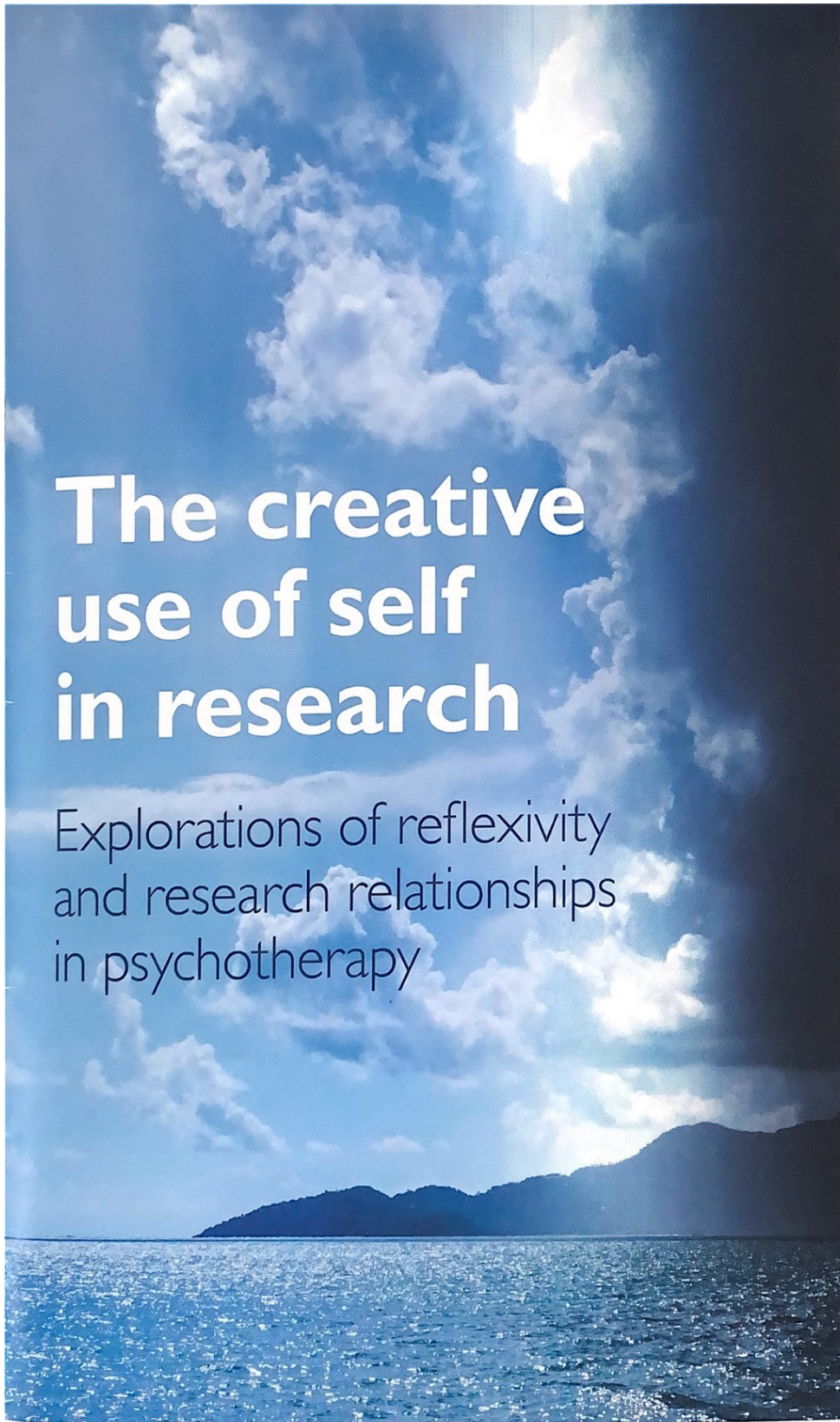


Issue 62 • Spring 2016  
ISSN 2049-4912

# The creative use of self in research

Explorations of reflexivity  
and research relationships  
in psychotherapy



the  
psychotherapist

The magazine of the UK Council for Psychotherapy

Follow us @UKCP\_Updates



# contents

## Feature articles

A creative and effective use of self in research	4
Being a therapist-researcher	6
Researching the self and beyond	9
Research? What research?	11
Role play as a therapeutic tool with sexual offenders	13
Where am I with my research?	16
Emotional experience plus reflection	19
Reflexivity and ethics in qualitative research	22
Writing, telling, listening, reading, seeing	25
A study of black issues in counsellor training	28
Developing imagination-based methods	31
The role of routine outcomes evaluation	34
Using our own experience in research	37

## Discussion

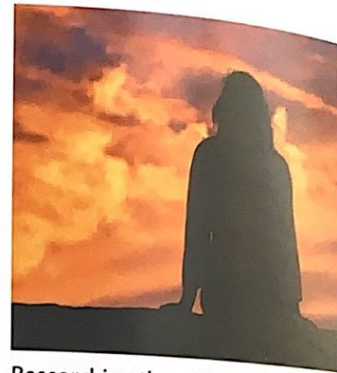
An existential exploration of 'The theme of the three caskets'	39
Writing and storytelling: to survive and to thrive	42
Writing and the art of practice	44

## UKCP news

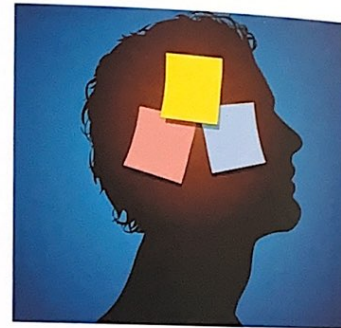
Improving access to psychotherapy training	46
Reflections on my time as chair of UKCP	47
The Professional Conduct Committee: an update	49
Digital Delivery Project update	50
Ethics Committee members sought	50

## UKCP members

Welcome to our new UKCP members	51
Step up, step out and speak	52
Obituary: Patricia Williams	53



Researching the self and beyond 9



The creative use of self ... working with memories and images 29



How feminist ideas have influenced a research work/life 37

## Diversity and equalities statement

The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) promotes an active engagement with difference and therefore seeks to provide a framework for the professions of psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling which allows competing and diverse ideas and perspectives on what it means to be human to be considered, respected and valued.

UKCP is committed to addressing issues of prejudice and discrimination in relation to the mental wellbeing, political belief, gender and gender identity, sexual preference or

orientation, disability, marital or partnership status, race, nationality, ethnic origin, heritage identity, religious or spiritual identity, age or socio-economic class of individuals and groups.

UKCP keeps its policies and procedures under review in order to ensure that the realities of discrimination, exclusion, oppression and alienation that may form part of the experience of its members as well as of their clients are addressed appropriately. UKCP seeks to ensure that the practice of psychotherapy is utilised in the service of the celebration of human difference and diversity, and that at no time is psychotherapy used as a means of coercion or oppression of any group or individual.

## Editorial policy

*The Psychotherapist* is published for UKCP members, to keep them informed of developments likely to impact on their practice and to provide an opportunity to share information and views on professional practice and topical issues.

The contents of *The Psychotherapist* are provided for general information purposes and do not constitute professional advice of any nature. While every effort is made to ensure the content in *The Psychotherapist* is accurate and true, on occasion there may be mistakes and readers are advised not to rely on its content.

The Editor and UKCP accept no responsibility or liability for any loss which may arise from



# Reflexivity and ethics in qualitative research

Researchers and participants in qualitative research have very different aims, says Dr Ruthellen Josselson. Ethics in research relies on reflexivity – a researcher’s awareness of the dynamics between researcher and researched and the ways in which, consciously or unconsciously, they might influence material and its interpretation.

**M**any of the dilemmas of qualitative research derive from the reality that qualitative researchers have split allegiances – to their participants and to their scholarly communities. In studies where the data derive from interviews, researchers need to form trusting, empathic relationships with their participants to understand the experiential phenomena that are at the heart of the study. Once they have collected these reports, researchers synthesise and interpret them in some way; often, they want to go beyond the stories their participants tell. Participants and researchers, with some exceptions, have different aims. Researchers, while occupied in

great detail with their participants’ experience, are interested in making larger statements that will contribute to scholarly understanding. Participants are concerned with their own experience of the lives they are living and are seldom interested in the conceptual matters at the heart of scholarship. Only in recognition of this split can we think clearly about matters of reflexivity and ethics in qualitative research.

## Influencing data

Unlike variable-based, hypothesis-testing research, where participants’ data are aggregated anonymously with many others, participants in qualitative research are studied as individuals and data are collected in a highly engaged relationship with a particular researcher. We do not presume some kind of objectivity. Who the researcher is will in every way influence the data that are obtained – and we acknowledge this. This is fundamental to the idea of reflexivity, a self-awareness practice achieved by directing an analytical gaze into the researcher’s self in an attempt to understand the dynamics between the researcher and the researched. Often, reflexivity is thought to involve awareness of the social locations of the researcher in relation to the topic and/or the participants – whether and how the researcher is connected experientially to the group under study – but it goes beyond this as well. Reflexivity marks the ways in which the researcher might have influence, consciously or unconsciously,

on the material obtained and how it is analysed. While often offered as a means to suggest ‘objectivity’, in a positivist sense, as though one could somehow remove oneself from the research equation by noting one’s inescapable involvement, reflexivity can enrich the study by placing the knower squarely in the context of the known (Goldstein, in press). Rather than bracketing the researcher out of the study, reflexivity involves intersubjective reflection (Finlay, 2002, 2015) that explores the intersecting subjectivities of researcher and researched.

Much has been written about the complex issues of the power dynamics of qualitative research. To many scholars, it seems that the researcher wields power, in that researchers hold the privilege of writing the public report. Yet participants have a great deal of power because they decide what they will or will not disclose. So-called member-checking does not solve this dilemma because the participant can only verify that they said what the researcher says they said (a useless waste of time, in my view); the researcher still has to take interpretive authority for interpretation of the material and that is done from a conceptual position that participants cannot occupy. As readers, we get the researcher’s account of what transpired in the research relationship and how the researcher made conceptual sense of it. The more we know about the researcher and how he or she intersected with the material, the better we can evaluate the researcher’s conclusions.

**Research as part of a relationship**  
The ethical attitude in qualitative research is rooted in the recognition that such research takes place in relationship, often intimate in its revealing, between two people. It is the human connection rather than the ‘procedure’ that produces data that will be meaningful. Ethics codes, however, are modelled after medical ethics, in which one person consents to having another person do something to them and tries to protect from harm the one who is being done to. We don’t yet have a written ethics code that covers research in which the researcher works *with* others, forming a relationship with them, the purpose of which is participant self-disclosure that serves the larger aim of the researcher inductively developing a theory about some human phenomena.



**Ruthellen Josselson** is Professor of Clinical Psychology at the Fielding Graduate University. She is a

co-founder of the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology and Editor of the APA journal, *Qualitative Psychology*. With Amia Lieblich, she co-edited 11 volumes of *The Narrative Study of Lives*, a series dedicated to publishing qualitative research. Based on interviews she has conducted over 35 years, she has published extensively, including *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach*.



### Unlike the therapy situation, where the aim is to effect change in the participant, the research situation treats the interviewee as the expert

The ethics of a research relationship are not covered by informed consent forms (which, in my view, often distort and undermine research relationships.) People can give informed consent to participate in the research project, but they cannot give prior consent to participate in an open-ended relationship that is yet to be established. Ethics relies on reflexivity, which informs every aspect of the research, from the first contact with the participant. What does the research tell the participant when the invitation for participation is made? What expectations are created in the participant?

All interviews are interventions. The encounter itself inevitably has an impact on the interviewee's life in the sense that it will lead to some rethinking or added meaning-making, as the interviewee, after the interview, reflects on her or his own words. Unlike the therapy situation, where the aim is to effect change in the participant, the research situation treats the interviewee as the expert, with the task being to effect change in the researcher's understanding of the phenomena of interest. In other words, the therapeutic situation is constructed for the participant to learn something; the research interview is oriented to the researcher learning something. Nevertheless, the participant often views the researcher as expert in something and monitors the researcher for his or her reactions to what the participant discloses. How does the researcher reflexively monitor his or her reactions to understand the effect on the participant? Good interviewers are adept at encouraging people to reveal some of the most sensitive areas of their lives. Interviewers must be sufficiently in control of their own inner processes, which they can manage to deal with complex and painful emotions. Harm can come from a defensive response by the interviewer, and this is too often overlooked. On the other hand, an accepting and sympathetic response to participants' disclosures may lead participants to find their experiences less disconcerting or worrisome (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

#### Consent to what?

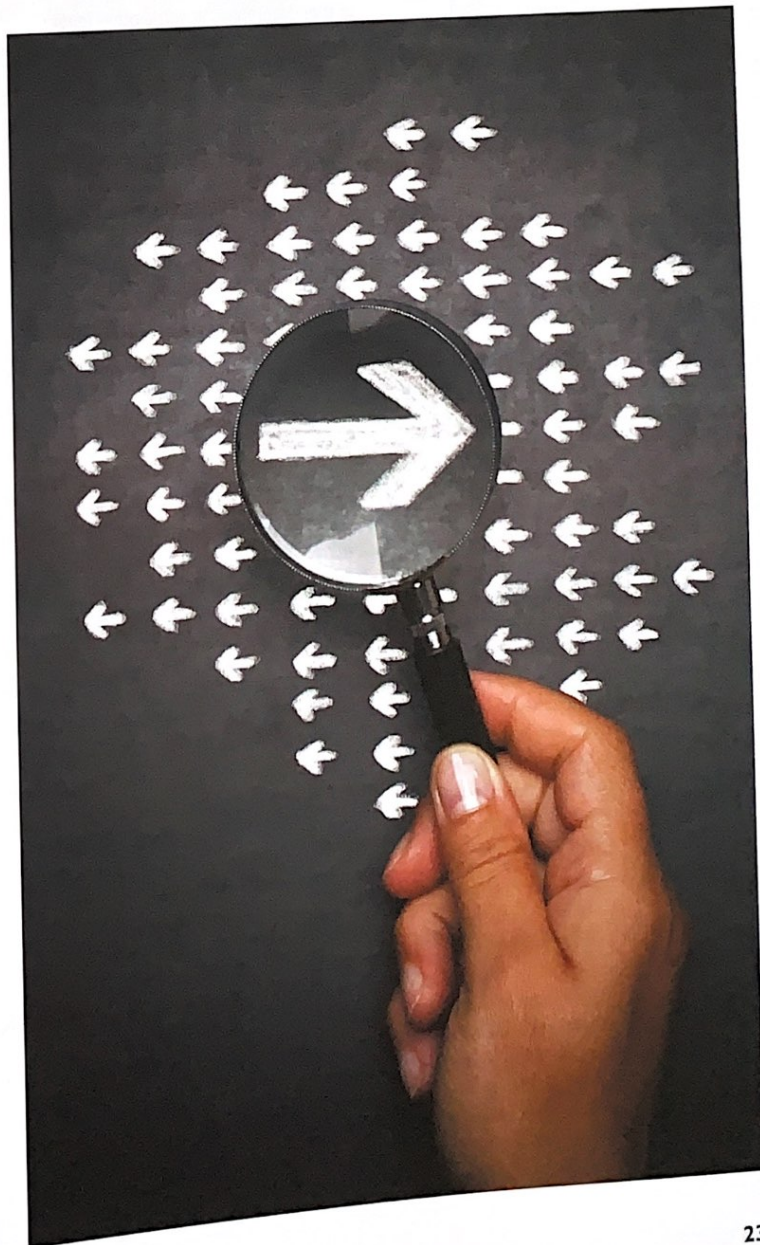
People cannot know at the outset, when they give consent to participate, just what they are agreeing to participate in.

Ethically, one must ask the participant at the conclusion of the interview how they felt about the interview and how they feel about having their disclosure included in the study.

Reflexivity requires that researchers consider their social position with regard to the participants (Fine, et al, 2000). Ethically, researchers must also become sufficiently acquainted with the social and cultural world of their participants to be able to

interact appropriately with them. This means knowing enough about their mores and expectations so as not to appear rude, insensitive or intrusive – but knowing little enough to be able to enquire deeply about those aspects of the world of the participant one wishes to learn about.

We cannot foresee all the eventualities in the relationship that will unfold. Therefore, I think, we have an ethical obligation to be aware of the implicit aspects of participants'





### The research report is not 'about' the participants but 'about' the researcher's meaning-making

consent – all those unstated expectations they may have of us – and to manage these in the dynamics of the relationship we form with each participant, both during the personal contact and in our handling of the material thus obtained.

#### Role as interpreter

After the interview, after the analysis, the qualitative researcher then faces the conundrum of turning away from the relationship with the participants to report their findings in relationship to their scholarly peers. What had been an engaged, empathic relationship, an 'I-Thou' relationship in Martin Buber's terms, at this point involves talking about people literally, behind their backs, 'I-it' objectified, and in terms largely unfamiliar to them. Qualitative researchers are well aware of the necessity for anonymity and disguise so that participants cannot be identified. But participants who read the published study may be able to identify themselves. An ethical awareness of ourselves in the relationship requires that we write about people respectfully but also be prepared to assert our role as interpreters of a phenomenon, of a text, rather than of a person's life. Elsewhere I have suggested that it may be an aspect of ethics to explain to our participants that what we write will be only about aspects of them and may not correspond to their understanding of themselves – that we are trying to understand phenomena rather than the person they feel themselves to be (Josselson, 2007). The authority of experience belongs to the participant; the authority of expertise belongs to the interpreter's disciplinary approach.

As an ethical position at this point, we must be prepared to stay in relationship with the participant, to explain our purposes as fully as we can, to make transparent our choices in as kind a way as possible, and to be prepared to contain whatever responses the participant may have (Josselson, 2007). Although we are unlikely to permanently or seriously damage anyone through our research practices, we do run a risk of hurting their feelings, surprising them or influencing them (for better or worse).

We weigh the moral dilemmas of what discomfort we may cause against what potential benefits outweigh the risks of harm.

#### Giving voice and decoding

Some qualitative researchers regard their research goals as 'giving voice' to their participants, making use of a hermeneutics of restoration; others frame their projects as 'decoding' the texts of their interviews at some other level of understanding in a hermeneutics of demystification (Josselson, 2004). Those whose research is designed to 'give voice' conceive their role as being a collaborator and a conduit, and struggle with the problems of faithful representation of the experiences of their participants. Others, in order to advance knowledge, make interpretive efforts at a conceptual level, excavating the intention and meaning behind appearances (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Hoskins, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). These researchers, whose designs involve analysing unconscious or socially constructed processes latent in the text, struggle with the ethical problems of interpretive authority (Chase, 1996; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Hoskins, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). Both groups of researchers can only report what the text says to them (Gadamer, 1975), embracing the unfinalisable nature of meanings.

The meanings we derive from a text are not already there in the participant. But I think that we sometimes get confused about this. It is hard to escape our embeddedness in a modernist, realist worldview – a worldview we can cognitively disown but still often emotionally rely on to ground ourselves. It may seem to qualitative researchers that they are 'finding' meanings rather than producing them (see Gergen, 2009). Truth is primarily a matter of perspective, as the philosophers of hermeneutic science have argued. It is our interpretive framework that structures understanding and this requires our reflexivity.

The ethical attitude in the report resides in the researcher's clarity that the report is the researcher's understanding or

interpretation of the text (Josselson, 2011). The inherent ethics of qualitative research lies in the resolute honesty of the researcher's reflexivity, which states clearly the biases, aims and positioning of the knower, and the circumstances under which the knowledge was created, with the researcher taking full responsibility for what is written. From this point of view, the report is not 'about' the participants but 'about' the researcher's meaning-making.

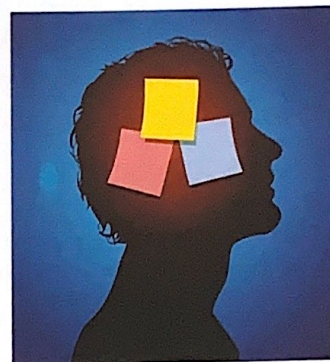
Reflexivity requires a clear-eyed view of the dialectic between connection and otherness, between the relationality of the interview and the disconnection of the interpretive process, between the illusion of objectivity and the equally pernicious illusion that we can fully represent others' subjectivity. What we can do is to recognise the relational dynamics at each stage of the research process and, ethically and reflexively, try to understand and report on our work transparently and fully.

#### References

- Chase SE (1996). *Personal vulnerability and interpretive authority in narrative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 45–59
- Fine M, Weis L, Weseen S and Wong L (2000). 'For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities'. In N Denzin and Y Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 107–132.
- Finlay L (2015). 'Probing between: reflexive-relational approaches to human science research'. In C Fischer, L Laubscher and R Brooke (eds). *Invitation to psychology as a human science*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Finlay L (2002). 'Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice'. *Qualitative Research*: 209–230.
- Gadamer H (1975). *Truth and method*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gergen KJ (2009). *Relational being: beyond self and community*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstein S (in press). 'Reflexivity in narrative research: accessing meaning through the participant-researcher relationship'. *Qualitative Psychology*.
- Hollway W and Jefferson T (2000). *Doing qualitative research differently*. London: Sage.
- Josselson R (2004). 'The hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion'. *Narrative Inquiry*: 14(1): 1.
- Josselson R (2007). *The ethical attitude in narrative research: principles and practicalities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 537–566.
- Josselson R (2011). "Bet you think this song is about you": Whose narrative is it in narrative research? *Narrative Works*, 1, 1: <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/NW/article/view/18472>
- Moustakas C (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



# Writing, telling, listening, reading, seeing: the creative use of self in research by working with memories and images



Memories can help researchers access and develop new knowledge about where they are in research and in life, says Mona Livholts, who provides practical guidelines on memory work for practice.

**M**emories are often actualised in the research process, but seldom acknowledged as 'material' or 'clues' to trace how we are part of the discursive story worlds that we study (Livholts, 2015: 163). In this article, I turn to the method of memory work to outline a textual and visual practice of remembering as a means of making creative and reflexive use of self in research. I will propose that working with memories and images can help researchers develop new knowledge from the perspective of their situated location in research and life.

This article is inspired by my own use of memory work in the study of welfare, media



**Mona Livholts** is Associate Professor of Social Work in the Department of Social and Welfare

Studies at Linköping University, Sweden, and Coordinator of R.A.W. The Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies. The main focus of her work is emergent writing methodologies, discourse and narrative methods, and artistic research processes.

studies and the gendering of space (Livholts, 2001/2011, 2007, 2008, 2012) and as a leader of writing groups across disciplines. It will emphasise the process of working with memories and images through using the technologies of writing, talking, reading, listening and seeing in order to create 'mo(ve)ments', as Davies and Gannon (2006: 7) put it.

### The memory work method

Memory work emerged in the 1970s in Germany when Haug et al (1987) developed a collective strategy in women's groups to work with questions of knowledge, sexuality and the body. The method involves several steps, including writing, reading, common discussion and analysis.

Writing is a central tool in memory work. Writing about specific situations allows for the recollection of what is rarely noticed in the flow of events in everyday life. It also allows us to cross the traditional science-literary divide. The growing field of memory work is interdisciplinary and diverse (Onyx and Small, 2001; Hyle, et al, 2008). It includes emotion (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton, 1992), education (Ingleton, 1999), family, fatherhood and motherhood (Widerberg, 2010; Pease, 2008), health studies (Koutroulis, 2001), social work (Fahlgren, 2009) and tourism studies (Small, 1999).

Collective and poststructuralist forms of memory work occur in the edited collection *Doing Collective Biography* (Davies and Gannon, 2006), where the conceptualisation

'collective biography' marks new attempts to work with memories as mo(ve)ments in the creation of discursive meanings and selves. The becoming of selves is emphasised in different projects by Davies and Gannon (2006). During weekly group sessions, questions such as 'becoming schoolgirls' and 'feminine characters in fiction' were asked. Another example of collaborative writing is 'nomadic inquiry' (Wyatt, et al, 2010, 2011), which reflects a style created in the intersection of collective biography, writing as a method of inquiry and poetic writing. There is an exciting question of viewer and viewed in the process of working with memory.

### Photos

The work of Kuhn (1995) explores the potential of photography in memory work. In her book titled *Family Secrets. Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Kuhn looks into images, such as photographs or film scenes, as 'pre-texts' for memories. She describes photographs as 'triggers' that promote the practice of remembering through their role in a complex pattern of social relations, cultural contexts and historical moments. By bringing in the spectator's agency and interpretative act in relation to an image, Kuhn suggests that 'memories evoked by a photo do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in a network, an intertext of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these and cultural context, historical moments' (1995: 14).

For Kuhn, the family album opens up conflicting interpretations and she argues that 'there can be no last word about my photograph, about any photograph', emphasising the open-ended narrative character of photography. Photographs are like Sontag (2007: 87) describes: pieces in an



## The recommended technique is to write a memory in the third person to increase your attention to seeing concrete situations

ongoing history, where 'one photograph, unlike a painting, implies there will be others'.

Memory work offers in this sense creative and reflexive forms of working with written memories and images to explore tensions and contradictions relating to knowledge, power and the self. It undercuts assumptions; instead of treating an image as 'evidence', it can be interrogated for non-overt meanings, producing 'counter-memories'. The longer we work with and on ourselves, the more adept we become at retrieving forgotten history. Stepping back into the past, we embark on a form of archeology. We discover fragments of an architecture which we then begin to reconstruct. (Haug, et al, 1987: 47–48). In the next section I provide guidelines for working with memories and images for your own practice (also see Livholts, 2015: 171–174).

### Working with memories and images – your practice

#### 1. Departures – the working constellation and the 'burning' question

The first aspect to consider is your working constellation. Will you be working individually, in pairs or in a group? Working in a group can help you to gain insights into a broader spectrum of memories, but it is also a good practice to work individually. You can, as a compromise, work at a distance with colleagues, through email, Skype or any other medium.

The next step is to choose a question/theme. Memory work literature advises us to choose 'a burning issue'. My assumption is that you already have a 'burning issue' represented by your research. If so, I suggest you work with 'my research (project)'. If you don't have a particular project, choose any question of interest – ideas for future research, for instance. If you combine research with clinical practice, you could choose a memory guided by 'my professional practice'.

#### 2. Write your memory and choose or create an image

*My research (project):* choose a memory from your research studies which represents a moment with particular meaning for you. This could be a memory from discussing your project with others, from reading texts or from

fieldwork. Memories will be multifaceted and set in a variety of contexts and spaces.

*My professional practice:* choose a memory from your professional practice – any situation filled with challenges, difficulties or positive encounters and outcomes. It might involve a meeting, conversation or dialogue with a client, service user, staff or colleagues. My experience is that scholars benefit greatly from this exercise, which helps to create awareness of emotions, communication, contexts, and institutional and professional cultures and codes.

*Photographic memory from my research and/or professional practice:* choose or create a photograph (or several photographs) from your research and/or professional practice which illustrates a moment of particular importance. You can choose already existing photos or you may want to create new photos. My experience from seminars and workshops is that scholars bring all sorts of photos – with or without people, of diverse geographical sites, views, buildings, schools and institutions, memorials, personal items and from the internet.

### Technologies of writing, telling, listening, reading, seeing

Writing and rewriting memories is an essential part of memory work. The recommended technique is to write a memory – an episode, event, moment, scene, action – in the third person to increase your attention to seeing concrete situations. Write with as much detail as possible but limit your text to half a page, maximum one page. Avoid biographical information, analysis and interpretation. I recommend you 'enter' the memory and write with the voice, emotional and sensory perceptions the memory evokes and to write in any style you find brings out this voice the best.

Begin with a simple description of the human subject/s of the photographs and/or describe the scene, then write an account from the position of a third person. Not all participants feel comfortable with this distancing technique. However, I would encourage you to try it and evaluate the difference. After working with the other technologies, you can

rewrite your memory or write new memories to create a 'collection'.

The oral practice of talking about memories and images extends analytical reflexivity and 'movements'. The act of speaking about and telling memories to others in the present actualises and constructs the way they create meaning today. The voice has a particular subjective and transformative function, bringing out the 'sound' of a memory and emotions to create context and movement between time and location – institutional, societal or local and global context.

Reading memories is a technology intimately related to writing and talking, and involves both 'silent' reading and reading 'aloud'. It is a performative act, where past memory encounters the present practice of interpretation through seeing and rereading. If you work individually, read your written memory aloud and record the reading and/or ask a colleague or friend to listen. For photos, begin your reading with a short, detailed description of the image. Reading aloud sometimes evokes (strong) emotions. The act of reading situates the author in relation to research and academic or professional life and may challenge university spaces dominated by mainstream research and practice as neutral and non-emotional work.

Listening is an important skill in education, research and professional practice. Listening carefully to your own memory when writing it (preferably in the third person) and later reading it aloud allows you to hear intonations and nuances and contradictions. The technology of listening is used to improve 'hearing skills' to analyse what is said, but also to recognise silences: what is left out, what stories are not told.

Seeing implies careful observation of detail and interpretation and, particularly in relation to photographs, creatively engages in a variety of ways of seeing, and seeing again. This practice of working with memories involves 'viewing' the aesthetics of written memories and images. Reflect on your first impression of the details in the image. Think about the relationship between viewers and viewed, why this photograph was taken and its place related with other photographs.

### Summary

I have addressed the memory work method as a creative use of self in research. I have suggested that memories and images can help the researcher develop new knowledge about her or his situated location in research and life. It is not



## feature article

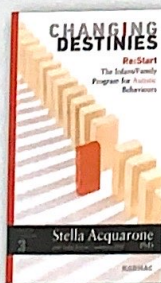
so much about 'having a good memory' as about practising it. The longer we work with and on ourselves, the more adept we become at retrieving forgotten history. We discover, as Haug et al (1987: 47-48) suggest, fragments of an architecture which we then begin to reconstruct.

### References

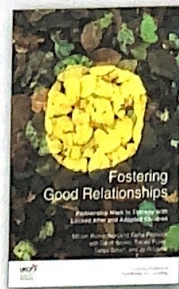
- Davies B and Gannon S (2006) (eds). *Doing collective biography: Investigating the production of subjectivity*. New York: Open University Press.
- Fahlgren S (2009). 'Discourse analysis of a childcare drama: or the interfaces between paradoxical discourses of time in the context of social work'. *Time and Society*, 18(2/3): 208-230.
- Haug F, et al (1987). *Female sexualization. A collective work of memory*. Verso.
- Haug F (2008). 'Memory-work as a method of social science research: a detailed rendering of memory-work method'. In AE Hyle, et al (2008). *Dissecting the mundane. International perspectives on memory-work*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Hyle AE, et al (2008). *Dissecting the mundane. International perspectives on memory-work*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Koutroulis G (2001). 'Soiled identity: memory-work narratives of menstruation'. *Health*, 5: 187-205.
- Kuhn A (1995). *Family secrets. Acts of memory and imagination*. London and New York: Verso Classics.
- Kuhn A (2010). 'Memory texts and memory work: performances of memory in and with visual media'. *Memory Studies*, 3(4): 298-313.
- Livholts M (2001/2011). *Women, welfare, textual politics and critique. An invitation to a thinkingwriting methodology in the study of welfare*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing. Doctoral dissertation originally published at the Department of Social Work, Umeå University, Sweden.
- Livholts M (2007). *Vanlig som vatten? Manlighet och normalitet i mediernas berättelser om våldtäkt*. [As normal as water? Masculinity and normality in media representations of rape]. Malmö: Gleerups förlag.
- Livholts M (2008). 'The loathsome, the rough type and the monster: the violence and wounding of media texts on rape'. In V Burr and J Hearn *Sex, violence and the body. The erotics of wounding*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 194-211.
- Livholts M (2015). 'Working with memories and images'. In M Livholts and M Tamboukou *Discourse and narrative methods. Theoretical departures, analytical strategies and situated writing*. London: Sage, 162-176.
- Livholts M and Tamboukou M (2015). *Discourse and narrative methods. Theoretical departures, analytical strategies and situated writing*. London: Sage.
- Onyx J and Small J (2001). 'Memory work: the method'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6): 773-786.
- Small J (1999). 'Memory work: a method for researching women's tourist experiences'. *Tourism Management*, 20: 25-35.
- Sontag S (2007). 'The image world'. In J Evans and S Hall (eds) *Visual culture. The reader*. London: Sage, 80-94.
- Widerberg K (1995). *Kunskapens Kön: Minnen, reflektioner och teori [The knowledge of gender: memories, reflections and theory]*. Stockholm, Sweden: Norstedts Förlag.
- Widerberg K (2010). 'In the homes of others: exploring new sites and methods when investigating the doings of gender, class and ethnicity'. *Sociology*, 44(6): 1181-1196.
- Wyatt J, Gale K, Gannon S and Davies B (2010). 'Deleuzian thought and collaborative writing: a play in four acts'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(9): 730-741.
- Wyatt J, Gale K, Gannon S and Davies B (2011). *Deleuze and collaborative writing. An immanent plane of composition*. New York: Peter Lang.

## New and forthcoming in the UKCP books series

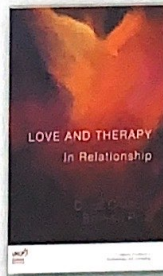
For the best new thinking in psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling



**Changing Destinies: the re-start infant family programme for early autistic behaviours**  
Stella Acquarone  
This book is about a new approach called 'Re-Start', developed by Stella Acquarone, to diagnose and treat early autism. In the Re-Start infant/family programme, a multidisciplinary team works with the parents and through the family relationships to reconfigure dysfunctional dynamics with the aim to "change destinies".



**Fostering good relationships**  
Miriam Richardson and Fiona Peacock  
This book is about different kinds of holding: holding the child in a safe cradle of hope and support, holding stories that contribute to a positive sense of identity; holding in mind the early trauma, holding the worry; holding a listening space for the child's voice to be heard and holding the people together in a parachute of partnership so they can come together around the common and specific purpose of looking after the child.



**Love and therapy in relationship**  
Divine Charura and Stephen Paul  
Sigmund Freud noted the importance of love in the healing of the human psyche. So many of life's distresses have their origins in lack of love, disruption of love, or trauma. People naturally seek love in their lives to feel complete. Is therapy a substitute for love? Or is it love by another name? This book offers explorations of the complexity of love from different modalities: psychoanalytic, humanistic, person-centred, psychosexual, family and systemic, transpersonal, existential, and transcultural.

### Books about psychotherapy: Write a review?

We regularly publish book reviews in *The Psychotherapist* written by members of UKCP. If you would be interested in writing your own review of a book that would be of interest to our members, we want to hear from you. You can choose any book related to psychotherapy. You can either suggest your own book that you have enjoyed, or pick from our list of suggestions online ([http://bit.ly/ukcp\\_books](http://bit.ly/ukcp_books)). We have also joined forces with Karnac Books, a specialist in psychotherapy and mental health publishing, to develop a series of books that reflect on and contribute to emerging themes in psychotherapy practice, training and research. Members are entitled to a 10% discount on all titles in the series when ordering through Karnac's website.

To order a book, or for more information on the full series, go to: [http://bit.ly/book\\_series](http://bit.ly/book_series)



# A study of black issues in counsellor training

Dr Isha McKenzie-Mavinga's study highlights the marginalisation of black and multicultural issues in counsellor training and practice. Ultimately, she aims to open up theory and translate it to fully aware, inclusive practice.

**O**ver the past couple of decades the interest in multicultural dimensions of therapeutic practice has increased, reflecting political and social change. However, as a tutor, I have often noticed that black counsellors and clients do not feel that transcultural theory has been sufficiently transferred into practice. The context of race and racism, for instance, is mentioned in the literature and addressed on some training courses without being integrated into the general programme. This suggested gap in counsellor training became the subject of my research, 'How do trainee counsellors in Britain understand concerns about black issues raised by themselves during their training or about clients during the therapeutic process' (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2015).



**Dr Isha McKenzie-Mavinga** is a psychotherapist and writer who has taught transcultural

workshops at Goldsmiths, University of London for 26 years. She has also worked as a student counsellor and senior lecturer at London Metropolitan University. She is the author of *Black Issues in the Therapeutic Process*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2009, and is currently working on her next book, *The Challenge of Racism in Therapeutic Practice*.

## Expanding methodology

One of the most difficult challenges in setting up a multicultural study is finding a suitable methodology to discover new paths while not perpetuating oppression. I experienced difficulties applying the theories at hand because the approach and focus had not been attempted before. Qualitative and multicultural theory did not apply strategies to work on black issues and I found their use could confine the method and, if applied dogmatically, promote Eurocentric inferences. This supported awareness of the ethical implications of 'epistemological power' and 'epistemological racism'.

My trouble with finding definitions brought my own experiences to the forefront. Take the concept of black issues, for example. What is it? Where did it come from? Whose definition? My use of the concept was derived from my personal and professional experience as a trainer and black woman. I used my creative skills as a self-reflective process and to express the voice that others sometimes find difficult to listen to.

## Creative use of self in research

Without fully realising it, I embarked on a heuristic multicultural journey that invoked an emotional response and the development of new concepts to support understanding. Taking an active approach, I designed a study that brought together research and practice, integrating the study into my work as a counselling trainer. My role as black facilitator, tutor, researcher and 'insider outsider' played an important part in the challenging nature of this study and as a model for developing safety and compassion to facilitate the process.

Drawing on a pluralistic approach, the heuristic process (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005, 2006, 2015, 2016) of understanding trainee counsellors' relationship with black issues was explored during training workshops. The study gave voice to trainee counsellors' concerns. It encouraged dialogue about relationships as black people, or with black peoples, linking to the therapeutic process. The participants' narratives demonstrated the usefulness of shared concerns and the process of finding a voice, confirming the emancipatory process of multicultural research.

Through using my creativity to share my own vulnerability, I learned how to work with and overcome my own silence and use my voice. This helped me become more aware of the tone and context of my voice when exploring black issues.

I also became attentive to the context and how of my emotions when discussing racism and the rough edges I encounter within myself when I am experiencing oppression. There were times when I felt like quitting because the job felt too difficult or scary. I honestly thought that developing a new discourse that challenged institutional racism would mean I would die, or that someone would kill me. It was really just a fear of unknown territory and how volatile the theme of racism appears to be. The poem *Invisible* (opposite) came out of my experiences with colleagues in an open plan office.

## Storytelling

Storytelling and oral traditions lie deep within the heritage of African and Asian peoples and this proved to be a useful way of untangling the transformative process of the study. In *Beloved* (Morrison, 1988), the community is silenced when struggling to support Beloved's mother who abandons and also attempts to destroy her children. The community later pulls together because of their new understanding; healing takes place through a shared history of slavery, oppression, mistrust, guilt and racism. Beloved returns in her broken state and creates a bridge between fear and transformation. On the one hand, she resurrects memories of her traumatic beginning and the history of white patriarchal domination and, on the other, achieves reconciliation with her mother and the community. Beloved's mother, in her desperation to save her children from the

ensla  
the tr  
I can  
born  
Belov  
whic  
fath  
slav  
herit  
into  
and  
allo  
disc  
eler  
ther

B  
tr  
tr

O  
Th  
iss  
ca  
qu  
a f  
th  
Th  
qu  
Br  
th  
b  
o  
P

B  
r  
fi  
v  
a  
t  
e  
t  
t  
e



## Black issues :raining

Idy highlights the  
lticultural issues in  
. Ultimately, she aims  
e it to fully aware,

### anding methodology

if the most difficult challenges in  
g up a multicultural study is finding  
ible methodology to discover new  
while not perpetuating oppression.  
rienced difficulties applying the  
es at hand because the approach  
cus had not been attempted before.  
stive and multicultural theory did  
ply strategies to work on black  
nd I found their use could confine  
thod and, if applied dogmatically,  
e Eurocentric inferences. This  
ted awareness of the ethical  
tions of 'epistemological power' and  
ological racism'.

ble with finding definitions brought  
experiences to the forefront. Take  
ept of black issues, for example.  
? Where did it come from? Whose  
n? My use of the concept was  
rom my personal and professional  
ce as a trainer and black woman.  
creative skills as a self-reflective  
nd to express the voice that others  
s find difficult to listen to.

### e use of self in research

ily realising it, I embarked on  
multicultural journey that  
emotional response and the  
nt of new concepts to support  
ling. Taking an active approach,  
s study that brought together  
d practice, integrating the study  
k as a counselling trainer. My  
facilitator, tutor, researcher  
outsider' played an important  
allenging nature of this study  
el for developing safety and  
o facilitate the process.

Drawing on a pluralistic approach, the  
heuristic process (Mckenzie-Mavinga, 2005,  
2006, 2015, 2016) of understanding trainee  
counsellors' relationship with black issues  
was explored during training workshops.  
The study gave voice to trainee counsellors'  
concerns. It encouraged dialogue about  
relationships as black people, or with black  
peoples, linking to the therapeutic process.  
The participants' narratives demonstrated  
the usefulness of shared concerns and  
the process of finding a voice, confirming  
the emancipatory process of multicultural  
research.

Through using my creativity to share my  
own vulnerability, I learned how to work  
with and overcome my own silence and use  
my voice. This helped me become more  
aware of the tone and context of my voice  
when exploring black issues.

I also became attentive to the context  
and how my emotions when discussing  
racism and the rough edges I encounter  
within myself when I am experiencing  
oppression. There were times when I felt like  
quitting because the job felt too difficult or  
scary. I honestly thought that developing a  
new discourse that challenged institutional  
racism would mean I would die, or that  
someone would kill me. It was really just a  
fear of unknown territory and how volatile  
the theme of racism appears to be. The  
poem *Invisible* (opposite) came out of my  
experiences with colleagues in an open plan  
office.

### Storytelling

Storytelling and oral traditions lie deep  
within the heritage of African and Asian  
peoples and this proved to be a useful way  
of untangling the transformative process of  
the study. In *Beloved* (Morrison, 1988), the  
community is silenced when struggling to  
support Beloved's mother who abandons  
and also attempts to destroy her children.  
The community later pulls together because  
of their new understanding; healing  
takes place through a shared history of  
slavery, oppression, mistrust, guilt and  
racism. Beloved returns in her broken  
state and creates a bridge between fear  
and transformation. On the one hand,  
she resurrects memories of her traumatic  
beginning and the history of white  
patriarchal domination and, on the other,  
achieves reconciliation with her mother and  
the community. Beloved's mother, in her  
desperation to save her children from the

enslavers, is driven to insanity as she recalls  
the terror.

I cannot begin to empathise with anyone  
born into slavery, but somewhere in  
Beloved's story there is something with  
which I resonate. Having no history of my  
father's side of the family, who were freed  
slaves, I made my journey to search for his  
heritage. This has given me great insight  
into the missing parts of my education  
and counsellor training. In addition, I have  
allowed myself to transgress the pain of  
discovering these missing parts. These  
elements of human nature were emerging  
themes in the process of the study.

once recognised, can be worked through  
and used for personal development. I liken  
this process to Jung's (1980) transformative  
concept of 'alchemy'. When old attitudes,  
defences and shadow archetypes become  
exposed and new insights are gained, there  
is progress and a new discourse arises. To  
support these insights, I introduced the  
concept of 'black western archetypes' that  
inhabit racist bits of the collective shadow  
and can be made conscious through  
exploring individual shadow elements of  
internalised racism.

Self-challenge, equalities issues and the  
needs of both black and white students

## Black counsellors and clients do not feel that transcultural theory has been sufficiently transferred into practice

### Opening a can of worms

The challenging nature of placing black  
issues in the training curriculum opened a  
can of worms. Those worms consisted of  
questions and concerns about racism as  
a feature of students' lives and therefore  
the training of black and Asian counsellors.  
This assisted me in devising my research  
question: How do trainee counsellors in  
Britain (from any background) understand  
their concerns about black issues raised  
by or about themselves during training  
or about clients during the therapeutic  
process?

Being both inside and outside the research  
raised ethical concerns about students'  
feelings about the theme, and if those  
would influence the way I marked their  
assignments. I was challenged to find ways  
to engage with a process that supported  
emancipation through dialogue, as opposed  
to silence. Students were able to express  
their fears about the impingement of racism  
on the subject of black issues. This created a  
bridge from fear to transformation.

### Expanding frameworks for understanding

On recognising the powerful feelings  
evoked during the transformative phase,  
I developed the concept of recognition  
trauma. A process of powerful feelings is  
started when the survivor or perpetrator  
of oppression becomes aware of their  
position in this phenomenon. This process,

and clients played a key role in the study.  
A reconciliation of social history and  
transferring knowledge into deliverable  
techniques was considered. The study  
played a role in creating new social forms  
and opening up theory.

Eurocentricism has been challenged in the  
process and application of the method,  
particularly in not leaving the responsibility  
to black students, or expecting students to  
find out about black issues in counselling  
outside the training. The question of  
how black issues are addressed has  
been explored through the process of  
understanding students' relationship  
with the phenomenon. The narratives of  
established practitioners were also explored  
to affirm the research phenomenon of  
black issues in training. From this I gained  
a broader understanding of their concerns  
and a framework for grounding the theory  
and creating further data.

### Can our narratives transform knowledge?

I have summarised emerging themes from  
this period of immersion, illumination and  
reflection on the impact of black issues in  
training. Responses to the phenomenon  
demonstrated that racism needed to  
be explored as part of the process of  
understanding black issues. The information  
presented above reflects the intensity of  
becoming engaged in the process of a  
study that symbolically represents 'a can of

### Invisible

They talk over my head  
They lean across my desk  
They stand beside me  
They ask someone else  
They ignore my request  
They take it off the agenda  
They try to convince me  
They say it's my problem

They arrive after me  
They stand in front  
They cue behind me  
They get served first

They turn their backs  
They want to shake hands  
They gave children guns  
They stole my lands

They wounded my heart  
They tortured my body  
They blinded my heritage  
They made the trail bloody

They show their tears  
They want compassion  
They carve their smiles  
They follow fashion

They misinterpret my words  
They don't want my opinion  
They wear their guilt  
They can't see I am broken

They fail to hear me  
They want me silenced  
They shrink away  
They call my power violence

They invite challenge  
They leave me on the frontline  
They include me when  
They want a token

They say show me how  
They have their problems  
They want it written  
They don't want it spoken

They come for my soul  
They have already taken  
They want me the same  
They make me different

They want to be conscious  
They want to do it right  
They want me visible  
They want me out of sight

ISHA MCKENZIE-MAVINGA (2002)



worms'. Examples of issues that emerged from students' concerns are listed below:

- My tutor researcher role
- The role of the black expert
- Issues of fear, safety and finding a voice
- Participants knowing and 'not knowing' about racism
- Differing levels of awareness and understanding of the meaning of 'black issues'.

There was acknowledgement that tutors felt it was difficult to do this work with students when it had not been part of their own training. My experience was no different to theirs and at times I felt unsupported. There seemed to be a lot of intellectualising and guilt expressed: for example, much attention given to reasons why they felt that they had not responded to my numerous requests for feedback, and why I was the only one keeping it on the agenda. I reminded them that they had previously asked whether they would be able to address black issues without my presence. Their responses seemed to support their fears about this topic. I challenged them to explore whether they were diluting the issue of racism. I spoke of operating from their defences and guilt about the theme. I also encouraged them by sharing the data I had already collected, which showed progress. We discussed the issues of it being my project and how sometimes individuals get apathetic and

uninterested in what seems to belong to another. I reminded them that they had all said they were willing at the beginning. I felt disappointed and impatient, yet I needed to stay with the process. I sometimes felt like just leaving it and not challenging or demanding any more response, but that would be giving up. I became concerned about destructive responses and that my own work might get picked to pieces. I guess this was a parallel to the students' concerns about my response to their work. Another poem, *Transcription* (below), evolved.

#### Writing up the research – having a voice

When it came to writing up my thesis, an old pattern of not feeling good enough crept into my writing and I eliminated my poems, thinking that they would not be accepted, even though they illustrated my process. This is one of the poems that I had written.

*I sit here in tears  
In fear of abandonment  
Patiently waiting  
Tuning this scenario  
For the voice that fears  
To come to me  
For this healing complete  
That we may be free  
But for this life  
This world, this family,  
This, the voice  
I wait patiently*

#### Transcription

I face the blank page/yawn, feel hysterical  
Laughter and tears beneath the surface  
With a prod my chest may exude this mass  
Afraid, my pen will cease to flow  
I stop to itch my nose/aware of stopping  
Stopping may distract attention  
My thinking once curbed,  
Can this narrative transform knowledge?  
Holding this pause/this moment in history  
A space to unravel, to mind and observe  
A cathartic matrix of writhing worms  
Each ventricular journey a precious growth  
Illumination of new born concepts/routes  
Past to future unfolding wisdom and notion  
A tapestry of experiences embrace tentatively  
Ignite the passion of learning new other ways

ISHA MCKENZIE-MAVINGA (2002/2005)

My supervisor moved me to tears when she said to me, 'You are free now Isha, you can include your poems.' Being told I was free was like mirroring freedom that I was about to give up. Many individuals don't really accept that they are free; that is why this work is necessary. We think we are living in a free country, we believe we are free, but we are not fully using our freedom. This is why I introduced the concept of a black empathic approach – to encourage a shared sense of celebrating identity and connecting with the impact of racism.

#### Informing practice on different levels

The study transformed my own practice as a psychotherapist and trainer, first by maintaining an inclusive approach to minority issues and gathering knowledge and theory to support that approach. Second, I explicitly addressed my availability to explore the deeper meaning of oppression, racism and black issues in training and the therapeutic relationship. Third, I used ongoing support to remain aware of my countertransference responses and of the compassion I had developed to model the support process. Fourth, I developed less fear of starting at the beginning, learning from my mistakes and asking for and expecting relevant help.

#### References

- Jung CG (1980). 'Psychology and alchemy'. *Collected works of CG Jung*. London: Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2002). 'Creative writing as healing in black women's group'. In A Dupont-Joshua (ed) *Working interculturally in counselling settings*. London: Routledge, 10–28.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2003). 'Creative writing as healing in black women's groups'. In A Dupont-Joshua (ed) *Counselling in intercultural settings*. Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2003). 'Linking social history and the therapeutic process, research and practice on black issues'. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research* 3(2): 103–106.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2004). *Finding a voice – understanding black issues in the therapeutic process*. Association for University and College Counselling.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2005). 'A study of black issues in counsellor training'. Doctorate in psychotherapy by professional studies, Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute, London.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2006). 'Is counselling colour blind?' *Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal*, 6(3).
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2015). 'Black issues in the therapeutic process: a multicultural heuristic study'. In S Goss and C Stevens (eds) *Making research matter*. London: Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2016). *The challenge of racism in therapeutic practice: engaging with oppression in practice and supervision*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Morrison T (1988). *Beloved*. London: Pan books.

## Developing imagination methods to enhance reflexivity

Psychotherapy is a rich resource of to enhance researcher reflexivity, a tradition of using imagination-based are hidden from conscious awareness use of innovative mental imagery t

**Psychotherapy, with its wealth of knowledge and theories of intrasubjective and intersubjective processes, has helped to inform methods, theories and approaches in other social science disciplines. Qualitative research has proved to be no exception and different psychotherapy modalities have made particular contributions to its repertoire. One such example would be psychoanalytically informed methods, which are designed to illuminate the unconscious dynamics operating in the researcher and the researcher/participant relationship that may impact on the research (Browne, 2006). As researcher reflexivity comes to the fore in qualitative research practice, the discipline of psychotherapy is particularly well positioned to contribute further methodological innovations to the wider field. This advantage is due to its expertise in understanding how the therapist's self is implicated in relational therapeutic processes.**

Before I co methods t shapes the understan 'reflexivity,

**Research** A review that rese: multifac: to captu single ac Research with diff constru: be fair t add anc already providi as thou stating encorr subjec dynam (p532) helpfi variari ii) intri collat



**Val Thomas** is a practitioner and supervisor. She was, until professional counselling training now working at The Minister C member of the Research Train are the research process and



in what seems to belong to them that they had all willing at the beginning. I felt impatient, yet I needed process. I sometimes felt that and not challenging or more response, but that up. I became concerned responses and that my et picked to pieces. I guess o the students' concerns to their work. Another (below), evolved.

My supervisor moved me to tears when she said to me, 'You are free now Isha, you can include your poems.' Being told I was free was like mirroring freedom that I was about to give up. Many individuals don't really accept that they are free; that is why this work is necessary. We think we are living in a free country, we believe we are free, but we are not fully using our freedom. This is why I introduced the concept of a black empathic approach – to encourage a shared sense of celebrating identity and connecting with the impact of racism.

#### research – having

ing up my thesis, an old good enough crept eliminated my poems, I'd not be accepted, trated my process. s that I had written.

#### Informing practice on different levels

The study transformed my own practice as a psychotherapist and trainer, first by maintaining an inclusive approach to minority issues and gathering knowledge and theory to support that approach. Second, I explicitly addressed my availability to explore the deeper meaning of oppression, racism and black issues in training and the therapeutic relationship. Third, I used ongoing support to remain aware of my countertransference responses and of the compassion I had developed to model the support process. Fourth, I developed less fear of starting at the beginning, learning from my mistakes and asking for and expecting relevant help.

#### References

- Jung CG (1980). 'Psychology and alchemy'. *Collected works of CG Jung*. London: Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2002). 'Creative writing as healing in black women's group'. In A Dupont-Joshua (ed) *Working interculturally in counselling settings*. London: Routledge, 10–28.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2003). 'Creative writing as healing in black women's groups'. In A Dupont-Joshua (ed) *Counselling in intercultural settings*. Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2003). 'Linking social history and the therapeutic process, research and practice on black issues'. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research* 3(2): 103–106.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2004). *Finding a voice – understanding black issues in the therapeutic process*. Association for University and College Counselling.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2005). 'A study of black issues in counsellor training'. Doctorate in psychotherapy by professional studies, Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute, London.
- McKenzie-Mavinga (2006). 'Is counselling colour blind?' *Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal*, 6(3).
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2015). 'Black issues in the therapeutic process: a multicultural heuristic study'. In S Goss and C Stevens (eds) *Making research matter*. London: Routledge.
- McKenzie-Mavinga I (2016). *The challenge of racism in therapeutic practice: engaging with oppression in practice and supervision*. Palgrave MacMillan.

## Developing imagination-based methods to enhance researcher reflexivity

Psychotherapy is a rich resource of methods and approaches that can be applied to enhance researcher reflexivity, says Val Thomas. One valuable seam is the tradition of using imagination-based methods to disclose aspects of the self that are hidden from conscious awareness. Val illustrates the article with Jo Harding's use of innovative mental imagery to shed light on her research process.

**P**sychotherapy, with its wealth of knowledge and theories of intrasubjective and intersubjective processes, has helped to inform methods, theories and approaches in other social science disciplines. Qualitative research has proved to be no exception and different psychotherapy modalities have made particular contributions to its repertoire. One such example would be psychoanalytically informed methods, which are designed to illuminate the unconscious dynamics operating in the researcher and the researcher/participant relationship that may impact on the research (Browne, 2006). As researcher reflexivity comes to the fore in qualitative research practice, the discipline of psychotherapy is particularly well positioned to contribute further methodological innovations to the wider field. This advantage is due to its expertise in understanding how the therapist's self is implicated in relational therapeutic processes.

Before I consider how to develop new methods to illuminate how the researcher shapes the research, it is important to understand what is meant by the term 'reflexivity.'

#### Researcher reflexivity

A review of the literature would indicate that researcher reflexivity is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that is difficult to capture. Furthermore, there is no single agreed position on this practice. Researchers from different traditions and with different theoretical perspectives construct reflexivity differently. It would be fair to say that these different positions add another level of complexity to an already complex topic. Finlay (2002a) provides a general definition of reflexivity as thoughtful, conscious self-awareness, stating 'reflexive analysis in research encompasses continual evaluation of subjective responses, inter-subjective dynamics, and the research process itself' (p532). Finlay (2002b) also suggests a helpful typology and identifies five different variants of reflexivity: i) introspection, ii) intersubjective reflection, iii) mutual collaboration, iv) social critique and v)

discursive deconstruction. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider all aspects of reflexivity – the reflexive practice discussed here is informed by the introspective variant, ie the use of personal revelation, to shed light on different aspects of the research process.

#### Reflexivity in practice

Reflexivity in practice requires a deep enquiry into the inner processes of the self. This task will very often include accessing the parts of the self that are hidden from conscious awareness. These inner unconscious dynamics shape how we construct and process our experience, and this will inevitably include how we carry out research.

Clinical experience in psychotherapy generally confirms that relying purely on verbal reflections and techniques for this task can be somewhat limited, particularly with regard to the dynamics and patterns laid down during preverbal developmental stages and also during traumatic adult experience. Consequently, psychotherapists will often draw on a range of nonverbal modes, according to their particular modality, to help shed light on these unconscious processes, one contemporary example being the therapist's embodied countertransference responses to their client. One particularly important nonverbal mode, of course, is mental imagery, and there is a well-established tradition of using clients' mental images to provide insights into the factors that are shaping their perspective and influencing their experience. It would follow then that the



**Val Thomas** is a practising counsellor, psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor. She was, until recently, course leader for professional counselling training at Anglia Ruskin University and is now working at The Minster Centre as course developer and as a member of the Research Training team. Her main research interests are the research process and the therapeutic use of mental imagery.



# feature article



visualized, held on the line with the  
worthily research project on a 17-minute  
opening the door and walking into an  
empty room. Spinnly over the course of  
a few days, an unworldly of what  
appeared to me, to be a normal person.  
The story of my experience in this state and  
the process of my research is the focus of  
this feature article.

Why has it  
research  
devel

# feature arti





mental imagery techniques originally developed for therapeutic purposes could be usefully applied in extra-therapeutic contexts such as qualitative research.

### **Positioning myself**

My own interest in developing methods to shed light on researcher reflexivity began when I was engaged in my own doctoral research project. I had had a creative

reflective practice for many years, based on using mental imagery to enquire into my own subjective processes. While doing research, it felt like a natural development to apply a similar approach to my project as a means of deepening my own reflexivity.

I began with a standard visualisation exercise of imagining myself standing in front of a door leading to a room. I

visualised a plate on the door with the words *My Research Project* on it. I imagined opening the door and walking into an empty room. Slowly, over the course of a few visits, an image unfolded of what appeared to me to be alchemical apparatus. Tracking developments in this image and interacting with it over the course of the project proved very helpful in terms of understanding how I was implicated in the research process (Thomas, 2014).

### **Incorporating the learning in our training**

When the research team at The Minster Centre began to advocate for more creative methods (Cotter, 2015), I took the opportunity to begin to teach this procedure to the master's dissertation students. One of the students, Jo Harding, gives an account below of her experience of using imagery that both informed and transformed her research process.

This example clearly demonstrates the potential for mental imagery methods to shed light on the research process. It begs the question why it has taken so long for psychotherapy research-practitioners to explore and develop innovative applications of this kind – particularly as the discipline has such a long and rich tradition of imagination-based clinical applications. Other therapy modalities have forged ahead in this regard – one in particular, art therapy, is currently at the forefront of

## **A student's account of using imagery**

**My dissertation research (Harding, 2015) explored the client's lived experience after their therapist self-disclosed a personal bereavement. I used heuristic methodology, wherein I was the research subject: the experience was one I had had as a client. For those unfamiliar with heuristic research, it involves searching internally to find the essence of an experience by accessing both explicit and vitally tacit or unconscious dimensions. It requires reflexivity and freedom of exploration (Moustakas, 1990). Throughout my research, I checked in with my image for guidance**

**about my process, and also sketched and wrote about it in my reflexive research journal.**

I first 'met' my image in October 2014, through a guided visualisation led by Val Thomas during a workshop at The Minster Centre. Val invited us to identify an image representing our research project. I was surprised by my image: a black climbing frame, with many interconnecting bars. It was enormous in comparison to me, reflecting how daunted I felt by my dissertation. Aspects of the image seemed immediately relevant to my research methodology. Its stark blackness symbolised clarity, and it invited me to explore and play. However, I felt confused

by seemingly contradictory elements. Initially, the solid frame seemed to represent structure, which reassured me, as habitually I organise to feel in control. However, the bars were extremely slippery, and when I imagined climbing on it, I was unable to hold on, which frustrated me. It transpired that my inability to grip the frame was an important pointer: to let go of my need for control. In heuristic research, it is essential to let the phases unfold naturally and without structure (Sela-Smith, 2002). Initially, I struggled to trust that this could happen, and drafted a timeline for the research stages. Whilst doing so, I became distracted by the incessant repetition in my mind of a familiar line from Leonard Cohen's song, 'Anthem'. When I looked up the lyrics, I discovered another line: 'forget your



### Why has it taken so long for psychotherapy research-practitioners to explore and develop innovative applications of this kind?

embracing new modes of enquiry. McNiff (1998) provides an instructive account of the development of research in this modality. In the beginning, art therapy research (in common with other therapy modalities) was primarily informed by psychology, with an attendant emphasis on enquiring into its therapeutic efficacy. However, more recently, this research paradigm has been questioned and new types of research are proposed that resonate with the artistic process. In other words, art-making itself is being used as the vehicle for the enquiry. It is worth noting that these developments have been driven by practitioner-researchers. It has not been easy to establish these new research methods. As McNiff (p51) states in relation to art, 'It has not been appreciated as a way of knowing and systematically studying human experience and other natural phenomena.' This unreflected resistance to the use of imagination-based methods of enquiry is predicated on a long-held distrust of imagination as a source of valid information (Thomas, 2016). Despite this cultural resistance, innovative approaches to research are emerging from this modality that have the potential to integrate clinical and research practices as well as influence

the wider qualitative research field. Art therapy demonstrates what is possible when clinical knowledge and expertise is creatively applied to research practice.

#### Concluding remarks

I believe that talking therapies, in particular psychotherapy, have the potential to generate similar levels of innovation in research practice, particularly in relation to shedding light on the research process. Imagination-based procedures are particularly suited to expanding the repertoire of reflexive methods in qualitative research – as I hope has been illustrated through the detailed account of applying a psychotherapy-informed imagery-based procedure to research. Art therapy has shown how practitioner-researchers have pioneered new modes of enquiry when they have applied their clinical knowledge and expertise to research.

Psychotherapy also has a great deal more to offer to the wider field of qualitative research, and one way of accomplishing this is to actively foster an imaginative engagement with research. As with art therapy, practitioner-researchers can lead the way through applying clinical expertise

and methods to their own process of enquiry. Creative experiments such as these can lead to new ways of illuminating researcher reflexivity. It is time to embrace a more imaginative engagement with research practice in psychotherapy.

#### References

- Cohen L (1992). *Anthem* (lyric). New York: Sony Music Entertainment.
- Cotter A (2015). 'Humanising psychotherapy research and training in research: intersubjectivity and beyond'. *The Psychotherapist*, autumn 2015, issue 61.
- Finlay L (2002a). "Outing" the researcher: the provenance, process and practice of reflexivity'. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4): 531–545.
- Finlay L (2002b). 'Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of using reflexivity in research'. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2): 209–230.
- Harding J (2015). *The shock and aftershocks: a heuristic exploration of the client's lived experience following their therapist's self-disclosure of a personal bereavement*. MA dissertation. The Minster Centre.
- McNiff S (1998). *Art-based research*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Moustakas C (1990). *Heuristic research: design, methodology and applications*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sela-Smith S (2002). 'Heuristic research: a review and critique of Moustakas's method'. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(3): 53–88.
- Thomas V (2014). 'Drawing on creative reflective practices in counselling research: an example of using mental imagery to enhance researcher reflexivity'. *British Journal of Counselling and Guidance*, 42(1): 43–51.
- Thomas V (2016). *Using mental imagery in counselling and psychotherapy: a guide to more inclusive theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

perfect offering' (Cohen, 1992). This felt like a sign to trust the process instead of planning it. My climbing frame then transformed from a fixed to a mobile object, swaying gently, which felt like affirmation that I was on the right path. From then, my frame often changed form.

My image was helpful in overcoming the greatest challenge I faced during my research: trusting my instinct to remain the sole subject and not conduct interviews. Moustakas (1990), who developed heuristic research, advocates interviewing to gather data. Even though some contemporary writers question the necessity of using co-researchers (Sela-Smith, 2002), I was very anxious about deviating from the classic method. My image consistently indicated

appeared as a round metal receptacle containing a single sunflower, as only one could flourish. Later, the frame became a mini-trampoline, on which I bounced alone, exhilarated. When I imagined another joining me via an interview, we bounced out of synch and I fell, at risk of being crushed by the other. My instinct was right, as had I conducted interviews, I would not have explored my process so deeply, which was vital for my findings.

In heuristic research, going deeper involves surrendering to discovery and potential pain. In my case, this involved exploring death, which I strongly resisted initially. In querying my resistance, I saw my frame as an object resembling a heating duct, with a tube that disappeared underground. The invitation was to go deeper into

my unconscious domain, wherein I encountered and explored what was the heart of my findings: fearing my own death.

Although at times I encountered resistance, I later struggled to let go of my exploration, afraid I would lose my way. When I checked in with my frame, it was curled over, at rest, indicating that it was time to incubate and allow my unconscious processes to work, another stage in heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). To signal the completion of my research, my climbing frame transformed, shedding all traces of the 'frame'. It became a large black glass vessel, in which I could rest. In retrospect, I have no doubt that my experience was far richer and truer as a consequence of using imagery.



# The role of routine outcomes evaluation in developing reflexivity in clinical practice

Dr Biljana van Rijn asks whether psychotherapists should embrace practice-based research in the quantitative format of ROE. Can we develop it and make it our own?

**W**ithin the therapeutic community, we are noticing an increased emphasis on routine outcome evaluation (ROE). ROE involves using standardised questionnaires in the ordinary course of therapy, usually after each session, to evaluate therapeutic progress. In the UK, large-scale ROE is used in IAPT to evaluate the effectiveness of psychotherapy for moderate anxiety and depression. Outcomes are published and used to create benchmarks for psychological therapies in the NHS (Glover, et al, 2010; Gyani, et al, 2013; Clark, et al, 2009).



**Dr Biljana van Rijn** is Faculty Head of Applied Research and Clinical Practice at the Metanoia Institute

in London where she runs a research centre. Biljana is a TA psychotherapist and a counselling psychologist. She is also a clinical supervisor and tutor at the Metanoia Institute. Biljana has a particular interest in integrating the fields of psychotherapy practice and research and supporting the involvement of psychotherapists in research.

## Bridging the gap

Some voluntary and statutory sector organisations have adopted this methodology, primarily to demonstrate their effectiveness and to gain funding. ROE is, however, an area where the gap between the therapeutic community, researchers and policymakers is at its widest. The majority of psychotherapists only use it if required by their employer and don't see it as relevant or clinically useful. This may put the therapeutic community at a disadvantage in that it places them outside the decision-making process about the provision of psychotherapy and counselling services. Reflection from both psychotherapists and researchers is needed to bridge this gap.

As a psychotherapist and researcher, I have insight into the issues on both sides. On the one hand, a body of research indicates that the reflection we already use in practice has limits, particularly in evaluating our own effectiveness. On the other, ROE, when used mechanistically, doesn't have the capacity to develop practice. The aim of this paper is to present some of my thinking about gaps in practice and research in this area, raise questions and make suggestions for a way forward.

## Developing methods of feedback and evaluation in psychotherapy

Importance of feedback in psychotherapy, as in any professional activity, seems to be self-evident. We need to recognise the impact of our interventions and adapt our work to help clients achieve their aims.

Therapists have long been alert to this, and various methods for reflecting on psychotherapy processes and outcomes have become embedded in psychotherapy training and practice. Students are observed in their practice sessions during training. Many of them audiorecord their sessions, and all have supervision and personal psychotherapy. This suggests that we already have multiple methods and skills to assess the effectiveness of our practice and our abilities.

Unfortunately, research suggests that this is not as effective as we might think. Psychotherapists seem to suffer from a self-assessment bias similar to that found in other professions. Research by Walfish et al (2012) found that most of their psychotherapist participants rated their skills as above average in comparison to their peers. They thought that only 3.66 per cent of their clients deteriorated during therapy, and 47.7 per cent of the sample said that none of their clients deteriorated. Similar results have been found in other studies (Lambert and Shimokawa, 2011; Lambert, et al, 2002).

## Inaccurate evaluations

These evaluations seem to be very inaccurate when compared to actual psychotherapy outcomes. Psychotherapy outcomes research shows that, on average, across the different therapeutic settings, only about 40 per cent of clients achieve clinically significant change and up to 20 per cent deteriorate. In addition, a review of literature on alliance ruptures shows that they are far more frequent than therapists identify or clients disclose (Muran, et al, 2010; Safran, et al, 2011).

The literature on premature endings in therapy also shows that they are common in both public services (Pekarik and Finney-Owen, 1987) and private practice (Mueller and Pekarik, 2000). Therapists' skills in building and repairing the relationship have an impact on the dropout rates (Roos and Werbart, 2013). The question that arises is, how can we realistically assess alliance ruptures and outcomes in our own practice?

Research like this suggests that we need to find a way of reviewing or supplementing ways of reflecting on our practice, even when dealing with things as familiar as identifying alliance ruptures, our own skills assessment or our clients' need for different ways of working. As a profession, we might



## feature article

have moved too far away from formal evaluation methods that could have a role in this process.

### What are the difficulties in using ROE?

Holmqvist et al (2013) address some of the tensions when using ROE in psychotherapy. I have frequently heard from students and colleagues that some of the outcome measures are not well suited to the practice of psychotherapy. Instead of aiding therapy, they are based on the medical model and seem to suit a political purpose rather than support therapy. For example, the focus on anxiety and depression does not reflect a clinical reality where clients present with several coexisting issues. Psychotherapy formulation is far more helpful in developing treatment plans and therapeutic theory is of more help in working with clients than routine outcome measures (ROMs).

ROE usually takes place in time-limited settings. However, long-term and open-ended therapy, which usually take place in private practice, do not have ROE protocols or measures suited to this type of work. For example, most of the commonly used measures rely on calculations of clinical cut-off scores and are not particularly useful once clients have moved below the clinical range of symptoms. In my experience, in long-term psychotherapy, this usually happens within the first six months to year of therapy, when the more in-depth work usually starts.

Over my years of teaching students to use ROMs in the research clinic, I am aware of unease about using questionnaires and 'forms', as if this format somehow does not suit the culture of psychotherapy practice. This unease is amplified by fears of being assessed and 'measured'.

### Developing reflexivity in ROE

An approach to developing ROE needs to start from a reflection on what we might gain from it in terms of the benefit of developing work with individual clients and using creativity to integrate it into the therapeutic process. The following are just some suggestions from work at the Metanoia Institute.

### Developing clients' engagement and openness

In some psychotherapy settings, ROMs are only used for evaluating the service.

## PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE-9 (PHQ-9)

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?  
(Use ✓ to indicate your answer)

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

FOR OFFICE CODING 0 + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_  
\*Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all       Somewhat difficult       Very difficult       Extremely difficult

### A commonly used questionnaire; PHQ-9

Therapists do not see the clients' responses and are unable to use them in any way. There is an argument that this gives clients more freedom to provide feedback but it is not particularly helpful to the therapeutic process. Instead, ROMs could support engagement in self-reflection between sessions. Completing a questionnaire once a week between sessions creates a structure that could assist reflection.

Questionnaires also give an opportunity for feedback to the therapist without seeming too personal or rude, which is a concern for many clients. In this way, ROMs could help identify ruptures and attend to the working alliance. Finally, being able to have a conversation with a client about therapy, what works and what doesn't, has a role in building the therapeutic relationship and engaging clients in their own therapy. Openness about negotiating the aims of therapy

and ways of working has been an integral part of humanistic therapies, such as transactional analysis (Sills, 1997), and has been more recently highlighted as a 'metatherapeutic' dialogue in a pluralistic approach by Cooper and McLeod (2011).

### Integration of measures into the therapeutic process

Questionnaires are frequently seen as alien to the therapeutic process. This is particularly the case for psychotherapists, in contrast to clients. The formal wording and structure of questionnaires seem to mark them out as something different from other personal material clients bring into sessions. However, some of that formality and consistency might support the therapeutic process. For example, it would not be particularly useful to spend time each session reviewing all aspects of clients' wellbeing, from their sleeping patterns to how often they feel despairing. Instead,



## Research indicates that the reflection we use in practice has limits, particularly in evaluating our own effectiveness

both clients and therapists tend to choose whatever is a figural theme for them on the day.

The information given by clients in ROMs could be significant for the therapeutic process and provide feedback to therapists. It could indicate that the client is at risk, becoming more distressed or deteriorating. Clients could communicate this regularly and quickly, without the need to engage in prolonged and detailed enquiries each session. Of course, not all distress indicates deterioration and integrating the information into the therapeutic dialogue needs to be flexible and individual to each client. For example, therapists at Metanoia usually start by taking time to scan through the questionnaires the clients bring to the session, ask them if they want to focus on anything in particular, and reflect on what they have noticed, such as areas of risk, feedback on the therapeutic relationship, etc. Used in this way, questionnaires become an additional reflective tool and could be adapted to suit different clients and therapeutic styles.

### Choosing measures that suit psychotherapy practice

Most commonly used measures in the UK focus on recognisable clinical disorders such as depression, PHQ-9 (Kroenke, et al, 2001) and anxiety, GAD-7 (Spitzer, 2006). Measures of global distress such as CORE-OM (Barkham, et al, 2001), helpful aspects of therapy (Elliott, 1993) and the therapeutic relationship (Bordin, 1979; Tracey and Kokotovic, 1989) could be more suitable outside health settings. Many other measures that focus on interpersonal styles, attachment, compassion, etc are available. They are easily accessible and many are free of charge.

### Training of therapists and supervisors

For ROE to become common and integrated into therapeutic practice, it needs to be integrated into psychotherapy training and supervision alongside other reflective methods. Integration into training could support a change in the culture of psychotherapy, which could involve moving beyond the false dichotomy between

subjectivity and objectivity to embrace a wider range of complexity of human expression. This might also mean that, as individuals, we might also need to embrace our fallibility more fully and realise the limits to our ability to know what is going on for our clients – or even within the process of psychotherapy.

### Development of research

#### ROE in long-term psychotherapy

Current methods of ROE are poorly suited to long-term psychotherapy. Giving sessional measures to clients after the first year of psychotherapy, in my experience, makes it repetitive and needlessly mechanistic. It would be helpful to consider ways in which ROE could support the long-term therapeutic process. Using measures at regular intervals might provide a history of the process that therapists and clients could use. For example, for clients who experience periods of emotional instability, ROM could develop their ability for mentalisation, helping them remember times when they felt very distressed and times when they did not.

#### Developing new questionnaires

There is a need to develop and test measures and methods led by therapeutic need that are truly useful to psychotherapists. This suggests a need to conduct more research and engage therapists who work in private practice, as they are fast becoming the only providers of long-term psychotherapy.

### Conclusion

Practice-based research in its quantitative, formal format of ROE presents a challenge to the therapeutic community. Is this something we could embrace and make our own? What can we learn from it? My view, as a relational psychotherapist, is that I would like to open up a wide range of discourse with my clients, including the sources that do not traditionally stem from psychotherapy. ROE could give us an opportunity to develop our reflexivity and responsiveness, as well as contribute to the body of practice-based research.

### References

- Barkham M, Margison F, Leach C, Lucock M, Mellor-Clark J and Evans C (2001). 'Service profiling and outcomes benchmarking. Using the CORE-OM: toward practice-based evidence in the psychological therapist'. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 69: 184–196.
- Bordin ES (1979). 'The generalizability of the psychoanalytic concept of the working alliance'. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice*, 16(3): 252–260.
- Clark DM, Layard R, Smithies R, Richards DA, Suckling R and Wright B (2009). 'Improving access to psychological therapy: initial evaluation of two demonstration sites'. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 47: 910–920.
- Cooper M and McLeod J (2011). *Pluralistic counselling and psychotherapy*. Sage.
- Elliott R (1993). *Helpful aspects of therapy form*. Accessed 30/08/12 at [www.experiential-researchers.org/instruments/elliott/hat.pdf](http://www.experiential-researchers.org/instruments/elliott/hat.pdf)
- Holmqvist R, Philips B and Barkham M (2013). 'Developing practice-based evidence: benefits, challenges, and tensions'. *Psychotherapy Research*, 25(1): 20–31.
- Kroenke K, Spitzer RL and Williams JB (2001). 'The PHQ-9: validity of a brief depression severity measure'. *Journal of General and Internal Medicine*, 16: 606–613.
- Lambert MJ and Shimokawa K (2011). 'Collecting client feedback'. In J Norcross and MJ Lambert (eds) *Psychotherapy relationships that work*, 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 203–223.
- Lambert MJ, Whipple JL, Vermeersch DAD, Smart W, Hawkins EJ, Nielsen SL and Goates M (2002). 'Enhancing psychotherapy outcomes via providing feedback on client progress: a replication'. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 9(2): 91–103.
- Mueller M and Pekarik G (2000). 'Treatment duration prediction: client accuracy and its relationship to dropout, outcome, and satisfaction'. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 37(2): 117–123.
- Muran JC, Safran JD and Eubanks-Carter C (2010). 'Developing therapist abilities to negotiate alliance ruptures'. In JC Muran and JP Barber (eds) *The therapeutic alliance: an evidence-based guide to practice*. US: Guilford Press, 320–340.
- Pekarik G and Finney-Owen K (1987). 'Outpatient clinic therapist attitudes and beliefs relevant to client dropout'. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 23(2): 120–130.
- Roos J and Werbart A (2013). 'Therapist and relationship factors influencing dropout from individual psychotherapy: a literature review'. *Psychotherapy Research*, 23(4): 394–418.
- Safran JD, Muran JC and Eubanks-Carter C (2011). 'Repairing alliance ruptures'. In J Norcross and M Lambert (eds) *Psychotherapy relationships that work*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, 224–238.
- Sills C (1997). 'Contracts and contract making'. In C Sills (ed) *Contracts in counselling*. Sage, 11–33.
- Spitzer RL, Kroenke R, Williams JB and Lowe B (2006). 'A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder: the GAD-7'. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166: 1092–1097.
- Tracey TJ and Kokotovic AM (1989). 'Factor structure of the Working Alliance Inventory'. *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1(3): 207–210.
- Walfish S, McAlister B, O'Donnell P and Lambert MJ (2012). 'An investigation of self-assessment bias in mental health providers'. *Psychological Reports*, 110(2): 639–644.



## Using our own experience in research in counselling and psychotherapy: how feminist ideas have influenced a research work/life

Jeannie Wright reflects on her move towards an autoethnographic, arts-based approach to counselling and psychotherapy at a time when the prevailing climate in the UK tends towards positivism and outcome studies.

**R**ecently leaving a job where I had used my office as a transitional holding space between jobs, countries and homes, I found all sorts of old reflective journals and research diaries that I had completely forgotten about. The move away from respect-able, 'scientific' methodological approaches such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) towards a more 'alternative' narrative, arts-based autoethnographic is very clearly mapped out in those pages.

### The use of writing for therapeutic and reflective practice purposes

Using my own experience is at the heart of this epistemological shift and in this brief snapshot of over 20 years' researching



**Dr Jeannie Wright** has been involved in therapeutic practice and research nationally and

internationally for many years. She has worked as a director of counselling and psychotherapy programmes at the University of Warwick, and was Associate Professor in Counselling at Massey University in New Zealand. Her doctoral study was on the therapeutic potential of expressive and reflective writing. She is author of *Reflective Writing in Counselling and Psychotherapy*.

and publishing in counselling and psychotherapy I aim to trace some of the influences that have been most important. The theoretical framework for most of my practice-based research has been feminist, in all its fragmentation. There are political principles underlying who is researching whom, why and how in the questions and critical voices of feminist research. In counselling and psychotherapy, we still seem to lag behind compared to other social sciences, arts and humanities disciplines, which is perhaps not surprising in a new and applied area (Speedy, 2008).

The research topic I have returned to consistently is the use of writing for therapeutic and reflective practice purposes. Evangelical about communicating

my findings with clients and supervisees, I started out with a very 'respect-able' IPA study of five women who had used writing in brief, work-based therapy (Wright, 2003a). IPA values an understanding of the world from the perspective of the research participants and recognises interpretative work by the researcher (Smith, et al, 2009). The IPA thematic analysis, however, did not do justice to the thick descriptions of therapeutic experiences I was hearing, nor to my experience of working with these women. Too much was missed. I brooded about case studies, following feminist relational ethics where power sensitivity is key. Eventually, I managed to overcome ethical queasiness and worked with a former client to produce a 'co-researched'



case study, a crucial distinction maybe. The famous and very useful Josselson (1996) piece about doing this work in anguish made sense and yet I wondered about that balance between the risks involved and the benefits. In hindsight, the client decided not to use her name or even 'co-author' the article – the vulnerability was all hers, not mine. It was possible, however, to foreground her own words in a way that IPA would not have enabled and she managed with ongoing consent to approve the finished piece.

## The (not always welcome) use of self in research

Especially in counselling and psychotherapy, where the ethics of case study research have been well analysed (McLeod, 2010), I wondered about using myself as a case study instead, and so found my way towards autoethnography. I disagree with McLeod's lukewarm appraisal of using ourselves in counselling and psychotherapy research. Some of the ethical contradictions about telling others' stories even sent me spinning back into more 'objective' ways of working, such as thematic analysis – but not for long.

Early on, I also realised that funding for the kind of qualitative research I wanted to do would be hard to find, if not downright impossible. In the yellowing ring binders cleared out of the office, I find paper copies of proposals for funding for research on the client's experience of therapeutic writing online, on the role of writing therapy in time-limited workplace counselling, and so on. As far as I know there is still a gap in the counselling at work literature, where contracts are time-limited and writing, a reflective, supported kind of writing, works well for people, whether online or as an adjunct to face-to-face therapeutic relationships. I notice that in one proposal I'm using IPA in order to come across as a proper 'scientific' researcher, although I cannot pretend to be a psychologist. The electronic version of this funding application is long lost in a trail of laptops and university networks; in the paper copy, I'm using language like 'superordinate themes' and 'verification step.' It makes me smile.

I was still passionate about the need to publish accounts of using writing with clients, but I was stuck. Here's one extract from my research diary after I'd completed the PhD dated 2006: 'it seems I have to go into the doldrums to come out with something – what? A bit of drive? Confidence? I re-read

## The move from respect-able, 'scientific' methodological approaches towards a more 'alternative' narrative, arts-based autoethnographic is clearly mapped out

parts of Kim Etherington's (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher* and felt like singing – even mopped the hall floor! Energising or what.'

### Perseverance and authenticity

It goes to show how important it is to carry on writing and to submit for publication, even when it feels like we're publishing into a total vacuum. In spite of Kim Etherington's (2000) shining examples, I had felt increasingly uncomfortable with telling other people's stories derived from the world of counselling and psychotherapy.

In 2006, I was preparing to leave the UK for a new job in Aotearoa New Zealand. I write habitually and started catching down on paper some of my observations about what was going on for me at the airport, literally in transition between jobs and countries. Three years later and the subsequent article was published in an American journal where, taking extracts from my personal journals in an autoethnographic study of migration and writing, I claimed the therapeutic as well as the research value of that writing (Wright, 2009). I now see how careful I was in that article, at least on the surface, to observe Martin Tollich's injunctions about the ethics of autoethnography (Tollich, 2010). Using a metaphor of imagined inked tattoo, Tollich suggests treating any autoethnography with great caution, anticipating the author's future vulnerability. He also suggests that autoethnographers should always assume that all the people mentioned in the text will read it at some point.

Naïvely, in retrospect, it felt safer to me to write about my own experience. When my father died in 1996, I wrote some poetry not meant to be read by anyone other than me. In an article deliberately sent again to an American journal of poetry therapy (who would read that?), I allowed that poetry out into the light where others could read it (Wright, 2003b). Now I wonder about the ethical responsibility of some of those decisions. There is no way to gain informed consent from the dead. What I did gain was another publication, though not, of course, in a recognised five-star journal. (Those who

work in academic contexts will know the tension between high scores on somebody else's scales and using our own experience in research.) And, occasionally, an email arrives thanking me and letting me know that something I've written about my own experience has been read and has been useful to somebody else.

Using a kind of private, confessional writing was how I always survived when the going got tough. I strongly identified with bell hooks asking for and being given a diary:

*Confessional writing in diaries was acceptable in our family because it was writing that was never meant to be read by anyone. Keeping a daily diary did not mean that I was seriously called to write, that I would ever write for a reading public. This was 'safe' writing... I could be angry – there with no threat of punishment. I could 'talkback'. Nothing had to be concealed. I could hold on to myself there.*

HOOKS, 1999: 4–5

Ann Cvetkovich, more recently, using feminist and queer theories, has rehabilitated the personal confessional journal as a way out of depression as well as a form of scholarly activity (Cvetkovich, 2012). Depression is analysed as a form of public feeling, and while individual therapy is given short shrift, more collective activities are recommended.

### Collaborative reflexivity

Of course the isolation of this solitary personal writing position, which has been described as schizoid by one email correspondent, is reduced by reading/ connecting with other people's writing – and that was my next move towards collective biography. The vulnerability and potential exposure of using our own experience in research are lessened in collective biography, which has different ethical and political principles, together with a clear feminist foundation (Wright, et al, 2011).

Theoretically, feminist thinking and scholarship have shown up again and again for me in practice and research. In counselling and psychotherapy, we are not yet clear about a feminist infrastructure or framework for practitioners or

research  
and psy  
by the r  
more pl  
accepta  
needec

Conc  
Gradua  
autoeth  
biograp  
close a  
(Jossel:  
based i  
on the  
short a  
traject  
climate  
in the l  
and ou  
specia  
about  
and w

### Refe

Cvetko  
feeling  
Press.

Etherir  
researc  
Jessic

Hooks  
at wor

Jossel  
study

Jossel  
(2002)  
learnin  
Ameri

McLe:  
couns

Smith  
Interp  
theor;

Speer  
psych  
Macn

Tollic  
pract  
autoe  
Resec

Wright  
work  
writin  
Resec

Wright  
reflex  
Poetr

Wright  
ther:  
Inqu.

Wright  
'Frac  
mod  
Guid



## ove from respect-able, 'scientific' ological approaches towards a alternative' narrative, arts-based hographic is clearly mapped out

herington's (2004) *Becoming  
earcher and felt like singing  
d the hall floor!* Energising or

### ce and authenticity

how important it is to carry  
to submit for publication,  
ets like we're publishing into  
In spite of Kim Etherington's  
xamples, I had felt  
omfortable with telling other  
derived from the world of  
psychotherapy.

eparing to leave the UK for  
earoa New Zealand. I write  
arted catching down on  
y observations about what  
me at the airport, literally  
veen jobs and countries.  
and the subsequent article  
an American journal where,  
om my personal journals in  
phic study of migration and  
the therapeutic as well as  
e of that writing (Wright,  
ow careful I was in that  
the surface, to observe  
junctions about the ethics  
hy (Tollich, 2010). Using a  
ined inked tattoo, Tollich  
any autoethnography  
anticipating the author's  
y. He also suggests that  
s should always assume  
mentioned in the text will  
nt.

ct, it felt safer to me to  
n experience. When my  
I wrote some poetry not  
y anyone other than me.  
ately sent again to an  
'poetry therapy' (who  
allowed that poetry  
ere others could read  
ow I wonder about  
ility of some of those  
o way to gain informed  
ad. What I did gain was  
though not, of course,  
star journal. (Those who

work in academic contexts will know the  
tension between high scores on somebody  
else's scales and using our own experience  
in research.) And, occasionally, an email  
arrives thanking me and letting me know  
that something I've written about my own  
experience has been read and has been  
useful to somebody else.

Using a kind of private, confessional writing  
was how I always survived when the going  
got tough. I strongly identified with bell  
hooks asking for and being given a diary:

*Confessional writing in diaries was acceptable  
in our family because it was writing that was  
never meant to be read by anyone. Keeping a  
daily diary did not mean that I was seriously  
called to write, that I would ever write for a  
reading public. This was 'safe' writing... I could  
be angry - there with no threat of punishment. I  
could 'talkback'. Nothing had to be concealed. I  
could hold on to myself there.*  
HOOKS, 1999: 4-5

Ann Cvetkovich, more recently, using feminist  
and queer theories, has rehabilitated the  
personal confessional journal as a way out  
of depression as well as a form of scholarly  
activity (Cvetkovich, 2012). Depression is  
analysed as a form of public feeling, and  
while individual therapy is given short shrift,  
more collective activities are recommended.

### Collaborative reflexivity

Of course the isolation of this solitary  
personal writing position, which has  
been described as schizoid by one email  
correspondent, is reduced by reading/  
connecting with other people's writing - and  
that was my next move towards collective  
biography. The vulnerability and potential  
exposure of using our own experience in  
research are lessened in collective biography,  
which has different ethical and political  
principles, together with a clear feminist  
foundation (Wright, et al, 2011).

Theoretically, feminist thinking and  
scholarship have shown up again and  
again for me in practice and research. In  
counselling and psychotherapy, we are not  
yet clear about a feminist infrastructure  
or framework for practitioners or

researchers. Research in counselling  
and psychotherapy is still dominated  
by the medical model, and calls for a  
more pluralistic perspective on what is  
acceptable and publishable are urgently  
needed.

### Concluding reflections

Gradually moving towards  
autoethnography and collective  
biography, becoming more and more 'up  
close and personal', was inevitable for me  
(Josselson, et al, 2002). Based on practice-  
based research, modelling reflexivity  
on the way through, the aim of this  
short article has been to reflect on that  
trajectory at a time when the prevailing  
climate in counselling and psychotherapy  
in the UK tends more towards positivism  
and outcome studies. This particular  
special issue may raise some questions  
about that epistemological dominance  
and who controls what in our field.

### References

- Cvetkovich A (2012). *Depression: a public  
feeling*. Durham and London: Duke University  
Press.
- Etherington K (2004). *Becoming a reflexive  
researcher: using ourselves in research*. London:  
Jessica Kingsley.
- Hooks B (1999). *Remembered rapture: the writer  
at work*. London: Women's Press.
- Josselson R (1996). *Ethics and process in the  
study of lives*. London: Sage.
- Josselson R, Lieblich A and McAdams DP (eds)  
(2002). *Up close and personal: the teaching and  
learning of narrative research*. Washington, DC:  
American Psychological Association.
- McLeod J (2010). *Case study research in  
counselling and psychotherapy*. London: Sage.
- Smith JA, Flowers P and Larkin M (2009).  
*Interpretative phenomenological analysis:  
theory, method and research*. London: Sage.
- Speedy J (2008). *Narrative inquiry and  
psychotherapy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave  
Macmillan.
- Tollich M (2010). 'A critique of current  
practice: ten foundational guidelines for  
autoethnographers'. *Qualitative Health  
Research*, 20(12): 1599-1610.
- Wright JK (2003a). 'Five women talk about  
work-related brief therapy and therapeutic  
writing'. *Counselling and Psychotherapy  
Research*, 3(3): 204-209.
- Wright JK (2003b). 'Writing for protection:  
reflective practice as a counsellor'. *Journal of  
Poetry Therapy*, 16(4): 191-198.
- Wright JK (2009). 'Autoethnography and  
therapy: writing on the move'. *Qualitative  
Inquiry*, 15(4): 623-640.
- Wright JK, Lang SKW and Cornforth S (2011).  
'Fractured connections: migration and holistic  
models of counselling'. *British Journal of  
Guidance and Counselling*, 39(5): 471-486.

## An existential exploration of 'The theme of the three caskets' from *The Merchant of Venice*

Carol Ann Peters considers how the 'three caskets'  
scene in Shakespeare's play illuminates different ways  
of thinking about the nature of 'choice'.

*In sooth I know not why I am so sad:* Antonio (I.i.1)

*By my troth, my little body is weary of this great world.* Portia (I.ii.1-2)

**A**s a Shakespeare enthusiast,  
I am often struck by how his  
plays express the whole spectrum  
of emotions in the briefest of time  
that is the play. In just two or three  
hours, the bridging and compression  
of time, place and character are  
accepted without hesitation and the  
dilemmas and contradictions that  
we all may experience are played  
out. During a recent performance of  
*The Merchant of Venice*, I was taken  
by how Shakespeare's portrayals  
communicate many different  
psychological states, both public and  
private. As therapists, I feel that we  
could use this substantial body of  
work to enrich our understanding of  
human nature. We can learn a lot from  
Shakespeare - perhaps even more



**Carol Ann  
Peters** is a  
professionally  
qualified  
counsellor and  
psychotherapist  
based in Surbiton.

Carol has worked as an honorary Staff  
Counsellor for the Psychological Well  
Being Service in Kingston NHS Hospital  
Trust.

about the human struggle than from  
the scores of psychological theories  
that we encounter in our work. It  
occurred to me that Shakespeare  
helps us to think in a bigger and  
brighter way. Involvement in the  
language creates fresh emergent  
consciousness that takes shape in a  
phenomenological way, in that it is felt  
in the guts rather than the head. These  
thoughts and feelings emerge as we  
respond to Shakespeare's language;  
we become more attuned to ourselves  
and therefore more attuned to our  
clients.

### The three caskets

In *The Merchant of Venice*, one aspect of the  
play captivated me: the scene depicting a  
choice between three caskets (or chests) of  
gold, silver and lead. The three casket scenes  
take place in Belmont, a romantic setting  
outside the trading city of Venice. Portia,  
a wealthy Christian heiress from Belmont,  
is bound by the will of her dead father to  
set a challenge for a potential husband.  
The challenge involves a test of choosing  
between the caskets, each inscribed on the  
outside and each having a message within,  
but only one (the lead casket) containing  
her portrait. The suitor who chooses the  
lead casket with Portia's portrait chooses  
correctly and wins her hand in marriage. The  
suitors are the Prince of Morocco, the Prince