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Conducting psychotherapeutic research with Free Association Narrative Interview

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Abstract: Deciding on methodology and method can be a complex and anxiety provoking task for new researchers and doctoral students. This is a reflexive, first person account of a doctoral journey addressing some key junctions and critical decision-making processes during a doctoral project. The article captures personal and professional considerations throughout a qualitative study into female therapists' experiences of working with male clients who were sexually attracted to them. The study employed Hollway and Jefferson's (2008) hybrid method Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) which involved multiple unstructured interviews with five female participants. FANI offers a framework within which researchers underlying motivations about the research can be explored. This paper aimed to show how FANI method offers a frame for bridging a practitioner-researcher divide (Archard, 2018) by providing an opportunity for practitioners to use their full range of skills and competencies from their clinical work and apply it for the purposes of research.

Keywords: Relational research: Reflexivity; Working with unconscious processes; Practitioner-research; Psychoanalytically informed research

Deciding on methodology and method can be a complex and anxiety provoking task for new researchers and doctoral students (Bager-Charleson & Kasap 2017) . My experience as a student and now as a tutor on a Doctorate course in Psychology and Psychotherapy, tells me that the easiest way of dealing with these questions is to choose "what everybody else does," sometimes leading to students considering only a relatively narrow range of methodological options and the field of psychology being denied of new and innovative ways of researching.

This is a reflexive, first person account of a doctoral journey addressing some key junctions and critical decision-making processes during a doctoral project (Lukac-Greenwood, 2019). The article captures personal and professional considerations throughout a qualitative study into female therapists' experiences of working with male clients who were sexually

attracted to them. I used the relatively seldom used method of Free Association Narrative Analysis (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, 2008) as an example of making research relevant and applicable to the psychotherapy practitioners. As such, I aim to bridge what has commonly been referred to as "practitioner-researcher gap" (Archard, 2019; du Plock, 2016; Goldfried, 2010; Giovaziolias, 2005).

The method itself has been described in some detail by Hollway and Jefferson (2008; 2000) and has since then been used to research a broad range of topics. For instance, Peacock et al (2022) describe the FANI method as a "powerful tool" to understand the landscape of functional neurological disorders. They used the method to explore NEAD, which is dissociative or Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizures understood to have a psychological or/and social backgrounds. Other studies have drawn on the FANI method in areas including alcohol consumption by women in their post-partum period (Vicario et al, 2021); the experience of "austerity" in the UK (Stenning, 2018); the experiences of intellectual disorders among people (Capri 2018) and experiences of primary school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (Plender 2019).

However, despite the similarities in the use of skills involved in this research method and the psychotherapy process, it has not commonly been used in psychotherapy research. The main focus of this paper, therefore, is to place FANI into parameters and language of Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy research, and in doing that, make a case for its use amongst competing research methods within psychology and psychotherapy field.

Free Association Narrative Review

Most fundamentally, FANI (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008) aims to recognise the importance of emotions, and most specifically, the role of anxiety, in the research process. It suggests that anxiety plays a part in participants' ability to talk about the research topic and researcher's ability to engage and interpret participants' accounts. Using the psychoanalytic concept of unconscious, it posits that the effects of the anxiety may not always be known or understood by participants or researchers. Consequently, it calls for ways of accounting for this complexity by calling researchers to go beyond participants' verbal accounts and engage with the research accounts in more nuanced ways. The ways Hollway and Jefferson (2008, 2000) address this complexity is reminiscent of the complexities in the therapeutic work because of which, as mentioned above, I considered it particularly applicable to the psychotherapeutic research.

The method is underpinned by three fundamental ideas / principles:

1. The significance of the reflexive researcher who engages critical and sustained self-reflection on methods, practice and research context in order to recognise our emotional involvement in the project (Bager – Charleson, 2014; Etherington, 2004).

2. A focus on the idea of Gestalt – that the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts, suggesting that the context of the participant's account as a whole might shed meaning on any particular detail within it.

3. The recognition that participants may be defended participants and researchers may find it difficult to speak about things (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). There is value, then, in using psychoanalytic theory to explore the unconscious processes in the research process within the participant as well as between the participant and researcher.

Methodological context

FANI is a hybrid method, incorporating elements of

- Narrative tradition
- Psychoanalytic case study methodology and
- The biographical – interpretative method (Rosenthal, 1993; Schutze, 1992, cited in Hollway & Jefferson, 2000)

In addition to its own hybrid nature, it sits within a broad umbrella of Psycho-Social Research, itself a cluster of methods and methodologies whose goal was to bring psychodynamic insights to the understanding of the social world (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Cummins & Williams, 2018; Stamenova & Hinshelwood, 2018).

In my experience, the hybrid nature makes it less appealing to the doctorate students and new researchers who may need to justify their choices and find ways of fitting their research into recognisable categories, familiar to their examiners. Consequently, as mentioned above, one of the motivations for writing this paper is to attempt to position the methodological,

philosophical and theoretical aspects of the method into the categories and language of Counselling Psychology and make it more accessible to the future psychology and psychotherapy students.

Philosophical underpinnings

Most fundamentally, the Psycho-Social methodology is underpinned by a different ontology of self. In contrast to the rational and conscious self, the Psycho-Social concept of self incorporates the idea of psychic depth (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway, 2009; Crociani-Windland, 2018), found in psychoanalysis as well as many other forms of psychotherapy. Furthermore, the notion of unconscious is not something seen as simply belonging to the individuals but as an ontological basis for all reality (Crociani-Windland, 2018).

Epistemologically, FANI sits within a social constructionist tradition in so far as it holds that participants' personal worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences of the social world. However, it goes further to incorporate psychoanalytic ideas that the subject's experiences of the outer world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008, 2013). As mentioned above, within this idea is also a psychoanalytic notion of defence mechanisms, a conscious or unconscious desire on the part of individuals to deny or distort reality in order to maintain a socially acceptable image. This point was particularly pertinent given the sensitivity of my research topic, providing a way of accounting for the possibility that it might be difficult to speak about sexual dynamics and that some of it might get to be known through embodied rather than declarative means.

Furthermore, this broadening of the ontological and epistemological positions to include the notions of unknown, embodied and unconscious self and knowledge particularly appealed to my desire to find a way of researching which would honour my psychotherapeutic work and as such, as mentioned above, bridge the scientist – practitioner divide (e. g. Archard, 2019; du Plock, 2016; Goldfried, 2010; Giovaziolias, 2005).

Research questions

The interview explored two questions:

1. What was your experience of working with male clients who are sexually attracted to you?
2. What is the extent to which you were able to use the experience outlined above in the work with the client?

A social constructionist philosophical positioning

The social constructionist philosophical positioning focuses explicitly on social as well as psychological considerations which appealed because of the particularity of my research topic. Having been subjected to many social and religious prohibitions and biases throughout history (e. g. O'Connell-Davidson & Layder, 1994), sexuality as a subject of my research needed to be examined in its sociocultural context. My own experience of feeling like a prostitute when working with a male client who was sexually attracted to me, made me examine the role of societal norms in colouring my experience in derogatory terms. This served as a reminder of the importance of the context within which research participants' experience could be situated and which could be used as a way of interpreting participants' accounts. The emphasis of Psycho-Social Research on social context therefore explicitly highlights the social context which I appreciate.

Further, FANI method takes a critical realist position suggesting that there is a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences, if the participant is viewed as a Psycho-Social subject, to be known through another subject, the researcher. Consequently, it positions researchers and respondents as co-producers of meanings (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008), emphasising researcher's reflexivity within it which directly spoke to my own conceptualisation of myself as a therapist.

Finally, the method is premised on the notion of a double hermeneutics. It sees the dialogical relationship between the researcher and their participants as an interpretative loop (e.g. Kuhn 1991 in Zayed, 2008).

Theoretical underpinnings

As mentioned above, a fundamental theoretical concept underpinning Psycho-Social methodology is the idea of *defended research subjects* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). It is a way of accounting for the anxiety of the research process. Using psychoanalytic theory, which traditionally examined this issue via concept of defence mechanism (Freud, 1958), the creators of the method emphasised the potential that research material may stir uncomfortable feelings for those being interviewed and those doing the interview.

A related process of *free associations* (Freud, 1955) is a way of getting beneath the surface of the participants' accounts. Hollway and Jefferson believed that participants' ability to structure the interview and determine its content and direction would allow for greater opportunities to uncover unconscious communications within it (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013; Cartwright, 2004; Holmes, 2014). The idea is based on Freudian's concept of free association used in psychoanalytic therapy in which a patient is invited to say the first thing that comes to mind without any censorship.

More recently, in addition to the use of free association, the original observation of defensiveness has been further explored and expanded by Psycho-Social researchers who were interested in looking at broader role of affective dynamics in the research process. Cummins and Williams (2018), for example, recognised that research encounter is full of different affects (anxiety, boredom, excitement) which may be a product of the relationship that is co-produced or brought to the research relationship by one of the research parties. To account for, understand and make use of these affective processes within research, a broader range of contemporary object relations psychoanalytic theory was called upon. Hoggett (2010) used ideas of "thirdness" (Benjamin, 2004) and "coherence–generating thoughts" (Bion, 1962) to argue for a more dialogical stance of researchers and for the joint meaning making process within interviews. Long (2018) advocated for the researcher's use of self in the research process based on the idea of researcher being part of the associative unconscious of the system being explored. Finally, Midgley and Holmes (2018) proposed a way of formulating interpretations within research interviews based on Bion's (1962) and post Bionian reverie theory (e.g. Ogden, 1995; Aron, 1995). This theory advocates awareness of the general feelings in a therapeutic encounter as a way of considering potentially disavowed elements of patient's emotional life. I was particularly drawn towards more recent work of relational and intersubjectivist theorists who highlighted the importance of mutuality and intersubjectivity and who emphasised importance of context as a precondition of having an experience at all (e. g. Aron 1996; Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997; Mitchell 1988). This body of work suggested a way of thinking about the interpersonal field between the therapist and client / researcher and participants as a potential source of knowledge.

In summary, I found the use of a Psycho-Social Methodology (e. g. Clarke & Hoggett 2009; Cummins & Williams, 2018) and specifically, Free Association Narrative Interview as a research method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013) particularly helpful given:

- its extended epistemological position which includes notion of unconscious and its explicit emphasis on working with implicit as well as explicit data which lends itself well to the exploration of the research question which presupposes multiple and not necessarily fully known or owned interpretations
- the explicit role given to the use of theory and researcher's reflexivity in tapping into what might be unconscious or unsaid in the interviews
- the explicit Psycho-Social focus which provides space for investigation of the nature of the internal as well as external contexts (e.g., psychological, social, cultural, professional) in defining different interpretations
- the emphasis on the importance of the whole as part of this fundamentally idiographic approach, allowing contextualisation of the findings
- the alignment with the therapeutic process which bridges the practitioner – researcher gap

How to conduct the study using FANI

Although the descriptions of the conceptual foundation of the method as outlined above are clearly outlined in the current literature (e.g. Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2013), the descriptions of the practical steps to be used in the actual research process as well as the process of analysis of data are relatively opaque.

For students who might be steeped into thinking there is a correct/incorrect frame of mind associated with assessments, this lack of guidance might cause too much anxiety. Consequently, in this section, I will provide detailed account of the process I undertook in my study, not as a definitive example but as an illustration, simply to offer more detail and start the process of creating a more concrete form of engaging with the method.

Overall research process

The study involved two interviews with each participant. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were shared with participants for their comments and feedback.

Work with each participant was done subsequently. Each participant's data was analysed and reported on separately. Data from first interviews was analysed for the initial themes and used in second interviews which provided an opportunity to test my preliminary interpretations as well as giving participants time to reflect. In this way, participants were actively engaged in the process of data generation as well as analysis.

Throughout the process, I kept a reflective journal which formed part of the data which was also used in the second interview with participants and in the data analysis (see below for the detailed breakdown of the process of analysis).

After my initial analysis all data was shared with a research buddy who further added to data interpretation. Once all additional feedback was incorporated into the analysis, reports were shared with participants who were invited to comment or add to them. The final step involved analysis of material across participants' accounts.

The interview:

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes. It explored the following areas:

- Participant's experience with a client where they experienced the sexual dynamic to be central to the therapeutic process

- Participant's thoughts on how their experience influenced the psychotherapeutic process

Interviews were minimally structured, using open ended questions to allow a free flow of participant's associations in describing their experience as mentioned above.

My Reflexive Position

My relationship to the subject area

My response to a male client's sexual attraction was the least understood or discussed area of my psychotherapeutic work. This experience formed a starting point for my research, both in terms of its topic as well as in terms of its methodology.

The most difficult aspect of this experience was associated with a period of work when the client implicitly or explicitly communicated his sexual feelings towards me whilst paying me directly in cash. For me, the situation had strong connotations of prostitution which made me feel dirty, non-professional and unskilled. Later on, when I separated the context of payment and as such the image of prostitution, I managed to address the issue of sexual attraction with the client, but I did it with the sense of "being done to." The difficulty was associated with what it means to be enjoying being an object of sexual desire – "the slut", by my own and society's standards of behaviour for married, professional women. Therefore, fear of embodying the prostitute in different ways, either by being paid for services which (although not directly) were linked with the client's sexual arousal, or by enjoying the feeling of being a sexual object, was detrimental in exploring the nature of our relationship.

Although I experienced shame and embarrassment, I did not want to make a presumption that all female therapists would experience the same feelings. Instead, I wished to explore the experiences of other therapists and the extent to which they were able to use it in their work with clients.

Methodologically, my experience of shame in talking about sexual dynamics, guided me toward the method which would acknowledge the role of defence mechanisms within research.

Throughout the project, my own experience and reflections served as potential data to be considered and tested with participants and therefore they constituted an integral part of this research (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Etherington, 2007, Lukac-Greenwood, 2019). I treated them as being reflective of the phenomena under study, akin to the psychoanalytic notion of countertransference where one acknowledges that one's own responses and reactions are reflective not just of oneself as an individual but of one's relationship with and experience of the other person in the room (Halling, 2005, Whitehouse – Hart, 2012).

One example of drawing on my experience in understanding participants reactions was the way I understood their lack of response towards my final analyses of their accounts.

As will be discussed in the analysis section below, my intention was to involve participants in the research process at all stages. My preliminary interpretations were shared and worked with participants in our second interview. However, with one exception, participants did not respond to my final analyses. Initially, I found it puzzling and somewhat disappointing.

Although I considered a possibility that they were too busy to respond as well as potentially in disagreement with my final analyses, I also wondered whether their lack of response was a way of distancing themselves from their accounts.

I reflected on my own difficulty in talking about sexual matters as well as my own fears that I would be personally and professionally slighted if I owned up to sexual feelings at work. In particular, I wondered whether accounts becoming more "concrete" by being put onto a paper, potentially to be published in professional publications, was making association with them even more disturbing. I wondered whether my participants feared for their own sense of personal and professional standing as they saw themselves in print in my study, in the same way as I struggled with becoming "the slut" in the therapeutic relationship and feared the professional and societal judgement towards me as a married, professional women. As discussed in the findings, sexual feelings can provoke reactions that mix our personal and professional sense of self, which can cause confusion and anxiety resulting in the feelings being denied. I came to wonder whether participants' lack of response could be seen as a version of that denial.

Further examples of the ways in which I made use of my reflexivity in the findings can be found in (Lukac-Greenwood, 2019; Lukac-Greenwood & Van Rijn 2021).

Finally, I considered the impact of my own personal history, my position in society as well as the power relations within the research process as further ways in which my relationships with the participants and by extension, the data in this study, might have been affected (Rooney, 2005).

Data analysis and interpretation

Whereas traditionally, the analysis of data would be a separate step which would precede data collection, in this study, in line with the idea of Gestalt, the collection and analysis of data were partially contained within the interviewing process itself.

In doing this, I was encouraged by

1. the calls for the greater incorporation of inter-subjective processes in research dynamics (Holmes, 2015; Holmes, 2017; Midgley & Holmes, 2018; Frosh 2003)

2. the stance of narrative inquiry analysis which positions meaning making as occurring throughout the research process (Etherington, 2011)

3. the arguments for the use of reflexivity in fostering collaboration and democratisation of vulnerability (Etherington, 2007)

4. Hoggett et al's (2010) extension of the FANI method to include a more dialogically active involvement of participants in the data analysis

Analysis as a part of the interviewing process

Operationally, as mentioned above, the interview itself provided the first opportunity for a holistic take on data because some of the initial formulation of the core themes happened as a part of the interviews. These initial themes were first introduced by participants in response to the open question of what it felt like to be working with male clients who were sexually attracted to them. They were further developed in the second interview when participants were invited to further elaborate on anything already said.

The role I took in the interviews was somewhat more active than the one described by Hollway and Jefferson (2008). I used Stromme et al (2010) description of interview as a continuous *hypothesis testing process* and Midgley and Holmes (2018) ideas on the use of *reverie* and *within-interview interpretations* to justify this change. Consequently, I saw my role to include probing into, opening up and expanding participants' presenting accounts for the purposes of enlarging the phenomena under investigation and tapping into its potential unconscious elements during the interviewing process. This also marked a departure from Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2008) use of free associations as the primary way of accessing the unconscious material. I made greater use of the interpersonal dynamics between the participants and myself which necessitated greater involvement in the interviews by

sharing and testing of my understanding and experience with participants.

This constituted the first step in the analysis of key themes which I further elaborated upon after the interviews were completed.

Post interview analysis

The literature shows a variety of processes of analysis employed, according to the author's preference and the nature of the study. Consequently, the precise process of analysis in this study was devised specifically by me for the purpose of this research. I nonetheless drew on technical suggestions offered by other methods, something which the literature acknowledges as not unusual (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2015).

For the explicit parts of interviews, the post-interview analysis in my study in many ways resembled most recent elaborations of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2022) and seemed methodologically appropriate.

For the interpretative part, I adhered to what Braun, Clarke et al (2022) or Finlay (2021) refer to as "artfully interpretive" (in contrast to being scientifically guided) analysis, which involved attention to the positioning of the researcher and a more explicit creativity, artfulness and researcher's reflexivity in the process. In my case, this involved attention to the principles of narrative and psychodynamic theories. Specifically, I drew on:

- psychoanalytic theory with its emphasis on the role of feeling in the process of thinking (e.g., Bion, 1962; Hollway & Frogett, 2012)
- narrative theory's emphasis on the structure and the tone of the story and the linking elements between its parts (e.g., Murray, 2015, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Bamberg, 2010)
- the notion of experience-near aspects of data (affect-laden data) (Hollway, 2009) which I tapped into by listening to recordings of the interviews
- my 'reflexivity' in thinking about the impact of the interpersonal dynamics on the co-construction of the narratives
- the use of imagery (e.g., Murray, 2015), free associations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) and reverie (Holmes, 2017; Midgley and Holmes, 2018) as ways of tapping into affective aspects of the interviews

Bager-Charleson & McBeath (2021) suggest a hybrid of Reflexive Thematic Analysis called Narrative Thematic Inquiry (NTQ) where both implicit and explicit narrative dimensions are guiding their analysis. Like them, I was interested in what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as semantic, "manifest" themes and "latent" themes beyond the spoken words. My analysis involved attention to dimensions typical for narrative research in terms of interest in how participants organise their experiences into stories and how these, in turn, may communicate personal, cultural and social beliefs and values and beliefs about self and others. This included, in my case, interests in both the said, spoken – and the unspoken like pace, emphasis and rhythm of each account.

With this interest in narratives at the forefront, I followed the stages of Braun & Clarke (2006):

- An intimate familiarisation with the data through data immersion
- A first stage coding based on emerging aspects that stood out when reading
- Re-reading to consider and challenge earlier meanings throughout new readings.
- Cluster codes into themes with broader meanings
- Considering data saturation when no more new codes or themes arise
- Re-read and review the themes to confirm if they remain meaningful and stable
- Write-up of themes as part of final meaning-making

Description of the process of analysis of data employed in this study

In line with the idiographic tradition, each participant's data was looked at separately. Only after this was completed, the data was looked at in relation to all cases together. The description of the process below refers to the analysis of data for each participant.

Immersion

The first step of post-interview analysis involved *immersion* with all of the data associated with any one participant - listening to the tapes, reading pre- and post-interview notes, transcribing interviews and writing reflections and reactions to the tapes. In line with the notion of "experience near" (Hollway, 2009) aspects of data, I initially listened to the recordings of the interviews, noting their emotional undertones and my own reactions to listening to them. Theoretically, this process could be described as a process of emotional attunement or "reverie" – a state of being open to musing, dreaming and becoming alert to the range of affective and sensory responses when confronted with the interview tapes and text, which in turn, Bion (1962) argues is a basis for knowledge. In line with the importance of grappling with the whole described above, initially I aimed to establish a *gestalt* within each participant's data-set (for the use of reverie in research process see also Midgley & Holmes, 2018; Holmes, 2017).

I captured the outcomes of the immersion in two ways. One was to simply jot down words which described or captured aspects of the interviews which stood out for me when interviews were listened to and looked at holistically, allowing for these to emerge from the process as a whole rather than being crafted out of the specific words used by participants in interviews. This formed an initial list of 'immersion themes' to consider in the overall participant analysis.

Further, in line with narrative approaches (e.g., Murray, 2015), I made use of writing to summarise my experience of working with the participant. For this purpose, Hollway and Jefferson's use of the pen portrait (2013) and scenic writing (2014) was adapted to create a means of capturing the overall *feel* of working with each participant. In addition to providing a context to the findings, this also aimed at creating transparency of the defences with which the work with any one participant might have been imbued and by which it might have been influenced. This overall feel was included as an introductory section to the findings associated with each separate participant.

Detailed look at the text and generation of codes

Following that, the process of generation of codes and theme was followed albeit not in such linear fashion as suggested by McLeod (1994) or Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved a more detailed look at interview transcripts. Aspects which carried emotional weight were sought, specific words were scrutinised for their potential latent meanings and the inconsistencies in reporting were sought out. These were used to further inform or adjust the holistically derived themes.

Specifically, in order to code the material, I highlighted words which carried emotional weight and significance within the text of the transcripts. Some of the highlighted text included simple words such as 'supervisor' which served as a marker for the content of the interview, which described that supervision played a part in the participant's experience. At other times, the highlighted text included descriptions of emotions and descriptions of the interpersonal field between the participant and her client or between the participant and me, the researcher (e.g., "I might need to be prompted. You might need to be curious").

I then created an additional column in the transcript (see appendix for an example of an extract of the transcript) in which I noted my reactions related to that segment of the interview text, such as:

- my emotional responses after listening to tapes (e. g. "I am feeling a bit awkward, not sure what words to use"; "It feel like she just gives me the bare minimum and I give up wishing for more – I move onto the next client")
- my observations on the manner of speech ("Speed of words – sexual arousal uttered very quickly")
- changes of tone or focus ("Notice the evasiveness and shift from emotional to rational in her response too")
- notes to myself about aspects of the interview to follow up on in the next interview ("Her answer suggests the wealth of opportunities to talk about and yet the actual account I am getting from her is quite sparse. Check her feelings about this")
- notes denoting the interview-based themes ("This is quite important – what you feel about any one thing (client) depends on the context")
- notes to myself which link different parts of the interview, outlining inconsistencies, similarities or differences in how things are described ("I am thinking about the 'police' in the previously described case - responsibility in this case is shared – as if it is difficult to bear having the sole responsibility for it")

I used my own reflexivity contained in column 4 of the interview transcripts and in the post-interview notes to seek additional ways to understand the interview text, as well as to find additional themes which were related to the expressed content but were also contained in the interpersonal field between the participants and myself.

Finally, I created an additional column (column 5) in which I jotted down provisional ideas for the codes and high-level themes to which interview segments related and according to which they could be collated / looked at.

See Table 1 in the Appendix for a segment of the first interview transcript with participant 1.

Generation of themes

At the end of interview 1, given that I was interested in the contextual and potential latent meanings, I considered all codes in their context and I looked at data through the tripartite lenses of each participant's: 1) *gestalt*, 2) interview text and 3) the interpersonal dynamics of the research process. Practically, this meant that I reviewed all pre- and post-interview reflections, interview text and columns 4 and 5 of the interview transcript. I looked for overlaps and contradictions, identifying the first set of emerging themes and questions to explore in the follow up interviews. Although the majority of this work was done by hand, by writing notes, shifting papers and sticky notes, I have reproduced an electronic example of it for the purposes of explication of the process. See Figure 1 below for a pictorial depiction of the data overlaps for Participant 1.

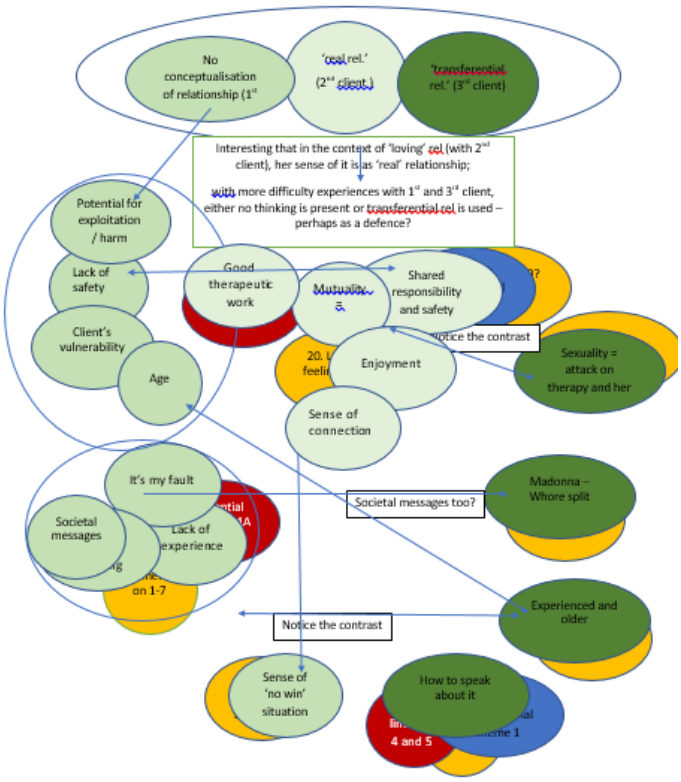

Figure 1: Overlap between sub-set of themes after 1st interview – Participant 1

The circles in green relate to the themes which emerged out of the text of the interviews (different shades of green relate to different clients that the participant discussed); blue is related to the interpersonal themes within the interview; red circles relate to themes identified in the post interview reflections; and, yellow are a result of immersion.

These themes were then discussed and elaborated upon with the participant in the follow-up interviews. For example, in the follow-up interview with participant 1, I made an experience-based suggestion that neither of us wished to be in charge of the interview process and shared my initial way of understanding it as neither of us wanting to take ownership of the material and ultimately report it in this study. This was very much an iterative process in which I moved backwards and forwards from the text to theory, to my experience and experience of research buddies, in order to make sense of the data.

Finally, it is important to note that despite following the process described above, the final set of themes which I reported on were not simple amalgamations or summaries of

codes contained within the lists of themes. In presenting my findings, I aimed to capture the story of the participant's account. Plus, at times, such as with Participants 3 and 5, I aimed to explicate descriptions of the chronological development of themes, their continuity and contradictions over time, while I aimed to explain and expose my interpretation and understanding of their accounts. In this way, in line with the hybridity of my method outlined before, I departed from the simple use of the content analysis by making use of notions borrowed from the narrative and psychoanalytic traditions.

Reviewing themes

While not always possible because some of the ways of understanding data and experience emerged only after the interviews were completed (such as with participant 3), for as much as possible, I engaged in the interpretative work between the interviews, using the final interview as a way of corroborating and reviewing my understanding with participants. As a result, the majority of the themes reported in this study will have been discussed with participants at some point in the interviews. In addition, in order to account for some of the post interview interpretative work, I shared drafts of all my analytic thinking with the participants, inviting them to comment or add to it.

Nevertheless, as Smith (2007) points out, this is theoretically a never-ending process because the possibility of constantly digging further for further interpretation is always present. In addition, this is also a highly personal process, specific to me as a researcher and to my participants in relation to me. The interviews generated data based on the specifics of the research interactions between participants and me, whilst the analysis of data relied on my personal judgement of data's significance based on my experience of working with participants and my interpretations of the text based on that experience.

Analysis of themes across participants accounts

It was important to analyse each participant separately for two reasons. First, I wished to understand my participants' first person experience of working with sexual attraction in depth, especially as my study was premised on the possibility that participants may not be always feel free to speak of their experience. Secondly, given that some of my interpretations were based on intersubjective reflexivity (Finlay, 2003) - my felt sense of my relationship with each of the participants - my analysis demanded an in-depth reflection on each of the participants accounts in their own right. In this way, my study was different to a study utilising Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

It was only afterwards that themes were compared across all participants. In addition to simply thematically organising data, this also involved a deeper level of analysis which sought to understand the meaning behind similarities and differences of different participants' accounts.

Findings

The detailed report of the findings in this study is published in Lukac-Greenwood and Van Rijn (2021). Given the methodological focus of this paper, the reporting of the results will therefore not be comprehensive and will be done with the aim of illuminating the context and learnings associated with the use of FANI method. The results are summarised in the figure 2 below.

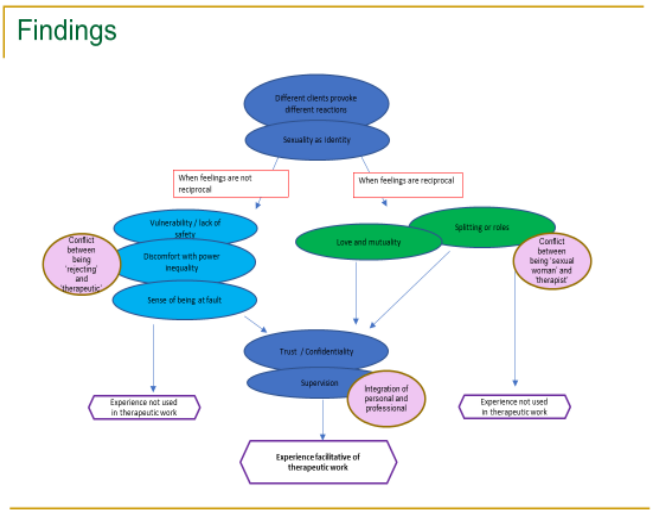

Figure 2: Pictorial representation of findings

When analysing **therapists' experience** (research question no.1), four themes stood out as similar across all participants. Highlighted in blue, in figure 2 above, they are outlined in the middle of the diagram, summarising findings suggesting that:

- Different clients provoke different reactions
- sexual dynamics are experienced as one's identity which makes them a particularly sensitive area of therapeutic work
- confidentiality and trust are extremely important in the work with sexual dynamics
- supervision is a significant part of the work

In terms of the differences between different participants, in situations when therapists did not report feeling attracted towards their clients, they described experiences as:

- feeling vulnerable and physically unsafe
- feeling discomfort with being in a more powerful position than a client
- having a sense of being at fault for attracting male sexual desire

On the other hand, when they reported being sexually attracted to their clients, participants' experience seemed to fall into two contrasting categories, namely:

- experience of conflict between their feelings towards the client (feeling sexually attracted towards them) and their conception of their role as a therapist as a result of which they reported ways of splitting those two roles
- sense of love and mutuality withing the therapeutic relationship enabling the integration of their experience with their therapeutic role and consequent success in the work with sexual dynamics

Findings related to the research question 2 – **the ability to use the experience in the work with the clients** appears to be related to therapists' perceived sense of conflict between how they found themselves feeling and what they thought was an appropriate way of feeling as a person and a therapist. The conflict between the two disabled them from using their experience in the work and eroded their sense of authority in the psychotherapeutic role. On the contrary, when they were able to withstand the negative experience associated with working with sexual dynamic in order to integrate them with their therapeutic role, they were able to make use of that experience in the work with the client.

More specifically, in situations when they did not feel sexually attracted to the client, the conflict revolved around the question of how to work therapeutically with negative feelings towards the client and the consequent sense of themselves as rejecting. For instance, one of the participants described the challenge as the question of : "How do you say to somebody – you disgust me when I know that actually behind all of this is potentially a very vulnerable child".

When they, on the other hand, did experience reciprocal feelings towards the client, the conflict manifested itself in relation to their sense of self as sexual women and its perceived incompatibility with the role as therapists :

> The therapist in me and the woman in me kind of almost had an encounter, I think, and it was like – what do you do with that?

The unhelpful ways of dealing with this conflict involved:

1. the splitting of one of those roles (either denying their sexual feelings or terminating the therapeutic relationship):

> "She [the second supervisor] just stopped and said: 'Do you think there is an erotic transference here?' And I was "nooooo" – that was my reaction".

> "It felt like someone had to go […] and realisation that it is better that it was me then her [the wife] – almost like, you know, that I had been in the affair that he had."

2. work without regards to the sexual dynamics:

> "I was happy, I think, at the time to leave the problem being out there and me being the helpful person that was helping him with the difficulties that he was having in his life, rather than me contemplating the fact that actually I was part of the problem for him."

or

3. work which involved over focusing on the notion of 'maternal transference' which enabled expression of some of the feelings towards the client in a way which was felt to be congruent with the role as a therapist.

R: You say you were very lucky that such patient came to you. How would you describe him?
P: "A little lost boy, a lost little boy who didn't have the words with which to say how he felt because he wasn't going to be heard anyway."

From the above example, it appeared that using the experience for the benefit of the therapeutic work seemed a challenge for female therapists, occurring only in the instances when therapists were able to withstand the ways they were being made to feel and being able to see that as part of their therapeutic role, without the need to deny or augment their feelings or terminate the therapeutic relationship.

I have come to respect him as an adult male lover. And I think that therapist needs to be able not just to love their patient but maybe by the end of the therapy, to be able to see their patient as a potential lover. And that is why I think, the work with this client was successful. I know it was a much more successful therapy.

Given these findings, the study highlights the need for personal development work, supervision and institutional support to address the complex interplay of individual, clinical and societal issues appearing to play part in the female therapists' experience of working with sexual dynamics.

Interaction between Methodology and Findings

There are two particular methodological features which enabled findings in this study and without which it would be difficult to make the conclusions I did. First is the use of the notion of 'gestalt' in cross-participant analysis (in addition to it being done on the level of individual analyses) and the second, the study's epistemological position which encompassed the notion of "unspoken" and "unconscious knowledge."

1. Use of 'Gestalt' in findings

It is important to note that I looked at the themes across the participants as a dynamic whole rather than as an aggregation of individual themes. I believe that this enabled a couple of new observations, not apparent when themes were looked in their isolation or simply collated together:

- I noticed that therapists' experience differed depending on whether they felt the reciprocal sexual desire towards the clients or not. I used this as a basis for organising data in relation to my first research question concerning the experience of working with male clients who are sexually attracted to them, outlined above.

- I then noticed that the extent to which participants reported using their experience in their work depended on the extent to which they managed their sense of personal - professional conflict that working with male client's sexual attraction potentially created. This formed a second organising principle for the reporting of my findings, outlined above.

2. Use of the epistemological stance which included the notion of 'unconscious' in the findings

When reading the findings of this study, it is important to note that none of my participant ever reported feeling the conflict. This was my way of summarising their descriptions of the difficulties they encountered, thus highlighting the importance of having the freedom to go beyond participants' words that FANI's epistemological position provided. As mentioned in the introduction, this freedom was considered particularly important for the study of sexual dynamics in psychotherapy, a topic that is considered personal, sensitive and even a taboo (xx). My study provided a direct confirmation of this difficulty by highlighting the link between talking about the sexual feelings and participants' heightened concerns over confidentiality and fear of "betraying" a client when discussing their work with the "outsiders," thus raising significant implications for the work of supervision as well as research when it comes to sexual attraction in therapy.

Evaluation Criteria and Validity Checks

The concept of validity in any research is dependent on ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and truth the research was positioned within.
Qualitative researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Finlay, 2021; Patton, 2002, cited in Morrow, 2005; Willig, 2013) argue for different criteria for evaluating qualitative research to the traditional measures of reliability, validity and generalisation. They argued that the criteria for judging the quality of research cannot be reduced to tactics for removing observer bias and call for transparency in the way researchers play a role in knowledge production (Finlay, 2021).

My view of validity resonates with what Finlay (2021) refers to the importance of being explicit about own "philosophical sensibility and theoretical assumptions" seeking to ensure that these' are consistently, coherently, and transparently engaged". Furthermore, like Braun and Clark, I am critical of accounts suggesting that themes "emerge" or are being "discovered" in ways that "denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (Braun & Clarke 2020, p. 16).

In line with these views, the validity and reliability of my study rests on the use of and transparency of my reflexivity. Finlay (2003) refers to at least five reflexive variants, and my reflexive stance is particularly influenced by what they call "intersubjective reflection" characterised by attention to how "unconscious processes structure relations between the researcher as participants [in ways where] both will be subject to projections and introjections" (2003, p. 21).

As argued by Braun & Clarke (2020, p. 7), I have put my reflexivity skills to the forefront. I have expanded on my personal responses and described how my analysis was influenced, theoretically, by principles in narrative research, treating coding as an open and organic process and the themes resting on an iterative process compared with storying rather than as finding pre-existing entities.

Using triangulation

The study employed two forms of triangulation – sharing of materials with a research buddy and with participants. The research buddy was a fellow colleague and a student on the Doctoral Programme, who was familiar with the method. He helped me consider my own blind-spots in considering the material.

Given the social constructivist nature of the study and its fundamental reliance of researcher reflexivity, the purpose of seeking input from participants was less to do with validating interpretation but more to do notions of fairness and ontological authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1995, in Morrow, 2005). Fairness demands that different constructions are solicited and honoured whereas, in ontological authenticity, participants' individual constructions are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated. Triangulation in my study ultimately aimed at creating a dialogue between different perspectives (Patton, 2002 cited in Morrow, 2005).

After the initial analysis, all available data - transcripts, researcher's reflective notes and the researcher's initial analysis - was shared with my buddy. The buddy commented on the aspects of data which were omitted or aspects of the analysis which may not have been supported by the data, thus acting as a check on the researcher's unconscious defences or blind spots.

On one occasion, I had an opportunity to work with the data with a group of psychosocial researchers who engaged in a structured process called the "Dubrovnik Method" (Hollway & Volmerg, 2010) contributing their views on how to see or interpret it. After the incorporation of the buddy's and research group comments, my analysis was further shared with participants who were invited to comment, reject or add to it, with the aim of keeping the analysis relevant to the intersubjective field of the research dyad.

Although not directly inputting into research data, my weekly therapy occasionally dealt with material which was evoked by the research process and as such served as an additional indirect means of considering my unconscious processes.

At this stage, the analysis was deemed to be sufficiently ready to be reported for the purposes of this study. Although agreeing with Ballinger (2006) that having a convincing and relevant interpretation is a question of personal judgement, I aimed for explicitness in relation to my own personal biases and clarity in the linking of interpretations with relevant examples.

Critique of FANI

One of the key criticisms of a psychoanalytic approach to research is its potential for over-interpretation. Critics (e.g., Frosh, 2010; Frosh and Emerson 2016; Thomas, 2018) argue that the usual methods of testing psychoanalytic interpretations rely on close observation of the patient's response to it over an extended period of time which is unavailable to researchers interpreting the text. Thomas (2018) went further to argue against Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) triangulation response to criticism, which he thought was significant but not sufficient way of obtaining verification of one's interpretations.

Considering these criticisms, my study, following the example set by Hoggett et al (2010) attempted a more dialogical and longitudinal stance to FANI method. Although longevity of the therapeutic encounter is impossible to replicate in the research, I was keen to build in an opportunity to test the interpretations within the research encounter as they would be within the clinical encounter.

However, the use of interpretation within the interview is a contentious subject. For Holmes's (2014) it is an ethical concern because of the difficulty of offering interpretations when they are not asked for. Although this criticism was less applicable to my study in which I used multiple interviews and worked with participants who were psychologically sophisticated and supported, the criticism points to the ethical complexities of working with unconscious dynamics within the short time frame of research. This is an area ripe for further consideration and an area of greatest personal learning for me, as discussed in more detail below.

Lessons learnt from using the FANI method

1. Ethical difficulties related to method

In conducting this research, I abided by the British Psychological Society's (BPS) and United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy's (UKCP) codes of ethics in addition to which relational research ethics were attended to (Etherington, 2007; Finlay, 2016; Josselson, 2007). The research was approved by Metanoia Institute's ethics committee. Notwithstanding, working with the notion of defended participants was more complex than I initially imagined or prepared myself for.

In the first instance, I was struck and surprised by the level of my anxiety associated with sharing my interview analysis with participants. I feared being "wrong" making a mistake and being seen as presumptuous. Although I managed to make sense and use these feelings in the context of the topic as a whole, nonetheless, the experience highlighted the difficulty of developing what Josselson (2007) called "interpretative authority" which can be particularly difficult when the researcher feels like having split loyalty towards participants and towards the research community. This was the exact difficulty I experienced.

I struggled with the possibility that some of the findings may come as a surprise to them [see Josselson (2007) for discussion of ways of dealing with participants' discomfort of reading about themselves]. On a practical level, I attempted to prepare my participants for this possibility before the research started by outlining the nature of my methodology and by checking that participants were supported by having access to therapy and supervision. However, when faced with this issue as a part of the research process, I became aware of the complexity of researching material which participants may wish to disown.

In thinking about this issue, I found Midgley and Holmes's (2018) discussion on the similarities between clinical and research interviews particularly useful. They proposed that the more "clinically seeming" the interview, the more "successful" it will be in facilitating latent emotional expression. However, equally, they warn that the more clinical the interview is, the greater difficulty there might be for the participants as well as the researcher to fulfil the research aims of disseminating knowledge rather than keeping it for the benefit of the participating individuals (as would be done in therapy).

For me, this point of the difference between research and therapy ended up being particularly difficult aspect of the research process. Although I have come to see this dynamic as a part of the research topic I was investigating, nonetheless, this might be something to consider and process in more detail for the new researchers and in particular, for those who occupy a joint identify of being practitioner-researchers.

2. Practical and emotional preparation required for the research with the unconscious dynamics

Finally, the learning point about emotional preparation required for this type of research cannot be overemphasised. Although in many respects, I started the project with a reasonable understanding of the philosophical, psychological, and practical foundations of my method, in retrospect, I realise that I did not fully appreciate its emotional complexity.

An obvious example is the question of pilot interviews which I can use to illustrate my point. Best practice in qualitative research methodology suggests use of pilot interviews for the preparation of researchers for the forthcoming process. However, given the difficulties in the recruitment of participants, I felt that using one interview as a pilot study would be a luxury I could not afford. Instead, I conducted a second-best thing, a *self*-interview, which did not fully prepare me for the level of anxiety which was to occur in my interviews.

Similarly, in terms of analysis, although for slightly different reasons to do with the validity of interpretations, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) advocate group-based work. Given the practical constraints of my research context related to the individual nature of the doctoral research and the lack of availability of colleagues who were able or knowledgeable

about this method, my analysis sought a practically more manageable input of others, of one person at a time (e. g. from the research buddy, participants, or supervisor). Again, in retrospect, although in this way I believe I have managed to triangulate my findings, I wonder whether my "solution" betrays a lonelier way of working.

Given the philosophical and theoretical premise of my methodology, assuming that anxiety is ever present, and the unconscious cannot be controlled, I do not believe that either a pilot study or a group based analytic work would produce clear answers to researcher's anxiety. Nonetheless, in retrospect, my overall experience was of feeling lonely and sometimes, as a result, uncertain of myself.

Having said all of this, I am also aware that feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and reluctance to seek support are the very feelings also reported by my participants, therapists working with sexual attraction. My own fear of making mistakes, of appearing presumptuous, of wanting disown sexual dynamics, of working in isolation, are paralleled by the themes I reported in relation to my participants. In the same way as Huysamen (2018) described her research as reproducing and perpetuating the dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity it set out to study in the first place, the same could be said about the inevitability of my experience. As Midgley and Holmes (2018) state, in research which deals with emotional and unconscious dynamics, understanding comes through enactment.

Although the notion of parallel processes, transference, and countertransference dynamics I knew about, I understood and worked with as a therapist, nonetheless, it took me by surprise to experience it in the research process. I believe this is important to be known and understood by new researchers and hope that my project can serve as an example of its practical and emotional manifestations.

Summary

In summary, this paper aimed to show how FANI method as a proponent of Psycho-Social research methodologies offers a frame for bridging a practitioner-researcher divide by providing an opportunity for practitioners to use their full range of skills and competencies from their clinical work and apply it for the purposes of research.

Furthermore, FANI offers a framework within which researchers underlying motivations about the research can be explored. This would be something of a particular interest to doctoral students who will be using their research as a way of growing and developing into professionals and for whom clarity about their own psychological processes may be personally as well as professionally relevant.

Finally, the aim of the paper was to encourage future researchers to use the method and in that way continue current debates on what, where and how of studying the unconscious processes. Current research is not explicit enough on the various ways in which the unconscious is conceptualised and not systematic enough in relation to the ways in which that could be done. This is a fertile area for future debate and research.

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Appendix

Col. 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Ref.	**Researcher**	**Participant**	**My reflections**	**Potential codes / themes**
7		Have I worked with clients where there's been sexual attraction, yes…		
8	Is there a particular client that comes to mind?		I take a guiding role!	Leading vs following role
9		There are a couple. A few. One very early in my practice. He was a sort of, teenager who…hmmm…teenager, about nineteen or twenty who was …errrr….who was errr… who would get sexually aroused in the sessions …errrr… which at the time I found very difficult because I was pretty new as a counsellor, just begun, few years into my psychotherapy training, so we are talking quite a long time ago	Notice difference in speed of uttering words. Hesitation around teenager (is it his age that makes her hesitate?). Initial pause and then quick expulsion of words, as if gathering momentum for words to come out. Being inexperienced was a factor	Experience Age (clients or her own?)
10	How old were you?		I am wondering whether it is just the lack of experience or her own age too	
11		How old was I? errr Well, it probably would have been around 1989….90. I was ….probably 38, 39…something like that. But I felt quite new as a psychotherapy trainee.	She doesn't seem to have her age in her mind suggesting it is more her in-experience that mattered	experience
12	sure			
	Ooo, ok.	And errr… my supervisor at the time told me to stop working with him. And now, looking back, I am not sure that was the right thing to do. Because I think it made him feel really ashamed of... of his sexual arousal.	Speed of words – 'sexual arousal' uttered very quickly. Sexual arousal = Shame	Supervision shame
13	How was sexual arousal manifested, could you see the physical?		I am feeling a bit awkward, not sure what words to use.	How to speak about sexuality / language

Table 1: Example of working with the interview transcript