

Is there a role for therapeutic photography in social work with groups?

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IS THERE A ROLE FOR THERAPEUTIC PHOTOGRAPHY IN
SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS?

Neil Fraser Gibson

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the
Robert Gordon University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Therapeutic photography is the term given to the use of photography to elicit positive outcomes for the user, yet these benefits appear to be underutilised within professional practice, particularly where a therapeutic relationship already exists which could be enhanced, none more so than the profession of social work.

This research begins by exploring the current uses of therapeutic photography to identify common outcomes and highlights the similarities between the theoretical approaches of therapeutic photography and those of social work. Utilising a socio-ecological model, a programme was then designed and delivered to a group of social work service users from a mental health setting. The qualitative approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilised to explore the ways participants used the images they produced, and how social work theories might be applied in practice.

Six super-ordinate themes were identified within the results. These were 1) exposing the self, 2) searching, 3) developing the self, 4) family relations, 5) medicalised label, and 6) isolation. Each of the super-ordinate themes had three sub-themes. Results suggest that the photographs produced initiated discussions around identity, and social work theories were applicable throughout the programmes. Knowledge of group work theories was useful and, when conducted amongst peers, the use of therapeutic photography facilitated a threefold stage of exploration beginning with social identity, then personal identity, and finally self-concept. The practice of therapeutic photography also appeared to change power dynamics within the therapeutic relationship and gave a sense of control to the participant.

The outcomes indicate that, when structured, the use of therapeutic photography within social work with groups may have benefits to both the participants and the professionals as it enhances communication, empowers the service user, and enables the objectification and externalisation of issues for discussion.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction - A personal rationale

In the spring of 2004 I was a PG Social Work student and undertook a placement through Erasmus. I went to Antwerp in Belgium to work at a government run centre for asylum seekers called Fedasil. The placement ran for 12 weeks, but during my time there I wanted to work with a group of asylum seekers and run a project with them. I had with me an old Nikon F100n film camera and several spools of 35mm black and white film, so I decided to run a photography club in the centre and asked volunteers to meet me one afternoon.

A variety of participants with different cultural backgrounds attended and I explained the purpose of the group – to have fun with the camera, to take pictures of life in the centre, and to select images for display within the centre. Each day the participants would book out the camera and document their lives.

When I developed the images I expected to see a multitude of bleak, stark photographs of the cramped conditions, the unsanitary dormitories, and the oppressive atmosphere, but instead there were lots of smiling people. The participants spoke about the images and identified positives in their environment, which included a sense of community (albeit temporary), and the support they gleaned from one another. The images were displayed during a community open day and the participants wrote captions for each one explaining why they had captured that particular image.

Years later, the intervention still sticks in my mind. This was my first foray into using photography with social work service users, and my last for over 10 years. From my practice experience I noted that within statutory UK services the work tends to be procedural and system driven. There seemed to be little opportunity to allow service users to creatively express and explore their situations, and the dominant method when working in adult services was the one to one interview which relied solely on verbal information.

However, I did encounter pockets of practice where photography was being used; a day care service for adults with a learning disability had set up a photography group; a young female in residential care was able to express emotions through photographs of seascapes in various weather conditions she had pinned to her bedroom wall; and care managers were engaging with photograph albums when conducting assessments. When I asked practitioners why they

used photography there appeared to be no definitive reason only that it appeared to be effective in engaging the service user.

And so this was the starting point for this research. I wanted to find out if photography could assist the profession of social work, and initial research led me to the practice of therapeutic photography which appeared to underpin the pockets of practice I had encountered.

Guidance note

From herein, I shall write in the third person, referring to myself as “the researcher”, only offering a further personal perspective in two short sections – the positionality within the methodology chapter, and a final reflection at the end of the project.

1.2 Introduction/Background

There is a popular saying stemming from the 20th century which states “a picture is worth a thousand words”, but if this were true, then photography could potentially make the spoken word redundant and communication could be simplified. Although this scenario has not transpired, the use of images in society exposes the average person to a multitude of messages every day through television, print media, on line marketing, and personal engagement with photography, to name but a few. Added to this, technology has advanced to the point where a large majority of the Western population carry cameras in their pockets every day as they are embedded within mobile phones and tablets, and the resulting outpouring of visual images has led to what has been referred to as the democratisation of photography (Jeffries, 2013).

Sontag (1977), writing in an era before technological advances married cameras with mobile devices, recognised the mass appeal of photography and expressed concern that this moved the practice away from an artistic pursuit, towards one where people took photographs to “possess” pieces of the past (p.9). Sontag believed that the action of seeking possession places the photographer in a position where they are invariably seeking knowledge, and this consequently puts them in a position of power;

“photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing...it is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power” (Sontag, 1977, p.8).

Roland Barthes (in Barthes & Howard, 1987) recognised the power of the image and attempted to provide an explanation as to why this medium has such appeal and describes photographs as possessing *studium* and *punctum* (p.146). *Studium* is the element of the photograph which provides interest for the viewer, draws them in, and helps them engage with the image. Barthes believed this was assisted by the inclusion of cultural cues which allows a viewer to glance at an image and understand what is happening in it and what the photographer was attempting to convey. To illustrate his point, he discussed how press photographers can convey a message quickly to the reader through the codes and conventions of their images – an image can be glanced at and the meaning is immediately apparent. However, when an image holds the attention of the viewer, makes them ponder on the content, and perhaps evokes memories and emotions within, then the attribute of the image responsible for this deeper response is the *punctum*, a connection between the photograph and the viewer because of something within the image which has provided a catalyst for an emotional response. This element of the photograph is often accidental as the emotional responses of others are difficult to predict, but Barthes recognised the power of photographs to not only inform, but to also evoke.

As a result, the mass appeal and ease of access of photography has been utilised to help people explore their situations. Recent news stories in the UK have identified the power of photography in working with service users with a mental health problem to explore their conditions (Obert, 2015), and in working with Syrian refugees to express feelings of safety and security (Coomes, 2015). Barthes's (& Howard, 1987) *studium* and *punctum* may help to explain the appeal of visual images and the ease at which a message can be communicated, but this appears to benefit the viewer of the image rather than the photographer. Sontag (1977) recognises that taking photographs may foster feelings of power within the photographer, yet this appears to suggest only one beneficial aspect of taking photographs and talking about them.

The two projects mentioned above are examples of a growing practice, that of therapeutic photography, and this research project will explore the concept of this branch of photography. The outcomes of this approach will be considered and the results of research will be offered to analyse whether these align with the practice of social work. Ultimately, the aim is to consider whether social work could benefit from incorporating therapeutic photography into practice.

1.3 Overview of thesis

- **Chapter 2 – Subject area/Background information**

In this opening section, the concept of therapeutic photography is outlined and the distinctive features of this approach are highlighted. This involves acknowledging the practice of “phototherapy” which shares similarities with the practice of therapeutic photography, and will go on to consider the ways in which photographs can potentially be utilised within a social work setting.

Consideration is also given to the “therapeutic” nature of social work alongside the relational nature of the profession to suggest ways in which the practice of therapeutic photography might be compatible with social work. This section concludes by offering the aims and the research questions of this thesis.

- **Chapter 3 – Literature review**

Following a description of the methodology used to source relevant literature, this section analyses the practice and use of therapeutic photography to elucidate key themes. To do this, the literature has been divided into four areas where the use of therapeutic photography has been particularly prevalent. Following each of these areas, consideration is given to the practice of social work to discuss any correlation of theoretical approaches.

The first area to be considered is the use of photographs to facilitate self-exploration and understanding. This largely draws upon the practice of self-portraiture and the works of Ziller (1990), Weiser (2004, 2001), Nunez (2009) and Spence (1986) who pioneered photographic techniques with links to Freudian psychoanalysis, alongside psychodynamic theory, which may inform and enhance therapeutic relationships between professionals and service users. These theoretical underpinnings are then considered in terms of social work practice to ascertain how the profession incorporates and utilises them to facilitate understanding of, and engagement with, service users.

The second area of discussion is the use of photographs to explore significant relationships which includes the use of family photographs, and how social identity can be expressed through images. The changing nature of photography is acknowledged and the impact of this on role definition is recognised, but the potential for using images to enable identity formation is highlighted. This is then considered within social work practice and the relational nature of the profession is explored. This focuses on theoretical approaches which enable practitioners to consider the impact relationships have on an individual, and how theorists such as Bowlby (2008), Fairbairn (1952) and Minuchin (1974) have informed social work practice.

The third area considers the use of photographs to assist narrative elicitation. This technique has been used in the field of research and the literature review explores the perceived benefits of this approach in terms of communication, control and power differentials (Pink, 2013; Collier & Collier, 1986). Ways in which this method has been employed are discussed and suggestions that this can enable positive impacts on self-esteem and self-efficacy are acknowledged. In turn, narrative exploration within social work is explored and the importance of considering this technique in the context of the environment and society is elucidated. The consequential impact on identity is also highlighted, and the importance of self-esteem and self-efficacy to social work practice is discussed.

The final area of exploration is the use of photographs to explore and challenge societal issues. Largely influenced by the work of Wang (1999) who developed a technique known as “photovoice”, the intentions and outcomes of employing this strategy with minority communities is discussed and the alignment with the philosophy of Freire (1970) is explained. Themes of empowerment emerge from the literature and are considered in terms of social work practice and how the profession works with communities to achieve similar outcomes.

To conclude the literature review, the researcher suggests a structured approach to utilising therapeutic photography based on Bronfenbrenner’s (2009, 1992, 1986) socio-ecological model which considers relationships across various domains of society including family, peers, organisations, and the wider culture.

- **Chapter 4 – Study design and method**

To operationalise the research, consideration is given to the method employed to gather and analyse data. This section begins by looking at using qualitative research and will highlight methods considered before moving on to provide an overview of the chosen approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and a justification for doing so.

Within this chapter, the data collection techniques are also discussed. The qualitative tools consisting of participant observation, photographs, and focus groups are explained in the context of the research project.

A programme of activities was devised using Bronfenbrenner’s (2009, 1992, 1986) socio-ecological model to structure the exercises and the full programme is outlined. An overview of the pilot study is also offered and information on any adjustments made to the programme is acknowledged.

The chapter then moves on to look at how the participants were selected, before the focus moves to a reflection on issues of ethics, bias, data collection and analysis.

- **Chapter 5 – Therapeutic photography with a mental health support group – Internal influencers on identity**

Using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), this chapter takes a closer look at the dynamics occurring within a therapeutic photography group with service users experiencing mental health issues. Following an introduction which presents the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes explored within the chapter, the results are explored.

Within the mental health group, issues pertaining to identity became evident from the outset and the first super-ordinate theme looks at the feelings of exposure which was experienced by all of the participants as they began to take photographs and engage with their images. As the group engaged in the exercises, the second super-ordinate theme focused on identity exploration as the participants searched for definitive characteristics of their selves. The third super-ordinate theme looked at how the participants emerged from the process and developed a clear perspective of their current roles, characteristics, and qualities.

- **Chapter 6 – Therapeutic photography with a mental health support group – External influencers on identity**

Continuing the analysis of the mental health support group, the focus moves to look at how the participants used the exercises and photographs to explore other influencers on their lives. As with chapter 5, the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are introduced before a fuller exploration of each one is offered within the rest of the chapter.

The first area of focus was the family, and participants used the experience to acknowledge how they were raised, and how this impacted on their own experience of parenting. The next super-ordinate theme moved on to explore the role of professionals who have had an impact on their lives, both positively and negatively, and how professional contact can compound issues of labelling and societal attitudes. The final super-ordinate theme which was explored by all of the participants related to issues of isolation and how that shaped actions and behaviours amongst the group.

- **Chapter 7 – Analysis**

The penultimate chapter draws upon the IPA results from chapter 5 and 6 to provide further analysis in order to suggest the impact of therapeutic photography within social work settings with groups. The chapter begins by looking at the influence of the group environment on individual learning amongst the participants and suggests links to the theoretical approaches of social identity theory and identity theory, as well as the writings of Cooley (1902).

Once the group impact has been analysed, the chapter explores individual learning. This analysis suggests links to self-concept and the writings of Mead (1934), Rogers (1959, 1951) and Winnicott (1971, 1965). As a result, the researcher offers a three stage model of exploration which participants of therapeutic photography may go through as they progress through social identity, identity, and then self-concept.

The chapter moves on to consider the outcomes of self-efficacy and self-esteem and suggests ways in which the narrative exploration of images may assist this. Then, the concepts of self-disclosure and control are analysed, before considering the aspect of empowerment and how this may be linked to therapeutic photography.

Finally, the chapter concludes by offering an analysis of the applicability of social work theory to the information and outcomes of the therapeutic photography group. Again, these are largely linked to the exploration of identity, but the relevance of group work dynamics are also discussed alongside the psychodynamic theories and the building of a therapeutic milieu.

- **Chapter 8 – Concluding remarks and reflections**

The closing chapter revisits the four main research questions set out within chapter 2 and offers a summary conclusion for each one. Limitations of the study are suggested, but the strengths are also highlighted, before looking at recommendations for education, practice, and further research. To end with, a final personal reflection on the research project is offered.

Chapter 2 – Background to Therapeutic Photography and Social Work Practice

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces some basic concepts which are important to the exploration of therapeutic photography and social work practice. It will begin by defining therapeutic photography, but to do this the concept of phototherapy will also be introduced and defined so that the differences can be appreciated and the relevance of each to social work made clear.

Following this, social work practice will also be introduced and exploration offered as to why a “therapeutic” intervention would be considered in this professional context. Issues around the nature of social work, its theoretical base, and eliciting information will be acknowledged.

Consolidating this information, the chapter will conclude by outlining the aims and research questions which were used to analyse the applicability of therapeutic photography to social work.

2.2 Therapeutic Photography versus Phototherapy

Since the 1850’s, photographs have been used in therapy. Their initial use was within psychiatric hospitals when working with mental health issues where female inmates of a lunatic asylum were photographed and confronted by their self-image as a means of attempting to shock patients out of their condition (Drinkwater, 2008). By the time of the Second World War photography was being used in a more therapeutic manner with servicemen and since this time photography has been used in ways which include assisting recovery, understanding identity, and challenging structural oppression (Gibson, 2017; Stevens & Spears, 2009; Glover-Graf & Miller, 2006; Perchick, 1992). Since the early part of the 21st Century, the therapeutic use of photographs has fallen under two different labels – *Phototherapy* and *Therapeutic Photography*.

Phototherapy is the name given to the structured use of photographs in a formal counselling (or therapy) session, usually led by a trained counsellor or a mental health professional. By contrast, Therapeutic Photography refers to photo-based activities that can be initiated by the self, or conducted in groups, the main difference being the lack of input from a professional counsellor or therapist (Weiser, 2016).

2.2.1 Phototherapy

Weiser (1984) has attempted to give structure and clarity to the practice of Phototherapy so that others can introduce the concept into their formal counselling and therapy sessions. She views it as a set of techniques to assist in sessions where non-verbal and visual communications are considered to be as important as verbal communication. She explains that service users enter therapy because they wish to grow, change, develop in confidence and relate to others better, all elements which are underpinned by communication. She views photography as an *expressive* activity, and as such, believes it can be used as an expressive therapy. Creative expressions are seen by Weiser as projections of our selves and can be used to explore psychosocial development through the way in which an individual perceives, stores, retrieves and puts forth information. How we then go on to express this information can assist a therapist in understanding how we internalise the world around us. Phototherapy allows the service user to creatively express their internal make-up (i.e. thoughts, feelings and beliefs), where the therapist guides conversations to elaborate meaning from personal photographs and make links to the psyche. Because of the emphasis on identity exploration, phototherapy appears to be rooted in the psychoanalytic theories of writers such as Freud (2001), Fairbairn (1952) and Winnicott (1965) (Hills de Zarate, 2012; Marxen, 2009; Yerushalmi & Yedidya, 1997), whilst incorporating the Jungian approach of assisting the artistic expression of emotional disturbances and unconscious thought processes (Stevens & Spears, 2009; Graf, 2002). Ziller (1990) also notes that self-concept is developed in the process and this can be explained through the work of writers such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902).

Weiser (2004) believes that a photograph in itself can never be read like a book or deconstructed to reveal hidden inner codes or secrets. A photograph is unique to its creator, and equally unique to the viewer of the image. Weiser states that nobody can be trained to therapeutically decode a photograph because photographs only *suggest* meaning. Therefore, participants who use photographs therapeutically will construct their personal version of reality, bringing with them their own unique and subjective interpretation (Barbee, 2002; Weiser, 1999). This means that specialised training in using photographs within these settings is not required, simply the ability to recognise the photograph as a communication tool to elicit information (Stevens & Spears, 2009; Hammond & Gantt, 1998).

Phototherapy sessions tend to be structured around one of five different strategies; using photographs taken by the client; using photographs taken of the client; using self-portraits or photographs taken by the client to represent “the self”, with the client having been in control of

taking the image; using family photograph albums; and using “photo-projectives” (Weiser, 1999, p.3). This last strategy involves taking a phenomenological stance to explore perceptions and emotional responses as a result of looking at, and talking about, photographs to uncover meaning (Loewenthal, 2013).

Because there can be deep memories and emotions attached to personal photographs, the recommended approach is to engage phototherapy with the involvement of a trained counsellor or therapist to provide a protective counselling framework so that containment and resolution of issues which surface can be dealt with timeously (Glover-Graf & Miller, 2006). By contrast, therapeutic photography does not have to be facilitated by a trained therapist or counsellor and therefore lacks this protective counselling framework. Weiser (2004) argues that if clients become involved in a less structured form of intervention such as therapeutic photography and engage with the material on their own, or as part of a group, this might precipitate the need for formal therapy sessions with trained staff. Equally, therapeutic photography offers outcomes that might also negate the need for formal therapy or counselling. She states that although therapeutic photography is not “therapy”, there are mutual similarities between the two practices of phototherapy and therapeutic photography.

2.2.2 Therapeutic Photography

Therapeutic Photography is the term used for photographic practices in situations where skills of therapists or counsellors are not needed, yet for a practice to be truly “therapeutic” there should be benefit to the end user in terms of deepening understanding of the self with an aim to reduce inner conflict and enhance coping strategies (Borden, 2000). An extensive description of therapeutic photography includes the application of photography to increase self-knowledge, awareness, well-being, relationships, and to challenge societal issues such as exclusion, isolation, intercultural relations, conflict, social injustice, as well as informing research (Weiser, 2015).

The primary difference between phototherapy and therapeutic photography appears to be in the formal involvement (or not) of a counsellor or therapist, but Weiser (2004) suggests it is easier to view the two practices as being two opposite ends of a continuum; one is “photography – during – therapy” whilst the other is “photography – as – therapy” (p. 35); one requires a trained counsellor or therapist to guide (and contain) the process and has the sole aim of *therapy*, whereas the other is about the enjoyment of *photography* with the added bonus of finding out information about

yourself and others on the journey. However, she concurs that there will be a natural overlap where the two practices intersect. Although Weiser (2004) believes that the practice of therapeutic photography does not need a professionally trained counsellor, Halkola (in Loewenthal, 2013) states that the practice of phototherapy and therapeutic photography are very similar, and both benefit from having professionals guiding sessions. She goes on to explain that there may be specific outcomes within therapeutic photography which include self-expression, rehabilitation, healing, and empowerment, and, because of the nature of issues that may arise from the exploration of these concepts, each session should be facilitated by a professional who has experience in health, education, or social work.

For some, viewing photography as a tool for therapeutic interventions requires a shift of thinking. Photography is typically seen as a pastime or hobby, an activity for simply recording holiday snaps and memorable moments in life, or as a means of capturing celebrity lifestyles through paparazzi intrusion to be enjoyed as images in the media (www.photovoice.org). So much is involved in the taking of a photograph which extends from the initial thoughts about the decision to take a photograph, composing the image, pressing the shutter, through to the production of a tangible image. Photographs we produce are informed by looking at other pictures, editing photographs, discussing photographs, presenting photographs, using photographs in online blogs and social networking; all of which collectively contribute to how photographs can enable dialogue and communication about who we are, what we are, and where we come from. For a number of service users, photography can help explore self-identity and it can act as a distraction to help forget about problems, for others it can help create order within their lives as those engaging with photography are forced to move away from spontaneity and consider a more structured approach (www.photovoice.org). Because photography objectifies the photographed subject, holding an image can provide distance between the subject and the service user. The photographer naturally has to put distance between themselves and the subject to capture it in an image which can encourage them to become a “contemplative “quasi-outsider,” which...invites deeper reflection and more meaningful interpretation of events and circumstances” (Dennis et. al., 2009, p. 468). This suggests that sensitive subjects can literally be discussed *at arm’s length*, where the use of images could actually assist in the process of socialisation by becoming a protective factor in the process of exploring self-concept. Sharing photographs also encourages storytelling and dialogue which can help build bonds and friendships; in minority communities common issues can be identified through photography and bring isolated members of the community together (Wang & Burris, 1997; 1994).

Using artistic techniques as a therapeutic tool is not a new concept. The practice of art therapy would appear to be a profession which could readily incorporate the use of photography, yet its use is relatively rare in this domain. This is perhaps due to the fact that photography requires specialised equipment and, because of the planning that goes in to capturing an image, spontaneity is curtailed and this in turn impacts on emotional expression (Kopytin, 2004). However, the rise of camera phones, budget digital cameras, and online photo sharing sites (or social networking sites) makes photography one of the most accessible art forms available to the general public (Loewenthal, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008). As a result, this has impacted on the democratisation of photography which makes it a less intimidating form of creative expression (Glover-Graf & Miller, 2006) and opens up the possibility of its use in social work practice.

The process of taking photographs has been described as therapeutic in itself as it can encourage the photographer to be reflective, mindful, and task orientated (Huss, 2012; Kopytin, 2004). Because the skillset to participate in therapeutic photography is minimal it offers up an opportunity to engage in a medium which is widely recognised within society and creates a potentially powerful form of communication between the photographer and the viewer of the image (Griebling et. al., 2013; Loopmans et. al., 2012), not least a social worker intent on building a meaningful dialogue with a client. Through this dialogue, a new awareness can emerge as issues are explored and people learn from each other, and the theoretic base for the practice appears to be holistic in terms of acknowledging the impact of psychodynamic theories, but also theories which define how culture and society impact on self-esteem and self-efficacy; indeed many writers feel that the technique is underpinned by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970; 1998) and his philosophy which aims to educate and empower marginalised individuals and communities by exploring the environment and working in groups to identify issues which can be collectively challenged (Griebling et. al., 2013; Ozanne et. al., 2013; Duffy, 2011; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Carlson et. al., 2006; Carr, 2003; Dietz, 2000).

There appears to be a fine line between the intended outcomes of phototherapy and therapeutic photography. Loewenthal (2013) explains that photo based interventions can assist in the expression of emotions, exploring behaviours which are both acceptable and unacceptable in society, elucidating experiences that may be problematic to verbalise, enhancing self-esteem and self-efficacy through exploring self-image, assisting the exploration of memories, and strengthening relationships through sharing and communication. The therapeutic aspect also includes the client taking the photographs themselves and then using Weiser's (2004) photo-projection technique to provide a narrative for the image; the photographs are not the *treatment*, but they are a useful supplement to therapeutically enhance communication (Cosden & Reynolds, 1982).

Because of the distinguishing factor of the involvement of a trained counsellor or therapist, the domain of phototherapy appears to be out with the reach of the average social worker who is not ordinarily qualified to be a therapist or counsellor within the education they receive (in the UK). Therefore, to utilise photography within social work interventions, it is the practice of therapeutic photography that the profession must look to, but with an appreciation of the similarities between the two practices.

2.3 The “Therapeutic” Role of Social Work

In July 2014, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) offered a global definition of the profession as such:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.”

(<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>)

In this definition of social work concepts such as empowerment, development, and theoretical approaches all have to be considered in terms of how social work *engages* service users and it is within this engagement where we have to consider the *therapeutic* aspect of the profession. It has been argued that social work used to be a profession where the relationship between the worker and service user was of utmost importance as this was where the therapeutic aspect of the work was conducted, but in recent years the profession has become more procedural, confined by legislation, policy and directed by a need for an evidence base to validate outcomes (Trevithick, 2003; Walker & Hext, 2002). However, although possibly diluted, the need to consider therapeutic working within social work still exists and the impact of this usually stems from the relationship wherein discussions and analysis of problems can take place (Howe, 1998). Goldstein et. al. (2009) believe there has been a significant shift in utilising theoretical approaches in social work, particularly psychodynamic approaches, that recognise the importance of using the relationship between worker and service user which acknowledges that the self and others are interconnected and exert influence on one another; a “relational matrix that shapes the therapeutic process” (p. xiv).

2.3.1 Relational Social Work

The quality of the relationship between social worker and service user can assist in a number of areas including recognising and processing issues with regards to the self and relationships with significant others; linking into services to help address discrimination, oppression, or to assist in advocacy; and to help reduce or contain anxiety with a focus on building coping strategies (Trevithick, 2003). If this is done effectively then the outcomes for the service user include motivation, empowerment, a stronger sense of self in terms of relationships with society, and a willingness to engage with others rather than isolate oneself (Jordan et. al., 1991). Indeed, if therapeutic relationships are not considered then social workers are missing out on valuable information about behaviour and emotional regulation within significant relationships experienced by the service users which would suggest that social work practice is “at best foolish and at worst seriously negligent” (Howe, 1998, p. 50).

Critics suggest that relational social work relies too much on psychodynamic theories in an attempt to understand problems, and that this omits recognition of wider societal issues that could be addressed (Altman, 1995; Frosh, 1987), but this critique has been embraced by others who believe that widening the focus to encompass recognition of the impact of culture, society, politics and economics can actually enhance relational social work in considering psychodynamic theories alongside others (Goldstein et. al., 2009; Ruch, 2005; Borden, 2000). Indeed, some warn of the risks of social workers being overly focused on the micro levels of practice at the expense of acknowledging wider issues that might disempower the service user, and therefore encourage social workers to have an appreciation of the wider environmental factors (Furman et. al., 2014; Donaldson, 2004; Dietz, 2002). This is echoed by Sudbery (2002) who states that relationships do not simply occur between two people; they occur across all spectrums of society, and they also occur within individuals who might struggle to marry up their internal view of themselves with their external skills and abilities, all of which can manifest in the relationship between social worker and service user. Therefore, social workers need to develop skills and knowledge to inform them of these different levels of relationships and employ the theories that can be used to understand and explicate dynamics. It also requires a shift away from the social worker having an authoritarian role, to a role where there is more of a partnership in which the service user can feel they are being listened to, and that the information they are offering is valued (Askheim, 2003; Howe, 1993). If the dynamic between social worker and service user becomes one where information is shared and learning occurs *between* subjects, then this is where the relationship becomes *therapeutic* (Borden, 2000).

2.3.2 Theory in Social Work

The relationship is not the only aspect of social work which instils a therapeutic value within interventions. A social worker has to use practice experience and, more importantly, knowledge of theories to help understand human behaviour (Trevithick, 2003; Parsloe, 1988). Howe (2008) explains that underpinning social work practice with theory can assist the worker in five different ways: it assists *observation* which helps the worker know what to look for; it aids *description* so the worker can document and arrange observations; it provides *explanation* so that the worker can make connections between observations and look for causal links; it impacts on *prediction* which helps to consider what might happen in the future; and it informs *intervention* so that a course of action can be defined. Coulshed (1991) highlights the importance of using a theoretical approach when chaotic situations arise so that the worker can find structure and regular patterns in the presented behaviours and situations and navigate through them. Trevithick (2012) explains that using a theoretical framework effectively means that the worker must also draw on the experiences, expectations, and views of everyone involved in the situation, particularly the service user. This ultimately means that social workers must use their theory base to help them understand the service user, but also work with the service user to identify ways forward. This underpins the importance of good communication between social worker and service user so that information can be obtained in order to apply theory.

Social work, as a profession, has a wide theoretic base which has been described as *eclectic* and which has led to accusations of inconsistency within the practice (Parton, 2000; Sheldon, 1978). Sheldon (1978) believed there was a divide between social work practice and social work education and suggested that the theoretic base was difficult to define given that it was impossible to come to a profession-wide agreement as to the types of theories to be used when working with service users. He suggested that other professions had a defined number of theories to be utilised when working with patients, clients, and service users, but social work used too many theories which diluted the effect. Over 20 years later, Parton (2000) argued that there is still a drive to tighten up the theoretic focus of social work through moves to proceduralise the practice and underpin all actions with legislation. He suggests that the role of social work has always been an ambiguous and complex one but that this should be seen as a major strength of the practice and an eclectic theoretic base should inform actions. He explains that problems social workers are presented with do not come in well-formed packages but are often messy, complex, and are unable to be solved in any measurable manner. This eclectic theoretic base will then help social workers engage with service users to negotiate solutions, rather than impose solutions, thus empowering the social worker to become

more sensitive to meanings attributed to the narrative of their service users. Having a good knowledge of theory will inform practice which, Parton (2000) explains, gives voice to minority groups and individuals, whilst improving understanding, interpretation and dialogue within the therapeutic relationship rather than social workers becoming legislators and authoritarians.

2.3.3 Communication

For theories to be applied within a therapeutic relationship there needs to be good communication between the social worker and service user. Generally, social work intervention involves some element of change, whether in behaviour, structure or environment. Howe (in Parton, 2003) highlights that the change process within individuals arises when people are given the opportunity to talk and explore their interpretations of lived experiences; having “an active conversation about oneself...brings about understanding and change” (p. 3). Stern (2004) describes communication within psychotherapy as creating opportunities for humans to interact, explore, recognise, then share experiences and, in doing so, bring experiences into the conscious, opportunities which he refers to as “now moments” and “moments of meeting” (p. 166). These change inducing conversations need not solely exist between social worker and service user, indeed, the value in discussing issues with peers may help individuals learn that they are not alone in their experiences, and the familiarity of shared narratives might bring about a sense of empowerment amongst groups of people. To this end, attempts have been made to enhance the communication process within social work, often in group settings, to facilitate the flow of information and the sharing of knowledge.

To facilitate communication, the profession of social work has borrowed techniques from other disciplines in an informal manner, sometimes of an artistic nature, and indications are that they provide a useful foray into narrative exploration and assist in the enhancement of wellbeing, meeting needs, and addressing issues of oppression and empowerment (Damianakis, 2007). If utilised within group settings, creative strategies also impact on the education of peers which allows each participant to explain their own understanding of a situation, potentially leading to others altering their perspectives, based on individual interpretation of the object of artistic expression (Moxley & Calligan, 2015). Huss (2012) attempted to map the use of image making by service users and believes there are three primary uses within social work which are; expressing a subjective experience and using symbolic representation to make sense of an experience; explaining an image to a group in order to construct a meaning (or viewpoint) based on information from peers; and

using the image to interact with others to assist clarification of meaning as well as using the image to focus on in order to project communication onto it. However, it has been highlighted that guidance on incorporating art based techniques to enhance communication within social work is limited (Moxley & Feen, 2015; Huss, 2012).

In an attempt to map specific use of photography based interventions within social work, American based researchers DeCoster and Dickerson (2014) identified 23 research papers documenting the technique, but on further analysis only seven related specifically to the profession of social work, and every one of these seven used photography in very different ways to elicit outcomes including training in editing packages, incorporating videography alongside photography, and using photographs to solely gather feedback about a service, all of which appears to validate the opinion highlighting the lack of guidance proposed by Moxley and Feen (2015). From DeCoster and Dickerson's (2014) research they were able to suggest similarities in the theory base between therapeutic photography and social work but did not offer specific detail. However, they suggest that the knowledge and skills required to incorporate a photographic element into social work intervention was within the scope of the profession. They went as far as to suggest that "therapeutic photography's predominate client-directed, client-centred approaches, embracing experiential and interpretive diversity, cultural sensitivity, with clients as the experts, shows to be an excellent fit within the social work paradigm" (DeCoster & Dickerson, 2014, p. 15).

2.4 The context of social work within this study

As identified within the IFSW definition of social work in section 2.3, social work is an international profession, yet despite a seeming globalisation of the profession, practices in social work vary from country to country as agencies and organisations function at local levels to meet the needs of their communities (Harrison & Melville, 2009; Lyons et. al, 2006). This study, and the consequent analysis of the applicability of therapeutic photography to social work, takes place in Scotland, where a devolved Government shape specific policy and legislation for the populace, and the profession practices under the legal framework of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. As a result, the question is asked from a Scottish perspective, and it is therefore important to give an explanation of Scottish social work.

To practice social work in Scotland, a practitioner must successfully complete a BA (Hons) course, or a PG Social Work course, to obtain the professional qualification in order to be employed (both in a statutory and voluntary/third sector organisation). Therefore, a qualified social worker will have

both an academic and a professional qualification because they are integrated within the BA (Hons), PG Dip, and the MSc routes. Both the academic side of social work, and the professional practice of the profession, are regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to ensure that the people of Scotland receive social services which are provided by a “trusted, skilled, and confident workforce” (www.sssc.uk.com). Not only do the SSSC regulate the workforce, they also set the Codes of Practice for employers and employees to enforce standards in the delivery of services. This, in turn, protects the service users who receive input from social service employees and clearly guides members of the public if they wish to raise a concern about the practice of any worker if they feel the standards are not being met.

2.4.1 Education

Scottish social work education is underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE), documented in the Government publication “The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland” (2003). As well as outlining competencies in practice, standard 4 highlights that social workers must evaluate and use up to date knowledge and research within practice. This emphasises the importance of using theory within practice to inform assessment, intervention, and report writing to give input into decision making forums and to ensure social work is an evidence based profession (Morago (in Lishman, 2012)). Without a knowledge of theory, social workers would be unable to work in a manner wherein their practice is informed, and where it can be used to enhance critical thinking and analysis (Stepney (in Stepney & Ford, 2000)). As a result, theories are taught to social work students which range from psychoanalysis, psychodynamic, psychological, sociological and environmental – wide ranging in scope, but taught in order to provide workers with ideas and models to be used to make sense of situations and to shape actions (Beckett & Horner, 2015). This means that a social worker may have a knowledge of Freud and his writings on psychoanalysis, but this does not mean that a worker can deliver psychoanalytic therapy, only understand how it might impact on the behaviour of the person they are working with in terms of protecting the id and engaging defence mechanisms (John & Trevithick (in Stepney & Ford, 2000)). This, in turn, can shape an intervention such as a referral to an appropriate agency to receive counselling. Having a sound theoretical knowledge means that social work, as a profession, can be an evidence based practice wherein decisions are evidence informed and defensible, and therefore replicable (Morago (in Lishman, 2012); Smith, 2004). This should continue when a student leaves university and begins a career, and it is the role of the supervisor to ensure that this takes place within a culture which

encourages analytic, critical, and reflective thinking as part of continual professional development (McLaughlin & Teater, 2017; Ruch (in Lishman, 2012)).

2.4.2 Supervision in practice

The SSSC place responsibility of post registration training and learning with individual social workers once they leave education and enter the workforce, but within their Codes of Practice for Employers of Social Service Workers (www.sssc.uk.com), there is an expectation that employers will help and support employees to address training and development needs. Within this, they highlight the importance of supervision to address staff development. Supervision of social workers is described as an essential component to prevent burnout, support reflective practice, and to facilitate professional development (Howe & Gray, 2012). Although the SSSC are not prescriptive about how supervision should be delivered, or how often it should take place, there is an expectation that it should be educational, supportive, and administrative (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Tsui, 2004).

Payne (in Connor & Black, 1994) explains that the educational aspect should be evident in the relationship between the supervisor and the frontline social worker where knowledge and interventions are explored in order for the service user to receive maximum benefit from the agency or organisation. The supportive aspect of supervision should come from exploring the personal impact on the worker themselves from the cases they are managing, and a chance to explore personal development and career progression. The third aspect of administration is an opportunity to assert service standards, monitor workloads, and to provide critical analysis.

In summary, the regulation and education of the workforce is underpinned by Government and is in place to protect the workforce, and importantly, to protect the users of social work services.

2.5 Conclusion

Therapeutic photography is a generic term for interventions which incorporate a photo based element in order to facilitate positive change within the participant through dialogue and the use of symbolic communication. This change usually relates to self-esteem and aims to empower the individual by assisting them to experience viewpoints of other participants and foster identification, and possibly even collective action. When setting therapeutic intervention into a social work context

the problem that requires consideration is how this will enhance communication, how it will impact on the formation of the relationship wherein therapeutic work can be conducted, and how social work theories align with those of therapeutic photography.

Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) suggest that problematisation should be used to facilitate the critical rethinking of a particular theory or approach. By problematizing, the research goal becomes one which attempts to “disrupt the reproduction and continuation of an institutionalised line of reasoning” (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011, p.32). From the initial exploration of therapeutic photography and the potential applicability of the practice to social work with groups, the following problems arise:

- The definition of therapeutic photography is ambiguous and the practice is very closely aligned to phototherapy. There appears to be some debate around the level of expertise a professional requires when delivering a therapeutic photography programme/intervention.
- The “therapeutic” benefit of using photography requires clarification to distinguish the approach from one which simply uses photographs to enhance communication, inadvertently obtaining a therapeutic outcome. To do this, there must be some analysis of *how* the use of photography benefits the service user.
- Could therapeutic photography be used in social work, and what are the ethical implications?

This is the starting point for this research project. The aim of the research project is to ascertain whether therapeutic photography has a role within social work practice. Given the relational nature of both therapeutic photography and social work the research will look specifically at utilising this intervention within groups. To do this four research questions have been set to explore the intervention of therapeutic photography and its applicability to social work.

2.5.1 Research Questions

- RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is therapeutic photography and how is it currently being used?
 - The literature review will offer an exploration of how photography is used in a therapeutic manner. This will include an analysis of the techniques used in both Phototherapy and Therapeutic Photography to determine crossovers in practice, and will look at issues such as the relative importance of having a trained professional/counsellor, the use of photography to understand the self, using photography to define roles within society, the use of images to access the unconscious and the use of photography to empower minorities within society.

- RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How can social work utilise therapeutic photography?
 - The literature review will then move on to look at the purpose of social work intervention. This will include an examination of the type of theories and interventions used, and whether certain interventions are better placed to incorporate the use of visuals with specific service users. Consideration will be given to interventions which already incorporate the use of photographs to examine the purpose of using visuals, as well as the outcomes.

- RESEARCH QUESTION 3: How do social work service users engage with a therapeutic photography intervention?
 - Moving on to practice issues, this question will be answered by using the qualitative research technique of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine therapeutic photography in practice. An analysis will be offered using a programme created and informed by evidence from the literature and delivered to a group of participants who are representative of social work service users. Issues of engagement and efficacy will be explored in terms of the use of photographs alongside user views and assessments.

- RESEARCH QUESTION 4: What are the outcomes of a therapeutic photography programme, and what are the implications for future practice?
 - Using further analysis of the qualitative data, the outcomes of the group will be examined to ascertain whether there has been any potential impact on the participants. This will include analysis of the photographs, participant observation data, and a focus group interview. In light of these findings, the implications for social work practice will be considered.

Chapter 3 – Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This literature review offers an exploration of how photography is used in therapeutic settings and the implications this may have for social work practice (as per research question 1 & 2). Following a description of the search strategy used to source materials, the review is presented in four distinct sections based on themes which emerged from the analysis of the literature; photographs to understand “the self”, photographs to understand relationships, photography to elicit narratives, and photography to explore society. Each of these sections will identify the application, implication and theoretical underpinnings of each approach. After each section, the theories identified will then be explored within the context of social work to identify similarities and implications for practice. Short explanations of the theoretical concepts to facilitate understanding will also be provided.

Following a review of these four areas, the literature review will conclude by suggesting a systems approach to the use of photography within social work and a further investigation into the arguments underpinning this method will be explored.

3.1.1 Conducting the literature review

The topic of therapeutic photography and social work practice is an emerging area and there were limited sources available. Accordingly, this required the researcher to look at the applicability of therapeutic photography across a number of different professions which included health, sociology, and psychology. As a result, any peer reviewed article which suggested a therapeutic outcome from the use of photography was considered. This resulted in the inclusion of articles from all over the world, but given that many of the key authors driving the therapeutic use of photography are from Canada and Europe this was to be expected (Nunez (in Loewenthal, 2013); Weiser, 2001; Ziller, 1990). Publication dates were considered for each article to ensure the material was relevant to the modern day practice of photography, which is largely digital, so any article which focused purely on print photography, specifically developing images in darkrooms, was discounted. That said, if the article discussed the practice of capturing an image then it was deemed appropriate, regardless of whether it was digital or print. When discussing theoretical underpinnings there were approaches

which dated back to the turn of the 20th century and these have also been included as they demonstrate the foundations which current approaches are built upon.

Due to the niche subject area, a general search for relevant articles was conducted using Google Scholar, but databases such as Web of Science, SocINDEX, ScienceDirect and SAGE Journals Online were also explored. Search terms included *therapeutic photography*, *photovoice*, *photo elicitation*, *hermeneutic photography*, *participatory photography*, and *portrait photography*.

Each sourced article was evaluated for its relevance to the subject area which included consideration of the clarity of the problem or issue being discussed, how photography was utilised within the research, whether its use was underpinned by appropriate theory, how the literature review supported the action of the researcher, how the outcomes were supported by the methodology, and whether there was a logical conclusion to the research. The four key areas of self-portraits, relationships, narratives, and exploration of society arose from the literature review in terms of how photographs were being used in social work, social care, health, and research and this impacted on how the material is presented within the literature review.

3.2a Photographs to understand “the self”

Taking photographs of the self, or self-portraits, can be used therapeutically to explore issues pertaining to the self, mainly with regards to esteem, knowledge, and confidence (Weiser, 2001). It is a technique which encourages introspection with an aim to highlight positive aspects of identity to facilitate self-acceptance (Glover-Graf & Miller, 2006; Weiser, 2004).

There is no set format for doing self-portraiture. Clearly the primary remit is that the photograph must be of the service user, preferably taken by the service user. The photograph is then used in some way to analyse how the service user is perceived which will involve analysis on how they see themselves, before looking at how others see them. The reasons service users seek intervention are wide and varied, but the way people feel about themselves underlies the majority of contacts including self-esteem issues, self-worth issues, feeling disempowered, and feeling undervalued. Any therapeutic intervention should begin by looking at how the service users feel about themselves and work towards trusting self-acceptance before the service user can trust others to accept them. Working with self-portraits helps this process by encouraging the service user to work with the question “who am I?” (Weiser, 1999; Berman, 1993).

To address this question, there is an element of communication with the self through the image, and this may involve an exploration of self-concept, along with self-disclosure, to be able to address issues (Barbee, 2002; Ziller, 1990). Burns (1984) explains that self-concept is a key factor in “the integration of personality, in motivating behaviour and in achieving mental health” (p. 2), and Ziller (1990) believed this was a factor that was worth exploring through self-portraiture. He explained that perceptions of self-concept link into confidence and will impact on situations an individual is willing to place themselves into, which in turn impacts on the behaviour of the individual. Through exploring self-portraits Ziller assisted the process of finding meaning, which he believed had a direct impact on enhancing self-concept. He also recognised that internal thoughts and feelings about the self also had to be set in a societal context and consideration given to how individuals are expected to behave in the given culture in which they exist. He recognised the value of theorists such as Mead (1934), Stryker (1980) and Cooley (1902) who all highlight the social concept of the self, and was drawn to Cooley’s “looking-glass self” (1902, p. 152) which described how the view of the self, and the beliefs an individual holds about how others perceive them, can be different and are tempered by the emotions of pride and shame. Mead (1934) explored societal roles in identity formation and described the process as the impulsive, unique driving force behind behaviour (which he termed the “I”) being tamed and shaped by interactions with society until a social being emerges (which he

termed the “me”). In their study of photographic self-representations produced by university students, Combs and Ziller (1977) state that “the photographs become the “me” that can be experienced by the “I”” (p. 454), and although never mentioning Mead (1934) in the research, they appear to recognise his influence.

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From a very early age children are fascinated by their own image; a photograph can confirm a child’s identity and place within the family; “from very early in life, the need to have oneself reflected is crucial to the development of the self” (Berman, 1993, p.3). Even from birth a baby needs confirmation of its own identity and for this will look to its primary carer; cries initiate a reaction from the carer, and a response brings confirmation that the child exists and can command attention in order to have needs met. Later it will look into the face of the carer, test out a facial expression such as a smile, and look for a reaction from the carer, a process Winnicott (1971) called *mirroring*. When the mother mirrors the baby’s action, the baby recognises that it has been seen and therefore exists. As we grow our identity formation is informed by how our interactions with our community and society are mirrored to us. Self-portraiture through photography allows us to see how others see us, and allow us time to reflect on how we project ourselves. In a formal therapeutic setting the therapist will provide the therapeutic gaze which echoes that of Winnicott’s “*good enough mother*” allowing service users to explore their full range of emotions (Martin, 2009). However, because therapeutic photography does not necessarily involve a trained professional, this protective milieu may be absent.

Berman (1993) explains that, for some, being photographed is not always a positive experience. As children they may have been forced to pose; low self-esteem might make being photographed feel unpleasant, which ultimately might create a fear of seeing and being seen in ways which are deeply uncomfortable. This might result in a participant disengaging from the process, but it is also something that could be managed by a professional facilitator if they are aware these emotions might occur. Berman argues that the photographs that appeal to us most are the ones that we have taken, or the ones that include us in the image, and this is because, if taken by ourselves, there is an element of control over what is included and what is said about the image, or, if they include us, they conjure up memories, emotions, and feelings we attach to the image.

Nunez (2009) believes that a fear of the camera lens stems from problematic relationships with our own self-image. She explains that we are dominated by two ways of seeing – how we think about ourselves internally, and what we think about ourselves when we view ourselves in a mirror,

externally. She uses self-portraits as a form of therapy for three reasons; firstly, as self-portraiture forces the individual to become the subject of the photograph this can expose vulnerabilities; secondly, once confronted by the self-portrait a process begins that is akin to a formal therapy session wherein an inner dialogue looks at self-perception, begins to question, forms judgements, and moves into acceptance; and finally the multiple meanings taken from the analysis of the self-portrait can help to unify differing aspects of the personality.

Nunez (in Loewenthal, 2013) underpins her work with self-portraits with Freudian psychoanalysis, helping the subject gain self-acceptance. She has since gone on to develop a programme for service users who are interested in using self-portrait as a means of self-exploration. The programme involves service users photographing three different areas of their lives – photographs of the self where participants are encouraged to consider emotions, identities, and the physical body; photographs of the self with others exploring one-to-one relationships; and photographs of the self interacting with the wider world (crisitinanunez.com). She believes the process should culminate in the intimate sharing of the produced images so that service users can free themselves from the confines of the ego. Nunez has a background in psychotherapy, but has no formal training in photography, but in her own words “through self-portraiture I had found a way to re-create the loving gaze of my mother” (Loewenthal, 2013, p.95).

Nunez is not alone in taking a psychodynamic approach when looking at self-portraiture. Phillips (1986) recognises the value in using photography to address the loss of ego boundaries and states that a photographic image can help the service user take one step back from reality and view the self-image from a safe distance. Phillips also talks about the importance of the therapeutic alliance which has similarities with Nunez’s approach in that the programmes developed are intended to be delivered by a “professional” and not a programme to work through on one’s own. The programme devised by Nunez also appears to have underpinnings in art therapy and the belief that creative interventions can help service users realign their self-images when the gap between how they define their identity, and how society interprets their identity, is large enough to cause self-esteem issues.

Milford et.al. (1984) recognised the value of using self-portraiture in group settings, a process they refer to as *visual self-confrontation*, and explain that the process can provide the service user with previously unknown information – a simple example they use is when someone’s opinion of themselves is challenged by group feedback, albeit they assume this feedback to be positive. However, using this approach to address self-esteem issues comes with a warning. Being confronted by one’s own self-image will result in a state of objective self-awareness which can lead to a comparison with one’s internalised standard, and if this comparison results in a negative discrepancy

between the two states then aversive arousal takes place and a fight or flight response is often initiated. If a therapist is involved in this process their job is to keep the service user in a state of objective self-awareness, however this underpins the argument that therapeutic photography requires a professional to guide it (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). Again, this is linked to a psychodynamic approach wherein the anxiety produced when viewing oneself may result in adaptive ego functions, but it could also be argued that an aroused state makes the service user more accepting of further therapeutic intervention (Milford et.al., 1984).

In the UK, Jo Spence (1986) has been one of the dominant voices behind the use of self-portraits for therapeutic gains. Spence died in 1992 but prior to this she had worked to highlight the therapeutic benefits of using self-portraits to deal with her health issues. Unlike Nunez, Spence had no formal training as a therapist but was a photographer by trade. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer she found the experience of dealing with medical professionals disempowering, alienating, and ultimately she felt infantilised by the experience. She decided to use her photography to try to gain some control and to help her understand what was happening to her body and created a series of visual illness diaries. These diaries helped Spence come to terms with her struggle between her real appearance, and society's impression of what an ideal woman should be, and consequently, after a successful lumpectomy, her work went on to inform women's rights groups as well as disability movements in their campaigns for rights (Dennett, 2009).

Spence went on to formalise some of her techniques with other interested parties such as Terry Dennett (2009) and Rosy Martin (2009) who were also interested in identifying the therapeutic benefits of using photography for self study. Therapeutic staging was one technique developed wherein participants are encouraged to express internal feelings by thinking about how they want to be photographed and staging the scene. This was heavily influenced by Spence's love of cinema and her appreciation of Sergei Eisenstein as a director who believed in guiding the viewer through a series of "shocks" (Dennett, 2009). With Martin, Spence developed collaborative photo therapy which was a form of co-counselling done in partnership with another person, but again, unlike traditional counselling, no involvement of a trained professional is necessary. The technique involves revisiting images stored in memory which may be problematic to the service user and reconstructing them, then capturing them in a photograph, thus challenging the mythologies of others who have attached stories to old images, and therefore defined identity (Spence, 1986). This technique assumes that the images to be recreated in photographs are readily available to the participant, thus suggesting that conscious memories, as opposed to unconscious memories, were the focus of collaborative photo therapy. The work of Spence and Martin allowed them to challenge social and

psychic construction, but they believed it was the process of engaging rather than the production of a finished image that provides therapeutic value. In their own experience, their traumas were not the same but each could identify with the other and once the work was shared others too found recognition (Spence, 1986).

The idea of challenging social construction is continued in other forms of therapeutic photography. In terms of using self-portraiture to do this Newbury (1996) found that incorporating self-portraiture into a programme which looked at how disability was constructed within society aided students to integrate different levels of understanding of how images were used to define disability, but also in ways that they could reclaim their own identity through self-portraiture. This technique has also found its way into research practices where it is termed *auto photography* and asks research participants to capture data through self-portraits and environmental photography. It is believed that this practice empowers participants and gives them the ability to select what is important to them (including people and environmental factors) and then asking them to capture this in a photograph, thus avoiding the constraints of verbal communication with which some people might struggle. However, the practice is not without criticism as some believe that a photograph will potentially distort the objective image it aims to capture because the photographer is subjective in the means they use to portray the image (Noland, 2006; Sontag, 1977). The viewer of the image can also distort the information, but Noland (2006) argues that by visualising the distortion, it still brings it to the attention of the researcher and it can then be discussed, and what is said about the image may be more important than the image itself.

3.2a.1 Summary

The majority of literature focussing on photographs to understand the self has been produced by practitioners who have had substantial experience of using photography with service users and clients, and present their own experiences and observations as informed opinion (Weiser, 2004, 2001, 1999; Martin, 2009; Nunez, 2009; Dennett, 2009; Newbury, 1996; Berman, 1993; Phillips, 1986). It could be argued that this exposes the literature to bias as these practitioners promote their own practice, yet an alternative view could be that their experience provides valuable insight into the potential implications of the techniques.

A key theme to emerge from the therapeutic use of photography to look at the self is the ability to explore self-concept in terms of how the participant views themselves, and how they believe others

view them. In using a visual approach issues can be objectified in an image, held at a distance, and a dialogue begins where the individual looks at their relationship with the self. Accepting the fact that people have a relationship with themselves is important, and this means appreciating that people can be accepting of their own image, but equally can be critical, punitive and obstructive if a negative self-image is present (Sudbery, 2002). With visual images such as photographs, the therapeutic relationship can be enhanced by listening to what an individual says about their photograph, rather than the professional attaching their own meaning to the image (Weiser, 1999). There are risks that the participant will find this uncomfortable or upsetting, and this suggests that a facilitator with professional skills to identify discomfort and work with it would be advantageous. Despite this, the use of therapeutic photography does not appear to be underpinned by formal training or guidance. The underlying theories which have been identified are familiar to social work practice which suggests similarities in approaches, and this chapter will now go on to discuss these.

3.2b Social work theory and “the self”

The exploration of photographic self-portraiture reveals the dominant theoretical approach is psychodynamic theory (Nunez (in Loewenthal 2013); Berman, 1993; Ziller, 1990; Phillips, 1986). Psychodynamic theories stem from the work of Freud and have been built upon by other theorists to facilitate social workers in their practice to help understand behaviour based on relationships, motivation, and emotions (Brearley (in Lishman, 2015); Payne, 2014). Payne (2014) explains that social work must consider internal psychological pressures experienced by the service user, alongside how the service user is affected by external social factors. The difference in these two factors may cause disequilibrium between the service user and their environment, and it is the job of the social worker to help the service user address attitudes and reactions caused by internal psychological pressures, as opposed to directly trying to change the external social factors which may require resources out with the means of the profession.

The work of Freud is usually a starting point for social workers to understand psychodynamic theory. Freud believed that every human has an instinctive biological drive but that they long to maintain homeostasis which is affected by a three-way struggle between the id, ego, and the superego. The id relates to the unconscious component of an individual’s mental life where primitive instincts drive actions, but where unpleasant memories and repressed emotions are also stored, which continue to influence behaviour. The superego relates to how an individual has been nurtured which contributes

to how the wants of the id are met and will impact on how moral values are developed. The ego manages the relation between the id and the superego and will work to protect the id if the superego is unable to provide for the id's wants. Central to Freud's driving forces is the concept of anxiety which is an emotion created when homeostasis is not achieved, and the ego then has to create defence mechanisms to cope with this (Brearley (in Lishman, 2015); Payne, 2014; Borden, 2000).

Repression is one of the more common defence mechanisms employed by the ego and leads to memories that are painful, threatening, or highly emotionally charged being *forgotten* by the conscious part of the mind, but where they take root in the unconscious to resurface at a later date in coded forms such as behaviours and emotions, often towards people who had nothing to do with the original memory (Brearley (in Lishman, 2015)). Splitting often arises when an individual has had to deal with contradictory emotions in their relationship with others which leads to the individual viewing others as all good, or all bad, and stems from an inability to view other people in their lives as holistic beings capable of both good and bad actions. This leads to the mental compartmentalising of other people in their lives – if needs are being met then the person is good, but when needs are not being met the person is bad. This can often be accompanied by the defence mechanism known as projection which sees characteristics of the self being externalised and attached to another person. The purpose of this defence mechanism is to remove unwanted qualities of the self from the unconscious, and place it on others (Brearley (in Lishman, 2015); Payne, 2014). Brearley (in Lishman, 2015) notes that it is not only negative qualities that are ascribed to other people, positive aspects can also be attributed resulting in the idolisation of others. Other ego defence mechanisms include sublimation (where impulses from the id are satisfied by a substitute object in socially acceptable way (for example, redirecting aggressive impulses into sporting activity)), displacement (when emotions are redirected at a substitute object), rationalisation (when the real reasons behind activities are repressed and explained by other, more acceptable reasons), denial (where the truth is too painful to handle and the mind refuses to acknowledge reality), and regression (when the mind reverts to an earlier phase of development where it felt more comfortable and behaviours at this stage can manifest) (Brearley (in Lishman, 2015); Payne, 2014).

Midway through the 20th century psychodynamic theorists began to challenge Freud's view and moved towards a relational perspective which recognised the importance of conscious decision-making and motives, but also viewed the quality of relationships and interaction with the social environment as important for personality development (Borden, 2000). These theorists included Adler, Jung, Klein, Winnicott, Bowlby and Erikson, all of whom contributed to the social work

knowledge base by recognising that human beings are social creatures and are influenced in their development through their interactions with others. Borden (2000) explains that it was the work of Suttie (1999) which drove the relational perspective; he believed that problems stemmed from the dynamics of the family, social and cultural circumstances, as opposed to purely biological influences.

Nunez (in Loewenthal, 2013) and Martin (2009) refer to the work of Winnicott in their approach to self-portraiture with photography. Winnicott (1971) wrote about mirroring and recognised that developing children have to rely on others to meet their needs. In a caring relationship, when a child exhibits a need, that need is met which demonstrates to the child that they exist and that their actions will result in corresponding reactions, much like looking in a mirror and learning from the reflection. This mirroring relationship contributes to the development of the identity of the developing child, a process Winnicott referred to as the development of a *true self* (Beckett & Taylor, 2010). However, a *false self* can also develop when a developing child is inadequately mirrored and the needs of the child are ignored or unmet. This false self is a defence mechanism which sees the feelings and needs pushed into the unconscious while the child becomes preoccupied with trying to second guess how significant caregivers are going to act. Winnicott recognised that caregivers can never meet all of a child's needs constantly, but parenting had to be *good enough*. He also recognised the importance of the transitional object in helping a person mature from a protective relationship into a new relationship with the wider world, or a stage of relative safety into a more unpredictable stage. For children this can often be an old toy or blanket which they will eventually emotionally outgrow, but the importance of photographs as transitional objects has also been suggested by others (Prins, 2013; Hills de Zarate 2012; Weiser, 2004). Borden (2000) believes that Winnicott's work in psychoanalysis has made him one of the seminal figures within therapeutic practice, and along with the other relational theorists drove forward the object relations movement which will be discussed further in sections 3.3a and 3.3b.

Another significant theorist for practitioners in social work is Erik Erikson (1963) and his eight stages of psychosocial development which took Freud's theory of psychosexual development and considered the cultural and social impacts upon these. Freud believed that children begin life by seeking gratification for needs. The first is oral where needs are met by taking food in through the mouth. The second is anal where a child learns that they have parts of their bodies that they cannot always see and that excretion needs to be managed. The third is a phallic where the same sex parent is identified with and the child learns about appropriate family relationships, and the fourth is the Oedipal stage when the child is attracted to the opposite sex parent, ending in latency when social learning redirects attraction towards people out with the family (Payne, 2014). Erikson (1963)

believed that these factors influenced development, but his approach to ego development differed from that of Freud in that Erikson did not believe that individuals were solely driven by internal factors and that development takes place across the life stages. He proposed there were eight stages of development across the lifespan and that at each stage an individual must deal with a psychosocial crisis; for favourable outcomes to be achieved, an individual must resolve each one with a larger share of experiences which fosters learning towards the positive polarity of each crisis. If favourable outcomes are achieved at each stage, the developing adult ends up with positive basic virtues (see fig. 3.1). Much like Winnicott’s recognition that parenting needed to be *good enough*, Erikson did not advocate an entirely positive outcome at each stage (indeed, he argued that this was not possible), the ratio only needed to be favourable for healthy development (Gibson & Gibson, 2016).

STAGE	Psychosocial crisis	Positive outcome	Age
1	Basic trust vs basic mistrust	Hope	Infancy
2	Autonomy vs shame and doubt	Will	Early childhood
3	Initiative vs guilt	Purpose	Pre school
4	Industry vs inferiority	Competence	School age
5	Ego identity vs role confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence
6	Intimacy vs isolation	Love	Young adulthood
7	Generativity vs stagnation	Care	Mid life
8	Ego integrity vs despair	Wisdom	Maturity

Fig 3.1 – The 8 stages of development by Erikson (1963)

Using self-portraiture is a means to explore identity, and Erikson recognised the importance of identity. His fifth stage concerns itself specifically with ego identity which was the starting point for his definition of the eight stages as he worked backwards and forwards from this one stage, recognising the crucial importance of identity formation and how it impacted on everything else. He believed that the combination of the ego’s ability to adapt to all previous stages which incorporated Freud’s psychosexual development, the skills learned as a person moves from childhood through puberty and into adulthood, and the opportunities offered by society, should all culminate in a positive identity for the individual (Gibson & Gibson, 2016; Erikson, 1963). However, if outcomes from previous stages have been negative, and opportunities within the environment and society are

not positive enough, Erikson believed that the individual can experience a loss of identity because they can over identify with others and try to project their diffused ego image onto others to see if they can gain clarification through reflection.

Borden (2000) believes the importance of psychodynamic theories in social work lie in the fact that they help to enhance understanding of intrapsychic processes so that the service user can look for other ways to manage experiences that cause conflict. Key to this is the therapeutic alliance wherein the social worker will show empathy and can explore experiences, narratives, and learning, to help modify the service users' self-perception and representation, as well as address emotional issues (Ogden, 2009; Borden, 2000). Borden (2000) also highlights the fact that a therapeutic alliance does involve mutuality in that the service user and social worker should both be involved in the process. The power should be shared and the social worker should be a co-participant, willing to learn from the service user, and empower the service user to explore solutions.

“In the broadest sense, relational perspectives seek to encompass biological, psychological, and social domains of experience and to link concepts of person and environment in process-orientated models of human functioning” (Borden, 2000, p.366).

3.2b.1 Summary

Social work is a relational profession, both in forming therapeutic relationships to enable change, and in understanding relationships and the complexities within these (Borden, 2000; Suttee, 1999). These complex relationships begin with the individual and how they feel about themselves. As Weiser (1999) identified, any therapeutic intervention needs to begin with an exploration of self-perception as it is important to accept who you are before looking for acceptance from others.

Psychodynamic theory has developed from a belief that all behaviour was driven by the motivation of inner drives to an encompassing view that external influences play an equal role in defining identity. The by-product of any problems this may cause is *anxiety* (Ruch, 2005; Howe, 1998), and the ego may work to protect the inner self by engaging defence mechanisms. A knowledge of these can help practitioners address them when they arise and, as Erikson (1963) explained, assist service users to reflect on issues in order to seek clarification of the self.

Using the technique of therapeutic photography may help to bypass defence mechanisms through the *objectification* of an issue; the photographer makes an issue tangible by giving it form, and it can then be discussed in its externalised form. However, the relationship with the self is only one of

many relationships which the application of photography can creatively explore. This chapter will now move on to look at the use of therapeutic photography to understand and explore relationships.

3.3a Photographs to understand relationships

Family photographs are a link to the past; images can display unity, cohesion, rituals, and chronicles of the development of family life. The concept of “family” is not an easy one to define as every family will be impacted and shaped by history, sociology, psychology, culture, institution, and relationships. Using family photographs can be a useful starting point for exploring relationships in general by looking at the boundaries of the family and how they have impacted on an individual (Hirsch, 1997). Family albums can be a rich source of autobiographical storytelling and images also contain non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body language, as well as historical and cultural references. Traditionally within western culture, family photograph albums document success; birthdays and weddings, celebrations and holidays. The ways in which photographs are presented can also be telling, for example gaps in chronology might suggest the family were facing particularly challenging times which were obviously not photographed. There are also cultural variations to the family album as it is not uncommon for some societies also to photograph the dead so that they have a complete record of a person’s life from cradle to grave. Ultimately, the traditional family photograph album acts as a public relations document for the family (Martin, 2009; Weiser, 2004; Berman, 1993).

Ulkuniemi (2007) believes there are four different ways in which family photographs are commonly used. Firstly, in relation to the traditional family album and the preservation of historic events, family photographs *document*. Secondly, photographs are used as iconic symbols – on walls, in wallets or purses, and on mobile phones – they bring *unity* to the family and are even used to provide a visual reminder of a relative who has passed away. Thirdly, photographs provide opportunity for *interaction*, an area which is showing growing popularity on social networking sites such as Facebook, Flickr and other photo sharing sites. Showing photographs can be inclusive and adds another dimension to a person’s life when they can enhance their stories using visual examples. Finally, photographs aid in *building the identity*. Looking back at a photo collection can reaffirm your life journey so far and gives opportunity to relive experiences at a later date. These

four areas do not require the need of a formal therapist or counsellor to facilitate the use of photographs, and Ulkuniemi (2009) highlights the benefit of exploring family photographs in peer groups as social patterns which impacted on identity formation can emerge through the conversations.

Family photographs are closely tied to memories, and research into the construction of memory suggests that one of the main contributors to how they are formed is the way in which autobiographical narratives are retained by an individual (Brookfield et. al., 2008). These autobiographical narratives are formed through storytelling and this includes stories told within families to bind and strengthen identity. Many of these stories are formed around visual prompts and materials that we have within the family unit, therefore these visual records can provide useful tools to help remember and access these family narratives (Spence & Holland, 1991). Photographs will factor into these visual prompts, but they can also include a multitude of other items, and narratives may differ greatly as each person will have their own interpretation of the memory. Weiser (2004) explains that within a story a narrative is constructed using linguistics to verbalise memories, and family photograph albums are constructed using a sequence of images, but like any story, the family album is not an objective historical document but rather a subjective construction by the albums maker which is open to interpretation by every family member who can incorporate their own differing viewpoints into their own personal narratives.

Within formal family therapy photographs are often used to look at times of change within the family unit. This might include using the images to look at power alignments within the family and to look at complexities of the different relationships between various members (Phillips, 1986). The theoretical underpinning builds on and from the Freudian approach, but incorporates theories which aim to define and understand the quality of the relationship being discussed such as Fairbairn's (1952) theory of object relations, as well as Bowlby's (1979, 1969) attachment theory which recognises that the quality of the relationships experienced in childhood will impact on relationships formed in later life. Fairbairn (1952) looked at how an infant will internalise aspects of positive (pleasurable) and negative (painful) experiences and then carry these through to adult life in a process known as "transference" which unconsciously informs relationship formation. Freud (in Yerushalmi & Yedidya, 1997) hypothesised that the unconscious brings memories to the fore via visual means such as dreams and fantasies, yet he favoured verbal techniques to elicit information from his clients. Others argue that because many childhood memories are in the unconscious, photographs can help to access these and bypass the censorship of the conscious; as most

therapeutic relationships rely on verbal information, using a visual component as an added sense can aid the communication of meaning and message (Yerushalmi & Yedidya, 1997; Feder & Feder, 1981).

The main argument for using family photographs to understand the dynamics within the unit is that they provide a window which gives insight into how internal relations interact with the external world. Again, this is tied up in non-verbal cues, what Stern et. al. (1998) term “implicit relational knowing” (p. 302), acknowledging that it is a largely unconscious process, but not in the Freudian way of being repressed or removed. This implicit relational knowing is gathered through our interactions as we go through life, we naturally gather conscious material but at the same time will be adapting ourselves so that we can connect with people we like, and avoid people we do not like. This unconscious material is stored as implicit memory, which Stern believes can be accessed through our non-verbal behaviour and body language (Rodolfo de Bernart, (in Loewenthal, 2013)). Hence, using photographs to look at non-verbal behaviour and body language is a useful starting point for accessing the implicit relational knowing.

Working with family photographs also assists in identity formation and clarification but the taking of family photographs is not a static phenomenon and over the past 100 years has seen some considerable changes. At the beginning of the 20th century photographs recorded the dignity of life, rites of passage, and the formal recording of the developing generations; at the beginning of the 21st century photographs record fun aspects of life, the family playing together, and the emphasis on leisure time. It used to be the case that exploration of body image and open displays of feelings and emotions were taboo, but nowadays these may be common images in our family albums or on social networking sites and modern-day taboo’s might consist of illness, the monotony of everyday life and work, failures and hard times (Ulkuniemi, 2009). Identity is also not a static phenomenon, but Slater (in Ulkuniemi, 2009) warns that identity is becoming tied into the consumerist way of thinking and that presenting our image is becoming more important than being represented by our image, an aspect of self-presentation which Goffman (1959) referred to as *impression management*. Images are becoming more and more public and social networking sites are being used to tell others about the experiences we are having, the events we have been to, and the active lives we engage in; the danger here lies in how we decide which photographs make up our true identities, and which make up our *digital* identities (Martin, 2009; Van Dijck, 2008).

Van Dijck (2008) believes that photography now plays a major role in identity formation, and with the ever increasing use of social networking sites, photo blogging and camera phones, the role of the photograph as a means to capture memory is now secondary to photography’s function as a tool for

communicating one's identity. He recognises the importance of the camera within family life and notes the writing of Sontag (1977) wherein the taking, organising, and presentation of images helped the family understand their connections whilst documenting ritualised moments of development, but points to the work of Harrison (2002) whose research has suggested that self-presentation has become the main function of photography. This shift is attributed to a change in culture, alongside developing technology, which has allowed a younger generation to use photography to facilitate peer bonding and conversation.

"Individuals articulate their identity as social beings not only by taking and storing photographs to document their lives, but by participating in communal photographic exchanges that mark their identity as interactive producers and consumers of culture" (Van Dijck, 2008, p.63).

The consequence of this is that generational perceptions of identity through photography may differ depending on the participants' experience with photography. Where people once took photographs on film and had them printed onto photographic paper so that the image became a tangible object, the digital photograph has become a means to share experiences which can become transient in nature (Kindberg et. al. 2005). Kegan (1994, 1982) (in Modlin, 2015) states that we perpetually interpret meaning from our surroundings across the lifespan, and in adulthood the two main systems are *socialized* and *self-authoring*; the socialized adult has the capacity to identify with others, share beliefs and values, and empathise, whereas the self-authoring adult becomes more autonomous and does not rely on the validation of others as much. This might suggest that the photographic experiences described by Harrison (2002) and Van Dijck (2008) are activities for enhancing the socialized meaning system, but deeper analysis of the image is an activity for the self-authoring meaning system.

Using photography within family work can also have practical applications. Genograms are often used in a wide number of settings including social work, counselling, psychology and medicine, and aim to provide a pictorial overview of family generations and relationships within. Often symbols are used to represent family members but by including photographs this can provide a visual layer of communication which can be read to elicit non-verbal communication and body language. When using photographs in genograms there are three parameters which are used to read the pictures; firstly there is an interactive parameter which aims to understand how people within the image relate to one another through their interactions; secondly a relational parameter looks at the generations and the narrative of the family to try to identify specific patterns that may repeat overtime; and thirdly a symbolic metaphoric parameter is used to establish whether there are underlying meanings or messages attached to the images selected for the genogram, for example,

the image might provoke a memory which may not be immediately apparent from the image, but for the person who selected the photograph the memory can be very vivid (Rodolfo de Bernart (in Loewenthal, 2013)). Brookfield et. al. (2008) point to the importance of using photographs when engaging in life story work with adopted children. Again this work involves looking at the narrative and should construct an accurate history so that the adopted child can have some coherence into their journey through care, aiming to strengthen the child's resilience and build on attachment by recognising positive experiences with people in their past. However, the tendency is that challenging experiences will be omitted and can result in an incomplete narrative which may hinder the child in the future when they try to locate difficult events from their past.

As well as assisting the exploration of relationships, attachment theory also underpins the use of photography in bereavement. Within family therapy photographs of the deceased are used to evoke associations and also to investigate unresolved grief. Research suggests that the older we get the more important photographs become as they can provide repositories for memories, so much so that it has been suggested that photographs of people who have passed away can provide a "tenuous immortality" (Csikzentmihalyi & Halton, 1981 (in Johnson, 1999, p.232)).

3.3a.1 Summary

The literature presents differing approaches to using family photographs and informed opinion from practitioners on the impact and effectiveness. Ulkuniemi (2009, 2007) used her own images and researched the reaction of viewers, whereas Brookfield et. al. (2008) and Rodolfo de Bernart (in Loewenthal, 2013) explore the value of working with children and families who were engaging in meaning making with their own, pre-existing images. Brookfield et. al.'s (2008) research also made attempts to understand the phenomenon of engagement with photographs by using focus groups to draw out the collective voice of parents with fostering experience, and then used discourse analysis to interpret the focus group transcripts.

Photographs which include significant others create opportunities to explore the relationships and bonds between the object and the photographer. These opportunities arise from using pre-existing family images and new photographs to open up a dialogue which allows for the exploration of family issues which can reveal a multitude of memories, but also values, culture, and beliefs. Sudbery (2002) also highlights that any work which attempts to explore relationships invites issues that may surface in the professional relationship between worker and service user. It may be that some of the

difficulties experienced by the service user are transferred into the working relationship, projected onto the worker, or cause emotional disturbance. Although therapeutic photography has no formal training process, it may be advantageous if a professional working to explore relationships has a good theoretical understanding of how these are formed and how they impact on behaviour.

3.3b Social work theory and relationships

Within their definition of social work, the International Federation of Social Workers describes the profession as one which “*promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people*” (<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>). This overarching statement pinpoints the vital component of social cohesion as being one that the profession needs to recognise and work with, and this places emphasis on looking at how society prospers and survives through the relationships and cooperation of its members. Gerhardt (2006) explains that the human being is a social animal and because of this our physical and emotional development is shaped by social interactions. Howe and Campling (1995) also believe that humans are defined by the quality of social relationships, and experiences of previous relationships will shape how individuals handle new relationships. Howe goes on to explain that because social workers deal with service users who are in distress, or cause distress, they are dealing with people’s emotions which are likely to be in a heightened state and it is therefore important that effective working has to be underpinned with a good knowledge of the human condition, including why certain reactions might be provoked by stress and anxiety.

Knowledge of attachment theory is one way for social workers to assess the quality of relationships the service user has with others. In the 1950s John Bowlby (2008) introduced the concept of attachment theory for understanding the quality of the care giving relationship between mother and child. Since then, his theories have been developed by a number of other authors including Mary Ainsworth (et. al., 2014), who worked to classify the insecure attachment styles through an experiment known as the “strange situation”, and David Howe (1995), who recognised that the importance of attachment goes beyond childhood as it continues to impact on relationships throughout all stages of the life-cycle. Within social work practice the four attachment styles are now recognised as i) a secure attachment which is defined by a constant, positive, and available

relationship between carer and child; ii) ambivalent attachment where the quality of the relationship is inconsistent and the child has to demand attention in various ways and therefore feels undervalued; iii) avoidant attachment where the care is constantly unavailable, rejecting, and the child develops self-reliance very quickly; and iv) disorganised attachment which is defined by unpredictable and frightening responses which are often accompanied by violence and abuse (Gibson & Gibson, 2016; Aldgate & Gibson, (in Lishman, 2015)). These attachment styles are mirrored in adulthood wherein those service users who formed secure attachments in childhood will be autonomous, secure individuals; those who experienced ambivalent attachments will be preoccupied, entangled individuals; avoidant styles will be demonstrated in dismissing, detached individuals; and disorganised attachment styles will be repeated in fearful, avoidant personalities (Gibson & Gibson, 2016; Howe & Campling, 1995; Bretherton, 1991). These styles are discernible from responses given to an interview known as the *adult attachment interview* (George et. al., 1985) where the ways in which questions are answered can direct social workers to certain attachment styles. The 20 question format elicits direct responses to the answers, but by listening to the way in which the narrative is communicated (such as the amount of detail offered, focus on the subject matter, levels of anxiety displayed) insight can also be gleaned into certain adult attachment styles. Attachment is adaptable and it does not automatically follow that an attachment style from childhood will define adult attachment styles; human beings will learn from different circumstances and relationships and will adjust internal working models to adapt and social workers should be aware of this ability to change (Iwaniec & Sneddon, 2001). Aldgate & Gibson (in Lishman, 2015) believe that attachment theory underpins the three key areas of social work – assessment, planning, and intervention – and can inform specific techniques such as genograms, eco-maps and life story work, interventions which some believe can be enhanced through the use of photography (Rodolfo de Bernart (in Loewenthal, 2013); Brookfield et. al., 2008). The value of considering attachment theory in social work also relates to the therapeutic relationship between worker and service user. If the worker can provide a milieu which lets the service user explore issues in a non-judgemental manner, where emotions and feelings can be explored, and where empathy informs communication, then the service user can experience what a secure attachment should feel like and the relationship between the worker and service user can be described as *earned secure* (Gibson & Gibson, 2016).

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The work of Klein and Fairbairn developed object relations theory which proposes that human beings are driven by the need to form and maintain relationships with significant others. Klein surmised that young babies see the world from a paranoid schizoid position where the main carer is

viewed as either all good or all bad depending on how needs are met, but this viewpoint soon moves into a depressive position and the baby realises that the main carer is not split into *good carer* or *bad carer*, but is actually a whole person who is capable of being both good and bad. This is the beginning of the integration of the ego and the start of synthesis between internal and external situations. At times of difficulty and stress, an individual may revert back to a paranoid schizoid position and be unable to see another person for both their good and bad aspects, simply viewing them as all good or all bad, but healthy relationships should be able to move back into the depressive positions (Beckett & Taylor, 2010; Klein (in Mitchell, 1986)). Fairbairn (1952) further developed Klein's theory and took the standpoint that healthy relationships involved the capacity to invest the self into a relationship, whilst accepting something back from the other person in the relationship, thus making the relationship reciprocal. However, when needs were unmet or punished in childhood, splitting occurred and unpleasant experiences were buried in the unconscious, but within two clear domains – the libidinal, and the anti-libidinal. The libidinal part of the unconscious contained the feelings associated with having needs that were not met by the primary carer such as the carer being unavailable, or love being withheld. In contrast, the anti-libidinal part houses emotions associated with being shamed or punished. Fairbairn (1952) proposed that every human being will have elements of libidinal and anti-libidinal ego, but where childhood experiences have resulted in strong, dominant libidinal or anti-libidinal egos, they can adversely affect relationships in adulthood. This might mean that a dominant libidinal ego might seek out partners that will meet unmet need from their childhood and exhibit behaviour often described as clingy and needy, whereas a dominant anti-libidinal ego might isolate themselves for fear of being hurt in adult relationships, as well as their own emotions. As a result, an individual is not seeing their partner as a whole person if the partner is only satisfying a certain part of the whole ego. Again, this is an unconscious defence mechanism and is not a conscious decision that a person makes (Gibson & Gibson, 2016; Gibson (in Lishman, 2015); Yumatov, 2014; Borden, 2000).

Arguably, the first experience individuals have of relationship formation occurs within the family unit. Traditionally the word "family" conjured up images of a heterosexual couple with children who lived in the same household, but Walker (in Lishman, 2015) warns that this assumption is outdated and that social workers need to recognise the wide diversity of family units within today's multicultural society. Consideration needs to be given to issues such as ethnic diversity, sociological issues, extended families, lone parent families, same sex partnerships, unmarried parents, divorces, stepfamilies, as well as adoption and fostering. Working with families, from a social work perspective, may take a systemic approach which views an individual as functioning within a number of systems and subsystems, and defining their identity from these interactions (Minuchin, 1974;

Burnham, 1968). Genograms are often used with service users to build a picture of the family unit and can be useful at both the assessment and intervention stage. They can be drawn with symbols or pictures to represent family members, but Rodolfo de Bernart (in Loewenthal, 2013) argues that using photographs is a more effective method of building up a genogram and allows exploration of systems out with the immediate family that images from the photographs offer up. Berman (1993) also argues that the potential for using photographs to explore family systems, and dynamics within, is a rich source of information.

Much of the theory used in family therapy stems from the work of Minuchin (1974) who believed that the structure of a family needed to be analysed to find the source of any issues or problematic behaviour (Walker (in Lishman, 2015)). Minuchin (1974) states that repeated transactions within the family unit will establish family norms and structure. This structure is then maintained by two systems; a *generic* system which governs how families are organised and delineate lines of power, and an *idiosyncratic* system which sets forth mutual expectations of family members. This system should be adaptable and there should be clear boundaries for every member of the unit. In turn, analysis of these boundaries can determine whether the family has become disengaged (where certain members become peripheral and separate), or enmeshed (where family members have a heightened sense of belonging and a loss of autonomy) (Burnham, 1968). An analysis of boundaries can also help understand the subsystems which naturally occur within the family unit. There will be a number of naturally occurring subsystems within each family unit, for example parental subsystems, sibling subsystems, and parent – child subsystems (Janzen & Harris, 1986), but if the boundaries of a subsystem become confused and affects a person's role within a family they can become problematic (Minuchin, 1974). To give an example, a mother might begin to use her daughter as a form of support if she is having problems with her husband, a situation which may result in the daughter becoming a confidante and "friend" for her mother, leading to isolation of the father, and ultimately leading to role confusion for the daughter. Triangulation is also an issue to consider when working with families which occurs when a two-person system experiences anxiety and brings a third *element* into the relationship in the hope of providing stability (Janzen & Harris, 1986). This third element can be another family member, a child, or even an issue, such as alcohol use. Sometimes the triangulation of the relationship can provide homeostasis, but it also has the potential to become perverse and pathological (Haley, 1967). It is also important to note that homeostasis could also be problematic if the effort to maintain this is not always serving the interests of all the family (Janzen & Harris, 1986). Through discussing family issues and structures, a social worker also has the opportunity to explore whether there are explicit and established family rules that govern the behaviour of family members, and also whether family myths exist which

define expectations of the family members and their relationships with others (Janzen & Harris, 1986; Minuchin, 1974; Burnham, 1968).

Early and GlenMaye (2000) warn against solely looking for problems and issues within the family and suggest that social workers need to take a strengths approach when practising with families in order to allow service users to define and attribute meaning to their situations. They believe that the homoeostasis that keeps families together, including traditions and myths, and the systems in which they are embedded, means that they are already drawing strengths from these resources and, if working to empower service users, social work needs to highlight existing coping strategies and build on these. To do this, Early and GlenMaye (2000) explain that a social worker needs to form a collaborative relationship with the service user and be guided by them in all areas from initial assessment, right through to evaluating the intervention, and they also highlight the importance of considering resilience. Gilligan (2004) believes that resilience should be something that all practising social workers consider in work with their service users as the more resilient a person is, the better they are at avoiding the impact of adversity when faced with challenges. He explains that resilience is built up when an individual experiences repeated interactions with favourable elements of their environment. Daniel and Wassell (2002) highlight six areas where these favourable elements can be built up; experiencing a secure base where a person feels safe to explore from, and safe to return to; engaging in education; establishing friendships based on patterns of secure attachment; developing talents and interests; having positive values and feeling able to contribute to society; and having good social competencies to facilitate communication and engagement with society as a whole. Gilligan (2004) points out that resilience may well occur in only one or two of these domains, rather than all six, but where domains of resilience occur, these can be viewed as protective factors. In considering resilience, a social worker is considering relationships with the wider world which mirrors Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (which is discussed in section 3.6), and Gilligan (2004) states that social workers must try to understand service users in their own social contexts and try to identify their whole needs. In doing so there is more opportunity for a therapeutic alliance to develop, and it is this trusting relationship that is often the most productive element of social work contact (Gilligan, 2004). Folke (2006) also believes that considering resilience factors alongside socio-ecological systems is not only useful for identifying where strengths lie, but also for identifying where there is capacity for development.

3.3b.1 Summary

People form relationships based on their own experience of being in a relationship, and for the large majority of people, the first relationship experienced is the parental one. Here, the foundations are laid and an individual builds up beliefs in the world around them based on feelings of safety and trust in their carer, and in the environment. Good experiences result in a strong sense of self and a positive internal working model, but negative experiences during formative years may result in a poor internal working model and suspicion of the world around us (Gibson & Gibson, 2016; Bowlby, 1969).

A knowledge of attachment styles and family relationships can provide the social worker with an insight into the internal working model through the expression of beliefs, values and attitudes, and this insight can be used to create interventions which give the service user control or structure which can be useful in addressing anxiety within problematic adult attachment styles, particularly dismissive and preoccupied ones. Social work education places value on theories which analyse and attempt to understand relationships, and when combined with therapeutic interventions this should enhance the working relationship, and the outcome for the service user. These approaches could potentially compliment therapeutic photography when using images to explore relationships and provide the professional understanding of relationships that may be absent in unstructured, informal groups.

Psychodynamic and relational approaches encourage introspection and an examination of past experiences to see how they have shaped lives, but these experiences also need to be viewed in situ with the environment, culture, and society to consider external factors that may be problematic (Folke, 2006; Gilligan, 2004). This chapter will now move on to look at how therapeutic photography is used to explore these wider cultural and societal issues.

3.4a Photography to elicit narratives

Photo elicitation stems from research practice wherein photographs are used with research participants to elicit a response which is thought to be deeper than using linguistic means alone. Harper (2002) relates the value of using photo elicitation to the evolution of the brain; because the part of the brain that processes visual information is responsible for learning long before the part that processes linguistic information, Harper argues that using images can access a deeper level of consciousness than using words alone. Certainly, research into brain development may support the fact that the right side of the brain is responsible for documenting visual reality and this is the portion of the brain which develops initially from birth to around two years of age, until the left side begins to develop in equal measure with the arrival of linguistic ability (Gerhardt, 2006; Weiser, 1988). However, McGilchrist (2009) warns that viewing the right and left side of the brain as being responsible for visual and verbal development respectively is too simplistic, and that neuroscience suggests the left side is actually responsible for structuring, ordering, and defining detail in the world around us, whereas the right side is used to make sense of visual cues, consider alternative options, and remain vigilant when structure is absent. He continues to state that modern society is becoming too reliant on the left hand side of the brain, seeking rationale and order in everything, and that approaches to exercise the right hand side of the brain should be favoured. The influence of the image continues to permeate human life and the value of working with images extends beyond the early years of childhood; images become “part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge” (Pink, 2013, p. 1).

Using photo elicitation in a therapeutic sense can be viewed as a means of accessing the unconscious (Loewenthal, 2013; Trainin Blank, 2009). This is built on the Freudian belief that unpleasant memories, thoughts and desires are removed from the conscious, and buried in the unconscious, a process which Freud (2001) termed repression. Using photographs to access the unconscious assumes that service users will attach meanings to the image through projection as a result of previous repression. There are three main approaches to using photo elicitation; firstly, in an approach called auto driving, interviewees will discuss photographs they have been presented with. The interviewees have no personal connection to the photographs used and may be asked to select a particular image that they are drawn to. This technique is often used in the practice of phototherapy where trained counsellors or therapists will use photos printed onto postcards (also known as *spectrocards*) to elicit a response in connection to the image (Saita et. al., 2014; Loewenthal, 2013; Halkola (in Loewenthal, 2013)). Secondly, reflexive photography is an approach wherein interviewees will create their own photographs and then bring them to an interviewer

where they will explore the deeper meanings of the photographs produced. Thirdly photo novella is a practice which requires the participants to document their daily routines and perhaps explore challenges within these. Noland (2006) highlights that photographs can capture the mundane aspects of life, but by exploring the image and drawing attention to certain elements issues and experiences can be brought into the conscious realm. Photo novella is similar to the practice of photovoice (which will be discussed in section 3.5a) which aims to challenge injustice or inequality and to highlight areas where change could benefit the participant (Loewenthal, 2013; Parker, 2009). John Collier (Collier & Collier, 1986) is credited as being the founding father of photo elicitation when, in 1957, he developed the technique to research environmental factors affecting service users with mental health problems. His team later used photographs to help define environmental factors when they were having problems trying to categorise themes using words alone. They found that by using photographs to assist in the interviews the respondents demonstrated better recall from memory as well as reduced misunderstandings between the researchers and participants (Harper, 2002).

In an approach informed by auto-driving, Schwartz (1989) used a variety of images that were taken by photographers and asked participants to determine meanings and messages behind each picture. He found that all participants used their own personal narratives and social experiences to draw meaning from each image, and that the message that the photographers had intended were not apparent. He concluded that photographs were a useful medium for eliciting perception, social constructions, and memories. The photograph itself has been described as a “neutral third party” (Parker, 2009, p. 1119) within the relational dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee in that the discussion can be focused on the image rather than the interviewer focusing attention on the interviewee which, in turn, reduces the power imbalance within that relationship. It also empowers the interviewee as ultimately they are the experts of their own situation and will hold the knowledge behind the images they have produced (Parker, 2009). Photo elicitation can also be conducted in a group scenario and is particularly good for identifying common themes or common issues amongst minority communities, as well as the polysemic nature of a photograph, that is, the multiple meanings people can attribute to one image (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). However, as with all group situations, there may be participants who feel inhibited in the presence of other people, therefore caution should be used when selecting appropriate group members, especially at the expense of one-to-one work (Collier & Collier, 1986).

Within society images form a major role in communication; the average person is exposed to an enormous amount of visual information every day through sources including films, TV, advertising,

internet use, and print media. Children learn to recognise visual images long before they develop linguistic skills and as a result photo elicitation has proved to be a successful tool to use when trying to get views from young children and adolescents. Photo elicitation has been used in pedagogical environments to seek information from young children on what they find is important within a classroom setting (Stan & Popa, 2013; Cappello, 2005). In their study on the importance of play for children, Alexander et. al. (2014) opted to gather data through photographs produced by the children as the visual element appeared to give the children confidence and gave power to voice and express feelings. Their data was backed up by interviewing the children, using the images to guide and explore what the children were aiming to express, and concluded that this approach was more inclusive than using interviews alone.

The success of this method has been attributed to the focus on visual information rather than lexical information, and also the manner in which information is sought deviates from the average adult/child relationships where the balance of power typically lies with the adult. Power dynamics were also a major consideration in research conducted into bullying by Walton and Niblett (2013) who recognised that children who had been bullied may be wary of power, control and authority, and the visual aspect of their questioning allowed the discussion to develop in a different manner which elicited new information when compared to previous studies which had relied on questionnaires and interviews alone. Goffman (2009) highlights denigration and social marginalisation as factors contributing towards stigmatisation which should be considered when thinking about power dynamics within an interview situation. As photo elicitation addresses some power dynamics this suggests it could be a particularly suitable intervention to use when working with stigmatised service users. Griebing et. al. (2013) explain that photo elicitation places the power of research into the hands of the photographer as they are looking to illustrate strengths and challenges within their lives, then share interpretations with interested parties. In turn, the interested parties, be it researcher, facilitator, or peers, then engage with the photographer in an effort to learn and understand what the issues are; the photographer becomes an educator.

As well as stigma, photo elicitation can aid in the development of identity, exploration of the self, and clarification of roles by acting as an externalised medium for the expression of issues (Goessling & Doyle, 2009). Rice et. al. (2013) found that photo elicitation was useful for helping younger adolescents who had experienced trauma prioritise wants and needs when care planning. The benefit of being able to externalise issues through images meant that participants could take photographs to represent what was personally important to them, and when the researchers looked

across all images there were clear themes with regards to the importance of friends and family to reinforce identity. The results also highlighted the importance of considering environmental factors, how they reinforce identity and how the participants found the process engaging and empowering. Teixeira (2015) observed that the action orientated way in which data is collected through photographs also encouraged participants creatively to discuss solutions to the issues identified, thus suggesting that empowerment was also an outcome of this approach.

Because of the emancipatory potential of photo elicitation, it appears to be a useful technique to elicit information from hard to reach communities. Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) used the technique in a medical setting when working with men who were going through prostate cancer treatment. They found that the experience was a therapeutic one in that it allowed the participants to photograph aspects of their treatment, then to reflect, process, and talk about what was occurring. It also allowed the men who participated to choose what would be discussed at each session by deciding what to photograph, thus the power was in their hands, and the interviewers felt that they were learning from the participants and became spectators of the participant's perspective.

If the societal perception is that minority groups are closed off and stoic, then attempts to reach these groups may be tainted by this attitude; if traditional methods of data collection have proved fruitless, then introducing a visual aspect may have benefits and could elicit more information. The therapeutic value of photo elicitation was also highlighted by Newbury and Hoskins (2011) when feedback from their study revealed that the process had been "healing" (p. 1070) for participants. Their study looked at problems associated with substance use and they found that photo elicitation helped to move away from the perspective that risk taking behaviour is an individual's choice, towards a more holistic view that the environment and society we are raised in will also contribute; photo elicitation allowed participants to bring other aspects of their lives into the interviews. They also noted that the dynamics of communication was affected by the introduction of a photograph in that the researcher would sit side by side with the participant, as opposed to face to face, and the conversation and eye contact was directed at the image, rather than with each other. This appeared to make the conversation feel more "comfortable" (p. 1068) and gave a sense of safety so that the participant could control the flow of information.

Stevens and Spears (2009) recognise close ties with art therapy and photo therapy in that an approach popularised by Carl Jung underpins some of the work in both fields. Jung believed that it was often easier to deal with emotional disturbances if they were given shape and form, rather than simply discussed in linguistics. Once they are expressed through art or photography they are given a concrete, objective form which is easier for the service user to work with than abstract thoughts

alone. This has proved useful when working with service users who might not be honest in their answers when being interviewed; the use of visual images can help to bypass denial and rationalisations by placing a concrete image into the hands of the service user and directly discussing the problem presented in the photograph (Graf, 2002; Chickerneo, 1993).

In another health based study, Fitzgerald et. al. (2013) used photo elicitation to look at obesity and tobacco use in Philadelphia and used Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological model to structure the results, using images and narratives to see where the impacting factors sat on the model, and also using the transtheoretical model (Prochaska et. al., 1993) to look at willingness to change. They found that photo elicitation gave good insight into the beliefs and priorities of the participants, but did feel that there may have been a tendency for participants to focus on areas which lent themselves to be photographed, and that this may have excluded other areas of discussion which were difficult to photograph. Despite this, abstract concepts were elicited in the discussion process. In another study by Angus et. al. (2009) they found that using photography to elicit information and discussion was actually a barrier for some participants. This appeared to be attributable to the social class of the participant, the subject matter they were focusing on, and the life experience of the participant. They warn that photo elicitation might not be appropriate for certain subject matters, nor for participants who are uncomfortable with using technical equipment like cameras. They do state that this can be overcome in the interviewer/interviewee dynamic by simply asking the participant if there was anything they felt they could not capture in a photograph, and then see if the response might elicit further discussion. Dennis Jr. et. al. (2009) warn that photo elicitation can also lead to an overwhelming number of images being produced and suggest that limits are set for participants so that the therapeutic benefit is not forgotten and consumed by the task of taking photographs. They also highlight another challenging area for this practice in that if illegal activities are part of the problem for the service user, this is not an easy (or safe) thing to photograph and perhaps this requires a more abstract approach to capturing images for discussion.

Clark-Ibanez (2004) favours participants taking photographs for themselves, rather than using a pre-existing stock of images to facilitate discussions. She believes there is value in using pre-existing images, but warns there might be a tendency for the interviewer to choose images to be used that they like themselves, or they can read messages into themselves, whereas if a participant is coming in with fresh images that they have produced, the photographs have much more meaning. She illustrates this by drawing on an example from her experience where she interviewed a young person who had taken 38 photographs of her new kitten:

“The content of the photos did not end up being as important. For Janice, moving to a new community and not yet knowing anyone were factors in her strong attachment to her kitten. What became more important (and interesting) was the conversation about how her parents let her have the kitten after moving from Watts to Oak Park: a mixture of being able to afford having pets and compensating for the loss of friends. For example, Janice explained her family’s slightly improved economic situation that (sic) allowed her to have a kitten” (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1513).

Harper (2002) describes three categories when using photographs to elicit discussion; firstly, he recognises that photographs are used to record inventories such as objects, people, and belongings. Secondly, photographs record events along the life path and record institutional landmarks like school, graduation, birthdays, weddings and celebrations. Thirdly, they capture social interactions, usually intimate moments that connect the self to culture and society. Harper believes that using the three categories of *inventory*, *institution* or *social* can help facilitate discussion and focus the conversation on one of these three areas. Whereas Ulkuniemi (2007) uses the categories of documentation, unity, interaction and identity-building to explore photographs in terms of relationships, Harper’s categories appear to look at the cultural definitions of the image; because of the polysemic nature of photographs this means that one image could actually fall into several different categories which may be an obstacle if discussion is defined by category. Hedges (1972) (in Graf, 2002) believed that categories might be too restrictive and advised that an effective facilitator using photo elicitation should work to establish a good rapport with the participants, have no preconceptions about images that would be presented, and work with both the photograph and the participant to elicit a discussion, appreciating that the participant will guide that process.

The therapeutic value of taking photographs is also important as the act of framing an image, pressing the shutter, and printing off an edited image can all impact on the way in which a service user views the world, as well as themselves. Cosden and Reynolds (1982) recognised that encouraging service users to engage in photography boosted self-esteem and had an impact on how they viewed the relationship between action and consequence because the process of photography involved planning the shot, anticipating the final image, and viewing the finished product. They also suggest that taking photographs can bring withdrawn service users into closer contact with their environment, as well as other people, and the act of displaying images and receiving feedback can have a direct impact on self-esteem. Overall, they believe that because photography involves creative expression, mastering a skill, sequencing events within time, and completing a task, the resulting impact on self-esteem makes it a therapeutic activity.

3.4a.1 Summary

The literature presents a variety of approaches for using photographs to enhance and compliment narrative exploration. Some use the techniques with single case studies or small sample sizes (Saita et. al., 2014; Stan & Popa, 2013) whilst others use photo elicitation on larger scales with group sizes ranging from the mid-teens, right up to almost 50 participants (Fitzgerald et. al., 2013; Angus et. al., 2009; Oliffe & Bottoroff, 2007). Most researchers encouraged participants to take their own photographs, but Walton & Niblett (2013) opted to take photographs which captured concepts which they felt might be relevant to their participants, then used these to facilitate discussion, which may have incorporated researcher bias into the results. Ethically, most studies encouraged voluntary, unpaid participation except for Teixeira (2015) and Fitzgerald et. al. (2013) who chose to financially reward participation. This could challenge the results on the grounds of participant motivation.

The use of photographs in the analysis process also differed amongst the studies. One attempted to use a computer programme to analyse and code the content of each image (Saita et. al., 2014) whilst others used the photographs to facilitate discussion, then used the recorded transcripts to analyse and code the data (Rice et. al., 2013; Fitzgerald et. al., 2013; Angus et. al., 2009; Oliffe & Bottoroff, 2007). However, a number of studies attempted to analyse the content of the photographs in an interpretive manner and did this using a variety of data collection techniques, drawing data from focus groups, participant observation, and interviews, thus using a number of sources to capture the experiential data and inform the interpretive analysis (Alexander et. al., 2014; Stan & Popa, 2013; Cappello, 2005; Clark Ibanez, 2004).

In terms of gathering information, photo elicitation is a method which changes traditional dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is more than simply an “aesthetic experience” (Coronel & Pascual, 2013, p. 120) and actually provides a tool for exploring and expressing cultural, social, economic and power dynamics which impact on the lives of the interviewee (Coronel & Pascual, 2013; Clark-Ibanez, 2004). This means that the interviewer has to be aware of their own preconceptions and be prepared to learn from the interviewee, and it also means transferring a large degree of responsibility to the interviewee for gathering information. From a research perspective issues which arise from this approach may be dealt with through ethics committees, but from a social work perspective there is a need to consider how this approach aligns with the purpose of the profession, a topic which this chapter will now move on to explore.

3.4b Social work theory and the narrative

Photo elicitation can be a means of accessing the unconscious and it is also a useful method for exploring personal narratives and social experiences (Rice et. al., 2013; Fitzgerald et. al., 2013; Trainin Blank, 2009; Schwartz, 1989). This technique of exploring life stories and interpretation of previous events is linked to social work through a strengths and narrative approach wherein the past has to be acknowledged, but interventions are forward facing and look at how the service user can reinterpret events to help move forward in the future (Payne, 2014). Strengths based approaches tend to focus on positives and have been criticised for being dismissive of negative factors when service users are giving an account of the experiences and may wish to explore these (Payne, 2014). Narrative approaches allow a fuller exploration of issues and are closely linked to identity formation as individuals try to construct who they are in relation to contemporary society (Riessman & Quinney, 2005).

White and Epston (1990) developed narrative therapy from their work with families in which they recognised there were a number of influential systems at play which impacted on family members and the roles they adopt; each of these roles had expected behaviours which were influenced by societal factors. White and Epston were influenced by the work of Foucault (in Faubion, 1994) and Goffman (1961) who described a hierarchy of power which is used to exert control over individuals using techniques such as subordination, surveillance, and demonstrating superior knowledge. This power delineation impacts on societal roles because they impose socially constructed norms through areas like politics, values, beliefs, and gender expectations. White and Epston believed that identifying these societal expectations and examining how they impact on behaviour was the underpinning factor within narrative therapy. Personal narratives are simply a *representation* of the life lived, not an accurate reflection; as a result, the *interpretation* of past events may be problematic for the service user and influencing behaviour and self-esteem in a negative way; “the dichotomy between how the individual views themselves (and) how society defines a person of “moral worth” within the culture” needs to be investigated (Gibson & Heyman (in Lishman et. al., 2014, p. 310)). White and Epston (1990) explain that the narrative therapeutic process begins with empathy from the social worker as the service users tells their story. The social worker should be looking for the *problem saturated* narrative which is where the story is largely negative and focuses on events that have been detrimental to the service user. The next stage is to externalise the problem by naming it, giving it an identity, and then deconstructing the story around the externalised problem. Part of the process of deconstruction will involve exploring how society has impacted on the view of the problem and how that has consequently shaped the service user’s

ability to cope. Ultimately, the aim is to get the service user to explore exceptions and to create an alternative narrative based around the root cause of the problem (Gibson & Heyman (in Lishman et. al., 2014); White & Epston, 1990). Moxley et. al. (2012) recognise the close links between narrative therapy and resilience explaining that when a service user identifies strengths used to cope with adversity, this can enhance self-respect by recognising themselves as resilient problem solvers.

Traditionally, narrative therapy has been a linguistic based intervention but the value of adding a visual element into the practice is now being recognised. Riessman and Quinney (2005) describe the distinguishing features of narrative work being linked to the two elements of sequence and consequence: to tell a story you need to select the events, create a structure and connect the events, and then evaluate the overall meaning. Petersen et. al. (2005) warn that verbally processing traumatic experiences and memories can be difficult for some, particularly with service users who experience alexithymia which makes putting feelings and emotions into words very difficult, and therefore other forms of communication should be introduced into the process of narrative therapy, including photography. Moxley et. al. (2012) used photography alongside narrative therapy in their research with homeless African American woman and found that using images helped to externalise the problem when the women were asked to look at areas which compromised resilience. Adding a visual element into narrative work appeared to allow service users to introduce metaphors for issues that might be difficult to directly address (Sitvast & Abma, 2012). In their work in health care, Sitvast and Abma (2012) recognised the value of using photographs to elicit the narrative and describe it this as *hermeneutic photography* wherein the therapeutic relationship explores how meaning is constructed. The use of metaphors within images to represent other, deeper and unconscious meanings, can be explored through photographs. In another health sector, the use of photographs to underpin patient narratives proved beneficial when working with individuals with type I diabetes in that it provided a patient centred approach and changed the consultation style between the physician and the patient. In their study, Smith et. al. (2006) encouraged participants to use photography to aid communication in consultations to look at how they were managing their disease, and to allow for reflection on beliefs and behaviours as and when they arose.

When a service user is recounting their life story the narrative may conform to what society deems as acceptable and normal, but adding a visual element into narrative therapy means that a self-initiated photograph may assist in the circumvention of defence mechanisms (Barbee, 2002). Photographs themselves can evoke narratives and can allow the social worker to explore the story with the service user which emphasises the role of the photograph as a neutral third party in the therapeutic relationship (Parker, 2009). This is particularly useful in narrative therapy because it

redresses the power balance in the therapeutic relationship and can facilitate the therapeutic alliance. Pink (2013) believes that exploring the narrative with the aid of visuals provides useful information to facilitate understanding about how the service users experience social environments, but also warns that no singular narrative is offered up in any one image and that the social worker must be willing to explore the meanings, which could be multiple. Ketelle (2010) believes that exploring narrative with the benefit of photography is so closely intertwined because both are socially constructed that one informs the other, whilst Washington et. al. (2009) observed that by using a combination of narrative exploration and photography with minority groups had two distinct benefits. Firstly, they *document* experiences, and secondly they helped identify where *strengths* are drawn from, thus making the outcome of the intervention that of empowerment. They also found that an additional effect of their study with African American woman who had experienced homelessness was that the use of images helped the participants give meaning to their homelessness experience and recognise it as part of their lives, but one that did not define their whole identity (Washington et. al., 2009).

Erving Goffman's work impacted on White and Epston's narrative therapy, but it has also impacted on social work practice in that social workers largely work with marginalised communities, or members of those communities, where stigma and labelling are rife. Goffman (2009) wrote about *social identity* and *personal identity* and explained that social identity can lead to alienation and isolation if the larger population of the society deems the membership of a certain social category to be far from ideal. He goes on to explain that personal identity is how each and every individual feels about themselves and that it impacts on the formation of a history or a biography to explain their uniqueness. When the effects of stigmatisation from social identity impact on self-esteem, personal identity is also affected. This viewpoint echoes the work of others such as Mead, Cooley, Bronfenbrenner and Winnicott who believed that, as social beings, identity is formed by observing and interpreting responses from others; we then incorporate this feedback from interactions into our identity (Crocker, 1999). Goffman (2009) underpinned his discussions by aligning his thinking with Erikson's writing and likened the development of social identity to the development of the ego across the lifespan, however, he has been criticised for neglecting to look at the formation of selfhood, and also for taking little account of motivation (Jenkins, 2008). Despite this, his identification of the impact of stigma on individuals in society facilitates social work to help recognise that negative outcomes may be the result of prejudice from society rather than individual shortcomings, knowledge of which can help to address self-esteem issues (Crocker, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989). Labelling theory is often associated with stigma in that once an individual is categorised into a certain role, the attributes of that role affect the self-esteem of the individual,

which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as the individual begins to adopt the characteristics; an example of this might be when someone finds out they have a mental illness and believes they are going to be alienated, rejected, and devalued by society, and begin to adopt this role (Link et. al., 1989). Rosenberg et. al. (1989) believe that self-esteem underpins human motivation in that every person wants to achieve self-maintenance or self-enhancement, and this is gained through three different sources; from observing and interpreting responses of others, from self-perceptions, and from social comparisons. If an individual feels appreciated by other people, if they feel that their actions are effective and productive, and if they feel that they compare favourably to others, then self-esteem will be enhanced (Verhaeghe et. al., 2008; Gecas, 1989).

Within social work practice it is not only self-esteem that needs to be considered, but also self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) identified self-efficacy as one of the main factors which underlies behavioural change and stated that those with good levels of self-efficacy were able to believe in their ability to make and maintain change. This is closely tied with self-esteem because human beings not only derive a sense of self from the reaction of others, but from self-evaluations of how actions and consequences of behaviour impact on self-development (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). For self-esteem to be effectively developed, the power dynamics of the therapeutic relationship need to be considered. If the power balance is too unequal and the person trying to develop self-efficacy is at the lower end of that power scale, then they will look for positive feedback from the person that holds the power, and then use this positive feedback to enhance self-esteem. If the power dynamics are balanced then the person developing self-efficacy may still be motivated by the feedback from others, but there should also be motivation from recognising the outcomes of their actions and how this can affect change in their life (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Bandura (1982) identified four areas of experience in which self-efficacy is developed; enactive mastery (building confidence and skills), vicarious experience (seeing others overcome challenges), verbal persuasion (positive feedback from others), and physiological arousal (understanding emotions and the consequences of them); ultimately, how an individual cognitively appraises and integrates these experiences will determine levels of self-efficacy. The last of the four areas of experience, physiological arousal, acknowledges the impact of anxiety on self-efficacy which links back into psychoanalytic theories where this particular emotion drives the ego to protect the id by employing defence mechanisms.

This suggests that it is beneficial for social workers to consider self-efficacy when planning interventions. This should involve an assessment of the task in hand, as well as the individuals' personal resources and constraints, and careful management of interventions can facilitate a positive change in self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Bandura (1982, 1977) also recognises that

self-efficacy involves outcome expectations and therefore it is important to consider motivation alongside self-efficacy. He believed that outcome expectations were impacted by the environment, and Gecas (1989) also suggests that, from a sociological perspective, individuals are actors within their own environments but need to take an active and creative view of themselves so that they can appreciate that they have a role in shaping and creating the world around them as well as being created by it. Bandura et. al. (2001) recognise that cultural differences will affect self-efficacy beliefs, and Gecas also identifies that self-efficacy will be affected by social structure, gender, social stability and change, as well as development over the life course, but that any work to enhance self-efficacy has beneficial and therapeutic consequences. If an intervention can facilitate identification and discussion of cultural impactors, then this suggests that poor self-efficacy could be redressed.

3.4b.1 Summary

It has been suggested that helping a service user to identify and externalise a problem makes it easier to begin to address and understand it (White & Epston, 1990). If objectified, this creates a third “entity” into the relationship between social worker and service user and creates triangulation (Janzen & Harris, 1986) which can provide stability, and in the case of photography it has been described as the neutral third party (Parker, 2009).

As a profession that aims to facilitate change, social work needs to consider what contributes towards the motivation to change, and what hinders efforts to make change. To do this, psychodynamic theories need to be considered alongside sociological factors and the social worker must recognise the powerful force that attitudes, beliefs and cultural values play on stigmatising and labelling service users, then work to address this in tandem with the service user.

In doing this, self-esteem and self-efficacy need to be acknowledged as these factors will impact on self-concept and motivation. If social work intervention is successful, it has also been suggested that empowerment is an outcome to be expected, and it is to this concept that this chapter will now turn to.

3.5a Photography to explore society

Griebling et. al. (2013) propose a hierarchy of photographic methods based on the level of participation, the personal growth of the service user, and the impact on the wider community. First on the scale, they feel that photographic methods document, investigate, evaluate, and uncover. Photo elicitation is second on the scale followed by the ability to challenge, and the third goal would be to empower. The technique of photovoice sits at the far end of this hierarchy.

Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris who, in 1992, set up a project which they called “photo novella” (which later became known as “photovoice”) to assist women in a Chinese village to photograph their everyday health and work routines, the underlying aim being to learn first-hand what challenges these women faced. Wang (1999) explains that this was underpinned by feminist methodology so that the programmes and policies could be developed *with* the woman, as opposed to *for* the woman. Allowing the woman in the project to control the process of taking photographs in order to communicate the challenges they faced made them the expert of their problems as opposed to sending in researchers to confirm or deny hypothesised problems. The goal with photovoice is to find a common theme amongst the group of participants and present the findings to policymakers in order to facilitate change, a strategy which is claimed to have stimulated improvements as a result of a number of projects (Wang et. al., 2004; Wang et. al., 2000; Wang et. al., 1996). In the case of the Chinese rural community the images illustrated to the policymakers the realities of the hardships the women were encountering. Because of this, photovoice was attributed to three policy changes aimed at day care, midwifery, and education for girls (Ozanne et. al., 2013; Wang et. al., 1996).

Wang developed five overarching stages to help guide the photovoice process; firstly, in collaboration with all of the participants, themes, topics and issues need to be identified so that there is a guiding “brief” for taking photographs, although she admits this is not always possible and that sometimes the researcher may have to be directive to encourage a theme to be focused on (Wang et. al., 1996). Secondly, all of the participants need to be trained so that they can use the photographic equipment, then go out and gather images with their cameras. Thirdly, as a group, the images are presented and discussed, the purpose being to reflect on the underlying meanings, and to critically analyse each other’s work. Fourthly, narratives are shared and the participants learn from each other’s experiences. Finally, the message taken from these collated stories and experiences are shared with policymakers, usually by displaying the photographs taken during the project (Griebling et. al., 2013).

Photovoice has been used with a wide variety of minority groups and Wang (1999) explains that the success of the intervention is due to some basic concepts. The images produced facilitate teaching which can be in a formal sense to influence health and well-being, as well as social policy, or it can be self-directed learning and expanding personal knowledge about how we view ourselves. Because the main outputs from this intervention are photographs, the resulting images can help to educate participants about common issues, and in turn help to inform policymakers. Even if policymakers do not directly view the photographs, the participants should still feel empowered through the process and have an awareness of issues which can then perpetuate action within their own group. Community action lies at the heart of photovoice and Wang believes it is the action of people coming together and sharing the stories behind their creations that makes photovoice an empowering intervention. There is also a sense that the participants are educating themselves and others. De (2015) noted that when young girls in an Indian slum were given cameras to participate in a photovoice project they felt they were getting the opportunity to explore their story through the photographs. The participants within the project explained that photographers could have taken images that were similar to the ones they produced, but the girls all had narratives that underpinned the significance of the image, and the story they were telling was from the girls' perspective, therefore the viewer got a sense of "girls' issues" (De, 2015, p. 34).

As well as feminist theory, photovoice is a *Freirean* process (Griebling et. al., 2013; Ozanne et. al., 2013; Duffy, 2011; Strack et. al., 2010; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Carlson et. al., 2006). Paulo Freire recognised that marginalised groups often feel powerless to the extent that community participation is rare, and to affect social change the perspectives of these marginalised groups is vital (Duffy, 2011). Freire proposed that community change can only be brought about by engaging people in dialogue within the communities, encourage critical reflection in a safe environment to look at why current issues are present, raise levels of critical consciousness to encourage action, and put pressure on policymakers to initiate change (Strack et. al., 2010). Photovoice goes hand-in-hand with the Freirean process as the learners and teachers are seen as co-creators of knowledge, an egalitarian approach creating knowledge through introspection, which is intended to guide participants through three levels of consciousness which Freire identified. At the base level, which Freire termed *the magical level*, participants assumed they had no voice, that they were inferior, and that this was the accepted norm. The next level is termed the *naïve level of consciousness*. At this stage, participants view the social situation as having been corrupted, but instead of addressing issues of hierarchical injustice, blame is directed at their peers. The final level, known as *critical consciousness*, sees a developing awareness of how individual assumptions can shape perceptions of

reality, the result being a responsibility for making choices that either accepts the status quo, or begins to make a change (Carlson et. al., 2006; Freire, 1998).

One of the main intended outcomes for participants involved in photovoice is that of empowerment. Wang and Burris (1994) aimed to empower the Chinese woman they worked with in the photo novella project and identified that for empowerment to work there needed to be access to knowledge, decisions, networks, and resources. Raeburn and Rootman (1998) identify control, participation, and competence as characteristics of empowerment, and Duffy (2011) recognises that the definitions of empowerment are wide ranging and might encompass activities as diverse as learning a new skill, through to taking part in political action. Catalani and Minkler (2010) write that it is the element of engaging participants in critical dialogue with peers, using images which document strengths and issues within the community, which contribute to the outcome of empowerment within photovoice. They further state that as well as individual empowerment, the outcomes include enhanced community engagement and improved understanding of the needs of the community.

A number of studies suggest that the practice of photovoice should follow a structure known as SHOWeD (Griebing et. al., 2013; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Gant et. al., 2009; Wilson et. al., 2007; Mitchell et. al., 2006; Wang, 1999) which is an acronym for:

- What do you **See** in the photograph?
- What is really **H**appening here?
- How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
- **W**hy do these issues exist?
- What can we **D**o to address these issues?

Griebing et. al. (2013) also highlight that the PHOTO question can be used instead of the SHOWeD format which is structured as so:

- Describe your **P**hotograph?
- What is **H**appening in this picture?
- Why did you take a picture **O**f this?
- What does the picture **T**ell us about your life?
- What **O**pportunities does this provide to help improve the lives of the group in question?

Following these lines of questioning can highlight common themes and issues, particularly if discussed amongst the group of photographers who have taken the images. In a project run by

Mitchell et. al. (2005) they used photovoice to look at incidences of sexual abuse within Swaziland schools. Single sex groupings of children were asked to photograph areas where they felt “safe” and where they felt “not so safe”. When the photographs were analysed by the groups there were a large number of images portraying the girls toilets and bushes around the school area, all marked as “not so safe”. The teachers were alarmed at the high number of photographs, but these areas were zones within the school where the girls were particularly vulnerable to sexual attack. In a further project, Mitchell et. al. (2006) used photovoice to explore absenteeism amongst school-aged children and refer to the results as “rich insider data” (p. 274) as the participants were able to illustrate reasons for being absent without feeling interrogated. The therapeutic benefits of engaging with photovoice were also highlighted by Aubeeluck and Buchanan (2006) who used the method to elicit views of informal carers for relatives with Huntingtons disease. They noted that because the carers had time to capture issues as and when they arose, and because they had time to reflect on positive aspects of the caring relationship as well as negative aspects, they felt their needs were expressed more accurately and described the process as “therapeutic and cathartic” (Aubeeluck & Buchanan, 2006, p. 109).

Loopmans et. al. (2012) identified a number of advantages of using photovoice to communicate a message. Firstly, they believe that photography is a very accessible form of communication, perhaps more so than writing, and only a very small amount of training is needed to produce images which communicate a message. Secondly, an unedited image taken straight from the camera gives “a direct and straightforward representation of the world” (p.702) and therefore adds visual clarity to communication. Thirdly, they reiterate an observation made by Newbury and Hoskins (2011) when exploring photo elicitation, the way in which a photograph is viewed helps to redirect the dominant gaze in that interviewer and interviewee will sit alongside each other to look at the photograph as opposed to sitting opposite each other, looking at each other, in a traditional interviewer/interviewee relationship. Finally, to support Wang and Burris’s (1997) argument, they state it can be used to empower communities by exploring issues and options for future action. Moletsane et. al. (2007) also recognised the value of using photovoice to access stigmatised communities and engaging them in social change, but they also recognised that using photographs to communicate a message included significant elements of having fun, an important aspect when engaging younger people. They suggest that enhanced engagement led to sustained attention and involvement, which ultimately leads to enhanced self-efficacy.

However, there will be occasions where it is not safe to take photographs. Wilson et. al. (2007) used photovoice with an after-school program to look at the strengths and issues in the communities

where drug use and violence were rife. One group wanted to take images that represented the drug culture but this was deemed to be too dangerous so instead they were encouraged to write about images that they could not capture. Goodhart et. al. (2006) had similar problems when using photovoice to empower students to advocate for their rights. They found that students were faced with unintended consequences when taking pictures of underage alcohol use, and illegal drug use. Students were therefore advised not to take photographs that could harm themselves or others, which ultimately affects the honesty of the images used within this project. It is therefore important to ask the question “was there anything that you could not photograph?” at the discussion stage. Moletsane et. al. (2007) found that the participants also got round this challenge by staging photographs and then explaining the meaning behind the photographs at the discussion stage. Goodhart et. al. (2006) recognised that there were challenges around confidentiality and privacy when photographing other people which had to be addressed from the outset so that civil liberties were not breached. They noted that engagement was affected if participants were not clear as to the purpose or method of using photovoice, and for optimal involvement the participants need to opt in to the project, rather than do so under compulsion. They also highlight that the quality of equipment used will affect outcomes and engagement (but recognise that this will be dictated by finances). However, Loopmans et. al. (2012) explain that if participants are only selected on their motivation to engage with photography, this potentially excludes those with low self-efficacy. They illustrate this point by noting that two male participants in their study of a deprived Scottish community expressed unease at using photography because they did not believe they were from the “correct social class” (p. 713), but as they engaged with the process they realised the potential the medium had to initiate change within the community and at a political level.

Wilson et. al. (2007) suggest that the success of their photovoice project with adolescents was affected by the participants’ cognitive abilities and their age and stage of development. They state that the level of analytic thought required in the SHOWeD process may well be beyond the capabilities of younger participants and highlight the work of Vygotsky’s (1962) social constructivist theory to add validity to their observations. Gant et. al. (2009) reflect on the process of photovoice and believe that the claims over the effectiveness of the technique are often unsubstantiated due to lack of empirical evidence. In an effort to provide quantitative data they researched civic engagement amongst youth by engaging them in a photovoice project and using a pre and post project questionnaire (Survey of Youth Engagement) to ascertain any changes in attitudes. They concluded that photovoice had minimal impact on the under 18’s in terms of engaging them in the community, but a greater impact on the 18 and over group. However, as each participant was paid \$500 at the end of the project one may query the impact this had on the reported data post project.

Loopmans et. al. (2012) acknowledge that participants of photovoice may also self-censor their photographs if they know they are going to be displayed within the community in order to conform to community norms and privacy which suggests there should not be a compulsion to display all images, and that the participants should be involved in the overall selection process at the end of the project to reduce any need to censor during the project.

Catalani and Minkler (2010) conducted a review of literature in relation to health and public health where photovoice was used. They identified 37 articles and found that participation was variable with only 27% of studies reporting a high level of participation, although they do recognise that the articles included in the studies were vague on levels of participation. The average duration of a photovoice project was roughly 4 months in length but there were very few consistent practices across the articles. 85% of the projects involved an element of photo elicitation, where participants would be expected to talk about the meaning of the photographs. Most of the studies were rooted in feminist theory and Freirean ideology and again, the outcomes of the projects tended to fall into three categories: enhanced engagement with the community, better understanding of the needs of the community, and increased empowerment for the individuals involved in the project. They suggest that empowerment stems from partnership, community participation, learning new skills through training, and through *researching* the environment which led to discussion and action. However, they also noted that none of the studies looked at long term empowerment and that there was an assumption that if empowerment was an outcome of photovoice then this would naturally have longevity. These factors suggest either an ad hoc approach to delivering photovoice, or the flexibility of photovoice to meet a wide variety of communities.

3.5a.1 Summary

As Catalani and Minkler (2010) identify, the application of photovoice across the literature is varied in scope and scale. The majority of studies used set formats to conduct projects and to involve participants in the analysis of the photographs. Only one study made attempts to further analyse the photographs (Carlson et. al., 2006). In their study they analysed the photographs in three stages: firstly, coding for everyday recognition of objects; secondly, looking for symbolic meaning in the image; and finally, looking for abstract interpretation of the image. This approach suggests that deeper analysis of the data may be a consideration when working with images.

There is a risk of over emphasising the importance and effectiveness of photovoice and Mitchell et. al. (2006) warn against promising too much to participants who choose to become involved with projects. If the outcome of empowerment is explicitly promised then expectations are raised, and when set in a climate where social and cultural change is slow, the lack of immediate efficacy at the end of the project may be counter-productive to any promise of empowerment. Wilson et. al. (2007) underline the flexibility of the technique and suggest that efficacy results in listening to the participants in terms of what end goal *they* want to achieve, rather than set a prescriptive outcome of targeting policy makers. In their work within a school, it was decided to target the school principal in order to affect change.

The relative simplicity of the process has appeal, and the scope of engagement across a wide range of communities is evident; if the means are both accessible and acceptable then engagement with a view to affect change has a motivating factor (Watson & Douglas, 2012). It has also been suggested that because of the Freirean underpinnings which foster group discussions and analysis, the potential for change across social ecology (individual, family, community, organisational, and society) is highly probable (Strack et. al., 2010). This chapter will now explore theories informing social work practice which align with photovoice and societal exploration through therapeutic photography.

3.5b Social work theory and society

The practice of photovoice is built upon three core principles; it adopts a feminist perspective wherein it can be used to question oppression and inequality, it is built upon a Freirean process which takes a pedagogical approach to address issues of powerlessness, and the outcome of the process aims to empower participants (Duffy, 2011; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Carlson et. al., 2006; Wang, 1999). Empowerment is a concept that social workers embrace in their practice as it enables alliances within working relationships with an aim of achieving greater understanding and change in the lives of service users by helping to understand social and personal obstacles (Payne, 2014). Empowerment also underpins the objectives of Freire's work, as well as feminist perspectives, and it is therefore important to consider how applicable these two approaches are to social work practice, before looking at how social workers empower in their practice.

“Social work practice, whether casework, group work, or community organization (sic), is inherently and substantively educational – pedagogical” (Freire, 1990, p.5).

Freire (1990) believes the role of a social worker as an educator requires the professional to be aware of their own practice. He explains that social workers are not neutral agents and will have their own beliefs, personal values and political leanings which they need to acknowledge. This means that social workers should not view themselves as specialist technicians, but aim to work alongside their service users in a progressive manner. In order to be progressive, a social worker needs to be aware of the gaps between their lives and the lives of their service users as it is impossible to be progressive if the social worker believes they are inherently *better* than the service users they work with. In order to close this gap, the social worker must develop a critical curiosity to question themselves and the world around them, but also to foster this in the people they work with, and only then will a social worker develop an effective knowledge of the problems within the society in which they work. From a pedagogical standpoint, the social worker must not assume that they have all the answers, but instead try to listen to the questions posed to them by the service user. Freire (1990) also states that social workers need to understand the limits of their practice and understand what is possible within the profession so that they refrain from building up false hope.

His views on the profession of social work in relation to pedagogy are critical of the traditional model of pedagogy as a means of filling up the empty vessel (the student) with knowledge (Freire, 1998). He believed that this perspective was disempowering for the student and that a better way of approaching pedagogy was to view the student and teacher as co-creators of knowledge, both willing to learn from each other, and both willing to listen to each other. Only when the power

balance was equalised could the student use their learning to achieve equilibrium between theory and practice so that informed action can be taken and freedom to feel complete as a human being achieved, which Freire termed *praxis*. Critical consciousness is another outcome of the Freirean approach which results in an awareness of issues and empowerment to take action to challenge those issues (Hare, 2004). Black and Rose (2002) believe a Freirean approach empowers service users to become active participants in developing their roles, rather than simply objects who allow people to control their lives, and that by engaging in critical debate and exploring subjective and objective reality, a transformation from dependence to interdependence can be achieved. The overall aim of the Freirean approach is to empower service users to be able to communicate issues that they are facing. In communicating these issues, they are helping others to learn about experiences they are facing, informing possible interventions, and becoming co-producers rather than passive consumers of social work services (Payne, 2014). The core values of Freire's work also align with the value base of social workers which adopts a person centred approach and also aims to encourage social responsibility within its practice (Narayan, 2000).

When Wang and Burriss undertook their first photovoice (photo novella) project their intention was to explore the perspectives of Chinese woman and the issues they faced in accessing health care. They worked from a feminist methodology so that they could develop support *with* the woman, as opposed to *for* the woman (Wang, 1999). Social work must also consider feminist perspectives in practice, with an aim to identify gender inequality, eliminate these issues, and promote the well-being of women as they define it (Dominelli & Campling, 2002). There is a perception that the practice of social work is largely dominated by females, both in practice and as service users, and therefore an awareness of society's expectations of roles and responsibilities of females is essential to understand how oppression occurs due to social and political norms (Payne, 2014; Trevithick, 2012); if conformity to these societal norms does not occur then this can often be seen as a female failing. In therapeutic work with couples or families, it is not enough to simply look at traditional gender alignments and expect the male to be the breadwinner, whilst the female tends the children; instead, practitioners must adopt an empowering, anti-oppressive framework towards practice and try to address the social context which impact on the feelings of failure and oppression (Walker (in Lishman, 2015)). Female social workers can work with female service users under the banner of *woman centred practice* because the commonality of gender already suggests that there is a shared awareness of societal oppression (Orme (in Adams et. al., 2002)), but male social workers can only hope to develop a *gender perspective* as they will never be able to work in a woman centred way (Hanmer & Statham, 1999).

Trevithick (2012) highlights five main principles for social workers to consider when working from a feminist perspective. Firstly, there should be an acceptance that there are inequalities between genders and that these differences have realistic impact on opportunities and life chances. Secondly, much like the Freirean approach, social workers should have a general interest and commitment to exploring issues with service users to build up knowledge and awareness. Thirdly, encourage female service users to shift their thinking towards being motivated to do things for themselves rather than for other people, including family members. Fourthly, power imbalances within the working relationship must be acknowledged, but working in an open, honest, and reliable manner should reduce the gap. Finally, in an effort to seek collective solutions to issues, ways of working that link personal issues to political issues should be enhanced, again mirroring the Freirean approach of working towards critical consciousness.

Hudson (1985) believes that taking a feminist perspective within social work can be challenging and workers who do this leave themselves open to allegations of engaging their personal values, rather than professional values, and lacking objectivity when conducting assessments. However, Dominelli and Campling (2002) would argue that this is simply an argument to oppress the feminist movement, that a social worker working from a true feminist perspective would never impose their ideology onto service users or colleagues, and that there should be complete acceptance of any female choice as to the individual level of involvement with the feminist agenda. Hudson (1985) also believes that there has been an overreliance on psychodynamic theories in social work practice which have a tendency to reinforce gender roles which can work against the feminist perspective. Orme (2003) explains that at the time of Hudson's writing in 1985 there was a significant movement to bring about change in social work practice so that woman's issues would be recognised, and this entailed resisting traditional social work theory. There was a suspicion about bringing feminism into social work academia for fear that it might become de-radicalised and colonised by men. It is also difficult to ignore the power imbalance within social work relations, particularly in statutory social work settings, and White (1995) states that this makes practising from a feminist perspective challenging as there can be a tendency to deny the power imbalances within the social worker/service user relationships. However, Dietz (2000) argues that social work practice can benefit when feminism is paired with empowerment perspectives. She refers to the use of language and how problems are constructed by linguistics which results in a professional tendency to over-pathologise; the terminology social workers use to define problems can borrow heavily from other disciplines and risks becoming overly medical, resulting in the objectification of the *problem* at the expense of viewing it in context to take account of resilience and empowerment factors. This was the standpoint that Jo Spence took when working with self-portraits to regain her identity whilst going

through treatment for breast cancer (see section 3.2a). As a result, social workers then focus on the micro level of treatment, targeting interventions at the individual rather than looking at the holistic picture and considering oppression at all levels. Dietz believes that empowerment through feminist practice involves a critical consciousness of the political environment, but also reconnecting through relationships which are built on trust and collaboration, and being allowed to explore narratives. The experience of telling the story can be a healing experience in itself because oppression can be explored and validated by an empathic listener. Indeed, Parton (2003) believes that by incorporating feminist perspectives into the practice of social work moves the profession towards a constructive social work approach where attention is given to collaborative narratives; service users are encouraged to explore their narratives, externalise issues, and then create new ways of managing the challenges, a similar ethos to that which underpins narrative therapy.

Carr (2003) suggests that by conceptualising the aims of a feminist approach into the three broad categories of consciousness, identity, and agency, this can help social workers align outcomes with those of empowerment in practice. Within social work practice, consideration of empowerment is a two-way process as it helps social workers to consider social barriers that might stand in the way of service users achieving objectives and give information on how to challenge these, but it also helps social workers to enable service users to become involved in the decision-making process, building capacity, as well as self-determination (Payne, 2014). Gutierrez (1994) believes that the process of empowerment involves an individual moving through four different stages; the first process involves increasing self-efficacy and believing that change can come from within, the second stage involves the Freirean concept of developing critical consciousness and understanding the challenges faced, the third stage involves developing the ability to reflect on previous actions and use this information to inform future action, and the final stage involves the individual identifying with others who are facing similar experiences.

However, there is growing concern that the term “empowerment” has become a buzzword that is used to generalise outcomes of social work involvement without actually considering how social workers can work to truly empower service users (Leonardsen, 2007). Leonardsen goes on to explain that social workers can only work to empower if they are competent enough to identify the challenges of power dynamics and the complexity of issues facing service users, and that if they do have this ability then they should work to politicise their service users so that they develop the ability to act upon situations. The simple way to achieve this is for social workers to begin with the question “what is the problem?”, but Askheim (2003) warns that social workers are caught between a dichotomy because to truly empower they must relinquish power and authority in their role, then

be guided by the service user as to how social work involvement should continue. This poses a problem as the service users right to self-determination has to be considered alongside risks that their decisions might present, whilst also respecting the statutory duties of the social worker. Social workers must also accept that they do not work within a cultural vacuum and that there will be gaps in their knowledge which can only be filled by a willingness to learn from the service users they work with (Graham, 2004).

Within social work, for empowerment based interventions to be successful, social workers need to operate as facilitators rather than experts, which may require a degree of reflection on the profession of social work. Donaldson (2005) explains that there is often a tendency for the profession to separate itself into two different camps; on one side are social workers who advocate for the rights of the individuals with whom they work, and on the other side are clinical social workers who are bound by statutory duties and feel that addressing social action would detract from the specialism of the service they deliver. These two perspectives need to be married up so that the professional responsibilities of meeting need, and pursuing change, can be combined.

Donaldson (2005) goes on to explain that there are therapeutic benefits to empowerment, particularly when working with groups. She feels that this is underpinned by Bandura's self-efficacy theory, but also Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) curative factors of group therapy. They identified 11 factors which they felt contributed to therapeutic change within groups which are:

1. Universality – recognition from other group members to validate struggles and shared experiences.
2. Altruism – satisfaction from helping others.
3. Installation of hope – belief in the efficacy of the group from both group facilitators and group members.
4. Imparting information – facilitators may begin by providing information in the hope that peer leaders will take over.
5. Corrective recapitulation of family experience – unconscious transference of familial experience onto the group which needs to be identified by the facilitator so it can be understood by the members.
6. Developing socialisation techniques – through consciousness raising and interacting with wide range of participants (peers/professionals) social skills will be developed.
7. Imitative behaviour – learning from the strengths of their peers to develop self-esteem.
8. Cohesiveness – feeling a sense of belonging and developing from this interpersonal context.

9. Existential factors – developing intimacy through sharing experiences, but taking responsibility for one’s own actions.
10. Catharsis – having a safe space to vent emotions and feelings, and feelings of relief through sharing and affirmation.
11. Interpersonal learning/self-understanding – through feedback from others each member develops self-awareness and insight.

Breton (1995) believes that social action can only result from personal healing and that an individual has to address self-worth, which will impact on self-efficacy, and in turn may result in the ability to participate in collective action and engage in consciousness raising. Chapin and Cox (2002) also acknowledge that empowerment approaches need to consider the personal, interpersonal and political levels of practice which suggests that individuals need to work out from an initial period of introspection, before progressing to considering peer involvement and the impact of the wider environment. Rappaport (1995) believes that incorporating narrative approaches into group work can enhance the goals of empowerment. She explains that individuals can find it difficult to sustain change without collective support, and from this collective support a communal narrative can develop which, once recognised, can either be sustained or changed.

3.5b.1 Summary

Empowerment is a nebulous concept which is difficult to quantify, but there is a suggestion that by opening up dialogue and identifying issues of oppression, this can raise levels of critical consciousness. Becoming aware of a problem is the first stage of being able to address a problem, and Freire (1998) identified this when he wrote about using education to empower communities. As critical consciousness is raised it can be useful to share experiences with others, and this “strength in numbers” impacts on feelings of power; learning from others, identifying with others, and taking action with others are all factors which can lead to enhanced feelings of empowerment.

For the social worker, the power balance is again called into question, and it has been suggested that to be an effective therapeutic worker the professional needs to consider oppression from all angles (familial, peer, community, society), but also to be curious and willing to learn from service users. By becoming co-creators of knowledge, the power balance between the social worker and service user moves towards equilibrium. This chapter will now consider how these four identified areas of

working with self-image, relationships, narrative, and societal exploration can be combined within the practices of social work and therapeutic photography.

3.6 A systems approach

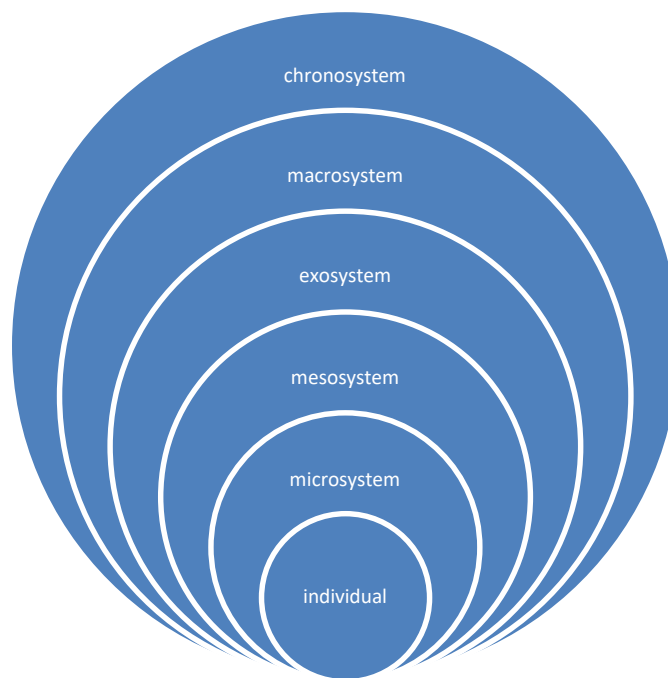


Fig 3.2 – Bronfenbrenner's (2009, 1992, 1986) socio ecological model

Bronfenbrenner (2009, 1992, 1986) recognised the impact families had on individual human development. He also recognised that the family did not function in isolation, therefore other factors had to be incorporated into our understanding of human development. He proposed that every individual functions within a microsystem, and this microsystem involves membership of various groups such as family, school, work, peers and neighbourhood. These various groups will come into contact with each other, directly or indirectly and will impact on how the individual functions within each microsystem. These relationships and connections between the microsystems are said to happen in the mesosystem. In turn, the microsystem and mesosystem function within an exosystem, the level at which an individual has virtually no direct control over what happens. Often this level is dominated by larger institutions such as mass media, social services, and local politics, institutions which clearly impact on the lives of those functioning at the microsystem level. At the outer edge of Bronfenbrenner's model, we find the macrosystem which he describes as the overarching culture

which impacts on the functioning of the inner systems. Ethnicity, social status, values and attitudes all impact on the macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner also included a chronosystem which took into consideration life transitions which can impact on an individual. These include the natural course of events such as birth, childhood, puberty, school, work, marriage, but can also include unexpected life transitions such as divorce, illness, and death. Bronfenbrenner recognised that these life transitions can impact on the individual and their functioning within the family depending on how natural or unnatural the transitions were (see fig. 3.2).

Bronfenbrenner (2009) believed that his ecological perspective helped provide an understanding of the development of a growing human, their interactions with the family, their perception of the wider world, and the way society shapes these relationships; therapeutic photography also aims to understand human development, family structures, narrative construction, and societal influences.

In recognising that photography can help to form identity through exploration of self-identity and family roles, Newbury (1996) highlights the impact of photographic images at the exosystem and macrosystem levels, particularly in advertising, media, and popular culture. He explains that photographic images are bound to our knowledge of modern society and how an individual aligns their self to this. Where this can become problematic is when the images presented at the exosystem and macrosystem levels stigmatise the individual within the microsystem. Newbury (1996) used photography with disabled students to explore how they were portrayed by charities, adverts, and family photographs, and then encouraged them to explore how they viewed themselves and how photography could assist in reclaiming identity. The advantages of using photography for this exercise was that the students could illustrate how they felt they were viewed by others, and how they viewed themselves, and this resulted in the students developing a critical awareness of the social environment and how they were viewed within this. The experience facilitated the students to become involved in a discourse to challenge and change their representations and was described as an empowering exercise.

Since the 1970s the ecological model has been incorporated into social work practice (Ungar, 2002), but some feel that the ecosystem model only provides guiding theory as opposed to directing practice, and because social work tends to rely on empirically tested interventions and evidence based practice, this has the potential to make the ecosystem model redundant within professional practice (Wakefield, 1996). Others argue that an ecological approach to social work has been lost in recent years and that the profession needs to revisit the ethos of the perspective to inform current practice. Jack (1997) believes that the 1968 Seebomh report, amongst others, highlighted the benefits for social work in adopting a community approach and underpinned the practice of

employing community workers to help communities identify their own issues and problems, and consequently find solutions for them. However, legislation such as the Children Act 1989 has divided the community approach (particularly within English childcare and child protection) in that it supports the provision of child protection and family support services, but often these are provided by different agencies, social work being the provider of child protection. Thus, social work has become a reactive profession rather than a proactive one, and social workers no longer have the time or resources to set up informal social support networks to address need within communities before they develop into child protection concerns. Jack (1997) highlights Department of Health research which looked into contributory aspects of child protection issues, the results of which failed to recognise any societal factors within their findings; instead they outline indicators of effective practice which promote child welfare and protection which include informed and empathetic relationships between service users and social workers, and having an appropriate balance of power within those working relationships. He goes on to highlight research conducted by Holman (1993) that suggests that where community groups have been set up, service users no longer feel stigmatised when approaching social workers as they are viewed as part of the community, which in turn results in earlier contact, a reduction in environmental stress, and improved self-image and coping mechanisms. Jack (1997) concludes by stating that an ecological perspective which informs interventions designed to enhance social support networks will never completely eradicate child protection concerns, but may effectively prevent a number of concerns coming to the attention of social work, and that social workers need to engage in discourse which recognise the impact of societal and political factors impacting on the lives of service users.

Sharland (2006) also believes that social work has become burdened by contradiction in that the traditional roles which aimed to support and empower service users have become more regulatory and disciplinary because of an emphasis on policy, procedure and legislation. She also supports Jack's (1997) observations where responsibility for service users, particularly younger people, has been taken on by other agencies which risks further removing social work from an encompassing ecological approach. She goes on to highlight research by Cohen and Ainley (2000) which acknowledges the importance of an ecological approach to help understand how identity is formed as it is impacted through learning in differing situations including the family, peer groups, and community groups, all of which are locally and structurally situated. Therefore, to truly do quality social work with service users a social worker needs to understand how individuals feel about themselves, interact with their family, are influenced by their peers, are viewed by the community, are treated by society, and are controlled by the political environment.

Strack et. al. (2010) suggest that the photo-based interventions, or “photoventions”, all have the potential to bring about change in, and for, participants, and that specific interventions such as photovoice can be directly aligned to a social ecological model to highlight benefits. They believe that a change occurs on several levels: on an individual level as it brings about self-efficacy and knowledge; on an interpersonal level there can be positive changes in social interactions and group empowerment; on an organisational level information can bring about policy change; and on a community level there can be changes in social norms, community participation and action. Yohani (2008) also uses Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework to support using photography with younger children. She stresses the importance of Bronfenbrenner’s *proximal processes* which refers to the way a developing individual interacts with people, objects, and places within the external environment which ultimately generates knowledge and skills (an extension of Vygotsky’s (1980) writings on the zone of proximal development). She explains that by giving children cameras to photograph their environment, and then reviewing the photographs with the children, proximal process is enhanced which impacts on coping strategies and development. This approach to understanding proximal processes by using photography has also been used to explore issues faced by young refugees (McBrien & Day, 2012).

3.7 Conclusion

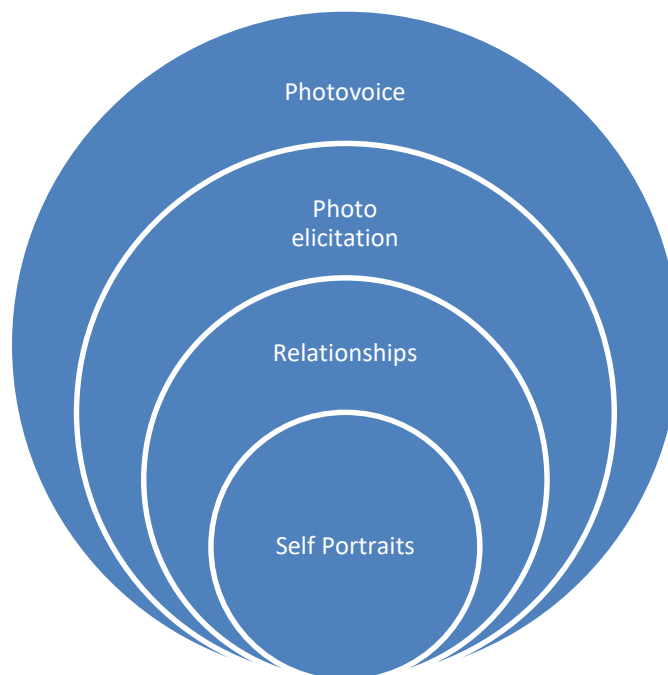


Fig 3.3 – The four domains of therapeutic photography.

This literature review suggests that the four domains of therapeutic photography straddle a wide range of theories which impact on social work practice. When working with self-portraits psychodynamic and psychosocial theories come into play, the question “who am I?” is asked, and self-acceptance is sought. The exploration of relationships within photographs extends the importance of psychosocial theories and incorporate family systems theories. Moving into the realms of photo elicitation, this practice also has roots in psychodynamic approaches but looks at the way in which we view the world and has links to narrative therapy, resilience, and how we tell our story. Photovoice then looks at how we interact with our environment and draws upon empowerment, power alignments, and societal norms.

This suggests that the intervention of therapeutic photography has theoretical underpinnings which would align with the practice of social work. However, the unstructured nature of therapeutic photography, and the lack of a definitive practice structure for UK social work means that consideration must be given as to how the intervention could be delivered. One suggestion to emerge is to explore relationships based on the socio-ecological model in order to facilitate dialogue around identity formation. The end result is a nested system which draws parallels with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory model (see fig. 3.3). The next chapter will discuss the methodology which was employed to further research the potential role of therapeutic photography

with a group of social work service users. Within this chapter, the researcher uses this nested system model to structure a programme in order to ascertain the impact of such an approach.

Chapter 4 – Study Design and Method

4.1 Introduction

Krysiak and Finn (2010) underpin the importance of research in social work by highlighting four functions; to develop effective and accountable practice, to enhance communication, to provide evidence that can help access resources to services and funding, and to develop knowledge. The concept of knowledge in social work draws upon information from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social policy, and also incorporates experiential knowledge which incorporates “a tacit understanding that is a complicated combination of personal judgment, past experience and theoretical knowledge” (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011, p. 3). The multifaceted nature of the profession suggests an eclectic approach to research in order to capture data which is meaningful and which represents the nature of interactions between worker and service user in a critical and creative manner (Bryant, 2016).

The previous chapters have explored the current use of therapeutic photography, detailed the theoretical links to the practice of social work, and highlighted themes which indicate anticipated outcomes. The intention of this research project is to explore whether therapeutic photography has a role in social work, and to do this the research needs to be operationalised.

This chapter will begin by revisiting the aims and research questions and indicate how the researcher will address each one before moving on to look at the philosophical underpinning of the research technique which was employed. The methods of data collection will be outlined, including identification and justification of the techniques utilised, before an overview of the programme which was used with the participants is offered. The chapter will move on to consider the participant selection techniques, data analysis, and research ethics, before culminating with a discussion on researcher bias.

4.2 Aims & Research Questions

The literature review has explored the main components of therapeutic photography, but has also highlighted similarities with the practice of phototherapy, and indeed, research techniques. Theoretical parallels have been explored, but this is also ambiguous in that the depth of knowledge and application is not clearly explained. The researcher has identified a gap in that the practice of using photographs therapeutically within the field of social work is a new one, and to research this area potentially offers benefits to the profession and the people who use the services.

The aim of this research project is to explore the efficacy of therapeutic photography when offering group work interventions within social work settings. With this in mind, and from the information gleaned when problematizing the information, four research questions have been set:

- RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is Therapeutic Photography and how is it currently being used?
- RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How can social work utilise therapeutic photography?
- RESEARCH QUESTION 3: How do social work service users engage with a therapeutic photography intervention?
- RESEARCH QUESTION 4: What are the outcomes of a therapeutic photography programme, and what are the implications for future practice?

Research questions 1 and 2 drew upon the literature review to examine the definition and current uses of therapeutic photography, before looking at the underpinning theories and how these link with (or indeed, mirror) theories used in the practice of social work. Research question 3 and 4 required the researcher to collect primary data and, in doing so, analyse the impact of therapeutic photography and how this could be utilised by social work service users. Accordingly, the researcher had to identify and settle upon a study design, consideration of which entailed a critical reflection upon philosophical standpoints, the selection of appropriate strategies for data collection, methods of data analysis and, finally, an appraisal of the ethical matters involved in conducting the study.

4.3 A Qualitative Approach

In deciding on a research paradigm to inform the method, the researcher considered the practice of social work, its multifaceted application of theories to understand the human condition and relationships, and felt that the socially constructed realities that service users manage on a daily basis, each one different from the next, tend towards the paradigm of social constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This paradigm views knowledge as something which is obtained and created through interactions and social relationships and therefore places emphasis on the process of a person making meaning from these interactions. This process of making meaning is not something that can be quantified, measured, or counted, and therefore, to examine this process, it is to the practice of qualitative research that one must look. Elliot et. al. (1999) explain that qualitative research aims to “understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations” (p.216). As a result, a number of approaches have emerged in order to assist researchers to gather accounts of these experiences including discourse analysis, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and grounded theory, each one underpinned by philosophical guidance, and each aiming to contribute to the knowledge base on understanding the experience of being. Qualitative research, and the associated approaches, appear to compliment the constructivist paradigm in that the researcher should not be viewed as a person with knowledge who is trying to prove something from their subjects, but instead they should approach the research relationship as a respectful negotiator who wants to learn from their participants, and in doing so is willing to share control of the experience in their search for knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Because qualitative research tends towards subjective experiences and the interpretation of them it is open to critique, but guidelines and principles should underpin the process in order to provide efficacy and quality throughout the duration of the project. Throughout the process there should be sensitivity from the researcher towards the participants and the areas being researched which should be underpinned by relevant literature, have an appreciation of the social and political climate that participants are functioning within, and have consideration of ethical issues. The process should be rigorous and the researcher needs to be committed to the topic in order to demonstrate methodical competence and in-depth engagement; there should be coherence and transparency from the very beginning of the process, through to the final stage of the project, and this should be reflected in the chosen methodology, the analysis of material, and the presentation of data; and there should be a consideration of the impact and importance of the study in terms of the contribution to knowledge that arises from the end goal (Yardley (in Smith, 2015); Elliot et. al.,

1999). These guiding principles were considered closely by the researcher and were instrumental in forming the decision on the research methodology.

To ascertain whether therapeutic photography has a role in social work with groups, the researcher had to give careful consideration as to how this was going to be investigated. The literature review suggested a number of outcomes, but the researcher realised that the actual experience of participation was something which had to be observed and analysed, then knowledge of social work interventions and theories needed to be considered alongside these experiential accounts. A number of approaches were considered, and these will now be outlined alongside justification as to why they were not chosen:

Thematic analysis – Thematic analysis was considered from the outset as it would allow for the examination of the data in order to identify patterns within that may be generalised for wider inference. It is an approach which can be used to report on experiences and meanings that participants extract from the project and has advantages when these are set into a societal context in order to understand how these discourses can impact (Robson, 2011). Braun and Clark (2006) highlight that thematic analysis can be advantageous when working within participatory research which appeared to provide an appropriate fit for delivering a therapeutic photography group whilst observing participant behaviour, however, they also warn that it is an approach which can be too descriptive and eliminates potential interpretation. Added to this, the small population of participants meant that it was potentially challenging to find general themes, and this required the researcher to adopt an idiographic perspective in order to analyse the experience of the individuals within the group which thematic analysis does not appear to do.

Discourse analysis – This approach guides the researcher in the analysis of written and spoken language or other semiotic events, building in knowledge of social psychology, post-structural social theory, and cultural influences to understand the dynamics (Muncie (in Jupp, 2006)). Discourse analysis was considered as it may have aided in finding common patterns in how participants who engaged with therapeutic photography used language to convey experiences whilst interacting with the photographs. However, where focusing solely on linguistics may have offered rich information on the function of language within the group, it may not have captured the participant experience of making meaning from the images and their narratives, nor how they made sense of the issues they chose to explore.

Grounded theory – Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory is an analytic inductive approach which would have allowed the researcher to develop new theory about the phenomenon of

therapeutic photography. By working on numerous cases the opportunity to develop and test theory as each case was analysed could have guided the process. However, the purpose of this project was to look at the existing practice of therapeutic photography, learn from this, and then apply this to a new phenomenon of social work. Because of the focus on participant meaning and experience within a specified phenomenon, this would not necessarily generate “new” theory, and for that reason an approach utilising grounded theory was discarded.

Participatory action research – Because the research involved devising a programme based on the current practices of therapeutic photography, then delivering this to a group whilst observing and evaluating the impact, programme evaluation research was considered alongside participatory action research (PAR). PAR views the participants as experts of their own situations and utilises techniques to facilitate them to become researchers (McIntyre, 2008; Lopes (in Jupp, 2006)). Certainly, the participants engaged in exercises throughout the programme (outlined later in this chapter within section 4.7) which resulted in self-analysis, yet this was largely due to the “therapeutic” aspect of the group rather than the research design. The researcher acknowledges that the information gathered to inform the results and analysis was generated through techniques which could be described as PAR, but his relationship as a researcher, facilitator, and social worker meant that there could be too many potential conflicts in terms of separating his input from the data. There was also an acknowledgement that he would have to interpret interactions, and that an approach which encouraged this may be more appropriate.

The researcher decided that the focus of the research should be on the *engagement and meaning making* with therapeutic photography and wanted to find out if the perceived outcomes from the literature review of increased self-efficacy, self-esteem and empowerment were evident, and if there were any other outcomes when using photography as an intervention. In order to do this, the approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) appeared to offer the most effective methodology for eliciting information from individual and group experiences of the intervention. This chapter will now move on to give an overview of this approach, alongside further justification for its adoption in line with the research questions.

4.4 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The third research question at the beginning of this section states that the researcher must assess engagement with a therapeutic photography intervention. In order to do this, the researcher had to devise and deliver a programme to a group of service users, observe behaviour, gather information, and then work with it to extract meaningful data. This process involved integration into a group, understanding and analysing human behaviour, and assessing the effect of participation on individuals within each group. In turn, this involved *experiencing* with the participants and adopting the Husserlian guidance of going “back to the things themselves” (Husserl, 2001, p.168); the researcher had to attempt to define the meaning of a lived experience of others.

The philosophy of Husserl has been instrumental in defining the approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a research method based on three distinct theoretical perspectives; phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et. al., 2009). Husserl was a phenomenologist and was concerned with aspects of *being* human and identifying the essence of human experiences. He developed techniques to assist in his quest, one of which is known as “bracketing” which involves viewing a situation, object, or event, in isolation from the rest of life (Addo & Eboh (in Taylor, 2014)). By doing this he believed researchers could forget all preconceptions and judgements about their subject, and simply focus on the subject in the here and now, thus engaging in a process where the phenomenon of the studied subject could be dissected until the purity of its existence was exposed. Smith et. al. (2009) term this process “eidetic reduction” (p.14) and explain that Heidegger expanded the scope of Husserl’s approach by recognising that the researcher is intrinsically bound to the real world and cannot exclude themselves from the phenomenon of being human, and that to understand humans, one needs to draw upon the experiences they have gleaned of being human themselves. An individual in the world is always going to be affected by relationships with others, and what this means for the researcher is that their experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and interests are inevitably going to impact on the interpretation of other people’s behaviours. This should be viewed as a positive and should be integrated into the research process, so long as this is clearly explained within the presentation of the research (Addo & Eboh (in Taylor, 2014)).

*

Heidegger was also a key figure in the field of hermeneutics which is concerned with the theoretical approach to interpretation. Historically, hermeneutics was largely associated with the interpretation of texts, particularly Biblical texts, but in recent times has been widened to incorporate the

“communications, actions and products of other human beings” (Hammersley (in Jupp, 2006, p.133)). Greenwood and Loewenthal (2005) explain that Heidegger believed that a researcher who observed a situation could analyse data and come to a conclusion about what they found, but for the researcher to fully maximise interpretation they had to experience situations *alongside* the subjects they were observing, not simply observe from the side lines. Schleiermacher (1998) highlighted the importance of considering the psychological aspects of interpretation and explained that interpreting the *communication* should be part of an overall process which also attempts to understand the *communicator* and the *circumstance of communication*. When considering the field of therapeutic photography in social work, the implications of Schleiermacher’s writings are that the photograph and narrative need to be understood in the context of the photographer and the environment they accommodate. The other factor in this process is the *receiver*, in this case, the researcher, and the knowledge he has. Given that the researcher is asking if therapeutic photography has a role in social work practice, knowledge of social work practice is required to answer that question. The *communicators* (research participants) are not expected to have any knowledge of social work theories, and therefore, theories can only be considered in light of the *communication*, which will be done using the *receiver’s* knowledge. Smith et. al. (2009) warn that this does not give the IPA researcher free reign to override the insights and claims of subjects by stating that their own observations are more valid, instead, the researcher should be aiming to *add value* to the original communication. Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1989) reiterate that in hermeneutics the researcher cannot help but approach research with existing preconceptions, values and attitudes, but the important thing for the researcher is to be aware of these preconceptions, acknowledge bias, and attempt to view the studied subject in a new light.

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If phenomenology focuses on the experience of being human, and hermeneutics focuses on interpretation, the third aspect of IPA is idiography – the specific detail of the individual experience. Idiography is often viewed as the opposite approach to nomothetic research and it is worth noting the differences in these approaches. Nomothetic research tends to generalise results to larger populations and is often based on quantitative research, whereas idiographic research focuses in on the specifics of the experience and is often deemed to be the study of the individual, as opposed to the group. The debate between these two approaches can be summarised as follows:

“Too many local...case-based (idiographic) meanings are excluded by the generalizing...nomothetic, positivist position. At the same time, the nomothetic, etic approaches fail to address satisfactorily the theory – and value-laden nature of facts, the

interactive nature of inquiry, and the fact that the same set of “facts” can support more than one theory” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.100).

The value within the idiographic approach is seen as the detailed analysis of a small sample size and the cautionary approach to suggesting generalisations - the focus on the specific can reveal experience, challenge expectations, and question preconceptions (Smith et. al., 2009).

IPA was adopted by the researcher to make sense of how the participants make sense of therapeutic photography, an approach Smith et. al. (2009) term *double hermeneutics*. They explain the researcher is like the participants in that he knows what it is to be human, but unlike the participants in that he does not have the direct knowledge and experience that is being reported by the participant. Therefore, the researcher must prioritise the “meaning-making” of the participant, before considering their own “sense –making” (p.36). IPA will give insight into the individual experience, but the research must also consider the impact on the overall group of participants. Some information will be generalizable from the IPA approach, but to look at the impact on the larger group, and the use of visuals, two further approaches were considered alongside IPA; ethnography and visual ethnography.

4.5 Other Perspectives

4.5.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is described as the study of people, groups and cultures and usually involves researcher engagement with the setting. Whereas IPA is concerned with the individual, ethnography tends to be concerned with the setting the individual is immersed in (Hammersley (in Jupp, 2006)). Generally, ethnography is a useful approach for researchers who are “interested in relationships between people and the physical, socio-political, personal, cultural and historical aspects of their life” (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 207).

Ethnography is based on a range of sociological and philosophical approaches which include hermeneutics and phenomenology, so in that respect the approach is not dissimilar to that of IPA, but Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) suggest that the primary goal of ethnography is to describe culture. To do this, they highlight the need for the researcher to adopt an approach which allows access to the meaning of behaviour and outline the naturalist perspective to guide this process. Naturalism is the approach to research wherein the social world is documented in its natural state, and the researcher attempts to seek out ways to elicit data whilst leaving the environment

undisturbed. This calls for the researcher to be respectful and appreciate the subjects, but it also suggests that the researcher may need to disappear into the background to effectively execute ethnographic studies. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) go on to argue that even “artificial” settings (such as a group set up to be researched) can be considered a part of society, and therefore, a setting created within a society is still *natural* in its form. It will still contain participants who interact with one another and contain examples of symbolic interpretation, giving the researcher an example of society in a microcosm. They also return to the argument presented when considering the researcher’s role in IPA, and that is the fact that the ethnographic researcher is also a product of society and is unable to escape society in order to effectively study it. Therefore, consideration must be given as to how the ethnographer integrates with the subjects.

One of these considerations is the length of time an ethnographer needs to allocate to the pursuit of data. Pink and Morgan (2013) point out that it is not unusual for ethnographers to spend at least one year in the field with their participants, but go on to suggest that short term ethnography can be equally as effective as long term projects. They argue that short term ethnography can be used in projects which aim to provide “informed interventions” (p.351) and state it is a method which sees the researcher exposed to intensive episodes of the lives of participants, but which utilises both observational and interventional methods with a purpose to create environments where there is a free flow of rich information. Within short term ethnography, Pink and Morgan (2013) identify three defining qualities: the contact with participants is more intense so the aims and expectations of engagement need to be clear from the outset and the researcher must position themselves in the heart of the action; the focus on detail needs to direct the line of enquiry with participants, and should be formed from the literature review or previous ethnographic studies prior to engaging with participants; and engagement must incorporate an appreciation of theory, both during the process, and in reflection after the process, and preferably with materials produced during the process (such as written texts or photographs). Similar to Pink’s (2004) short term ethnographic work, the engagement with participants within the therapeutic photography group lasted for 6 weeks, but it also used an intervention which was informed by literature, engaged with participants in a structured manner to obtain information pertaining to their lives, and applied social work theories to the information gleaned, all of which align to the qualities highlighted by Pink and Morgan (2013).

4.5.2 Visual Ethnography

The final approach which was considered was that of visual ethnography, the use of photographs to elicit information. Unsurprisingly, given the intentions of this approach, it is often termed as photo elicitation (Collier & Collier, 1986) and it involves the participants using images (in this case, produced by the participants) to explore their circumstances and to facilitate conversation with their peers and the researcher. The intention was to use the photographs to enhance articulation and to help the participants' access emotions and experiences that may have been forgotten, placed into the unconscious, and repressed (Radley & Taylor, 2003).

Photographs are subjective representations and are polysemic in nature, thus many meanings can be read into one image, and this can often lead to visual ethnography being criticised as a research method (Pink (in Jupp, 2006); Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). Grady (in Knowles & Sweetman, 2004) does not dispute these facts, but states that photographs are images captured by a human because of the significance of the content, and that content usually consists of people, objects, locations, or events, things that will have resonance with the image maker. He goes on to suggest that the information lies in the narrative attached to each image, and therefore it is important for the researcher to question the content, the framing, and the intention behind each photograph. In this approach, it is not the researcher that decodes the image, it is the participant. The researcher can assist in this process, but in a group setting, peers can also assist.

Pink (2013) advocates that visual ethnography compliments written and verbal communication in phenomenological and anthropological approaches to research. As with ethnography and IPA, the researcher needs to be reflexive and be aware of imposing their own views and experiences on the images they view. Bourdieu (1990) writes that all photographs capture elements of culture because humans cannot help but internalise what is around them, and therefore, images produced will inevitably recreate learned conventions of the visual cultures they live in. In many cases there will be cultural codes within images, but Pink (2013) warns against negating the creativity and imagination of the image maker, and encourages the researcher to consider individual differences alongside group similarities.

4.5.3 Combining these approaches?

Ethnography and IPA are not dissimilar in terms of research methodologies and the researcher gave consideration to combine these approaches for the purpose of looking at the implications of using therapeutic photography with social work. Research methods often address either the subjective or objective nature of existence, and it has been suggested that approaches need to encompass both of these concepts (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Ethnography and visual ethnography address shared meaning, cultural norms, and group interaction, whereas phenomenology addresses individual interpretation and experience. There may well be shared concepts from each approach, and themes for coding will also bear similarities, but the purpose of using these approaches is to deepen understanding of the relevance of therapeutic photography as an intervention within the field of social work. Maggs-Rapport (2000) used a combination of ethnography and IPA in her own research and justifies the approach as follows:

“If ethnography and interpretive phenomenology are successfully combined, the phenomenological perspective enables the researcher to concentrate on the phenomenon under review whilst the ethnographic perspective allows for the phenomenon to be considered in terms of the participant group and its cultural background. The researcher concentrates on how members of the participant group differ in their knowledge of their ‘community’, whilst attempting to emphasize the individuality of participant experience” (p.222).

However, the researcher believed that focusing on one specific methodology would give a richer account of the experiential nature of participating in a therapeutic photography programme and would provide a more structured approach to collection and analysis. Therefore, the chosen primary methodology remained IPA, but with an appreciation of ethnography and visual ethnography to assist in the understanding of the group nature of delivery.

4.6 Justification for IPA

Using IPA for this project was a decision shaped by the aims and objectives of the research. To assess whether therapeutic photography can be used in the field of social work with groups, the researcher needs to ascertain the experience of the participants, and then apply this to social work theory. Because IPA avoids generalisations and pre-defined concepts, and focuses on themes and ideas generated by the participants, it is often recommended for the research of new, sensitive, and under-researched areas (Smith, 2015; Basnett & Sheffield, 2010). The literature review suggested that the impact of therapeutic photography was on concepts such as empowerment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy; nebulous in the fact they are difficult to quantify, but concepts which analysis of the experience may be able to identify.

The ontological and epistemological approach of IPA would also appear to compliment the practice of social work in that neither is attempting to find out what is “real” because there has to be an appreciation that reality is relative to the situation a person finds themselves in. The approaches lie somewhere in between relativist and realist standpoints; relativist in that the phenomenon being studied has to be appreciated in the context of the environment and culture it is being conducted in, and realist in that the dynamics between researcher and participant, and indeed participant and the researched, are underpinned by very real relationships (Larkin et. al., 2006). These relationships are the essence of IPA in that “the nature of an observed object will inevitably place constraints on what can be revealed, such that approaches which are most sensitive and responsive to the nature of a subject-matter will evidently yield the most profitable outcomes” (Larkin et. al., 2006, p. 108). It is the “sensitive and responsive” element of IPA which aligns so well with the practice of social work and the values underpinning the professional practice.

Because IPA adopts an inductive approach, using idiographic perspectives to identify links between cognition and language, it permits the researcher to analyse how participants speak about experiences in order to gain insight into how they think and feel about them. It is for these reasons that IPA was chosen for this project as it is a method which allows interpretation of an experience, and one which can be openly analysed through a lens of professional expertise, as long as that analysis is explicitly acknowledged. It offers rich, in-depth accounts of the meaning of experiences, allowing an *insider’s perspective* which other approaches may not be able to capture.

4.7 Design

Using the literature review, a programme was designed for the purpose of creating exercises which utilised therapeutic photographic techniques for the purpose of ascertaining impact. A socio-ecological model was used within the design of the programme to structure the exercises in such a manner that gave opportunities to explore all levels of interactions and relationships in the lives of the participants. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) model considers relationships in the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, working out from self-perception, through relationships with significant others, up to the impact of societal views, beliefs and attitudes. Fitzgerald et. al. (2013) found the socio-ecological model was a useful tool in deciphering and coding the images generated in their study of Philadelphian residents and their views of nutrition, fitness, and tobacco use, whilst Yohani (2008) and McBrien and Day (2012) all acknowledge that a socio-ecological approach assisted in the delivery and analysis of arts and photo based work with refugee youth within their research.

The programme was delivered in five sessions over six weeks which allowed a gap between session four and session five of two weeks. This was to enable the participants to spend the two weeks gathering images for the final photovoice task. Each session was scheduled to run for two hours. A webcam, a laptop, and a projector were used to view images from the screen of a digital camera (or mobile phone) onto a wall. The tasks, and the theoretical underpinning of each one, were as follows:

4.7.1 Session 1

- ***Postcard selection***

This was used as an "ice-breaker" and the purpose of the exercise was to get participants used to working with images and talking about what the image means to them. It was based on the use of Spectro-Cards (developed by Halkola (in Loewenthal, 2013)) which are postcard sized abstract images traditionally used in phototherapy with a trained counsellor where a participant is encouraged to pick a number of images from a selection laid out in front of them and talk about why they chose the ones they did. The Spectro-Cards have been used in research by Loewenthal (2013) and Saita et. al. (2014), but instead of Spectro-Cards the researcher used a selection of postcards for the "ice-breaker" (see fig. 4.1) and each participant was encouraged to select two images that appealed to them, then introduce themselves to the group by explaining why they chose the images they did.



Fig 4.1

○ ***Photography scavenger hunt***

In order to encourage participants to explore their environment and to look for creative ways of capturing images the next task asked them to do a scavenger hunt. Each participant was given two items from a list which they had to photograph, then display to the group so that the other participants could guess what they were asked to photograph. The items were:

A happy face

Something from your pocket

Something that makes you smile

Something green

Something with a number on it

The Queen

Someone making a funny face

Someone's tongue

A pair of shoes

Something blue

Something red

Someone's eye

The weather

- ***Select a meaningful image***

This exercise introduced the aspect of control into the project and asked the participants to select an image on their phone, camera, or person, that has significant meaning to them and tell the group why they have selected that particular image. This is underpinned by Weiser's (1984) recognition that photographs taken by the client can reveal information such as what is important to them, what values they hold, what they believe in, what their social outlook is, and how they engage with others.

4.7.2 Session 2

- ***Self portrait***

Drawing on the work of Nunez (2009), Spence (1986) and Weiser (1984) the participants were asked to take a self-portrait and present it to the group. Within this exercise, the participants were advised that it need not be a traditional portrait where they capture an image of themselves looking at the camera, instead the image needs to capture something that they like about themselves. They were also advised that they do not need to take the photograph themselves, and can ask a friend (or fellow participant) to help them take the photograph.

- ***Emotions exercise***

This task asked the participants to creatively capture six emotions. They are asked to photograph joy, love, anger, fear, surprise and sadness. They are asked to do this without photographing any people, and to look for objects in their environment to represent these emotions. Participants are asked which emotions were easy to photograph, and which ones were more difficult.

4.7.3 Session 3

- ***How I see myself, how others see me***

Building on the skills built up in the emotions exercise, participants were asked to capture two images – one must represent how they see themselves, and the other must represent how others see them. Again, the participants were encouraged to be abstract and capture objects to represent meanings. This task, and the *emotions exercise*, is underpinned by knowledge of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; 1969) which identifies the impact that relationships have on our behaviour and self-perception, as well as the work of Gerhardt (2006) who identifies the impact attachment has on the ability to express and identify emotions.

- ***Two likes, one dislike***

In this exercise the participants were asked to photograph three things, two of which they like, and one of which they dislike. Once everyone has three images each individual takes it in turn to show their three images and the other group members must guess which the “dislike” is. Once identified, the participant must then explain why they photographed their two likes.

After everyone has presented, the facilitator then asks the participants to explain their dislikes, and then come to a group decision about which one thing could be banished from their collective lives altogether. This will involve each participant arguing their case as to why their dislike should be banished.

4.7.4 Session 4

- ***Day in the life***

This exercise was adapted from Craig (2009) and asked the participants to document a day in their lives. It is a task that is set at the end of session 3 so that the images can be explored in session 4. Each participant takes turns to present their day to the group. This task explores routines within lives, and also looks at external impactors affecting the participant. The structure of this task, and the *two likes, one dislike* task, are influenced by the writings of Bronfenbrenner (2009, 1992, 1986) in exploring societal impacts, as well as narrative

therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and resilience theory (Gibson & Gibson, 2015; Daniel & Wassell, 2002) which look at stigma and domains of resilience.

- ***Hopes***

This task recognises that the preceding tasks tend to focus on past and present issues, so the participants were asked to consider the future and take one photograph to represent something they would like to see happen in the future. Yohani (2008) links the aspect of hope to Bronfenbrenner's (1992) theory and explains that it is an important virtue to explore as it is linked to coping strategies.

4.7.5 Session 5

- ***Photovoice project***

This task was established at the end of session 4 and all of the participants are asked to pick a project to photograph. They are told that they should all be happy with the project, all work individually, and then they will take it in turns to present their images to the group. The group then work to identify common themes in the images and decide how to progress any issues that might emerge. This is adapted from the work of Wang (1999), and Wang and Burris (1997, 1994).

- ***Feedback through photos***

The final task asked each participant to take one more photograph that summarised what they had learned from the experience, and then present it to the group.

4.8 Pilot Group

Once the programme had been devised it was important to pilot it with a group of participants so that it could be evaluated in terms of how clear the tasks were to engage with, and to indicate whether the data collection techniques were going to elicit appropriate information (Krysiak & Finn, 2010). Once ethical approval had been obtained (see section 4.12) the researcher approached the local criminal justice social work department who had received funding to run a group specifically for females in contact with the criminal justice system (known as the Connections Women's Programme (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/5053/20>)). The social workers were seeking out new ways to work with the groups so the researcher presented his project to the team. The team asked the researcher to run a group with volunteer participants who were told that the project was a pilot, and that they would be free to withdraw at any time. Three participants took part in the pilot group, and a social worker from the service also co-facilitated with the researcher. This was also conducted to ensure the participants were offered support if there were any issues that might have triggered negative memories or emotions. In order to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the programme, another researcher also took part in the group so that her observations could inform the process.

The pilot group was conducted over a six-week period and retention of participants was 100%. A focus group was held at the end of the programme and feedback collected. After analysis, and a period of reflection, the programme remained unchanged and was delivered in the same format for the remaining groups, and specifically the mental health group.

4.9 Recruitment/Sample

Following the pilot study, the researcher sought agencies involved in the delivery of social work and social care services in order to conduct further group programmes for research. The sampling technique adopted for this project was opportunity sampling which utilises the researcher's local knowledge of agencies and service provision (Brady (in Jupp, 2006)). The researcher presented his research project at an AGM for a local charity which was attended by a number of representatives from agencies across Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire. After the presentation he invited interested agencies to contact him for further details of the project. This generated enquiries from organisations which included those working with substance use, mental health, autism, and carers.

From these enquiries, the researcher explored opportunities to run a six-week group work programme with each agency on the proviso that they provided the accommodation space to run the group in, a co-facilitator to work alongside the researcher, and support for any service user following the programme (should they require further input following the therapeutic photography experience to deal with issues that may arise). The agencies also agreed to recruit participants by giving them information about the group and asking service users to volunteer their participation. This meant that the researcher had no direct contact in the recruitment of participants, but indirectly affected the choice by defining the service user group they were selected from (through the initial choice of agency). An agreement was also signed by the agency (see appendix 1).

Five groups were conducted and varied in size from 4-7 participants. The participants were told that they did not require any skills in photography, they would not be asked to share any information they did not want to share, and they could withdraw from the group at any time. The groups were as follows:

- Substance use group 1 – 5 males and 1 female from a substance use recovery service.
- Mental health group – 6 females and 1 male from a mental health recovery service.
- Substance use group 2 – 5 males and 2 females from a substance use recovery service.
- Carers group – 2 males and 2 females from a carers support group.
- Autism group – 4 females and 1 male from an autism support group.

The agency who facilitated the “substance use” groups asked for the researcher to conduct two separate groups.

With all of the programmes delivered, the researcher also collected quantitative information based on self-reported scales to record self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment (see appendix 2 for

questionnaires used). Information from these results are not included within this study but further information on these scales, as well as the results, are contained in appendix 3 for information and will be used at a later stage to inform further research.

The choice of opportunity sampling allowed the researcher to access “hard to reach” social work service user groups and to recruit interested volunteers to reduce the likelihood of non-response within the study. Brady (in Jupp, 2006) warns that opportunity sampling is open to criticism because of the researchers influence in selecting participants and that this can result in a weakness when it comes to external validity and generalising the transferability of the results. However, it has already been noted when considering the IPA and ethnographic approaches that generalisations are difficult under these methodologies. The researcher has also made attempts to remove himself from direct selection of participants in an effort to reduce possible bias under opportunity sampling.

For the purpose of this IPA study the researcher has focused on the results from the mental health group. The researcher had to consider which group to focus on for this study and decided that mental health issues, given their growing prevalence and their impact on the overall disease burden worldwide, were one of the major factors which contributed to modern social work. The Mental Health Foundation reports that mental health issues are the primary drivers of disability worldwide, with 1 in 6 people experiencing common mental health issues weekly (www.mentalhealth.org.uk). Results from the other groups will be used to inform future research papers. Further information on the mental health group, including an overview of participants, will now be explained.

4.10 Context (Agency Information)

Mental illness is described as “one of the major public health challenges in Scotland” (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Mental-Health>) and estimations suggest that one in three people are affected by mental illness every year. Mental illness affects behaviour and thought patterns and the term “mental illness” (or “mental health problems”) captures a number of conditions including depression, anxiety, phobias, schizophrenia and personality disorders (<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-general/what-kinds-of-mental-health-problems-are-there/#.VcsgfyZVhBd>).

The Scottish Government have identified five main areas of work with mental health issues, the first being to promote and improve mental health services, and have set out specific priorities in the Mental Health Strategy 2012-15 (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/08/9714>). The seven key themes within the strategy include the need to address support for families and carers, improve the rights of people with mental illness, develop outcomes approaches, and to extend anti-stigma campaigns. Two other themes state that support and peer to peer work should be embedded across service provision, and support should also be increased across self-management and self-help approaches (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Mental-Health/Strategy>).

Statutory agencies and voluntary organisations use the strategy to guide service delivery. In the North East of Scotland, one of these voluntary organisations is Pillar Kincardine (Pillar). The organisation is funded by NHS Grampian and Aberdeenshire Council, and support local community members who are experiencing serious emotional or social issues due to poor mental health. Their mission statement is:

"We believe that people experiencing mental distress can direct their own journey towards improved mental health and to living independent, fulfilling lives. Our role is to give people the tools and the support to achieve this".

(<http://www.pillarkincardine.co.uk/pk/principles.html>)

The researcher was invited to speak at the Pillar Annual General Meeting about his proposed research project and was approached by the manager of Pillar following this. She invited him to run a group with some of the service users from the organisation. The service users volunteered to participate in the group and were given an information sheet about the project (see appendix 4).

4.11 Participants

The group met every Friday afternoon for five sessions over a six-week time period, and they also met for a focus group feedback session. The group was made up of the following participants (all names have been anonymised):

Name	Description	Sessions attended	Significant information
Margaret	Female in early 50's	1,2,3,4,5 & focus group	Born and raised in North America. Had a stroke which impacted on her mobility and speech.
Florence	Female in early 60's	1,2,3,4,5 & focus group	Born and raised in the North East of Scotland. Began the course whilst in a relationship with John, but that relationship broke down during the course. She also experienced homelessness and rehoming during the course.
Violet	Female in late 50's	1,2,3,4,5 & focus group	Born and raised in the North of England. Was separated from husband and lived in poor housing with an inactive landlord. Openly discussed contact with psychotherapy.
Caroline	Female in early 60's	1,4,5 & focus group	Born and raised in Glasgow. Was recently retired after working as a school teacher. Disengaged from the course after 1 st

			session, but then re-engaged. Blamed fluctuating mental health issues for this.
Michael	Male in mid 40's	1,2,4	Born and raised in Scotland. Had a traumatic upbringing involving parental abuse, being a looked after child, and being institutionalised. History of drug and alcohol use. Had 2 children but estranged from them.
Anna	Female in late 40's	1,2,3	Only attended 3 sessions as her son had autism and she found it difficult to attend the course and meet his needs.
Kay	Female in early 50's	2,3,5 & focus group	Born and raised in England. Married and relatively affluent. History of alcohol use.
John	Male in late 60's	1,2	Born and raised in the Scottish Borders. Only attended 2 sessions as he was in a relationship with Florence which ended during the course.

There were also two co-facilitators:

Sally – co-facilitator and employee of Pillar. Female.

Penelope – co-facilitator and employee of Aberdeenshire Council social work department. Female.

The nature of the participants' mental health conditions was not required from the researcher as they were all recruited through Pillar who had that information within their own files. The venue for the group was a community centre in the heart of the town. It was an older building with three large rooms and several smaller rooms which acted as office and storage spaces. The building had been a school at one time, but was now used for a number of purposes including fitness classes, educational classes, and after school clubs. Pillar had booked one of the large rooms for the therapeutic photography programme and participants sat around three trestle tables which had been joined together to form a large central table with seating all around it. A kitchen area in the corner of the room meant that participants could help themselves to tea and coffee throughout the exercises.

4.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this project was sought and granted from Robert Gordon University's ethics committee. This section will explore the considerations which informed the application, as well as the project as it progressed.

The ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015) state there are six key principles of ethical research:

- The design and conduct of research should be transparent and is required to demonstrate integrity and quality;
- All participants and co-facilitators should be fully informed about what their participation entails, how the information they give will be used, and how the final research outcomes will be used. Any risks should also be outlined;
- Confidentiality and anonymity must be respected;
- There should be no coercion, and participation should be voluntary;
- Participants must not be harmed (including physical, psychological and emotional harm);
- The research should be independent and any partiality, or conflicts of interest, needs to be explicitly declared.

All six of these ethical considerations were incorporated into the design and conduct of the research project. The intention of the research was to ascertain whether therapeutic photography could benefit social work service users, and it could therefore be argued that the ethos of this project was to find solutions, rather than simply to minimise harm. Information sheets were produced for every participant which outlined the purpose of the research, their participation within the project, and their right to withdraw at any time (see appendix 4). These were signed by the participants at the start of their involvement (on a detachable permission sheet so that the information sheet could be kept by each participant). Similarly, information sheets were produced for the agencies who were providing the service users (participants), co-facilitators, and premises. This sheet gave more detail about the research project, explained how the researcher was to be supervised throughout the project, and explained the agencies rights to view the information gathered by the researcher at any time (see appendix 1).

4.12.1 Legality

All information gathered was stored securely in a locked location, and all computer files were stored on a password protected laptop. Data was anonymised and names of participants were changed in the final presentation of the case studies. Consideration had to be given to the use of participants' photographs, and Weiser (1986) explains that the production of photographs by service users will result in images where the copyright will sit with the photographer. As the photographs were used to inform the research, and were used in the presentation within the case study, it was important that participants understood how their images were to be used. A release form was devised following discussion with the legal team at Robert Gordon University which asked participants to give the researcher permission to use their images, waiving rights under sections 77 to 89 of The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 (see appendix 5). The researcher clarified to the participants that if they did not want their photographs to be used, then they were under no obligation to give the images to the researcher. If participants were happy for their photographs to be used they transferred them to the researcher's laptop via Bluetooth, USB stick, e mail, or memory card.

4.12.2 Informed Consent

Every participant was provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see appendix 4) which outlined the purpose of the study, what would be involved, and how the data would be used after the delivery of the programme. The right to withdraw at any point was clearly emphasised and each participant was asked to sign this consent form. The participants were given a copy of the information sheet to retain and refer to throughout the process. The facilitator also read out the information sheet to every group upon distribution of the forms to ensure that any participant who had issues with reading, but who might be unwilling to draw attention to this issue, would be included as fully as possible.

Copies of the signed consent forms were kept in a locked drawer.

4.12.3 Confidentiality

The Participant Information Sheet (appendix 4) highlighted that information shared within the group would be treated as confidential, but any disclosure that indicated potential harm to a child or vulnerable adult would need to be passed on to the appropriate agency.

As the researcher was transcribing the focus group interviews himself, there was no need to consider issues of sharing audio files. The participants were made aware that their names would be anonymised in the transcription process, and the supervisors would have access to these written transcripts.

4.12.4 Safeguarding/Duty of Care

It was recognised that a project which explored identity through photography had the risk of exposing participants to emotive memories. The researcher was a qualified social worker and has a duty of care which is underpinned by professional values. As the researcher was working directly with social work service users, the SSSC Codes of Practice (2014) were adhered to throughout the research project. This meant that the rights of the service users had to be protected at all times, yet any disclosure made about harm to a young person or vulnerable adult would have to be shared with appropriate authorities. Although the therapeutic photography programme did not intend to cause harm, consideration was given as to how any disclosure of harm to self, or any psychological

distress caused through conversations within the group, would be dealt with. The researcher ensured that the agencies provided staff to give support (independent of the group) to service users should they require it. Although this support was not required, the specific agency for the study with the mental health participants actually provided two workers to follow up any issues which may have emerged. The programme also educated participants on the appropriateness of photographing other people and explained that permission would be required. These considerations were presented to the Robert Gordon University Ethics Panel who gave permission for the project to proceed.

4.12.5 Working with Photographs

The project involved the production of photographs, and even though all of the participants signed a release form (see appendix 5), the facilitator had to give further consideration as to the use of the images produced. Pink (2013) suggests that the publication of photographs within research should be an ongoing collaborative process between researcher and participant, and discussion should take place to decide which photographs should be included. Certainly, the participants were asked for permission to include their images at the end of the group process, but the researcher did not maintain contact after this to discuss the ongoing inclusion. Pink (2013) goes on to suggest that the researcher should give consideration to exclude certain images if they reveal the identity of the participant, stating “absence in such cases can be equally evocative as visual presence” (p.181), and this was an issue for a number of the images as the participants included themselves in their photographs. The ESRC Framework emphasises the need to respect confidentiality and anonymity which presented an issue for the researcher when presenting these images. As well as omitting the images, the researcher considered obscuring the images by using pixelating software to blur features, or by placing a black stripe across eyes to hide identity, but these approaches created a dilemma in that the participants had been exploring their identities, and a large part of that involved a sense of self.

Wiles et. al. (2008) explored the rationale for including the original, participant produced image within research and outlined two main reasons for doing so. Firstly, they believe that the inclusion of visual images adds value to the text, and if they underpin the data collection technique, they should be included. They emphasise that much of this research involves analysing identity and by excluding images, a researcher is denying a full exploration of identity. Secondly, they indicate that obscuring an image through pixelation or black stripes results in objectifying the person in the image and

stripping away the identity. As this project resulted in considerable identity exploration from each participant, the anonymising of the image appeared to be counterproductive. They also suggest that the approach of anonymisation can compound feelings of labelling and stigma because of the negative connotations attached to such images, relating the approach to anonymising photographs of criminals, or victims of crime.

A solution, they propose, is to present visual data in its original state, and make no attempt to anonymise the participants. The researcher made the decision to do that with the photographs within the presentation of the thesis to the examiners, whilst anonymising all names. However, for the wider dissemination of the thesis, the researcher decided to obscure identifying features of people within the images to respect confidentiality and anonymity as outlined in the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015).

4.13 Bias

Bias can occur at any stage within a research project, from the choice of literature reviewed, the selection of participants, the recording of observation, to the details extracted from the data for focus (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Observational research is frequently criticised for being vulnerable to researcher bias because participants may act differently in front of the researcher, but Angrosino (2007) argues that there are ways in which bias can be minimised.

Firstly, observation should feel natural for both the researcher and the participant, and to this end, within the therapeutic photography groups the researcher spent two hours a week for six weeks with the participants and clearly stated that his intention was to observe how they engaged with the exercises.

Secondly, themes should emerge from the observations, and this will lead the researcher down the route of further enquiry. Within the exercises the participants were set a task, but it was up to them to interpret it, choose what to talk about, and choose how much information to offer. Therefore, the researcher had no knowledge in terms of what participants would reveal so had to adapt to each narrative.

Thirdly, observational research should be combined with other approaches to provide alternative and complimentary viewpoints of the data, and this is underpinned by the technique of triangulating

the data collection techniques, using observations, focus groups, and the images produced by the participants.

As previously discussed, IPA and ethnographic methodologies also expose themselves to accusations of researcher bias, but this has to be weighed up against the value of pre-existing knowledge the researcher brings to the situation, in this case, social work theories. The researcher has had to question the applicability of theories to the data and the outcomes, but in doing so he has also considered alternative explanations throughout. However, this means that a subjective view of the data will be presented, but in an effort to reduce bias the researcher has sought to be impartial in all stages of the project.

4.14 Positionality

What is represented within an interpretive phenomenological study is the researcher's perspective of the information gleaned, but the intention remains that of understanding what is being communicated by the subjects of the research. The initial understanding of the researcher is challenged and adapted after incorporating new information from the participant, resulting in a reassessment of understanding (Vessey, 2009), a process which Gadamer (1989) refers to as a fusion of horizons, where one person's understanding and perspective, based on their personal life experiences, is re-adjusted when coming into contact with another person's perspective. The background of the researcher may also be a positive factor in deciphering the information, and so long as they acknowledge and explain their experience, and how this may shape the interpretation of the findings, the reader is informed and aware that the information presented to them is done so through the filter of a researcher from a certain discipline. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the researcher to step out of the role of author and state his positionality.

I am a white, Scottish, male in his early 40's and am a social work lecturer. I entered the world of social work in 2003 after a career in travel and tourism which saw me re-enter education to complete a post graduate diploma in social work. I worked in residential child care, and once qualified I took up a full time position as a social worker in the city hospital. After two years I went to work for the criminal justice addictions team, and then the adult protection team. Throughout my social work career I worked with a number of service users who had mental health problems, but I did not work for a generic mental health social work

team. After reaching a senior position I was offered a position at Robert Gordon University as a social work lecturer.

I am also a keen amateur photographer. I have only used photography on one occasion throughout my career and it was whilst I was a student in 2004. I went to Antwerp for my placement and worked in a residential centre for asylum seekers and I devised an intervention which asked for volunteers to participate in a photography project. There, I taught the group how to operate my film camera, and then lent it out to the participants and asked them to capture life in the centre from their perspective. Their images captured positive interactions and this went against my preconceptions as I had assumed they would photograph negative aspects of camp life, and we displayed the images at a community open day at the end of my placement.

As this was my only experience with photography, I have no preconceptions that photography provides a therapeutic intervention for social work service users, but I have an interest in the theoretical underpinning of interactions in the profession.

4.15 Data Collection

The research philosophies and approaches have been outlined, and an explanation offered as to the use of IPA to present findings, results and analysis. Three techniques were used to gather data within this project, and these will now be explained and justified.

4.15.1 Participant Observations

Within participant observation the researcher becomes both a participant of the group and an observer of behaviour in the group (O'Reilly, 2008). This was a factor to which the researcher gave careful consideration prior to data gathering as he was going to be acting as a group facilitator, whilst at the same time, a researcher. The role of the researcher was overt in that the participants were given information from the outset that the researcher would be taking notes throughout every session about how each participant engaged with the exercises. The participants were given an

information sheet which explained the purpose of the research project (see appendix 4) and were also told that they could have access to the researcher's notes at any time.

The group met once a week for six weeks (with a two-week gap between session four and five to allow participants time to engage in the final project), and each session lasted for a maximum of two hours. The group met in a meeting room where a large, central table accommodated all of the participants sitting around it. This allowed ample workspace on the table, and also for the placement of a laptop, a webcam, and a projector so that images could be projected onto the wall from the digital displays on the backs of cameras and phones. There were no set group rules and this was deliberate as imposing these as a facilitator would have enforced a power dynamic which may have jeopardised efforts to assess impacts on empowerment. The researcher considered encouraging the group to set their own rules, but this could also have created different power dynamics amongst the participants from the outset, so the decision was to have no set rules within the groups. However, issues of confidentiality were addressed in the information sheet which was given to participants at the beginning of each new group (see appendix 4). Every group worked through the tasks outlined in section 4.4.

The researcher also participated in the various photographic exercises and was actively involved in discussions generated by all of the photographic images. However, being in a position of facilitator and researcher means that reflection is always required to ensure that assumptions, knowledge and experience are not biasing the results (Coffey (in Jupp, 2006)), as well as an awareness that the researcher is not trying to "prove" that a therapeutic photography programme is effective.

During each group the researcher took notes and attempted to capture data which included what was said, how it was said, the use of non-verbal communication, the use of the image, and engagement with each task. The majority of observations were verbal and visual, and immediately after every group session, using the written notes, the researcher dictated fuller notes onto a voice recorder, and then transcribed these recordings using Dragon Naturally Speaking 12.0 software for later analysis. It is recognised that the notes, though taken in a manner which attempted to capture an unbiased view, will inevitably reflect the interests and lived experience of the researcher to some extent, so every effort has been made to question each observation within the analytical process to minimise this.

Analysis was carried out using the principles of IPA as previously outlined. Although the approach was initially formulated to analyse verbatim scripts and texts, Larkin and Griffiths (2002) argue that it provides "a stance or perspective on data analysis which ought to allow for the key principles to be

applied to forms of other data” (p.286). In their study of the experience of people recovering from substance use, they used participant observation alongside interviews and suggest that the researcher needs to be aware that they will have preconceptions that will need to be considered when interpreting the notes taken, but if this is considered it can provide an “insiders perspective” (p.309) of the data. In an effort to address this concern, the researcher took measures to make distinctions between observations and reflexive statements within the notes. This then allowed the researcher to elaborate on the reflexive statements to further analyse the applicability of the technique.

4.15.2 Photographs

The main purpose of the therapeutic photography group work with participants was for them to generate photographs to demonstrate understanding and facilitate discussion. As explained within the exploration of visual ethnography, the meanings and narrative attached to each photograph was driven by the participants, as opposed to the researcher, and observations were noted about how each image was used. Participants were also given a release form to give the researcher permission to use their photographs in the presentation of results (see appendix 5).

Participants were encouraged to use their own equipment to take photographs, and these ranged from digital cameras to mobile phones and tablet computers. The researcher also had a supply of six digital cameras for any participant who was without any photographic equipment. Because all images were captured on digital devices, a web cam connected to a laptop and projector was used to view images from the screen of the photographic device, and project onto a wall or screen in order to enlarge it for all participants to view. Added to this, participants could easily transfer images from their devices onto the researcher’s computer via memory card, USB stick, e mail, or Bluetooth connection. Discussions were held from the outset about ensuring that participants had permission from people if they wanted to photograph them to ensure confidentiality was not breached.

As with other studies which have used photography and IPA, the photographs were used by the participants to make issues visible and to facilitate the explanation of events and the main focus of analysis was on what was said, rather than the choice of subject (Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Radley & Taylor, 2003). However, using IPA in the analysis of photographs also gives the opportunity to consider the expression of emotions and lived experiences which might be difficult to express verbally, wherein the photograph becomes a tool which is used to communicate visually

(Shinebourne & Smith, 2011; Kirova & Emme, 2006). Indeed, Kirova and Emme (2006) argue that photography within IPA allows the photographer to “bracket” their lived experience within an image which can often lead to the revelation of the “unspeakable” (p.2-3) and can enhance the fusion of horizons referred to by Gadamer (1989) wherein the photograph bridges the understanding between the photographer and the viewer of the image.

4.15.3 Focus Groups

In order to ascertain the views of participants in their engagement with therapeutic photography the researcher gave consideration to two data capture methods, focus groups or interviews, and opted for focus groups. There were two main reasons for this choice; firstly, the purpose of the research project was to look at therapeutic photography with groups, so, to get collective group feedback, all of the participants should be mutually interested and invested in discussions, and be able to contribute to each other’s comments and criticisms about the experience (Morgan (in Jupp, 2006)); secondly, because the group participants are a homogenous group there may be commonality and themes that they will be able to draw out through collective discussion (Royse, 2007). There is also a perceived aspect of “safety in numbers” so that participants may feel more empowered to discuss both positive and negative experiences in the company of their peers.

Given that the literature suggests the potential for empowerment within the technique of therapeutic photography, the researcher did not want to pick a data collection technique which might be viewed as disempowering for the participant. Within a one-to-one interview there is a power imbalance wherein the researcher is probing their subject for information. The participants who took part in the therapeutic photography group work had all been past or present users of social work services, and the researcher felt that exploring photographs in a group environment where peer support was prevalent, then changing the dynamic and isolating participants for information, went against the ethos of the project, and therefore opted for a focus group to elicit feedback on the therapeutic photography process.

The focus group was conducted at the end of the six-week programme. Photographs that had been produced over the six-week period were projected onto a screen in the form of a slideshow in front of the participants so that they could interact with the images as they discussed the technique. A recording device was placed in the centre of the table. Participants were made aware of this and were given a further information sheet which they were asked to sign, consenting to participation in

the focus group (see appendix 6). Questions focused on positive and negative experiences, areas of enjoyment, areas that could be improved, and self-reported analysis on the impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment (see appendix 7). The recordings were then transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking 12.0 software for later analysis.

Again, the focus group transcript was then analysed using IPA to identify themes within the data. Palmer et. al. (2010) suggest that using focus groups within IPA research has advantages when the researcher wants to engage participants as a group because of the contextual experiential situation, and because the reflection of an experience may elicit richer detail than one to one interviews. However, they also highlight the risks in looking for phenomenological accounts when working with multiple voices and suggest using an approach outlined by Smith (2004). He advises parsing focus group transcripts at least twice when using IPA - firstly in order to identify any group patterns which may influence or define the dynamics, and then secondly to draw out the individual, idiographic accounts. Tomkins and Eatough (2010) state that using IPA with focus groups should not be chosen as a pragmatic, timesaving tool, but should be justified by the nature of what is to be studied – in this case, the use of therapeutic photography within a group environment. The impact of the group also needs to be considered in terms of the dynamic so that the researcher can consider how an individual makes sense of their own experiences, but within the confines of being grounded within an interactive group setting. If this is done effectively, and the focus group conducted in an effective manner, it is possible for individuals to make greater personal disclosures than they would in a one to one interview (Wilkinson, 2004).

4.16 Data Analysis

Within phenomenological and ethnographic research there is always ongoing analysis; from the conception of the research question, through the literature review, into data collection, and onto the final stages of writing up, the researcher is constantly questioning the data, alongside their own assumptions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). However, “formal” analysis of the data usually commences once the researcher has all the data in front of them. Angrosino (2007) advises that there is no set formula for analysing data within this field, but three clear steps should be adhered to; 1) manage data so that the researcher can approach it in a logical manner and demonstrate

thinking, 2) know the material well by reading and re-reading it, 3) then work towards developing clear themes from the data.

As the data was being used to search for themes without any preconceived framework, the analysis of the data was inductive (Krysiak & Finn, 2010). Analysis was structured on an approach outlined by Smith et. al. (2009) which requires the researcher to appreciate the participants' viewpoint, and to endeavour to represent that in as accurate a manner as possible. In order to do this, the researcher printed off all transcripts from the observations and focus group, and then went through the material line by line so that he could question what was being communicated. It is worth noting that the concept of double hermeneutics, as well as reflexivity, came to the fore at this stage as the researcher was analysing his own observations and had to approach them as if they were an unseen document, even though they contained his original observations and impressions of the participants' engagement with therapeutic photography.

The analytic process within IPA is not prescribed by a single method and should be "characterized by a healthy flexibility in matters of analytic development" (Smith et. al., 2009, p.79). However, the focus should be on the attempts by the participants to make sense of the experience, in this case, the use of therapeutic photography within a group setting. To this end, Smith et. al. (2009) propose a set of processes which should be included in all IPA analysis: looking at individual experiences, looking at shared experiences, and moving from descriptive accounts to interpretive ones. This has to be conducted against the backdrop of attempting to understand the experience for each participant in terms of how they make meaning, and how they assert their point of view. Within this context, the researcher used the following framework, adapted from Smith et. al. (2009), to conduct analysis:

Stage 1 – Reading and re-reading

The first process involved spending time reading the transcripts from the focus group, the participant observations, and looking at the photographs which the participants had volunteered. This was an ongoing process and the researcher attempted to come at the material with an inquisitive naivety upon each reading, questioning what was meant and what had been expressed after each sentence. During this process, the researcher found it useful to read the material out of sync, so that pages would be printed off, then selected at random and read in isolation from the wider narrative of the transcript. Doing this, in conjunction with looking at the photographs

alongside the transcripts, allows the researcher to become immersed in the data (Shinebourne & Smith, 2011).

Stage 2 – Initial noting

The researcher began this process by thematically coding the transcript and identifying issues emerging from the text (see appendix 8). After completing this, the researcher realised that this was an overly simplistic approach to the analysis of the data, but it did indicate some of the emerging themes which assisted in the later analysis of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes. The researcher then re-read the transcripts and began making notes alongside sentences. These were a mixture of descriptive and conceptual comments and began to capture thoughts about the underlying intention of statements and visual expressions. Smith et. al. (2009) suggest a useful technique is to underline any sentences and then write an account of why it was highlighted, but the researcher found it more useful to ask questions after every sentence to analyse why the statement was made, what the intention was, and what the impact on the individual and the group was. An example of the initial noting is included in appendix 9. This line of questioning was also applied to the photographs (see appendix 13).

Stage 3 – Developing emerging themes

The third stage involved working with the original transcripts and the researchers notes together to identify emerging themes from the data. Smith et. al. (2009) highlight that this stage involves working with an enlarged dataset which the researcher must attempt to reduce in terms of volume of data, whilst at the same time maintain the complexity and richness in terms of capturing the interplay between relationships and the patterns between the original transcript and the exploratory notes. An example of this stage is contained in appendix 10 and demonstrates the approach wherein three columns were used to work with – the central column contained the transcript, the right hand column contained the researcher's exploratory notes, and the left hand column was reserved for noting down the potential emerging themes. The researcher also found it useful to return to the technique of reading sentences out of sequence and isolating them from the rest of the text, and then doing the same with the exploratory notes to again question what was being said, how it was being said, and how it was being received. The same questioning approach was also used for the photographs, taking care not to lose sight of how the participant had used the image, and what was

contained within the photograph, so as not to let the researcher's interpretation dominate (see appendix 13).

Stage 4 – Searching for connections across emerging themes

The three columned table was then further analysed, along with the photographs, and an attempt was made to cluster the emerging themes into conceptual similarities. Descriptive labels were used in this clustering process and these later formed the basis for the super-ordinate themes which emerged. An example of this stage is demonstrated within appendix 11 and illustrates how the researcher took each relevant sentence from the transcripts, as well as notes from the participant observations, and grouped them under each descriptive label. This process helped to see the spread of the occurrences across the group, but the researcher was aware that generalising the data was not necessary under IPA, so was keen to also look for exceptions from out with the descriptive labels. Again, as with the previous stage, the researcher also made every effort to ensure that connections with the photographs (appendix 13) and the participant narrative were maintained. Because a large number of the themes related to identity in some form the researcher used the technique of abstraction and subsumption to identify six overarching super-ordinate themes, each containing three sub-ordinate themes (Smith et. al., 2009).

Stage 5 – Deepening the analysis

Once the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes had been identified the researcher went back to the data, read through the transcripts of the focus group and the participant observations, viewed the photographs, and queried whether the themes identified could be applied. If any exceptions were noted, the researcher queried whether there were any themes missing, or whether this was simply surplus information. The reflexive notes were also used at this point and aided the application of theories to the data. This was also an important stage when writing up the data in terms of considering the applicability of therapeutic photography to social work as a number of theories were applied at this stage to test the appropriateness of the technique. The final table of themes is presented in fig 4.2

SUPER-ORDINATE THEMES	SUB THEMES
Exposing the self	Fear/paranoia Creating masks of deception Removing the mask
Searching	Dichotomy and fragmentation Reaching for the ideal Fear of freedom
Developing the self	Social comparisons Layers of exploration Forced to confront
Family relations	Upbringing Responsibility Rebellion
Medicalised label	Professional respect Rebellion Relating to society
Isolation	Self-imposed Enforced Relating to society

Fig 4.2 – Super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes used within the results

4.17 Reflexivity

Shaw (2010) explains that qualitative researchers, and specifically IPA researchers, work from an interpretivist paradigm where the analysis focuses on the interactions between the individual, the environment, our culture, and our place in time. This denies an objective, reflective approach and

favours subjectivity which requires reflexivity in order to ascertain how the researchers self is impacting on the interpretation of the experience of others.

Reflexivity in qualitative research involves acknowledging and documenting researcher feelings, emotions, bias, and decision making processes (Loewenthal, 2007). By documenting the process, these can be used to provide an “audit trail” to demonstrate where and when decisions were made (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This allows the researcher to constantly review the process as it progresses, and to ensure their interpretation of the data is clearly signposted.

To this end, throughout the presentation of the IPA results, reflexivity underpins the analysis within each theme. The process of noting and developing emerging themes, again underpinned with reflexivity, is presented within the appendices (8, 9, 10 & 11), and the researcher also kept a reflexive diary (see appendix 12) throughout the process so that the use of self, including professional social work knowledge, could be bracketed out with the participant observation, focus group, and photographs which constituted the main data. The purpose of using these reflexive diaries was to explore the links to social work theory, particularly within the discussion chapter (7), as well as providing a system where the reflexivity could assist in the monitoring of researcher bias (as discussed in section 4.13).

4.18 Summary

The issue of the subjective nature of phenomenological and ethnographic research has been acknowledged, and this underpins the importance of the researcher having an awareness of preconceptions, but also building in reflexivity and reflection to the process of data analysis. This is also underpinned by the Heideggerian philosophical approaches to conducting research and appreciating the knowledge and experience the researcher brings to the data in order to add value.

The following chapters move to explore the findings derived from the approach presented within this chapter. The researcher has presented quotes, photographs and observations to demonstrate how the dominant super-ordinate themes, and the sub-ordinate themes, were arrived at. In chapter 5 the intrinsic impacts of engagement with the therapeutic photography programme is explored, particularly with regards the feelings of exposure, searching and development experienced by the participants. Chapter 6 will go on to look at the external impactors such as the influence of the family, the feelings associated with professionals, and the impact of isolation. Within these two chapters the researcher has been careful to present the experiences as they were encountered in

order to give the reader a rich and detailed account of the participant experience. These results are then carried into chapter 7 and further analysis is applied to decipher whether these experiences can inform social work practice, and which theories may emerge through these encounters.

Chapter 5 – Therapeutic Photography with a Mental Health Support Group (Part 1) – Internal Influencers on Identity

5.1 Introduction

As per the study design and method discussed in chapter 4, an interpretive phenomenological analytic approach was utilised to explore the dynamics and outcomes of the group.

Six, inter-related super-ordinate themes were identified from the analysis: 1) Exposing the self; 2) Searching; 3) Developing the self; 4) Family relations; 5) Medicalised label; and 6) Isolation. These themes centred around the identity of the participants as they explored their photographs and associated narratives. This chapter will explore the first three super-ordinate themes as they appeared to link closely to internal influencers which affected perception of self-identity. The following chapter will then focus on the subsequent three super-ordinate themes which appeared to link to external influencers on identity.

The first of the super-ordinate themes, “Exposing the self”, identified the initial concerns of the participants and related these to the wider aspects of dealing with their identity within the confines of a society that can often find it difficult to relate to people with an “invisible” illness. It also highlighted how this can lead to adopting particular roles and personas that concealed their true feelings and identities. The second super-ordinate theme, “Creating masks of deception”, identified the process of searching and identity exploration which took place after participants came to the realisation that protective barriers could come down and they could assert their own needs. Often this involved confusion as identities had been suppressed for many years. The third super-ordinate theme, “Developing the self”, recognised the process of identity re-formation as the programme progressed. Participants began to realise that the information gleaned throughout the exercises could be applied and tested in the safety of the group. Fig. 5.1 below highlights these super-ordinate themes and their related sub-ordinate themes which will be explored herein:

SUPER-ORDINATE THEMES	SUB-ORDINATE THEMES
Exposing the self	Fear/paranoia Creating masks of deception Removing the mask
Searching	Dichotomy and fragmentation Reaching for the ideal Fear of freedom
Developing the self	Social comparisons Layers of exploration Forced to confront

Fig. 5.1 – Super-ordinate themes, and related sub-ordinate themes

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Exposing the Self

From the outset, there was a sense of uncertainty which underpinned the exploration of the photographs by the participants. The nature of using photographs to initiate discussion appeared to be a new concept, to actually have attention directed towards them and to openly share aspects of their lives with the group. This appeared to expose a sense of vulnerability and fear within each of the participants as they engaged with the initial exercises. More specifically, these vulnerabilities and fears included paranoia, deception, and hiding behind other personas.

a. Fear/Paranoia

The initial stages of the therapeutic photography programme saw the participants choosing from a variety of postcards and selecting an image which appealed to them, taking part in a photography scavenger hunt, talking about memories of photographs as they were growing up, and then sharing meaningful images from their photographic devices. The novelty of the situation was apparent as participants appeared to be looking for guidance from the facilitator, as well as from each other, and they appeared to seek validation that they were engaging with the images in the “right” way. This initial uncertainty may have been responsible for the revelations that followed, but as they began to share images and talk about their situations, a sense of fear and paranoia became evident, not in

their actions, but in the shared narratives. Below, Violet captures feelings of fear, while Caroline's extract highlights paranoia, both of which are representative of feelings within the group:

Violet – “I didn't know what to expect so I was a bit apprehensive at first because I think it is about exposing yourself, I think that is what was sort of at the back of my mind – Should I? Shouldn't I? – but I am glad I did it.”

Violet reflects on these early stages of participation and the memories of listening to other people open up about the images they chose. This reminded her of the uncertainty she felt herself at this point. Her quote invites rumination on the inherent risk she felt in revealing information about herself to a room full of people she barely knew. Her use of the word “exposing” is a powerful expression and suggests that she feels she is laying herself bare, completely unprotected and vulnerable, entirely naked for all to see. Yet despite these feelings towards exposure, Violet also reports feeling only “a bit apprehensive”. This juxtaposition in her quote suggests elements of perceived control in the process – a feeling that the risks will be outweighed by the benefits.

Caroline was also suspicious from the outset. She engaged with the initial exercises and realised that participants were using the photographs to share information about themselves and she worried about what might happen to this information:

Caroline – “I mean I have heard things that people repeat that really shouldn't, I mean, we all do, you know, the things, something that is of slightest interest and I've got that, it's like a paranoia, it's an inbuilt thing, ehm, that I don't think I will ever lose it now, ehm, I didn't have it when I was younger, but I have definitely got it now, ehm, so I found it, I found it scary. I did, I found it very scary.”

Disclosing highly personal information to “strangers” appears to be profoundly uncomfortable for Caroline – she is suspicious and perhaps even cynical regarding the integrity of others and consequently seeks to protect her privacy and confidentiality. Her extract echoes the fear and vulnerability highlighted in Violet's quote. Caroline recalls situations where confidence had been breached and she suggests that she too may have been guilty herself of partaking in the sharing of information – “we all do” indicating the nature and normalcy of the situation. Interestingly, Caroline also related this to her own mental wellness and linked this to faulty thinking, stating it is “like a paranoia”, which predisposes her to be mistrustful of others, suspicious about what might happen to information she chooses to share. Caroline makes a statement about her age, perhaps equating her advanced years to wisdom, and paranoia is something she has learned over her lifespan, wary of repeating past mistakes.

The concerns about exposure, fear and paranoia were echoed by the other participants within the group throughout the exercises. In the initial exercise involving post card selection, Michael chose an image of an industrial fence, overlooked by a watch tower:



Fig. 5.2 – Michael photographed a postcard of fencing

The black and white image is bleak and unwelcoming, representing feelings of being trapped in, or being excluded from society (fig 5.2). The fence may symbolise a defense mechanism – keeping Michael safe whilst keeping others out. Yet, the tower on the left hand side of the image conjures up Bentham’s Panopticon (Foucault, 2012) where people are constantly under surveillance and cannot escape from scrutiny. Michael uses the image at the outset to express his paranoia and fear. In a later exercise he produced the following image to represent a day in his life:



Fig. 5.3 – Michael photographed a tobacco packet and hid brand name

The sense of being watched continued in this image of his tobacco packet and cup of tea (fig 5.3). He deliberately placed the lighter over the product name so as not to endorse the tobacco to the viewers of the image. It is as though Michael was a character in a television programme addressing concerns about product placement. Within both images, there was a sense that Michael believed he was being constantly watched, monitored and observed which is synonymous with being imprisoned and experiencing a loss of liberty. His personal freedom is restricted and he no longer has any privacy and feels a need to conceal his true identity, a feeling which was endorsed within the accounts of the other participants.

The observations also captured these accounts and in one exchange Florence spoke to the group about how she felt that people she encountered would look at her and judge her. She would often be asked about how she was 'doing' and explained that she wanted to be able to honestly give an account of her feelings, but realised she had to give a brief, socially acceptable response. Her narrative resonated with the other participants who also shared a sense of dread when going out into public, revealing a collective paranoia arising from engaging with people they perceived as "normal". This suggested that the invisibility of their mental health conditions left them feeling exposed and vulnerable, open to judgement by the wider public. Because of the hidden nature of their condition, the participants felt there was a lack of visual evidence which validated their illness, resulting in deliberate attempts to appear as "well" as possible, concealing the true nature of the extent of their conditions. When this became too challenging, the reaction was withdrawal – it was easier to avoid scrutiny and judgement if the participants could avoid contact in the first place.

By the very nature of the photography tasks, participants became the observers of themselves. No longer were they preoccupied with thoughts about what other people might think about them, they were using the images to question what they thought about themselves. This appeared to alleviate the initial paranoid concerns and the fear subsided. What emerged was inquisitiveness into how they had been dealing with this paranoia in the past and an exploration of the techniques they employed to cope with the perceived scrutiny.

b. Creating Masks of Deception

The previous sub-theme introduced the concept of concealing mental illness due to the fear of being judged by others and potentially stigmatised. In response, participants projected themselves in a particular manner to appear “normal” and consequently avoid the scrutiny of others, an aspect of identity which Winnicott (1965) termed the “False Self”. In this sub-theme, “Creating masks of deception” participants explored the energy expelled on presenting a duplicitous self to others. Florence coined the phrase “practicing to deceive” when Caroline stated to the group that she was guilty of putting up barriers and ‘fronts’ in an effort to pretend she was something she was not. Florence’s expression encapsulated the skillset that each participant had to develop and perfect to engage with others, knowingly being dishonest about their own feelings and emotions, but also denying themselves the expression of their true identity. This deception resulted in suspicion of the true nature of other people Caroline interacted with, as Margaret explored with her in the following quote:

Margaret – “It’s just like your home, not wanting anyone in it – you don’t want to go into anyone else’s either.”

Caroline – “No, absolutely not (laughter) that goes without saying.”

Margaret – “No, we’ve tried and tried to get her to come and visit and have a coffee at mine, but no.”

The barriers Caroline has presented had led to her becoming suspicious of other people and their intentions, yet in the group she had learned that this was a pattern of behaviour she had engaged in to protect herself. In her quote her home environment has become an extension of her identity, and to let someone “in” to this aspect of her life would be to begin the process of dismantling the barriers she has put up to protect herself, and possibly expose her vulnerabilities. Caroline’s phrase “that goes without saying” emphasised the transparent actions she employed, as if to state that it should be obvious to the group that this behaviour is familiar to them all, that there should be overwhelming unanimity in terms of employing strategies like this. However, Caroline’s laughter appeared to be more defensive than humorous, as if she was questioning her own rationale for her behaviour. She had become so entrenched in maintaining a protective barrier that she was oblivious to Margaret’s effort to socialise with her, inviting her to her home, stating she had “tried and tried” to get her to come, yet Caroline had not recognised this. The laughter may indicate an awareness that her actions are deceptive in that they only serve to reinforce her protective barrier and do not act as an effective means of finding out who she could be if she admitted others into her life.

Michael also focused on home as his mask of deception and took a photograph of a cleaning product to represent a day in his life:



Fig. 5.4 – Michael photographed a cleaning product

By photographing a bottle of cleaning fluid, Michael was stating to the group that part of his routine was to ensure his living conditions were presentable (fig 5.4). When pressed by the group on why this was important to him he explained that if his environment felt clean, then he felt more relaxed internally, but he then continued to explore the concept and decided that if his living conditions appeared neat and orderly, people would perceive him to be feeling in a similar way. Michael did not have a compulsive disorder which compelled him to clean, he simply used this as a defensive strategy to present an image to other people so that they would see order and cleanliness, and in doing so he hid the turmoil he felt inside. In essence, he has presented an external image which is in opposition to how he feels internally. Unlike his image of the tobacco packet in fig 5.3 he had not obscured the product name. Instead, he had objectified a projected image, a front he put on for others to see and therefore, because the label is not part of his internal identity, he felt no need to hide it from observing eyes. In this case, the label might provide him protection in that observers will see something they are familiar with and be content – the perception of “normality” and order protects him.

In another image within the same exercise, Michael presented an image of a mask:



Fig. 5.5 – Michael photographed a mask

The image was included amongst other iconography he explored to represent a day in his life. He had photographed a Christian cross, a Red Indian statue, and this mask (fig 5.5). The devilish appearance suggested someone who is evil or mischievous, but the black tears indicate deep sadness. There is almost a feminine quality with the glitter through the red paint and the defined eyelashes. Michael used this to talk about being judged on his external appearance, but it may also relate to how he wanted to be seen by others, as if his lifestyle may, in some way, be glamorous and envied by others. He stated that this resulted in putting up defences and acting in ways which made him unapproachable. This time, Michael's image was not metaphoric, it was literal. He viewed this as a costume he had to put on and appeared to want to show that he was a troubled character who had fallen from grace, so far so that he had become the polar opposite of angelic. However, through the darkly ingrained tears he demonstrated regret, sorrow, and perhaps sought redemption. Through the objectification of his mask he admitted that his use of substances had also provided a barrier of protection around himself as he became unapproachable from the outside, and numbed from the inside.

The observations also capture other participants exploring their "masks" and one exercise in particular initiated considerable discussion about the presentation of the self to others. In that exercise, participants were asked to produce two images, one for how they see themselves, and another for how they believe other people see them. All participants returned with two images and explored the differences in perception between the photographs. Margaret identified that her mask was one which involved hiding in larger groups so that her individuality morphed into a collective group identity, Kay's mask consisted of "keeping busy" so that people perceived activity as good mental health, Violet's mask was one of caring and she explained that by putting the needs of others

before hers prevented a focus on her own needs – her role became a protective mask, and Florence admitted that her mask was humour, an aspect she went on to explore within the next sub-theme.

c. Removing the Mask

In the previous sub-theme, the concept of defining masks of deception was explored and participants appeared to identify aspects of their personalities, roles and characters which they could hide behind or adapt to create protective barriers. In this next sub-theme, the participants moved onto considering life without the mask and dismantling some of the barriers, revealing what Winnicott (1965) referred to as the “True Self”. For that reason, this sub-theme has been entitled “removing the mask”.

For the majority of participants, the realisation that barriers and fronts had been presented appeared to be a benefit. The learning behind this appeared to allow participants to move on from this and explore other aspects of their identity which gave them purpose and direction. Florence and Margaret’s conversation within the focus group captured their thoughts about removing these projected barriers:

Florence – “Yeah, I can be happy. I have a smile on me a lot more these past few weeks, even singing so...can’t be bad can it? Well, the singing part for everybody else I don’t know (laughter)...me singing might not be good for everybody else.”

Margaret – “Yes, I actually think I’ve actually heard more of your real laughter (to Florence) than your covering up.”

Florence – “Yes, that’s true. Because I played the clown for so long, for so many years just to cover up how I was really feeling but now it’s a natural enjoyment of friendships and situations, you know, I’m finding me!”

Margaret – “Yes, you are finding you again.”

Florence – “The real me.”

In this exchange, there was a real sense of self growth and self-acceptance and Florence stated she “can be happy”, as if she was still seeking permission to be so. This permission appears to have to come from her as she moved from fear of exposure (as explored in the first sub-theme) to removing her protective mask and showing her “real” self – her sense of being afraid had diminished, along with the pretence, and the thought of exposing her true self was no longer accompanied by feelings of fear. Her language suggested that power, strength and confidence had replaced the cautious approach to self-projection. Within the exploration of photographs in the group environment, Florence had identified that she had been projecting a protective front to others for a number of

years, but now she had become aware of that and, through her own conversations and the narratives of her peers, explored other avenues of who she is. There was happiness in her observation which she shared with the group, but there was also the ever present sense of self-depreciating humour creeping through in her statement about singing and its impact on others. Because Margaret confirmed Florence's observations, this informed her self-esteem and self-efficacy and she continued to explore the experience, equating it to being like the sad, make-up encrusted clown being cleansed of a mask to reveal a "natural", refreshed person at the end of the process. Her choice of language suggested that there was a toxic nature to her behaviour, but removing this cover and reverting to a natural state equated to an identity which is "healthier". She stated that she was "finding me", so the process was not complete as she still had more exploration to do, but the process had begun and her tone of voice suggested that this was a positive experience, she was happy with what she had discovered. She entered the process as Florence, a performer hidden under layers of disguise, but referred to herself at the end of the process as being "the real me" and this might be due to the fact that she had been able to explore her roles and relationships, but also the fact that she had learned from other participants in the process and recognised behaviours they exhibit which impact on her own presentation. The change in Florence was also represented in an image she presented within the final exercise where participants explored their safe spaces:

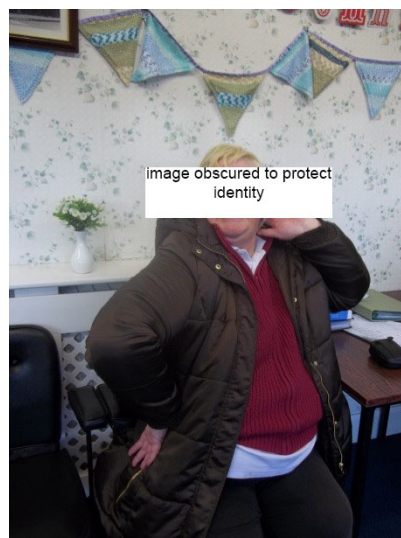


Fig. 5.6 – Florence posed for the camera

Florence opted to take a self-portrait and in the image she appeared to be "acting the clown", but she described the photograph as a representation of who she really was, relaxed, smiling, and playful, addressing the camera and stating "look at me now!" (fig 5.6). Significantly, this was the first

time during the programme she had included an image of herself – during the self-portrait exercise in the early stages of the programme she felt unable to take a self-portrait as she stated she “did not recognise the old woman in the pictures”. In this image she demonstrated that she was able to look at herself, identify positive qualities she had, and celebrate them. She recreated a glamorous pose, playing with her hair with one hand, whilst her other hand was placed on her hip, reminiscent of Hollywood poses from the 1940’s and 50’s. Yet, in her oversized anorak and her untucked shirt, there was no need for her to present as orderly or immaculate, she was stating she was happy in her own skin.

All participants explored how they projected images in order to blend into society and to please others, and most moved to a point where they could consider alternative strategies for interacting with others where they could be more attentive of their own needs, rather than the needs of others. Violet explored her caring role and asserted that it was time for her to put her needs before her ex-partners, whilst Kay reflected on her busy persona and gave herself permission to relax and reflect (and she claimed the use of photographs and photography helped her do that). These changes appeared to be enhanced by the feedback and input of other participants, and the process Milford et. al. (1984) termed *visual self-confrontation* was able to take place. Milford et. al. warned of a state of objective self-awareness arising from this process, one which could see the participant fighting to learn more about the realisations, or alternatively, one which may see them taking flight and departing from the process.

In sum, the super-ordinate theme of “exposing the self” encapsulated how the participants began the process with a natural fear and suspicion of exploring the concept of self in front of other people, and how these feelings manifested in the images and narratives. Once this had been externalised, there was a consequent exploration of protective strategies that were used to defend the self from the scrutiny and negative opinion of others. What followed, for some, was the ability to consider removing these barriers (or masks) and being more aware of one’s own needs, rather than always considering the needs of others first. Once the masks had been removed and the participants recognised the constraints they had imposed on themselves, the next process commenced, one which saw the participants searching for their true self.

5.2.2 Searching

The natural progression of exploration within the images and narratives appeared to revolve firmly around identity. Feelings of exposure explored within the first of the super-ordinate themes gave way to feelings of curiosity as participants began to use photographs in order to analyse important people and issues in their lives. This involved looking back at the past, consideration of the present, but also some thoughts about how identity might continue to be shaped in the future. This did not always appear to be a comfortable process and there were a multitude of experiences within the room, but throughout this participants appeared to exercise control and caution when it came to disclosing information to others. As time went on, the group began to explore aspects of their lives in more depth which allowed for advice and support to be offered from the peer group. For the participants, it appeared that their identities were faced with alternative paths in terms of how they could develop; creating a dichotomy for some, but for others, the options became overwhelming and their identity risked becoming fragmented. This was most evident within the quotes, observations and photographs relating to Caroline and the researcher largely focuses on her within this super-ordinate theme which has been termed “searching”, but examples are also offered to demonstrate how the sub-themes applied to the actions of other participants. Within the super-ordinate theme, three subordinate-themes are explored which were termed “dichotomy and fragmentation” where confusion occurred, “reaching for the ideal” where expectations and goals were explored, and “fear of freedom” where aspects of control emerged and liberty of actions were realised.

a. Dichotomy and Fragmentation

In the first super-ordinate theme, participants realised that they had been guilty of adapting the self to hide the true nature of identity, and this had resulted in a suppression of the true self. This realisation led to opportunities which allowed participants to explore how the self could be developed, and to do this there was a degree of self-reflection and self-analysis with the use of the photographs that were being produced.

Caroline, who had feared exposure from the outset, explored the challenges she faced in completing the photographic exercises. Margaret and Violet had been talking about how they enjoyed Caroline’s company and that they had been trying to include her in social meetings out with the group which elicited the following response:

Caroline – “Well, you’ve tried so hard that ehm...I know you find this hard to believe but I’ve been quite completely unaware of it because I have got my defence mechanisms so high that I never actually realised. Isn’t that peculiar? And I know I am peculiar to myself but I am not really peculiar to my family...what’s left of it, there’s not many folk are left of it. I don’t know who I am, I’ve absolutely no idea at all really. I know...I know the labels I’ve been given but I don’t know who I am in...I don’t know...I lost it about 10 years ago and I’ve kind of started to regain it, but I still don’t really know, and I want to stop talking, and I want you to all stop looking at me too (laughter).”

In her quote Caroline explored her internal thoughts about the process of completing the exercises, but also in terms of how this had invited exploration of who she was - her true identity. She reminded the group about the issues she had explored through the photograph exercises, the close identification with her family and their influence on her upbringing, her role as a mother, her professional identity as a teacher, and then retirement. Although she never mentioned it outright, there was also her role as somebody with mental health issues, and this may well be one of the “labels (she has) been given”. This statement suggests Caroline was looking for definition, explanation, or instruction about her identity and how to behave – if she could relate to the label then she would understand how she should ‘be’. But such labels have contributed to a fragmented and confused identity and she has difficulty identifying with them because they are so multi-faceted, openly admitting to not knowing who she is. She states “I don’t know who I am”, conveying a sense of feeling totally lost, confused and scared, pinpointing two distinct points of change: 1) 10 years ago, when her mental health deteriorated, and she lost her previous roles, and 2) when she retired. Confusion regarding her identity has left her fearing interactions with others. In response, she excluded people from her life and states her “defence mechanisms” were high. The way in which she asks the group “isn’t that peculiar?” suggested she was looking for feedback from the other participants, to give her confirmation that it was an unconscious action, rather than her conscious decision, to avoid contact with others. However, she appeared to know in herself that it was an action she had employed as it was difficult for her to decide on a persona when in the company of others. The use of the word “peculiar” also acted as a label, but seemed to normalise her illness by giving it a softer term than “mental illness”; it was safer for her to think of herself as a bit strange, a bit peculiar, rather than someone who is ill. The losses she had incurred through changes in her identity have also impacted on the confusion for her, yet her solution is to look towards others and try to learn from them instead of contemplate her inner strengths. At the end of her statement she could see that people were interested in what she was saying, but then ends by trying to push them away – “I want to stop talking, and I want you all to stop looking at me” is another way for her to say “I want your attention, but I don’t want your attention” – the dichotomy appears to be evident.

Caroline went on to confirm that she preferred to listen rather than participate when asked which exercise had been her favourite. She replied:

Caroline – “The table full of photographs, I loved it, I loved it, I thought that was fabulous, I really did, I could have spent the whole day on that one...and I would have loved it if we had started each session with that, because it was so fascinating what people chose off the table, you know.”

This exercise was the very first exercise where participants had to choose two postcards and talk about why they appealed to them. In her statement she reinforces how much she “loved it” and identified that it was the aspect of listening to others that she enjoyed the most. She was presented with a “table full of photographs” which contained a multitude of images, and therefore, a multitude of options to invite rumination, reflection, and projection. For Caroline, having so many options in front of her was familiar and the exercise gave her the opportunity to consider her labels, but also learn from others how they dealt with issues. She found the process “fascinating” as it gave her insight, knowledge, and power. Within the narratives of other participants, Caroline was able to recognise aspects of her own life, her own illness, and strategies for dealing with these, but for her to verbalise these from her own perspective still caused her anxiety. She returned to this within the focus group:

Caroline – “I am uncomfortable with feelings, you know, I don’t mind thoughts or opinions or, you know, a debate, oh I can do that till the band plays, but the feelings bit is really tricky I think, because you’re vulnerable, and you are seeing somebody else’s vulnerability and I think they are equally...to me they are equally anxiety provoking.”

Within her admission, there appeared to be transference as she stated that hearing about someone else’s vulnerabilities also created anxiety within her, but this appeared to contradict what she had explored before, listening to the stories of others and learning from them. Caroline stated she could engage in debate, but dealing with “feelings” was “tricky”, suggesting that a debate was an opportunity for her to adopt views, opinions and standpoints to create a barrier around her identity, but to go beyond this and actually engage with emotions, finding out how she really thought and felt about something, would expose her vulnerabilities – if she did not know who she was and how she felt yet, how could she expect others to accept her? She continued to be pulled in different directions, the dichotomy within her behaviour and actions were verbalised within her quote. Perhaps this linked to coping strategies and the realisation that other participants with vulnerabilities had developed coping techniques, and therefore she should be able to do it too, thus producing heightened anxiety within her as she felt she was not able to obtain this.

Dichotomies were also identified within Caroline’s images and narrative, but on occasion, they became more than two opposing factors and often became a multitude of possibilities, thus

appearing to reinforce the suggestion that her identity was becoming confused and fragmented. This became increasingly evident in the exercise which asked participants to document their thoughts on “safety”. Caroline stated she was anxious about presenting her images so wanted to go first, then showed a variety of perspectives around her home and the town she lived in. What became evident was how she had titled the images, describing each photograph from a perspective such as “looking out” (fig 5.7), “looking up” (fig 5.8), and “looking back” (fig 5.9); concluding her exploration she stated that she was avoiding “looking in”.



Fig. 5.7 – Caroline photographed “looking out”



Fig. 5.8 – Caroline photographed “looking up”



Fig 5.9 – Caroline photographed “looking back”

This appeared to be a diversionary technique for her, focusing on external factors prevented her from being reflective and contemplating her inner thoughts, feelings and desires. As she “looked out” she had captured an image of an isolated, bare tree in the midst of concrete houses, making it look out of place, alone, and naked (fig 5.7) – feelings that Caroline experiences whilst searching for her own identity; in “looking up” her bannisters lead the eye to the top of her stairs, but reveals nothing, leaving the viewer to question what is at the top, perhaps reflecting Caroline’s own uncertainty about what lies ahead (fig 5.8); and in “looking back” she gives an insight into her Catholic upbringing, the traditions and icons within her family, and of memories shared with her family as they displayed the same decorations year after year (fig 5.9) – even the colour within the picture conjures up sepia stained pictures from a bygone era. During her exploration of these images she revealed that she often got up in the middle of the night to look out of her window to find out “where the moon is”, and at the same time observed how many other people around her had their lights on at that time of night. She imagined life going on around her, picturing the lived experiences behind all of the lit, and unlit, windows. Her search for direction was rewarded as she shared her photographs, by listening to others and comparing herself to others, she appeared to be seeking guidance to assist her on the path of finding her true self.

The observational data also noted dichotomies and fragmentation for other participants and, for the majority, these decisions presented a number of options. Violet explored the pressure she was receiving from an ex-husband to care for him now that he had been diagnosed with cancer, yet she knew if she took on this role it would be for his benefit alone; she would be returning to a life of servitude which she no longer wished for. Kay was in recovery from substance use issues and she presented her choices as two stark options – continue recovering, or face institutionalisation.

Margaret, who was also in recovery, was more ponderous in her choices, but her recovery was physical and mental as she came to terms with the loss of abilities due to a recent stroke. During the

exercise entitled “How I see myself, how others see me” the observations noted that Margaret had photographed a poster which had four little diagrams behind a larger “?”. She said that this represented her as she feels she hides behind things quite a lot and she also likes to question herself, which the group felt was a common thing, but Margaret seemed to see this as a negative for herself. She said she liked to stay behind things, like “hiding in the background”.

Margaret appeared to have been an independent person prior to her stroke, but the sudden change brought on by the condition had meant she had to accept help from others, including paid carers. She was attending support groups which she was able to explore with the group (see image 5.10 below), but she recognised that she was comfortable in the homogenous makeup of the support groups she attended, finding roles which involved making teas, coffees and lunches so that she could fit in (see image 5.11 below) and have others depend on her. As a consequence, she was no longer asserting her individuality and she often captured images which further explored her new identity as part of a bigger group (see image 5.12 below).



Fig 5.10 – Margaret posed with a support group



Fig 5.11 – Margaret photographed her lunch preparation for the group



Fig 5.12 – Margaret posed with friends

All three images demonstrate this aspect of Margaret’s exploration. In fig 5.10 she has asked someone to photograph her with other members of her stroke recovery group and sits at the edge of the collective, one leg outstretched from the image as if she is hovering between joining and running. In fig 5.11 she focuses on her role within the group - that of provider, cooking lunch so that she can be further accepted into the collective. In fig 5.12 she is out with friends, but again she conveys unity and safety in numbers. She does not confidently embrace the others like the central person - similar to the larger group image she is on the edge, looking slightly uncomfortable with her arms behind her back and a slight smile. The images suggest she is familiar with her role as a group member, but not yet comfortable with it.

For her, the dichotomy was to continue within the safety and inclusivity of groups, or to work towards an independent life again. She realised this in her own narrative and began to consider life beyond support groups and talking about what she would do as her abilities returned.

b. Reaching for the Ideal

In the previous sub-ordinate theme, the concept of exploring different routes, or paths, of identity was highlighted, predominantly through the results relating to Caroline. The subsequent sub-themes of “reaching the ideal” and “fear of freedom” largely arose from observations and the images used, rather than the information from the focus groups and explore the two main factors which impacted on the process of searching for the new identity.

The first of these sub-themes, “reaching for the ideal”, relates to an internal driver which appeared to put added pressure on the participants to be the epitome of perfection in their search for their identity.

Within the focus group, Caroline reflected on her interaction with the group and made the following statement:

Caroline - “I can see all your good qualities, all of you, all separately and together, you’ve all got fantastic qualities, and I can see that”

Her choice of words placed a focus on the perception of others and she appraised the individuals within the group, as well as her perception of the group as a whole. Caroline was positive in her assessment, stating that she could see the “good” and “fantastic qualities”, an assessment which she has arrived at after listening to the narratives and viewing the photographs over the past six weeks. However, in arriving at her conclusion she must also have wondered if she was part of the collective which she has deemed to be “fantastic” and this was a quality she would like to be able to project, and indeed internalise and own. The language Caroline used was powerful and idealised, yet overly optimistic in that nobody can be “fantastic” all of the time and there has to be balance. It appeared as though she was placing herself and others on a pedestal where greatness had to be achieved and maintained at all times.

Caroline appeared to consider her projected image from the outset and seemed to be preoccupied with how she was perceived by others. She chose an image of Emily Pankhurst (fig 5.13) in the initial postcard selection exercise and explained it had appeal because there was a sense of strength in the image and Caroline stated she “wants to be like that” and “project confidence”, for people to look at her and see a strong woman.



Fig 5.13 – Caroline photographed a postcard to represent confidence

Her chosen image did convey confidence and pride as the photograph of Emily exuded an air of wisdom in a bygone era, an era which may have been familiar to Caroline as she grew up (fig 5.13). As a retired teacher, Caroline was drawn to the authoritative aura and the eyewear in Emily's hand gave a sense that she was well educated and professional. Without knowing the group, Caroline had assumed that people viewed her as weak because she stated that she "wants to be like that". The idea that she can "project confidence" suggested that she did not really need to feel confident, just give an air of being confident. In the final week, during her exploration of "safety", Caroline produced the following image:

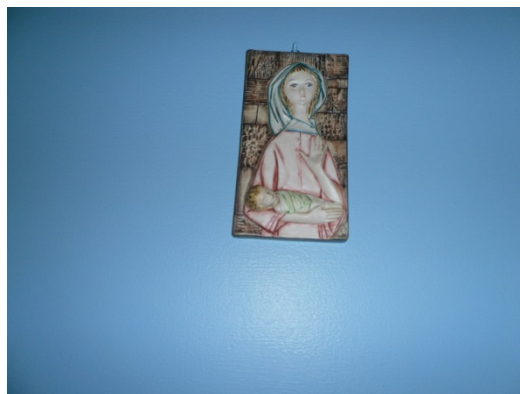


Fig 5.14 – Caroline photographed an icon which her mother had owned

Strength of character was an important quality for Caroline and she used the iconography of the Virgin Mary to represent this (fig 5.14). She also spoke about the link to her own mother who she had considered to be strong in character. The icon had followed Caroline's mother from her home,

to the nursing home, and now hung in Caroline's home, a reminder of past journeys and what she should aim to be. However, this compounded her feelings of guilt and consequent anxiety – in exploring the icon she revealed an internal struggle which meant she was not able to obtain this idealised image of strength she so desperately wanted to harness. The image of the icon is set against a perfect blue background, like a cloudless sky, and the young image of Mary holding the infant Jesus sits powerfully against this backdrop. The eye contact is absent, and the positioning of the image within the frame of the photograph projected an object of great value, placed high up, almost out of reach. The icon appeared to be placed on a pedestal where Caroline could work towards attainment, but set against the context of her losses, this proved to be almost unachievable. The loss of her role as a teacher, and her consequent mental health problems were being internalised by her as a weakness, thus creating inner conflict as she strove for the idealised image of who she should be, but could not find the resources to realise that.

Kay also looked at various aspects of her idealised self, including how she attempted to create the perfect home environment so she could be the best mother to her children, a contrast to how she may have been in the past towards them due to her mental health issues and substance use. This was remarked upon when she produced an image of her Christmas tree:



Fig 5.15 – Kay photographed her Christmas tree to represent order and perfection

The picture was clearly posed as the chair had been moved in front of a door (fig 5.15). It appears to portray an ideal Christmas scene with the perfectly decorated tree, and the immaculately arranged presents, alongside a chair to relax and enjoy the ambiance. Yet this is not maintainable and the scene will have to change - the chair moved back into place to allow access through the door, the presents moved so the floor can be cleaned, and eventually the tree and decorations will be packed away once the season is over. With this image, Kay projected an air of perfection, but behind this there is an uncomfortable sense of temporalness. She appeared to be stating to the group that behind the façade of the projected ideal, there were signs of being unable to maintain this. It was as

if what was being projected was expected of her, but this could not be long term and she had to revert to a state wherein she was able to relax the pretences and allow herself to be natural, rather than structured and ordered. However, there was also a sense of being in control; the way the room was arranged and the presents bagged are all down to the control she exercised, but her control appeared fleeting in the context of Christmas where the presents would eventually be distributed and the space this occupied became empty again.

The observations noted that Caroline and Kay were not alone in striving for the ideal and some of the other participants identified this in their images too. Michael shared a photograph of his two children, twin girls, which he carried in his wallet and explored his role as the “perfect” father, despite not having access to his children and not having seen them for three years. He strived for continuity and normality in terms of his relationship with his children, yet did not yet have the resources to fulfil this role. This appeared to link to his exploration of projecting an external image to suggest to others that things were going well, but how that could hide internal feelings. In objectifying ideals, the group sometimes used this as an opportunity to explore general aims, but there was also identification that ideals could not be maintained indefinitely, and the group appeared to recognise this in their exploration.

c. Fear of Freedom

Alongside the effort to strive for perfection (as explored in the previous sub-ordinate theme), the images and observations also highlighted a “fear of freedom” which surrounded the participants. Like the previous sub-theme, this was not immediately evident from the focus group transcripts, but manifested largely from the photographs and observational data. By exposing the self and associated projections, opportunity was created to re-assess routines and strategies, thus realising a sense of freedom. The participants appeared to realise potential that change gave, but approached this with suspicion and fear.

Within the focus group, Kay explored strategies she employed to maintain good mental health:

Kay - “Yeah, because I think if you...if you can kind of, sort of, like, recognise in advance the sort of triggers that might set you off on sort of a downward spiral then it might, you know, you might actually be able to do something, you know, like, like distract yourself from it, like maybe, you know, like keep yourself busy or go and do something”

Kay appeared to find the explanation challenging and struggled to find the right words to use, but she has used her photographs to identify triggers to her “downward spiral”, a journey she finds

difficulty returning from and one which perpetuates unhappiness. The constant use of “you” in her quote suggests a dialogue she is having with herself, as if her current self is giving advice to her former self. Kay recognised hope in her strategy, one which she can divert the downward spiral by occupying her thoughts and keeping busy so as to “distract” herself. However, this comes at a price, and if she is constantly busy then she has no time to reflect, no time to recharge, and may ultimately face burnout. Her strategy suggests denial, but also a fear of the unknown. If she allowed herself time to reflect she may identify new directions she could develop in, but in exploring this freedom she also risks letting her defences down and progressing on her downward spiral again.

This was an issue Kay returned to in her photographs. In the exercise entitled “How I see myself, how others see me” she had photographed a bee on a flower to represent how people view her. There was recognition that other people see her as busy, but that she also keeps herself busy to distract her mind. She went on to photograph a poster of a question mark “?” to represent how she views herself. There was reluctance to focus on opportunities that were presented to her following recent events, but she stated that she liked to listen to others and learn from their issues as it helped put hers into perspective, often minimising them, and this was how she believed she created opportunities to learn.

Caroline also conveyed a sense that she had to keep busy and find purpose in her day to day life which appeared to be a technique employed to prevent her from pondering opportunities. She spoke about various projects she was engaged in, referring to her garden in one of her images:



Fig 5.16 – Caroline photographed her back garden

Caroline conveyed a sense of preoccupation, of engaging in projects but never completing them, and this related to her previous statements with regard listening to others, looking in all directions apart

from inwards, and about searching for something she has not yet found. Her garden appeared to be a source of experimentation, a space for her to try out new ideas, but also a graveyard for the abandoned ones before they reached fruition (fig 5.16). She recognised that it was cluttered as she explored the image, but stated “it’s mine!” in a forceful manner. The contained space gave her some safety to explore her freedom as she searched for a talent or skill to give her added purpose. However, it is also a hidden space, overlooked by one small window and kept in the shadows of everything surrounding the garden. She was not ready to test these new ideas out in front of others.

The observations also captured examples of freedom, and the fear that often accompanied this. Margaret boasted of her freedom when exploring her relationship with her TV. She stated she could watch TV at any time of the day or night to please herself, then told the group she would “be sitting up till 3am tomorrow, watching TV”, but then another participant pointed out that this was because Margaret loved watching the Grand Prix, to which Margaret laughed in acknowledgement. Margaret had tried to convey a sense of living without boundaries and embracing the freedom this gave her, yet on further inspection there was a schedule which dictated her freedom. Margaret enjoyed the idea of freedom, but she also needed routine to give her life structure. She laughed because she knew she was trying to deceive the other participants in conveying a carefree, unstructured life, but she was caught in her own lie. Margaret was also ensconced in attending support groups and this shielded her from exploring her individuality. She had become a valuable member of these groups she attended and took on roles within these to serve a purpose within the larger community. In a sense, her freedom was choreographed in that she had to adhere to the timescales of others (see fig. 5.10 earlier in this chapter).

For Caroline, freedom would come in the form of finding a new purpose, pastime, or hobby; Kay would find freedom in reflection and breaking the cycle of her addiction; whilst Margaret would find freedom in asserting her individuality and escaping from the group think. However, the fear of freedom also provided routine, familiarity and relative safety.

Where the first super-ordinate theme of “exposing the self” identified a process which engaged the participants in an analytic process, focussing the mind to ask the question “who am I?” the second super-ordinate theme of “searching” appeared to pose the question “who do I want to be?” This involved looking at choices, as explored in “dichotomy and fragmentation”, considering idealised perceptions, and also becoming aware of limitations and concerns, as explored in “fear of freedom”. Once participants had spent time in these stages, the process of identity re-formation appeared to begin, and this became evident within the third of the super-ordinate themes, “developing the self”.

5.2.3 Developing the Self

The act of identifying (or exposing) issues led to searching and identifying dichotomies in the trajectory of the identity, as explored in the first two super-ordinate themes. The end process appeared to involve an exploration of how to obtain, or at least work towards, self-acceptance; hence this super-ordinate theme is called “developing the self”. It would be a stretch to identify a transformation from confused identity to clear identity in all of the participants, but the process did appear to facilitate some form of clarification for the majority. Through analysis of the data, three sub-ordinate themes arose which suggested how this clarification transpired. The first sub-ordinate theme identified “social comparisons” wherein the participants would learn from one another by comparing their situations and developing strategies for coping with some of the situations they had to deal with. The second sub-ordinate theme recognised the layered exploration of the participants, where they controlled the depth of detail they offered once issues had been identified and objectified. Because of the objectification of issues, the third sub-ordinate theme is entitled “forced to confront” because once the issue had been externalised in an image, it appeared easier to talk about and deal with.

a. Social Comparisons

The aspect of social comparison emerged from the focus group transcript. Although it appeared to apply to all of the participants, it was within the quotes from Violet and Florence where the sub-ordinate theme was largely evidenced. As the project was conducted in a group setting, there was ample opportunity to listen to other narratives whilst viewing images. What this provided was exposure to the coping mechanisms of fellow participants, as well as advice and strategies for dealing with adverse situations. In the focus group the participants were asked if they felt in control of the information they were sharing:

Violet – “Ehm...Yeah, I think I did, you know, it was personal to me, and I think you get worried, don't you, about what somebody else might think or say about your photographs or whatever, and I think that's what I was...I think something that...I'm like that, there's always something at the back of my mind saying, you know, what will that person think, and I think it's just been a good learning curve, it doesn't really matter.”

In Violet's response she is not convinced at the beginning that she was entirely in control because she stated “...I think I did...”, but the more she participated in the exercises, the more she established a pattern of engaging with her own images and then assessing feedback. Perhaps the photograph encouraged her to share more information than she thought she might and this

“worried” her initially. She identified that this worry stemmed from the personal nature of her exploration, and her quote suggested that she was in the limelight, placed on a stage for all to see, and her self-doubt always meant she questioned her rationale for engagement, and what the benefit might be. In the group environment she was sharing her vulnerabilities with others and gauging reactions to inform her on levels of acceptance of the group, but as time went on she was able to recognise that others were doing the same, sharing their own issues, comparing issues and strategies. The photograph acted as an extension of the self in that issues were objectified in the image, then a narrative added a further level of exploration, and this left her open to judgement, but also the choice in what she photographed and said provided protection too.

Within the group environment there was encouragement and interest and Violet comes to the realisation that she cannot control others – everyone was dealing with their own issues and there was solidarity and comfort in this realisation, the fact she was not alone in this world in dealing with challenges gave her reassurance, though not in a selfish way, more in an inclusive way. This gave her strength to address her own issues without becoming preoccupied by concerns over what others might think of her. Within this, she also benefitted from the narratives of the other participants and was able to compare herself against some of them.

It may be that social comparisons prevent deeper exploration in that a person becomes overly concerned with how others see them, but Florence identified how exposure to the stories and images of others allowed her to progress on to become more reflective and self-analytical. In her feedback she made reference to an exercise where participants were encouraged to abstractly represent six emotions by exploring the environment in a local tropical glasshouse called Duthie Park and explains why she felt this was her favourite task:

Florence – “I think at the Duthie Park one, because it was quite a challenge to pick one for each emotion, you know, it did open your eyes more to yourself, you know, had you thinking more, concentrating on you which is a thing I am not used to doing because I’d rather concentrate on everybody else, but concentrating on yourself is...you know...but it’s not as scary as I thought it would be.”

There was a sense that she had given herself permission to focus on herself, but at the same time she incorporated the learning she obtained from the others. Through her statement “I am not used to doing...” it appeared that she had spent a large part of her life being concerned about what other people think about her, therefore to be in an environment with other people who she could identify with gives her comfort, but also gave her safety to move past this level of analysis to think in more depth about the person she is. She likened this to “open(ing) your eyes”, the visual nature of each exercise forced an exploration of the environment around her and she appeared to internalise this

ability and use this skill to aid the process of “thinking” and “concentrating” about who she is, which had been easier than she expected.

Florence returned to social comparisons in two more quotes:

Florence – “I think one of the things was, I mean I love photography in itself, you know, but sharing it with, you know, our friends, is even more powerful and you learn more about yourself too.”

Florence – “Definitely, to learn more about each other, and ourselves (Margaret – ourselves) yeah, to look more closely at ourselves without being scared of it, you know, what makes us tick.”

In the first quote she identified a factor which assisted her exploration – her “love” of photography, but she does not clarify this in terms of whether it is taking photographs, viewing photographs, or both. There appeared to be a natural assumption that a photograph is for “sharing”, and it may be that the social norm of taking and showing photographs within the culture she was raised in automatically invited the sharing of information alongside the image – observations recorded the way in which the image was shared in that body language meant that eye contact was on the photograph, the posture of the viewer leaned into the narrator to view the image, and both of these factors appeared to enhance the flow of communication. Florence hesitated (using the phrase “you know”) before calling the other participants her “friends”, but did this to acknowledge the “power” of the medium in creating new, stronger bonds between people which assisted learning – information they shared helped her understand who she was. This is also enhanced within her second quote where she reflected on the ability to “look more closely at ourselves without being scared of it...what makes us tick”. There may have been similarities, but there were also clear differences, and the more the similarities were identified, the easier it was to reflect on the differences.

Social comparison is important because there is learning to be had about roles, values and expectations, and Cooley (1902) recognised this when he wrote about the *looking glass self* – the perceptions of how we believe others see us will define identity – using reactions of others as a mirror, allowing us to adapt to fit in. However, both Florence and Violet have used the exercises to move beyond this and began to look at motivation and drive, more akin to self-concept than role definition.

b. Layers of Exploration

In the previous sub-ordinate theme, the participants used the experience to learn from each other, whilst also comparing themselves against each other. Moving beyond social comparisons into deeper reflection suggests layers of exploration in the process for participants and this did appear to be apparent in how the exercises progressed and the detail of the narrative associated with images, hence the title for this sub-ordinate theme. When asked to choose a theme for the final photovoice task which they could all explore, the participants chose to look at “safety”, but more specifically asking themselves about their “safe space” – what was it, and what threatened it? Within discussions, they had already established that external presentation was important to provide a defence for the inner identity in that if things looked good on the outside, people would assume that things were also good on the inside. Therefore, for the group to collectively decide to investigate this further meant that they would be allowing others to see inside their safe spaces, thus potentially exposing further internal vulnerabilities. How the participants appeared to deal with this was to layer exploration of their safe space by starting with images of possessions which had sentimental value and meaning, then move on to explore relationships which gave them safety, before looking at the threats to safety which included vulnerabilities. Within the focus group, Florence reflected on the technique of layering her exploration

Florence – “Well yeah. More in control of how things are to make it safe for me, you know, and stop worrying too much about what other people think all the time, you know, just to make myself feel safe and happy.”

Florence recognised the aspect of “control” within her quote. She decided what was going to be photographed, who she was going to show that photograph to, what she would say about the photograph, and how much detail she would offer. When broken down into the various stages of exploration and narration, the layers of control and safety emerge and she realised that the way in which she was investigating her issues and identity was a “safe” method for her. As a result, she reduced her anxiety with regards to the opinion of others, but this was not eliminated entirely as she acknowledged she would only stop worrying “too much”. She linked this realisation to her own safety and emotional wellbeing – reducing the preoccupation with the opinion of others leads to a better outcome for her welfare.

To further illustrate this process, three images from Kay’s exploration are presented:



Fig 5.17 – Kay photographed her bookshelf

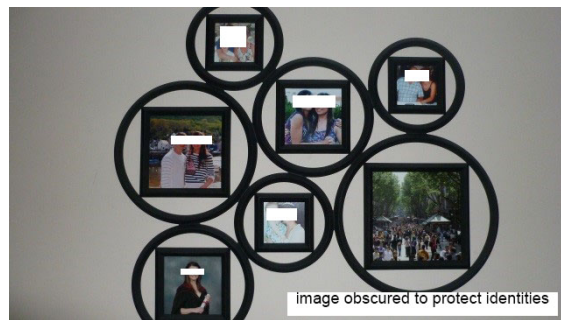


Fig 5.18 – Kay photographed family images



Fig 5.19 – Kay photographed her “black dog”

In Kay's first image, the books represent possessions (see fig 5.17), illustrating a pastime she is passionate about, and a source of strength for her. By presenting her reading choices she allowed people to gain a sense of her character. The books demonstrate an eclectic mix of reading material, but the very first two books on the top shelf relate to personal issues she has had – "Beat the Booze", and "Codependency". Having these on display appeared to be a powerful statement to those she allowed into her safe space, exposing her issues for all to see. She then moved on to include her family and used a photograph of photographs (see fig 5.18), highlighting the cultural significance of the family image as a public relations exercise for showing unity, interaction and cohesiveness of identity (Martin, 2009; Ulkuniemi, 2007). Like many family photographs put out on display, the images portrayed good times, the success of a graduation, and family holidays – the positive moments of the family cycle. She then included a photograph of a dog (see fig 5.19). The assumption from the group was that this was her pet, but she explained that this represented a book called "I Had a Black Dog" by Matthew Johnstone which used Winston Churchill's analogy for depression (Black Dog) to explore the impact of her condition. Even the manner in which she had captured the image suggested the oppressive and heavy nature of depression – the dog avoids looking at the camera, the image is framed in a manner that the dog is viewed from above, as if it is not worthy of being placed on an equal level, and the stark nature of the brick wall adds to the feeling of being somewhere without any redeeming qualities. In presenting her images in this manner, Kay moved beyond the out-facing presentation she surrounded herself with, to an analysis of internalised issues and how she might deal with them. Compared to the early stages of the group, participants were now using photographs to openly explore the true self, demonstrating personal growth and a growing knowledge about their selves.

This staged level of exploration also emerged within the participant observations and appeared to be replicated across all of the images which explored the safe space. Florence looked at possessions within her home and considered how instrumental her past had been on shaping who she was, even including a picture on her wall of a lioness which she explained her children had given her, suggesting identification for her with the animal in providing protection for the family. Then she explored groups she was involved in and significant people within those, and she ended with an exploration of self-expression and spoke about not being constrained by others who had tried to belittle her throughout her life. Similarly, both Caroline and Margaret culminated their explorations by looking at self-imposed isolation, whilst Violet looked at how she could move from a non-confrontational position to gaining the ability to challenge others in order to improve her

circumstances, specifically around housing issues. By exploring each layer, getting to the core of the issue was simplified which was aided by listening to the voices of others, a sense of collective awareness, and perhaps empowerment, but there were also times when confrontation with the self could have resulted in withdrawing from the process, as the final sub-ordinate theme of “forced to confront” moves on to explore.

c. Forced to Confront

The layers of exploration within the previous sub-ordinate theme resulted in the objectification of a large number of issues and themes. Objectifying issues in a photograph meant that they had been externalised and could be held, literally, at arm’s length to be explored. For some, this was an experience which provided a layer of safety between them and the issue, whilst for others, the confrontation of issues placed participants into a situation where they were initially uncomfortable, specifically Caroline.

Despite Caroline’s misgivings from the outset about participating and sharing with others she explored what it was that kept her returning:

Caroline – “Therapeutic can mean a walk, you know, nobody needs to share anything or whatever, and I thought it was in the sense “I’ll be able to take a photograph, which I can’t do at the moment”, but it’s been very, very challenging at the beginning and very...comforting...and, I dunno, there’s a feeling of solidarity really, so I’ve been really enjoyed it.”

It appeared that curiosity drew her in at the beginning, believing she was going to learn a new skill, despite having the concept of the programme explained to her by the manager of the service, as well as the facilitator. Her approach aligned with what she had already revealed about her ongoing projects at home – searching for something new to be good at, to underpin an identity she sought. She found that she did learn how to use a camera and produced photographs that were interesting and worthy of exploration by herself and others. However, she was angry with herself for seemingly being tricked into participation, fearing she had been pushed into a situation where she had to think about change and the unsettling emotions which arose from this, but then she appeared to come to a sudden realisation that she has actually found the experience to be a positive one, “comforting” and enjoyable. Her choice of words suggest relief, warmth and safety, as if the act of being comforted has taken her back to the familiarity of being surrounded by people who care, who are interested, and who can help her to help herself. The confrontation has been explored with others, and where she might have entered the experience feeling that she is the only one dealing with

issues, she learned that others are also dealing with issues, and there was “solidarity” in this realisation. She finishes by mixing her tenses (“so I’ve been really enjoyed it”), suggesting that she was still experiencing the positives from the experience, but realised she had to place the tasks into the past and move forward with the knowledge she had gained. She offered a further insight in another quote:

Caroline: “It’s just, I don’t know, I think maybe if you acknowledge something it becomes easier to deal with.”

The photographs had provided her with moments of discovery. It had been a complex experience for her and she had not always found it easy. She was confused about why she kept returning, but there was an awareness that she had to “acknowledge” and accept aspects of her life, bring them into the consciousness of her mind, and recognise that they were impacting on her wellbeing. She still used words which suggested she is not entirely clear about the process (“I don’t know”, “maybe”), but confrontation had been “easier” and she appeared to feel a benefit.

Florence also explored the confrontation of her own weaknesses in the focus group interview:

Florence – “I think too that it also takes a burden off your shoulders, you know, to a certain extent. You’ve been carrying all this inside you for so long, but then you are openly sharing this, and it’s like opening the floodgates, you know, it’s just out there now, you know, it’s no longer your problem as such, it’s a shared thing, so it is...you know...you are not as scared of it anymore because you...like... “this is such and such, makes me feel that way”, so you recognise it now so it gives you a bit of comfort knowing what your weaknesses are, and what your strengths are.”

With the images, Florence was able to objectify some of the issues she experienced, whilst analysing her perception of the self. She referred to “carrying all this inside you for so long”, as if she had been burdened by her emotions for years, unable to release the associated feelings. For her, this had been a heavy load, and because it had been “inside”, there had been no physical signs that people could have picked up on. However, within the group, she had been able to explore within a place of safety, the result of which was an “opening (of) the floodgates”, allowing the stored emotions and feelings to come pouring out – a release of internal pressure. She likened herself to a dam, holding everything in place because she felt this was her role, but now realised that she did not need to do this. She had confronted her issues, shared them, and learned from others that similar experiences could be overcome. Objectifying these in a photograph gave her “comfort” that she had identified weaknesses, but she also found strength because she recognised strategies from the “shared” narratives. Once identified, her weaknesses could be dealt with.

The act of self-confrontation also emerged within the participant observations and participants appeared to be using their new found information about social comparisons to assess how much

information to share, and when. Week three appeared to be the point at which the participants were making significant self-disclosures. Margaret chose this week to explain that she had recently experienced a change in physical health due to a stroke, Kay revealed her battle with alcohol and referred to herself as an “alcoholic”, whilst Violet also spoke about a medical condition she suffered from called Dysplasia, also giving detail of her contact with professional psychiatrists. Violet was also able to pinpoint the moment in which she began to find her relationship with her self becoming uncomfortable, as noted in the observations when she explained to the group that she had not been scared by the thought of self-portraits until she had children, experienced post-natal depression, put on weight, and after this she did not like looking at her own image. Her statement revealed a shift in perspective wherein the image she was presented with no longer fitted the societal expectation of what a woman should look like. Compounded by poor mental health, she found it challenging to look at herself and her self-esteem deteriorated. All of the participants admitted to not enjoying seeing themselves within their images and this could also equate to poor self-esteem, an issue that appeared to become easier to address when participants engaged in the self-portrait exercise where they had control over what, and how, to photograph a positive characteristic of themselves.

Florence also considered her relationship with her own image. She did not produce a photograph for the self-portrait exercise, stating that she had been experiencing issues with a relationship breakdown and consequent housing issues during the week. She was asked what she might have photographed and she stated that she would have photographed her children, as she viewed them as the most positive aspect of her self. However, she went on to state that the reason she did not like looking at her own image in photographs was because she did not recognise herself – she saw an old woman with mobility issues, but inside she still felt like a young woman with all of her abilities. Having to look at her own image meant that she had to face up to her ageing and her physical deterioration. Despite this remark, Florence included a self-portrait in her final exercise exploring safe spaces and said she felt like taking it and being “a bit daft” (see fig. 5.6 earlier in this chapter). She had moved from avoiding her image, to confronting it head on, and feeling safe to do so.

Ageing was an issue that arose on a number of occasions with regards to personal fears. John, who attended the first two sessions, and Kay, both took photographs to objectify this fear and linked this to becoming “insignificant and ignored”.



Fig 5.20 – John photographed a park bench to represent “fear”

John photographed a park bench with a plaque on it to symbolise ageing and death (fig 5.20). The simplicity of the plaque against the intricacies of the rot iron design is stark, and the white writing stands out against the black background. John conveyed a fear of being forgotten, of being reduced to a few letters on a memorial, for people to cast a fleeting glance on and continue with their lives.

Perhaps this was compounded by already having a mental health problem and finding it challenging to integrate into society, one which appeared to be shunning the needs of the ageing population. Margaret also used the experience to consider how she was coming to terms with her physical illness following her stroke. The infallibility of the body appeared to be inescapable within the explored narratives, yet the milieu appeared to foster these conversations, creating an environment where confronting fears sat alongside peer support and understanding.

The super-ordinate theme of “developing the self” acknowledges the impact on the self of learning within a group environment so that strategies can be explored, and comparisons made. This was also set within the context of using photographs to externalise and objectify issues so they could be explored in a manner which provided layers of safety and control for each participant. As a result, participants were confronting issues in their visual form, bypassing any possible previous tendency to deny the existence of the issue as there had been a decision on the part of each participant to give it a visual form. Once in a visual form, it was there for all to see, explore and exorcise.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

The first three super-ordinate themes have investigated the exploration of self-identity from internalised perspectives. In essence, theme one asked “who am I?”; theme two asked “who do I want to be?”; and theme three asked “how can I be me?”. From the analysis of the data there would appear to be a dynamic at play which facilitates participants to explore the false self and work towards the emerging true self (Winnicott, 1965). The use of photographs within the group space also allowed issues to be objectified and investigated, giving opportunities for participants to contribute to each other’s knowledge in terms of coping strategies and previous experience. In turn, this brought the group closer together, facilitating a safe space in which to further explore issues, but also a safe space to test out new ideas and identities.

The following chapter explores three further super-ordinate themes, still acknowledging identity formation, but incorporating external influences. It also explores the impact of family, professionals, and society on each participant and their perceptions of the self.

Chapter 6 – Therapeutic Photography with a Mental Health Support Group (Part 2) – External Influencers on Identity

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the intrinsic nature of identity formation. This chapter now moves on to focus on external forces and the role of influential others. Theme one, “Family relations” explores the impact of upbringing and responsibility. “Medicalised label”, the second of the super-ordinate themes, explores the impact of professionals on the behaviour of the participants, whilst the third and final theme, “Isolation” explores the impact of societal views on individual actions. Fig. 6.1 summarises the sub-ordinate themes which arose within each super-ordinate theme, and this chapter then goes on to explore these in more detail.

SUPER-ORDINATE THEMES	SUB-ORDINATE THEMES
Family relations	Upbringing Responsibility Rebellion
Medicalised label	Professional respect Rebellion Relating to society
Isolation	Self-imposed Enforced Relating to society

Fig. 6.1 – Super-ordinate themes, and related sub-ordinate themes.

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Family relations

Within explorations of identity, family featured significantly with every participant. There were three main strands to the exploration which began by using images to illustrate upbringing, then, as the exercises progressed, some participants used the experience to look at how they had parented their own children. The final strand of exploration was linked to rebelling against what had been, and what was, expected of them by their family. The theme of rebellion also occurred in another super-ordinate theme when examining relationships with professionals which is explored later within this chapter.

a. Upbringing

Perhaps unsurprisingly, family featured prominently within the participants' narratives and images. The exercises were based around Bronfenbrenner's (2009; 1992; 1986) socio-ecological model which recognises the importance of family on the microsystem and although family was mentioned in the focus group interviews, it was an area which was explored in more depth through the photographs and observations. Within these memories, there were opportunities for the participants to reminisce, explore cultural and societal norms, and reflect on the influence parenting had had on them.

Within the focus group, Violet reflected on the use of her photographs to reminisce about her family:

Violet: "You know, you are looking back to where your safe place was, and a lot of it was when you were younger, when you were little."

The use of language in Violet's quote was set in the past tense – she was "looking back" at where her "safe place was", revealing that, at present, there may be no safe space for her. Her photographs allowed her to safely visit the past and recall memories which created a sense of security for her as she dealt with the reality of her current situation. There are exceptions within her memories as she stated "a lot of" her safety was when she was younger, specifically when she was a child, and had no worries or concerns because other people protected her, cushioned from the harshness and reality of life which she now experienced. There is an assumption that this was the same for everyone, as if a safe and secure childhood was a given for all (which was not the case). This was valuable learning

for Violet and it may have been that she had not realised that she relied so heavily on these memories to give her support during problematic times, but once she had visualised them it became more evident to her.

Violet went on to use her photographs in an exercise entitled “a day in the life of...” to explore these family memories of safety and warmth. She used images of baking a cake to recall links to her family, as noted in her photograph:



Fig. 6.2 – Violet photographed the process of baking

When showing her photograph (fig 6.2), Violet recounted memories of her mother and grandmother teaching her to bake and stated that it “brought back memories of being loved by them”. Violet used the photograph to illustrate the process she was engaged in, exploring the task of baking and how it allowed her to become immersed in memories of family. The matriarchs of her family were now deceased and she was the dominant female in her family, yet the task of baking took her back to childhood and appeared to provide emotional protection, reminiscing about memories, feelings and emotions she experienced when being taught how to bake by the generations before her. The image portrayed preparation, each ingredient carefully measured as if she was a participant on a cooking programme, but perhaps more akin to her mother and grandmother creating a sense of ease to the process when teaching a child to bake. By placing the concept of “being loved” in the past tense we also get insight into her current loneliness, something she does not feel she has control of. Producing edible delicacies for her family is something she can control, so she used this experience to give her purpose, but also to wrap herself in the memory of an environment where she was cared for and protected whilst being nurtured.

The very first interaction in the project also related to family upbringing and came from Anna, a participant who eventually withdrew due to family pressures herself. The postcards had been laid out for the first exercise and as the participants were getting settled around the table she selected an image depicting a scene from gardens in the centre of a local city. In the picture, men were playing draughts on an oversized outdoor board in the middle of the gardens.



Fig 6.3 – Anna photographed a postcard which reminded her of adoption

The observations noted Anna's reasoning for choosing the image (fig 6.3). She explained that she remembered visiting some ceilidh classes before being taken to Union Terrace Gardens to watch people play draughts as a very young child. She went on to state that this was around about the time that she and her sister were adopted and she connects memories of Union Terrace Gardens with her memories of early adoption.

In Anna's narrative she revealed roots into Scottish culture through the reference to ceilidh dancing classes, but more prominently, recalled a time of significant change in her upbringing. She did not offer further explanation at this stage and questions remain about why the adoption took place, as well as whether her sister and her were accommodated together, not to mention the possibility of other siblings. The facilitator noted that it was not clear whether these were positive memories Anna was recalling, and that there had been opportunities at this point for further exploration, but that a group environment (particularly on day 1 of the programme) was not the most appropriate setting to do this. It was also noted that this was a significantly rich revelation in terms of detail, and that this might raise expectations about the level of information other participants would be expected to share.

The routine of family life when growing up was also explored, often by including photographs which captured objects and possessions with sentimental value, and other times by photographing

landmarks or items which were reminders of childhood. The observations noted a discussion about routines during the “day in the life of...” exercise where Caroline was exploring the impact her family had had on her routine.

Caroline - “I thought my working life was giving to people but I was useless when I stopped working, so I don’t really see it as doing it outside a working environment, I was paid to do it and I got on and jolly well did it, if you see what I mean?”

Caroline acknowledged that the routine she experienced when growing up continued into her career, but she described the memory as if she was simply going through the motions, doing what had been expected of her, and doing what had been instilled in her by her family. By stating “I was useless when I stopped working” Caroline recognised that routine had ended and this should have liberated her, but it had not. Instead it left her confused and lost, and this was compounded by the fact that she felt she was paid to “give” to people – her time, her interest, and her knowledge – and once the routine of work ended she struggled to continue to do this in her new role as it was something she believed she only did because she was paid to. Routine was important to Caroline and she said that she had learned this from work which was generational, passed down through family relationships. She went on to explore her beliefs and stated that learning occurred from parents as they establish routine in your life. Michael interrupted and he explained that most of his routine had been learned from being brought up in various care institutions, from the children’s home, from when he was in a young offenders centre, but also from his time in the merchant Navy, stating “routine has always been important to me and structured my day”.

Michael did not say this to shock; his statement was made with a sense of pride in the fact that he had learned routine, despite a lack of family input. In the statement he revealed considerable information about himself, but he also demonstrated that out of the seeming chaos of his childhood he had used the security of institutionalised settings to give him the abilities to learn order. Whereas the other participants identify the security of family, he does not deny the secure aspect, but acknowledged that he has had to source his from elsewhere.

The sub-ordinate theme of “upbringing” was a common theme that everyone could contribute to – all of the participants had a story to tell about their childhood. Most were positive experiences, but at times other stories emerged. During the first session, whilst talking about childhood memories of having photographs taken, Michael stated that he remembered a funny story when he had been forced to eat a can of cold baked beans by his parents because he had said that he did not like them, and they photographed his humiliation whilst he ate them. Michael could tell by the lack of laughter that this was not a humorous story, but in fact a form of abuse he had been subjected to. In his

recall, no photograph was used within a task to provoke the memory, simply his recollection with regards to having experienced being photographed in the past. The longevity of the image still allowed him to reflect on his upbringing, even if the photograph was not present.

b. Responsibility

As opposed to the exploration of upbringing within the first sub-ordinate theme, the second sub-ordinate theme of “responsibility” looked at the perspectives which developed from the expectations of being part of a family unit, as well as the changes and challenges of raising a young family. As with the previous sub-ordinate theme, this emerged largely from the photographs and participant observations.

Whilst exploring safety, Violet produced images she had taken of old family photographs. She explained that she had cried when she laid these out on the table to photograph them as they were a direct link to the past for her.



Fig. 6.4 – Violet photographed memories (part 1)

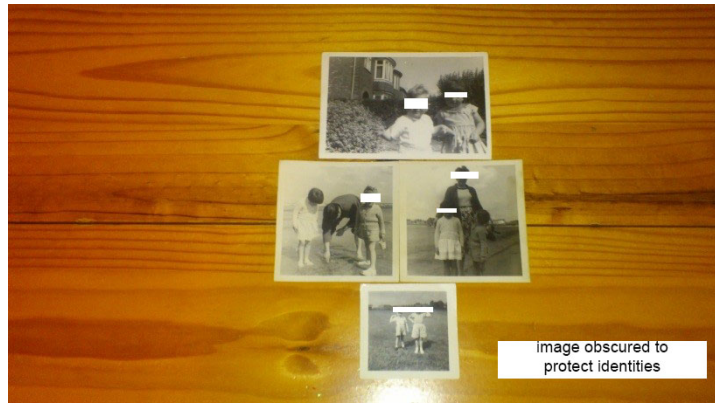


Fig. 6.5 – Violet photographed memories (part 2)



Fig. 6.6 – Violet photographed memories (part 3)



Fig 6.7 – Violet photographed memories (part 4)

Violet was able to go into great detail about the lives of the family members in each image (fig 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 & 6.7), recalling the tin bath they used every Sunday, her father learning a brass instrument, and the excitement she felt in 1964 when she was asked to be a bridesmaid. There was a sense of responsibility in her narrative, she was the keeper of all of these past stories and she had to share them and pass them on to her own children. The photographs became a vessel for her to do that and although she had cried, she described the tears as those of “happy emotions”. She had laid the photographs out in small groups, associating familiar family memories into small collections, the poses in each photograph reminiscent of the era they were taken in. The photographs are not in an album, suggesting she kept them in a box, all her memories collected together in one place. Within the images she identified good times, but also viewed them as a chronological document of her existence, ending her exploration by highlighting one image and explaining that it was taken in 1998 which she described as “the year the problems started”. There was a definite sense of comfort as she relived the past in the images which gave her escapism from her current situation of poor housing, fear of the landlord, and fluctuating mental health, but this was accompanied by a sense of duty and responsibility to continue the story of her own family. This was emphasised when she explored an impending visit from her grandchildren (in November) and how she was going to set up the Christmas tree and prepare Christmas dinner, so her grandchildren could have the experience that she remembered having when she was young.

The securities, or lack of, were reflected in how the participants dealt with issues as they became adults, parents, and carers for both children and ageing parents. Florence wore motherhood as a badge of honour, describing the experience in the very first session as being “the best job in the world” and later exploring gifts from her children (particularly the picture of the lioness) when pictorially representing safety in the final exercise.

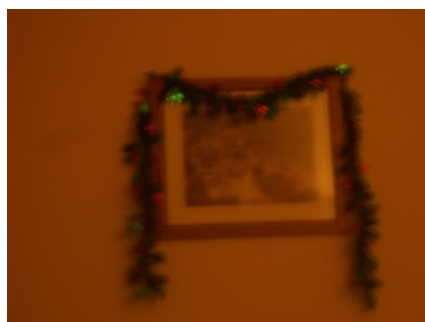


Fig. 6.8 – Florence photographed a picture of a lioness with a cub

Florence’s photograph was very poor quality but in the picture a lioness stares out as a cub embraces her round the neck as it perches on her back (fig 6.8). Florence used the image to portray

strength of character – she was like the lioness in the picture and she would protect her family at any cost. Being a mother, for Florence, confirmed her role within society. She had produced the next generation and has fulfilled her role to provide for them. There is an absence of a male figure within the picture, and this also echoed Florence’s life wherein she had learned to be self-sufficient for her family as her relationships had not ended well for her. Her house was sparsely decorated, yet the picture, a present from her children, took pride of place.

Florence reflects on her strength of character in the focus group:

Florence - “Since I was a young girl really when I first had my children I did not have much respect for myself, I didn’t look after myself, I was always looking after everybody else, you know, and I felt I wasn’t good enough to join in the company all the time and, you know, I had nothing to offer. But between all the Pillar groups and this one too I’ve learned so much, that I am worth a lot more than some of the people I have been with, you know, they are all...because they programmed me into thinking “what a horrible person I am, I am useless, etc.” you know, you know, “nobody will ever love me or want me”, but it’s not true, and this reinforces it because, you know, I’ve got a lot to offer, you know, as a friend, as a woman.”

Florence’s quote highlights the low self-esteem she experienced from an early age, yet the pride in her children dominates and she always puts their needs first. But underpinning this, she recognises there was self-neglect and a belief that she was second rate to all of those around her, feeling she had “nothing to offer”. She internalised the feedback she received from partners who “programmed” her like a robot whose aim it was to meet needs and accept a subservient place in society. As a result, she was always on the outside looking in, never good enough to join in. She reflected on having children at a young age and this might underpin limited life choices. She conveyed a sense that she automatically went through routines, accepting the emotional and psychological abuse that was inflicted on her, but shielding her children from this and trying to act as a buffer between them and the abusive relationships. She had used her photographs to assert her voice above the historic voices she experienced, learned about her positive qualities and realised that her matriarchal strengths helped her raise children she is proud of. By the end of her quote, she conveyed a sense of emerging from the experience feeling much stronger, like the lion in her image on her living room wall.

Kay also had offspring, two teenage children, and on two separate occasions she photographed women with small children to represent the emotion of love, as well as feelings of safety (it should also be noted that she asked permission to take these photographs, and also photographed them from behind so they could not be identified). Significantly, she focused on younger children for her representations, suggesting that the love she referred to was the feeling of unconditional love experienced between a parent and young children, before a child naturally begins to strive for

independence and has to reassess relationships with their parent. It may be that relationships became strained at the same time as her mental health deteriorated, and her substance use increased.

Added responsibility also encumbered the participants with loss, but this was explored through the photographs in a manner which appeared to be positive. Violet reflected on what she had enjoyed most about the experience during the focus group:

Violet – “I think sharing. Memories as well. Talking. I think that’s been the nicest.”

Loss was explored by all of the participants including the death of ageing family members. For Violet, it was the calendar month of November which brought back memories of her Dad dying; brought to the fore by a photograph she took of a park bench with a plaque on it as she felt it represented the emotion of sadness for her. Yet her quote revealed that sharing these memories with the other participants, and learning about their own experiences of loss, brought her comfort and gave her “permission” to talk about these memories. It was an area Violet went on to explore further in the focus group:

Violet – “But I think everybody gives in here.”

The images not only encouraged sharing within the group, but had served a purpose. Using photographs appeared to make issues such as loss and sadness more visible and easier to talk about. Violet identifies this as “giving”; a word which suggests the act of sharing was selfless and benefitted other participants. Through talking, the participants revealed similarities - John had also photographed a park bench to explore the same emotion of sadness, whilst Margaret photographed a purple flower and explained that her mother’s favourite colour had been purple, and this reminded her of the loss of her Mum.

Notably, within the photographs, reminders of responsibilities and loss appeared to be everywhere, and were different for all of the participants. The facilitator commented in his notes that the risk of exposing the participants to memories that would remind them of loss was something that was very difficult, if not impossible, to mitigate against given that loss was associated with so many different triggers, each one different for each participant. Indeed, it was perhaps the therapeutic milieu that brought the memories of loss to the fore, the photographs simply acting as a catalyst for this exploration to surface.

c. Rebellion

The sub-ordinate themes have so far identified the impact of upbringing, and the consequent responsibilities as participants got older. The third sub-ordinate theme highlighted a further issue - "rebellion". Within the exploration of family and their impact, there was an acknowledgement of rebellion against expectations. Some stories of rebellion were linked to developmental issues, testing boundaries within the teenage years, and gave insight into family norms. These manifested in all three areas of the focus group, the photographs, and the participant observations. Within the group, it was Caroline who offered the most insight into her upbringing as she engaged with the exercises. In the focus group, she reminisced about attitudes she experienced whilst growing up:

Caroline – "Maybe is it because...like I can see all your good qualities, all of you, all separately and together, you've all got fantastic qualities, and I can see that, but maybe because...it's something about, I don't know, your upbringing or whatever, "don't blow your own trumpet", don't. We were never ever encouraged to say, you know, you were good at anything, you were actively discouraged actually."

Through her statement "you were actively discouraged..." Caroline hints at punishment for highlighting strengths within the family. She does not elaborate, but there are suggestions of a punitive upbringing. Her quote reveals that the family did not want to draw attention to themselves, and that meant they established strict norms and ensured everyone abided by them. She notably referred to herself as "we" when she talked about not being encouraged; highlighting the struggle she still had in finding her individual identity as opposed to the homogenous family one. Caroline struggled to acknowledge her strengths because it had been ingrained in her that it was bad to do this, maybe even dangerous depending on the punishment. However, as she explored her rebellious side and listened to the narratives of others, she realised that she was safe to do so now, but perhaps the historic voices of her family were adding to the internalised dichotomy she was experiencing. The dichotomy manifested in a number of ways, and her statement in the focus group appeared to suggest she was able to recognise aspects of this:

Caroline – "I know what I think, I have always known what I think, because I am very clear headed in what I think, you know, my aims and, you know, what I want to do, but I still find it...I find it difficult to know my feelings, and other peoples."

In her statement she appeared to be puzzled about how she could be so "clear headed" in her thinking, yet find it so "difficult to know (her) feelings", as well as recognise emotions in others. It is almost as though she had missed out on a part of her emotional education as she was growing up, suggesting a distance between her and her parents. They had instilled an ability in her to be clear about where she was from, her familial identity, and gave her a sense of purpose, yet trying to engage with her personal identity was difficult and she was not sure what she wanted herself. She

appeared to desire independence, autonomy, and strength, but she also recognised that emotions play a large part in her life and she was not sure how to deal with these as she may have never been permitted to, by herself or her family.

Caroline went on to explore her parental upbringing and relayed that she came from a large family and grew up in Glasgow. She told of how they would travel everywhere by bus and recalled the look on people's faces as their large family all boarded. Caroline explained that she always felt part of a large group as she was growing up and believed that she missed out on developing individuality. There were family rules she had to abide by, explaining to the group that her family "were only liked when we were not causing trouble" and Caroline recognised that she had carried this within herself and stated she could be "a bit crazy and chaotic" but she recognised that this was "part of (her) charm".

Caroline internalised the family myth and abided by it, blending in to the background of her family and becoming as one with the homogenous unit, but she felt she has suffered because of this. Her individuality was not allowed to surface and she suppressed this, and as a result she described herself as "crazy and chaotic", again, terms which would not be out of place from a parental figure who attempts to normalise traits they see in their child – it may be that Caroline's illness manifested years ago and her parents used these expressions to account for some of her rebellious behaviours.

The observations captured acts of family rebellion within other participants too. Margaret recalled a story where she had been caught smoking when she was young and her parents had made her smoke 20 cigarettes, one after another. She remembered being sick after the experience, but defiantly stated that it did not put her off smoking. She displayed bursts of this defiant character throughout the exercises and her photographs would often reflect this, as in fig 6.9:



Fig. 6.9 – Margaret photographed her computer screen

In this image Margaret had taken a photograph of her computer screen which she photographed on many occasions, and captured a rebellious statement (fig 6.9). In it, she portrayed a stubborn character who refuses to conform, but one who has their own reasons for not joining in. The words in white down the side of Kermit the frog's body say "shut up, I'm still talking" and the imagery is juvenile with the use of emoticons and cartoon characters, reminiscent of childhood rebellion. She continued to assert her rebellious and independent qualities as she was exploring routines and stated that she could stay up till any time and watch TV when she wanted, behaviour reminiscent of a child who has found some independence and wants to challenge their parental authority, only now Margaret is in her early 50's this defiance seemed misplaced. These acts of familial rebellion might suggest that the parenting styles experienced were very authoritarian and that the participants who explored this area found it difficult to rebel when they were younger, so were now making up for it in their later years, when they felt safer to do so.

Within the super-ordinate theme of "family relations" there was a sense that participants were exploring culture, values and norms that had influenced them as they grew up, and had gone on to shape the way in which they parented too. This knowledge appeared to facilitate understanding of roles, but also helped to underpin some of the rebellious behaviours participants engaged in throughout their lives. This awareness of rebellion also assisted understanding when the group identified relationships with professionals, and how that could often be compared to the relationship experienced in the parent/child dyad they grew up with, and this is explored within the next super-ordinate theme.

6.2.2 Medicalised Label

All of the participants had diagnoses of mental health issues. It was a factor which brought them together as they engaged with the organisation, but also as they engaged with their photographs and each other's narratives. It appeared that receiving confirmation of having mental health issues meant adapting to the medicalised nature of the condition which involved assessing relationships with professionals and wider society. It was this issue which was captured by the fifth super-ordinate theme of the "medicalised label". Again, three sub-ordinate themes emerged and recognised the respect that the participants held the medical professionals in as they used the diagnosis to understand their conditions, but also acknowledged the tendency to rebel against the medicalised label. The final sub-ordinate theme explored how the medicalised label impacted on societal integration and relationships.

a. Professional Respect

All of the participants acknowledged contact with professionals at certain points during the programme. This professional contact was viewed as important by all of the participants, and there was a sense that these relationships between the professional and service user were based on trust and confidence. Caroline explored this in more depth when she analysed the milieu of the therapeutic photography group during the focus group:

Caroline: "I find it very...very, very hard. It's not that I don't have compassion for them, I find I am frightened of it, you know, I've said it already that you talk to professionals about that, and I am very frightened of the, ehm, I go to a meeting and it's on a card and they read it at the end "it's who you see here, what you hear here, you leave it here.""

In her quote, Caroline appreciated the environment within the therapeutic photography group was different and appeared to indicate that she was happier engaging in a one to one relationship with a professional, rather than with her peers. Her repetition of the words "very...very hard" emphasises her struggle. Caroline, like many of the other participants, was reluctant to talk in depth for fear of being judged at the beginning of the project. She was also afraid of what might happen to the information once others had heard it. Confidentiality, therefore, was a concern for Caroline, as she explored within her quote, mentioning the card at meetings. Her focus on the wording "...you leave it here" suggested that she could walk away from a professional and leave everything in the room, but with the therapeutic photography group she had continued thinking about issues after each

session – she was unable to leave her learning behind. There is perhaps a trust issue for her; she did not trust other people with her information unless they were professionals bound by confidentiality, but she also did not trust herself with information from other people and this “frightened” her. Trust, for Caroline, was reserved for professionals, not peers. It may be that the relationship she had with professionals solely focused on the illness she had, and the interaction with a professional, in a short timescale, focussing on a medical condition, was enough for her as she engaged in her own task of finding her identity amongst the changes, whereas the interaction with other peers widened the analysis of identity beyond her illness. This may be something she had not felt ready to think about until she had her illness under her control.

Caroline was not alone in her concerns, as Florence’s statement within the focus group demonstrated:

Florence – “Yeah, it sounded a bit scary and a bit, you know, you know, “how much are they going to see of you?”, you know, you know, “are you gonna be forced into saying things or...?” you know, showing a side of you that you are not happy with. Sharing a part of yourself you didn’t really want to share yet, you know.”

What Florence appeared to indicate was also mistrust, but this time, mistrust was focussed on professionals and a suspicion that they may manipulate her to get information that she was not ready to share. Her perception of professionals was as all seeing, all knowing people who could “force” information from her against her will. There were strong inferences towards issues of control within both Caroline and Florence’s statements and a fear that once information was verbalised then there may be a loss of control for the individual. This was emphasised in her final sentence where she talks about sharing a part of herself that she did not want to share “yet” – the inclusion of this word indicates that she did not wish to withhold information or keep it locked away and private, she wanted to feel that the information she chose to share was appropriate and would be dealt with in a timeous way. In essence, she wanted to explore, but wanted to have control over the process.

Margaret also summarised her thoughts about working with professionals within the focus group:

Margaret – “It was just to see if there was things that would be more able to understand because I was recently going to the counsellor and I was more able to talk here than I was there through the picture. There was more understanding.”

In her quote Margaret appeared to have been searching for something to augment her relationship with professionals, and that drew her to the group in the first instance. As she engaged she realised that the photographs she was taking and talking about were positively impacting on her communication skills. In her statement she appreciated that she was speaking “through” the photographs, not about them, and she was also connecting with others and initiating conversations

which she could join. As a result, she found there was “more understanding” and this may be due to the peer nature of the group, the fact that others may have experienced similar issues which they could empathise with and suggest strategies for dealing with them. In terms of her identity, this familiarity with others may have given her a sense of belonging, but there is also the nature of the group and the fact that everyone was researching their own issues through the photograph. This meant there was no professional assumption of holding knowledge about the situation of the individuals as the flow of information came from the images, the narratives, and ultimately, the choice of what the participants wanted to highlight. This appeared to provide equilibrium within the power dynamic between professional (the facilitator) and the participant, mirroring the Freirian process of professional and service user jointly researching issues and becoming co-creators of knowledge (Freire, 1990; 1970).

Violet was open about her relationship with professionals. In the exercise where participants were asked to photograph objects in their environment to represent emotions she took the opportunity to discuss her relationship with anger. It had been recognised that the participants had found it more challenging to represent the emotion of anger in their images and had discussed whether this was due to the nature of the culture they were raised in where expressing anger is seen as a negative quality. Violet stated that she had had the same discussion with her psychotherapist and concluded that it was a “normal” emotion, and that the ability to express all emotions was beneficial.

In her observation she appeared to give more weighting to her statement because it had been confirmed by a professional – had she just had the thought herself, she may not have given any credit to it, but the fact that, in her eyes, an educated and qualified person had said it, she gave it greater value. In the focus group she reflected on the experience of using photographs to explore her issues and made the following statement:

Violet – “And giving you the confidence maybe to try other things.”

Violet’s statement appeared to be linked to her previous feelings in relation to lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Through exploration she realised the labels she had been given, and the way in which she viewed professionals as almost being a superior species – she would trust every word, but at the same time there was a feeling of subordination. Within the group, the new found confidence appeared to facilitate further exploration of her medicalised label. She revealed that she also had experienced post-natal depression and currently had a diagnosis of dysplasia. In the exercise which asked participants to document a day in their lives, Violet produced this image amongst her presentation:



Fig 6.10 – Violet photographed her breakfast

The image signified the start to her typical day (fig 6.10). In the image Violet displayed her 'healthy side', capturing the fact that she sprinkled blueberries onto her porridge as they have "anti-oxidising properties". She went on to explain that she liked to research the benefits of diet and did not want to rely on medicine alone, therefore wanted to be careful about what she put into her body. This demonstrated an inquisitive side to her character, but also a search for wellness and self-protection. Despite this, she had also lined up a number of supplements and vitamins behind her breakfast which she used to enhance her diet. In doing this, she appeared to be medicalising her diet as well by taking supplements in a form which was similar to her medication for mental health. For Violet, it appeared that the solution to addressing issues came in tablet form, and she viewed herself as a condition to be treated. In doing this, she seemed to be viewing herself from the perspective of a medical professional, negating any need to consider social elements of her condition and how her environment could be adapted to meet her needs. Instead, her focus was on trying to "fix" herself so that she could adapt to her environment.

b. Rebellion

Links to professionals were a vital source of support for the participants, as highlighted in the previous sub-ordinate theme, however, as with familial relationships, some participants rebelled against professionals, viewing the relationship as an authoritarian one which exerted too much power and control, much like the parental relationship they had experienced when growing up. Therefore, in order to exercise control themselves, they behaved in a manner which could be described as adolescent towards these authority figures, as explored within this sub-ordinate theme

of “rebellion”. During the focus group interview, this became apparent when Caroline was talking to the manager of the organisation, Sally:

Caroline – “What did you say to me? I dunno. I don’t listen to a word you say (general laughter). To be quite frank, I don’t. I just get an idea in my head, honestly, I do. I don’t mean that in a disrespectful way, but what other people say doesn’t really influence me, because I do think something, and if I find that it is not what it is, and I’m not talking about this (the course) I’m talking about anything, I would just think “Oh, you made a mistake” but you know, but I wouldn’t try to find anybody else responsible, I would take responsibility – “you’re a daft bissum”. (To Sally) I don’t really listen to anyone Sally, I’m too old. No, I’ve listened to people all my life, so...”

Her dialogue was said in a humorous manner, but she approached her relationship with the professional (Sally) in a juvenile manner, choosing to hear what she wanted to, and filtering out what she did not. She used the term “to be quite frank”, which was a phrase she used considerably throughout the focus group interview before she delivered information which someone might find offensive or hurtful, and this was perhaps to endear her to others whilst she delivered her true feelings. Her statement projected an impulsive character and she wore this identity as a badge of honour, an aspect of her characteristic which she was actually proud of, and no professional could remove that from her as she was determined to hold on to it. However, she knew that by approaching situations in that manner she was actually leaving herself more vulnerable as her curiosity clashed with her head-strong and stubborn character, therefore she was always ready to accept blame by stating “oh, you made a mistake”. By claiming to be disorganised and selective in listening to information she could excuse some of her behaviours, but in doing so she continued to feel guilt when she made errors of judgement and she then ends up internalising this, labelling herself as a “daft bissum” (Glaswegian for “silly imp”), itself a term of endearment and a label a parent may give a child, infantilising herself through her choice of words, reinforcing her rebellious nature as being akin to a naughty child. In her search for identity she rebelled against professionals and disregards information, but in doing so she needed to be confident in her own choices, and in her identity. Clearly, she realised the dilemma she faced in her rebellion and does not finish her sentence as she was not sure what her point was, wanting to rebel so she can assert aspects of her identity which align with her feelings of being parented but unclear about how to follow through.

Rebellion also appeared within photographs and participant observations. Whilst exploring her feelings of safety within the photovoice exercise, Violet produced an image of the waiting room in the local psychotherapy department:



Fig. 6.11 – Violet photographed the waiting room at the psychotherapy department

The sterile and clinical nature of the environment was evident for all to see and was highlighted by Violet, complete with a box of tissues on the table in the middle of the room, a symbol of emotions and a gesture to address them (fig 6.11). Although Violet explored the safety she felt within this setting she did acknowledge that the milieu was not as conducive to learning as the therapeutic photography group was. Caroline confirmed that she also felt safe within the environment of the psychotherapy department because “professionals are paid to listen”. She appeared to enjoy an approach within relationships which is less personal than engaging with peers. The fact that someone is paid enforces a power dynamic within the relationship where she could feel subservient to the all-knowing, paid professional, again infantilised within the experience, and this, in turn, meant that she could act like a child might when they rebel against parental control, as emerged within her conversational dialogue with Sally above.

Following this exchange, Violet also appeared to move away from the view that medical professionals were the pinnacle of support and guidance. In one particular incident she discussed her treatment within the benefits office where she had been questioned about her attempts to find work. In the exchange with the employment officer she had been asked about efforts she was making to “get better”. She stated that she felt this was a “stupid question” and offered information that she was speaking to her GP and psychotherapist. She then explained that the employment officer asked her what she was doing with the psychotherapist, at which point Violet stated that it was not appropriate to be asked that. She had then spoken to her GP about the situation and had been assured that she had handled the situation well, but she chose to raise the issue with her peers and seek their opinion too. She received feedback from them about how to deal with issues like this in the future and Violet stated that she felt it was important to “come and be with other people who

really understand your problems". Violet demonstrated the learning she obtained from the group during the focus group where she was discussing Caroline's self-perception and her inability to see how popular she was within the group:

Violet – "When she walks into a room she lights it up, and I can't...I don't understand how you can feel you don't...you're not like that. I suppose we are all guilty of that at some point but I...I think she gives so much."

When considering Caroline's actions, Violet recognises aspects of her own characteristics through her statement "I suppose we are all guilty of that..." She identified that the participants all had experience of being seen by others in a different way from how they see themselves. The way professionals view her and talk to her is different from the way her peers talk to her and she appeared to realise how a person might not "light up a room" due to how they internalise experiences in other areas of their lives. Through the exploration of her own experiences, including the one at the benefits office, she acknowledged that this had impacted on her self-perception, but she was now finding the strength to challenge this.

In a sense, Violet's rebellion was not as overt as Caroline's, but she was no longer viewing herself as someone who was so different from the rest of her peers, and someone who purely needed "treatment". She was now exploring societal attitudes and experiences towards herself, and was dissatisfied. She used this experience to explore her dissatisfaction and looked at ways to challenge it – for her, she was rebelling against expectations.

c. Relating to Society

The two previous sub-ordinate themes have looked at the importance of the professional relationship and how participants rebel against perceived aspects of control and power. Violet's account of her experience in the benefits office was one example of how the participants explored their relationship with the wider society, particularly with regard how they were perceived and treated. The third sub-ordinate theme developed this focus to look at "relating to society", particularly when the medical professionals had given a label of mental illness. Often, the exploration of societal issues would be directed at other issues, rather than the labelling and stigma one might expect when dealing with mental health issues.

Violet was able to identify her anger at what she described as “the nanny state” in an image exploring emotions:



Fig. 6.12 – Violet photographed warning signs

In a family orientated setting, where children were encouraged to explore, signs warned people from engaging in certain activities, in this case running and picking up gravel. Violet regarded the “obviousness” of the signs as unnecessary and stated that if the behaviour had not been highlighted, then people would use their own common sense to work out the risks (fig 6.12). She also highlighted the fact that, despite being surrounded by hundreds of very spiky cacti, the sign pointed out the danger of picking up gravel, not touching the plants. She appeared to feel anger that her control over situations had been reduced, and this may have linked to her perception of how her illness defined who she was and what she did, being directed by instruction and guidance by the professionals. Again, there was a suggestion that as she learned about what she could not do, she wanted to challenge this and do it, linking back to her rebellious nature again.

The observations recorded that, as a group, the participants also explored how they were perceived by support agencies. In an exercise capturing likes and dislikes, Margaret had photographed a leaflet stand to highlight a dislike. She went on to explain that she felt overwhelmed when she is confronted by a leaflet stand which is packed with folded pieces of paper advertising various services, conditions, and locations.



Fig. 6.13 – Margaret photographed leaflets in the waiting room

Within this sea of colour, Margaret portrayed information, but the intended messages became lost as they competed for attention (fig 6.13). The end result was an off-putting, overwhelming onslaught of information which could not be processed by the viewer. Within this, there was also recognition that some of the participants had found useful information within leaflet stands, but there was agreement that agencies should find other ways of communicating a message that should not assume that once a leaflet has been produced, it will get to the right person. Kay suggested that television was a better format for passing information on, and explained that she would rather watch adverts on a screen within her GP surgery than wade through leaflets.

Television featured in many images and was clearly a link for the participants to the wider facets of society, but this came with its own risks in that portrayals of conditions and illnesses could be reinforced by media portrayal. There was a suggestion of this when a discussion occurred around smoking, alcohol and drug use, and the language used to describe people with issues included “junkie” and “alcoholic”. These labels were used to belittle this population in an effort to distinguish them from people who smoked, with one participant stating that “they do more harm to society than smokers”. It was said in a manner to separate the smokers within the group from other substance users in society, the implication being that the smoking participants were not *bad* people, as opposed to those with a label. However, unbeknownst to the group at the time, Kay was actually recovering from alcohol issues.

This exchange could have alienated her from the group, given the use of the word “they” in the statement about harms to society. Kay chose to speak out and revealed that she recognised that smoking was an addiction, but she had experienced addiction too in the form of alcohol addiction,

therefore she did not dislike smokers. In the focus group feedback, she went on to explore the final photovoice exercise which asked participants to investigate safety:

Kay – “Yes, todays was my favourite (photovoice). I thought it was, ehm, it was like a challenge and it was something to...to you know like last night because I spent like a lot of time thinking about the pictures and like what they meant and everything and I just found it a good exercise, I really sort of, ehm, cathartic really and ehm, and be able to just be honest about, you know, being an alcoholic as well.”

Kay recognised the challenge in the task, but also the challenge in dealing with the views of other people. As a mother, she perceived that she should be protective of her family, yet she has experienced alcohol issues which resulted in an admission to residential rehabilitation. In the eyes of society, she could be viewed as a mother who had failed her children by giving into alcohol to cope with pressures. Yet the exercise gave her permission to “spend...time” thinking, a process which she referred to as “cathartic”, it gave her psychological relief and the experience was rewarding. She refers to being “honest” about her issues and this was enhanced by the fact that she photographed her condition for all to see in the following image:



Fig. 6.14 – Kay photographed the alcohol aisle in the local supermarket

Her problem with alcohol had been objectified and could not be hidden from the other participants any longer (fig 6.14). She chose to enter the supermarket and pictorially represent her alcohol issue, but in doing so she actually made a further statement and demonstrated to the other participants how difficult it can be to deal with a problem when the cause is so evident within society. Within her quote she returns to label of “alcoholic” at the end of the sentence, but the label was now only part of her identity, not her whole identity, as she refers to this aspect being “as well”, in addition to who she is. The fact that she used the word “alcoholic” is not challenged – it could be that as part of her treatment under a 12 step programme this was a self-imposed label, or it could be a label she has picked up from society to describe someone with alcohol issues. The fact that this is a value laden

term is not analysed within the session, but the facilitator's reflective notes suggested work which could have been followed up at a later stage to explore how this has impacted on her life.

Living with a condition was familiar to all of the participants, and involvement with professionals both helped and hindered – helped in the fact that conditions could be understood and treated, but hindered in the fact that it could lead to labelling and a sense of exclusion from society. This super-ordinate theme also recognised that there could be a tendency to rebel against the professional contact due to issues pertaining to control. The final super-ordinate theme picked up on some of these issues and looked at another common occurrence impacting on the participants, that of isolation.

6.2.3 Isolation

The final super-ordinate theme was “isolation”. It was an area that impacted on all of the participants' lives in varying degrees, but often there was an element of choice in this. There was also recognition that, much as with the medicalised label, factors in society also contributed to these feelings. Hence, three sub-ordinate themes emerged from the data. The first theme looked at self-imposed isolation, when the participants made a choice to remove themselves from the eyes of others and hide away. The second theme then identified times when isolation was imposed, and this could be through attitudes and values which forced a participant into withdrawal. The final sub-ordinate theme returned to issues of relating to society and looked at how that might influence factors pertaining to isolation.

a. Self-Imposed

Unlike most of the other super-ordinate themes, the data appeared to reveal the theme of isolation in a different manner – whereas previous themes looked at the quotes, then images and observations, the issue of isolation emerged first in the photographs, then observations, and the quotes were used to clarify what was being observed. When looking at self-imposed isolation, the photographs were used to objectify triggers, as well as common traits amongst all of the participants.

For Kay, the project made her aware of triggers she faced when her mental health deteriorated. In the final exercise, as she was exploring the concept of safety, she produced two photographs of her own bed:



Fig 6.15 – Kay photographed her made bed

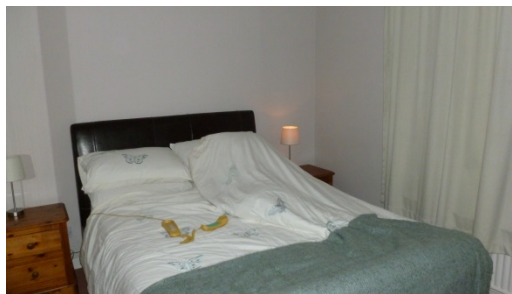


Fig 6.16 – Kay photographed a “bad day”

In the first (fig 6.15), Kay had used her bed to symbolise order and control – the room is ordered, the bed has been made, the curtains open, and there was a sense of calm and tranquillity, but in the second (fig 6.16) she identified her triggers which could lead to deterioration in her mental health. She had arranged cushions under the covers to make it look as though she was still in bed, her head firmly under the covers. The curtains were closed and the phone was off the hook, and she decided to represent how she felt when she was ignoring the day, isolating herself from the outside world. For Kay, this required a deeper sense of reflection into her condition and to work through a process of deteriorating mental health and the consequent self-imposed isolation she subjected herself to. In visualising these triggers and pictorially representing them she was able to tell other people about warning signs so that they might be able to identify and help. Reflecting on her condition, identifying triggers, and then visualising them led to a common theme emerging from the images of others:

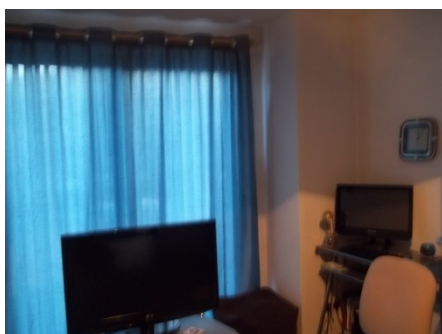


Fig. 6.17 – Margaret photographed her closed curtains



Fig. 6.18 - Caroline photographed her closed curtains

The other participants had also used their curtains to represent issues of self-isolation (fig 6.17 & 6.18). There was a surprised reaction from the group at this point as none of them had realised that anyone else did this. Sally, the service manager, noted that if she went round to someone's house on a home visit during the day and observed that the curtains were shut, she felt it was a good indication that the person she had come to see was having a "bad day". By using the curtains, the participants were able to literally shut out the outside world and cocoon themselves into their home, closing the temptation to look out, but more importantly, shutting out anybody who wanted to look in. They were only separated from the outside world by a thin sheet of material, but it was enough to feel protected, safe, and isolated. From this exploration, Kay identified learning and discussed this in the focus group:

*Kay – "And also I think in a group like this when you learn about, like, what affects other people then maybe you'll like recognise it in them by the way they are talking or the way they are acting and, and maybe you'll...not that you'll be able to do something yourself but you know like, maybe alert **** (staff member) or somebody who knows what to do or who knows the person, you know, I think that could be a benefit."*

Kay hints at a new found sense of empowerment in that knowledge gained from the group could help her protect members in the future, but also perhaps, protect herself. Recognising familiar

behaviours within the group with regards the curtains, she does not feel so isolated by her own actions and finds reassurance in the strategies and actions of others. She identified her own limitations within this, stating she could alert someone to help, but for Kay, knowledge was powerful.

As well as isolating the self, strategies were also visualised that kept others out, and this became evident within Caroline's exploration when she produced the following image during the final exercise, focusing on safety, as the photograph and observations demonstrate:



Fig. 6.19 – Caroline photographed a fence

As Caroline presented her image she stated it represented imprisonment of her self, both literally and metaphorically, and the fence conveyed feeling threatened when other people opened up to her (fig 6.19). The group asked her to explain more, asking why she felt threatened, and Caroline said that there was a fear that people would expect her to open up too and immediately the group recognised what she meant and Caroline was quite surprised that they understood her.

Within Caroline's image and explanation there was a sense of expected reciprocity, that by receiving information she must also give it, and she does not trust herself or others with this power and control. As a consequence, she isolated herself from them by building metaphoric walls and fences between her and them. However, she is taken aback that the group recognise these feelings within her and also share them. She began to realise that she was not so different, and the feelings she was expressing within the group were also shared by them. By exploring her self-imposed isolation, she ended up becoming more included in the group. Margaret picked up on this point within the focus group:

Margaret – “(To Caroline) it’s just like your home, not wanting anyone in it – you don’t want to go into anyone else’s either.”

The physical and mental barriers that Caroline had put up were noticed by others in the group and because she had explored and externalised them in images, they became more evident to her too. Now that she had identified these issues, she still needed to reflect on why she prevented others from getting close to her, and there was realisation that she was confused about who she was as she came to terms with a change in circumstances through retirement and mental illness – from her perspective she needed to find out who she is first, then work towards self-acceptance, before she could begin to let others in to her life and look for acceptance from them (Weiser, 1999).

For Kay, the fact that she identified her own triggers and helped others recognise theirs was a positive outcome of the project as she explained in the focus group:

Kay – “And then, you know, and then sort of be aware of things that are...because otherwise you do su...otherwise you’ll just find yourself like, closed in, almost, and then not know how...because it’s such a big step to get yourself back up there again.”

In her quote she took her time getting to the point, as if she was still trying to come to terms with what had taken place within the exercise. She used her reflective skills to focus on previous experiences, visualise them, structure them into an order, and now had a document to show her what a downward spiral in her mental health might look like. She identified other contributing factors which impact on her mental wellbeing like motivation, poor weather and other small triggers which eroded her mood. Describing this as being like a journey down a stairway into a constricted area where she was unable to move conjures up feelings of oppression and claustrophobic environments, and reference to a “big step” made her mental illness feel like being trapped in a dungeon. She also conveys a sense that her actions require bravery to deal with the issues, and the use of “yourself” in her quote indicated that the actions had to come from within - nobody else could do this for her. She appeared to be verbally psyching herself up to address this.

b. Enforced

In the previous sub-ordinate theme, the aspect of self-imposed isolation was explored. Where some chose to put up barriers to protect themselves, thus isolating themselves, others found that they had barriers forced upon them and this led to enforced isolation, which is the focus of the next sub-ordinate theme.

Michael was the first participant to touch on this issue when he selected a picture of a fence with metal spikes in the postcard selection exercise (see fig. 5.2, Chapter 5). He explained that he had selected the image because he felt “trapped” and “fenced-in”. He stated that some of these feelings were self-inflicted, but others were not, and because he had struggled with addiction problems in the past, he believed the views others had of him were negative. As a result, he appeared to internalise the perception of others. This was a big issue to start the first session with and there was a sense that he was testing the boundaries to see how much information he could share, and whether his self-disclosure was going to lead to instant isolation from the others from the outset. It may be that this was a strategy to see if it was worth the emotional investment continuing with the project, or if he was going to be ostracised from the beginning. If this was his strategy, it was effective for him as the group accepted his comments and observations and encouraged him to participate, so much so, that he felt safe enough to share the following image during an exercise entitled “a day in the life of...”:



Fig. 6.20 – Michael photographed his self-harm scars

Michael chose to share an issue he faced - that of self-harm - an act he engaged in when isolated (fig 6.20). The cross shapes in the image may signify a religious element to his behaviour, as if his self-inflicted wounds were penance for his behaviour and action throughout the day. It may also be that he viewed himself as a Christ like figure, forced into solitude to find himself, and the self-harm marks were a reminder of his journey. Michael was an outsider and because of his history with drug and alcohol use, mental health issues, and a turbulent upbringing, he did not share similar backgrounds to the other participants, indeed, within the community he lived in, he was unique in his differences and was easy to distinguish within the small population. The sharing of this image to a group of participants who were relative strangers had been a big risk for him and may have enforced his

isolation, but it may have been that he had experienced isolation all of his life and therefore thought that the potential benefits outweighed the risks. When his image was shared he appeared to read the room before showing it, pausing to make sure it was not going to provoke shock. It did not, and he was met with an empathetic response from others. It was also noted by one of the other facilitators that this was the first time Michael had shared such information with peers, and was probably only able to do so because he felt he was in control of the information he shared.

The image provoked Violet to make the following statement:

*Violet – “...yes, that was one of the most powerful things I’ve seen when he shared because that reminded me of **** (daughter) cutting herself and the fact that I didn’t know she was doing it, and could I have prevented it? But that really, that really hit home. That was very brave I thought.”*

Michael’s control, and his consequent revelation, resonated with the others more than he had realised. Violet recognised the enforced isolation that Michael experienced and explained that she had felt this, along with her own daughter. The actions of showing a photograph and talking about it are called “powerful” by Violet, but not only that, the image is singled out as being “one of the most powerful”, as if there had been many instances of powerful images, yet this one stood out. Her quote also recognised that Michael did not “show” his image, he “shared” it, as if he was giving the others a privileged insight into his life, disclosing his sense of isolation with a select few. Violet still had questions arising from her memory which, amongst all the pleasant ones of family she recalled, this was one that she did not enjoy. She emphasised the fact the image “really” hit home, as if Barthes (& Howard, 1987) punctum and studium had been directly evidenced – not only had the image drawn her in, it had awoken something within. Michael is no longer isolated in her eyes, he had been elevated to a position where he was viewed as a champion for the rights of the oppressed, and he was “brave”.

By the end of the therapeutic photography programme Michael was mentioned in the focus group interview:

Margaret – “I think it’s brought us closer.”

Violet – “Closer together.”

Margaret – “because even Michael is feeling more in part of the group now.”

Michael was not present at the focus group, but the attention had been turned to him as the member who had been most on the fringes and the one who made some extreme revelations. The group reflected on their acceptance of what he shared and, although he had not completely immersed himself in the group, there was recognition that he was feeling “more in part of the group”, suggesting there was still some way to go before he would be considered a full group

member. For the other participants, Margaret's observation suggested that there might have been a sense of group unity from the outset, but now, after six weeks, this had been strengthened through the process of taking photographs and sharing narratives. Violet confirmed this, validating the idea Margaret had vocalised. This suggested the group dynamic was instrumental in the process of therapeutic outcomes, an issue Florence acknowledged in her exploration within the focus group:

Florence – "I felt it was good to be able to empathise with other people, you know, what their, you know, their fears and safe places are, I could empathise totally with them on a lot of the stuff, you know, and it doesn't make you feel so isolated, on how you're feeling, you know, every day."

Enforced isolation also came from living with a mental health condition, and Florence acknowledged that this was a lonely experience for her. However, the shared experience of the group had given her opportunity to "empathise", appreciating the feelings others experienced and recognising the familiarity of these within her own life. In her statement she picked "fears" and "safe spaces", areas of polarity which were important to her as she learned that she may be able to address some of the issues she faced, thanks to the input from others. She recognised that she had been trying to protect herself from the judgement of others and because of this has developed a suspicion of others. She also highlighted that she was referring to emotional and psychological isolation, rather than physical isolation, as she related the experience to her feelings throughout. In the focus group, Florence was asked what she would change about her experience with the therapeutic photography group:

Florence – "Oh, I think the length of the course actually...longer...because it's not really enough time to...I think there is a lot more we could learn from each other."

For Florence, the exploration was not complete, and the most important learning had come from her peers. Her enforced isolation was over and the familiarity within the actions and behaviours of others made her feel more included, but she wanted to continue the journey of discovery and pursue the learning she had begun to understand. It may be that the images she had used, and the narratives she had heard, had brought the issue of emotional isolation into her consciousness and she was able to recognise her previous coping strategies, but also how they had possibly been maladaptive.

c. Relating to Society

Isolation, be it enforced or self-imposed, affected all of the participants as highlighted in the previous sub-ordinate themes. The consequence of this was that there was an impact on how the participants related to society because of their isolation and this was the issue explored in the final sub-ordinate theme.

The observational data noted a particular discussion about getting past the front door. Florence stated that “sometimes you need to focus on what has to be done to get you through the front door and out”, and Michael said that often “the front door can look like prison bars preventing you from going out”.

There was a sense of preparation in Florence’s description, preparing the self for what lies beyond the door, but also ensuring that the sanctuary of home remained a safe place to return to. In passing the front door she portrayed a sense that she must engage with society and this was a daunting prospect. Michael deepened the analogy by referring to prison bars, but does not explain whether they protected him from the outside, or kept him locked up on the inside – in his description there was a sense that he wanted to be able to engage with the world beyond the front door, but was not sure how to. He had also experienced containment before, as he revealed when he spoke about spending his formative years in a young offenders centre. The feelings he experienced now may well be a reminder of how he felt when he was detained.

One of the main methods the participants used to engage with wider society was through media, and specifically television, which emerged through the photographs taken by the participants. It was mentioned as a form of information when the participants explored the over-use of leaflets (see fig. 6.12 in this chapter), and in the previous super-ordinate theme there was recognition that exposure to television may be a factor which reinforced labels and stereotypes of mental illness and other conditions.



Fig. 6.21 - Violet photographed her television (part 1)



Fig. 6.22 - Violet photographed her television (part 2)

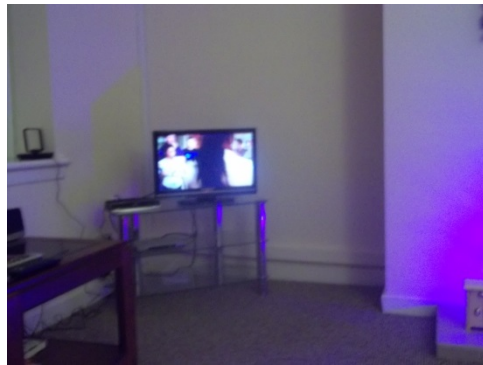


Fig. 6.23 - Florence photographed her television

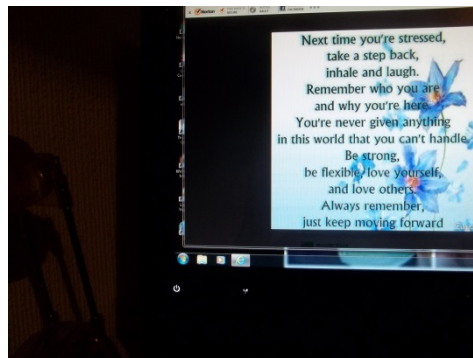


Fig. 6.24 - Margaret photographed her computer screen

In the photographs the television was a familiar sight in living rooms, but it seemed to be more of a source of company within their exploration. Notably, when Violet was exploring a day in her life, she captured the morning news programme in her first image (fig 6.21), and later in the day captured an afternoon show (fig 6.22) – the television always seemed to be present and informing her about the outside world. Similarly, Florence used the image of her television to represent feelings associated with safety (fig 6.23), the noise and light in the image creating a warming presence in her home. Margaret also captured a screen (fig 6.24), but she focused on her computer displaying an inspirational quote sent to her by her sister, which was her link to the outside world, as well as family living overseas. Margaret could project her identity through the computer with ease, a

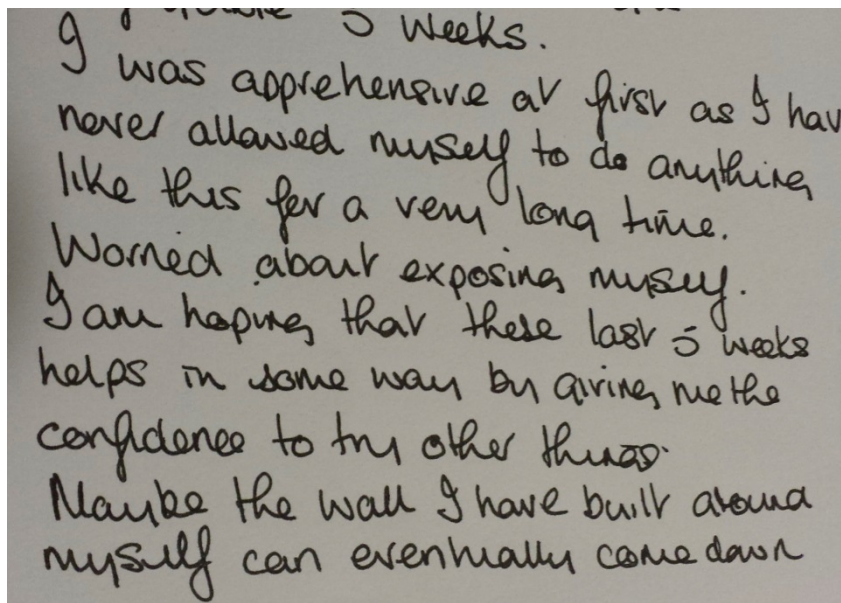
contrast to the difficulty she experienced when trying to communicate face to face because of the impact of her stroke.

The risk of relating to society through media was that it appeared to be a one-way process where the viewer received information and did not question it. The participants were exposed to the will of programmers, news producers, and network managers who, generally, have a lot of power in shaping opinions within modern culture. As previously explored, this may mean that questionable attitudes towards vulnerable people in society can be reinforced through labelling and stigma, but also through highlighting sensational, headline-grabbing stories which focus in on crime and danger, leading to fear of the outside world, and compounding existing feelings of isolation. Yet the participants had left the confines of their living rooms and ventured out into a meeting room in an old school building to take photographs and share narratives. Caroline attempted to capture the milieu in her quote:

Caroline: "You know, ehm...but there is a different atmosphere, can you feel it? Ehm, you know, it is, it's actually a tangible, to me it's tangible, like that first, I mean I was really nervous when the photographs were all there and there is a different feeling in the room, I feel it, I mean, I know, in my whole, I don't feel the tension."

Caroline referred to the atmosphere as "tangible", suggesting that she could actually hold it in her hand, which is exactly what she had been doing when she took her photographs, then displayed them to others. She also held other people's cameras and phones in her own hand when viewing their images; for the majority of the time when the participants were talking their hands were occupied, eye contact was on the photograph, and body posture leaned in to one another as they discussed the image. Clearly, Caroline's statement did not simply refer to her hands being occupied, she felt there was a strong presence of change, knowledge and information in the room and she had not experienced this so powerfully before. For her, speaking to a room full of people about personal issues caused her stress and anxiety as she viewed this as a form of relating to society, revealing her identity for all to judge – a source of "tension" for her as she had to be permanently on guard to protect herself. However, although she would admit that the process was not anxiety-free for her, she did acknowledge that something made the process easier for her within the therapeutic photography group. The presence of images created a different dynamic, one in which the cultural familiarity of photography and sharing images engaged all of the participants and appeared to liberate them in the initial stages of group bonding and onwards throughout the process, assisting the process of self, cultural and societal exploration.

For some, this was the first time they had done something like that in a very long time, as Violet explored in written feedback she gave at the end of the focus group:

A photograph of a piece of paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The paper is white and the background is a plain, light-colored surface. The text is as follows:

I was apprehensive at first as I have never allowed myself to do anything like this for a very long time. Worried about exposing myself. I am hoping that these last 5 weeks helps in some way by giving me the confidence to try other things. Maybe the wall I have built around myself can eventually come down

Fig. 6.25 – Violet wrote feedback at the end of the final session

In her feedback (fig 6.25) she relayed the sense of apprehension she had in sharing her identity with others, referring to this as “exposing” herself, acknowledging the process explored within the first super-ordinate theme. She was not convinced that there had been a change, but she was “hoping” there had been and she indicated that the area of change would probably be in her confidence levels, giving her the ability to leave the safety of her home and engage in other activities. No longer would she have to solely rely on the input of professionals and the company of her television now that she knew there were more options available to her – creative expression, support groups, and the company of peers. She ended by acknowledging the metaphoric wall she had built up to isolate herself from those around her; it had not come down yet, but it had reduced in size and she could envisage a future where it might be totally removed. She appeared to have recognised her ability to achieve and affect change, signifying her feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment may have been impacted by her experience. Violet went on to summarise the outcome for her:

Violet – “That I have got a voice, which, as a child, and probably the generation I grew up in, children didn’t have a voice that they have now and that, you know, I do have a voice.”

In her quote she was no longer afraid to speak up, she felt empowered and able to assert herself. She recognised the impact of her upbringing, the society she was raised in, and the family norms. The times have changed and there is recognition that she also needs to change with the times. Perhaps for the first time she realised that the idealised images she had presented of her family upbringing also held the key to some of her current issues and that there were behaviours that she

was indoctrinated to through her childhood. Using the photographs to explore her situation had demonstrated to her that communication was beneficial as it had positively impacted on her knowledge, awareness, and confidence. She was able to make sense of her thoughts, track her issues, and speak out about what she was facing. In stating “I do have a voice” she has realised that she entered the process feeling silenced, keeping quiet for so long, but now acknowledged that silence and isolation had achieved nothing, and if change was desired, she could not continue with this strategy. She had to verbalise her issues to others in order to influence the future direction of her life.

Within the final super-ordinate theme, isolation was not necessarily viewed as a negative attribute or experience. For some, isolation was a welcome reprieve from some of the issues that had to deal with, whilst others recognised that they had very little choice in terms of inclusion, and made the best of their situation. Where isolation was imposed, there was often anger, and through the images there was a degree of understanding about why views and attitudes became prevalent and could compound the situation.

6.3 Summary

In presenting the six super-ordinate themes, exceptions were considered. Certainly, within some of the super-ordinate themes, characteristics were stronger for some participants more than others, an example being Caroline and the amount of time she spent searching for a new identity because she had experienced considerable confusion following her retirement, but also stemming back to childhood. She was the participant who found the experience most anxiety-provoking, yet despite this she continued (after a brief disengagement) and completed the exercises. The researcher considered whether she was the only one who had experienced this confusion and realised that all of the participants had elements of a confused identity, Caroline was just the most vocal about her confusion. Therefore, the six super-ordinate themes have attempted to represent the observations and findings from all of the participants within the study without assuming wider generalisations beyond the therapeutic photography group, and each super-ordinate theme encapsulates behaviours, characteristics and observations for all of the participants based on the researcher’s interpretation of the data.

What chapters 5 and 6 have presented is an overview of identity analysis which was enabled by the use of photography and proposes a model of the way in which this analysis developed: In the initial

stages of the therapeutic photography group there was a period where participants explored their current identity. During this stage they listened to the narratives of others and were able to compare and contrast their situations. This appeared to lead to learning about strategies that were being employed, but also possibilities about how identity could develop if current strategies were not working. There was considerable emphasis on social learning at this stage, as reflected within the first three super-ordinate themes. Following this process, participants explored the opportunities created by this learning, and this appeared to move beyond social learning and into the realms of analysing self-concept. This was based on external factors, as well as intrinsic ones, and participants explored their upbringing, culture, family, and their medicalised labels. The final super-ordinate theme looked at the overall impact of the participants' situation and focussed on isolation, but recognised that this was much a protective factor, respite from a society which can be harsh to those who do not meet the criteria of a "normal" person.

The use of photographs throughout the process allowed issues to be identified, objectified, and externalised, and then processed through narrative exploration. Participants described the process as "powerful" and "cathartic" as old identities were analysed and the possibility of new identities were explored and tested. The dynamic of using photographs within a milieu exploring identity and societal issues provided a different approach for all of the participants and suggests that self-disclosure within the narratives was made easier because of the visual nature of their inquiry.

In the next chapter, these results will be further analysed to explore the process, outcomes, and the applicability to social work.

Chapter 7 - Discussion

7.1 Introduction

Drawing upon information from the literature review and the findings from the results in chapter 5 and 6, this chapter offers a discussion of the data. The first section considers the impact on the group identity, whilst the second section considers individual learning and identity. The outcomes of the therapeutic photography group are then discussed within the emerging themes from the literature review of self-efficacy, self-esteem and empowerment, alongside observations from within the analysis of the data, particularly around self-disclosure. The chapter then concludes by considering the applicability of the use of therapeutic photography to the profession of social work.

7.2 Group Learning

Within the three super-ordinate themes within chapter 5, the participants appeared to feel exposed from the outset and explored the fear and paranoia they experienced. This involved discussion of the deceptive actions they engaged in to mask true feelings, and how they might assert their feelings and emotions in a way that represented them in a more accurate sense. The participants also appeared to use the experience to search for their true identities in ways which saw them analysing their options, appreciating the fragmented nature of their current identities, and exposing uncertainty about future possibilities. This appeared to culminate in a sense of purpose where participants became more assertive about their identities and used social comparisons and self-confrontation to arrive at a point where they were ready to embrace their true identities.

The analysis of the data revealed a dynamic at play which initiated an exploration of fears and paranoia from the outset, then led to participants visualising and discussing their vulnerabilities such as Violet's feelings of exposure and Caroline's feelings of uncertainty and suspicion. Feelings of "being watched" then gave way to a process of self-exploration, one in which defense mechanisms appeared to be bypassed in order to allow issues from the unconscious to emerge. The result was

that the participants appeared to identify strategies which had been used to help them cope, but that sometimes meant self-deception and a suppression of the true self. Given the short timescale of the programme, the participants shared considerable information within a confined timeline and it could be suggested that photography provided a medium which facilitated the exploration of identity amongst peers.

Harper (2002) highlights that when two or more individuals discuss photographs which they have taken a new meaning can emerge between participants, and in a mapping exercise of projects utilising photography and narrative he found that identity was a common issue to emerge, with other themes being family and society, history, and culture. Certainly, all of these themes appeared within the observations, focus group interview, and the analysis of the photographs which would suggest there is a dynamic at play which gives rise to these themes. The use of photographs also appeared to facilitate, and possibly accelerate, group bonding as images were used to identify commonality in culture, upbringing and issues. Often, photographs would contain familiar objects, locations, or situations which the participants quickly highlighted and this appeared to help identify similarities between people.

The work of Cooley (1902) may offer insight into how the group element impacted on identity. Cooley (1902) wrote that the self and society were intertwined, and that the self could only develop through interactions and feedback from society. He famously coined the phrase “looking glass self” (p179) to describe the concept that identity formation is influenced by our perceptions of what we think others think of us. He describes the process of identity formation akin to regarding ones image in a mirror and assessing the result, but instead of a mirror, the individual uses reactions of others around them to gather feedback. He explains that this is a three step system where we imagine how we appear to others, we imagine others judgements of that appearance, and then we gain an emotional response from that judgement (e.g. pride, or shame). Examples of these steps were encapsulated in the observations of the group – when Caroline explored images of strength in the postcard of Emily Pankhurst she assumed that this was something to aspire to, but the group feedback suggested she already had considerable strength; Michael’s self-harm image produced an emotional response which made him feel more accepted by the group; and Florence found pride in the exploration of her maternal role.

Burns (1984) explored the application of the looking glass self principle to group working and stated that, depending on the interactions between members, the timescale and lifespan of the group, and the levels of intimacy between members, there is potential for the principle to have considerable impact on identity formation and group association. It may be that the mechanics of working with

photography in a group setting creates the atmosphere where a “therapeutic gaze” (Martin, 2009, p.42) is permitted. She uses the term to describe the relationship between a phototherapist and a client, but in essence the term refers to working in a way which encourages an individual to create a meaningful image for themselves, and then explore the narrative behind the image in a manner which is non-judgemental, encouraging and trusting in an environment which is safe and accepting. Instead of the phototherapist providing the therapeutic gaze, this was provided by the peers and facilitator.

Given that the presence of peers appears to have facilitated self-exploration, it is worth acknowledging the concept of social identity and the role this might play in therapeutic photography groups. Described by Zhang et. al. (2010) as a “social-psychological theory that focuses on membership in a social unit and intergroup relations” (p.68), social identity theory describes the process of individuals enhancing identity formation through perceived membership of social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Learning about the self can become strengthened through identification with other group members and similarities can reinforce a sense of identity and can assist in the definition of the group norm. Conversely, the differences between group members and non-group members can also reinforce identity (Turner et. al., 1987). This appeared to be evident in the early stages of the group, particularly during the postcard selection exercise where the participants shared an aspect of their identity to the group for the first time. A number of participants focused on geographical locations to assert nationality and culture, whereas others chose to focus on roles they held such as being a parent or a carer. The advantage to individuals in enhancing social identity is threefold; firstly, it assists individuals in understanding the social environment so that they can map their roles within situations; it assists in the ability to define other people and, according to their social identities, predict how they might behave which helps understand how the world functions; and shared social identities provides unity and safety, aiding in the long term survival of the group (Zhang et. al., 2010).

As an individual learns from a group, they activate their identity (a concept known as salience) in order to fit in, and to direct the overall behaviour of the group (Oakes, 1987). Within the therapeutic photography group, the participants developed confidence over the six-week period and appeared to be guided by each other in terms of information sharing and task participation – the group rules were being set by the participants based on their behaviour within the group and the amount of information they shared. However, Turner et. al. (1987) also state that de-personalisation can occur upon development of a social identity within groups, and this results in individuals strongly identifying with the other members to the point where individualisation can be diluted. This was an

aspect of social identity theory that was not observed within the group and this might be due to the short term nature of the group project, or the fact that each individual was exploring issues from a personal perspective and then bringing them to the group for discussion. This resulted in identification with others, but the initial exploration was from a personal perspective rather than a collective decision, however, the facilitator was aware that the risk of de-personalisation within individuals should be monitored when conducting future groups.

Once the participants had established a sense of safety and social identity, the process appeared to move into a new phase wherein there was a search for possibilities and a new direction for their identity. During this stage there was a realisation for Caroline that her identity had become fragmented, whilst others faced dichotomies in their own identities. For some, the process meant that they could listen and learn from others, but the sense of control that came with the exploration of images meant that opportunities for self-exploration were never far away and opportunities to apply learning were prevalent. West (2004) identifies similar issues in his experience, reporting that individuals are fragmented collections of experiences and emotions, and therefore use narrative to assist in the formation of a coherent and unified experience of the self. This appeared to be applicable to all of the participants who were using photography to explore, and then using narrative to clarify; Violet used the opportunity to explore her past roles and a future caring for others, whilst Kay used the opportunity to reveal an identity of a recovering problematic alcohol user.

Stets and Burke (2000) explain that identity formation is a reflexive process wherein an individual will objectify themselves, compare themselves against others, and define themselves into categories, and because of this process social identity theory should also be considered alongside identity theory as the two approaches, although different, have many similarities that can assist in understanding how identity is formed. Identity theory also takes the premise that society influences individual behaviour, but where social identity theory is primarily concerned with group membership; identity theory tends to focus more on roles within society (Stryker & Burke, 2000). By self-categorising into a role, an individual is potentially telling others that they identify with the societal expectations demanded by their role position. As well as the above examples of Kay and her role as a recovering alcohol user, and Violet's role as a carer, this was evident in the images and narratives; Florence explored motherhood, stating it was the "best job in the world", asserting her pride in her role as the matriarch of the family; Caroline explored her role as a dutiful daughter and sibling of a large family and how she had to conform to the rules within; and Margaret focused on her role within the community support groups as a provider of food and drinks for the participants, a vital pair of helping hands. However, what was also notable with the therapeutic photography group

was the lack of specific exploration of the role that brought them together as a group. Mental health was never directly mentioned, instead the participants focused on issues affected by mental health, and the support provided for mental health, and this may have been because the label was so deeply ingrained it had become an unconscious, everyday factor for them, only being brought back into the conscious through the photographs as issues were objectified. It may also have been because the group preferred exploring other avenues of their identity because they had support agencies they went to in order to explore the medical side of their mental health, therefore themes such as family, reminiscence, isolation and culture were all noted ahead of their socially imposed labels.

The medium of photography may also have inadvertently directed participants to explore identity. Musello (in Ulkuniemi, 2007) looked at the use of family photographs and believed they could be categorised into four distinct areas in terms of how they are used; to document events (and preserve memories), to demonstrate unity (which suggests the influence of social identity theory in finding commonality with others), to facilitate interaction (which might be to illustrate interaction in the image, or to use the image to interact with others), and to build identity through investigating the self, status, and to relive experiences through the photograph. Although Musello was writing specifically about family photographs, these four aspects were certainly replicated in the therapeutic photography group during the exploration of all images, particularly by Kay and Violet who photographed old family photographs to highlight the importance of familial identity. Perhaps this is because these four categories encapsulate the cultural norms of using photographs, therefore the participants unconsciously knew how to use images, a process known as *implicit relational knowledge* (Stern et. al., 1998). This describes the ability of individuals to access procedural knowledge which directs behaviour in terms of how to act, how to think, and how to respond emotionally in certain situations, primarily within a therapeutic setting where relationships between participants and facilitators can reach a productive plateau because of these unconscious norms. Therefore, although the individuals did not directly speak about the identity which brought them together as a group, the implicit relational knowledge may have provided each one with an acceptance of the reason, but also guided them in terms of the rules of using photographs and directing narratives in terms of social acceptability. This allowed them to explore individual identities with the function of the photographs having an “established discourse” (Brookfield et. al., 2008, p.481).

The exercises within the therapeutic photography group programme also facilitated group discussions so that identities could be explored and roles could be clarified. The latter exercises

asked participants to document a day in their lives and to explore the environment to look for positives and negatives, and these were akin to reflexive photography and photo novella (Loewenthal, 2013; Parker, 2009). Clark-Ibanez (2004) broadens this concept and believes that the practice of photo elicitation is a more accurate description of facilitating narratives through images. Similar to the photographic categories offered by Musello (1979) (in Ulkuniemi, 2007), Clark-Ibanez (2004) points to the work of Harper (2002) in order to classify photographs produced for photo elicitation. Harper (2002) presented three approaches; photographs to provide an inventory of important things (such as objects, people and pets); photographs to explore events that have meaning and usually linked to common cultural norms such as holidays, birthdays, or school life; and photographs which intimately connect the photographer to society, history or culture. All three of these approaches explore identity and suggest that every single photograph produced can also give insight into identity, yet Clark-Ibanez (2004) states that “there is nothing inherently interesting about photographs; instead, photographs act as a medium of communication” (p. 1512). What this suggests is that categorising images using Harper’s (2002) or Musello’s approach appears to be a secondary issue, and the main focus should be on how the photograph is used to aid communication, more specifically, how the photograph is used as a catalyst to explore identity. The photographs taken by the participants within the therapeutic photography group varied from person to person – varied in quality, content, and abstract representation – but each one was used to convey a message, story, or meaning and each one was an objectification of something the participant wanted to talk about. In this way, the photograph was externalising an issue and was then used as a catalyst to communicate the narrative. Indeed, the photograph as a catalyst may even have happened before the photograph was taken, perhaps at the point when the facilitator presented each task and the thought process began, but once produced it was used to convey meaning and message. It has also been noted that the non-verbal communication within the group when images were being shared was non-confrontational, inviting, and open which also facilitated the sharing of information. There were also occasions when the photograph was used as a catalyst when it was not even present, specifically when Michael shared his memories of a photograph being taken whilst he was being humiliated by his parents and forced to eat cold baked beans from a can. This suggests that the longevity of an image has impact on the participants; even when the photograph is absent, the memory remains.

By using photographs to identify, explore, and externalise issues the participants were able to collectively discuss aspects of their identities that emerged. This was conducted in an environment which was understanding and each person was guided by the group in terms of how much information they could share about each issue, thus social identity theory appeared to contain the

groups actions. Identity theory then allowed the participants to look at their roles, but instead of looking at the role which brought them together as a group, aspects which also defined identity were brought to the fore and areas such as creativity, culture, family and history were discussed. Within these discussions, another aspect of identity was highlighted, that of personal identity, and it is through further analysis of the interpretive phenomenological data that an insight into how this was explored can be achieved.

7.3 Individual Learning

The researcher utilised IPA to analyse the way in which the participants engaged with images, but what was also noticed was the way in which the participants became researchers themselves, and their focus appeared to be their own identity. Smith et. al. (2009) explain that Husserl was driven by a desire to find a way of enabling people to understand their own interpretation of a phenomenon and, if this were possible, the essence of the experience could then be shared and understood by others, thus impacting on the way in which others personally interpret the phenomenon. They go on to explain that Husserl focused on the conscious nature of inquiry, that which a participant brought into their consciousness and objectified, which he believed demonstrated an intentionality on the part of the subject to define a relationship with the object of attention which was worthy of exploration.

If this is applied to the process of a participant within the therapeutic photography group, we can see the objectification occurring within the production of a photograph. The *intentionality* might not have been conscious initially, but by committing a thought, idea, or emotion to an image the participant externalises it, creates a tangible item, and objectifies a part of their own identity which they bring to their own consciousness, and can then explore this. It is through the act of reflecting where understanding emerges and using photographs encourages the photographer to explore why the image was captured, what the meaning behind it is, and what that reveals about the identity of the photographer.

This interpretive phenomenological approach gave deeper insight and appeared to reveal identity formation as an ongoing, evolving experience, much as Sartre (2008) did when he stated “existence precedes essence” (p.652). Merleau-Ponty (1962) believed that the phenomenon of being human was driven by the knowledge that, as individuals, we were different from everything else in the world, and this difference was our identity.

The philosophy of Mead suggests a useful connection in how participants using therapeutic photography explored their identity. Mead (1934) recognised that identity was borne from interactions with society but identified two different components of identity, the “I” and the “me”. Burns (1984) explains that the “I” relates to the impulsive nature of the identity which revels in its uniqueness and asserts differences in order to define itself, whereas the “me” is the part of the identity which learns social acceptability, rules, norms and behaviours in order to interact with others and survive in situations which demand conformity. Mead believed that the key to exploring identity was in communication so that the relationships between the self and society could be understood. Within the therapeutic photography group, the participants routinely explored relationships with two forms of communication, visual and verbal. Mead wrote that identity relies on social communication and that individuals learn from the responses they get from people around them and refers to this as a conversation of gestures wherein language emerges. It is within this conversation of gestures that Mead describes a triadic structure emerging where a person chooses to initiate communication, a receiver responds to the communication, and meaning emerges from the response. When this triadic relationship is applied to the participants of the therapeutic photography groups the initiation of communication takes place when a participant displays an image and explains the meaning behind it. Eye contact is focussed on the image and fellow participants usually lean in to see the image, thus body language is non-threatening and the participant relies on verbal feedback from which they extract meaning. It is the extraction of meaning where some of the therapeutic value comes from, for example, when Michael decided to share his image of self-harm scars he received an empathetic response (and sympathetic from some) which allowed him to open up more about when he felt the need to inflict pain on himself, and it was noted by co-facilitators that he had not shared this information with other peers before. Burns (1984) explains that the exploration of “I” and “me” occurs in children as they experiment through play, then learn the rules of the game, and this could be applied to the therapeutic photography group too in that the participants had fun in the “play” of capturing images and interpreting each task, but were then guided by each other in terms of the “rules of the game” when it came to sharing information with each other. What this allowed the participants to see was the “I” at play;

they were all able to engage their impulsive, curious and creative selves in the company of each other.

In turn, this appears to have allowed exploration of self-concept, an aspect of identity about which Rogers (1959, 1951) wrote in his development of group work, to look at issues pertaining to self-awareness and emotional understanding. At the core of his work was phenomenology and he used this to try to understand how each individual learns to function in their own subjective worlds (Rogers, 1959). He believed it was the perception that individuals build up about themselves which influences interactions with the social world, and this was a continual process which aimed to achieve actualisation.

According to Rogers (1951) the process of self-concept is threefold and consists of developing a view of the self, then developing value, and then striving to achieve an ideal version of the self. This process appeared to be mirrored in the results which interpreted the interactions with the images as participants “searched” for their new identities and worked through issues of reaching for the ideal, and the fear of freedom and change. The view of the self is the starting point for therapeutic intervention and in the therapeutic photography group the participants shared information in the *postcard selection* exercise, the *self-portrait* exercise, and the *select a meaningful image* exercise which captured elements of their identity which they felt safe to share (such as cultural ties, family, interests and roles). As the programme developed the participants used the safe environment to delve deeper and explore more issues, receiving feedback from one another, which Rogers terms positive regard. Positive regard from others can result in positive self-regard within individuals which equates to enhanced self-esteem. Rosenberg et. al. (1989) view self-esteem as a basic human motive in that there is a natural drive towards self enhancement which is defined by a perception that you are liked, you can achieve, and you are as good as those around you (Verhaeghe et. al., 2008).

However, Burns (1984) warns that if individuals are too reliant on feedback from others to enhance their self-esteem they may unconsciously work to protect their self-concept from changing and deny or distort positive regard from others. It may be that this could explain Caroline’s actions at the start of the process where she attended the first session, but then avoided coming back for two weeks, before returning to engage from the fourth session onwards. She appeared to demonstrate discomfort at the beginning of her group experience, and the feedback she received from others may have been misinterpreted, thus initiating a primitive response of fight or flight to protect her self-concept.

If self-esteem is enhanced then the self-concept is positively rewarded and directs behaviour towards maintaining this new feeling, which Rogers (1951) believed was a move towards self-actualisation, striving towards the ideal version of the self. He stated that this was an ongoing procedure and the self-concept would only influence a drive towards the ideal self rather than dominate it, but in defining self-concept Rogers underpins the importance of looking at the perception people have of themselves, and how it impacts on their behaviour and motivation. The third super-ordinate theme identified this process which recorded participants in the process of developing the self-identity; using the images, narratives and feedback to assess future direction. Throughout the process, social comparisons were made and there was a sense that some were actively confronting their old identities to enable a new one to emerge. There were high numbers of observations, both within the reflexive notes and the participant observation data, which pertained to support offered by fellow participants, and links to the social work intervention of group work (discussed later in this chapter). This would suggest that individuals were motivated to perform because there was a positive benefit from doing so, and a safe space to do it in. It was also noted in the third superordinate theme that there was an aspect of safety in the way in which participants explored issues with their photographs, the interpretation being that there were layers of exploration within the images, each one leading to a deeper narrative as the process went on.

The value of considering self-perception as a starting point for any therapeutic intervention has been highlighted by Weiser (1999) who states that self-portraits can be used as a stimulus to explore self-narrative, and if this is done by a professional then the result could be that the subject learns more about themselves. Weiser was writing from the perspective of a photo-therapist, as opposed to a therapeutic photographer, which means that the professional in mind would be a counsellor or therapist. Milford (1984) recognises the value of using self-portraits to objectify oneself in order to visually confront the image presented and states that this can instil a fight or flight response, but that, if this is conducted within a group setting, the atmosphere of mutual support should provide an environment where flight will be resisted and visual confrontation can take place. Indeed, Florence ended the process by producing a self-portrait which she had been unable (or unwilling) to do so earlier in the process, largely due to the support and interest shown by the fellow participants, but also as a result of her own journey of discovery and developing self-worth. There is a risk that confronting the self-image might produce a strong arousal resulting in heightened anxiety, but Milford (1984) believed that this could be the precursor to therapeutic interventions because it opens people up to exploring more “mature ego mechanisms” (p.227).

There are three areas within the exploration of personal identity which potentially align with the work of Winnicott (1971). The first of these areas relates to his identification of a holding environment, a therapeutic environment first identified in the parent/child relationship, but professionally adopted to represent a milieu wherein empathy and understanding are provided to a service user in order to facilitate safe exploration of problematic issues. This might allow the service user to express controversial thoughts, explore emotions, or test out new ideas without being judged and criticised for doing so, and in terms of the therapeutic photography groups there were signs that participants were using the experience to disclose information and seek advice in a safe space, a space which could also be termed a holding environment. In her feedback within the focus group, Caroline referred to the milieu of the group as being “tangible” which highlighted the idea that using photographs in a group setting to explore issues created a different atmosphere, unlike anything she had experienced before in any professional setting. It may be that she felt as if she was being “held” in this environment because of the attention, focus and empathy she received when exploring, akin to Winnicott’s holding environment, and she likened this to a tangible experience.

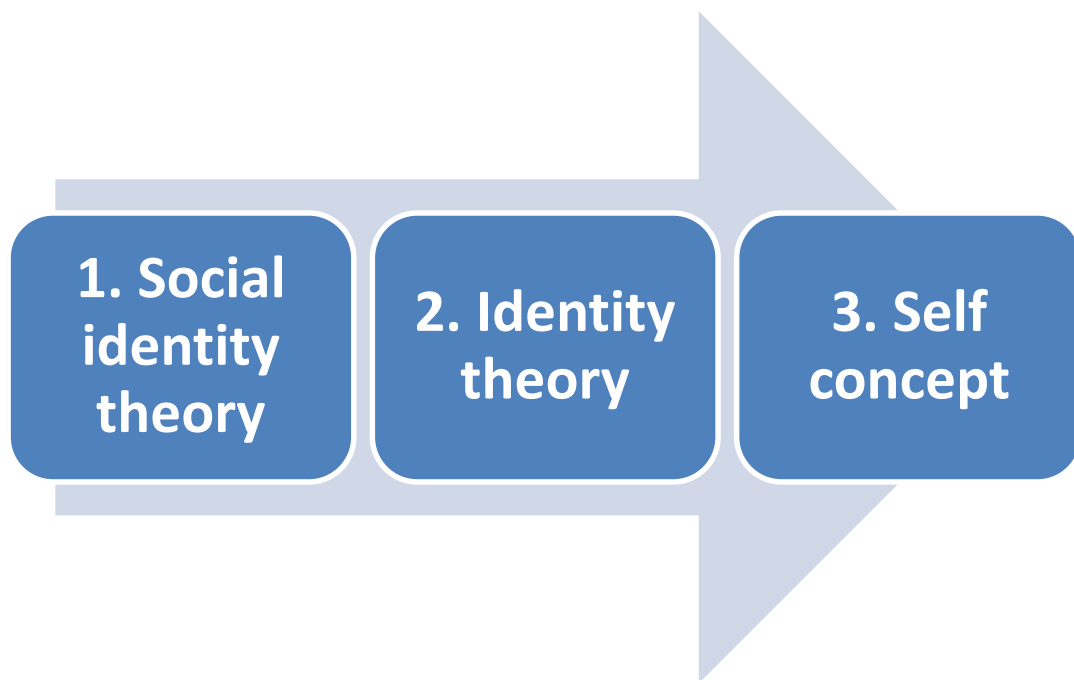
The first three super-ordinate themes presented in chapter 5 highlight the recognition of a “false” identity, the process of searching and exploration, and the emergence of a “true” identity which took place within the holding environment. It is here that we can draw another parallel to the work of Winnicott (1965), the exploration of the false self in relation to the true self. Harwood (in Honess & Yardley, 2003) explains that Winnicott’s true self refers to an identity that has been exposed to a healthy balance of experiences which leads to a sense of “aliveness and...feelings of realness” (p.57), but that if an individual strives to please other people, and adapts their behaviour in ways to meet the needs of others, then a false self can develop and a preoccupation occurs which sees the true self subsumed by the survival instincts of the false self. Winnicott (1965) described the false self as a defensive structure to protect the true self and viewed its function on a continuum with the highly problematic false self dominating all behaviours and interactions at one end, to a healthy functioning false self informing social graces, interactions, and competencies within society, “the gain being the place in society which can never be attained or maintained by the True Self alone” (p.142). Dominant false selves are impacted by a number of issues such as roles, families, and societal pressures, issues which emerged in the latter three super-ordinate themes within chapter 6, and by exploring these issues, then objectifying them through photography, this can aid individuals to confront the false self, enhance the true self through learning, and, if this is done with a group, social influences can be identified and attributed to possible feelings of oppression. The identification of the false self and the development of the true self would certainly align with the first three super-ordinate themes where participants became aware of their defensive stances,

duplicious actions, and behaviours aimed at pleasing others, and then worked to explore other options so that they could develop their selves in order to be happier and feel safer in their actions.

There is also a third area where Winnicott's work may be applied to therapeutic photography and that is in its use as a transitional object, a concept which has been identified by a number of other researchers and practitioners (Riedel, 2013; Hills de Zarate, 2012; Young, 2004). This viewpoint assumes that the image can assist in the transition from one state to another, but Winnicott (1971) believed it was the transitional *space* that was important and underpinned this stance by illustrating that children learn through play, and it is the process of becoming lost in play and accessing imagination and creativity which can aid a therapeutic transition and learning. This is akin to Mead's "I" at play (as described by Burns (1984)); being immersed in the transitional space can trigger emotions that may have been lost or buried in the unconscious, and reminding an individual that these emotions exist may be welcome respite from the reality of existence which may well be enough to initiate positive change.

7.4 Summary of Identity Exploration

Stets and Burke (2000) state that "to establish a general theory of self, we must understand how group, role, and person identities are interrelated" (p.228), and with the use of photographs, these three levels of identity would appear to have been explored by participants in the therapeutic photography group, as summarised in fig. 7.1.



Three stage exploration:

1. Social identity theory

Participants share images and build a therapeutic milieu, guiding each other on the appropriate level of disclosure and forming a bond through an interest in photography (which might be a welcome distraction from other aspects of life).

2. Identity theory

Participants identify roles, cultural ties, reminisce - facilitates group bonding and asserts identity and commonality.

3. Self concept

Then the images are further explored to see if the issues identified align with the purpose, ambitions, and hopes of the individual.

Fig. 7.1 – Summary of identity exploration using therapeutic photography in group work.

Given that the social element of interaction served to facilitate exploration, the catalyst that was photography could be described as the instrument of social transaction. It has been suggested by some that learning within human relations stems from transactions between individuals, and this relies on relationships which can be utilised for this purpose (Stetsenko and Arieivitch, 2004; Freedman & Combs, 1996). These transactional processes do not need to be pure discourse between individuals; they can also be participation, practices and produce of group interactions which can

impact on development. The photograph, in this respect, is used to encapsulate a concept, an idea, or an issue, and then used as a tool to discuss. It is externalised, objectified, and then held at arm's length for others to see, but this distance between the photographer and the image appeared to facilitate dialogue within the safety of the therapeutic space, and between individuals who demonstrated mutual understanding and respect.

The fact that the therapeutic photography programme was designed around exploring relationships (as influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1992) socio-ecological model) must also be acknowledged as the participants were guided to explore their relationships with self, families, routines, environment and society, but the exploration was also conducted within the new relationships formed between members of the group. It is within these relationships where some suggest the work of Mead (1934) illustrates again how the *therapeutic* aspect of learning through interaction begins, and that discoveries made can assist an individual to move to a more mature acceptance of identity in viewing the self in a societal context (Fishbane, 2001; McGoldrick & Carter, 1999; Orinsky et. al., 1994). Fishbane (2001) goes on to highlight that therapeutic work is collaborative because an individual needs to understand themselves, but also feel that they are understood by others. In using photographs, the group was using the established cultural norm of taking and viewing photographs to facilitate collaboration.

7.5 Outcomes

The literature review suggested that the main outcomes of utilising therapeutic photography for participants was enhancement of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and the potential to empower marginalised groups. The interpretation of the results from participant observations, photographs, and the focus group appeared to confirm that these areas were impacted upon, but also suggested other factors that were affected by participation, particularly self-disclosure and control. This section will offer a further discussion of these concepts.

7.5.1 Self-Efficacy & Self-Esteem

Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) believe that self-efficacy can be viewed as an extension of Cooley's (1902) looking glass self in that how we perceive the views of others will affect behaviour, but underpinning this is the motivation to behave in a certain way, and the consequences of that behaviour, which also define the self. They believe this defines an "active self" (p. 79) which is affected by Bandura's (1982) categories for building self-efficacy (mastering experiences, learning from others, receiving constructive feedback, and experiencing positive physiological states). Kasabova (2014) also believes motivation underpins self-efficacy, but for this motivation to affect the self there needs to be a realisation that changes in behaviour result in consequences.

The therapeutic photography group used their own photographic devices to capture images, be it cameras, camera phones, or tablet computers, so approached the tasks with a degree of knowledge about their own photographic tools. From the outset of the tasks the facilitator reinforced the message that there was no right or wrong way to read an image (Weiser, 2004). This meant that every image was "correct" if the participant justified it, and through sharing images they learned from one another. Feedback was offered after every participant shared the images, and this appeared to affect physiological states. At the beginning of the experience some of the participants were nervous, but soon built up trust in one another and confidence appeared to grow, an element of using photography which was also noted by Duffy (2013) where she observed participants moving from doubt at the outset, to efficacy and pride by the end. In the final superordinate theme in chapter 6 the participants explored isolation and the interpretation of results indicated enhanced self-efficacy for a number of the participants, particularly Violet. Within the final super-ordinate theme Violet verbalised the fact that she now felt she has "a voice" and referred to the "wall" she had built around herself coming down (see fig. 6.24 in Chapter 6) – she had started the process as a quiet, acquiescent participant, but learned that she was able to express herself and used her images to give her a sense of power and control. According to Bandura (1982), these changes would suggest a positive impact on self-efficacy. Cosden and Reynolds (1982) highlight that because photography is accessible, requires relatively little skill, and produces quick results it is a medium which is particularly suited to building self-efficacy.

Therapeutic photography groups also produce a large number of images throughout the duration of the six week course and when these are either printed off and laid out on a table, or displayed as a digital slideshow, the participants witness the volume of images they have produced in a short timescale. This gives opportunities to reminisce on the activities, and for further feedback to be

sought, but it also directs the conversation to the next steps for the groups. There always exists the opportunity to display the images to a wider audience, and, for some, an interest in pursuing their photography skills further may emerge. Stets and Burke (2000) believe that self-efficacy aligns with the “behavioural enactment of identities” (p. 233), as opposed to self-esteem, which they believe is more attuned to identification with other individuals within a group, but perhaps the exploration and enactment of identities through photography was enhanced by the fact that self-esteem was also addressed, and the familiarity of the group experience assisted the development of self-efficacy.

Enhancing self-efficacy is often viewed as being linked to the development of self-esteem which has been highlighted as an important point for social workers to recognise as task based interventions can affect change in both areas (Donaldson, 2005; Bednar et. al., 1995). Rosenberg et. al. (1989) identified three sources for building self-esteem which stressed the importance of feeling that you are likeable and that people appreciate what you do, that you believe you can achieve what you set out to do (self-efficacy), and that you compare well against others. Verhaeghe et. al. (2008) found that this latter point was important within peer groups and that this linked directly with support offered by fellow participants which, in turn, bolstered recovery and maintenance of positive self-evaluations. Indeed, Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) also draw parallels with Cooley’s (1902) looking glass self in terms of self-esteem and state that, although the perceived views of others are important in forming a sense of self, this is enhanced when these perceptions are based on the views of peers. Perhaps this explains the high levels of observations within the therapeutic photography group regarding support, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, as positive change in one area suggests changes in the other two areas will also be affected when doing group work.

7.5.2 Control & Self-Disclosure

Within the results, two other significant observations were observed; the aspect of *control*, and the choice of the participants to give information relating to *self-disclosure*. From the outset, deeply personal information was shared and the facilitator noted in reflections that although the use of photography acted as an effective communication tool, there existed the potential for participants to reveal sensitive and private information too quickly. This concern is mirrored by Loewenthal (2015) who highlights that using photo techniques potentially lead to clients expressing “too much too soon” (p. 13). Despite this concern, the facilitator also reflected that within his capacity as a trained, qualified social worker the information had never been overwhelming for him, but there may have been an impact on the other group members. This does raise a question as to why the

speed of disclosure would be a concern for some professionals. Given that social work is about working with vulnerable people who are often marginalised and oppressed, is it right that workers feel they should *control* disclosures? There were occasions throughout the therapeutic photography group where disclosure resulted in the sharing of deeply personal information, such as Kay's addiction to alcohol and Michael's self-harming, but these were made at appropriate points during the exercise, and were visualised and verbalised because they were important issues in the lives of the participants and were impacting on behaviour. For professionals to attempt to censor this seems to defeat the purpose of intervention. If anything, this perhaps reinforces the idea that therapeutic photography should be facilitated by a trained professional who can direct conversations to address issues, or signpost individuals so that further advice, support and guidance can be sought. There were times in the process where the reflexive notes have recorded the facilitator's feelings about opportunities to further investigate an issue with a participant, but because of the group setting, this has not been appropriate. There were also moments in the first session where participants revealed considerable information about themselves, such as Michael's self-harming, and Anna's adoption, which could have been further explored, but could also have put pressure on other participants to make significant revelations in order to fit in with the group. It is an issue which needs to be considered for future facilitation and perhaps underpins a need for specific training in the use of therapeutic photography should any professional wish to incorporate the technique into practice.

Burnard and Morrison (1992) state that the act of self-disclosure can be therapeutic in itself. They explain that individuals who self-disclose to others may have been through an experience which they have found to be transformative, and that by sharing information about themselves to others they are coming to terms with their own experiences. Self-disclosure is a natural part of forming friendships and by sharing and receiving information about ourselves and others there is a process of reciprocation taking place. Burnard and Morrison (1992) suggest there is a gradient of self-disclosure with regards to reciprocity and that over-disclosure can result in recipients feeling overwhelmed and either being intimidated into also over-disclosing, or being too afraid to join in and refraining from disclosing any information. Within the therapeutic photography group Caroline did admit to feeling overwhelmed by the sharing of information during the first session. She used the exercises to open up about her family background, but was also present when Michael revealed that he self-harmed. As a result, she avoided coming to the group for the next two weeks, but returned in week four and continued to participate until the end of week six. It may be that she was afraid that she would be expected to over-disclose, and as a result she withdrew, but for some reason she returned and continued. This could be attributed to the support from her peers, or the realisation that, ultimately, she controlled the information she shared – both visually and verbally.

The aspect of control was also recorded within the observations, particularly when participants were observed to demonstrate power over the information they shared. Participants reported feeling in control of the information they shared and this appeared to be reflected in the amount and depth of information offered during each exercise, which was particularly noted in the three super-ordinate themes within chapter 6 when family issues, professional trust, and feelings of isolation emerged. Yet the facilitator's reflexive notes also considered where the locus of control came from. He was setting each exercise and guiding discussions, therefore, in effect, he was "controlling" the sessions. However, the facilitator was guided by the group in terms of content. These reflections led to a consideration of the experience for all of the participants and the varying levels of control they may have experienced. These levels of control may stem from a construct which is often associated with self-efficacy, and that is *locus of control* (Zimmerman, 2000; Burns, 1984). If a person perceives that they are responsible for their own actions and can achieve through skill, talent, and experience then they have a strong sense of internal control; however, if a person believes that outcomes are often down to luck, chance, and the influence of others then they have a strong sense of being controlled externally. In reality, humans are influenced by both of these elements, but if self-esteem is low then a belief in external controls tends to be dominant (Burns, 1984). Burns (1984) also highlights other areas that might impact on a belief in external controls and these include low self-evaluation, difficulty in adjusting to change, and challenges in forming interpersonal relationships. As the participants moved through the exercises there appeared to be an increase in self-evaluation due to the fact that others were interested in the photographs and associated perspectives, there was a consideration of change and how each person had adapted their identities to address issues, and, through the group work, there was a sense of shared experience which impacted on the positive ability to form new relationships – all factors which should have a beneficial impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and therefore, locus of control.

7.5.3 Empowerment

Observations pertaining to aspects of empowerment were recorded, but the facilitator noted in reflections that observations which related to self-esteem and self-efficacy appeared to occur more frequently. Observations generally related to external expressions from participants, and the reflexive notes suggest that internal motivations and changes were harder to gauge from participant observation alone, so there may well be differences in the types of empowerment that were being captured. Leonardsen (2007) highlights that part of the problem in evidencing empowerment is the

fact that the word “empowerment” has become a “catch-all buzzword...that obscures more than it clarifies” (p. 4), and it is often used to describe general change. However, within the therapeutic photography group, empowerment appeared to be associated with knowledge, support, and community; akin to transformative experiences where individuals learn about coping strategies in the face of adversity from the input of others (Bush & Folger, 1994).

Askheim (2003) recognises that empowerment contains both individual and structural dimensions. The individual dimensions are affected by activities and interventions which impact on control, self-confidence, self-perception, and increased skills and knowledge. Structural dimensions look at the power structures within cultures and societies which can be challenged in numbers, but normally lead to oppression and isolation. Given the short term nature of the therapeutic photography group the changes in terms of empowerment appear to be attributable only to individual dimensions. However, empowerment has been described as a developmental process that cannot be set against a specific timescale, but will enable the individual to continue gathering knowledge about their situation, reflecting on issues, and then working out how to address these issues (Kaminski et. al., 2000; Zimmerman, 1995; Kieffer, 1984). Friere (1970) termed the beginning of this process as *conscientization*, becoming aware and reflecting on issues that relate to personal lives, and this has been encapsulated into approaches to address empowerment issues by recognising that this is usually the formative stage of any action, but the latter stages also include identifying with others and feeling connected to peers (Carr, 2003; Gutierrez, 1994).

The process of conscientization appeared to be apparent in the therapeutic photography group. Exploration of identity brought up common issues in terms of recovering from substance use, identifying warning signs with the mental health group, and dealing with aspects of isolation, as explored in the final super-ordinate theme within chapter 6. Certainly, the *photovoice* project at the end of the six weeks was underpinned by theories of empowerment and aimed to give a group the ability to raise issues and bring these to public attention, but the choice in what the group did with the images was theirs, and although the group displayed a selection of their images, the public impact was limited. However, this should not negate the impact it may have had on the participants themselves as the focus group feedback revealed that learning from others, and recognising that other people experience similar issues, was empowering in itself.

7.6 Applicability to Social Work

This study suggests that therapeutic photography in a group environment can have a positive impact on self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment, but it also puts the participant in control of the information which, in turn, impacts on self-disclosure, provides a forum for common issues to be explored, and leads to strong peer support. In terms of the objectives of social work as a profession, the outcomes would appear to align with the purpose of intervention which includes “outcomes which are therapeutic, empowering and developmental” (Sudbery, 2002, p. 149). Throughout delivery of the therapeutic photography groups, observations with regards to social work theory were also recorded within the reflexive notes but it is acknowledged that there are limitations within this approach. The researcher, although an experienced social worker and social work educator, has recorded theories and interventions that he will be familiar with and this may have excluded other theoretical approaches which could have been considered. However, the objective set out to assess if therapeutic photography with groups was a suitable intervention to consider within the field of social work, and the argument that is presented within this section is that if *any* theoretical approach from the field of social work can be applied, then this might suggest it could be an appropriate intervention. It is therefore important to consider the types of theoretical approaches which occurred, and if they were attributable to the interaction with photographs. Before going on to look at some specific examples, summaries of theories which the researcher was able to infer for each participant is presented in fig. 7.2. These are drawn from the reflexive notes which were kept throughout the duration of the project.

Caroline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious/Ambivalent (Preoccupied) attachment style. • Family systems theory suggests a controlling family background where asserting identity was not encouraged. • Loss of roles has led to significant change and fragmented identity. • Erikson’s stages would suggest she is in generativity versus stagnation, feeling unproductive and requires a purpose. • Enjoyed participating in the tasks (task centred). • Defense mechanisms – projection/transference.
Violet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant issues of loss and change. • Transition theory suggests she has become entrenched in the neutral zone where there is comfort from immersing in past memories.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting experience suggests secure attachment. • Erikson's stages would suggest she is still in intimacy versus isolation, and feeling isolated because of marital issues and mental health issues. • Experienced discrimination due to mental health. Poorly housed. • Disempowered by landlord. Used narrative approaches to re-dress (narrative therapy) • Enjoyed the group nature aspect of the project (group work).
Florence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious/Ambivalent (Preoccupied) attachment style. Puts the needs of others before her own. Subservient attitude. • Matriarch of her family. • Erikson's stages suggest she would be in generativity versus stagnation – may not feel a productive member of society due to mobility issues/mental health. Suggestion of negative outcomes from Erikson's previous stages. • Object relations – appeared to be attracted to exciting/rejecting relationships. • Experienced discrimination on bus journeys due to poor mobility. • Enjoyed the group nature aspect of the project (group work).
Kay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidant (Dismissive) attachment style. Requires control. Change – cycle of change – fear of relapse. • 12 step programme. • Loss and change – finds it difficult to express emotions. • Erikson's stages suggest she would be in intimacy versus isolation – has a family but also appears isolated because of the social impact of addiction. • Experienced discrimination through being labelled "alcoholic". • Enjoyed participating in the tasks (task centred). • Defense mechanisms – bypassed denial.
Michael	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorganised (Fearful) attachment style. Abused when younger. May have contributed to mental health issues. Finds relationships difficult and now estranged from his own children.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erikson’s stages suggest he would be in intimacy versus isolation – possible negative outcomes from all previous stages due to neglect/abuse. • Experienced discrimination due to substance use issues. • Enjoyed participating in the tasks (task centred). • Defense mechanisms – bypassed denial.
Margaret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidant (Dismissive) attachment style. • Very independent person but experiencing loss and change due to stroke. • Impact on independence – finding new role. • Resilience theory helps understand where she draws strength from. • Erikson’s stages suggest she may be in generativity versus stagnation and may feel she has been forced into stagnation because of her stroke. • Enjoyed the group nature aspect of the project (group work). • Defense mechanisms – bypassed denial. Regression. Tended to try to use humour to deflect, but then went on to explore issues through the photograph.
Anna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious/Ambivalent (Preoccupied) attachment (possible disorganised) based on how much information she shared initially. • Family systems theory may give more insight into how her experience of being parented has impacted on her now. • Erikson’s stages suggest she would be in intimacy versus isolation, but possible negative outcomes from previous stages – revealed parental issues and adoption at an early age. • Withdrew early.
John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidant (Dismissive) attachment style. Appeared to find comfort in using photographs to control his narrative. • Enjoyed participating in the tasks (task centred). • Withdrew at an early stage.

Fig. 7.2 – summaries of the social work theories with regards each participant.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, group work theories were considered throughout the delivery of the programme and participant observations pertaining to this were numerous. As well as knowledge of Tuckman’s (1965) descriptions of the stages of group life it was also useful to consider the type of

group based on the aims of the programme. Papell and Rothman (1966) categorised three distinct group types; remedial, reciprocal, and social. Remedial groups encourage individuals to consider issues which may impinge on social functioning, and address these through interaction with others. Reciprocal groups are primarily based around mutual support and self-help. Social groups are aimed at individuals who want to learn a new skill or talent. Because the therapeutic photography group encouraged participants to analyse social functioning, interact with others, provide support for each other, and develop a talent, therapeutic photography groups could be described as straddling all three of these categories. Some argue that recent developments in group work practice within social work has meant that agencies structure group work in a time limited manner, to meet agency objectives, to achieve change in service users, and to facilitate peer bonding, and this will result in approaches which incorporate remedial, reciprocal and social elements (Payne, 2014; Trevithick, 2012).

Payne (2014) highlights that group work can be directed by a variety of underpinning theories, and this makes it a suitable approach for multi-disciplinary working, but this study has attempted to consider the application of social work theories across four general domains; theories relating to the individual, relationships, environment, and society. This was done to mirror the exercises which were structured using Bronfenbrenner's (2009, 1992, 1986) socio ecological model which set tasks aimed at exploring relationships across the various systems he identified. In the initial stage of coding (see appendix 8) 12 different approaches were identified (excluding "exploring fears and strategies"), but again, it must be stated that this was influenced by the knowledge and experience of the researcher; other social workers may have identified different theories, as would professionals from other disciplines.

Psychodynamic theory tends to underpin phototherapy in that the photograph potentially provides a means to access unconscious, repressed, memories and bring them into the conscious by visually expressing them (Loewenthal, 2013; Yerushalmi & Yedidya, 1997). It could be suggested that, within the therapeutic photography groups, photographs were permitting the psychoanalytic process of free association wherein participants used images to freely express thoughts and feelings that were initiated by viewing and discussing their pictures (Bollas, 2008). One aspect of Freudian theory which became evident was the use of photographs (and associated narrative) as a defense mechanism, occasionally using humour to divert attention away from an issue, but more commonly, to use the image to externalise an issue and then address it in its visual form. Caroline acknowledged defense mechanisms during the focus group when she stated "...I have got my defense mechanisms so high that I never actually realised...", demonstrating a knowledge that she was protecting herself from

feelings she may not be ready to deal with, but others appeared to be using their photographs to bypass potential denial and share their issues: Kay used images to talk about her alcohol use, and Michael used his to speak about his self-harming behaviour. The reflective notes suggest that the language being used could also be linked to defense mechanisms – Caroline’s spoke about the process being “very scary when people share *their* hard experiences” which may be transference of her own feelings onto those of others; and the rebellion of Margaret and Caroline could also be linked to regression. Graf (2002) explains that images in counselling can provide a tool for communication between the conscious and unconscious which can help address issues of denial and other such defence mechanisms. If the issue has been photographed then, for the participant, they have brought it into existence for the group to address and discuss, therefore it can no longer be dismissed. The support and validation from peers can also assist in accepting the issue. Throughout the programme there appeared to be no adverse reactions from group members when issues were brought to the attention of others.

The works of other psychodynamic theorists influenced by Freud were also considered. Erikson’s (1963) eight stages of development describe various life transitions and crises which define how individuals cope with personal development, relationships, and societal expectations (Gibson & Gibson, 2016). When working with individuals, consideration can be given to the stage they are currently at, or stages which have been experienced which might impact on current behaviour. Erikson wrote from the perspective that the self is an object which is affected by the society it functions in, and as a consequence it is affected by achievements within the dominant culture (Burns, 1984). Perhaps this is why his theory appeared to be applicable to working with therapeutic photography; individuals objectified elements of their selves within the photographs, received feedback from others which may enhance a sense of achievement, and this encourages narrative exploration to offer a deeper explanation which can be linked to Erikson’s writings. Therefore, it is not the photograph specifically, but the milieu of the therapeutic photography group and the impact this has on sharing information which enabled the application of Erikson’s theory. The reflexive notes recorded times where the participants used their photographs to return (through reminiscence) to previous developmental stages and explored formative actions such as exploring the environment in their childhood, risk taking behaviour in adolescence (particularly Margaret and her exploration of smoking), and productivity in later years. All of these explorations gave opportunity to consider a variety of issues such as the development of trust in childhood, autonomy and industry, and the development of identity in the teenage years.

Generally, this was the case with the application of all social work theories within the therapeutic photography groups; the photographs acted as a catalyst to narrative exploration and added a visual element to a social work dynamic which typically relies on verbal information. This aspect of visual and verbal communication did appear to impact on adult attachment styles as identified by Hazan and Shaver (1987), and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). A preoccupied attachment style is characterised by a tendency for an individual to be overbearing and will often place the needs of others before their own needs, and this can manifest within conversations by narratives going off at tangents and becoming entrenched in the stories and lives of other people (George et. al., 1985). A dismissive attachment style can often see an individual avoiding intimacy and relationships in order to nurture self-esteem and this can result in a need to feel in control of situations (Gibson & Gibson, 2016). Using photography in the groups appeared to provide structure and contain the tendency to dominate conversations in preoccupied adult attachment styles, whereas the aspects of control appeared to encourage participation within dismissive adult attachment styles.

The reflexive notes suggest that Violet tended towards the preoccupied attachment style wherein her needs became secondary to those around her and she appeared to search for a role in which she was required by others – her ex-husband in his search for care in particular. Florence also acknowledged a tendency towards this attachment pattern in her parenting style. Using the images allowed them to see that they had interesting personal narratives without getting caught up in the lives of others. Showing a photograph and talking about it from their perspective appeared to limit the tendency to go off on a tangent to include the story about other people. It appeared that Kay displayed a dismissive attachment style and this came through in her photographs where she demonstrated a need for control. She was quiet at the beginning of the process, but as she progressed she realised that she could still exercise considerable control in what she shared and this appeared to encourage engagement. In both preoccupied and dismissive styles, the tasks put focus onto the individual which gave permission to the preoccupied style to spend time looking at the self, and the group nature of the programme meant that the dismissive style received attention and experienced other people taking an interest in their story.

Similar to attachment theory, the application of object relations theory (Fairbairn, 1952) noted within the reflexive notes gave insight into the quality of relationships that the participants entered into based on their view of themselves, and the belief in how they should be treated by others. Notably, Florence came into the process identifying that she had low self-worth, suggesting she had a dominant libidinal ego based on accounts of feeling rejected and unloved. Her description of relationships then indicate she was attracted by the excitement of the unpredictable nature of her

partners, believing that she could perhaps care for them in some way, and have that care reciprocated within the relationship. Again, working with this knowledge could allow a practitioner the opportunity to further explore these historic and unconscious decisions with a participant to fully explore these perspectives.

As people explored their identity, their relationships, and their environment through images there were considerable mentions about family, both through reminiscence and talking about present roles and activities. Some of these were simply acknowledging other people who impacted on the lives of the participants, but others went deeper and explored upbringing, the impact parenting had on raising their own family, and how feelings of rebellion had emerged as a result (as explored in Chapter 6). This appeared to offer links into family systems theory which can give social work practitioners insight into roles within the family. Family systems theory can assist in the exploration of problematic behaviour within families such as alliances between family members, secrets within families, myths that might become perpetuated through generations, and roles adopted through societal expectations (Gibson & Gibson, 2016). Similar to Freudian theory, because of the group nature of the project, there was not really an opportunity to explore these issues in depth, but when issues arose they were acknowledged (if not by the group, then by the facilitator) and identified as such. Two notable ones which arose related to a family myth which impacted on the behaviour of Caroline, and the general expectations on female members of groups in taking on caring roles because it was expected of them by other family members.

There were other psychosocial theories which emerged throughout the groups such as loss and change theory, resilience theory, and transition theory which helped to understand where an individual might be psychologically as they deal with change. Loss and change was prevalent in all of the participants as they explored their past histories and the consequent impact that losses had on their identity. When combined with knowledge of attachment styles, the reflexive notes could be used to hypothesise how loss was being dealt with, and how change impacted on coping skills. In Caroline's exploration, she chose to focus on a number of losses and admitted that these had resulted in a significant impact on her ability to define who she was, and what direction she was developing in. Knowledge of resilience gave insight into where strengths were drawn from during adverse periods of time – Margaret identified her creative skills, Kay her family, and Florence identified her network of close friends. Transition theory was used by the facilitator within the reflexive notes when Violet reflected on her old photographs and reminisced about her childhood, pinpointing the exact moment in time where things changed for her and life went from “good to bad”. The theory helped to understand the risks she faced in not being able to psychologically deal

with the life events she had experienced and becoming entrenched in the past, glorifying these experiences at the expense of being able to address current problems and issues.

All of these theories helped the facilitator understand behaviour, but also gave insights into how previous relationships and familial experiences impacted on current coping strategies.

Understanding these theories can also assist the therapeutic alliance between the facilitator and the participants. Borden (2000) describes the therapeutic endeavour as one which attempts to enhance understanding of the self and formative experiences, enable management of conflict (both internal and external), and to improve social functioning, and this is usually done by exploring relationships where most of these experiences stem from. If relational experiences can be shared in new relationships, then this can assist learning and reinforce it at the same time as individuals have the ability to make changes and test these out in a safe environment.

Social work interventions were also noted and the dominant one was group work, but task centred intervention and narrative therapies were also considered throughout. Within social work practice task centred interventions progress through four stages where the problem is defined, goals are discussed, problem solving is initiated, and an outcome is achieved (leading to termination) (Epstein & Brown, 2002). Within the therapeutic photography groups the tasks were set, participants had to define what to capture and what this represented, then present and discuss each image, and then end that task before moving on to the next. There were also patterns of narrative therapy within the outcomes of some of the tasks where participants' elicited information, developed narratives, defined roles and expectations, and in some instances, were able to reframe thinking based on outcomes of discussions. Notably for Violet, this occurred when she was discussing her housing issues and had accepted she had to live under the rule of an inept landlord, but through exploration of the problem she focussed in on some potential solutions and was able to move from viewing herself as part of the problem, to viewing herself as the agent of solution. Kettle (2010) suggests that photographs are ideally suited to developing narratives which can assist narrative therapy. As well as being technically constructed, they are also socially constructed and it is important to listen to the photographer explain the cultural context represented within the image. As narrative therapy aims to understand the impact of culture and society on "problem saturated" narratives, using a visual approach to explore cultural and societal norms can facilitate communication (Gibson & Heyman (in Lishman et. al., 2014)).

The applicability of the information offered to Bronfenbrenner's (2009, 1992, 1986) socio ecological model was also noted, but this should not be surprising given the exercises were structured around the model in order to explore relationships at the different levels. However, what this appeared to

do was to provide an insight into areas where individuals felt oppressed, and where commonalities could be explored, from which feelings of empowerment might be drawn. Because participants controlled the information they shared there was a power dynamic that was different from social work relations where a professional might be sitting with a service user and asking questions (possibly from a form) to obtain information. Within the therapeutic photography groups the participants were given themes within tasks, and they decided what to photograph and what to say; in essence, they decided what was important and relevant for them and shared it. For the facilitator it meant that they had to learn from the participants in order to empathise with the issues which ranged from self-harming, alcohol addiction, loss of role, fear of ageing, and living with a disability. For the participants, there was a perception that the information being shared with the facilitator meant that the power dynamic was different from relationships with other professionals because they were controlling the information, they were being listened to, and they were working in partnership with their peers and the facilitator to explore solutions.

As a social worker, learning from the participants is akin to the approach highlighted by Freire (1990) when he wrote that professionals should have a “permanent critical curiosity...in those with whom they work” (p.7). This curiosity informs the social worker about the issues from the point of view of their service users and makes the profession progressive, but also means that if the social worker shares knowledge on the basis of the information received, then the worker and participant can become co-creators of knowledge (Freire, 1998). Within the therapeutic photography group there were a number of occasions where information was shared by the facilitator based on the information from the participants, but the reflexive notes reveal that this was based on the narrative and the photograph where issues and problems were highlighted. Had it not been for the images and narratives, the information may not have been forthcoming.

Some highlight that social workers should strive to empower their service users, which has to be balanced between their statutory obligations and the rights to self-determination within the service user (and associated considerations of capacity), and that social workers should act as agents to help service users understand injustices at micro and macro levels and ways in which these can be addressed (Leonardsen, 2007; Donaldson, 2005; Graham, 2004; Askheim, 2003; Dietz, 2000). The therapeutic photography group appeared to assist this process and, using Gutierrez’s (1994) four stages of empowerment as an illustration - the participants increased self-efficacy through the production of photographs and the positive appraisal of these; they raised critical consciousness through the exploration of experiences such as transportation issues, housing issues, and treatment from staff at the benefit office; they reflected on previous coping strategies; and they drew strength

from newfound knowledge which brought new experiences and possibilities. Throughout this process, participants shared personal stories, and heard from others in order to develop a communal narrative which could be described as a source of empowerment (Rappaport, 1995).

It is this final point which underlines the *therapeutic* nature of the groups, as opposed to terming it simply as a “photography group”; Yalom and Leszcz (2005) outlined 11 factors which makes a group “therapeutic” (see section 3.5b in Chapter 3), and within the group there were examples which align with each of these factors. There was group cohesion and recognition, bonding and hope, sharing of information and application of theories to help understand dynamics, exploration of existential factors through photography, a safe space to share, and an overall impact on the identity of the participants.

7.7 Summary

Within therapeutic photography, the photograph is a communication tool which acts as a catalyst for emotional exploration. Performing this within a group gives opportunities for wider exploration of issues, but also for individuals to identify with one another, share experiences, and share coping strategies. It has been suggested by the researcher that when this is utilised within a group setting, a three stage exploration of identity is permitted where participants begin by defining their social identity, then focus in on role definition which is underpinned by identity theory, before assessing self-concept. The technique also redefines the power balance between participant and facilitator, and with increased control comes the ability to direct the communication to areas of interest and concern for the participant. This, in turn, appears to have positive outcomes for the participant in terms of increased self-efficacy, self-esteem, and empowerment.

The importance of social work considering relationships across all levels of society and the consequential impact this has on service users has been highlighted (Furman et. al., 2014; Donaldson, 2004; Dietz, 2002; Sudbery, 2002), and when therapeutic photography is applied in a structured manner this can allow insights into these various levels of society, and perhaps allow professionals to assess where the challenges are coming from, but importantly, this is done in conjunction with the service user (or photographer). Ultimately, a social worker needs to enter the experience of utilising therapeutic photography with the acceptance that they are there to learn from the service user, and then to use their social work knowledge and theories to help make sense

of what is being narrated to them, and in the Freirian sense become co-creators of knowledge with their service users (Freire, 1998).

Chapter 8 – Concluding remarks and reflections

8.1 Introduction

Within this final chapter, the research project will be concluded and the outcomes will be placed in context with the aims and research questions which were outlined in chapter 2. The implications for future practice, research, and education will also be considered, as well as the limitations of this project. To conclude, the researcher will also offer personal reflection on the overall project.

8.2 Conclusions

The aim of this project was to ascertain whether therapeutic photography is an approach which could aid the profession of social work, and from the results it has been suggested that there are a number of advantages to employing this technique. In order to answer this question, four research questions were set and these will now be re-visited to consider the outcomes for each.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION 1:** What is therapeutic photography and how is it currently being used?

The literature review revealed an elaborate definition of therapeutic photography, pointing to its application across a variety of settings, with numerous potential outcomes. Differences between therapeutic photography and phototherapy were highlighted, but cross overs in practice were also noted and the main distinction was recognised as being the absence of a trained counsellor or therapist. Within the wide use of therapeutic photography themes were observed from the application of the technique and a clearer pattern began to emerge.

The researcher surmised that the literature indicated that photography within a therapeutic setting was being used to explore the self and the many relationships encountered across lives. This included looking at the relationship with the self, with family members, with peers, with authority, with the environment, and with wider society; the photographer is never a neutral bystander and will always have a reason for taking the image, and a narrative to offer, which can explain their personal

connection with the photograph (and the contents within). It is this narrative that reveals the identity of the photographer, using the image as a conduit, which opens up a channel of communication. In peer situations, identity can be explored further as narratives are shared and opinions are sought to either challenge or confirm views and attitudes. The literature also suggests that patterns can emerge from shared narratives which can result in catalysts for social action; thus the outcome of empowerment was suggested.

The other suggested therapeutic benefits were those of increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, and within the therapeutic photography groups these impacts were observed as the technique involved producing and appraising images, learning from others, and evaluating identity on the basis of these interactions. As a result of this project, the researcher offers a definition of therapeutic photography as such:

A structured, guided, engagement with the creative intervention of photography in order to produce images for exploration where the self is considered in the context of relationships and interactions across the life cycle, with clearly defined outcomes for the participant.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION 2:** How can social work utilise therapeutic photography?

The dimensions of social work are multi-faceted, and social work practice also varies from country to country, but the international definition highlights the relational nature of the profession to analyse issues and improve wellbeing (<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>). Working with marginalised and vulnerable people from society in a therapeutic manner requires issues of power and communication to be considered, factors which the literature pertaining to the therapeutic use of photography suggests are inbuilt to the practice.

Introducing a visual element into the social work relationship changes the dynamics of communication, and by encouraging the use of photography to explore and express issues a service user is no longer relying on the traditional, verbal constructs of communication with an authority figure, they are directing the conversation towards issues which they feel are important to them. By encouraging the visualisation, or objectification, of an issue the process of identification is slowed down and the thought process is deepened so that clarity of the issue can be sought.

However, as with all social work interventions, the use of therapeutic photography has to be targeted to appropriate service user groups, and with the outcomes of the intervention in mind.

Increasing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment are the aims of the intervention, so service users engaging with the process would need to understand the intentions. It is also important to note that this project has looked specifically at utilising this intervention within a group, and the outcomes are attributable to the peer influence of the environment.

Alongside the benefits to the service user in addressing power and communication issues, the benefits to the social worker were also highlighted from the literature review and the therapeutic photography groups, namely the ability to link theories into the service user narrative. Structuring the delivery of the intervention around the socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; 1992; 1986) also allowed consideration of where issues arose from, be it at the microsystem (self-image, families, and peer influence), or at the outer end within the macrosystem (laws, policies, attitudes and values).

Utilising an intervention such as therapeutic photography within social work incorporates a Freirian approach to practice wherein service users are encouraged to bring social issues into their consciousness and become critical of the forces impacting on the continuation of them (Ozanne et. al., 2013; Freire, 1970). This exposes social workers to relationships where they may not be in direct control of the flow of information offered to them and, as reported in the results, this may lead to concern over the type of information disclosed, but Freire (1973) highlights the value of community dialogue in order to express and explore issues; peer support reduces the onus on the social worker as a *problem fixer*.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION 3:** How do social work service users engage with a therapeutic photography intervention?

Every participant explored their own identity. This meant that the perspective within the narrative was always from the “I” and participants appeared to appreciate time for themselves - to think about themselves, and to talk about themselves amongst peers who demonstrated a genuine interest in what they had to say. Because eyes were focused on the photographs, communication was non-threatening; there was a lack of direct eye contact, people leaned in towards each other to view images, and when the photograph was on display there was only one person talking about it, so there were no competing voices.

Participants were also in control of the information they shared. Everyone had time to display their image, and then add a narrative, which meant that nobody was over-dominant within these groups. There was no pressure to give lengthy narratives and in the early stages of each project some participants preferred to listen and ask questions, rather than give in depth narratives. However, as the projects developed, the quieter participants found confidence. This was threefold; the control over what they photographed, the control over what they said about the photograph, and their identification with their peers within the group.

As a result, the researcher has proposed a threefold stage of exploration wherein the group begin by finding common ground in terms of the dynamics of their interactions, their interest in photography, and their common bonds which make up their social identity; the group then become focused on the tasks in hand and within their images and narratives they define their identity in terms of roles, culture and values; and the final stage is a more personal one wherein each individual looks beyond their socially imposed roles to define their self-concept.

- **RESEARCH QUESTION 4**: What are the outcomes of a therapeutic photography programme, and what are the implications for future practice?

The outcomes of increased self-esteem and self-efficacy were both recorded in the observations and the IPA results, and whilst there was also an impact on feelings of empowerment this did not appear to be as obvious as the other impacts, perhaps because empowerment might manifest over a longer period of time following interaction with the project. However, there were more immediate outcomes, particularly with regard to using therapeutic photography in a group setting. Peer support in terms of offering advice, guidance and assistance was common because shared narratives established common bonds which appeared to help participants explore experiences, including feelings of isolation. Because of the aspect of control and the visual nature of the output, self-disclosure was also high and participants felt encouraged to reveal considerable information about their identity, often through abstract images.

Using therapeutic photography with a group results in a high output of visual images and it is worth considering what to do with these photographs. The final task within the programme explored displaying images to a wider public, and the impact on self-efficacy appeared to be apparent, but for the programme to have lasting impact it may be beneficial for each participant to be given copies of a photo montage from the project, or if budgets allow, to compile a photobook for each participant.

For social work, the implication appears to be that using a structured therapeutic photography programme with groups has the potential to increase awareness and knowledge, assists in exploring the role of the self in society, and can impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment. The cost of delivering the intervention is virtually nil as participants can use their own photographic equipment and images can be viewed from the digital display of the device. Because the programme is aimed at groups the reach is greater than one-to-one work, and the nature of peer support means that the social worker is not only guided by the nature of disclosures within the group, they also learn from the group about issues that are important to them, thus becoming educated by the experts of the situation.

However, the literature review and the findings also indicate that training for any professional undertaking a therapeutic photography intervention is recommended. By applying theories familiar to social work practice the researcher has made attempts to explain behaviours within the participants, but in doing so he recognises that he is drawing on years of practice and academic experience. For social workers to make use of therapeutic photography in future practice, education needs to be considered and training offered to assist workers to successfully deliver therapeutic photography interventions, and deal with issues which may arise through participation. For social work students, this could be incorporated into existing curricula so that creative techniques, specifically therapeutic photography, can be taught alongside existing interventions. For social workers in practice, continual professional development and staff training could be offered.

8.3 Strengths and Limitations

The risks of generalising data from interpretive phenomenological analytic approaches, as well as ethnographic approaches, were highlighted within the methodology, but alongside this the merits of these approaches for studying a micro society were also highlighted. The researcher does not make any claim that the results from this project can be applied to *every* social work setting across the UK, but the results do suggest that working with photography in a group environment has potential benefits. It has also been recognised that the researcher can never approach a project without some bias, and it is important that this is acknowledged and reflected upon throughout every stage of the research. The inherent knowledge of the researcher has also influenced the results and the researcher recognises that another social worker (or researcher) may well identify other appropriate theories in the narratives and behaviours of the participants, but it has also been argued that the

purpose of the project was to ascertain if therapeutic photography could be utilised by social work, and the very fact that *any* social work theory can be applied would suggest there is applicability.

It is also difficult to isolate the impact of a project of this scale as each session was delivered weekly in two hour sessions; this meant there were 166 hours of *other* experiences occurring between sessions. However, at the end of each session the facilitator set tasks for the following week, so participants were encouraged to investigate issues out with the two hour sessions. Also, the structure of the course was based around a model which recognised the importance of relationships across different domains of society, so without these 166 hours in between sessions there would have been no opportunity for the participants to reflect, investigate, and analyse relationships for each task.

The literature review suggested impacts on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment, which are nebulous concepts. With this in mind, the researcher was directed to look for these concepts within the observational data. The researcher did attempt to capture observations in a way that relied on description, but he also recognised that there will be subjective interpretation within the observations to ascertain the impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment. Combining data from the focus groups, observations, and photographs was thought to be the best way to reduce subjectivity, but again, a different researcher may have made differing judgements on the impact of these concepts.

In terms of assessing the transferability of the results, it should be recognised that the small number of participants involved in the research may be a limitation. Certainly, the outcomes from this project suggest that further studies should be encouraged to look at the applicability across larger numbers of service users, but it should also be noted that the chosen approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis may not be appropriate for larger groups.

The other notable limitation within the study relates to the geographic location of the participants, all of whom live in the North East of Scotland. Despite this, the project encouraged participants to explore their identity, and being from a certain background was not a precursor to participation. Within the exploration, individuals expressed their differences, whilst finding similarities with others, and this was replicated in the literature review which drew on writings from all over Europe, America, and further afield.

8.4 Recommendations for Education and Practice

The importance of communication within relational social work has always been emphasised in social work education (Lishman, 2009), but perhaps focus needs to be placed on new technologies and the implications these bring to open up different channels of communication. Most of the participants within the therapeutic photography groups used their own mobile devices to capture and share images. These devices also held a vast number of stored images which participants were able to look through and attach narratives to, almost akin to photograph albums. Future practitioners should be encouraged to view these devices as rich sources of information and to consider ways in which they can enhance the communication between themselves and their service users. Much like the Freirian approach which encourages practitioners to learn alongside participants, social work educators must also be prepared to learn from their students and be prepared to make attempts to embrace new technologies and the possibilities these bring.

It is also important to note that image capture devices will constantly evolve, but the principles of working with an image, listening to the narrative, and using this information to build the therapeutic relationship has been the underpinning approach to therapeutic photography for over 40 years, and it is these opportunities that educators could emphasise when training the future workforce. However, this study has highlighted some issues that require further consideration in terms of training and educating future workforces which will be discussed within this section.

8.4.1 Ethical considerations

One aspect to acknowledge is the importance of considering training for workers to be able to incorporate therapeutic photography into their current practice, and also be able to effectively address issues which may be disclosed throughout the process. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, training could be incorporated into existing curricula for students, or offered to qualified workers in the form of continual professional development.

Within the intervention which was outlined in chapter 4 (section 4.7) and delivered in order to gain the results which informed the discussion and conclusion, the participants were guided to ensure that they did not photograph any person without their prior consent, and the latter exercises helped the participants explore how they could abstractly represent issues in order to avoid photographing

people. Despite these safeguards, facilitators need to be vigilant about who has been photographed, and what will happen to these images at the end of the group process.

The intervention within this thesis did not outline any intended use of the images produced by the groups involved at the outset of each group. This was a deliberate strategy as the researcher felt that this could influence the dynamic of the group. To give an example, if the researcher had told the group that their images would be publically displayed at the end of the 6 weeks, participants may be concerned about photographing something for fear that it would be publically viewed at the end of the process, instead of used within the confines of the therapeutic photography group. This, in turn, could disempower and censor a participant from the outset. Therefore, at the end of the group process, the facilitator invited a discussion as to what the participants would like to do with their images. The mental health group in this thesis chose to not display any of their photographs, but some of the other groups which the researcher worked with to inform future research did choose to put on displays, make photo books, or use them at open days for the service providers.

The facilitator should be ready to advise in this process and consider the appropriateness of publically displaying output from a therapeutic photography group. This was also an issue the researcher had to consider when looking to include images within chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis. As discussed in chapter 4 (section 4.12.5), the original images were included without any censorship to the examiners, but for wider dissemination of the thesis, the researcher did obscure the images to protect identity and to respect the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015), as well as the SSSC professional Codes of Practice.

Facilitators also need to be aware of the risks of photographs being used which may be ethically challenging. In the mental health therapeutic photography group, the facilitator considered the appropriateness of Michael's self-harm scar image. He did not prevent this from being shown to the group, and the consequences were positive for both Michael and the other participants. Throughout the group, the researcher engaged with his professional code of practice to determine the appropriateness of images, an experience replicated when public health nurses discussed the use of visual technologies when engaging with adolescents and had to deal with challenging images and content (Laholt et. al., 2018). In their study, the public health workers felt that their professional codes of ethics, as well as knowledge and experience, guided them in their reactions and ongoing engagement with the adolescents. As a profession, social workers are also guided by codes, ethics, knowledge and experience, and these qualities should be employed to help navigate ethical issues if they transpire through the images. This is an issue that would require further training and guidance

if therapeutic photography was to be incorporated into social work practice in order to clarify the ethical responsibilities of the workers when facilitating groups.

8.4.2 Safeguarding

If therapeutic photography is to be used in social work, there needs to be a consideration of safeguards for both the workers and the service users. As explained in chapter 2 (section 2.4), social work in Scotland is regulated, underpinned by formal higher education, and one where a supervisory structure is in place to support the workforce which is underpinned by the Codes of Practice (SSSC) and general principles of non-maleficence. For this intervention to be replicated in other countries, the researcher recommends that similar support structures must be in place. This is to ensure that the workers delivering the intervention are safe and supported, as are the service users receiving the intervention.

This study has been conducted to consider the applicability to the profession of social work, and the results should not be translated as being replicable across any profession. That is not to say that the intervention cannot be used by other professions, but further research should be conducted before incorporating this approach into other disciplines. They, too, must consider issues of regulation, support, and protective safeguards for workers and clients. Again, the researcher recommends that this protection is vital for professionals and service users alike.

8.4.3 Experience

As explained in chapter 2 (section 2.4), this study took place in Scotland where social work practice is a regulated profession, and one which requires an academic qualification to be employed. As a result, workers entering the workforce should have a knowledge of social work theories to inform their interactions and ensure that they practice from a perspective where evidence is utilised to demonstrate processes. The researcher in this study also acted as the group facilitator and recognises that his experience and expertise in social work was utilised throughout the process. In his 10 years of social work practice he used social work theory to inform reports written for the courts; he used knowledge of psychodynamic, psychological and sociological approaches to shape assessment and intervention with service users; and he used his education to run groups in order to facilitate exploration of issues in substance use and in adult support and protection (the latter was

specifically for practitioners rather than service users). These skills shaped his facilitation of the therapeutic photography groups in this research project, and this should be recognised as a limitation of the study as his skills in facilitation cannot be generalised to all social work practitioners in Scotland.

Within the study of the mental health group, the researcher was open and honest with the participants about the scope of his involvement, as outlined in chapter 4. The agency which hosted the group also provided staff who could follow up on any issues which were identified within the group work, but were not appropriate to discuss in a group setting. When Michael displayed the photograph of self-harm scars the facilitator did ask the agency to have a follow up one to one session with him to discuss this disclosure. Therefore, it has to be recognised that the social work knowledge and expertise of the researcher was utilised to signpost a service user for additional support. A knowledge of group work dynamics also assisted throughout the process and the researcher recognises that he used experience in this area to competently guide the participants through the programme (Doel & Sawdon, 1999).

This is worth acknowledging as it raises issues about the training needs of a social worker if they are going to replicate and deliver an intervention such as this.

8.4.4 Training needs for social workers/facilitators and supervisors

From this study, the researcher suggests that specific requirements of facilitators should be highlighted, and if they are absent, then training should be provided to ensure that they can practice in a safe and effective manner.

In Chapter 2 it was reported that one of the main differences between phototherapy and therapeutic photography is that the former requires a trained therapist. However, this programme of research concluded that there appears to be 'a fine line between the intended outcomes of phototherapy and therapeutic photography' (p.17). It would therefore appear vital that facilitators are aware of not inadvertently providing therapy requiring therapeutic training but calling it 'therapeutic photography'. Indeed, Loewenthal (in Pauwels & Mannay, 2019) proposes that 'therapeutic photography' is only ethically appropriate when either the practitioner and client are one and the same or the facilitator stays completely away from any reflections or interpretations of the photographs.

As the intervention used within this thesis is aimed at working with groups, experience or training in group facilitation is paramount (Doel & Sawdon, 1999). This should include a knowledge of group dynamics, as well as the purpose of therapeutic group work (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Tuckman, 1965). Another aspect to highlight is the importance and value of group work within the social work profession. In the early 21st Century, social work faces budget cuts alongside many other front line, state funded organisations, and this results in services trying to do more, for a greater number of people, with less funding. Although group work addresses some of these issues in terms of increased reach for a practitioner, the value of the therapeutic dynamics within groups should always remain the primary reason for employing this approach (Doel (in Lishman, 2015)). Therefore, the researcher suggests that social work education continues to stress the importance of group work as an effective intervention to be considered alongside other approaches, rather than a “catch all” approach to reach multiple service users for the sake of demonstrating that a service is statistically viable.

Experienced practitioners who act as facilitators can also bring with them a knowledge of agencies and support structures where service users can be referred if issues arise which cannot be dealt with by the social worker within the context of the therapeutic photography group. Again, this information should be made available to practitioners who may not have this local knowledge through training or resources within agency settings.

Any qualified, registered social worker in Scotland should have a working knowledge of theories to assist in assessment and intervention, and once in practice this needs to be discussed within supervision. Any deficit in these should ordinarily be identified and addressed. This underpins the importance of a clear structure for supervision so that the intervention can be reflected on (as defined by Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). This also includes supervision for the supervisor (as defined by the Codes of Practice (sssc.uk.com)). It is recommended that the supervisor has experience and an appreciation of theories which consider power dynamics across the ecological system (Freire, 1990; 1973; 1970). This will aid in the understanding of the dynamics present within this intervention.

One final area that would be worth highlighting in terms of training requirements would be to refresh social workers’ knowledge on their duties under the SSSC Codes of Practice which is something that can be visited within supervision. It is also worth focusing on an appreciation of ethical issues which may present themselves through using photographs in a therapeutic group setting. The codes should assist in guiding practitioners in addressing any issues which may arise, but certainly, specific training could be provided to highlight common areas which occur in visual expression, particularly recognising the outcome of increased self-disclosure within this technique. It

is anticipated that further research into the technique of therapeutic photography in social work settings with groups can identify common forms of self-disclosure which could assist in the formation of training in this area.

8.4.5 Education for social workers/facilitators

Creative approaches within social work are a means to help build relationships between the social worker and the service user, and to promote the use of creative imagination in exploring issues (Hatton, 2015). With regards to the outcome of this study it is important to stress that the researcher is not making any claims that the intervention utilised is a form of *therapy*, but the outcomes do suggest that it is *therapeutic*. This distinction needs to be highlighted as it again emphasises the importance of delineating between the two practices of therapeutic photography and phototherapy. Weiser (2004) describes a continuum between the two practices, and the literature review has explored where these boundaries can become blurred. Social work practice in Scotland, and indeed the UK, utilises theory to inform assessment and intervention, and the literature explored where these theories are shared in therapeutic photography, phototherapy, and direct social work practice. The fact that social workers use a number of theories in their practice is best summarised in the following quote:

“Psychosocial and relationship-based practice and interventions take place at the intersection of the individual’s psychological/internal world and subjective states (eg happiness, sadness, depression, etc) and their social/external world and objective statuses (eg age, race, poverty, unemployment, etc). Therefore, they are interdisciplinary by nature, systemic in thinking (holistic with cyclical reciprocity) and integrative in approach and practice (drawing upon and integrating multiple approaches)” (Megele, 2015, p.3).

Jacobson (2001) explains that if social workers only worked from a particular perspective (such as psychoanalytic) they risk neglecting other factors which may contribute to the issue at hand and use a theoretic standpoint to address issues which might have arisen through sociological or environmental circumstances, not internal drivers within the service user. She refers to an example from Halpern (1995) wherein poverty and the associated challenges cannot solely be addressed by getting the service user to consider their upbringing and how that contributes to the situation. Jacobson (2001) also warns that an approach which utilises therapy alone can only address issues once they have been identified and do not consider methods of prevention.

The theories used in social work practice are not being used to deliver therapy, they are employed to help understand how experiences and relationships impact on behaviour, and in turn, how interventions can be shaped to address some of these issues. They can be used in this sense to understand and inform the therapeutic process where a service user uses an intervention to help make sense of their situation, the external forces, and their own internal strategies (Wels, 2004). In the case of the therapeutic photography group within this thesis, the results appear to indicate that the process of involvement in a therapeutic photography group has a positive impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment, and can also impact on feelings around control and self-disclosure. However, it must also be highlighted that this is one group from one service user setting, and further research must be undertaken to see if this has scope to be replicated across social work as a profession.

8.4.6 Support/supervision for social workers/facilitators

In terms of the suggested outcomes, if therapeutic photography is used to assert a positive impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment, then it can be viewed much like any other social work intervention wherein there are defined outcomes for the service user, and a clear structure for delivery. The supervision of the social worker should be delivered in the same way as supervision for workers delivering other social work interventions. If using the model of supervision as outlined by Kadushin and Harkness (2014), then an employee will be able to consider the dynamics of the intervention and the outcomes in an environment which is educational, supportive, and administrative. This should not differ too much from the style of supervision offered to therapists working in creative arts as it should also give “an opportunity to scrutinise ongoing clinical work, to ensure safe practice and to enhance the level of clinical practice” (Coulter (in Hogan & Coulter, 2014, p.205)). However, the main difference between the supervision of therapists and social workers is that social workers are not required to undertake personal therapy in order to engage in interventions with service users, although they are encouraged to use supervision to process feelings and emotions which arise from their duties (Tsui, 2004).

Personal therapy for therapists is commonplace in the profession (Macran & Shapiro, 1998). In social work, personal therapy for individual workers is not required out with formal supervision, and the reason for this may be the fact that therapists are practicing from one specific perspective where “personal growth and emotional well-being are paramount if individuals are to function effectively in their...role” (Macran & Shapiro, 1998, p.21). Indeed, both therapists and social workers are

supported through supervision, but the personal therapy should differ from supervision by looking at the coping strategies of the worker. However, it is recognised that good supervision should address the personal impact on the worker, regardless of professional standpoints (Howe & Gray, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2008; Tsui, 2004).

Within this thesis, the power dynamics between the facilitator and the participant were also identified and issues of control and empowerment appeared to be enhanced through interaction with therapeutic photography. Within a formal therapy session, the power dynamic is very different and the therapist is viewed as the expert of the situation, one who may hold the answers to the problems. Hogan (2013) recognises that adding a photographic element to therapy also exposes the therapist to the unknown and there should perhaps be an appreciation of a change in power dynamics wherein the professional becomes a co-creator of knowledge with the service user. This issue was also identified within the thesis and acknowledged the Freirian philosophy of working with people to gain knowledge and then address issues which may arise from that. It is an issue which supervision should be ready to address in that the facilitator is, in effect, entering the unknown if they are co-creating knowledge. Support should therefore be offered to help the worker process issues and address knowledge deficits.

Chapter 3 (section 3.6) discussed the challenge faced by social work as a profession from moving from technical, rational and procedural approaches to one where the wider recognition of impactors can lead to a more creative way of practice. This thesis has proposed using an ecological approach to structure a programme where photography can be used therapeutically, but it has also stressed that supervision is a vital component to support facilitators if they are using this technique. If the model of social work delivery is truly changing, then supervisors will also need support to acquire the knowledge needed to provide support. At the very least, this researcher suggests that knowledge of empowerment, underpinned by Freire (1990, 1973, 1970), would be a basic requirement to understand power dynamics in social work across the ecological systems. The scope of the debate is perhaps a topic for future research in terms of the supervisory needs for social workers who utilise psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories in their practice, and also, for those who use therapeutic photography in their practice, but again, it is important to state that they are not using these theories to deliver therapy, they are using them as part of a wider understanding of human behaviour in the context of their environment, culture and society.

8.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Aiming to determine the applicability of therapeutic photography to social work practice resulted in the delivery of a programme to a service user group of people with mental health issues, and this is one area which could be further explored to see if the intervention has more impact on other service user groups. This could be conducted in a comparative manner, or with focused work to determine specific outcomes for participants with definitive conditions. However, the researcher suggests there will always be difficulty in generalising the impact and outcomes to specific conditions because of the nature of identity exploration within the intervention which will be impacted by numerous factors over and above the specific condition.

This research project, and the resulting thesis, is a small scale study which used participants from a specific geographic area, and from a particular service user group. As outlined in the methodology, the approach of using IPA as a means of gathering and analysing data calls for the researcher to draw upon their own experience and recognise that in the process. For these reasons, this project is not generalizable and further research is required before therapeutic photography can become an established and recognised intervention in social work, or indeed, other professions. What this project does do is adds to the evidence base and gives support to the idea that this intervention has applicability. Therapeutic photography is an approach which can be used by any untrained person, including in the use of peer to peer support (Weiser, 2015), but what is suggested here is that structure and facilitation from a social work professional with knowledge and experience of delivering therapeutic interventions, is advantageous to the profession of social work when working with groups where self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment issues are evident. Service users should be clear about the intended outcomes when engaging in social work interventions, and social workers should be clear about their purpose, and when to provide additional support, including potential referrals to other networks (Payne, 2014; Trevithick, 2012).

Because of the limitations of the research methodology and the sample size, further research into the applicability of therapeutic photography in social workers with groups is recommended. As stated within the methodology (Chapter 4, section 4.9), the mental health group was selected for this project, but other groups were conducted and the researcher intends to analyse the material from the observations, focus groups, and photographs in the same way as has been conducted within this study to see if the results are replicated. The researcher would also recommend repeating the programme with another group of participants from a mental health setting to see if the results obtained correlate with the results from this particular study. The researcher has also

recognised that he was influential within the study in terms of experience in delivering group work, so it would be important that further research involves other practitioners.

This project looked at group work and the researcher would suggest that the intervention could be adapted to do one-to-one work with service users. This is another avenue which could be explored using further research to determine how therapeutic photography impacts on the therapeutic relationship, the ability to communicate, and the outcomes with regards to identity exploration. Clearly, the dynamics will differ from the results within this project as peer support will be absent, but the opportunities to utilise social work theory for further exploration without fear of breaching confidentiality are much greater.

Another issue to emerge during this project was the way in which participants reminisced about memories of images. Two of the participants specifically photographed older images to explore their family and feelings of safety, whilst another spoke about memories of having his photograph taken during an unpleasant family experience – all suggest the longevity of memory connected to the image may be a factor in why photographs provide a different dynamic to the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, it may be advantageous to explore the longevity of memory with regards to the photographic image.

One final suggestion for future research stems from the implications for professionals. An argument for utilising therapeutic photography has emerged from this project, but the outcomes from the groups in terms of increasing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment, are not exclusive to the social work profession. Indeed, many of the research articles within the literature review drew examples from health care, community development and education which suggest applicability across other professions. Therefore, future research could consider this approach within other professional disciplines to ascertain impact and outcomes for people utilising those services. It would also be advantageous to research the ethical implications in more depth, and to do this from a variety of professional standpoints. As outlined within this thesis, social workers in Scotland are regulated, educated, and supervised in order to guide them through ethical issues, but other professionals, and indeed, social workers from other countries, may not have such a supportive framework. It is hoped that by further analysing ethical issues, as well as further research on the delivery and application of a programme utilising therapeutic photography, guidelines and advice could be provided in order to support professionals who wish to use this approach in their own practice. In turn, research can then be conducted with facilitators to identify specific support and training needs which they feel might be required through further engagement with therapeutic photography.

8.6 Methodological Appraisal

The researcher has attempted to provide validity within this project in order to add to the contribution of knowledge. Yardley (in Smith, 2015) proposes four principles which can be applied to qualitative research in order to ascertain the method and potential applicability, to which the researcher has applied to this project:

1. There should be sensitivity to context

In order for research to be deemed as a high-quality qualitative project it needs to be conducted in a way which allows the exploration of new subject areas in a manner which permits the emergence of new phenomena, appreciates the context, and encourages participants to form new meanings and understandings throughout the duration of the project and beyond (Camic et. al., 2003). In this respect, a number of measures were taken to ensure sensitivity. Firstly, a rigorous literature review discussed the practice of therapeutic photography, identified underpinning theories, and analysed these theoretical links with the practice of social work. This information was then used to consider the best method for data collection and analysis and the philosophical standpoint of IPA was discussed with regards this approach. The ethical implication of working with a group of participants was considered, alongside the best methods for data collection. A criticism of the way in which data was collected for this project may well be that the therapeutic photography sessions were not recorded and simply relied on participant observation notes made by the researcher. The researcher recognises that recording sessions would have provided verbatim accounts of the events, but these would still be subject to a subjective analysis. There should also be acknowledgement that the participants' involved highlighted fear and suspicion about being observed, focusing on CCTV and a controlling state within images – had the researcher introduced video cameras or audio recording equipment into the group environment from the outset, there may have been suspicion and withdrawal. To this end, the researcher would argue that methods were chosen in order to be as sensitive to the participants as possible. This sensitivity was incorporated into the analysis of the data, and utilising IPA and the associated principles meant that the researcher was making every effort to ensure that the participants' voices were heard throughout.

2. There should be commitment and rigour

At every step, the researcher has considered the best methods to answer the research question with regards therapeutic photography and its potential use in social work with groups. The literature review suggested impacts on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment, concepts which are

nebulous and difficult to quantify. Qualitative research was chosen in order to ascertain the experience of a social work group, and IPA was used in order to attempt understanding by, and of, the participants throughout their engagement with the programme. The reflexive notes, alongside the analysis of the data were then used to consider the applicability of social work theories and the outcomes for the participants. Because IPA was used, the study focused on a small number of participants, and from only one service user background – mental health – so, in that respect, the results are not generalizable and may only be applicable to this specialism. However, the themes generated from the data could be used by future researchers to see if these patterns are repeated across other areas of social work provision. The researcher has made every effort to highlight these limitations throughout the research process and to apply rigour in the analysis of data by working closely with his supervisors with specialisms in the field of IPA, and attending training and development focusing on the methodology.

3. There should be coherence and transparency

IPA was chosen as the preferred methodology for this project because the researcher wanted to ascertain the *experience* of the participants engaging in a therapeutic photography project, and then *apply* expert knowledge to those experiences in order to determine if there could be applicability of the technique within the practice of social work. The researcher acknowledges that the approach is subjective in nature, but has endeavoured to highlight processes throughout, including extracts and images within the results, interpretation of the data, and a paper trail of analysis within the appendices to demonstrate how the research was conducted. Yardley (in Smith, 2015) highlights that qualitative research is strongly influenced by the researcher; therefore, reflexivity needs to be transparent throughout. The researcher has recognised this and used this reflexivity to consider the applicability of social work theory, acknowledging his background and interests, and incorporated this into the appropriate sections of the thesis, highlighting the fact when this has been done.

4. There should be consideration of the impact and importance of the research

Given the small scale nature of this research it is difficult to definitively state the impact of the project, however, the researcher acknowledges the findings do add to the contribution of knowledge to the practice of therapeutic photography, and the potential implications for social work, in the following ways:

- This is the first IPA study which looks at the impact of therapeutic photography within the field of social work and, to that end; the findings suggest there is a positive benefit for participants which allows them to explore their identity.

- The researcher has proposed that using therapeutic photography to facilitate the exploration of identity results in a three stage process which sees participants moving from considering group identity, role identity, and then self-concept.
- Using therapeutic photography in a structured manner appears to impact positively on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and empowerment, but also enhances feelings of control and aids self-disclosure. This project has offered a model to consider in order to provide structure (see fig. 3.3 in Chapter 3) and a programme which could be used to deliver the intervention (see section 4.7.1 in chapter 4).
- If this method is to be incorporated into the practice of social work with groups, there needs to be consideration as to how training can be disseminated within the profession to address the ethical nature of using images, and the accelerated speed at which self-disclosures might happen.

8.6.1 An Appraisal of IPA

Using IPA for this project created challenges, but also opportunities. IPA offers the researcher a tool for the detailed exploration of both personal meaning and lived experience (Smith & Osborn (in Smith, 2015)), so in that respect it was advantageous for the analysis of a group of participants engaging with therapeutic photography. The traditional approach for data collection would be through the use of a one to one interview which would be recorded and transcribed, before being analysed using the approaches described by Smith et. al. (2009). However, the researcher felt that particular technique may pose challenges for the participants he was researching in terms of the power dynamic changing from group participation, to one to one interviews. There was also the feeling that this style of data collection would only simply give an account of the experience in retrospect, rather than an account of living through the experience. Therefore, in order to capture the experience of participation, alongside a reflective account of participation, the methods of participant observation, focus groups, and photo analysis were chosen and analysed using IPA. Reflexive accounts made by the researcher were then used to draw out any potential applicability to social work using knowledge of theories and interventions. As a result, the data is open to subjective interpretation throughout the process, but the researcher has employed the analytic tools which

underpin the method of IPA and always questioned if the results were portraying the message communicated by the participants, whilst using supervision to assist the analysis of his own analysis.

Using the focus group transcripts and the participant observations required skills in working with textual information for which IPA seems well placed. The challenge was in using the photographs and how to incorporate them into the analysis. The researcher did not want to add any analysis of the visual material that had not been identified and discussed with the participant, so where the photographs have been used, the question has always been asked as to the *intention* of the image, how it was used, and what the outcome for the participant was. The researcher felt it was important not to stray from this remit as the purpose of using the photographs in this setting was to explore therapeutic benefit for the participant and the applicability to social work – any further interpretation of the image that had no bearing on the therapeutic outcome for the participant appeared to be irrelevant. This approach acknowledges that there is an interpretation of the image using phenomenological analysis, but that it should be contained by the complimentary data and results from the focus group transcript and the participant observation, similar to the approach of researchers using mixed data collection techniques in photo elicitation and photovoice (Alexander et. al., 2014; Stan & Popa, 2013; Carlson et. al., 2006; Cappello, 2005; Clark Ibanez, 2004). In a sense, using photographs in IPA can be viewed as pushing the boundaries of the methodology as the approach typically utilises language to capture and ascertain cognition. Within this project, the photographs have been used to supplement the linguistic data, but with analysis to support the traditional IPA results, as described by Shinebourne & Smith (2011), and Kirova & Emme (2006). This challenge should be considered if using photographs in future IPA projects and, this researcher's advice would be to create clear guidelines for the analysis of images and involve the participants wherever possible so that the intention is captured.

8.7 Final Reflection – A Personal View

This project was borne out of my interest in photography. In embarking on this research I was interested to see if photography could be therapeutic, and if so, could it be utilised by social work as a profession? What I discovered throughout the process was that the photograph was a catalyst which assisted people to tell their story, and from a social work perspective the information offered was rich.

The project I focussed on for this research was a mental health group, but I also worked with other groups throughout the process and wanted to offer an account of another experience I had with therapeutic photography. One of the most challenging groups was the one with autistic service users. The first session was very quiet and the participants did not share much information at all. I began to think that I had found a group that was going to suggest that this intervention was not appropriate, but I was wrong. By week two the participants began to use the photographs to express their emotions, a concept that was alien to some, but the peer bonding process had begun and those that found it difficult were encouraged by those that had a better understanding of what was required and guided by them. Weeks three and four brought a series of disclosures about isolation, anger, loneliness, and a curiosity of “neurotypical” lifestyles. The final project witnessed the group expressing the positives and negatives of being autistic which was a learning experience for them as some of the younger members gained hope and optimism from the older members, but I felt that the biggest learning experience had been for me. This made me feel quite selfish and I began to wonder if I was exploiting the group for my own ends in gathering research data, but realised that all the group had been doing was talking about their experiences to other people who were interested, who were prepared to listen, and who asked questions about their narratives and photographs. Two of the group members commented on the dynamics of the group and stated that it felt good for them to be the experts of their own lives, as opposed to working with professionals who assumed they knew best. This was an important moment in the project as I realised that the participants were engaged in the process and could see value because they were being heard.

One year later, I met with two staff members from the agency where I ran the autism group and they reported that three of the participants were still in regular contact with the organisation. Since participating in the therapeutic photography group, one participant had formed his own support group as he had reported that he had not realised that people with

autism experienced the same things that he had experienced before diagnosis, and that sharing narratives within the group had made him realise that he was not alone; another participant had set up a support group on a social media platform where she regularly posted photographs of inspirational quotes she painted on her walls in her flat; and the final participant had continued photographing, but had also entered two of the images she produced during the group into a national competition. The staff members reported that they had seen a noticeable change in confidence following the therapeutic photography groups, but I recognise that it is very difficult to solely attribute these new activities to the outcomes of therapeutic photography, yet it reinforces one of the areas for potential future research – the long term effects of the group on empowerment.

There were many avenues open to exploration, but in presenting the information I had to attempt to remain true to the aims and research questions of the project to ascertain whether therapeutic photography had a role in social work. I would have liked to have presented every group in the form of an IPA case study, but this would have made for an extraordinarily lengthy presentation, so every attempt has been made to give examples of how the technique was used, and this invariably comes at the expense of other material which could have been included, such as specific examples from the autism group. However, as a final note to the value and impact of photography, when selecting images to be used within this presentation I was able to recall each and every story behind the image which suggests the longevity of a narrative when attached to a visual prompt.

Chapter 9 – References

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www.jnevins.com/whitereading.htm

www.photovoice.org

Appendix 1 – Agency Agreement Form

Therapeutic Photography – group programme.

This form acts as an agreement between Neil Gibson, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and

.....

1. **Project Agreement:** between Neil Gibson, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and
.....
2. **Duration of the programme:** The programme will run from to and will be delivered in 5 separate sessions, each lasting 2 hours, with an opportunity for participants to give feedback in a follow up session after the programme has finished.
3. **About the programme:** The programme has been developed to give participants the opportunity to use photography to explore issues around self-identity, relationships, life story, and their environment. The programme has three intended outcomes which are increased self-esteem, increased self-efficacy, and increased empowerment.
4. **Ethics:** The project has been approved by Robert Gordon University's ethics panel.
5. **Participants:** Each participant will be given an information sheet to explain the purpose of the programme and can opt out at any time. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form to say they are happy to participate in the programme. Neil Gibson will deliver the programme and observe how it is received. He will also collect feedback from the participants at the end of the programme.
6. **Programme Outcome:** The results from observations and feedback will be used in Neil Gibson's PhD report to look at the impact of a therapeutic photography course. Feedback will also be provided to the management of throughout the programme as requested.
7. **Permission to use material:** Neil Gibson will have the right to use his written observations and the feedback from participants for academic publication, providedhave no objections. Permission to use any photographs produced by participants will be sought from the participants directly.
8. **Attendance:** Neil Gibson will attend every week during the scheduled programme. He may also be accompanied by another staff member from Robert Gordon University for some of the scheduled sessions.
9. **Expenses:** Neil Gibson's expenses will be covered by Robert Gordon University and no expense will be incurred by

10. **Policy Issues:** Neil Gibson will abide by, and be covered by the health and safety, confidentiality, and equal opportunities procedures of Robert Gordon University.
11. **Supervision:** Dr John Love will be available to supervise Neil Gibson throughout the programme.
12. **Confidentiality:** Neil Gibson is registered with the SSSC and will abide by the codes defining social work practice. The confidentiality of information given will be respected. All information collected for research purposes will be anonymised.
13. Acknowledgements: will be acknowledged in the final report.

Signed:

Dated:

Appendix 2 – Questionnaires

Part one (self-efficacy)

I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10

Part two (self-esteem)

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
At times I think I am no good at all	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I am able to do things as well as most other people	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I certainly feel useless at times	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10

I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I wish I could have more respect for myself	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I take a positive attitude toward myself	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10

Part three (empowerment)

I feel powerless most of the time	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Making waves never gets you anywhere	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
You can't fight the establishment	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
When I am unsure about something, I usually go along with the group	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Experts are in the best position to decide what people should do or learn	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Most of the misfortunes in my life were due to bad luck	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Usually, I feel alone	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People have no right to get angry just because they don't like something	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People have the right to make their own decisions, even if they are bad ones	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People should try to live the lives they want to	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People working together can have an effect on their community	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People have more power if they join together as a group	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Working with others in my community can help to change things for the better	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
People are limited only by what they think possible												

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action											
Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life											
Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10
I am generally optimistic about the future											
Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Strongly disagree	9	10

Appendix 3 - Quantitative Data Collection and Results

Throughout the delivery of the programme to all of the groups, small amounts of quantitative data were gathered. As the literature review highlighted the positive impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy and empowerment after engagement with photo based interventions the researcher sought out quantitative tools which claimed to capture information for each of these. Information on the tools used to gather this information is presented within this appendix, as are the results, and these will be used at a later stage to inform future research.

- **Self-esteem**

The 10 question Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem questionnaire was used at the beginning of the six week programme, then again at the end of the programme (see appendix 4 – part 1). The questionnaire used a 10 point Likert scale which asked participants to record whether they strongly agreed, through to strongly disagreed, with set statements. Each participant who completed the questionnaire then ended up with two sets of results which the researcher used to analyse if there was any change in self-recorded feelings of self-esteem. The Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire is widely regarded as a valid tool for capturing understanding of global self-esteem across different genders, cultures and ages (Robins et. al., 2001).

- **Self-efficacy**

Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) general self-efficacy scale was used in the same manner as the self-esteem questionnaire (see appendix 4 – part 2). The respondents completed one at the beginning of the group programme, then one at the end, and any changes between the two were noted. A similar 10 point Likert scale was also used. Again, the choice of this questionnaire was underpinned by the fact that it is regarded as an effective tool for capturing information about perceived self-efficacy (Luszczynska et. al., 2005).

- **Empowerment**

The third and final questionnaire used aimed to capture feelings of empowerment and was devised by Rogers et. al. (1997). In their study, Rogers et. al. (1997) focussed on the concept of empowerment amongst users of mental health services, and the questionnaire they devised encompassed self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore, in their original questionnaire there were questions which were also in both Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem questionnaire and Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) self-efficacy questionnaire. The present study adopted an abridged version of Rogers et. al.'s (1997) questionnaire to use with participants of the therapeutic photography group in order to avoid repetition of questions that had been previously asked in the other two questionnaires (see appendix 4 – part 3). Again, a 10 point Likert scale was used, and participants completed one at the start of the group programme, and another at the end, and the researcher noted any changes when comparing the two.

As well as self-esteem and self-efficacy, the questionnaire breaks empowerment down into a number of different concepts and looks at power, activism and optimism (Sibitz et. al., 2011). It is regarded as an effective tool for capturing self-reported attitudes towards empowerment because of its psychometric properties (Corrigan et. al., 1999).

Quantitative results

At the beginning of every group, all participants were given a questionnaire consisting of 39 questions. Each questionnaire was devised of three parts which aimed to capture information on the participants' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and feelings of empowerment (as described in the results and method chapter 4). The participants were given another questionnaire consisting of the same questions at the end of the six week therapeutic photography group.

This section now goes on to present the results from those questionnaires by comparing the answers from the questionnaires at the start of the process against the answers given at the end of the process. The results are presented as percentage changes to indicate the overall difference in answers over the six week period. Where results suggest an overall improvement, the researcher has highlighted the change in green, and an overall decline has been highlighted in red. For each of the three categories of self-efficacy, self-esteem and empowerment, the researcher has also compared the gender divide in how questions were answered.

- Self-efficacy

Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) – self efficacy

Overall results:

I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	5.63% improvement
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	9.38% improvement
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	1.88% improvement
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	6.88% improvement
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	1.25% improvement
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	1.88% decline
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	5.63% improvement
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	10% decline
If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	2.5% decline
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	6.25% decline

n=16

Results for females:

I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	No change
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	18.57% improvement
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	1.43% decline
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	1.43% decline
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	No change
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	4.29% decline
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	11.43% improvement
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	18.57% decline
If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	12.86% decline
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	7.14% decline

n=7

Results for males:

I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	10% improvement
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want	2.22% improvement
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals	4.44% improvement
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	13.33% improvement
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations	2.22% improvement
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	No change
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	1.11% improvement
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions	3.33% decline
If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution	5.56% improvement
I can usually handle whatever comes my way	5.56% decline

n=9

The results from the Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) self-efficacy scale suggest positive improvement in some areas, but equally, negative declines in other areas were also noted. The most notable decline was observed for the question which asked about the ability to find several solutions for a problem which saw an overall decline of 10%; however, when looking at the gender specific results the females recorded a decline of 18.57%, whereas the males had only a 3.33% decline. It might be

that the wording of the question encouraged participants to think about coming up with multiple solutions to problems, and participants felt that they only came up with one or two options when exploring problems, not several. Given that other questions which asked about problem solving skills recorded an overall improvement it does seem like an anomaly within the results.

The largest improvement was noted with regards to the question which asked about dealing with opposition and finding the resources to achieve which recorded a 9.38% improvement. The gender specific results noted that the females were largely responsible for this number as they recorded an improvement of 18.57%, whereas the males only recorded 2.22% improvement. The females also recorded a high figure in terms of remaining calm and relying on coping strategies with an improvement of 11.43%. The males scored highly when recording their confidence in dealing with unexpected events (with 13.33% improvement) and in managing problem solving skills if they apply themselves (with a 10% improvement).

When the results are averaged out, there would only appear to be a 1% improvement in overall self-efficacy; however, the gender specific results indicate that males recorded an overall improvement of 3% in their self-efficacy, whereas the females recorded an overall decline of 1.6%.

- Self-esteem

Rosenberg (1965) – self esteem

Overall results:

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	8.75% improvement
At times I think I am no good at all	5.63% improvement
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	6.25% improvement
I am able to do things as well as most other people	6.88% improvement
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	6.25% improvement
I certainly feel useless at times	7.5% decline
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	6.88% improvement
I wish I could have more respect for myself	6.88% decline
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	3.13% improvement
I take a positive attitude towards myself	8.13% improvement

n=16

Results for females:

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	7.14% improvement
At times I think I am no good at all	1.43% decline
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	7.14% improvement
I am able to do things as well as most other people	7.14% improvement
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	14.29% improvement
I certainly feel useless at times	8.57% decline
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	17.14% improvement
I wish I could have more respect for myself	5.71% improvement
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	1.43% decline
I take a positive attitude towards myself	11.43% improvement

n=7

Results for males:

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	10% improvement
At times I think I am no good at all	11.11% improvement
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	5.56% improvement
I am able to do things as well as most other people	6.67% improvement
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	No change
I certainly feel useless at times	6.67% decline
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	1.11% decline
I wish I could have more respect for myself	7.78% improvement
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	6.67% improvement
I take a positive attitude towards myself	5.56% improvement

n=9

The results for self-esteem were obtained from Rosenberg's (1965) scale and recorded overall improvements in eight domains out of ten. The highest overall scores related to feelings of self-satisfaction (with an improvement of 8.75%) and having a positive attitude towards oneself (with an 8.13% improvement). The two areas of decline in the overall scores were with regards to feeling useless at times, and not having enough self-respect with figures of 7.5% and 6.88% recorded respectively.

Within the gender specific results there were significant improvements across three questions in the female population. Feeling that they were a person of worth (at least on an equal plane with others) recorded a 17.14% improvement; feelings relating to pride improved by 14.29%; and having a positive attitude towards oneself improved by 11.43%. Feelings of uselessness recorded a deficit of 8.57% in the same population.

The improvements within the male population did not record such high numbers as in the female population. There were improvements with regards to negative thoughts about oneself of 11.11%, and with regards to feeling satisfied about oneself with a 10% improvement. Again, as with the female population, feelings of uselessness were recorded as a deficit of 6.67%.

Once the results are averaged out there appears to be an overall increase of 3.76% in terms of the impact on self-esteem. When the gender specific results are averaged out there is an overall increase of 5.86% within the female population, and a 4.56% increase within the male population.

- Empowerment_ - Rogers et al (1997) (abridged) - empowerment

Overall results:

I feel powerless most of the time	6.56% improvement
Making waves never gets you anywhere	16.25% improvement
You can't fight the establishment	11.25% improvement
When I am unsure about something, I usually go along with the group	11.88% improvement
Experts are in the best position to decide what people should do or learn	5.94% improvement
Most of the misfortunes in my life were due to bad luck	No change
Usually, I feel alone	2.5% improvement
People have no right to get angry just because they don't like something	4.38% improvement
People have the right to make their own decisions, even if they are bad ones	1.88% improvement
People should try to live the lives they want to	4.38% decline
People working together can have an effect on their community	4.38% improvement
People have more power if they join together as a group	No change
Working with others in my community can help change things for the better	0.31% improvement
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action	2.5% decline
People are limited only by what they think possible	No change
I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life	0.63% improvement
I am generally optimistic about the future	0.63% decline

n=16

Results for females:

I feel powerless most of the time	0.71% improvement
Making waves never gets you anywhere	21.43% improvement
You can't fight the establishment	24.29% improvement
When I am unsure about something, I usually go along with the group	10% improvement
Experts are in the best position to decide what people should do or learn	9.29% improvement
Most of the misfortunes in my life were due to bad luck	8.57% improvement
Usually, I feel alone	8.57% improvement
People have no right to get angry just because they don't like something	No change
People have the right to make their own decisions, even if they are bad ones	12.86% improvement
People should try to live the lives they want to	1.43% decline
People working together can have an effect on their community	4.29% improvement
People have more power if they join together as a group	2.86% improvement
Working with others in my community can help change things for the better	0.71% decline
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action	No change
People are limited only by what they think possible	8.57% decline
I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life	10% improvement
I am generally optimistic about the future	No change

n=7

Results for males:

I feel powerless most of the time	11.11% improvement
Making waves never gets you anywhere	12.22% improvement
You can't fight the establishment	1.11% improvement
When I am unsure about something, I usually go along with the group	13.33% improvement
Experts are in the best position to decide what people should do or learn	3.33% improvement
Most of the misfortunes in my life were due to bad luck	6.67% decline
Usually, I feel alone	2.22% decline
People have no right to get angry just because they don't like something	7.78% improvement
People have the right to make their own decisions, even if they are bad ones	6.67% decline
People should try to live the lives they want to	6.67% decline
People working together can have an effect on their community	4.44% improvement
People have more power if they join together as a group	2.22% decline
Working with others in my community can help change things for the better	1.11% improvement
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action	3.33% decline
People are limited only by what they think possible	6.67% improvement
I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life	6.67% decline
I am generally optimistic about the future	1.11% decline

n=9

Across the 17 domains within the Rogers et. al. (1997) empowerment scale, improvements were recorded in 11 of them in the overall results, with no change being recorded in three, and declines being recorded in the other three. The largest improvements were recorded in the questions relating to “making waves” (or asserting yourself) which recorded a 16.25% improvement, and in moving away from group thinking to be more independent with an 11.88% improvement. The question which asked participants about standing up against the establishment also recorded an improvement of 11.25%. Other improvements were minimal, with the smallest improvement being recorded at 0.63%, but equally, declines were also very small with optimism about the future being recorded at a 0.63% decline, and taking action to solve problems recording a 2.5% decline.

The gender specific results also recorded similarly high spikes in the questions relating to asserting oneself and challenging the establishment, with improvements in the female population being recorded at 21.43% and 24.29% respectively. These results were not as high in the male population with improvements only being recorded at 12.22% and 1.11% respectively. The highest recorded improvement in the male population was with regard to becoming more independent and moving away from group thinking with an observed 13.33% shift. Overall, the male results indicated improvements in only nine domains, whereas the females recorded improvements in 11.

When the results are averaged out, the impact on empowerment suggests a 3.44% improvement. When these are further broken down into gender specific impact, the females record an overall improvement of 6.01%, whereas the males only record an overall improvement of 1.5%.

- **Discussion of quantitative results**

The results suggest that both males and females benefitted in terms of enhanced self-esteem, but the impact on self-efficacy was minimal, and for the females, an overall deficit suggests that the programme might even have been detrimental. However, it would also appear that females gained a higher degree of empowerment from the experience than their male counterparts.

The researcher recognises two particular limitations within these results. Firstly, it is noted that the number of completed questionnaires is small. Only questionnaires completed by participants who attended all of the sessions were included. The participants from the autism group were also not included as the facilitator from Aberdeenshire Council felt that it might be difficult for the participants to complete the questionnaire based on levels of cognition. Secondly, the researcher only asked the participants to fill in two questionnaires; one at the start of the group, and then one

at the very end. This meant that there was a six week gap between completion of the questionnaires. The researcher believes that the results obtained from the questionnaires cannot solely be attributed to the therapeutic photography groups as it does not account for any other events or activities that participants were engaged in throughout the six week period. To give an example, one participant experienced homelessness and relocation during the period, and the answers she gave in the questionnaire will account for those experiences, therefore it is difficult to claim that these results are a reflection of the therapeutic photography activity which made up two hours of a 168 hour week.

Appendix 4 - Information Sheet and Consent Form

The purpose of this group is to use photography to explore identity, improve self-efficacy, and to empower group members. The group will be run in 5 sessions, the first 4 will meet on a weekly basis with a gap between the 4th and 5th session to allow the participants to engage in their project.

Each session will have some theoretical input, followed by discussion and interactive exercises, and each week we will spend time looking at the products from the weekly tasks.

The sessions will be run as follows:

- **Session 1**

An introduction to using photographs and photography therapeutically and self-portraits

Participants will be given an overview of what therapeutic photography is before exploring some images to begin the process of looking for meanings in photographs.

Participants will then be encouraged to look at their phones/cameras for any photographs they have previously taken and explore these with other group members.

The full outline of the programme, including aims and objectives, will be covered in this session along with laying down group rules.

The group will then be encouraged to start experimenting with self-portraits and will be asked to take a photograph of themselves and then look for positive qualities within the image.

- **Session 2**

A look at roles and relationships.

The session will begin by displaying the self-portraits from the previous weeks homework and all participants will be encouraged to go around the display leaving post-it notes of positive comments on images that they like.

The session will then look at some of the theories to underpin roles and relationships, particularly attachment theory and family systems theories.

The group will then discuss how images can be taken to represent other things such as feelings, emotions, and memories.

A task will be set for the following session where each participant has to creatively photograph representations of people that are important to them, encapsulating how each of those people make the participant feel.

- **Session 3**

A look at telling your story.

The session will begin by looking at the images produced from last weeks homework, giving the participants the chance to explain meanings behind each image.

The session will then look at theories that underpin the use of photographs in narratives, now beginning to focus on the impact of the environment and society on individual lives. The group will look at how photographs can be used to tell your story.

A task will be set for the following session where each participant has to take a series of photographs that best represents an average day for them.

- **Session 4**

Introduction to photovoice.

The session will begin by looking at the images produced from last weeks homework, giving each participant a chance to tell their own story using the images that they have taken.

The session will then look at theories to underpin the use of Photovoice, using photographs to empower communities. Examples will be given to illustrate how photographs have empowered individuals and groups.

A task will be set for the following session, but the group will decide the theme of a photovoice project. Each individual will need to take photographs on a theme and be prepared to discuss the images that they have taken in the final session.

- **Session 5 (1 week gap)**

Photovoice.

In this final session the participants will each talk about the images they have produced for the project. The group will then have to look for common themes in the images and decide what to do with this information. Facilitator will provide guidance.

A chance for the participants to show off the work that they have produced

Further information

- Your participation in the programme is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time.
- You are in control throughout the whole process – you decide what you want to photograph, and you decide what you want to say about your photographs.
- This programme is part of a research project. The researcher will ask you to complete a questionnaire at the start of the programme, and again at the end, and will be interested in hearing your opinion of the programme throughout.
- All of the researcher’s material will be anonymised. You can ask to see copies of the notes at any time.
- Permission will be sought for the use of any images you produce, but again, you can refuse to let the researcher use any of your photographs and this will not exclude you from participating in the programme.
- The information you share in the group will be treated confidentially, but any disclosure that indicates a child or vulnerable adult is at risk will need to be shared with the appropriate agency.
- Most importantly, have fun with the programme – enjoy taking photographs and enjoy viewing other people’s photographs!

By signing below, you agree to be a participant in the therapeutic photography programme as per the criteria set out above.

Signed Date

Neil Gibson

September 2014.

Appendix 5 – Photograph Consent Form

Therapeutic Photography

¹Agreement for Use of Photography

DESCRIPTION OF

CONTRIBUTION:.....

[e.g. number of digital photographs]

DATE:

CONTRIBUTOR NAME:

CONTRIBUTOR ADDRESS:.....

.....

PROJECT: "THERAPEUTIC PHOTOGRAPHY"

RESEARCHER: Neil Gibson, Faculty of Health and Social Care

I agree to allow my Contribution produced as part of the above Project to be used by Robert Gordon University ("RGU") and to the standard conditions set out below.

SIGNED

(Contributor)

PRINT

(Contributor)

Thank you for agreeing to contribute to the above Project. Please note that RGU is under no obligation to use your contribution in any Project output.

By signing this form you are agreeing to the following:

- You allow RGU the non-exclusive right to use, reproduce, publish in an academic thesis, journal or other publication or otherwise disseminate your Contribution to the above Project without limit of time.
- You agree that RGU may edit or adapt your contributions and you irrevocably waive any “moral rights”² you have in them.
- You confirm that you will not be entitled to any payment or other remuneration or reward whatsoever for your contribution to the Project.

¹This Agreement shall be interpreted in accordance with the laws of Scotland, any dispute shall be referred to a single arbiter appointed by agreement or (in default) nominated on the application of either party by the President for the time being of the Law Society of Scotland

² This means specifically the rights set out in sections 77 to 89 of The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988

Appendix 6 - Focus Group Information Sheet and Consent

As you have recently participated in a therapeutic photography programme your views on the programme would be greatly appreciated.

I would like to invite you to take part in a short focus group interview where I will ask you about your involvement with the programme. I will record the entire session and transcribe it, but will anonymise all identifying features so that no individual can be identified.

Further information

- Your participation in the focus group is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time.
- You are in control throughout the whole process – you decide what you want say about the programme.
- This programme is part of a research project.
- All of the researcher’s material will be anonymised. You can ask to see copies of the notes at any time.
- If you volunteer any images, permission will be sought for the use of any images you produce, but again, you can refuse to let the researcher use any of your photographs.
- The information you share in the group will be treated confidentially, but any disclosure that indicates a child or vulnerable adult is at risk will need to be shared with the appropriate agency.

By signing below, you agree to be a participant in the therapeutic photography focus group as per the criteria set out above.

Signed Date

Neil Gibson

March 2015.

Appendix 7 - Focus Group Questions

Why did you want to participate?

What have you enjoyed about the course?

What could be improved?

Explore the 3 aims:

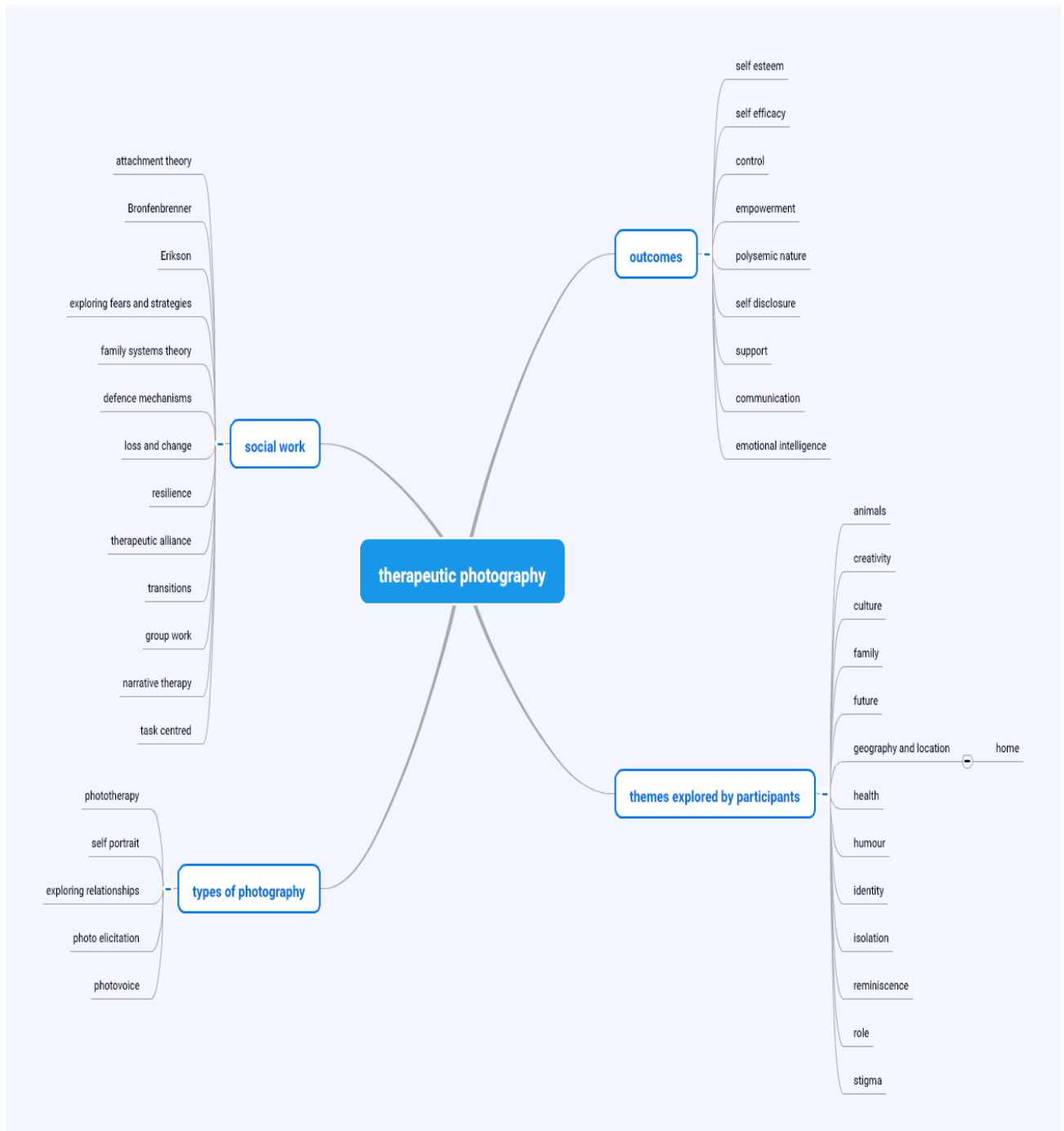
1. Self efficacy
2. Self esteem
3. Empowerment

Have you learned anything about yourself?

Have you learned anything about others?

Have you learned anything about your environment?

Appendix 8 – First Emerging Themes



Appendix 9 – Initial Noting

Therapeutic photography – day five – Pillar.

Today the session was focused on gathering feedback from the photo voice project that the group had been participating in over the past two weeks. Whilst we were getting set up I noticed Caroline had brought in old photographs from the 1950s to show and was going through them with Florence.

The participants today were Florence, Caroline, Margaret, Kay, Violet, then there was Sally and myself. Because of time constraints I had not managed to print off all of the photographs that had been taken so I put them on a slide show on the computer and projected them onto the screen. The group finally noticed that the photographs were on display and began to take notice of what was on the screen. At one point Michael's photograph of his self-harm cuts was on the screen and Caroline termed the photograph "courage". There were some general discussion about how powerful that image was and Violet said that it had been one of the most powerful images for her.

Commented [M1]: Not shown to anyone else. Was this a result of previous conversations? Exercises had prompted her to reflect on her own collection of photographs and share them in a safe space.

Commented [M2]: Self efficacy – realisation that there were a sizable number of images they had produced.

Commented [M3]: Unprompted. M was not here today but to have his image verified by the group was powerful. He was deemed to be full of courage for showing the image. Had perception of M changed over the 6 weeks?

Commented [M4]: Longevity of the image, and impact of it. Image has power which had impact – punctum/studium. Made M visible even though he was not present.

We then began the photo voice viewing and Caroline asked if she could go first because she said she was anxious about showing the photographs. The theme had been "My safe space". The first photograph was a view of a tree, as was the second photograph and she said that this was the view from her window but it was also a very safe feeling to watch a tree progress through the seasons. I asked her if she had a favourite season and she thought for a few seconds before deciding that spring and summer were her favourites. The next photograph was of her curtains that had been pulled closed and she said that this was a deliberate photograph, that she used her curtains to shut the world out and this made her feel safer when she was in her room with the curtains closed. Both Florence and Margaret stated that they do exactly the same and this was news to Caroline, she did not realise that other people do this. This led to some discussion about why people did this and how it also represented the mood they were in. Margaret said that it was very much related to how she was feeling and Sally confirmed that she knew that if Margaret's curtains were closed then she perhaps was

Commented [N5]: Anxiety raises again, but last week she spoke about putting things off until they became too much to bear, now she was asking to go first. Had she unconsciously begun to address her pattern of behaviour now that it had been externalised?

Commented [N6]: Sign of life – tree of life. She has referred to looking out the window before, at lights on around her, and here she also speaks about looking out at the world, but happy that it is healthy due to the growing tree. It is rooted to one place and slowly progresses through changes – she has also referred to slowing down/being lazy when smoking.

Commented [N7]: Rebirth into beauty – Bridges transitions – gaining a new identity.

Commented [N8]: This was not a chance image – she had prepared the scene to get a message across. By visualising, then verbalising the issue she makes it real and tangible. Others can identify with this tactic and did not realise others did this too. Identification, familiarity, relief that this behaviour is "normal" and acceptable/understandable. Withdrawing into shell. Cocooned. Like a butterfly waiting to emerge.

Commented [N9]: The power of the image to draw common themes together. How did they not know this?

Commented [N10]: Now the group start to identify triggers – warning signs for downward spiral. Low mood resulted in certain behaviours that were common amongst them all.

not having a good day. We spoke about the cultural significance of opening curtains and how this was emphasised by family traditions. The fourth photograph was of a sunset and the fifth photograph was again a view from her window and she said that this was about "looking out, not looking inwards". Her sixth photograph was of the stairs and banisters and she said this was about "looking up". Her seventh photograph was a nativity scene and she said that this was more about nostalgia than religion and that it reminded her of being small but it was also related to rebirth as well, about the opportunities to grow and develop, but very much reminding her of being a little girl. In her next photograph was a picture of Mary holding Jesus and she said that again this was related to nostalgia and that this had been in her mother's nursing home above her bed and her mother was a strong person and Caroline remembered looking at this picture when her mother had been in the nursing home. Her mother had actually taken the picture from her own home and Caroline said that Mary was a strong woman, strong in character, which is why she liked

Commented [N11]: Further exploration. M also makes the issue for her more real as this is a safe space to explore – therapeutic space.

Commented [N12]: More window gazing, but she summarises this perfectly – looking out prevents looking in. Keep the mind busy and there is no time to think about problems/issues. Sunset also signifies the end of something. She does seem to focus on stages. Why is looking inwards not a good thing?

Commented [N13]: Now we get another dimension/direction – looking up. Is this a reference to optimism? Or to religion – looking up to heaven? If you keep your "head up" then you are not gazing at your feet in a depressed manner – this may be a reference to cultural attitudes (chin up!).

Commented [N14]: Memories contained in this scene – family heirloom (or certainly a familiar ornament). Window gazing has prevented her from thinking about her self, but now she is looking back, a new direction – thinking about what once was. However, she links this to opportunity – to "grow and develop", so she is torn between two directions. Backwards or forwards?

Commented [N15]: The "little girl" from the last narrative brings in her mother, but on her death bed. Mother was "strong" – family myth? So is she expected to be like her mum too, be strong! She has objectified an object, removing it from its location and transferring it to the group, where she can explore the significance of the heirloom.

this as well. Her ninth picture was of her back door and she said that this was something she just wants to "get it open!". In her 10th photograph was her back garden and, although it was a bit cluttered, she said that this was her working space and there was lots of unfinished projects there and that her son felt that it could be tidied up but Caroline stated "its mine!". There were further images of a fireplace to which she said "hearth and home", and two photographs of a paperback reading HOME surrounded by cards, one of which also said "home", emphasising to us that Caroline's home is a very safe space for her. She did say that she felt self-conscious when displaying this but then she said that she should not be comparing herself to other people and she should be proud of who she is and then the group linked this back to Michael's images when he had photographed cleaning products in an earlier session and the group then spoke about external images and internal feelings and that we should not be compelled to clean just to project an image. Her next image was of the seaside beside Stonehaven and she said that she

Commented [N161]: A lot of emphasis on strength. Clearly a characteristic that she aspires to, or is expected to live up to. Mother imprints a sense of importance in objects which may be why C likes clutter – the importance of nostalgia in heirlooms – the risk of being forgotten. Does she equate herself to Mary? Theme of striving for strength in C's images.

Commented [N171]: Said as in a flurry of activity – a command – open the door and let it out. Is this how she feels internally, as if things have built up, become cluttered and she needs to release.

Commented [N181]: New, unfinished interests: Just outside her living space – an extension of her identity where she could try things out. Childlike attitude towards her garden "it's mine!", said like a toddler snatching back a toy. Does not like criticism of her experimental projects – trying to find the new identity.

Commented [N191]: This could have been an extension of the discussion prior to choosing the topic where HOME was mentioned a few times, but it did appear to signify where she feels safe. Her own space. Where the "I" can emerge and escape the "WE".

Commented [N201]: Appears to align very well with Mead and Cooley – Looking glass self challenges who she really is, and this makes her feel uncomfortable. Now she is letting the group see her true self, her living space, where she can let her guard down and relax. Where her true self resides.

likes Stonehaven and that she feels really comfortable here and in Stonehaven. She began to relate this to Pillar and said that she feels very comfortable and that there are secrets that can be shared. Her next two images was a wall and a fence and she said this was about imprisoning herself, both literally and metaphorically, and the fence was about feeling threatened when other people opened up to her. The group pressed her on this and asked why she felt threatened and she said that there was a fear that they would expect her to open up too and immediately the group recognised what she was saying and Caroline was quite surprised that they recognised. There was some general discussion within the group that some felt that speaking to other people/peers about their problems helped, but also listening to other people's problems helped as it made them feel useful, whereas others felt that listening to other people's problems might actually burden them. This certainly sparked a lot of conversation. Caroline began to speak about how, within her family, there was a general family myth that they were only liked when they were

Commented [N221]: Location. Community. Also provides a sense of belonging and reinforces her identity.

Commented [N221]: Secrets – again, childlike qualities - shared whispers. Does this equate to where she lives? Is she privy to secrets which makes her feel part of something bigger? Importance of the agency providing an area for exploration and comfort.

Commented [N231]: Linked to clutter – building walls, staring out of windows, it may be safe, but as the safety builds the fear of what lies beyond grows. Linked to education in her choice of words "literally and metaphorically".

Commented [N241]: Why threatened? Can she not trust herself when others share things with her? She has stated that secrets can be shared, but maybe she does not like hearing others secrets – she likes sharing hers, but does not like being burdened by others.

Commented [N251]: No – it's expectations – matching like for like. Think about identity theory and self-disclosure. Do all relationships, in her eyes, need to be reciprocal? The group also identify with this – but do they identify this aspect of C's character, or in themselves too?

Commented [N261]: Appears to be balanced and reciprocal – think Object Relations -

Commented [N271]: Again, is this linked to Object Relations – seeing someone as weak, or trying to assist someone, rather than seeing someone for all their good and bad parts. Does this not lead to isolation if relationship is not reciprocal?

Commented [N281]: Different styles of relating to people – different impact of being raised – linked to attachment theory and styles of adult attachment.

not causing trouble and Caroline recognises that she has carried this within herself and that she can be "a bit crazy and chaotic" but she recognises that this is part of her charm. There was then a lot of feedback from other group members to say that this is what they liked about Caroline and that she was missed when she didn't attend sessions. She did put up some resistance to this and later admitted that she uses defence mechanisms to shut praise out occasionally. The final image was the sea again and she said that this brings on a feeling of freedom. Caroline's session was the longest session but there was a lot of information came out of that, the fact that Caroline felt able to share but yet was cautious about sharing information, she seemed constantly pulled between two places.

Florence went next and in her first photograph was people at the "meet and eat group" and she said that she feels safe here, that she can have a laugh here, and a chance to share with other people. The next few images were also of the "meet and eat group" and were images of people attending

Commented [N29]: Family myth is verbalised – "Liked" when not causing trouble – so was there a pattern of trouble making she had to avoid? Maybe from siblings – tarred with the same brush. Conform to family norms – loss of identity.

Commented [N30]: She knows there has been an impact on her from all that she has experienced, the consequences are that she is "a bit crazy" which is an endearing way of saying MH issues, and "chaotic" may also be another way of saying "manic". She makes this out to be "charm" – take me or leave me.

Commented [N31]: Indicates she deliberately avoided coming for 2 weeks. Fear of listening to stories and being expected to equal what was being said. Safer to close herself off. But, she came back – why? People are praising her and giving her positive feedback.

Commented [N32]: Consciously shuts out praise (not unconscious) – is that because she does not believe it, or thinks she is not worthy? Locus of control – still struggling to work out how to control her control?

Commented [N33]: Wide, open expanse – freedom – cliché? What would she do with this freedom? And hasn't she already got freedom? Perhaps she means freedom from feelings and emotions and anxiety – to feel nothing?

Commented [N34]: Making up for the 2 weeks she was absent – afraid to listen to others, so unburden in the final week where she won't have to come back and deal with other people's problems?

Commented [N35]: Photographs illustrate she is pulled in different directions, and I observed the same in the PO's.

Commented [N36]: Familiarity – group identity rather than individual identity? Safe, happy, and in company – all very positive.

the group. She said that these are people that are important in her life and provide safety for her. The fifth image was herself pulling a funny expression and she said that she would not normally include a photograph like this but, because this was her safe space, she felt able to be a little bit crazy and expressive. In the eighth photograph we were taken to her own house where there was a vase filled with Christmas lights, a polar bear statue, and a wooden box she had made in Pillar. Again, her ninth image was similar and in her 10th image was a picture that had been given to her by her son and daughter of a lioness and cubs and she said that she loves big cats, especially tigers, but this picture meant a lot to her because was given to her by family. Her 11th and 12th photograph were again of possessions within her house, her Christmas tree, and a Christmas train, and her 13th photograph was of a TV. She explained that this was about home comforts, she spends a lot of time in this room but obviously TV is a focal point for her. Her 15th image was a dining table and chairs, and a clock that she had made, and her computer which she said she

Commented [N37]: Given that she didn't produce a self portrait, this is the first time she had captured herself in an image. She is happy and playful in the image, clearly the atmosphere is good and she feels able to let others see her when she is up. Views the group as a safe space too, and wants to experiment a bit – test the limits of her identity.

Commented [N38]: Now we enter her world – her identity laid bare – but this is a temporary house? We see her creative side with the box she produced, which links her back to the agency. She feels safe enough to show us her living area.

Commented [N39]: A present from son and daughter – animal protecting her cubs – like her? She prefers tigers, so her children don't know her that well, but she loves the picture regardless – visual image with memories tied to it.

Commented [N40]: Small memories – with a recent move, maybe these are just fractions of her true collection which illustrates who she is.

Commented [N41]: If you are isolated, isn't it better to have comforts around you? Nesting? Lair? But her TV is a focal point, much like many people. Cultural norm. TV as companion.

spends a lot of time on. We discussed Florence's photographs in relation to Caroline's photographs and recognised that Caroline's photographs had been of inanimate objects to share feelings of what she was surrounded by, and feelings of what enclosed her, whereas Florence's were more about people that provided safe spaces, but also there was a half and half split with possessions and the home as well, emphasising the importance of home as a safe space.

Kay had taken 25 photographs that were very expressive. Her first photograph was her bedroom and she said this was neutral, it was tranquil, and it was orderly and when it was like this she felt safe. In her second image was her bedroom again but it was made to look as though somebody was hiding under the duvet and that there was a telephone that was lying off the hook on the bed. She explained that this was not a safe space, that if she was to ignore the day and remain in bed, or if she was to take the phone off the hook, then this was a trigger for her in that things might not be going so

Commented [N42]: More possessions – more objects. Belongings. Linked to safe space, these belongings are filled with memories for her – gifts from the past. But she also connects to the outside world through her computer – virtual identity

Commented [N43]: Some similarities, but C did not include people. However, the people F included were strangers who come together in a group. F is happy in the group and finds a role – is this related to her family role – Yalom? Whereas C ay never have been clear about her family role as her identity was part of the homogenous family identity.

Commented [N44]: There was a limit? Was this because she felt very safe? Or because she enjoyed exploring.

Commented [N45]: No clutter. Order. In control. Links to how we present the exterior in order to protect the interior?

Commented [N46]: Preparation had gone into this image. Reflection on what threatened safety – what are her triggers. Able to then bring this to her consciousness, arrange this, visualise it, then objectify it in an image. Like getting something out there.

well and a downward spiral might be taking place. The third photograph was again the phone off the hook and her fourth photograph was her house from the exterior which she said was her safe space where her family was. In her next photograph was her garden which was very ordered, very beautiful, and she said again that this was about calm and tranquillity. She said that she becomes more anxious when the weather is bad and she cannot get into her garden to do any work in it. Her sixth photograph was of a Christmas tree which was very ordered and had lots of presents in bags underneath the tree, very structured. The next two photographs were around music, one radio and one ipod image, and she explained that music is very important in her life as well. She said she feels safe when there's music on. The next few photographs were of possessions, the ninth photograph was a bookshelf with books and the next three contained photographs of her own family photographs in frames. This emphasised the importance of family connections but also the familiarity of family portraits. Her 13th photograph was again of

Commented [N47]: Complex reflection into self – is this self-concept? Self-awareness?

Commented [N48]: She identifies where she lives. It looks inviting. Flowerbeds are neat and ordered – presents as middle class suburbia. Importance of family are highlighted. They have not been mentioned prior to this. Secretive self opening up.

Commented [N49]: As above – giver of life, but firmly in control.

Commented [N50]: Like an addiction – if you cannot do what you want then this provokes anxiety – no control over the weather, yet she knows it will impact negatively. Setting self up to fail? Garden is dependent on her and will struggle if she neglects it in any way (despite the need for rain from the weather – yet maybe she even controls this).

Commented [N51]: "structured" – again, ordered and regimented, like a magazine photoshoot for the perfect house. Is that her role – to be the perfect house wife?

Commented [N52]: Expresses creative side – feeling like there is company with you at all times with music – big influencer on mood. If she is busy then there is no time to think – if there is music on she cannot hear herself think.

Commented [N53]: Underpins the importance of photography in her life – her family rely on her, and she relies on them. Why did she not photograph them? We are told about them in her images but they are never present – sterile atmosphere.

a desktop with family photographs but I noticed two tags that were lying on the table because they were amongst other possessions and I asked Kay the significance of the two tags. She said that the tags had been attached to presents that she had been given by people who she was with in the Priory in Glasgow. In her next picture was the beach front near Stonehaven and Kay said this was safe and unsafe as her Dad had died last year and she often came to this spot to think about him, but recognised that it was a special spot so did not want to come too often. The next photograph was the Pillar allotment and she said that again she likes to be here because you get a lot of support from the support worker who attends the allotment and you can be involved in activities but also receive support. The next two photographs were of the leisure centre and the outdoor pool in Stonehaven and she said that these were safe spaces for her to go but that she had felt self-conscious photographing the leisure centre because she was next to a play park and she was a bit worried about what people thought of her taking photographs outside a play park. We

Commented [N54]: She was not going to say anything about them, but they were out of the ordinary and invited questioning. Questions easy at this stage as opposed to day 1. Surrounded by family photographs — do these freeze the good memories in time?

Commented [N55]: Another insight into her addiction. She now reveals she has been in residential rehab for her condition.

Commented [N56]: Place of worship. Place of memorial. If she comes too often, will it lose its significance? How did the loss of her dad impact her? Does this tie in with the addiction? The “safe and unsafe” suggests that some memories are unpleasant.

Commented [N57]: Support from “workers”, not peers. She is in a different social class (by presentation) and maybe she feels she cannot truly bond with the others — identity theory? Working in an allotment, good for self efficacy given she is a skilled gardener. In comfort zone — does she push herself outside comfort zone?

Commented [N58]: Emphasis on sport — healthy body, healthy mind, but also issues around being image conscious.

Commented [N59]: Fear of perception — female with a camera outside playpark — perception that people feel alarm and suspicion — lack of trust — is this projection?

then discussed whether other people had felt self-conscious about taking photographs and there was a general feeling that initially yes, but that disappeared. The next photograph Kay had photographed the wine aisle in a supermarket and a vodka display. She said that these were triggers for her and that she did not want to go back to drinking and again I asked if it was tricky to take photographs in a wine aisle when other people were around about and she said "I was only taking photos, they were buying alcohol!". The next two photographs were of Pillar and of Sally and she said that she gets a lot of guidance and a lot of family help from Pillar. The next photograph was of a dog tied up outside and it was a very cute looking black spaniel and Kay said that this was about an unsafe space, and she explained that this was about a book that has been written that was called "black dog" and was about depression so, for her, it was about knowing her triggers and about recognising when her "black dog" was coming. I emphasised again the difference in perception within photographs and that some might just think that she had taken the

Commented [N601]: Cultural norms of taking photographs – gives you permission to examine your space – scrutinise and search, from all angles – play of photography – the "I" at play.

Commented [N611]: Now we have the addiction objectified. She recognises there is always a risk of going back – image has impact – realisation that having an addiction to alcohol, then being confronted with so many varieties of alcohol in your local supermarket is very difficult – what if this was heroin. Constantly surrounded by triggers – media, adverts, pubs, shops etc.

Commented [N621]: Views users of alcohol as the ones acting unusually. Disbeliever that people do this. Buying alcohol viewed as evil.

Commented [N631]: Family in crisis? Maybe not to that extent, but she certainly gets help with issues. Issues still ongoing. Again, not peer support, but professional support.

Commented [N641]: This challenged the viewers as the expectation was that she felt safe because of the dog (or maybe unsafe because of the fear) but she used a metaphor which she had read to explore depression. This educated others, but in an informative way. She continues to focus on triggers – the bed, the alcohol, the black dog – all dangers that may jeopardise her recovery – she is walking a tightrope – there are family issues, memories of rehab, and the loss of important people in her life.

picture because it was a nice cute dog but for her it emphasised or signified a dark place. The last three photographs were scenes around Stonehaven; one was of Clashfarquar old folks home, the second was of the medical centre, and the third was of a prescription and she said that this was about the fear of becoming ill again and becoming institutionalised through illness and she said that this challenges her safe space.

After a short break Violet spoke about her pictures. Violet had been explaining to us last week that she did not feel safe in her home because it was neglected by the landlord and she was afraid of complaining in case the landlord evicted her so her first photograph was of a cracked ceiling in her kitchen which she said her landlord had done when he was doing another repair and put his knee through the ceiling. She explained that the landlord then said that he would put this on his "to do list" and this was over a year ago. The next few photographs also displayed neglect within the property. There was a conservatory door that would not lock and she said that this had broken and he had

Commented [N65]: More triggers, but recognition of the future in her final 3. She fears the options she faces if she relapses – care home/residential care/institutionalisation suggests being taken away from her family against her will. Medicalised. A problem for society – a burden. Heavy focus on professional involvement, no peers – however, she has just shared with peers – perhaps for the first time – using her photographs.

Commented [N66]: Links to Maslow – how can you address other concerns when your safety and security needs are threatened – fear of authority – power over her. Feelings of insubordination? Cannot assert her rights. Giving context to her images.

Commented [N67]: We see she has had courage to address issue, but results in more problems being created.

Commented [N68]: Prisoner to his time scale. Lazy attitude impacts on her anxiety levels. Feelings of inferiority in that she is placed on a list, yet so far down. Irrelevant.

Commented [N69]: Reinforce the message.

come to fix it but explained that he could not afford to buy a new door so he just instructed her not to open it which meant that she had barricaded it shut with her sons water filled punchbag when she was out of the house. There were photographs of her porch which had been broken in the year 2000 and still not fixed, and her next photograph was of damp in the porch. Then we were taken to the exterior of her property to illustrate where she has to walk to take washing as the washing machine is located in the garage. In her next picture she was looking at what makes her feel safe and she had photographed baking Christmas cake. She said that baking makes her feel comfortable, in control, and creates memories of her mother and grandmother and brings back memories of being loved by them. The next two photographs were again of baking Christmas pudding. The ninth photograph was an exterior of her house again but this time in darkness and she explained that there was no lighting to guide her to the garage and made her feel really unsafe. Violet's 10th photograph was the waiting room in the psychotherapy

Commented [NG(70)]: Threatened security. Again, feeling of inferiority. How to challenge this attitude? Symbolic blocking of door with a punchbag – violent and threatening – gives possible intruders a warning. Also, Jimprisons her in her room. She had been “instructed”, ordered! Like a prison guard.

Commented [NG(71)]: Ongoing list of repairs – neglected environment – not worthy of attention – does she internalise these feelings? Gradually rotting.

Commented [NG(72)]: The washing machine features again. Is the washing machine a symbol of something else for the group? Might it be that this was seen as a class thing – obtaining an indoor washing machine as opposed to old twin tubs or laundrette visits? But V has to leave her house to get to hers – still like visiting laundrette – leave the safety of her home to engage in her chores. A chore to do the chores – also, feels scared and threatened as she journeys to the machine.

Commented [NG(73)]: Reminiscence – activity brings recall. Food as a provider, a creator. Gives her time with previous generations – female role models. Memories of “being loved” – does she not feel loved anymore? Maybe not, given the neglect that surrounds her.

Commented [NG(74)]: Vulnerable and unsafe. What hides in the darkness. Is this linked to not wanting to spend time with self, because things can crawl out of the darkness? Fear of the unknown, but also linked to self-perception and the attitudes of others towards her which impacts on self-esteem.

department which was empty but she said that this was her safe space, that she could come and talk to professionals about her issues. Caroline was also speaking about how safe she felt when speaking to professionals because they were paid to listen to her but she felt challenged when speaking to her peers because they might judge her. This led on to a discussion about peer support and the majority of the group felt that peer support was vital. In her next photographs were her two sons which she referred to as "the bouncers". They were sitting under other family portraits of friends and family and said that this was a very safe space for her being surrounded by family. The next few photographs she displayed were old photographs from her past so she had laid them out and photographed them to say that these were her safe spaces. Her photographs contained images of her dad and his brother as children and said that this was their house in Ferryhill which was a pit house and that this brought back feelings of safety even though they had an outside toilet and had to bath in a tin bath. She said as children she didn't care about

Commented [NG(75)]: Contrast in presentation. Clean, warm, inviting. Respect for the room. Empty, but she spends a lot of time with her memories – are the ghosts of her past sitting with her? Recognition of her safe space away from home – the professional – someone who will listen to her concerns.

Commented [NG(76)]: C brings in another angle – if someone is paid to listen, does that not make it less personal? She wants confidentiality to be respected. Fear of how this information will be used by others – high mistrust – Erikson?

Commented [NG(77)]: Group do not share C's view. Value of peer support.

Commented [NG(78)]: Project an image – safe in the identity of the family. She has produced these 2 and there is pride. They are strong (or look it) and protective. The other images on the wall add to the history of her identity. "Bouncers" sound like gate keepers – the doors are unlocked, but they will guard the entrance. Eyes of relatives looking down – watching over.

Commented [NG(79)]: Links to the past – transitions – living in the past? History of identity.

Commented [NG(80)]: Hardship of the time has been forgotten – romanticised. Safe in a community – common goals, common interests. Everyone looked out for each other.

that but it brought back really good memories. She then had photographed her dad playing a brass wind instrument and said that as she had photographed it she had been crying because she remembered her dad practising his music at home, and then in the next photograph were her parents getting married and her grandparents were also in the photograph and she said that this conjured up feelings of safety and warmth, memories of being with her grandparents. The next few were again of family memories which are obviously very important to Violet and she was always talking about how safe she felt when in these memories. There was another photograph where she was a bridesmaid and she was able to pinpoint the exact year and said it was 1964 and was a magical moment for her to be chosen to be a bridesmaid. There was another photograph where she was kissing her daughter and she said that this was her and Emma and she said this was in a house where they had felt safe up into the year 1998, the year the problems started. The final photograph was of the Pillar participants and she said that she can arrive at a Pillar group with feelings

Commented [NG(81)]: The resilience of children – what is important – not material possessions, but family bond; Safety; Security.

Commented [NG(82)]: Aural reminder of a visual prompt. Emotional response to the image. Brass band – mining community. Social class. Being protected and feeling secure in that environment.

Commented [NG(83)]: Taking her back to her youth – memories of being a little girl and being surrounded by protective factors. Now, as an adult, those have been stripped away and she has to attempt to be an adult herself.

Commented [NG(84)]: Bridges transitions – living in the past because it is safer.

Commented [NG(85)]: Every girl's dream? Lifted from the mundane aspects of pit life to being a princess for the day. Date is imprinted on her mind – very significant moment.

Commented [NG(86)]: Now a turning point in the memories – the bond between mother and daughter is strong, in an environment of safety and security, but then that is stripped away. Something happens – loss and change. Did the problems start, or did the inability to deal with problems start – when coping strategies were ended – when identity changed?

of fear and anxiety but as soon as she enters the building they disappear. We then spoke about Violet's photographs and the importance of family in terms of providing her with a safe space when her house couldn't be a safe space and we also spoke about support structures she might be able to seek such as citizens advice. There is clearly anxiety around creating waves and problems with the landlord, and Violet does not want to be evicted. Kay offered advice as well so it was good to see that she was getting some peer support within this process. Within the session today Caroline was also receiving a lot of peer support and there was one point where Florence gave her a big hug and told her that the group loves her as she is and that she shouldn't change for anybody.

Commented [NG(87)]: Therapeutic milieu. Peer support- Escape – back to feelings of community. What role does she take on within this community? Is it a reminder of the family environment – non judgemental, empathetic, safe to explore.

Commented [NG(88)]: Peer support – exploring the problems she has exposed. Coming up with strategies.

Commented [NG(89)]: Fear of action. Trapped by circumstance, but also by availability of resources from local authority.

Commented [NG(90)]: Physical contact. Was matriarch, Cas worried child.

Margaret presented her photographs next and her first photograph was a screenshot from her computer with a recipe for peanut butter balls and she said "this is not a safe space for me" and started to laugh. She said that she had learned to make these when she was a child and that they brought back a

Commented [NG(91)]: Initially humour. Could be defence mechanism but she goes on to explore. Computer features a lot – virtual identity? Safe window to the outside world?

lot of good memories for her but she tended to make them when she was feeling down and related this to comfort eating, so although it was a pleasurable thing for her, she recognised that it was also something she did when perhaps she wasn't feeling so good. The next photograph was a comedy slogan with Kermit looking exhausted and she said that this was about Stonehaven, about the number of hills in Stonehaven, and how exhausted she feels climbing up and down all the hills in Stonehaven. The description under Kermit was about climbing hills and feeling tired when doing so. I asked if this was a safe space and she said it that it was, that she felt safe in Stonehaven. She also said laughter was important to her and that humour was a safe space. Her third and fourth photographs were of another service user at Pillar and she said that this service user was very important to her and that since Rosie had entered her life she had really felt a part of Pillar and that she had felt helpful towards Rosie too. In the next photograph Rosie had had a haircut and Margaret explained that the group had helped Rosie go for a haircut and Margaret

Commented [NG(92)]: Links to childhood. Memories of being with someone and cooking. Memory when tasting the food too. Cultural relevance of "peanut butter". Does this tie her back to Canada? She is using the memory of good experiences to deal with bad emotions now – strategy, but is it effective?

Commented [NG(93)]: Again, use of humour – light hearted in approach of exploration but underlines deeper significance. Is this related to mobility issues? Uphill struggle? Again, cultural significance of Kermit – reminder of youth. Does she have to be the joker within groups – is this an identity she formed to fit in with others?

Commented [NG(94)]: Happy in location. Feels part of community. Protective factor.

Commented [NG(95)]: Linked to identity – if she can engage with others through humour then this may lead to acceptance.

Commented [NG(96)]: Reciprocal bond – she has a role with R in that she helps her, but R helps M too. Bond is not explained, simply accepted, and the image shows happiness and joy between them. M moves beyond analysing importance of groups, to identifying individual relationships and the impact of those.

felt that as a group, the Pillar clients had really gelled and were very supportive towards one another, and of one another. In her fifth photograph was another group of people and she said this was a Thursday night group and there was a particular member of the group called Gary who Margaret said " makes it easy for me to go there at night" because he is so easy going and welcoming. Her sixth photograph was of her TV and she said this is a section of house that she spends most of her time in and it was noted that her curtains were also closed. Her next photograph was of her cat reclining in a basket that was hanging on a radiator and Margaret said this was her cat that helps her through life so much. Sally relayed a story that when Margaret was in hospital she had requested for her cat to be brought in to see her. The next photograph was of her front door and she said that this is both safe and unsafe for her. Safe in the respect that she can be protected by the buzzer and choose who she lets in, but unsafe because of the stairs on the other side (because of her mobility issues) and also the fact that there are no lights outside the front door so

Commented [NG(97)]: Simple task, yet support needed. Societal expectations that these are "normal" things to do, but for some they are daunting. Is this in line with policy with regards to aim of group work/peer support? Will the image help R appreciate the impact of her actions (and the actions of her support network)?

Commented [NG(98)]: Another exploration of an individual. She can form bonds with individuals and find common themes. It had been difficult for her to go, but something about G made this less so. She doesn't need to explain this, but her image underpins the importance of individual support as well as group support.

Commented [NG(99)]: Characteristics to boundaries of interaction.

Commented [NG(100)]: Similar to others, TV plays an important role – does this help to combat isolation? Social norm – discussing TV programmes, feeling left out if you do not watch. Also, distracts the mind.

Commented [NG(101)]: Similar themes emerging – closed curtains shuts out the world – forms a cocoon/shell to protect. Eyes cannot see in, but she can look out through the TV screen.

Commented [NG(102)]: She has been cheeky about her cat in the past, but now demonstrates affection towards it. She can love it, care for it, and feel she gets something in return – easier than human relations?

Commented [NG(103)]: Highlights the bond, but also emphasises M's role in the group as comedian?

She feels a bit unsafe in the darkness. The next photograph was of Sally and Margaret went on to explain that Sally makes her feel very safe, that she has been a huge support in her life, and she feels very safe when she is spending time with her. She went on to explain what Sally does in terms of taking her out to places, being their at appointments, so there is a lot of relationship support that she gets from Pillar too. The last photograph was a sign for Crossroads which is another support agency and she said that they have been really helpful towards her and have provided a carer for her on Thursdays and Sundays and are also supporting Florence to come to spend Christmas with Margaret which is something that Margaret feels extremely happy about, as does Florence.

Commented [NG(104)]: Dichotomy – helps to protect her when inside, but also a gateway to the outside – where people will see her. Not only does she have to deal with exposure, she also has obstacles to deal with – stairs, darkness – adding to the fact she as to WANT to go out. Make an effort.

Commented [NG(105)]: S was present. This is a big validation of the service provided. In terms of feedback, lots of rich information. M is also able to highlight that she has needed support and is able to verbalise the importance of that. It is a big step to admit you need help, but she goes into detail about how it has impacted on her life. Making someone feel 'safe' is a big thing.

Commented [NG(106)]: Highlighting other support structures. Another admission as to the involvement of carers. Might be disabling, but she can admit this to the group.

Commented [NG(107)]: Another friendship highlighted. Small gestures have big impacts on M's life.

Commented [NG(108)]: Many depths of exploration.

This had been a very powerful session and everybody felt very positive about the images they had produced. There were themes that came out such as the importance of home and family, but also the importance of possessions and photographs which encapsulate memories which also

provide a safe space. Nostalgia was important in terms of remembering feelings of warmth and security and safety. We then discussed what next for the images? I wanted to empower the participants to decide what to do with the photographs themselves and there was some discussion about whether they could be displayed somewhere with some kind of narrative alongside the image to explain what they represented. The group were very keen to do this but were also questioning anonymity so I explained to them that they should think about it over the next two or three weeks and I would make contact with Sally just to see what the group had decided to do. Sally was also very keen for them to do this as well and we discussed whether they could be displayed in Pillar, in the library, at the Arches, or within the newsletter to promote the photography group to other participants. It was also proposed that the group select which photographs to display as well.

There was a general discussion about the photography group and Kay described it as "very powerful" and there was a lot of

Commented [NG(1091): issues of empowering the group – this is a safe space, but what happens if the images are then seen by others – no longer in control of what is said.

Commented [NG(1101): Strong words. Powerful in what way? In the way it gave her "permission" to research herself – enabling her to make revelations about her issues – helping her bring some issues to the fore – maybe even unconsciously identified some issues. Learning from others, coping strategies.

positive feedback so I decided to start the focus group to capture feedback from the group. My observations, and Caroline's statement later on within the focus group, was that there was a sense of real openness with the information that was being shared. Caroline said that there was a different atmosphere and dynamic because she had been a bit afraid to share information at the start of the process but realised that it was actually quite safe to do so and she explained that she was terrified at the start of process. She actually hand wrote a note which she gave to me and I will photograph this to include as feedback.

Commented [NG(11.1)]: With verbal information, there is more opportunity to self-censor, but with visual approaches added there is more of a sense of making the issue real and tangible, then being able to talk about it whilst others look at it.

Commented [NG(11.2)]: Interesting note. She had been scared of the information, but at some point she realised that she was in control – but does she know what to do with this control?

Pillar focus group – transcript – 19/12/14

Present: Florence, Caroline, Margaret, Kay, Violet, Sally, Neil.

Neil – why did you want to participate?

Kay – I think...I think I wanted to come and do it because when you came to the AGM and you did the thing about people to bring out their phone and turn to the person next

to them and then like share why they had the photograph, and it just came across how powerful that was because everyone in the room...the noise in the room...you know, and I just think I just realised what a powerful medium it was.

Florence - I think one of the things was, I mean I love photography in itself, you know, but sharing it with, you know, our friends, is even more powerful and you learn more about yourself too.

Violet - Well, I didn't go to the AGM so (Florence - Neither did I) I didn't know what to expect so I was a bit apprehensive at first because I think it is about exposing yourself, I think that is what was sort of at the back of my mind - Should I? Shouldn't I? - but I am glad I did it.

Neil then asked the group if they had felt in control of the information they were sharing?

Violet - Ehm... Yeah, I think I did, you know, it was personal to me, and I think you get worried, don't you, about what somebody else might think or say about your

Commented [NG(113)]: She is remembering back to the first time she experienced an exercise. It resonated with her - something about the exercise had impact on her. She equates this to the volume of noise in the room - witnessing interaction on such a large scale, and so instantly. But was it more than the noise, the energy? She thinks about what this was and relates this to the medium of the photograph, even though it was an instrument within the communication. She recognised power and wanted to experience that. "I just realised" - instant - instant gratification?

Commented [NG(114)]: She has more to say but identifies one aspect. She is drawn to it because she "loves" photography - in what way? Taking, viewing? She does not elaborate. She recognises it as a tool for sharing - if you take a photograph then you want to show it. Refers to other participants as "friends" - has the bonding happened so quickly? Viewing on your own has power, but viewing with others is "powerful". She realises the learning was more about who she is, rather than who others are.

Commented [NG(115)]: This meant she had no preconceptions, nor did F.

Commented [NG(116)]: Fear of the unknown and at risk - vulnerable. She was only "a bit" apprehensive so there must have been an element of perceived control coming into the situation. "Exposing" self sounds as if she is stripping off all aspects of her social identity to reveal her true self. Naked, for all to see. For her to see.

Commented [NG(117)]: The 2 way conversation - weighing up pros and cons, or cost benefit analysis. Yet something made her decide to do it.

Commented [NG(118)]: Not convinced she had full control - maybe the images made her open up more than she had expected to.

photographs or whatever, and I think that's what I was... I think something that... I'm like that, there's always something at the back of my mind saying, you know, what will that person think, and I think it's just been a good learning curve, it doesn't really matter. Neil then asked Caroline but her mouth was full, so Neil asked Margaret instead.

Margaret – It was just to see if there was things that would be more able to understand because I was recently going to the counsellor and I was more able to talk here than I was there through the picture. There was more understanding.

Caroline – I've written down honestly what I felt (photograph of her written thoughts in file) because I didn't understand what the term meant. A therapeutic walk is the fresh air and the sunshine and the company of friends and when... I will say this that's also in there (indicates the written thoughts)... and when I realised it was such onus things, I was terrified, first day, I thought "Jesus! What have I done?" – everybody else knows, my goodness, and I

Commented [NG(119)]: Back to exposing vulnerabilities – she approached the experts and explored her personal perspectives and issues in the realisation that this left her open to judgement – looking glass self – we adjust actions based on the reactions of others, yet with images people were interested and encouraging. She can never control what people "think", nor maybe even know, yet it is a worry for her. She relates this to a fear of what people will think of "her photographs or whatever", but as her photographs are extensions and objectifications of her, then this would be a direct critique of her.

Commented [NG(120)]: Yet something has changed – she describes it as a learning curve which suggests quick learning in a short timescale. Why does it not matter? Should she just focus on life from her own perspective from now on? Perhaps it is about realising what you have got control over – she cannot control what people think, but she can control her actions and attitudes.

Commented [NG(121)]: She came out of curiosity, but looking for knowledge too. She reveals she was seeking input from a professional and hoped this might augment that relationship, but found that the use of images impacted on the ability to communicate – the photograph as a catalyst. She spoke "through" the picture, not about it, or to it, but the image initiated the conversation, then she joined it.

Commented [NG(122)]: "More" might be due to the peer nature of the group – familiarity in others stories – identity theory. Also, might be due to power balance and the Freirean approach of practitioner and SU jointly researching issues, therefore no professional arrogance to create a boundary/barrier.

Appendix 10 – Emerging Themes

Therapeutic photography – day one – Pillar		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAFETY IN COMMUNITY 	<p>The group was held in a local community centre within the town of Stonehaven. We had a large room with a table for all the participants to sit around, another table for projection equipment, and another table for teas and coffees.</p>	<p>Commented [NG(1)]: Locality—already a community. Does location influence?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINDING THE SOCIAL NORM 	<p>There were seven participants, two staff members, and myself as facilitator. The participants were Anna, Violet, Margaret, Caroline, Florence, John, and Michael. The staff members were Sally, and Penelope.</p>	<p>Commented [NG(2)]: Big room. Everyone was condensed around one table.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BODY LANGUAGE – FINDING THE SOCIAL NORM 	<p>Whilst the paperwork was being completed by the participants the postcards had been laid out on the table and the participants were looking through these. Some of the participants asked for help with the paperwork and one had a slight problem filling in the Likert scale self-efficacy/self-esteem questionnaire due to the wording above the likert scale. Anna picked up a black and white postcard which showed draft players in Union Terrace Gardens, Aberdeen,</p>	<p>Commented [NG(3)]: Choice of seating. Participants getting a measure of one another. Social awkwardness and social norms as people adapted</p> <p>Commented [NG(4R3)]: Postcards provided a visual distraction. Eye contact on images, not on each other, or socially trying to avoid eye contact with others.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EXPLORING – TOUCH – BODY LANGUAGE 	<p></p>	<p>Commented [NG(5)]: Tactile. Image invites interaction—visually and through touch. Social acceptability of engaging with the postcard and picking them up.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CATALYST - REMINISCENCE 	<p></p>	<p>Commented [NG(6)]: Already negatively impacting on ability/self efficacy—learned helplessness or strength to ask for help?</p> <p>Commented [NG(7)]: Why did she start? Confidence? Familiarity with group?</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP DYNAMICS • FINDING THE SOCIAL NORM – GROUP DYNAMICS • CERTAINTY • CULTURAL ASCERTATION • REMINISCENCE • SELF-DISCLOSURE/SOCIAL IDENTITY • SOCIAL WORK THEORY – ERIKSON/ATTACHMENT • PROJECTED IDENTITY (FALSE SELF) • ACTUAL IDENTITY/ROLE • IDENTITY EXPLORATION/LEARNING 	<p>and began to speak about her memories of this scene. I began the first exercise and asked the participants to select a postcard that they particularly liked, and then explain why they had selected it. I gave participants a few minutes to select postcards and once they had done this I opened it up to the participants to begin their explanation. Anna went first and had selected the image of the Union Terrace Gardens and explained that she remembered visiting some ceilidh classes before being taken to Union Terrace Gardens to watch people play drafts as a very young child. She says this was around about the time that she and her sister were adopted and she connects memories of Union Terrace Gardens with her memories of early adoption.</p> <p>Frieda went next and had selected a picture of a new-born baby and explained that she is a mother of four, she loved being a mum, and how she is a grandmother of 11. I asked if she saw her grandchildren regularly and she said "no, only one", to which her partner said "no. Two". She said that the best thing about being a mother was learning from your</p>
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Commented [NG(8)]: "Ice Breaker" – self disclosure – placing self in cultural and historic context – being able to remember that event places her age too? Demonstrates being rooted to a location.

Commented [NG(9)]: Was this in response to Anna? Did I take control away? Or was I asserting control?

Commented [NG(10)]: Volume of conversation. Some picked quickly. Others took time. Many hands on the images. Everyone working together, yet individually. Social acceptance of etiquette.

Commented [NG(11)]: She had already decided. The image appealed to her from the outset. Had she considered others?

Commented [NG(12)]: Again, roots her in Scottish culture. Is this to identify with others in the group? Assert identity.

Commented [NG(13)]: Childhood memory. Reminiscence. Chose to speak about drafts, not chess – childhood game.

Commented [NG(14)]: Big personal revelation for the 1st person. Does this set the tone for other participants? Will they be expected to make similar statements/revelations? Her family was separated, but was she also separated from sisters? Further exploration from SW difficult at this stage.

Commented [NG(15)]: Early adoption – how does this impact on her development? Attachment theory?

Commented [NG(16)]: Not a "cute" picture. Visceral and raw. Tough exterior – is this a protective factor for her? Yet identify as a mother – softer side?

Commented [NG(17)]: "Loved" in past tense.

Commented [NG(18)]: Now, a grandmother – new identity. Proud of her statement about having 11 grand children.

Commented [NG(19)]: Why did she forget about the other. There is sadness in her voice. Her eyes are downcast.

Commented [NG(20)]: "Best thing" – positive outlook, or is this a social norm to focus on positives?

Commented [NG(21)]: "learning" – does she feel inferior, less intelligent. Maybe she asserts that experiential learning is her strength.

children and sharing things with your children. Michael went next and he has picked a very small image of a metal fence with spikes at the top of the fence and he explained that he had selected this picture because he felt fenced in and trapped. He went on to explain that some of these feelings were self-inflicted but others were not. He then went on to say that he had mental health problems and addiction problems so these contributed to his feelings of being trapped, but he ended his explanation by indicating that he hoped that this would end soon so that there was some hope for the future.

John had selected a photograph from a town called Moffat and had a sheep statue on a rock. He said that he loved to travel to unusual places and had recently been travelling to find some linoleum factories and had hoped that he would come across a museum for linoleum but had not been successful. I asked him out of all the unusual places which was the best he had been to and he said that he particularly liked Royal Deeside, Braemar, and Ballater. I offered my selection next to

- **ROLE CONFUSION**
 - **MENTAL HEALTH**
 - **SELF DISCLOSURE/ISOLATION**
 - **ATTACHMENT THEORY**
 - **THE FUTURE**
 - **CULTURE**
 - **PROJECTED IDENTITY (FALSE SELF)**
 - **SOCIAL CLASS**
- Commented [NG(22)]:** Sharing – not being secretive – is the sharing for her benefit? Suggests experience is enjoyed with others, as opposed to isolation.
- Commented [NG(23)]:** This is the first reference to specific MH conditions. Image is very bleak, cold and uninviting. Does the fence keep him in or out? What is he trapped from? Where is he trapped? Again, invites further exploration but is this the 'right' space?
- Commented [NG(24)]:** Now he reveals that some are self imposed. This is a lot of self disclosure. He is stretching the boundaries of social acceptability. Is this because he has not learned the "codes and conventions" of group interaction, or is this part of his isolating strategy – push people away – create barriers.
- Commented [NG(25)]:** Drug use – from SW perspective this links to troubled past, particularly when combined with WH/isolation/drugs – Insecure attachments? Trauma?
- Commented [NG(26)]:** "Hoped" – still experiencing issues. Still in present tense, but uses future tense which signified a belief that there is a way out. Does he see the group as enabling this? Does this explain the high level of self disclosure? He has indicated there is a "future" which is positive, or is this also a social norm to pacify others?
- Commented [NG(27)]:** Places him in a cultural/geographic context.
- Commented [NG(28)]:** Moffat is not that "unusual" – is this an attempt to sound adventurous? To project an interesting identity to the group?
- Commented [NG(29)]:** This appears to be a strange interest. Is there a family connection. Is he asserting an interest in Scottish history? He is older, and museums might suggest a sense of "looking back" at better times?
- Commented [NG(30)]:** Again, not really unusual given our current geographical location. But traditionally seen as wealthy – tourism locations. Does this place him into a social class? Is this an attempt to assert that class identity?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CULTURE/IDENTITY • KNOWLEDGE/POWER • FAMILY FORMING BONDS • CULTURE/IDENTITY • IDENTITY CONFUSION 	<p>try and show that I was not waiting for all the participants to go before I spoke so I showed a photograph of a shoal of fish and spoke about my fish tank. Violet had selected a photograph postcard of Sydney in Australia and said that it reminded her of the bridge over the River Tyne in Teeside where she was from. She went on to say that a lot of the steel that was used in Sydney Harbour Bridge had come from Teeside and that she had fond memories of living in Teeside. When asked if she visits quite regularly she said that she does because they she still has family down there. Penelope added that some of the granite used in Sydney Harbour Bridge came from Aberdeen. Margaret had selected a postcard of a tree in autumn colours against a backdrop of hillsides with autumnal colours. She said she was drawn towards beauty, creativity and nature. She said that this very much reminds her of "fall" and I asked her if she was American to which she replied "no, Canadian". Caroline had picked a photograph of an older lady looking out towards the viewer. It was a very posed photograph and Caroline said that the woman looked very forceful in the image and she liked that, she wanted to be like</p>
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Commented [NG(31)]: Why did I select this image? Was it tokenistic as it does not reveal anything about me. Why did I go next? Was this an attempt to disperse control.

Commented [NG(32)]: Knowledge of cultural awareness. Used to root her in geography and culture. She uses the opportunity to state she is different from the others because she is from elsewhere. This appears to define her identity, but also invites reminiscence. She appears to miss the area.

Commented [NG(33)]: Again, demonstrates a knowledge of history and industry. This forms part of her identity - steel workers - linked to social class.

Commented [NG(34)]: Family ties us to a location.

Commented [NG(35)]: Forming a bond with someone by sharing knowledge. Also, providing "legitimacy" for the geographical connection. It's a small world and we are all connected.

Commented [NG(36)]: An outdoor shot. Very colourful and a sense of space.

Commented [NG(37)]: Now she explores her character. Again, linked to her identity.

Commented [NG(38)]: The use of the word "fall" has definite cultural connotations and places a person in North America. She forcefully states she is Canadian, outlining the clear difference between the 2 countries in her tone, also illustrating pride. She reminisces about her memories of autumn and this asserts her difference from the others as well, but she placed her characteristics before her nationality.

Commented [NG(39)]: A striking image - eye contact is prevalent in the image. The image demonstrates confidence.

that, to project confidence. Penelope pointed out that the image was of Emily Pankhurst and Frieda said that she reminded her of her own Aunt Violet. John also entered the conversation and said that when he was growing up his family had photographs very similar to this on the walls of their house, very old black and white formal photographs. Penelope had also selected a photograph postcard from Sydney in Australia and explained that she worked there for a short while. Sally had selected a postcard of Scotland and said that this had been a home for 10 years and that she loved the country and the people. I was aware not to try to involve Penelope and Sally too much in the process because they wanted to be seen as facilitators rather than participants but I wanted to involve them a little bit within this exercise because it was the introductions and getting to know people. The amount of information that came out from this very short introduction was very large and some people gave quite a lot of personal detail about themselves.

I then asked the participants "who had cameras?" and "who did not?", then asked who actually had photographs on them

• **KNOWLEDGE/POWER**

• **REMINISCENCE**

• **SOCIAL BONDING**

- Commented [NG(40)]:** She wants to be "forceful". There is a striving for another identity, dissatisfaction with who she is.
- Commented [NG(41)]:** She wants to be confident. By highlighting her "wants", she is emphasising her desires. This is self-defeating. Is the confidence with regards to the others and their narratives? Unlikely, given that she chose the image before the narratives were verbalised.
- Commented [NG(42)]:** Demonstration of knowledge again – Foucault/Goffman – asserting power through knowledge.
- Commented [NG(43)]:** Disarms this power with humour – she might not know who Emily Pankhurst is (or care) but she knows her family.
- Commented [NG(44)]:** Back to reminiscing. Memories of how photographs were displayed and how we engaged with them. Places him in time.
- Commented [NG(45)]:** Quite protected in the information she imparts. What does this tell us? She is a SW so maybe this is defensive – not sure about how far to use self.
- Commented [NG(46)]:** Again, one of the facilitators being guarded, but actually places her in cultural and geographical context like some of the other participants. She "loves" the country and the people – open attitude. Positive. Is this to protect the self when working with MH?
- Commented [NG(47)]:** Considerable self disclosure from some, but from others there was more of a sense of imparting socially acceptable information to help others fathom who you are.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOCIAL NORM • ROLE EXPLORATION • SELF EXPRESSION • ACCEPTANCE • OVERCOMING ADVERSITY/CULTURAL/SOCIAL CLASS • ROLE EXPLORATION/RIGHT TIME? • SOCIAL NORM 	<p>that they were particularly fond of either on their phones, in their purses/wallets, or elsewhere. Five of the participants offered up photographs immediately. Anna had a photograph of her son hugging a cat and she explained that her son had autism but had found contact with animals to be very beneficial. She went on to explain that he had selective mutism as a child but had learned to speak because of his contact with a dog. He was now able to express himself when he was with the cat. The group agreed that this was a beautiful picture and that she should actually have it printed. John had a photograph of his grandson in a wheelchair and explained that this was taken in Kirkcaldy and he had been very surprised at his grandson's ability to use his wheelchair and remarked that he had quite good mobility whilst propelling himself in the chair which he did not realise. Michael presented a picture of his two twin girls and explained that he had not seen these girls for three years. Violet handed me a paper photograph and within the image were her two grandchildren and it looked like it had been taken at school. She went on to explain that the eldest child had been raised</p>
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- Commented [NG(48)]:** Appeared to be instant recognition that photographs are used in this way. 5 out of the group instantly responded and demonstrated emotional connections to an image.
- Commented [NG(49)]:** Another significant revelation from her. She is a mother and a carer for a son with autism. Contact with animals – are they more accepting than people? Safer to be around.
- Commented [NG(50)]:** Another animal, underlying alternative approaches to contact? Her son also fills her narrative.
- Commented [NG(51)]:** Using something to express the self – as with a photograph?
- Commented [NG(52)]:** Now the group get involved and affirm the image as they affirming her role as a mother/carer who protects her child? Regardless, the praise is directed toward the content of the image and that appears to make her feel proud. Also about overcoming adversity.
- Commented [NG(53)]:** He continues the theme of overcoming adversity and tells the group that he has a disabled grandchild – does this evoke more sympathy from others if children are seen with adverse conditions – autism, disability? Focus on ability, rather than disability. Again, the geographical context of the image is also highlighted – rooting in Scottish culture and society. Does this also assert working class roots as Kirkcaldy is an old mining village.
- Commented [NG(54)]:** There is clearly a back story here and he appears to struggle to hold back emotion. This does invite questions but is this the right time. He is showing the image to invite questioning, but nobody does – is this as a response to his previous revelations?
- Commented [NG(55)]:** This is carried with her – a tangible image. Hands it to me – am I seen as an authority figure – in control of how the information is imparted?
- Commented [NG(56)]:** Cultural norm of school photographs – something everyone from the UK can identify with.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OVERCOMING ADVERSITY • EMOTIONAL – GUILT? • CREATIVITY/EXPRESSION • SOCIAL NORM 	<p>by her for the first year of his life because his mother had postnatal depression and he actually had Asperger's. She then said that the other child was the fun one so she tried to explain her relationship with the younger child but it was clear that she had quite a strong bond with the eldest child. Margaret had a photograph on her camera which was the sunrise over a church building in Aberdeen. The colours were beautiful and she explained that she was very drawn to these deep rich colours. I then led a discussion about the importance of photographs within our lives and commented that all but one of the photographs presented had pictures of people. Frieda also had a photograph that she presented which was of John, her partner, with one of his grandsons whilst he was getting ready for school and showed a very proud grandfather with his grandson. Frieda said that they were like two children together.</p> <p>The group were asked to take two photographs each for the photography scavenger hunt and were sent off to come back with images. This is a useful exercise and gets people thinking</p>
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Commented [NG(57)]: Another story of adversity and how a child has been impacted by a label. There is a special bond between her and the grandchild—postnatal depression in the mother—is this familiar? Does she feel guilt because of her own MH condition?

Commented [NG(58)]: The explanation is given to compensate for the attention given to the first child in the image. Could this be because of guilt? "Fun one"—so is the other one not fun? Harder work to care for someone with additional needs.

Commented [NG(59)]: Linked to her creative side. Sunrise and sunsets have romantic connotations, but also rebirth.

Commented [NG(60)]: Now we learn that she is in a relationship with J. There is no sense of how long this has been going on, but this might explain the previous comment about seeing 2 of her grandchildren—maybe she meant 1 of her own, and 1 of his? Does this then mean she is disengaging from the relationship by stating 1 grandchild? If so, why does she select J as a meaningful image—is it meaningful, or is it shown as part of the cement that holds their relationship together—symbolically meaningful?

Commented [NG(61)]: Emphasises J's childlike qualities with his grandson—is this a positive?

- **SOCIAL NORM**

about how to take photographs to represent things. When presenting the images I asked who would like to start and asked Florence to start off presenting her images. She presented her images and people guessed what she had taken. This went smoothly and people appear to be quite happy and enjoyed the exercise. Michael had been given something to photograph to represent something that he liked and presented a photograph of his skin with some deep cuts on it. I was a bit wary about showing that image but felt that it was his image and he should be in control and therefore I would display the image. It was quite difficult for the web cam to focus on the image and I asked Michael to give some background, to help the others guess what he had photographed, so he explained that it was the result of something that he liked to do. I had a suspicion that these were self-harm cuts but I also wondered if they might be an injury from a sporting activity, however it turned out that they were self-harm cuts. He explained that "yes this was something he liked to do", and what he liked to do was to self-harm. The reaction from the group was quite good

- **ASSERTIVE**

- **SELF DISCLOSURE – APPROPRIATE?**

- **FACILITATOR ISSUE – TOO SOON?**

- **EXTERNALISING IDENTITY**

- **REACTION**

Commented [NG(62)]: This involved projecting images onto the wall via webcam and projector. This took time to focus and slowed discussion down. After this, most participants passed the images around the group for people to see the images on the device.

Commented [NG(63)]: she now takes the confidence to lead off on this exercise, taking it to the group to assert control and decide who initiates each discussion.

Commented [NG(64)]: Was this his response to not being questioned about his daughters, or about feeling trapped? This was a big revelation and there was shock factor within this. However, it was also a big revelation from him – sharing deeply personal issues to a group he barely knew. When explaining this there was some trepidation in how he introduced it and he stated it was something he liked to do – "liked" – very positive connotation – sense of enjoyment.

Use of my self here too – why did I "allow" this image to be shown? The risk that it could unsettle people. Ethically, was this okay? But, to prevent display would have disempowered M. What if it had been more explicit? Where would the line be drawn.

Was it also a plea for help?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GROUP NORMING • SELF EFFICACY • CONTROL/SAFETY 	<p>though. They seemed to nod and understand and there was no criticism from the group to the graphic content of his photograph. There was some very positive feedback from the participants when photographs were presented, particularly when Caroline presented a photograph of a happy face which was Sally. It was very well framed and very well presented, particularly since Caroline was using a camera she had never used before and was clearly not comfortable with the technology, but the very first photograph she took was very good.</p> <p>Towards the end of today's session I summarised the exercises by explaining that they were designed to illustrate that everybody will take photographs differently, and that we cannot assume we know what a photograph is about. The best way of finding out what a photograph is about is asking the person who took a photograph. I then asked the group what their earliest memories of having a photograph taken and there were some quite interesting recollections, mostly around about the age of 5 to 7 years old where family</p>
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Commented [NG(65)]: Conformation. He has now externalised this aspect of his identity for all to see – take me or leave me. Have his other images been building up to this – the barriers, the drug use, now the self harm – exposing the negative qualities to see who would/could still accept him.

Commented [NG(66)]: Is this what he anticipated? He seems satisfied that there were no adverse reactions.

Commented [NG(67)]: Empathetic response. The group are still deciding who will be the most interesting. What are the lines of the group? What are the lines drawn? Who is in control?

Commented [NG(68)]: Continued to enhance self efficacy – ability to produce good images.

Commented [NG(69)]: Perhaps even more powerful – learning how technology and being good at it. Choice of image was safe for C – she chose a person she trusted and asked her to pose for a picture. C controlled this interaction and had a positive outcome.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CHRONOLOGY • SELF IDENTITY/FAMILY • SEEKING IDENTITY • GROUP IDENTITY/FAMILY SYSTEMS • LOSS OF SELF IDENTITY • PAST IDENTITY/SEARCHING FOR NEW IDENTITY • NEW IDENTITY • CHRONOLOGY 	<p>members had been taking photographs of their children. Violet commented that she had very old glass prints of her grandparents and Margaret said that she also had a similar glass print of family photographs. Caroline began to explain that when she had been small she had asked her mother where her baby photograph was because she was from a large family. She explained that her mother pulled out a photograph of a baby but Caroline doubted that it was actually her and stated that she thought she had been adopted, at which point her parents started laughing. Caroline said that this was the first time she realized that she was part of something bigger. That she was not an individual or an only child, but a part of a group, and that is how she saw her family unit from thereafter. She said that when they got on a bus it was always as a big family unit and other people on the bus would remark at the size of their family. However, she went on to say that her son is an only child and she cannot imagine how that must feel. Florence said that when she was younger photographs used to be taken in sexes, so that her images all consist of two girls together, or two boys together.</p>
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- Commented [NG/70]:** Pieces them both in time. Family connections but they themselves are part of this historic make up.
- Commented [NG/71]:** Conversation continues on a historical theme. Opportunity to reminisce. Questioning her self, even as a child - who am I? How do I fit in with this family? And where am I?
- Commented [NG/72]:** Cannot marry her own identity with that of the family? Suspicion about who she is? Forced to comply. Were they laughing menacingly or sympathetically? Why did she feel so out of place?
- Commented [NG/73]:** But then comes a realization that she is part of the big unit. What does that entail for her - compliance.
- Commented [NG/74]:** Loss of individual identity. Is this when it disappeared? Is that why she is searching for positive characteristics in images of Emily Panhurst. Is she searching for the loss of her individual self?
- Commented [NG/75]:** Outsiders did not even see her for a unique person. Just part of a homogenous group. She wants to be noticed for who she is. Talking in the past tense, but is this how she feels now?
- Commented [NG/76]:** Now we learn that she is also a mother, but only of 1. Is this because she wanted this individuality for herself? But she cannot comprehend how that must be. Difficulty seeing things from others perspective? Fear of going it alone? Is there safety in numbers?
- Commented [NG/77]:** Now we explore gender differences and the power imbalance. Was this due to single sex schools? Again, placing her in time.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOCIETAL NORM • SAFETY 	<p>We also spoke about how people retain photographs because Caroline had mentioned that her all photographs had been kept in a tin. This led on to talking about keeping photographs on computers and scanning photographs onto computers but there was also some recognition that some photographs would be kept in old leather suitcases or cardboard boxes.</p> <p>Before the session finished I explained what we would be doing next week when looking at self-portraits. I asked the group if anybody liked having a photograph taken and there was a unanimous "no". I said that next week we would start with self-portraits but explained that what I wanted them to do was to think about something that they like about themselves and then photograph that. Caroline got it immediately and said, "I like my hands?" and I said "exactly". I told the group that it could be anything at all. It could be the face, it could be some jewellery, it could be some clothing, or it could be a body part (and then told them to keep it clean). I said that we would start with this exercise next week at Duthie Park and they would be given time to work in pairs or</p>
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Commented [NG(78)]: Lack of order. Chaotic collection.

Commented [NG(79)]: Exploration of how to retain order – does this relate to life?

Commented [NG(80)]: Is this cultural, vanity to say yes? Or genuine discomfort at confronting the self?

Commented [NG(81)]: She quickly grasps how to feel safe in the exercise. Understands control she has. Immediately identifies her hands as something she likes. No hesitation.

- **SELF IDENTITY/TASK CENTRED**

small groups to produce these images but what I wanted them to do over the course of the week is to think about what it is they like about themselves that could be represented in a photograph. We then stopped the group at that point.

Overall this was a very positive group. It was well catered for, good room to work in, and enthusiastic participants. This is a group that has purely been set up to do therapeutic photography unlike the other groups which are already in existence and I am coming in to deliver a therapeutic photography programme. Therefore there is more a sense of commitment to attending the group here and people genuinely want to be there. When we finished today Anna turned to me and said "that was excellent". I also heard other participants saying how much they had enjoyed the course today.

Penelope added that she had been working with some of the service users for over 1 year, and today she had found out an incredible amount of information about them in such a short

- **DYNAMIC**

Commented [NG](82): Set something to think about over the week. Does thinking about a positive quality of the self benefit the individual over the week?

Commented [NG](83): Self reflection. Why did it work positive? Number of self-disclosures which were well Participation in the exercises?

<p>*****</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REWARD/ CATHARTIC/ STIGMA/ EXTERNALISATION 	<p>timescale.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Kay – Yes, today's was my favourite (photovoice). I thought it was, ehm, it was like a challenge and it was something to...to you know like last night because I spent like a lot of time thinking about the pictures and like what they meant and everything and I just found it a good exercise, I really sort of, ehm, cathartic really and ehm, and be able to just be honest about, you know, being an alcoholic as well.</p> <p>Violet – I think this one (photovoice) plus the Duthie Park I think, Duthie Park because we could take the same photograph and it would mean something different to everyone. But this one as well because, you know, you are looking back to where your safe place was, and a lot of it was when you were younger, when you were little.</p> <p>Neil then asks the group about anything they feel could be improved? (12.36)</p>
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Commented [N84]: Why? The sense of control led to self-disclosure, but it also had been about learning from the other participants where the boundaries lay. Some big revelations in front of strangers.
May be worth summarising all of the revelations.

Commented [N85]: There was a reward in this task for her – "challenge" – mental exertion as she made links and explored the issue. Gave her permission to "spend time" on the images. "Cathartic" refers to psychological relief – something rewarded her through this exercise. Maybe it was recognising patterns of behaviour that she had imposed on herself. She also explored this issue in her images too. Admitting to people was easier because she could put it in an image and talk to it.

Commented [N86]: Enjoying the varied perceptions – enforced the idea of self-concept even though there was commonality.

Commented [N87]: See expresses what was evident in the images – maybe she did not realise this so strongly before, but once it was expressed in visual form it became evident. A professional could have explored this, but she realised it herself, and that is valuable learning. Now, what does she do with that information?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JOY OF LEARNING/ DISCOVERY 	<p>Florence – Oh, I think the length of the course actually...longer...because it's not really enough time to...I think there is a lot more we could learn from each other.</p> <p>Neil comments that this is useful to know.</p> <p>Florence – Definitely, to learn more about each other, and ourselves (Margaret – ourselves) yeah, to look more closely at ourselves without being scared of it, you know, what makes us tick.</p> <p>Violet – And giving you the confidence maybe to try other things.</p> <p>Florence – Yes, definitely!</p> <p>Neil then asks the group if they have learned anything new about themselves?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SELF EXPLORATION/ SELF CONCEPT/ LAYERS OF SAFETY 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SELF EFFICACY/ SELF ESTEEM 	

Commented [N88]: Suggests there were positive benefits for F which she wanted to continue exploring, yet she attributes this to learning from each other – could agency continue delivering this? Suggests enjoyable and interesting.

Commented [N89]: Re-evaluates her statement and declares that self-exploration is not scary and that this is supported by M too – learning about self through exploration. This technique is not "scary", unlike other approaches she knows of. Process of capturing image, externalising it, and exploring it via narrative.

Commented [N90]: Linked to self-esteem and self-efficacy – belief that tasks can be achieved, and she is worth achieving them.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOMINANT FALSE SELF – EMERGING TRUE SELF/ COMPARING AGAINST OTHERS • HUMOUR TO CAP DEVELOPMENT • PEER SUPPORT/ VALIDATION • CLOWN – EQUATES TO TRUE AND FALSE SELF • EMERGING SELF 	<p>Florence – Yeah, I can be happy. I have a smile on me a lot more these past few weeks, even singing so...can't be bad can it? Well, the singing part for everybody else I don't know (laughter)...me singing might not be good for everybody else.</p> <p>Margaret – Yes, I actually think I've actually heard more of your real laughter (to Florence) than your covering up.</p> <p>Florence – Yes, that's true. Because I played the clown for so long, for so many years just to cover up how I was really feeling but now it's a natural enjoyment of friendships and situations, you know, I'm finding me!</p> <p>Margaret – Yes, you are finding you again.</p> <p>Florence – The real me. (14.47)</p> <p>Neil asks if anyone else feels they have learned something about themselves.</p>
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Commented [N91]: Her false self has been dominant, but now she is finding her true self again which has been hidden under roles and obligations. There is enjoyment in the process as it controls it she explores. She compares herself to others and find a favourable outcome, reinforcing happiness.

Commented [N92]: Use of humour to emphasise. Self-deprecating. "Don't get above your station" feeling.

Commented [N93]: Confirmatory comment to give validation. Learning about V has given the others insight, a knowledge that there has been a cover up in the past, but now her positive emotions are re-emerging.

Commented [N94]: Using diversionary techniques to distract from real emotions – clown has been used to avoid real feelings and feelings. "Natural" suggests stripping off the mask and finding people she can relate to on her level, recognising that this is easier than playing the clown, less effort. Finding the true self.

Commented [N95]: Again, conformation, yet recognition too?

Commented [N96]: True self.

- **EMPOWERMENT/
REMINISCENCE RE-EVALUED**

Violet - That I have got a voice, which, as a child, and probably the generation I grew up in, children didn't have a voice that they have now and that, you know, I do have a voice.

Commented [NG(97)]: She entered the process feeling silenced - for so long she has kept quiet, but now, through her images, she has been able to make sense of her thoughts and begin to track her issues; make sense of them, and speak out about what she is facing - does this equate to empowerment? Relates back to childhood again and identifies one of the drawbacks of her idealised upbringing.

Neil asks the group if they have learned anything about other people/relationships?
(15.14)

Florence - Yeah, definitely...eh...over the...since I was a young girl really when I first had my children I did not have much respect for myself, I didn't look after myself, I was always looking after everybody else, you know, and I felt I wasn't good enough to join in the company all the time and, you know, I had nothing to offer. But between all the Pillar groups and this one too I've learned so much, that I am worth a lot more than some of the people I have been with, you know, they are all...because they programmed me into thinking "what a horrible person I am, I am useless, etc." you know,

Commented [NG(98)]: Very reflective. Her self was neglected and secondary to others - existing to satisfy the needs of others. Betitled. No self respect also meant no respect from others. After all, why would you expect that? Very young when she had children - limited life choice. Self neglect. On the periphery - not good enough to join in. Very low self-esteem.

- **REFLECTION/ SELF NEGLECT/
SELF ESTEEM**

- **SELF ESTEEM/ FREE WILL/
EMPOWERMENT**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DICHOTOMY/ STRUGGLING IDENTITY/ FINDING SELF • THERAPEUTIC MILIEU/ LOSS AND CHANGE/ OBJECT 	<p>you know, "nobody will ever love me or want me", but it's not true, and this reinforces it because, you know, I've got a lot to offer, you know, as a friend, as a woman.</p> <p>Neil then turns attention to Caroline and reminds the group of what happened in an earlier session where the group had collectively told Caroline they loved her as she is.</p> <p>Caroline – I find that so hard to accept, really, but the other thing...it was your previous question...I know what I think, I have always known what I think, because I am very clear headed in what I think, you know, my aims and, you know, what I want to do, but I still find it...I find it difficult to know my feelings, and other peoples, you know, it's as if I have no experience of it, you see what I mean? Whereas in here...that's the bit that alarmed me at the beginning because people were talking about their feelings, ehm, it alarms me at other meetings I go to, I actually go to another meeting where that saying comes from, "what you see here..." , so I am uncomfortable with feelings, you know, I don't mind</p>
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Commented [NG(99)]: Compares herself to others – "worth a lot more" – self-esteem has increased. Recognises the damage they have done and the impact on self-esteem. Instead of listening to their comments, she has been projecting her own feelings onto them. "Programmed" sounds like she lacked free will. Robotic. Bullied. "This reinforces it" – she has learned about her own qualities – found friendship, found feminine qualities she had oppressed herself (because of others).

Commented [NG(100)]: Still struggling with her views – she thinks she knows who she is, yet all her images and narratives underline a woman struggling with her role. She refers to her aims, yet there are unfinished projects everywhere, but then she admits difficulty in her feelings and other peoples too – equates that to having no experience of it – maybe they have been suppressed for so long she has to learn how to engage with them again? The images have given her an insight into that, but also seeing how others interacted with their images. Safer for her to keep them closed.

<p>RELATIONS/ ISOLATION</p>	<p>thoughts or opinions or, you know, a debate, oh I can do that till the band plays, but the feelings bit is really tricky I think, because you're vulnerable, and you are seeing somebody else's vulnerability and I think they are equally...to me they are equally anxiety provoking...</p> <p>Margaret – It's just like your home, not wanting anyone in it – you don't want to go into anyone else's either.</p> <p>Caroline – No, absolutely not (laughter) that goes without saying.</p> <p>Margaret – No, we've tried and tried to get her to come and visit and have a coffee at mine, but no.</p> <p>Caroline – Well, you've tried so hard that ehm...I know you find this hard to believe but I've been quite completely unaware of it because I have got my defence mechanisms so high that I never actually realised. Isn't that peculiar? And I know I am peculiar to myself but I am not really peculiar to</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISOLATION • FALSE PRIDE – FALSE SELF • SURVIVOLETAL TACTIC/ PROTECTING THE SELF/ FAMILY 	

Commented [NG(101)]: Focus on this group in particular. The milieu meant that people could talk about feelings. She refers to expressing thoughts and opinions, superficial statements that provoke, get her noticed, and cause other people to react – a protective shell, but if she has to take that barrier down and speak about her vulnerabilities, she is worried what will happen next – what will she be seen in the past? For her, vulnerability is a weakness, and she does not like being seen as weak in others' object relations? Punitive approach – safe to isolate yourself so that you don't get hurt.

Commented [NG(102)]: M broadens this out and identifies that Caroline is able to such an extent that she presents barriers to her friends – no close contact – no admission into safe space (physical and mental).

Commented [NG(103)]: Sound of disgust. Badge of honour – proud for being like this, but isolation is not something she wants.

Commented [NG(104)]: She knows herself that this is a survival tactic – high defence mechanisms, yet not unconscious – she is fully conscious of these, so are they truly defence mechanisms? She does feel oblivious to the approaches from others and is surprised that they have attempted to engage her. Caroline is protecting her from getting close to others as it only results in hurt.

Commented [NG105]: This is a familiar tactic in her family, or one she has learned from her family, because of that homogeneous identity they have — part of something bigger.

Commented [NG106]: And now she recognises the issue: her identity has been lost and she wants to discover who she is, yet she can't because she has been conditioned to believe that she can identify patterns and things which are important to her, and she sees this in the others in that they can explore their identity, yet she is so fragile and vulnerable she might not be able to do this in public, in front of a group — afraid of getting hurt, afraid of exposing weaknesses (which, OR would say need to be punished), yet the social learning must be valuable for her to see that she has similar traits to others — self-imposed isolation, shutting curtains.

Commented [NG107]: The image C projects is different from the one she has in her head — there is a mismatch — she wants to be an unapproachable character so that she can continue to isolate herself, yet she fears that others find her charming and endearing.

Commented [NG108]: Recognises this aspect within her own character, of being seen by others in a different way from how she sees herself. Is this about relating too much into the looking glass part, or neglecting to regard the others as you are? Still looking for the same feedback from others as you did when you were younger, but having to deal with the fact that attention is transient?

Commented [NG109]: Appears to be a genuine moment where she acknowledges that kind words have been said — registered — receives a compliment in the spirit in which it was made.

my family...what's left of it, there's not many folk are left of it. I don't know who I am, I've absolutely no idea at all really. I know...I know the labels I've been given but I don't know who I am in...I don't know...I lost it about 10 years ago and I've kind of started to regain it, but I still don't really know, and I want to stop talking, and I want you to all stop looking at me too (laughter).

Neil poses the same question to Violet.

Violet – I think, as regards Caroline, I can't, I don't understand because I think she is such a warm person. When she walks into a room she lights it up, and I can't...I don't understand how you can feel you don't...you're not like that. I suppose we are all guilty of that at some point but I...I think she gives so much.

Caroline – Thank you Violet. I feel very touched, I really do, I do.

- LOST IDENTITY – FEAR
- OBJECT RELATIONS V SOCIAL LEARNING
- ROLE/ STIGMA
- ISOLATION
- DICHOTOMY – HOW I SEE MYSELF V HOW OTHERS SEE ME
- LOOKING GLASS SELF

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEER SUPPORT • REMINISCENCE – BLAME THE PAST • PUNITIVE PARENTING • LOSS OF IDENTITY • GROUP BONDING – LEARNING/ THERAPEUTIC MILIEU/ EXPOSURE – CONTROL 	<p>Violet – But I think everybody gives in here.</p> <p>Caroline – Maybe is it because...like I can see all your good qualities, all of you, all separately and together, you've all got fantastic qualities, and I can see that, but maybe because...it's something about, I don't know, your upbringing or whatever, "don't blow your own trumpet", don't. We were never ever encouraged to say, you know, you were good at anything, you were actively discouraged actually, but that was really, really kind Violet, and I will try because I think it is ehm...look, I've taken over from what Florence was saying because I thought my working life was giving to people but I was useless when I stopped working, so I don't really see it as doing it outside a working environment, I was paid to do it and I got on and jolly well did it, if you see what I mean? You know, ehm...but there is a different atmosphere, can you feel it? Ehm, you know, it is, it's actually a tangible, to me it's tangible, like that first, I mean I was really nervous when the photographs were all there and there is a different feeling in the room, I feel it, I mean, I know, in my whole, I don't feel</p>
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Commented [N6110]: Now it is no longer about C--she has had her time in the spotlight (and actually asked for the focus to be moved), so V acknowledges the input from everybody else. V has earned the right to be part of the group and wants to enforce this bond by including the others.

Commented [N111]: Is this her trying to build up to something negative to say about the others? She recognises the old saying "don't blow your own trumpet" and links this to her behaviour-- she's not doing it, she's warning others, which is a good way to follow in the bad points, is she reminding the others of this fact?

Commented [N112]: Confirms this - she has been raised to look at the opposite of her good points- "actively discouraged"- so what were the consequences for her? She still refers to herself as "we" - suggesting difficulty in separating her self from her old identity.

Commented [N113]: In her previous identity she gave - and she enjoyed it, but she suggests she only did it for money. She refers to herself as "useless" when she stopped, but this may refer to a loss of identity and unable to fall into her previous routine.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DIFFERENT MILIEU <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RELEASE – EXTERNALISING • SELF DISCLOSURE • LAYERS OF SAFETY • UNCONSCIOUS TO 	<p>the tension.</p> <p>General agreement</p> <p>Caroline – Even though we already know each other!</p> <p>Neil explains the theory behind externalising things into a photograph to put it "out there" for discussion. (21.02)</p> <p>Caroline – Yes! Yes, I suppose.</p> <p>Florence – I think too that it also takes a burden off your shoulders, you know, to a certain extent. You've been carrying all this inside you for so long, but then you are openly sharing this, and it's like opening the floodgates, you know, it's just out there now, you know, it's no longer your problem as such, it's a shared thing, so it is...you know...you are not as scared of it anymore because you...like... "this is such and such, makes me feel that way", so you recognise it</p>
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Commented [N114]: But she acknowledges that she cannot keep using this excuse because in this environment she notices the usual experiences in groups has gone. The atmosphere of using the excuse has been created a different milieu and she is aware of that. She is finding it hard to put her tough exterior because the exercises actually open her up, but she fears this also leaves her exposed.

Commented [N115]: So, the atmosphere differs from other groups.

<p>CONSCIOUS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEER BONDING – LEARNING CONTROL/ ATTACHMENT 	<p>now so it gives you a bit of comfort knowing what your weaknesses are, and what your strengths are.</p> <p>Caroline – That's it!</p> <p>Neil then asks if the participants have learned anything new about their environment? (22.10)</p> <p>Florence – Well yeah. More in control of how things are to make it safe for me, you know, and stop worrying to much about what other people think all the time, you know, just to make myself feel safe and happy.</p> <p>Neil asks Kay about a previous statement where she described the work as "powerful".</p> <p>Kay – Yeah, because I think if you...if you can kind of, sort of, like, recognise in advance the sort of triggers that might set you off on sort of a downward spiral then it might, you know,</p>
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Commented [N116]: A release for F – been carrying these things inside for so long, but now allowed to offload them – opening the floodgates, does suggest a danger of too much information coming out – how do you stop? If it's no longer your problem, does it become someone else's? No, she goes on to explain how she has identified the triggers, and then she goes into the consciousness – identification, objectification and explanation which leads to recognition of the triggers. Once the consciousness – unravelling them to make sense of strengths and weaknesses. Once identified, they can be addressed.

Commented [N117]: eureka!

Commented [N118]: She answers this as if it should be obvious, yes, she can do both this and relate this to her life – nothing what she can do both this and relate this to her life – nothing obvious has been stated about how V should deal with the landlord, but she clearly now has ideas. She also retreats into her own mind and tries to disengage from other peoples, but in a way where somebody with a preoccupied attachment might move into a secure pattern of attachment – looking at her own health and wellbeing.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REFLECTION/ OUTCOME • DISTRACTION 	<p>you might actually be able to do something , you know, like, like distract yourself from it, like maybe, you know, like keep yourself busy or go and do something or, or eh...you know rather than you just start to...you know, you feel a bit down, you don't really know what's causing it and you get a wee bit further down, a wee bit further down, but if you maybe look at your environment and the things like, you know, like when it's a horrible dull day outside, you know, does that put me down a bit? And then, you know, and then sort of be aware of things that are...because otherwise you do st...otherwise you'll just find yourself like, closed in, almost, and then not know how...because it's such a big step to get yourself back up there again.</p> <p>Florence – The barriers you put up as well.</p> <p>Kay – And also I think in a group like this when you learn about, like, what affects other people then maybe you'll like recognise it in them by the way they are talking or the way they are acting and, and maybe you'll...not that you'll be able</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISOLATION • EMPOWERMENT 	

Commented [N119]: She takes a while to get to her point, as if she is still trying to work out the impact of the exercises. She has identified barriers over the past 2 weeks and has carefully structured her images to document what might be – based on previous experiences. She recognises a spiral, small triggers like lack of motivation, or poor weather, and how that chips away at her mood. Small steps down require huge leaps back, and she sees this in her previous pattern of behaviour that she is working to protect herself. Her images not only help her reflect, but help her plan for the future. She talks about distraction, and this links to her keeping busy (which she also identifies).

Commented [N120]: identified the physical and mental barriers, self imposed isolation.

to do something yourself but you know like, maybe alert Sally or somebody who knows what to do or who knows the person, you know, I think that could be a benefit.

Commented [N121]: In her final statement there is consideration of empowerment. Not only are warning triggers becoming evident within herself, she can relate this to others too. Yet she knows the limits of her abilities and will seek help if she cannot deal with things herself.

Appendix 11 – Clustering Process

IDENTITY – deconstruction and reconstruction

Exposing the self

- (Exposing the self), and bypassing this with a photograph, virtual identity - “clown”, “practicing to deceive”

- o Violet – Well, I didn’t go to the AGM so (Florence – Neither did I) I didn’t know what to expect so I was a bit apprehensive at first because I think it is about exposing yourself, I think that is what was sort of at the back of my mind – Should I? Shouldn’t I? – but I am glad I did it.
- o and when I realised it was such onus things, I was terrified, first day, I thought “Jesus! What have I done?” – everybody else knows, my goodness, and I was really angry at myself. I thought, “That is typical you, walking into something you don’t even know what you are doing”, so I wasn’t really all that happy, to be quite frank.
- o Yes, that’s true. Because I played the clown for so long, for so many years just to cover up how I was really feeling
- o P42 – Florence in the How I see myself exercise
- o P55 – Michael presenting image to outside world (P60 “the state of mind affects the state of the house”)
- o P58 – “practicing to deceive” Caroline pretending to be someone she is not
- o P60 – worrying about other people – paranoia
- o Margaret – It’s just like your home, not wanting anyone in it – you don’t want to go into anyone else’s either. Caroline – No, absolutely not (laughter) that goes without saying. Margaret – No, we’ve tried and tried to get her to come and visit and have a coffee at mine, but no.

Commented [NG(1)]: This meant she had no preconceptions, nor did F.

Commented [NG(2)]: Fear of the unknown and at risk – vulnerable. She was only “a bit” apprehensive so there must have been an element of perceived control coming into the situation. “Exposing” self sounds as if she is stripping off all aspects of her social identity to reveal her true self. Naked, for all to see. For her to see.

Commented [NG(3)]: The 2 way conversation – weighing up pros and cons, or cost benefit analysis. Yet something made her decide to do it.

Commented [NG(4)]: “onus thing” – (burden responsibility liability obligation duty weight load c harge mantle encumbrance) She feels duty bound to explore and reveal. This fills her with dread and fear – expectation to delve deep and expose herself in front of others. Expression of religion – is she asking for guidance to give her strength – fight or flight.

Commented [NG(5)]: Yet she feels like the only one who did not understand, whereas the terminology had not been explained to anyone. She also had an information sheet. She got an idea in her head and went with it. Disregarded truth and was guided by her inner thoughts and beliefs. Insular behaviour. Did not say “my God” – suggests more religious undertones.

Commented [NG(6)]: Lack of exploration beforehand left her vulnerable. Reveals an inner voice giving herself into trouble, berating her for her choice. “Typical” – she has done this before, getting into situations without knowing the facts. Angry at who? Self, but also directed at facilitator.

Commented [NG(7)]: M broadens this out and identifies that C has isolated herself to such an extent that she presents barriers to her friends – no close contact – no admission into safe space (physical and mental).

Commented [NG(8)]: Sound of disgust. Badge of honour – proud for being like this, but isolation is not something she wants.

Developing the self

- (Developing the self), comparing against others, layers of exploration, roles, forced to confront (looking glass self)

- o Neil then asked the group if they had felt in control of the information they were sharing? Violet – Ehm...Yeah, I think I did, you know, it was personal to me, and I

Commented [NG(9)]: Not convinced she had full control – maybe the images made her open up more than she had expected to.

think you get worried, don't you, about what somebody else might think or say about your photographs or whatever, and I think that's what I was...I think something that...I'm like that, there's always something at the back of my mind saying, you know, what will that person think, and I think it's just been a good learning curve, it doesn't really matter.

- therapeutic can mean a walk, you know, nobody needs to share anything or whatever, and I thought it was in the sense "I'll be able to take a photograph, which I can't do at the moment", but it's been very, very challenging at the beginning and very...comforting...and, I dunno, there's a feeling of solidarity really, so I've been really enjoyed it.
- Florence – I think at the Duthie Park one, because it was quite a challenge to pick one for each emotion, you know, it did open your eyes more to yourself, you know, had you thinking more, concentrating on you which is a thing I am not used to doing because I'd rather concentrate on everybody else, but concentrating on yourself is...you know...but it's not as scary as I thought it would be.
- Florence – Yeah, I can be happy. I have a smile on me a lot more these past few weeks, even singing so...can't be bad can it? Well, the singing part for everybody else I don't know (laughter)...me singing might not be good for everybody else.
- Because I played the clown for so long, for so many years just to cover up how I was really feeling but now it's a natural enjoyment of friendships and situations, you know, I'm finding me!
- Florence – [The real me.]
- P30 – Violet identifies when the true self becomes uncomfortable.
- P31 – Florence – does not like her own image because she does not recognise it
- P42 – Margaret – hiding the true self
- P44/53 – emerging self – being yourself within safe space
- P56 – trauma/self harm
- P60 – true self as prisoner
- P67 – true self at rest, being shown where this happens
- P70 – self exploration in safe space – showing possessions
- P71 – Kay, self concept, safe space

● Future identity, acknowledging triggers, looking back

- P29 – Change due to illness/adapting
- P20/73/74 – Ageing
- P32 – the next generation
- P44 – considering future options – strength?
- P52/53 – reflecting on past to inform future

Commented [NG(10): Back to exposing vulnerabilities – she approached the exercises and explored her personal perspectives and issues in the realisation that this left her open to judgement – looking glass self – we adjust actions based on the reactions of others, yet with images people were interested and encouraging. She can never control what people "think", nor maybe even know, yet it is a worry for her. She relates this to a fear of what people will think of "her photographs or whatever", but as her photographs are extensions and objectifications of her, then this would be a direct critique of her.

Commented [NG(11): Yet something has changed – she describes it as a learning curve which suggests quick learning in a short timescale. Why does it not matter? Should she just focus on life from her own perspective from now on? Perhaps it is about realising what you have got control over – she cannot control what people think, but she can control her actions and attitudes.

Commented [NG(12): She appears to think she was coming to learn a new skill. And she did – she used a camera to illustrate her life, yet it was the content she was afraid of, and what others would think of her attempts. Is this related to loss and change? A change in the way she perceives her world threatens her position – even if it is unsettled – and she is resisting this change by displaying anger at herself and facilitator?

Commented [NG(13): She suddenly appears to melt. Again, a change of direction – yes, she has been challenged, but also "comforted" in the stories and in her patterns of revelation. She feels closer to the others, bonded, and they are solid as a collective. Mixes up present and past tense – "been really enjoyed it".

Commented [N14]: Forced introspection. Admits that she becomes preoccupied with other people, but now she had permission to think of her self. Slow down – mindfulness? "Open your eyes" as you searched the environment, noticing new things. With a task, it was not as "scary" because there were layers of safety, the camera, the delete button, the narrative, other photos.

Commented [N15]: Her false self has been dominant, but now she is finding her true self again which has been hidden under roles and obligations. There is enjoyment in the process as she controls it – she explores the environment and notices more, and this brings her happiness. She compares herself to others and find a favourable outcome, reinforcing happiness.

Commented [N16]: Use of humour to emphasise. Self-deprecating. "Don't get above your station" feeling.

Commented [N17]: Using diversionary techniques to distract from real emotions – clown has thick make up and is sad underneath, and she realises this. "Natural" suggests stripping off the make up and finding people she can relate to on her level, recognising that this is easier than playing the clown, less effort. Finding the true self.

Commented [N18]: True self.

The dichotomy and a search for direction

• **Searching for the self – dichotomy, C’s timeline, reaching for the impossible, fear of freedom - “see where the moon is”**

- Caroline – I think, ehm, the...I don’t think I even realised it was called “therapeutic photography”, I don’t, so if I realised it was I might not have come at all. So, I don’t know, that sounds so muddled really.
- Caroline – The table full of photographs, I loved it, I loved it, I thought that was fabulous, I really did, I could have spent the whole day on that one...and I would have loved it if we had started each session with that, because it was so fascinating what people chose off the table, you know.
- Caroline – I find that so hard to accept, really, but the other thing...it was your previous question...I know what I think, I have always known what I think, because I am very clear headed in what I think, you know, my aims and, you know, what I want to do, but I still find it...I find it difficult to know my feelings, and other peoples, you know, it’s as if I have no experience of it, you see what I mean? Whereas in here...that’s the bit that alarmed me at the beginning because people were talking about their feelings, ehm, it alarms me at other meetings I go to, I actually go to another meeting where that saying comes from, “what you see here...”, so I am uncomfortable with feelings, you know, I don’t mind thoughts or opinions or, you know, a debate, oh I can do that till the band plays, but the feelings bit is really tricky I think, because you’re vulnerable, and you are seeing somebody else’s vulnerability and I think they are equally...to me they are equally anxiety provoking.
- Caroline – Well, you’ve tried so hard that ehm...I know you find this hard to believe but I’ve been quite completely unaware of it because I have got my defence mechanisms so high that I never actually realised. Isn’t that peculiar? And I know I am peculiar to myself but I am not really peculiar to my family...what’s left of it, there’s not many folk are left of it. I don’t know who I am, I’ve absolutely no idea at all really. I know...I know the labels I’ve been given but I don’t know who I am in...I don’t know...I lost it about 10 years ago and I’ve kind of started to regain it, but I still don’t really know, and I want to stop talking, and I want you to all stop looking at me too (laughter).
- Violet – I think, as regards Caroline, I can’t, I don’t understand because I think she is such a warm person. When she walks into a room she lights it up, and I can’t...I don’t understand how you can feel you don’t...you’re not like that. I suppose we are all guilty of that at some point but I...I think she gives so much. Caroline – Thank you Violet. I feel very touched, I really do, I do. Violet – But I think everybody gives in here.
- I’ve taken over from what Florence was saying because I thought my working life was giving to people but I was useless when I stopped working, so I don’t really

Commented [NG(19)]: Jumps from one statement to the next. No continuity. Confused about her own thoughts. Casting her mind back to engagement. Disregards information.

Commented [NG(20)]: Recognises the confusion in herself – does she generally feel muddled? There appears to be ongoing guilt, rebellion, and struggle to assert an identity.

Commented [NG(21)]: She did not need to produce anything. She could be more abstract in her interpretation, less risk of exposing something she did not want to, even though nobody was reading her photographs. Liked to hear what people choose, even though she does not want to be burdened with stories. Photoprojectives. No self-efficacy, just indulging the self.

Commented [NG(22)]: Still struggling with her views – she thinks she knows who she is, yet all her images and narratives underline a woman struggling with her role. She refers to her aims, yet there are unfinished projects everywhere, but then she admits difficulty in her feelings and other peoples too – equates that to having no experience of it – maybe they have been suppressed for so long she has to learn how to engage with them again? The images have given her an insight into that, but also seeing how others interacted with their images. Safer for her to keep them closed.

Commented [NG(23)]: Focus on this group in particular. The milieu meant that people could talk about feelings. She refers to expressing thoughts and opinions, superficial statements that provoke, get her noticed, and cause other people to react – a protective shell, but if she has to take that barrier down and speak about her vulnerabilities, she is worried what will happen next – unfamiliar territory? Been hurt in the past? For her, vulnerability is a weakness, and she does not like seeing that weakness in others – object relations? Punitive approach – safer to isolate yourself so that you don’t get hurt.

Commented [NG(24)]: She knows herself that this is a surVioletal tactic – high defence mechanisms, yet not unconscious – she is fully conscious of these, so are they truly defence mechanisms? She does feel oblivious to the approaches from others and is surprised that they have attempted to engage her. Ma... [1]

Commented [NG(25)]: This is a familiar tactic in her family, or maybe she can be herself when with the family because of that homogenous identity they have – part of something bigger.

Commented [NG(26)]: And now she recognises the issue! Her identity has been lost and she wants to discover who she is, yet she is afraid of what she might find. Using photographs has shown her that she can identify patterns, and things which are important to her, and she sees this in the others in that they can explore th... [2]

Commented [NG(27)]: The image C projects is different from the one she has in her head – there is a mismatch – she wants to be seen as an unapproachable character so that she can continue to isolate herself, yet she hears that others find her charming and endearing.

Commented [NG(28)]: Recognises this aspect within her own character, of being seen by others in a different way from how she sees herself. Is this about reading too much into the looking glass self, or neglecting to register the true feedback. Is it a part of becoming insignificant to others as you age? Still looking for... [3]

Commented [NG(29)]: Appears to be a genuine moment where she acknowledges that kind words have made an impact – registered – receives a compliment in the spirit in which it was made.

Commented [NG(30)]: Now it is no longer about C – she has had her time in the spotlight (and actually asked for the focus to be moved), so V acknowledges the input from everybody else. V has learned she is part of the group and wants to enforce this bond by including the others.

see it as doing it outside a working environment, I was paid to do it and I got on and jolly well did it, if you see what I mean?

Commented [N31]: In her previous identity she gave – and she enjoyed it, but she suggests she only did it for money. She refers to herself as “useless” when she stopped, but this may refer to a loss of identity and unable to fall into her previous routine.

Asserting control and power – finding strengths

Recognising power, and disempowerment

- **The power dynamic – in relationships, in the photograph (stadium/punctum), asserting control (control)**

- Kay – I think...I think I wanted to come and do it because when you came to the AGM and you did the thing about people to bring out their phone and turn to the person next to them and then like share why they had the photograph, and it just came across how powerful that was because everyone in the room...the noise in the room...you know, and I just think I just realised what a powerful medium it was.
- Violet – yes, that was one of the most powerful things I’ve seen when he shared because that reminded me of Emma (daughter) cutting herself and the fact that I didn’t know she was doing it, and could I have prevented it? But that really, that really hit home. That was very brave I thought.
- P9 – controlling choice of image/interaction
- P21/25/71/72 – highlighting the need for control in a person – structure=order – link to anxiety
- P28 – group challenge facilitator on colour choice
- P29/65 – asserting control
- P36/37/75 – loss of control – feeling powerless over a drug/landlord
- P38 – taking back control
- P41 – participants not enjoying activity, but producing work
- P48 – exploring diet
- P51 – control over routine (but appropriate use of power?)
- P54 – withholding information (who gave the cross)
- P56 – disclosing information (self harm)
- P57/58 – rebellion
- P74 – recognising patterns and triggers
- Violet – Ehm...Yeah, I think I did, you know, it was personal to me, and I think you get worried, don’t you, about what somebody else might think or say about your photographs or whatever, and I think that’s what I was...I think something that...I’m like that, there’s always something at the back of my mind saying, you know, what will that person think, and I think it’s just been a good learning curve, it doesn’t really matter.

Commented [NG(32): She is remembering back to the first time she experienced an exercise. It resonated with her – something about the exercise had impact on her. She equates this to the volume of noise in the room – witnessing interaction on such a large scale, and so instantly. But was it more than the noise, the energy? She thinks about what this was and relates this to the medium of the photograph, even though it was an instrument within the communication. She recognised power and wanted to experience that. “I just realised” – instant – instant gratification?

Commented [NG(33): The impact of the image is offered. “Powerful” is a strong word and used to emphasise the impact of the visual. It had emotional resonance for all – is this the same as punctum/stadium?

Commented [NG(34): “Risk” (?) of images awakening thoughts and feelings in others – but could the same not be said about linguistics? Image has more impact. Awoke memories for V – may have been suppressed – recognition that the situation is common, and for M there was recognition that self harm impacts the family (through V’s reaction).

Commented [NG(35): “Home” used as an analogy for the “I” – the self exposed – she was confronted with an issue that was personal to her, yet impacting on someone else. But she recognised the main impact was not for her, but for M – in displaying (externalising) an issue, he was confronting his demon.

Commented [NG(36): Not convinced she had full control – maybe the images made her open up more than she had expected to.

Commented [NG(37): Back to exposing vulnerabilities – she approached the exercises and explored her personal perspectives and issues in the realisation that this left her open to judgement – looking glass self – we adjust actions based on the reactions of others, yet with images people were interested and encouraging. She can never control what people “think”, nor maybe even know, yet it is a worry for her. She relates this to a fear of what people will think of “her photographs or whatever”, but as her photographs are extensions and objectifications of her, then this would be a direct critique of her.

Commented [NG(38): Yet something has changed – she describes it as a learning curve which suggests quick learning in a short timescale. Why does it not matter? Should she just focus on life from her own perspective from now on? Perhaps it is about realising what you have got control over – she cannot control what people think, but she can control her actions and attitudes.

- o You know, ehm...but there is a different atmosphere, can you feel it? Ehm, you know, it is, it's actually a tangible, to me it's tangible, like that first, I mean I was really nervous when the photographs were all there and there is a different feeling in the room, I feel it, I mean, I know, in my whole, I don't feel the tension.
- o Florence – Well yeah. More in control of how things are to make it safe for me, you know, and stop worrying to much about what other people think all the time, you know, just to make myself feel safe and happy.
- o Studium/punctum – P26, P64/90 (courage/powerful),

Commented [N39]: But she acknowledges that she cannot keep using this excuse, because in this environment she notices the tension she usually experiences in groups has gone. The atmosphere of using photographs to explore issues has created a different milieu and she is aware of that. She is finding it difficult to hold onto her tough exterior because the exercises actually open her up, but she fears this also leaves her exposed.

Commented [N40]: She answers this as if it should be obvious – "well yeah". Through having control in the exercises she learns what she can do with this, and relates this to her life – nothing obvious has been stated about how V should deal with the landlord, but she clearly now has ideas. She also retreats into her own mind and tries to disengage from other peoples, but in a way where somebody with a preoccupied attachment might move into a secure pattern of attachment – looking at her own health and wellbeing.

Levels of safety

• Levels of safety within and without the group

- o Florence – I think at the Duthie Park one, because it was quite a challenge to pick one for each emotion, you know, it did open your eyes more to yourself, you know, had you thinking more, concentrating on you which is a thing I am not used to doing because I'd rather concentrate on everybody else, but concentrating on yourself is...you know...but it's not as scary as I thought it would be.
- o Florence – Definitely, to learn more about each other, and ourselves (Margaret – ourselves) yeah, to look more closely at ourselves without being scared of it, you know, what makes us tick.
- o P11 – choice of what to photograph – hands for a self portrait.
- o P19/61 – threats to safety – exploring fear in an image
- o P31/44/54 – therapeutic environment provides safety
- o P34/47/67 – environment as safety – my safe space
- o P65 – safety in past history/family roots
- o P81 – safety in professional support
- o P93 – layers of safety: Florence – I think at the Duthie Park one, because it was quite a challenge to pick one for each emotion, you know, it did open your eyes more to yourself, you know, had you thinking more, concentrating on you which is a thing I am not used to doing because I'd rather concentrate on everybody else, but concentrating on yourself is...you know...but it's not as scary as I thought it would be.
- o Florence – Definitely, to learn more about each other, and ourselves (Margaret – ourselves) yeah, to look more closely at ourselves without being scared of it, you know, what makes us tick.
- o Florence – I think too that it also takes a burden off your shoulders, you know, to a certain extent. You've been carrying all this inside you for so long, but then you are openly sharing this, and it's like opening the floodgates, you know, it's just out there now, you know, it's no longer your problem as such, it's a shared thing, so it is...you know...you are not as scared of it anymore because you...like... "this is such

Commented [N41]: Forced introspection. Admits that she becomes preoccupied with other people, but now she had permission to think of her self. Slow down – mindfulness? "Open your eyes" as you searched the environment, noticing new things. With a task, it was not as "scary" because there were layers of safety, the camera, the delete button, the narrative, other photos.

Commented [N42]: Re-evaluates her statement and declares that self-exploration is the most appealing, and this is validated by M too – learning about self concept. Deepening exploration. This technique is not "scary", unlike other approaches she knows of. Process of capturing image, externalising it, and exploring it via narrative.

Commented [N43]: Forced introspection. Admits that she becomes preoccupied with other people, but now she had permission to think of her self. Slow down – mindfulness? "Open your eyes" as you searched the environment, noticing new things. With a task, it was not as "scary" because there were layers of safety, the camera, the delete button, the narrative, other photos.

Commented [N44]: Re-evaluates her statement and declares that self-exploration is the most appealing, and this is validated by M too – learning about self concept. Deepening exploration. This technique is not "scary", unlike other approaches she knows of. Process of capturing image, externalising it, and exploring it via narrative.

and such, makes me feel that way", so you recognise it now so it gives you a bit of comfort knowing what your weaknesses are, and what your strengths are.

Layers of control

- **Layers of control (in what to photograph, what to show, what to say) - "being quite frank"**

- Neil – Did you feel you were being pressurised? Florence – No, not once I was here. No, no, no. Once I got started I was quite happy about it, you know.
- "it's who you see here, what you hear here, you leave it here", and I want that and I didn't really...ehm...I don't trust anyone really to be quite frank, you know, I really don't because, with the best will in the world, I mean I have heard things that people repeat that really shouldn't, I mean, we all do, you know, the things, something that is of slightest interest and I've got that, it's like a paranoia, it's an inbuilt thing, ehm, that I don't think I will ever lose it now, ehm, I didn't have it when I was younger, but I have definitely got it now, ehm, so I found it, I found it scary. I did, I found it very scary
- Florence – Well yeah. More in control of how things are to make it safe for me, you know, and stop worrying to much about what other people think all the time, you know, just to make myself feel safe and happy.

- **Appropriate level of self-disclosure**

- Caroline – I think I'd still go back to I found it very scary when people share ehm their hard experiences, I find it very...very, very hard. It's not that I don't have compassion for them, I find I am frightened of it, you know,
- P8 – self harm
- P55 – medication and self medication
- P71 – Kay and alcohol
- Florence – I think too that it also takes a burden off your shoulders, you know, to a certain extent. You've been carrying all this inside you for so long, but then you are openly sharing this, and it's like opening the floodgates, you know, it's just out there now, you know, it's no longer your problem as such, it's a shared thing, so it is...you know...you are not as scared of it anymore because you...like... "this is such and such, makes me feel that way", so you recognise it now so it gives you a bit of comfort knowing what your weaknesses are, and what your strengths are.

- **Depth of exploration – simplistic v reflective (control) - "onus"**

Commented [N45]: A release for F – been carrying these things inside for so long, but now allowed to offload them – "opening the floodgates" does suggest a danger of too much information coming out – how do you stop? If it's no longer your problem, does it become someone else's? No, she goes on to explain that it is the process of identification, objectification and explanation which leads to recognition – bringing issues into the consciousness – unravelling them to make sense of strengths and weaknesses. Once identified, they can be addressed.

Commented [NG(46): Definite in her assessment. Felt completely in control. Fear of the unknown. What helped her get through the door? Curiosity? Motivation. Degree of existing self-efficacy.

Commented [N47]: She wants confidentiality – she wants to reveal more, but cannot. Suggest 1 to 1 exploration would be best for her – should this be a further option? Weiser – precedes phototherapy?

Commented [N48]: Again, "frank", before telling the group she doesn't trust them. She feels if she does expose her secrets, others will spread them. Vulnerable.

Commented [N49]: She recognises this behaviour in herself – gossip – she does not trust herself, yet projects this onto others. Justifies this by saying that everyone does it.

Commented [N50]: She answers this as if it should be obvious – "well yeah". Through having control in the exercises she learns what she can do with this, and relates this to her life – nothing obvious has been stated about how V should deal with the landlord, but she clearly now has ideas. She also retreats into her own mind and tries to disengage from other peoples, but in a way where somebody with a preoccupied attachment might move into a secure pattern of attachment – looking at her own health and wellbeing.

Commented [N51]: C appears to be stuck on this idea, that "hard" experiences were shared, but in reality there was nothing too "hard". It might be that she has not got to the core of what she wanted to explore, there might be hard experiences she has had but has not revealed them – transference – yet it sounds like she is aware of them, so have they been brought to the fore of her mind? Talk to professionals – yet they only treat the illness (medical model) and do not see the full journey of the individual. Is that why she finds it safer?

Commented [N52]: A release for F – been carrying these things inside for so long, but now allowed to offload them – "opening the floodgates" does suggest a danger of too much information coming out – how do you stop? If it's no longer your problem, does it become someone else's? No, she goes on to explain that it is the process of identification, objectification and explanation which leads to recognition – bringing issues into the consciousness – unravelling them to make sense of strengths and weaknesses. Once identified, they can be addressed.

RELATIONSHIPS

Family – relating and rebelling

- **FAMILY - childhood**

- P1 – memories of old city and childhood (revelation of adoption)
- P4 – roots
- P10 – Caroline challenging her parents – family systems
- P10 – memories of how photographs were taken and used
- P24/25 – representations of childhood in images of frog
- P37 – being caught smoking
- P50/59 – Caroline and Michael explore childhood and link to routine
- P51 – hiding identity from family
- P66 – nativity scene linked to childhood (order, controlling – link to family myths p68)
- P77 – memories linked to safety and warmth
- Caroline – Maybe is it because...like I can see all your good qualities, all of you, all separately and together, you've all got fantastic qualities, and I can see that, but maybe because...it's something about, I don't know, your upbringing or whatever, "don't blow your own trumpet", don't. We were never ever encouraged to say, you know, you were good at anything, you were actively discouraged actually,

- **FAMILY – links**

- P17/24/66 – memories of loss of Mum.
- P2 – raising a family
- P20 – image of LOVE was mother and daughter
- P23 – November being a month of loss (death of Dad).
- P33 – traditions
- P53 – support from sisters
- P70 – present from children of a picture of a lion
- P76 – living in the comfort of memories (baking, family photographs)
- P78 – 1964 and 1998 – the year where things changed.

Commented [N53]: Is this her trying to build up to something negative to say about the others? She recognises the old saying "don't blow your own trumpet" and links this to her behaviour – don't celebrate your good points, which suggests you need to wallow in the bad points. Is she reminding the others of this fact?

Commented [N54]: Confirms this – she has been raised to look at the opposite of her good points "Actively discouraged" – so what were the consequences for her? She still refers to herself as "we" – suggesting difficulty in separating her self from her old identity.

The medicalised label

- **Relationships with professionals (identity linked to health) – linked to parental relationships – rebellion v respect, societal relationships (exposure – CCTV, blurring names)**

- **PROFESSIONALS:**

- P27 – Experience as a patient
- P35 – label of dysplasia and understanding from society
- P40 – leaflets for info
- P45 – speaking to GP, but also peers
- P48/55 – relationship with medication – the ill identity?
- P49 – support from professionals – viewed as safe space.
- P73/74/81 – recognising the support offered from professionals
- P76 – professionals are paid to listen (Caroline)
- Margaret – It was just to see if there was things that would be more able to understand because I was recently going to the counsellor and I was more able to talk here than I was there through the picture. There was more understanding.
- Florence – Yeah, it sounded a bit scary and a bit, you know, you know, "how much are they going to see of you?", you know, you know, "are you gonna be forced into saying things or...?" you know, showing a side of you that you are not happy with. Sharing a part of yourself you didn't really want to share yet, you know.
- Caroline – What did you say to me? I dunno. I don't listen to a word you say (general laughter). To be quite frank, I don't. I just get an idea in my head, honestly, I do. I don't mean that in a disrespectful way, but what other people say doesn't really influence me, because I do think something, and if I find that it is not what it is, and I'm not talking about this (the course) I'm talking about anything, I would just think "Oh, you made a mistake" but you know, but I wouldn't try to find anybody else responsible, I would take responsibility – "you're a daft bissum". (To Sally) I don't really listen to anyone Sally, I'm too old. No, I've listened to people all my life, so...
- I find it very...very, very hard. It's not that I don't have compassion for them, I find I am frightened of it, you know, I've said it already that you talk to professionals about that, and I am very frightened of the, ehm, I go to a meeting and it's on a card and they read it at the end "it's who you see here, what you hear here, you leave it here",

- **SOCIETY**

- P23 – nanny state
- P35/36/37 – labelled a smoker/junkies and alcoholic
- P38 – disability/ageing
- P40 – over information through leaflets
- P45 – treatment at benefit office
- P60 – Paranoia

Commented [NG(55)]: She came out of curiosity, but looking for knowledge too. She reveals she was seeking input from a professional and hoped this might augment that relationship, but found that the use of images impacted on the ability to communicate – the photograph as a catalyst. She spoke "through" the picture, not about it, or to it, but the image initiated the conversation, then she joined it.

Commented [NG(56)]: "More" might be due to the peer nature of the group – familiarity in others stories – identity theory. Also, might be due to power balance and the Freirean approach of practitioner and SU jointly researching issues, therefore no professional arrogance to create a boundary/barrier.

Commented [NG(57)]: There is a perception that someone is not going to be in control, or not going to be able to censor themselves – perhaps there is a belief that people are going to be probed and analysed – "a bit scary". There is also a belief that someone is going to be exposed to scrutiny and "forced" to say something – by who? Perception of being controlled – power balance.

Commented [NG(58)]: Good side, bad side – knowledge of this, yet want to hide this. The word "yet" seems important as this indicates that there is a desire to explore, but at a suitable pace. Goes back to having control over what is photographed, what is shown, and what is said – 3 levels of control.

Commented [NG(59)]: A humorous statement but with truth. She filters out what she wants to hear (or not). So, was working with photographs different in that she could not filter out information as it was being presented in a different form?

Commented [NG(60)]: She has had a laugh and this reinforces her identity as the comedian in this episode, so she reinforces it. She has the attention of the group and is getting positive feedback from them. Uses the term "frank" a lot – this appears to precede something that she deems may be offensive to someone.

Commented [NG(61)]: Does not address facts. Impulsive (underpins projects in the garden). She wears this as a badge of honour – a characteristic to be proud of – it makes her who she is and can excuse behaviour by attributing this to her characteristic.

Commented [NG(62)]: And she knows that she leaves herself more vulnerable if she approaches situations like this. She projects as being head strong and stubborn, yet she is curious. Again, this probably protects a vulnerable character underneath and projecting an identity of being scatty and disorganised means she can excuse some of her underlying issues. She takes the blame – internalises the guilt, adds it to the guilt already there. Calls herself "daft bissum" which is Glaswegian dialect for silly imp – a term of endearment, perhaps what she was called as a child by her parents. 2nd reference to Glaswegian dialect from C.

Commented [NG(63)]: Back to finding identity – if she has listened to others, now is her time not to listen, but this means taking responsibility for actions (which she recognises above). However, does she really mean this? How can you suddenly stop listening, and why? Sentence unfinished – laughter acts as a full stop and excuses her from completing her thoughts. Escape through ... [4]

Commented [NG(64)]: C appears to be stuck on this idea, that "hard" experiences were shared, but in reality there was nothing too "hard". It might be that she has not got to the core of what she wanted to explore, there might be hard experiences she has ... [5]

Commented [NG(65)]: She does not reveal what she is frightened of.

Commented [NG(66)]: She wants confidentiality – she wants to reveal more, but cannot. Suggest 1 to 1 exploration would be best for her – should this be a further option? Weiser – precedes phototherapy?

- o P73 – self conscious about taking photos
- o Kay – Yes, today's was my favourite (photovoice). I thought it was, ehm, it was like a challenge and it was something to...to you know like last night because I spent like a lot of time thinking about the pictures and like what they meant and everything and I just found it a good exercise, I really sort of, ehm, cathartic really and ehm, and be able to just be honest about, you know, being an alcoholic as well.
- o I don't know who I am, I've absolutely no idea at all really. I know...I know the labels I've been given but I don't know who I am in...I don't know...I lost it about 10 years ago and I've kind of started to regain it, but I still don't really know, and I want to stop talking, and I want you to all stop looking at me too (laughter).
- o

Isolation – enforced and self-imposed

• Self imposed isolation v social isolation, prisoners

- o Margaret – because even Michael is feeling more in part of the group now.
- o Florence – I felt it was good to be able to empathise with other people, you know, what their, you know, their fears and safe places are, I could empathise totally with them on a lot of the stuff, you know, and it doesn't make you feel so isolated, on how you're feeling, you know, every day.
- o Margaret – It's just like your home, not wanting anyone in it – you don't want to go into anyone else's either.
- o And then, you know, and then sort of be aware of things that are...because otherwise you do su...otherwise you'll just find yourself like, closed in, almost, and then not know how...because it's such a big step to get yourself back up there again.
- o Florence – The barriers you put up as well.
- o P3 – fenced in – visual representation
- o P21 – sadness equated to loneliness
- o P49 – spending time with son
- o P52/79 – connecting to others via computer
- o P53 – bonding with an animal
- o P57 – clutter as self imposed isolation – a shell
- o P60 – front door as prison bars
- o P65/80 – curtains
- o P68 – fence as a metaphoric barrier to keep people away
- o P69 – admits to using defence mechanisms
- o P70 – TV a connection to the outside
- o

Commented [N67]: There was a reward in this task for her – “challenge” – mental exertion as she made links and explored the issue. Gave her permission to “spend time” on the images. “Cathartic” refers to psychological relief – something rewarded her through this exercise. Maybe it was recognising patterns of behaviour, or support structures. Uses the word “alcoholic” – self imposed label – stigma attached to that, but she also explored this issue in her images too. Admitting to people was easier because she could put it in an image and talk to it.

Commented [NG68]: And now she recognises the issue! Her identity has been lost and she wants to discover who she is, yet she is afraid of what she might find. Using photographs has shown her that she can identify patterns, and things which are important to her, and she sees this in the others in that they can explore their identity, yet she is so fragile and vulnerable she might not be able to do this in public, in front of a group – afraid of getting hurt, afraid of exposing weaknesses (which, OR would say need to be punished), yet the social learning must be valuable for her to see that she has similar traits to others – self-imposed isolation, shutting curtains.

Commented [NG69]: Focus is turned to the person who was most on the fringes – he challenged with extreme revelations, yet the group accepted his comments and observations – is this linked to social identity/identity – comparing to others, who might traditionally be “outside” the group? However, “feeling more in part” suggests there is still some more travelling to go for him.

Commented [NG70]: “empathise” is chosen to illustrate how she understood the feelings of others (because they were familiar to her) and share the feelings (because she too had experienced them). She focuses in on fears and safe places, the polarity between the two, as this was important learning for her – she understands her own feelings and they are put into a context which makes her address feelings of self imposed isolation – protecting the self from the eyes of others – a suspicion of other people. But it is not physical isolation, it appears to be an emotional isolation she recognises – an everyday feeling which she can now understand as it has been identified and brought into the conscious.

Commented [NG71]: M broadens this out and identifies that C has isolated herself to such an extent that she presents barriers to her friends – no close contact – no admission into safe space (physical and mental).

Commented [N72]: She takes a while to get to her point, as if she is still trying to work out the impact of the exercises. She has reflected on her triggers over the past 2 weeks and has carefully structured her images to document what might be – based on previous experiences. She recognises a spiral, small triggers like lack of motivation, or poor weather, and how that chips away at her mood. Small steps down require huge leaps back, and she sees this in her previous pattern of behaviour that she is working to protect herself. Her images not only help her reflect, but help her plan for the future. She talks about distraction, and this links to her keeping busy (which she also identifies).

Commented [N73]: Identified the physical and mental barriers, self imposed isolation.

Page 3: [1] Commented [NG(24)] Neil Gibson (sass) 17/12/2017 20:16:00

She knows herself that this is a survival tactic – high defence mechanisms, yet not unconscious – she is fully conscious of these, so are they truly defence mechanisms? She does feel oblivious to the approaches from others and is surprised that they have attempted to engage her. Maybe her inner voice is protecting her from getting close to others as it only results in hurt.

Page 3: [2] Commented [NG(26)] Neil Gibson (sass) 10/08/2017 20:14:00

And now she recognises the issue! Her identity has been lost and she wants to discover who she is, yet she is afraid of what she might find. Using photographs has shown her that she can identify patterns, and things which are important to her, and she sees this in the others in that they can explore their identity, yet she is so fragile and vulnerable she might not be able to do this in public, in front of a group – afraid of getting hurt, afraid of exposing weaknesses (which, OR would say need to be punished), yet the social learning must be valuable for her to see that she has similar traits to others – self-imposed isolation, shutting curtains.

Page 3: [3] Commented [NG(28)] Neil Gibson (sass) 10/08/2017 20:14:00

Recognises this aspect within her own character, of being seen by others in a different way from how she sees herself. Is this about reading too much into the looking glass self, or neglecting to register the true feedback. Is it a part of becoming insignificant to others as you age? Still looking for the same feedback from others as you did when you were younger, but having to deal with the fact that attention is transient?

Page 8: [4] Commented [NG(63)] Neil Gibson (sass) 10/08/2017 20:14:00

Back to finding identity – if she has listened to others, now is her time not to listen, but this means taking responsibility for actions (which she recognises above). However, does she really mean this? How can you suddenly stop listening, and why? Sentence unfinished – laughter acts as a full stop and excuses her from completing her thoughts. Escape through humour. "I'm too old" would carry weight if she always made wise decisions, but according to her she does not.

Page 8: [5] Commented [N64] Neil 10/08/2017 20:14:00

C appears to be stuck on this idea, that "hard" experiences were shared, but in reality there was nothing too "hard". It might be that she has not got to the core of what she wanted to explore, there might be hard experiences she has had but has not revealed them – transference – yet it sounds like she is aware of them, so have they been brought to the fore of her mind?

Talk to professionals – yet they only treat the illness (medical model) and do not see the full journey of the individual. Is that why she finds it safer?

Appendix 12 – Reflexive Notes (extract)

Extracts from reflexive account:

...Caroline spoke about her family today and gave some interesting insights into how they were perceived when she was growing up. She told a story about the family boarding a bus and people being surprised at the number of them as they got on. She also spoke about family rules, specifically one where the family had been told that they were only liked when they were not causing trouble. It brought to mind the family myths of Minuchin when working with families in therapy, and how underlying rules and expectations can shape outward identity, but suppress the development of individuality. This seems to apply to Caroline and her current behaviour in terms of being confused about whom she is and what direction she is going in. It also appears that this has been underpinning her behaviour for many years and she may have constantly struggled to assert individuality. I wanted to explore this in more detail within the group, but Caroline appears to be cautious about sharing information and suspicious, yet at the same time is one of the participants who offer most information about herself through the photographs.

...I have been thinking about attachment theory and the way it shapes behaviours in the participants. Kay was very quiet and reserved from the outset, but as she has engaged with the photographs she appears to be demonstrating a strong sense of control. Given the experiences she has shared with the group, she appears to be a very independent person and I would say she had a dismissive attachment style – high sense of trust in her self, but low trust in others. Through the photographs, I sense she is using her trust in herself to assert control of the experience and this gives her confidence to share her experiences with the others – she is firmly in control throughout the process and this makes participating “easy”. Violet also has signs of an insecure attachment, but she could be described as having a preoccupied style in that her conversation often went off on tangents and involved other people. I have noticed that the photographs appear to keep her “contained” and this reduces the temptation to go off on tangents – she is much more focused when using the images.

...There was a very challenging moment today. During the ice breakers I gave the participants the scavenger hunt task. During the feedback I was displaying the images on the large screen using the web cam. Michael had been asked to photograph something he liked doing and I could not make out what he had photographed – it looked like blurred red stripes. I was trying to get the image to focus on the web cam when I realised that he had photographed a recent scar and I suspected that this was a self-harm scar. I momentarily considered not showing the image, pretending that the camera would not focus, but realised that this would be dishonest. I was worried about upsetting the other participants, particularly as this was day 1, but decided to press ahead as Michael had chosen to photograph something that was important to him. When it finally focussed he told the group that this was something he liked to do, that he would self-harm if he had had a bad day. The reaction from the group did surprise me as nobody appeared shocked or repelled by the revelation. Instead, some members, particularly Violet, displayed empathy and revealed that they had also had experience of this within their own families.

It made me consider why I was so risk averse and wanted to prevent the image from being shown. I think this was down to the “unknown”, worried about what the group would think and do. I was trying to control the images, and perhaps the speed of the revelations, and really I had to accept that empowerment meant that I had to relinquish control, accepting that the group needed space to explore issues and make self-disclosures.

Appendix 13 – Analysis of photographs (extract)



M used the image during “day in the life”.

Used it to underpin the structure in his day.

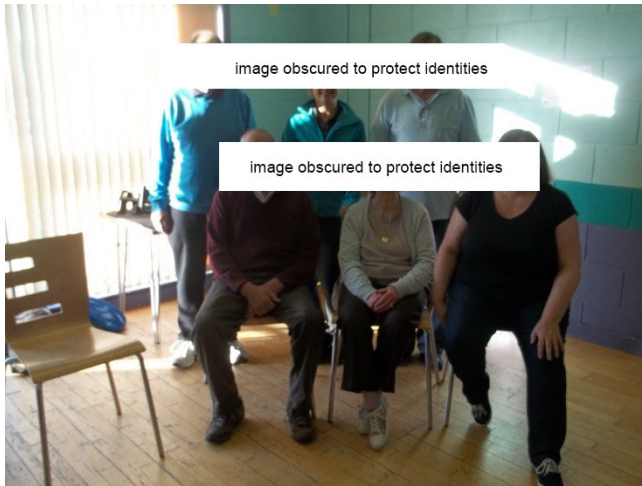
Only dominant words are “Smoking kills” – is this a nod to previous substance use? Risk taking behaviour?

Lighter strategically placed over brand name. M acknowledged this in his description of the image? Why? Previous references to fear of being watched and observed. Does he feel he is always being observed? Is he a character in his own movie – Truman Show/Big Brother.

Links to panopticon.

Cup is almost empty – does this create the question half full or half empty – is M an optimist or pessimist?

Exposing his self, but there is fear and paranoia.



M captured this during “day in the life”.

Member of a group. Most of her current narrative exploration revolves around groups, yet she appears a solitary person. Uses humour a lot but is this a defense?

She does not look comfortable in the image, sitting at the edge, almost ready to flee. Leg is almost going out of frame and there is space between her and the other 5. Does this reflect her feelings about group membership? Forced into new groups which is a challenge for an independent person.

Is the empty chair symbolic? Is this her past self?

She appears to be searching for her new role and identity, but there may be a dichotomy given she is torn between her past (abilities?) but has to come to terms with her new identity (and disability?).



K took this during photovoice exercise. My safe space.

Represents order. Photograph looks very posed – too perfect?

Presents are immaculately bagged, tree is beautifully decorated, and the chair looks inviting. But the chair is blocking a door (to the kitchen?). Curtain is closed so nobody else can see the perfect order. But what happens to this space once Christmas is over? Tree comes down, presents go, and the chair is removed from the doorway. Does that leave a void? Is the “order” we see only temporary? Is that why the curtain is shut...to hide the temporary nature away from prying eyes?

In her search for a new identity she appears to be striving for perfection – the ideal.



V took this as part of her exploration of a day in her life. This was linked to memories of her mother and grandmother teaching her to cook when she was a little girl.

V spends a lot of her time in the sessions reflecting and reminiscing on the past. Suggests that memories are happier than her reality and she romanticises about the past times.

In the image she is preparing for baking a cake. She has measured out all the ingredients in an orderly fashion – she is prepared and organised – in control. This also reminds me of a TV chef (Blue Peter?), but also makes cooking simple, much like her mother and grandmother may have done for her, preparing the ingredients so she, as a little girl, could drop them in the bowl and start mixing.

In the background you can make out bottles of tablets, as though her mental health (and treatment) is ever present, in the background.

Maybe think about transitions theory, about how V is maybe having problems moving forward because of the safety of memories in the past.

This image provides a link to family relations and V's upbringing.



V's opening image from day in the life – breakfast.

V has planned this shot. The spoon angle matches the cup handle and provides “flow” through the image, as if the viewer is being encouraged to “read” the image.

Her cereal is healthy. She explained that she sprinkles blueberries onto the cereal because of anti-oxidising properties and other health benefits and this invites her to open up about how interested she is in healthy eating, and how she likes to research the area.

Paul Newman cup – an aspiration? If she has a healthy lifestyle she may be able to attract a mate who looks like a film star?

Medicine in back ground is a contrast to the healthy berries. She explained that she does take supplements to make her healthy. Is this a reliance on medication? Is this because she has been medicalised through her contact with medical professionals – the only way to get better is to treat with medication? She is a symptom which requires treatment, needing to be fixed?

She does appear to refer to her mental health issues, and is open about treatment. She wears a medicalised label. Yet she demonstrates respect for the professionals she deals with, giving value to what they say.