically. The converse is also possible—if the supervisor is truly open to understanding their supervisee's reasonings and the results of their inquiries, their own views and positions may change too in line with that learning. In other words, the research supervisee need not be a person-centred practitioner, or indeed hold research values aligned with person-centred philosophy to be facilitated in their research efforts in a person-centred manner through a model of genuine encounter. This is modelled in both the presented case studies, in which the supervisees assume different research paradigms and methodologies to my own.

The literature regarding research supervision supports prioritising the quality of relationship. Brew (2001) suggests that mismatches in conceptualising research correspond to failure to complete projects; this would be ameliorated if research supervisors encounter and offer unconditional positive regard to a supervisee's research approach, as previously noted. Interpersonal connection with supervisors is highly prized by students (Ives & Rowley, 2005), and poor relationships can have disastrous results (Salmon, 1992; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). A recent study of students in counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology found a supervisor's empathy and research experience were most valued, beating out communication skills, research supervision experience, methodological and topic expertise; empathy and support from research supervisors were further highlighted outside quantitative results (Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2021, p. 565). Prioritising relational quality and empathy in research supervision would support the tentatively proposed person-centred approach to research supervision, which tends to both these relational dimensions.

2.3 | Case study design

The inclusion criteria for cases selection were as follows: (1) research supervision relationships that employed the presented theoretical approach; (2) research undertaken in counselling and psychotherapy; and (3) research supervision relationships that have been concluded, to alleviate conflict of interest for participants. Only two cases fulfilled all criteria, both of which have been included.

Case material presented is drawn from three sources: the researcher's memory, notes taken during supervision meetings and artefacts relating to the research supervision (e.g. email correspondence). Each supervisee was a master's student, and had five hours of research supervision, alongside correspondence between meetings and feedback on a complete dissertation draft. Consent was sought and received from both participants for this publication. Both participants reviewed the included material and explicitly were offered the right to retract consent if material did not correspond with their experiences. Both participants reiterated their consent for final publication after they reviewed the included excerpts. This study was approved by the University of Edinburgh's Counselling, Psychotherapy and Applied Social Science Ethics Committee. Participants are anonymised using pseudonyms, and identifiable details were omitted to ensure confidentiality.

Study limitations stem largely from constrained samples and data collection methods. My short tenure in post means I have only supervised masters research projects to completion, unfortunately excluding the greater scope of doctoral supervision work. While the study design is not intended to yield generalisable results, the demography of cases are uniform in age (20s) as well as sex and gender (female/women), though cases differ in racial and cultural identities.

Cultural differences regarding education must be held in mind in these presentations. One of the areas for growth in the proposed model is its relatively unnuanced consideration of difference as it meets potentially different identities in the research supervision relationship, and how this might impact the potential approach to the research supervision relationship. As it stands, the person-centred research supervision model prioritises openness to meeting difference and diversity in research supervision, but it likely can be improved through more informed awareness and incorporation of knowledge of different power structures related to education as it pertains to age, race, gender, queerness, religion, dis/ability and other aspects of identity. While I do not

believe such concessions are insurmountable in efficaciously offering person-centred research supervision (certainly such experiences of difference, power and marginalisation can be worked through relationally in person-centred counselling relationships in my experience), they must still be tended to with reflexive awareness and sensitivity of how they might impact such relationships. I am particularly aware of sociocultural differences in educational relating, particularly power dynamics between the 'teacher' and 'student' role in higher educational settings; some of these differences I accept will likely be out of my frame of awareness as a White, cis, American who has only resided in Anglo cultures. For this reason, pseudonyms have been chosen that still correspond with the cultural aspect of the supervisee's identity (Durga as racially South-Asian and culturally Hindu, Lydia as White of Anglo cultural background) to allow readers to consider such their own diverse angles of experience in their readings of the cases that will inevitably differ from mine. Similarly, themes I have focussed on could have notable attribution to supervisees' identities beyond my awareness, which merits critical scrutiny from feminist, decolonial and other relevant perspectives.

Additional manners of recording experiential data ideally could have been considered, such as reflexive notetaking or audio recordings. In this case, however, such methods were impossible to implement since these supervisory relationships were not intended to be presented in research when conducted, and data are being compiled retrospectively. Future studies, however, might consider such methods in gathering data for further theoretical development.

3 | CASE PRESENTATIONS

3.1 | Lydia

Lydia's presence was simultaneously confident and unsteady when our research relationship began. After exchanging introductions and discussing expectations of research supervision, Lydia expressed her research interest clearly: exploring the experience of coming into adulthood from her cultural frame. Her passionate curiosity for this transitionary life phase was immediately palpable, and I wondered what personal significance it held for her. I knew first-hand from my doctoral research what a bountiful resource personal connection to an inquiry could be, and I felt fortunate to collaborate in that energetic work with her.

While there was roaring fire in her belly about becoming adult, the means of harnessing that blaze's energy were somewhat confused. She was uncertain how to approach the project; our philosophical and technical meanderings were flavoured with notes of overwhelm and an underlying concern of 'getting it wrong'. She felt very split between methodologies, particularly whether to inspect others' experiences or to focus on self-experience in her enquiry. Lydia seemed relieved by my assurance that, while I could not be certain what the best approach was, I was keen to find it with her. We agreed that she might consider the literature on both methodologies

and seek to articulate her research question about coming-of-age experiences.

By the next session, there was movement, but trepidation persisted. Lydia decided she would pursue interviews, drawing parallel with our work as psychotherapists with our clients. Nevertheless, a methodological frame for analysis eluded her. What Lydia hoped to discover through the interviews was still murky, and, again, she questioned what might be 'right' or 'wrong' for the project. I felt an embodied anxiety as she asked this, greater than I would expect for a technical decision. My instinct was to acknowledge it, intrigued about its presence in the research frame. I paused, reflecting on whether such a reflection was appropriate. I decided to follow the thread. 'You've mentioned "right" and "wrong" a few times', I reflected, 'and I feel sense of anxiety when you mention it. I'm left wondering what brought you to this topic about adulthood?'

Lydia elaborated her arrival to adulthood—a very painful transition from an extremely regimented and controlled school life to a stark absence of structure or guidance upon leaving home. This swift change left her feeling uncertain of what adulthood meant, what it looked like and what effect it had, coupled with a prevailing sense that whatever an adult was, she was not it. This felt frustrating and unjust, as if the system had set her up for failure by establishing a false expectation of an ordered life path, only to be abandoned. Lydia identified similar struggles in her client work, though values and attributes ascribed to adulthood varied widely amongst individuals, often based on cultural factors. She now challenged adulthood conceptually, identifying it as a culturally constructed phenomenon rather than static or clearly defined.

Engaging emotionally with Lydia's experience gave insight into how she was researching. I acknowledged a parallel in the 'right/wrong' dichotomy for her research process and the lonely and ambiguous route she walked in becoming adult. She resonated with this, and through discussion, we eventually realised how present power was in this narrative, through educational institutions to the 'adult' construct itself. This played out in the research process too; the power implicit in wondering about a 'right' or 'wrong' way to do research echoed the past wish for a 'right' or 'wrong' way to be an adult.

Clarity came to the methodological issue as Lydia's genuine curiosity honed in on discourses and power regarding adulthood. I acknowledged that in research, as she experienced in her clients' coming-of-age, there might not be one 'right' way; I expressed faith in her genuine interest to uncover what approach to her research would be best for her. I identified Foucauldian discourse analysis as a potential means for working with discourse and power in interview material. Upon introduction, she was initially cautious due to the philosophical complexity of this method, but independent engagement with the literature sparked passion and solidified her choice. With this settled, Lydia smoothly navigated her project; our supervision work then focussed on support through the interview processes, re-engaging and contextualising findings with theory, working collaboratively to writing deadlines, and the final draft reviews at the project's end.

3.2 | Durga

Durga began supervision settled in her methodological decision-making. She wished to conduct an autoethnographic enquiry into her parenting experiences through a conceptualisation of 'emotionally immature adults'. However, there were several uncertainties in beginning our relationship. I addressed frankly some often overlooked technical challenges of autoethnography, like asking about her creative writing practice and skills. She had questions of her own, particularly regarding what aspects of her cultural lens to inspect those relationships through. There was an array of intersectionality within those formative relationships, from religious faith to generational trauma, before considering the psychotherapeutic literature. Ontological and epistemological framing of the project was uncertain, as was their knock-on to ethical considerations. Knotting questions sprouted up without apparent direction to hack towards; exasperation and anxiety grew thick where unknowns touched Durga personally. We agreed further reading would be required to address these issues, and her personal needs and limits regarding disclosure needed reflexive attention.

Before our next session, however, a rupture occurred. It began with an email from Durga regarding ethical difficulties of her self-research, and the question of her parents' involvement. In exploring options of circumventing this, she proposed an alternative topic salient to counselling research, in which she was less personally involved. The alternative topic's appeal was personal safety, avoiding relational risks through disclosure. She ended the email beseechingly: 'I really need direction from you on which topic is best to focus on. Only based on this guidance will I be able to move further in the ethics process'.

I read these words during a training I was leading, 30 counsellors-in-training listening attentively to material my colleague was delivering. It suddenly felt apparent how inexperienced I was in my role. I was aware from listening to colleagues from South Asia that the teacher holds a powerful, guiding role in those cultures, and I wondered whether I was being invited into such a hierarchical model in which I was to be expert; I felt deep resistance to the idea of this dynamic playing out. My gut wrenched, as I knew I could not indulge Durga's wish—not if I was congruent with how I conceived of the regard held for other, of teaching, and of my tentative supervision theory. Yet, I feared that denying her vulnerable request might intolerably damage our budding relationship. I concluded that to be genuine in the relationship, I would have to summon my courage to tolerate that risk; I committed to being as empathic and sensitive as possible in doing so.

My email back acknowledged Durga's role in the research project, and her responsibility to own the research decisions therein. I tried to reflect that there was no optimal choice, and she was to consider the personal and professional costs involved. 'I'm aware this may not be the most satisfying response, or what you were hoping for'. I wrote, 'However, I trust in your capacities to be able to decide which topic will be best for you, and look forward to collaborating with you…, regardless of which of these… [you] move forward with'.

Her reply made clear that my words were difficult to swallow. She wished for more structure in navigating this 'nerve-wracking' personal process. While she acknowledged her responsibility, making this choice left her aggravated, and she linked it to institutional frustrations—unclear assessment guidelines, disruption caused by strikes, etc. She reiterated a desire for direction, particularly for 'practical nitty gritties'. Again, I answered as empathically as I could while holding a clear line of what I could or could not offer. I clarified her questions, owning my misunderstandings; I asserted, again, that both projects were viable; I offered practical guidance material for ethics and dissertation processes. I could not, however, provide a decision.

Durga responded confirming her topic, but it was clear that she felt let down by me. She was torn between safety and passion; she opted for the latter, but pain remained from making that decision alone. I sent one final (lengthy) email owning her disappointment was, in part, due to my failure to demarcate my role with regard to such decisions. I conveyed that my stance came from honour and awareness for her autonomy:

> My role in your work is not as a personal mentor, guide, or authority on your personal ethics, or to tell you what is worthwhile to research… [It] isn't my place to decide what you should or shouldn't do, or what you should or shouldn't be comfortable pursuing – that would be an improper use of my power to insist you go towards my research philosophies or paradigms [or preferences]… This is an opportunity for you to own your research, and I would not want to take [that] away from you, even if that process is uncomfortable or uncertain at times.

This exchange was tense and painful, but it forged a strong bond capable of relational communication and dialogue. When offering me her ethics application, she acknowledged us standing at the precipice of where technical, ethical and personal aspects of research meet. She wrote:

> … I do understand what you mean and I am glad we can have this dialogue to understand what I feel like I need in this process. Honestly I am a bit scared of what I am choosing to undertake but I do want to push through that fear to make this project happen … although I might need some help to go deeper into my experiences or pointed in the right direction

Through this confrontation, something had become known to her, and I felt moved by her bravery to push forward in meeting herself through researching.

In our following session, we reflected on these exchanges at length, finding ourselves in them beyond text. We explored final ethical questions, and it felt collaborative and vulnerable between us—these qualities became indispensable to our supervisory

relationship. Autoethnography invites the whole self to the work; Durga shared stories of family past and present, religious parables, memories of self, written and dialogical exploration. We both arrived vulnerably and openly to the work after rupture and repair, enabling going 'deeper' together.

Durga sent her first draft at the end of persistent effort and anxious unfolding. This self-research was toilsome, and we adjusted sessions to be shorter but more frequent nearing submission to support this rich, but exhausting, process. I was staggered by what she generously and openly offered when I read her draft. My comments spoke to my emotional reactions alongside the technical: 'This hits like a ton of bricks'; 'this pain is so visceral, thrashing, recognisably and familiarly primitive'; 'It feels terribly lonely, though I realise now that isn't stated'. I felt privileged as collaborator, profoundly aware of both her risk in writing it and that I, as her supervisor, was likely the first to experience it.

This effect was mutual to some degree. After final submission, Durga reached out to acknowledge our working relationship:

> I want to thank you and express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support, understanding, and immense patience throughout this research process. Your invaluable guidance and insights pushed me to strive to be better and grow both professionally and personally. What I produced in this research could not have been possible without you. … Letting Go of this piece of writing proved unexpected hard and I was shaking for hours after submission. Nonetheless, your kindness and holding of my painful experiences and process, enabled me to get through this process without disintegrating.

I was struck by the evidently entwined personal and professional facets of our relating, what we held in the crucial process of submitting and the courage demanded of her to present this work.

4 | DISCUSSION

These case studies hopefully bring insight into my proposed theory for person-centred research supervision. While readers will have their own responses to presented materials, I explore three themes that arose in reflecting on the cases—relational vulnerability of research supervisor and supervisee, challenges abdicating 'expert' role and congruence between supervisee and research project.

4.1 | Vulnerability in the research supervision relationship

As a person-centred therapist, I have experienced first-hand the intimacy and vulnerability involved in a relationship that facilitated self-learning. I had factored this into my tentative theory regarding research supervision but was unsure whether this would manifest similarly when learning *beyond* the self—such as in a research project. In both research supervision relationships, however, relational vulnerability was apparently crucial for developing learning and completion of both studies.

In Lydia's case, her disclosure about her personal coming-of-age experience and the associated challenges underpinned her enquiry and project design. I wonder whether that quality of meeting would have arisen without empathic awareness of the anxiety present in her methodological deliberations. Similarly, Durga and I also connected through a very vulnerable inflection point—that of conflict—which required openness from both our sides, exposing frustrations and limitations. This lead not only to a decision regarding the topic; it allowed us to cleave an opening to personal aspects of her autoethnographic work.

Wyatt and Taland (2018, p. 221, p. 226) wrote about this quality in supervising autoethnography, noting that it comes with 'vulnerability and risk', that it is 'intimate'. While these aspects undoubtedly characterised Durga and my work, they were also key with Lydia, despite a very different methodological approach. These might evidence that vulnerability and intimacy have broader significance in the learning of research supervision, certainly in qualitative research paradigms.

4.2 | Abdicating expertise in research supervision

My theory proposed that research supervision would be most effective if pursued with a person-centred quality of presence. Critical to this is non-directivity, relinquishing the 'expert' role with clients in order to encounter them. This ultimately proved difficult, though not untenable, in both case studies. The challenges stemmed from two factors—the technical nature of research, and expectations from research supervisees.

The former, I believe, does not need to be relieved within the proposed model but can have an impact on relational dynamics. Due to research's technical nature, the research supervisor, through experience or study, may have accrued greater factual knowledge regarding research methodology and philosophy than the supervisee. Lydia's case illustrates this dynamic through my methodological suggestion (Foucauldian discourse analysis) after discussing personal experiences. While I think this is in line with person-centred teaching, as Rogers (1961) depicted (e.g. he offered educational books, films, etc.), such offerings must still prize supervisee autonomy. I did not prescribe Lydia's methodology, but acknowledged an option for her consideration. Similar to sign-posting clients to external resources in the counselling relationship, sensitively making the Other aware of opportunities does not seize the expert role, but permits them well-informed, autonomous decision-making.

Meeting differences in supervisee expectations, however, proved more challenging. Both supervisees invited me to act as expert by determining approaches or topics. Though it cannot be absolutely clear, this may have been related to an enactment of

something personally related to the enquiry itself for the supervisee (such as in Lydia's case) or may have been influenced by different cultural understandings or expectations of the roles and responsibilities of educators (such as with Durga). When I declined the expert role, frustration, anxiety, disappointment or a sense of withholding manifested. I believe working through these feelings relationally was productive in both relationships and projects, but required resilience alongside vulnerability and empathy as a research supervisor. I wonder whether this edge is necessary while staying with the counter to aspect of encounter. I realise now that I responded similarly to my supervisees as I would with clients who wish me, as a therapist, to direct their life: empathising with disappointment and challenge, congruently owning why I cannot advise (e.g. that I don't know what is best), and holding in unconditional positive regard their ability to choose, whatever the outcome.

4.3 | Congruence between supervisee and research project

In both projects, it felt essential not just that the study was coherent but that it genuinely aligned with the researcher. Both Durga and Lydia were implicated in the authentic curiosity of their enquiry. This echoes Rogers' (1961) assertion that science is another way of being a person. However, I dare to extend this claim; I argue that consistency between scientific being and the supervisee's genuine experience was necessary for a project to manifest.

This is to say, in the process of becoming a researcher, one's *person* must be engaged. Attending to the self was at the heart of forming both Lydia and Durga's enquiry; the relationship between themselves and their research subjects ultimately drove the search for answers, despite personal challenge. Again, Rogers' (1961) curious paradox is evidenced: the research supervisees accepted openly themselves, their position, their motivation for research and through this process started becoming researchers. I assert that only in being congruent can the research supervisee encounter the Other of their research. Reaching this encounter position requires an opening to change only possible through self-acceptance, which can be facilitated through congruent encounter with the supervisor. This is in line with my theory, affirming that though research supervisors offer to encounter relationally, supervisees can cultivate capacity to encounter themselves, and develop, crucially, a capacity for encounter in their way of being a researcher.

5 | CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

I proposed a working model for research supervision based on the person-centred approach, necessitated by the absence of adequate training or guidance for counselling and psychotherapy research supervision. This theory tentatively asserts learning is relational and requires encounter with an Other; the supervisory relationship therefore should embody qualities that facilitate this, especially the necessary and sufficient conditions for personality change, the encounter position and person-centred quality of presence.

By inspecting two cases studies, themes arose that supportive evidence of this approach. Both cases evidenced the importance of the relational encounter; vulnerability and intimacy between supervisor and supervisee advanced and strengthened the projects. Some aspects of person-centred presence were challenging to maintain, particularly non-expertise; whether or how to alleviate this is unclear, as this process yielded valuable developments in the research process. Finally, research supervisees' congruent alignment with their research enquiry appeared paramount in motivating and completing the projects; this supports an approach modelling congruence through the research supervision relationship.

While these findings are a useful starting point, more research must be conducted to evaluate this model. Inspecting specific aspects of the theory through the person-centred pedagogical literature might clarify these dimensions of research supervision. It would be illuminating to inspect doctoral supervision cases, to see whether similar themes arise. Wider variety in research paradigms used might also yield revealing data. Finally, further studies might consider supervisees' experiences, rather than only presenting a supervisor's experiences, bringing greater insight into relational dynamics in research supervision.

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