‘The space between: exploring the complex relational dynamics existing between participant, researcher and supervisor in a qualitative research study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’.

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Aim of presentation

- To explore the dynamics of the interrelationship between participant, researcher and academic supervisor within the context of a PhD research study.

- To consider the wider implications of this triadic relationship and its contribution to the research process.
Overview of research study

- Qualitative study.
- Explores the phenomenon of humanistic therapists’ personal experience of traumatic bereavement and its impact on their professional identity and practice.
- Uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Narrative Analysis.
Broad theoretical principles of IPA

- Phenomenology
- Hermeneutics
- Idiography
The triadic relationship of Participant, Researcher and Supervisor
“All real living is meeting” (Buber, 1958, p.11).

“The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical, and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship” (Oakley, 1981, p. 451).
Becoming a ‘custodian’

Data generation informed by ethical considerations and sensitivity of topic

- Initial visit
- Interview
- [Member checking of transcript]
- Final visit and collection of participant’s written reflection
Although the research is the catalyst for the interaction with participants, it seems to be about something bigger as well. Even though we are primarily participant and researcher, it seems as if we assume a variety of different roles – colleagues, fellow bereavement counsellors, fellow counsellors at different stages of our professional development, fellow bereaved individuals … and fellow human beings’.
Reflection following interview with ‘Louise’

‘Louise was very calm, prepared and relaxed. I re-emphasised the point that we would stop the interview if she so wished. … I felt enormously privileged to have heard Louise’s story of bereavement and what had preceded it. Louise talked freely, openly and honestly and the interview seemed to have a ‘holistic’ feel to it as if she was ‘rounding something off’.
Reflection following final meeting with ‘Louise’

‘I was pleased that I had carried out this tripartite approach to data generation as it has greatly enhanced my relationship with my participants in terms of creating trust, openness and transparency… I also believe the steps I took following the interview to ensure the participant’s self care, as well as the care I took in transcribing, were crucial in maintaining a reciprocal and trusting relationship’.
Custodian? Analyst? Interpreter? Managing complexities and tensions

- Researcher or therapist? The here-and-now context of the interview situation.
- Dealing with material that resonates with personal experience.
- Data analysis – the challenges of IPA’s idiographic and interpretive approach.
- The supervisor as ‘container’.
The triadic relationship of Participant, Researcher and Supervisor
Perceptions of Supervisor’s role

- Encourager
- Expert
- Container
- Judge
- Mentor
- Task driver
- Counsellor
- Protector
- Nurturer
- Facilitator
- Gate Keeper
- Advisor
- Supervisor
Dimensions of ‘space between’ researcher and supervisor

- Trusting the researcher to negotiate the complexities in R-P relationship.
- Creating a safe space for researcher to be vulnerable.
- Balancing support and challenge?
- Tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty.
- The ‘space between’ as facilitating and encouraging critical thinking.
- Minimising power imbalance.
Issues of ‘(in)visibility’.

Supervisor’s empathic engagement with Participant’s story.

Resonances with Supervisor’s own issues – a hidden dimension of the supervisory process?

Balancing tensions in the triadic relationship.
Managing tensions in competing roles

- Maintaining vigilance: ethical requirements and beyond?
- The interweaving of cognitive and intuitive processes
- Balancing competing roles and demands.
This presentation has:

- Explored the dynamic nature of the relationship between Participant, Researcher and Supervisor in a qualitative research study.
- Identified some of the tensions between competing roles
- Raised questions as to the contribution of this triadic relationship to the research process as a whole.
We welcome your questions and thank you for listening.
References

References – contd.