EXPLORING THE VALUE OF GROUP DREAM EXPERIENCE (GDE): A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS' EXPERIENCES OF GROUP DREAM SHARING AND DREAM WORK.

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Abstract

Despite the longstanding interest of psychological research and practice in group dream sharing and group dream work, to date no research has been conducted examining group dream experience (GDE) of psychotherapists. Furthermore, GDE has not been considered in the context of Counselling psychology.

In this thesis GDE as a term is used to refer to a generic expression of psychotherapists' complex experiences of participation in, and facilitation of, dream sharing and dream work in groups. It was assumed that GDE can be noted during a collaborative effort within a group to explore and share transpersonal meaning outside individual understanding of a dream recalled from sleep, for the purpose of gaining insight and awareness. The range of group techniques from different modalities for working with dreams may evoke GDE.

This study explored psychotherapists' GDE from the psychoanalytic, Gestalt and Social Dreaming groups. The qualitative method of Thematic Analysis was used to process the data from individual interviews conducted via Skype with seven participants, and one face-to-face focus group interview conducted with a group of five psychotherapists.

Three overarching themes were identified: In-action GDE, On-action GDE and GDE as a whole. These three aspects of GDE were distinguished as a result of overseeing the whole data set. This differentiation considered subtle differences in the experiences, depending on where they were situated in time and space in the participants' lives, with the acknowledgement of the potential 'superposition' of all three aspects. The findings were contextualised through the integration of theoretical literature and useful analogies from different disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, physics, and computer science.

This thesis argued that GDE is a complex nebulous experience which is hard to articulate. It involves the processes of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of meaning, facilitated by dreams shared in a group. Based on the findings from this research, GDE is viewed as an opportunity to approach and cross a certain threshold of awareness that expands past everyday reality, thereby playing a part in promoting Professional Maturation.

Chapter 1. Introduction

> *One night I dreamt that I was in a futuristic apocalyptic city. Skyscrapers with most intricate details were around me, sparkling in the bright sunshine. They were continuously changing in shape, like a kaleidoscope. I was with a group of people. I knew I had to be with them for survival, but it was hard work. I did not want to lead but I wanted to be equal. I felt strong but I experienced a sense of confusion: 'What am I living for now? What is to become of me among these people?'*
>
> Maryna

This dream is like a snapshot of a moment in my journey towards developing my epistemology and accomplishing this research. It captures my relationship with the would-be-known where, through the interaction with a group, I become aware of both – the potential information and my connection to it. Therefore, I consider the interaction between the conscious, the unconscious, the knowledge, the individual, the group and the social as essential to my enquiry. Furthermore, I see the relationships between these aspects having dream-like qualities, where connections are rhizomatic and where democracy and equality are promoted via flexibility. These assumptions are partly based on personal and professional experience, partly influenced by reading on the topic and, most of all, inspired by my exposure to the research process that I am going to present in this thesis.

To lay the foundations for the background of the research project, I would like to briefly describe the origins of my epistemology and theoretical framework. They stem from my socio-cultural heritage, my psychological training, and my psychotherapeutic practice.

I identify myself as a researcher-practitioner who takes an interest in the unconscious which belongs not only to an individual, but could potentially be shared between many people. Schröder's (2015) idea that people interact with each other by sharing dreams, image schemas and metaphorical creativity, to make sense of societal boundaries and to position themselves within the space defined by them, also resonates with my research epistemology and my approach to clinical practice. By subscribing to this viewpoint, I question whether these psychosocial processes can be represented in group dream sharing and group dream work.

I am Ukrainian by origin and was brought up in the post-communist society with communal culture. It held strong values, which were reflected in stories and dreams about survival by means of unity. From the beginning of my psychological training, I have been aware of this phenomenon represented through my internal longing for 'we-ness' and 'our-ness' in social environments. Furthermore, Ukrainian culture recognises the value of night-time dreams in

many areas of social life, including passing on intergenerational wisdom within families, spirituality, education and politics. During my training in the UK I learned about the social and professional culture of Western psychology, which, in my view, represented different attitudes to dreams and dream sharing. For example, over time I noticed that the value of dreams was often attributed to the individual unconscious and how it would manifest in a group.

This reflection on the cultural differences led me to a discovery of some useful texts. I came across the dissertation by Panchuk (2017) which depicted the dreams of Ukrainians shared in a group just before the beginning of the Revolution of Dignity in Kiev in 2014. This representation of group processing of the social atmosphere through dreams reminded me of Beradt's (1968) book *The Third Reich of Dreams*. These texts stimulated my curiosity about the social component in the enquiry about dreams, which could be viewed as a cross-cultural phenomenon.

Beradt's (1968) collection of dreams once brought to light a specific social reality (Nazi Germany) in the contexts of the unconscious and the group (the survivors). Nevertheless, it was puzzling to me that for decades this book was rarely cited in the psychotherapeutic literature. The attempts at in-depth reviews have been mostly written from the 'individualistic' psychoanalytic perspective (e.g. Volkan *et al.,* 2012; Bulkeley, 1994; Bettelheim, 1986). Furthermore, it was almost as if the reviewers were sensing the 'beyond-latent' content in this text and indicating that interpretation of dreams might not be needed, as the book 'speaks for itself' with painful clarity and the chilling sense of premonition. This was similar to a tenuous sense that I had after reading Panchuk's (2017) dissertation about dreams of Ukrainians before the revolution.

Throughout the first five years of training (see Appendix 1), I volunteered with the NHS Let's Talk Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service, which provided a range of treatment programmes to the local communities. The psychotherapeutic interventions included CBT, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Person-centred Therapy, counselling and psychoeducational groups. At the end of year six I started working as a trainee counselling psychologist for the NHS Health Psychology department in a large hospital. Just like in my dream cited above, I entered different social realties with the questions about my professional 'becoming'.

My parallel engagement in private psychotherapy practice expanded my thinking flexibility and, at the same time, raised frustrations and disillusions with the systems I was part of. In the NHS I witnessed long-standing over-reliance on a single epistemology and the culturally-driven power of the medical model (Sharp *et al.*, 2018). The impact of these translated into

governments' policies that aimed to quantify therapy outcomes and minimise financial costs by specifying good practice for the practitioners (Unsworth *et al.*, 2012). As the result of this socio-cultural influence, dream work has been marginalised as complementary, time-consuming and not cost-effective, therefore less accessible in training and treatment programmes (Leonard and Dawson, 2018). These experiences highlighted for me the reality of superficial attempts to deal with complexity in NHS mental health services.

I felt that in a restricting, rigid and structured manner the medical model by default ensured that psychotherapeutic practice in the services I worked at had apparent features of safety, clarity, accountability and efficiency. On the surface this model seemed concerned with a problem of defining difficulties and finding what is workable and helpful for people in psychotherapy. Although these attributes were often deconstructed in the professional discussions, they remained valuable within the culture of the services where the processes of knowing and defining were the focus of therapeutic interaction. As Coffey (2007) pointed out, openness to complexity in organisations is a constant challenge as it requires acknowledging the social nature of reflective practice and learning, which can turn power relationships in organisations from a top-down process to bottom-up. The default position of the medical model was to reduce uncertainty by increasing control via linear structure and procedural consistency. However, the complexity I was working with as a psychotherapist demanded a flexible democratic approach, that would acknowledge fragmented presentations and continuous emergence of something bigger than the sum of defined parts – the social phenomenon of mental health.

My passion for this research emerged in resonance of Bastide's (1966, cited by Ullman and Zimmerman, 2017) call for the mental health industry to shift from re-personalisation towards re-socialisation of dreams, as one way to access infinite social complexity. I attribute to Counselling psychology a capacity not only to integrate and evaluate the integration of different models of therapy, but also to extend the depth of this process through the positioning of practitioners into society as complexity negotiators and as agents of change. Counselling psychology as a discipline has the needed openness to the alternative epistemological choice and counselling psychologists, as researchers-practitioners, are capable of approaching research activity as a social and cultural practice (Collins, 2009). They embrace subjective, undefined, intangible phenomena in consideration of complex non-linear problems, which are deeply embedded within the socio-cultural foundations of mental health (Capra, 2015).

1.1. Clarifications

As my research is into phenomena that are difficult to describe, I will engage in the process of narrative expression rather than precise definition. The very subject of my research has been emergent through the process of data collection, analysis and construction of a written narrative. I had to make choices about the words that would capture something that is dynamic and unformulated and, therefore, reduce the richness of the whole to the elements that I am able to name. In my expression of the concepts, I was guided by the premises of Complexity theory, which accommodates the limitations of capturing and conveying the context-sensitive, non-linear, and fluid nature of the phenomena (Weisel-Barth, 2006).

I introduced the Glossary for the purpose of clarification of the concepts applied in this thesis. This was a very challenging task, as I encountered a great diversity of definitions that are in current circulation within academic literature. Hence, I sampled flexible expressions of my understanding accumulated from different sources.

1.2. Aim and Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research was to explore psychotherapists' experience of group dream sharing and dream work. I have invited practitioners to identify and explore their experiences of sharing their own dreams in a group; their experiences of working with their clients sharing dreams in a group; and to reflect on the potential implications of these experiences. By conducting this study, I attempted to capture and develop a narrative that would help counselling psychologists and psychotherapists to shed light on the complexity and value of Group Dream Experience (GDE).

1.3. Research Questions

Consistent with the purpose of the study, the overall research question considered the psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. There were three subordinate research questions as follows:

Question 1: What is psychotherapists' GDE as a participant?

Question 2: What is psychotherapists' GDE as a facilitator?

Question 3: What are the implications of these experiences for psychotherapists?

1.4. Rationale for the Study

There are several reasons why this study needed to be carried out. In the process of information gathering I noticed that the dominant discourse that acknowledges the importance of dreaming had psychoanalytic underpinnings (Vedfelt, 2017), and that anti-psychoanalytic

discourse discounted the value of dreams to the cognitive function (Rosner, Lyddon and Freeman, 2004). Furthermore, there was an emergent discourse that acknowledged the value of dreaming in social processes and challenged the two approaches mentioned above by emphasising the futility of the focus on individual psychology in a world of quantum co-dependence (Long and Manley, 2019). This tension between different narratives is yet to be negotiated in the field of psychotherapy in general, and in Counselling psychology in particular. Furthermore, there is a scientific need to substantiate claims about the value of dream sharing in social interactions including psychotherapy.

The practice of working with dreams in groups has developed in recent years, moving from one-to-one to social orientation, especially in the field of integrative practice such as Social Dreaming; however, the literature has fallen behind in reviewing this progress. Furthermore, the bulk of recent research into group work with dreams was developed on the basis of the psychoanalytic approach or the cognitive-experiential model. To date, I have found no published work that would offer a coherent representation of GDE from the phenomenological perspective of the psychotherapists, which would also account for the psychosocial aspects of this experience. Therefore, there is a need to form an accessible narrative that would illuminate the complexity of GDE and its possible implications.

I consider this study important within Counselling psychology as I see this discipline as having the necessary properties to conduct a meaningful enquiry, including its openness to complexity and reflexivity, as well as the pursuit of broader perspectives on therapeutic change. Jones Nielsen and Nicholas (2016) in their review of the development of Counselling psychology in the UK revealed an increased interest on the part of the representatives of this profession in identification and exploration of the unique ways that counselling psychologists contribute to the variety of services and to multidisciplinary teams. This interest is stimulated partly by the development of their professional identity, and partly by the need for maintenance of a strong representation of Counselling psychology as it competes with other NHS applied disciplines. This study serves an important function by seeking to offer an account of GDE and its value for the professional identity of counselling psychologists.

1.5. My Experience of the Research Process

I have presented my dream about a futuristic apocalyptic city to my peer supervision group, who reflected on the sense of destruction, ambivalence, uncertainty and hope. The dream itself was difficult for me to bear and yet hearing it back in the group made it tolerable. It was as if I did not have to be with its complexity on my own anymore, therefore opening my mind to the diversity of perspectives and the creativity associated with it.

This dream can illustrate my emotional response to conducting the research into GDE: hope, passion, rejection, tension and a sense of collaboration. The imagery of new, incredibly intricate, curious, familiar and frightening colossal shapes reminded me of the essence of GDE. The encounter is with something bigger than the individual, bigger than a group, something that expands its fractal in the process of oscillation; something that captivates with its profound meaning and its uncertainty.

Just like in my dream, I found it emotionally challenging and practically laborious to keep going as I was not sure where it would take me and what implications it might hold for me as a person and as a professional. This research gave rise to an internal sense of transformative leadership, enabling me to approach multiple challenges with creativity, resilience and faith. This research has deconstructed and reconstructed personal, professional and social aspects of my identity.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Since Freud's (1961, 1900) innovative work with dreams, many counselling and psychotherapy theories have evolved utilising research findings about dreaming as an important neuropsychological process. Nevertheless, the translation of these findings into the context of group theories has taken longer and generated less intense research interest. This, in itself, presents a paradox, considering that a group setting is a common space for dream sharing in many societies. The importance of this group activity has been appreciated from an anthropological perspective. According to Arden (1996), many socio-cultural systems across the world have used dream telling over centuries as a source of transpersonal information sharing.

One of the reasons for this disparity of progress in individual and group psychological narrative about dream sharing can be attributed to the diverse modalities of dream work. Some perspectives, such as Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and Psychodrama, acknowledge dreams as an aspect of wider therapeutic group work (Pawilik and Pierzgalska, 1990; Perls, 1969; Moreno, 1951). Other approaches to group work have been developed specifically as dream-focused practices, such as Dream Sharing Groups (Shohet, 1985); Personal Growth Groups for dream appreciation (Ullman, 1994, 1986, 1984, 1979; Toombs and Toombs, 1985), Social Dreaming Matrices (Lawrence, 2018, 2003, 1998, 1982), and the Cognitive-Experiential Model of Dream Interpretation (Hill *et al.,* 1999, 1993). Furthermore, the application of these models expanded their purpose beyond psychotherapeutic work into training and professional development of practitioners from different disciplines, including doctors, nurses, teachers, business owners etc. (Blechner, 201; Lawrence, 2003; Hill, 1996; Ullman,1994).

It could be argued that different psychological approaches acknowledge and emphasise different benefits and limitations of working with dreams in a group. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners representing various theoretical perspectives can hold different beliefs and attitudes towards the status of dreams in a group (Bontempo e Silva and Sandström, 2020). Thus, in some groups, dreams are a reoccurring stimulus in the interaction of participants, while in other groups dreams are rarely explored (Corey and Corey, 1992).

The diversity of approaches to dream work and dream sharing in groups influenced how I structured the literature review for this study. I consciously moved away from a linear or hierarchical overview of the theories, towards a framework allowing the interaction between them. This enabled me to talk about the emergent nature of GDE, as well as its intricacy. I considered the adaptations of Complexity theory, Nomadic theory and Quantum analogy for their concept potential in addressing different aspects of GDE and elaborate connections

between them. In Part 1 I discuss a range of theories that indicate a possibility of GDE emergence from the Fabric of Complexity. Part 2 is focused on GDE within the group.

2.1. Part 1: GDE Emergence from the Fabric of Complexity

The complexity within the process of group dream sharing and dream work is constituted from dreams, the conscious and the unconscious, the social and the individual. Attempting to capture through a narrative these elements of complexity and their interaction is a difficult process in itself. Complexity theory is one of the frameworks that can be applicable for the description of such a phenomenon with multiple contributing parts. It has a capacity to absorb concepts from different theoretical backgrounds as it is content- and value-free. Furthermore, Complexity theory accounts for self-organisation, changeability and active interaction between the components, as well as postulating that all experiences of these interactions are contextual (Weisel-Barth, 2006). It also accounts for the ways in which order (directionality) and disorder (uncertainty, randomness and instability) combine to produce emergent higher levels of organisation (Schermer, 2012). Another characteristic of Complexity theory applicable to GDE, is the assumption that each component of the phenomenon is motivated by the 'value' of interaction and functioning due to its organic role (Edelman and Tononi, 2000).

Since the era of Enlightenment the topics of the conscious and the unconscious have been approached by scholars of human nature. Nevertheless, these mental activities have still not been fully described nor explained. It would be reasonable to say that we still do not know what constitutes the conscious and unconscious mind. However, it is evident that there are multiple efforts to create a narrative attuned with different disciplines, in search of a definition and an explanation of these phenomena. Some of these attempts to theorise about the conscious and unconscious in human life acknowledged the individual and collective aspects, as well as their interaction. Somewhere within the intersection of these levels of complexity, expressed in the theoretical thinking, the notion of dreams occurs. It is as if it is interwoven into the vibrant and multidimensional Fabric of Complexity (Figure 1) formed from the components mentioned above.

In the following sections I develop my narrative around complexity and the five aspects (the unconscious, the conscious, the individual, the social and dreams) identified in Figure 1, as a point of reference in a sea of constantly evolving information. The shift in theoretical thinking from the individual to the social position on dreams, the conscious and the unconscious, is introduced first. Then theoretical ideas about the interaction between the five aspects are discussed. Finally, the theories that help to explain emergent qualities of GDE are considered.

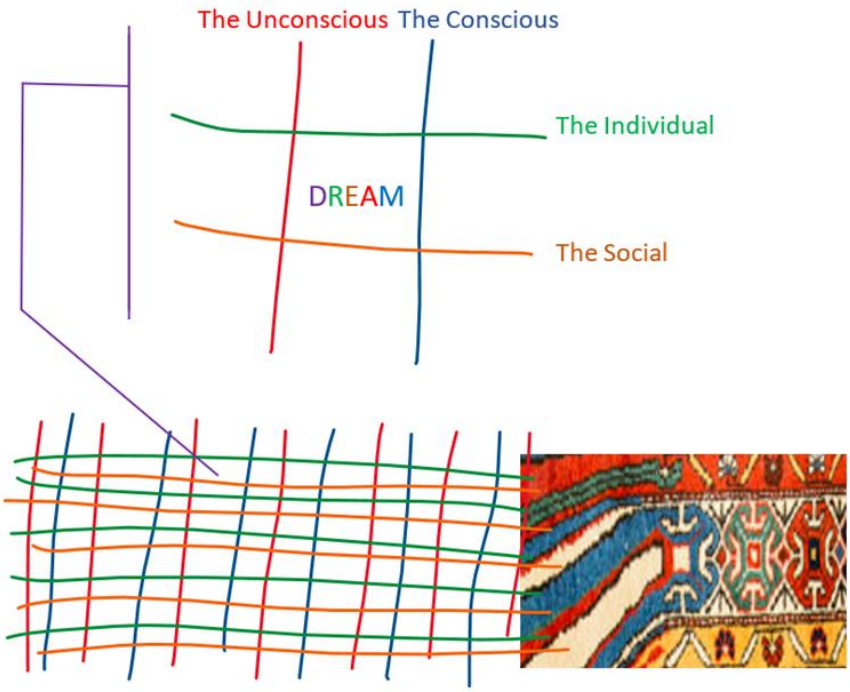

Figure 1. The Fabric of Complexity (the fragment of the carpet is adapted from the artwork by Faig Ahmed).

The theories of dream content and function proposed by Freud (see Appendix 2) and Jung (see Appendix 3) became an example of conscious and rational thinking about multifaceted phenomena – an example of cutting through complexity by identifying a direction. In the 20th century, recognising the need for a looser focus to acknowledge complexity stimulated a shift of thinking in the academic community. Ideas about the infinity of the unconscious and the multifunctionality of dreams encouraged cross-disciplinary consideration, where psychology had to stand side by side with sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, and physics. Furthermore, to engage in the discussions around these topics it became necessary for the theorists and researchers to construct dense and non-linear narratives where the essence of the Fabric of Complexity can be addressed.

2.1.1. Wilfred Bion and the infinite unconscious

Wilfred Bion (1984, 1962) was one of the theorists to offer such an explanation about the interplay of the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams. In Bion's theory this complexity was depicted via connecting processes of transition and transaction. Bion (1962) applied Winnicott's (1956) concepts of *holding* and *transitional space* in the context of social interaction. He proposed that conscious thinking is a transactional process and individual knowledge is always constituted through the interaction with others, beginning with the mother-child dyad that offers the launching pad into society. He modified the Kleinian

psychoanalytic perspective on the connection between the mother and her infant to explain the early experience of dream sharing, and the unconscious elements of dreams that surface out of repressed early trauma of separation and longing for containment (Meltzer, 2009). He continued this theoretical thread of connectivity in his proposition of autonomous evolution of the unconscious mind under the influence of experiences with others (Andrade de Azevedo, 2000). Furthermore, this evolution was represented in dreams via transaction between the unconscious and the conscious (Bion, 1962).

The processes of transition and transaction in Bion's theory indicated a sense of development in time that is continuous in nature. These processes trigger transformation of a phenomenon (e.g. thinking or emotion) from raw, undeveloped, non-mental impersonal into personal experience. Bion's theory of thinking defined the transformation of *β-elements* (unprocessed unconscious emotional experiences) into *α-elements* (conscious thoughts) via *α-function*, a 'digestive' process which made unconscious elements available for awareness (Bion, 1962). Bion (1992) drew parallels between α-function and dreaming in their capacity to metabolise the impressions on the individual experience made by the *infinite unconscious*. He also used such terms as the O, Ineffable Unknown, the Absolute Truth about cosmic, impersonal Ultimate Reality, a source of thoughts without a thinker. Bion (1992) further proposed that dreaming is an experience of a mental activity of *not-yet-thinking*, which requires the tolerance of mind in the memory-less and desire-less state, which he compared to the concept of *negative capability* (Keats, 1970). He pointed out that in the conscious state the human mind is often blind to what is openly new in every moment. In order to gain impressions of the unconscious, which is more sensitive to novelty, negative capability might be the way. Bion was also influenced by the idea about the limitations of the conscious mind to comprehend complexity on its journey towards discovering new information, described by Poincaré in his *Science and Method:*

> *If a new result is to have any value, it must unite elements long since known, but till then scattered and seemingly foreign to each other, and suddenly introduce order where the appearance of disorder reigned. Then it enables us to see at a glance each of these elements in the place it occupies in the whole. Not only is the new fact valuable on its own account, but it alone gives a value to the old facts it unites. Our mind is as frail as our senses are; it would lose itself in the complexity of the world if that complexity were not harmonious; like the short-sighted, it would see only the details and would be obliged to forget each of these details before examining the next, because it would be incapable of taking in the whole. The only facts worthy of*

our attention are those which introduce order into this complexity and so make it accessible to us.

Poincaré (1897, cited in Glaveanu 2019, p.36)

This non-linear consideration is important for depicting the complexity of dream sharing in a group, as it directs our attention to the dynamic, ever-changing, transformative relationships between the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams, which are impossible to capture when targeting clarity of knowledge. Bion's theory became an invitation to shift the focus of psychological science from the comprehension of the complex processes related to dreams, towards the observation and exploration of diverse experiences. This opens a discussion about a potentiality of GDE: in particular, the exposure to newness and the prerequisites of individual minds to go beyond knowledge with the help of social context.

2.1.2. Gordon Lawrence and Social Dreaming

Gordon Lawrence (1993) followed the ideas of Freud (dreams being central to the individual's psychic life and to the cultural tradition of society), Jung (the collective unconscious) and Bion (the infinite unconscious). He attempted to explore further the phenomenon of the unconscious in dreams by developing a method of *Social Dreaming*. Lawrence (2003, 1998) defined Social Dreaming as a collective technique that helps to reveal and process the unconscious links between individuals and society. It targeted a non-clinical application suitable to a wide range of social and relational areas. Social Dreaming employed a matrix structure for group dream sharing and aimed to gain knowledge of the culture and the environment, rather than to develop self-knowledge.

Lawrence (2002) postulated that dreaming and dream sharing are the indications of both the essence and absence of human knowledge, as dreams reveal the unknown, unspoken in the known. His primary assumption was that dreams do not just belong to the dreamer, but are a communal property as well. Hence dreams are part of the complex system and can help people to better understand society and culture.

In the search for representation of complexity in dreaming, Lawrence was one of the first theorists to discuss and consolidate the work of Beradt (1968), who described the dreams of Germans just before World War II in her book *The Third Reich of Dreams*. Lawrence considered psychoanalytic reflections on this text by Bettelheim (1968), who was concerned with the apparent absence of latent content and with the prophetic nature of the dreams. Lawrence consequently proposed the idea that the dreams described by Beradt (1968) could not be explained exclusively from the position of the individual unconscious, but have to be looked at from the socio-cultural perspective, as 'they arose from the public realm and the

disturbed human relations that the context engendered…The dreaming can be seen as a nightly, running commentary on the psychosocial reality of Nazi Germany' (Lawrence 2003, p.616). Lawrence (2003) saw these dreams in the context of their function for society: 'the dreamers are thinking of reality by processing their chaotic experiences of their social environment and rehearsing, through their dreaming, how they are to survive it' (p.616).

Through the identification of the social aspect in dreaming and the development of Social Dreaming as a group technique, Lawrence was not aiming to create a method for differentiation between personal and collective components of the unconscious. Rather he was guiding participants towards appreciation of the complexity and the possibility to connect with the collective. For example, he encouraged participants to consciously choose which dream material to share in the group, and to associate to the dream not the dreamer, thereby ensuring that 'the cultural context of dreaming is addressed' (Lawrence, 2003, p. 610). He also discouraged interpretations of the dream or the dreamer in this process. This was enhanced by the seating arrangement which promoted personal distancing from the other, but connection through a pattern (e.g. a spiral or snowflake).

It is interesting to note that in order to express their ideas about dreaming and its function in human existence, the theorists must cut through complexity and reveal an angle from which they can build their explanations. Using the metaphor of Oedipus and the Sphinx, it might be possible to acknowledge these different views on complexity of Lawrence and Freud, considering that both were attempting to encapsulate in their theories the interplay of the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams. The opening to this complex system for Freud was the Oedipus perspective of the individuals with their desire to produce knowledge following unexperienced curiosity and the need to solve problems. The position of the Sphinx, according to Bion (1961), is the entrance to the complexity from the position of transcendent knowledge that already exists and is experienced as shared unconscious.

Social Dreaming, 'is not about the individual's intrapsychic and personal unconscious, but about intersubjective space and the social unconscious' (Lawrence, 2011, p. 332). Although Lawrence (2003, p. 610) proposed that Sphinx perspective 'grants freedom from the individual psyche', the Complexity theory, when applied to Social Dreaming, might reverse this sense of liberation via the notion of connectivity and interdependence of the system's components.

Nevertheless, there is an undoubtable element of expansion in the process of exploration when dream content can be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective. Lawrence defined this expansive space as a *matrix,* and *dream-thinking* as its substance (Lawrence, 2011). The

concept of the matrix associated with the growth environment was adapted from Foulkes (1973); combined with Bion's (1962) notion of dreams being a form of unconscious thinking and a source of the infinite; and activated via the Jungian method of amplification. These components constituted the *Social Dreaming Matrix* (SDM) - the setting where multiple dreams were shared between people via infinite associations. On the basis of SDM, Lawrence (2011, p. 334) theorised about the emergence of 'the infinite possibilities of meaning' and justified the application of Social Dreaming for developing understanding of groups and organisations; thus, utilising the one type of complex system to study the other. This manifested a considerable shift of the dream theory towards psychosocial research, where simplification as a process of knowledge production about complexity, was replaced by learning from the complexity.

2.1.3. Quantum dreaming

Lawrence and Biran (2002) referred to the theory of quantum physics to develop thinking about complexity of dreaming. They suggested that

> *every atom of our body and mind contains at the sub-atomic level both waves and particles simultaneously. Every elemental event in neurophysiology is related to other elemental events as entities in the cosmos at large through waves and particles. Waves periodically collapse, coalesce or configure as particles. When it is in this form, it becomes a piece of information, a fragment of knowing, a shared experience of the infinite. We can have the working hypotheses that dreaming which continues for 24-7-365 throughout our lives is a wave function. When a dream emerges from 'the black hole of the psyche', to use Montague Ullman's phrase, it is a particle, which is worthy to be observed*
>
> Larence and Biran (2002, p. 221).

The use of Quantum analogy makes it possible to address theoretically the Fabric of Complexity where GDE might be sourced and where the conscious, the unconscious, the social, the individual and dreams are co-dependent and at the same time autonomous. The ideas of Freud, Jung, Bion, Lawrence and other theorists can be consolidated with the help of *Quantum relativity* as a framework. For example, it could be thought that the Fabric of Complexity has a property of *fragmentation* (this terminology was borrowed from Parkinson, 2004), which enables the dreamer to deliver the reality of the infinite, but it happens at the expense of representation of the dream. The shared dream becomes a particle, that is imminent in its form and renders its meaning essential potential. The dream demands autonomy from the dreamer as it becomes fixed when retold by the dreamer's expression of

it. Prior to that the dream exists in a *fuzzy cloud of probabilities* (this terminology was borrowed from Heisenberg, 1927). Group where the dreams are shared can be therefore perceived as recreating these probabilities.

If the dream can be figuratively compared to a quantum particle, then it might have a potential for *superposition* (this terminology was borrowed from Schrödinger, 1926) – being in multiple places (the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social) at the same time. When dreams are brought out of the individual psyche, they therefore become observable consequently losing their 'quantum properties'. Furthermore, we might also be able to consider the individual and the group as vessels for the dreams.

Continuing the analogy with quantum particles, we might think of dreams as intangible entities, which spread in a group of people, like ripples, exercising their *wave function* (this terminology was borrowed from Schrödinger, 1926), leaving us to wonder where they will end up and to speculate about the probability of their destination. If we were to draw a parallel with the *uncertainty principle* (this terminology was borrowed from Heisenberg, 1927) in quantum physics, we would be able to explain the futility of prediction around the meaning of the dream, and to relax in the state of negative capability (Keats, 1970). Furthermore, this comparison can be extended to the idea of the *search for the hidden variable* (e.g. in psychological terms, latent content) and the move towards consideration of various realities within the Fabric of Complexity where multiple representations of the dream split in multiple locations.

Quantum analogy applied to the narrative about GDE has the potential to explain why it is so difficult to define GDE. It might be thought that our individual conscious mind is poorly equipped to see the underlying shared unconscious elements. However, we also might consider that, in the context of the group dream sharing and group dream work, the parallel consciousnesses can surf many parallel unconscious worlds, allowing individuals to become more aware of multiple possibilities.

Claiming to understand GDE could be viewed similarly to understanding the quantum phenomenon – it comes at the expense of admitting the existence of a parallel/shared/collective/cosmic unconscious or *multiverse* (this terminology was borrowed from Schrödinger, 1926) and admitting that this understanding is incomplete. Furthermore, if we were to use the analogy of the *Copenhagen interpretation* (this terminology was borrowed from Bohr, 1920, cited in Kragh, 2002) we could explain this incompleteness in the context of research into GDE. This approach might suggest that any attempts to study the complexity of a shared unconscious will reduce it to a shallow projection of its full richness. Following this, it could be thought that, when GDE is observed via a research method, it might take attributing

properties of an individual theory and become a part of reality viewed through this lens. Any attempts to explain these observations might lessen to one out of many possible projections of *psychosocial infinity*.

The questions over what exactly constitutes GDE and its potential implications for psychotherapists, can lead to thinning out the Fabric of Complexity by shedding the multiverse in favour of simply getting a practical answer from GDE. However, the application of the *unquestioning approach* has its challenges. For example, in order to learn something about the complex nature of GDE and the representation of psychosocial infinity in it, the research needs to investigate places where group dream sharing might not occur. Nevertheless, the move from fragmentation to wholeness of complexity within psychological research accommodates the process of reflexivity and accounts for *entanglement* produced by the process of observation, which has a potential to promote the emergence of ideas about new applications of knowledge about GDE.

The holistic perspective was also promoted in the theory of *process work* by Mindell (1992) through the introduction of *Deep Democracy* - the idea of existential openness and appreciation for all levels of experience. Deep Democracy was formulated on the basis of the quantum principles, and it can account for intricate relationships between the observer, the event, and the method of observation. According to Mindell (1992) dream sharing is one of the pathways to Deep Democracy, which encourages the use, maintenance, and awareness of meta-skills such as openness to harmony, diversity and fluidity.

It might be proposed that Counselling psychology requires theoretical and empirical openness to recognise the value of complexity and to absorb the uncertainty associated with it when it comes to the production of a scientific narrative for GDE. Deep Democracy might be one of the pursuits that Counselling psychology as a discipline has at its core, as it lies on the edge of multiple realities of psychological, medical and social veracities.

2.1.4. Making the invisible visible

It is a great challenge to talk with any authority about the complexity of GDE as it is something that we cannot readily see. To make sense of this there is a need to investigate the invisible and, through its description, to make it visible. The narratives of the participants introduced in this thesis might be viewed as multiple attempts to accomplish this. Moreover, this research in itself might be considered an instrument to help to detect and express GDE.

Following the theoretical thoughts about the relativity of our knowledge, it is possible to assume that the reality of GDE depends on the instrument used to detect it. In psychology seeing life is not predictable like physics: not everything is knowable. However, the mystery of

exploration of the invisible is attractive and motivates us to find better ways of questioning its nature. For instance, in the search for the answer to the question 'What is the invisible GDE?' I explored the questions 'Where?' and 'How?' GDE is made visible. Up to this point I have attempted to present transdisciplinary theories with a potential to begin the process of expressing what GDE might be. In this section I will try to develop the understanding of the potential places of GDE emergence and the nature of this emergence.

The anthropological concept of *liminal space* (Van Gennep, 1960, 1909) or psychological concepts of *transitional space* and *potential space* (Winnicott, 1971), are the theoretical examples of existential states with a potential to channel the Fabric of Complexity discussed in this chapter. It can be argued that these spaces enable growth of new awareness, which allows us to 'see' what before was inaccessible or invisible.

In the context of social groups, the concept of *liminality* was first introduced by Van Gennep (1960, 1909) and later developed by Turner (1969). The original definition was focused on a state of identity, social position and self-consciousness. Manley *et al.* (2015) highlighted the experiential quality of this state and expanded its definition to include access to the *social unconscious*. According to Deane-Drummond (2014) the wisdom of liminality crafts a liminal space through transformation, evolution and becoming. It can be argued that in many cultures and societies liminality as a state is often associated with dreaming and liminal space, or with dream sharing (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960, 1909). It is viewed as a 'standing at the threshold' or a barely perceptible moment when there is no assumption of knowledge, but an awareness of the emergence of something new out of something old (Overland *et al.*, 2014). According to Turner (1987) in the liminal space the individual sense of identity is partially dissolved, and disorientation is induced alongside the possibility of new perspectives. Within the liminal space the readiness is sensed to move across the limits of previous understanding into an emergent meaning (Turner, 1987). It can be argued that this sense of transition might explain the context where GDE surfaces to the level of conscious awareness.

This concept of liminal space has some similarities with the transitional space described by Winnicott (1971). He defined transitional space as an intermediate area between inner reality and external reality, which represents a 'third' area of experience within the individual:

> *The third part of the life of a human being, a part we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall*

> *exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.*
>
> Winnicott (1971, p. 2)

Winnicott (1971) described dreaming and dream sharing as major aspects of transitional space, which starts with the earliest *transitional objects* (connecting symbols) and concludes in socio-cultural actions. He defined dreaming as a *transitional phenomenon.* Bulkeley (1994) applied this concept in her analysis of Beradt's (1968) *The Third Reich of Dreams* in order to discuss the power of social environment (Nazi Germany) to influence and disrupt people's experiences within their transitional spaces. She suggested that the application of this concept can enable us to notice invisible psychosocial experiences (Bulkeley, 1994).

Winnicott (1971) defined the space among people as a *potential space,* also situated between inner and outer reality. Initially this concept was presented in the context of play between mother and child. However, later Winnicott extended this idea to include interactive spaces between people that contribute to socio-cultural experiences. Manley *et al.* (2015) applied this concept to locate the interaction of people during dream sharing in the Social Dreaming Matrix, suggesting that potential space offers new ways to make complexity visible. Long and Manley (2019) made further attempts to theorise about the complexity of 'in-between space' by drawing links with the Deleuzian concept of *smooth space*. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988) smooth space represents an ultimately liberating space where thoughts, feelings and expressions can self-organise and free-flow – something that Winnicott might have called an *'area that is not challenged'* (Winnicott, 1971, p. 2).

Considering the above perspectives on the 'spaces' where GDE might become perceptible, it can be useful to explore the rise of this experience. Nomadic theory by Braidotti (2011) describes a process of emergence which is situated within the 'in-between' space. Braidotti (2011) was guided by the Deleuzian ideas about networks, flows, and dynamic transformations in order to navigate around the concept of becoming. She theorised about this process as movement towards uncertainty, embracing the chance to be steered by the path; the process of shifting from linear growth into multidirectional development. The rhizomatic process of change was first discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) as a flow of knowledge with multiple non-hierarchical points of entry and exit in the awareness. The perspectives of Braidotti (2011) and of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) might be helpful in defining the process of GDE emergence within the Fabric of Complexity.

So far, in the discussion of different theories, GDE, its context and the possible process of its emergence have been framed by the concept of the Fabric of Complexity. Also, this

perspective creates natural gravitation towards psychosocial research trends (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009), with the possibility of viewing GDE as a psychosocial subject or a meeting point of inner and outer forces of something *constructed* and yet also *constructing* (Frosh, 2003).

Psychosocial research aims to gather 'beneath the surface' data, as well as to change the relationship with it. The underpinning assumption of this approach is that all social research is a relational activity, which requires holistic awareness and flexibility applied towards the process of exploration (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Psychosocial research can be particularly useful for Counselling psychology which is currently in need of adequate adaptation in its structure and application for the purpose of sustainability in the times of flux and uncertainty (Goldstein, 2019). Counselling psychologists in their practice are working with complexity that is often liminal and creating further uncertainty. Psychosocial research has a potential to aid learning from complexity with the developmental outcomes for Counselling psychology theory and practice reaching out into the broader social world.

Based on the theoretical considerations presented in this chapter, I would like to propose that GDE emerges from the Fabric of Complexity which offers the potent in-between space where the process of emergence can become detectable. Furthermore, the psychosocial approach to exploring GDE might be suitable, due to its capacity to consider the Fabric of Complexity and therefore satisfy Counselling psychology theory and practice driven by the accountability beyond the border of this discipline (Goldstein, 2019).

2.2. Part 2: GDE Emergence in a Group

2.2.1. Dreams in the context of group experience

The experience of the group is full of complexity and dynamism. It absorbs continuous happenings on psychological, verbal, non-verbal, conscious, and unconscious levels. Dreams shared in the group can add to the richness of group experience.

I consider groups as living social entities, which form, exist, survive or decline within the wider social ecosystem. This ecological viewpoint corresponds with Bateson's (1972) ideas around interconnectedness of human systems, their function and life span. Nitsun (1996) considered the life of groups from the psychoanalytic perspective in his book *The Anti-Group: Destructive forces in the group and their creative potential*. He differentiated group characteristics, which represent the realism of group ecology. These were defined from Nitsun's (1996) observations of the complex group experiences, where negativity and positivity were appreciated in their interaction.

When considering the complexity and dynamism of GDE in a group, these characteristics (e.g. incompleteness and unpredictability) are important to acknowledge, so I discuss them in this section. I focus on the experience of interaction between dreams and groups, accounting for both the anti-group tendencies (destruction, opposition and decline) and group forces (construction, creativity and survival).

Some of the benefits of group dream sharing are associated with increased creativity, collaboration, empathy and containing capacity in the group. For instance, improvement of self-understanding by individual members via creativity has been emphasised by the advocates of group dream work (Mahrer, 1990; Rossi, 1985). Kolb (1983) and Ullman and Zimmerman (1979) found that dream work triggers spontaneous member involvement and support, which improves group cohesiveness. Malon (1989) suggested that dream processing in a group helps dreamers overcome hidden fears, develop a sense of connection with others through common life stories or perceived insecurities, and recover an authentic sense of self. Group dream work can facilitate the move from the familiar self towards perspectives of others, which, according to Bion (1991) is important for maintenance of emotional health. Furthermore, through dream sharing, group members can mirror each other with empathic listening which can enable the group's containing function (Bion, 1991).

The presence and availability of peers in the group make dream sharing an accessible space where group process can be metaphorically depicted. Dream symbols, images and sensations are often transformed into metaphors that allow participants to approach group interactions in a more meaningful and yet lighter way (distancing in metaphor). Livingston (2001) suggests that 'the value of working with dreams in the group is not the opportunity for completeness and orderly working through. The value is in the aliveness and deepening of group process' (p.24).

Dreams, shared in the group, absorb and represent the elements of group culture and discourse. They morph into collective 'portraits' of interaction between a dreamer and a group (Stone and Karterud, 2006). The peers can help one another to construct meaning and deepen the reflection that evolves during the discussion. Furthermore, the process of sense-making is not prescriptive; whatever is said is heard by everybody, thus the exploration of the dream, even if it is focused on one individual, is still experienced by everybody in the group (Stone and Karterud, 2006). The relational elements of group dream sharing allow for the exchange of dream perceptions that might contribute to healing within individuals and within the group as a whole (Repede, 2009). Gilbert (2002) and Dombeck (1995) discussed the benefits of group dream work in evoking the participatory nature of healing empowered by a group ritual, story-telling, symbolic imagery, and compassion in a communal setting.

Group dream sharing and group dream work are not exclusively defined by positive experiences. Dreams' obscure nature can evoke a sense of unpredictability, uncertainty and ambiguity in the group. The interactions of the group with the dream can give rise to confusion and disturbance (Nitsun, 1996). For instance, the dream can provoke changes in groups at different levels of communication, such as the current level, the projective level, the transference level and the primordial level (Foulkes,1964). There may be changes in the matrix, such as what members choose to bring into the group, as well as changes in group mentality, for example, the unanimous expression of the will of the group (Bion, 1961). All these potential variations can result in disrupting experiences.

Ullman and Limmer (1987) suggested that dream has a place in what Foulkes (1964) called the *condensed phenomenon*. It is a discharge from the collective unconscious of the group as a communication unit and it has a capacity to form a *group dream* (Foulkes, 1964). It can highlight something that has happened or is happening in the group – an actual situation in the group or the relationship of a single member of the group, which can lead to resistance and conflict in the group (Ullman and Limmer, 1987).

Other concerns around group tensions triggered by dreams are associated with the time consumed by lengthy and evocative recall of the dreams, that could be otherwise used to facilitate clearer and more focused processing (Rutan *et al.*, 2014). Yalom (1995) identified the difficulty imposed by the irrelevancy of an individual's dream to immediate issues of other group members. Individuals in the group may also offer dreams to avoid dealing with other topics or to restrict the interactions of the group to dream processing (Rutan *et al.*, 2014). Despite some research indicating that dreams can act as an accelerator in the group work, that ignites involvement, focusing and processing (e.g. Richarz and Römisch, 2004; Goelitz, 2002), it could be argued that some individuals in the group might not be ready for the 'fast ride' (Rutan *et al.*, 2014).

The preconceptions of the group members towards dreams could become problematic. For example, some individuals believe in the foretelling nature of dreams, expecting them to come true in the future (Miller *et al*., 1982). Knapp (1987) pointed to the confusion experienced by some group participants due to the complex symbolisations and analytical procedures. Furthermore, the issue of safety can become a major obstacle as some people can be fearful that through their dreams their deepest secrets or deficiencies will be revealed and scrutinised in front of a group of strangers (Yalom, 1985). Shuttleworth-Jordan (1995) noticed that 'public sharing of a dream is equivalent to entrusting others with a treasured personal possession' (p. 20). Although this can elicit trust and empathy between group participants, it can also lead to an overprotective attitude towards 'the personal belonging'.

Hoss and Gongloff (2019) acknowledged the challenges associated with shared group expectations and group culture that might influence collective attitudes towards dreams. Furthermore, wider social culture can reinforce different views on dream sharing. According to Hofstede (1980) individualism and collectivism differ significantly. Wang (2021) compared the social behaviours represented by these two cultures, and drew a distinction between their attitudes and preferences. The individualistic cultures emphasise the needs of the individual over the needs of the group as a whole. In this type of culture, the psychosocial norms are associated with independence and autonomy, which promote perception of such traits as self-reliance and assertiveness as highly functional. In contrast, the collectivist cultures nurture such characteristics as self-sacrifice for the benefit of the group, loyalty, generosity and interdependence. It could be argued that cultural differences present multiple difficulties in the context of group dream sharing and group dream work. People without the same cultural sympathy might struggle with the potential value clash, misunderstanding and prejudice. Consequently, the need to extend the depth of awareness can present a challenge to group facilitators.

Clark (1993) raises awareness in group facilitators about the task of guiding the group members through the experience of group dream sharing so that insensitive, premature, intrusive or imposing interpretations are avoided. Dream processing has been identified as a challenge for group psychotherapy due to the lack of training and experience with dreams among practitioners (Miller *et al*., 1982). However, the turbulence evoked by shared dreams, like other issues in the group, can be managed with group facilitation skills, such as handling expectations and establishing boundaries, dealing with distress and disclosure, modelling resilience and tolerance of 'not knowing' etc. (Rahmani, 2018; Moller and Rance, 2013).

To summarise, dreams in the context of the group experience can be viewed as positive, negative or an ambivalent occurrence. The emergence of GDE as a result of group dream sharing and group dream work, therefore, can be perceived differently. It could also be argued that GDE is emergent from the overall group experiences and is influenced by general group characteristics.

2.2.1.1. Dreams in the context of unstructured group experience

It can be said that different modalities of group dream sharing and dream work (e.g. psychoanalytic, Gestalt and SDM) are usually held within a boundary of space and time. In some instances, the stages of the group session might be introduced by the facilitators. Generally speaking, groups can be differentiated by the structure applied to *the task,* which is formed either by the group or for the group to accomplish (Bion, 1961). In psychoanalytic and Gestalt groups the value is assigned to unstructured format. Nitsun (1996) called this

arrangement a *therapeutic arena*, which allows the activation of group matrix, group mentality and creative potential. The unstructured nature of SDM is perceived as a prerequisite for accessing a non-directional socio-centric world (Lawrence, 2000). Dreams as unstructured or loosely structured units of information might be considered as matching material for the format of such groups, which can stimulate the process around the task of a group (Mindell, 2011). However, this very absence of structure (in both groups and dreams) can also amplify the dependency needs, confusion and anxiety in participants (Nitsun, 1996). The management of group dynamics is heavily dependent on the skills of the facilitators (Clark, 1993). Some unstructured groups, such as SDM, are purposefully aiming to reduce group dynamics by focusing solely on the dreams and the process of their flow, which also requires skilful hosting (Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2018). The more unstructured the group, the more there is a need for it to be managed with skills (Krippner *et al.*, 1994). This could also mean that GDE, which might emerge in unstructured groups, is more likely to be skilfully facilitated.

2.2.1.2. Dreams in the context of unpredictable group experience

Nitsun (1996) noted that 'the number of participants in a group and the various levels of interaction and communication combine to create a situation that can be filled with surprise both welcome and unwelcome' (p. 54). Dream sharing in some groups is anticipated by design (e.g. SDM) and in some (psychoanalytic groups) it can occur spontaneously. Furthermore, the unpredictable nature of the dreams can add to a common worry of participants about the general unpredictability of the group. For example, the uncertainty among members of the group around attendance and the appearance of dreams in a group, can put at risk the process of engagement. The increase in group unpredictability can trigger irrational group behaviour and feelings of fear and anxiety (Nitsun, 2015). However, the mechanisms, which make us unpredictable, help us to deal with and appreciate unpredictability in others and are a fundamental part of a cognitive system that defines us as humans and as social beings (Markman and Duke, 2016). Furthermore, the unpredictability can be viewed as functional and contextual conditions for learning via improvisation and creativity (Khabbache *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it could be argued that unpredictability is a complex characteristic of the groups where GDE might emerge and be utilised for knowledge generation.

2.2.1.3. Dreams in the context of incomplete group experience

According to Nitsun (1996) groups in general have a restricted capacity for processing everything that is happening within, offering their participants only limited opportunities to share their material, including dreams. Furthermore, individual inputs are often shortened in order to accommodate a group as a whole. This incompleteness can jeopardise the depth of exploration, especially when it comes to the ambiguous dream content, and create a sense of

frustration with unmet individual, interpersonal and group needs. Also, it can leave some members resentful and protective over their dreams which have not been attended to fully. Considering different contemporary theoretical underpinnings (Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and SDM) of group dream sharing and group dream work, it could be argued that dreaming is also an incomplete and continuous process which is revisited through connection with others. Furthermore, dreams, as products of dreaming process, have an incomplete and fragmented nature, and so might be perceived as potent stimuli in the group (Irwin, 2020). In order to manage this complex constellation of elements (the dream, the group and the process) honesty about the incompleteness and the shift towards collective process might be required, which might help to survive disruption (Nitsun, 2015) and to promote psychological growth (Mindell, 2011).

2.2.1.4. Dreams in the context of experience of group development

Many group development theories (for example Agazarian (2018), Ashbach and Schermer (2005), Beck (1981), Tuckman and Jensen (1977) seek to explain why groups take time to develop, and to become productive, go through disruptive periods and sometimes decline. Many of these explanations fall into a linear pattern of stages. Nitsun (1996) offered a different perspective on the experience of group development which might be useful when considering dreams in this context. He suggested that groups fluctuate in their development and oscillate between periods of progress and regression, the occurrence of which is unpredictable, unrelated to group cohesion and natural for group development.

Nitsun's ideas correspond with the concept of *order through fluctuation* proposed by Prigogine (1997) in his book *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature,* where he encouraged scientists to move away from determinism and face irreversibility and instability in systems. Prigogine warned about the strong bias of the system theories toward structure and the neglect of a process. Furthermore, he opposed the ideas of stability in favour of change and transformation, suggesting that systems are prone to procreate spontaneously, shifting from one coherent state to another.

Order through fluctuation, taken as an analogy, can be applied to the processes of dreaming and dream sharing. The production and expression of dreams might be viewed as random occurrences and at the same time linked to particular stages of sleep (e.g. REM) and to periods of purposeful awareness (e.g. in conversation with others). It is as if the information system within the dream bounces between different processes and reorganises itself as the result. The individual and the group, in response to the dream, can fluctuate between order and chaos on their developmental journey. Furthermore, the entrance of the dream into the lived experience could potentially mark an irreversible shift to a new stage.

As mentioned previously, some groups are formed with dreams being their main focus (e.g. SDM) and other groups consider dreams as a part of the more general group process. In both instances the dreams' occurrence and expression are unpredictable, just like the impact of them on the group and its development. Hawkins (1986) has noted group sensitivity to different events such as breaks, losses and dreams, that contributes to fluctuation in group progress. Furthermore, the fluctuation in group development has a potential to influence dream production and expression. Foulkes (1964) for example, described the appearance of group dreams as a representation of developmental events in the group. Dombeck (1988) noticed that the sharing of these group dreams happens at the approximate time during the group life when a different stage of development has become apparent in the group process. There might be an intricate developmental 'entanglement' of a dream, an individual and a group that potentially gives rise to GDE.

2.2.1.5. Dreams and groups in the context of transformational experience

Ullman (1996) proposed the idea that dreams are phenomena that people experience in the critical moment of transformation of one form of consciousness to another. This event falls completely outside ordinary information processing capacities, so it is experienced as indefinable. During sleep this happening is forced upon the human mind, which has to deal with it in an ordered way constrained by time and space, therefore reducing the condensation of information available in the dream. Ullman (1996) suggested that a second transformation occurs at the stage of awakening from sleep, when the mind is making attempts to convert this private experience into a public format. This transformation forces the conversion of the sensory information into discursive mode. However, language is limited in its capacity to capture the original information density, therefore most of the information is left beyond the narrative.

In order to explain these successive transformations of the information from the 'black hole' of shared psyche through the individual mind, Ullman (1996) referred to the theoretical narratives from quantum physics. He used the analogy of Bohm's ontological theory which postulates that the invisible at one stage transforms into the visible in the next stage through a process of expansion, and what is visible at this stage becomes invisible for the next stage (Bohm and Stapp, 1994). The focus on observation, as opposed to interpretation, opens a possibility of connecting with the information density. Hence, Ullman (1996) suggested not to interpret but to appreciate the dreams, due to their transformational qualities. He stated that dreaming transformation is a creative process which cannot be understood as a function of an individual, but has to be considered in the context of contact, or the lack of it, between people (Ullman, 1996). The emphasis is on the need for appreciation of awakeness and dreaming, the

conscious and the unconscious, the individual and social elements which are not competing but are integral parts of complex human reality. Ullman (1996) proposed that dreams are the tools for both personal and social transformation. Groups can be an environment where these tools can help the autonomous self to connect with, and be part of, a larger unity. Furthermore, dreams have enabling potential for a group to see itself, as a reflection in the individual unconscious (Ullman, 1996).

Groups, as an environment, harbour a transformation potential too (Nitsun, 2015). Therefore, it is important to consider the experience of transformation that might arise when dreams are shared or worked with in a group. Nitsun (1996) suggested that the models of Gestalt, Cybernetics, Dialectics and autopoiesis can be helpful in the explanation of transformation as a phenomenon of the group. By applying these theoretical models I will attempt to cross-reference the transformational forces of groups and dreams.

The idea about transformation where a change in one part triggers the transformation of all other parts, was originally postulated in the Gestalt theory. The individual and the environment were perceived as a unified field or system, in which all parts are interdependent. Koffka (1935) pointed out that the whole is different to the sum of its parts, emphasising the differentiation between meaningless summing up, and the meaningful consideration of whole-part relationships. Lewin (1943) developed this perspective in the context of social transformation by extending Gestalt principles to the study of groups.

Bateson (2002) explained the phenomenon of mutual causality where interactions can be understood through belonging to a system and its circular nature. This idea laid the foundation for the cybernetic understanding of the whole system with appreciation of the pattern of relationships between its parts.

Gestalt and Cybernetics offered an alternative way of thinking about transformation and change. Instead of applying a linear thinking about social systems as sequences where an individual is an initial stimulus, these models postulated that the self is only a small part of a much larger whole, where stimuli for change might be presented as feedback (constructive or destructive) between its components. Maruyama (1963) proposed that the stimuli that set this change (balancing or unbalancing) trigger transformation, which is already contained in the pattern of a system.

The systemic approach offers a useful framework for understanding dreams and groups in the context of transformation. For example, a dream can be seen as a negative or positive exchange in the group. The consequence of this dynamic might be predetermined by the inherent potential of the group either to hold or to fragment (Nitsun, 1996). Therefore, the experience of transformation during group dream sharing or group dream work can be either

constructive or destructive. The cybernetic model in this context places a group and a dream in a circular transformative relationship. This idea of continuous transformation also resonates with the concept of *autopoiesis*, developed by Maturana and Varela (1980). It refers to the ability of living systems to create and perpetuate themselves for the purpose of survival. Similarly to language, dream can be regarded as a connective and reorganising part in the life of the group. Therefore, dream sharing can be considered as a 'making process' in itself, where meaning is in motion from standing as one thing to becoming another.

In the group the dream emerges not as a complete unit of information, but as a relative phenomenon in the movement between participants, as if it is suspended between the elements of relationships in a group and is in continuous oscillation. It can, therefore, be compared with the dialectic idea of fluctuation between the states of organisation and disorganisation, which are fundamental to a system and co-dependent in their generativity (Morgan, 1986).

2.2.2. Dreams in the context of a group space

2.2.2.1 Dreams in the semi-safe space of a group

Despite the shared perception of groups as public arenas where privacy is diminished, where the fears of exposure, humiliation and attack are activated, and where anxiety and suspicion are exacerbated, people choose to join one another with the common goal of sharing something (e.g. thoughts, hopes, dreams). Apprehension evoked by the prospect of working with dreams in a group can be related to the concern about emotional or psychological safety. Vincent (1994) defined this sense as

> *a perceived freedom from psychological harm that can be measured on a continuum from feeling threatened to feeling safe. Individual's position on the continuum at any given moment is dependent on the amount of trust he/she has in herself/himself and in the group members*
>
> (p.76).

When people decide to join a psychologically-oriented group, they anticipate that this group will not be a completely safe space (Yalom, 1995). Therefore, it might be reasonable to think that individuals choose the interpersonal environment that is in many respects unknown, unpredictable, and challenging. Furthermore, when people share dreams in groups, they also make an individual decision to do so in such an environment (Ullman, 1987). However, due to

the incompleteness of the group experience, they might also develop regret over making their dreams public (Sher, 2013).

The idea of a not fully protected shared environment, chosen and accepted by the individuals for the purpose of interaction, has been developed by Berman (2019) in the context of group analysis. His concept of a semi-safe place might be useful for the explanation of tension between the sense of security and the sense of vulnerability that can simultaneously occur during group dream sharing and group dream work. Berman (2019) defined semi-safe space of the group as 'a co-created, basically safe and mutually accepted infrastructure, with the mutually recognized challenge of being and communicating in an unexpected and not fully protected environment' (p. 190). The dreams in the semi-safe space of the group might aid the development of the minds through interaction. This process is sometimes experienced as turbulent and unsafe. According to Berman (2019) the act of risk-taking (such as dream sharing) has also a potential to produce safety if it is a practice that is mutually accepted in a group, while lack of risk-taking can intensify doubt and fear.

The acknowledgement of the semi-safe group space where GDE might occur highlights the role of the facilitator. In some modalities like SDM this role is associated with the process of hosting and emphasising the 'stepping back' approach, and in other methods such as Gestalt and Psychoanalysis there is an anticipation of active facilitation. Nevertheless, different modalities encourage similar practices for establishing the initial safety in groups. These include boundaries management (time, task, confidentiality, safety from intrusion), and modelling through leadership in exemplifying and respecting the boundaries of task and process. Consequently, the semi-safe quality of the group space can be managed. Furthermore, if it is managed skilfully, the incompleteness of safety can benefit group process and the individuals within it (Berman, 2019).

2.2.2.2. Creative space between the group and the dreams

Creativity can be defined as a process of generation of a novel product or idea that is of value to an individual, a group, or greater society (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). One of the settings in which this process can take place is a group (Adarves-Yorno *et al*., 2006). The group and the dreams can share a space that might be stimulating, sustaining, and validating for the experiences of creativity and imagination.

Winnicott's (1971) ideas about creation and recreation of unconscious processes in creativity acknowledge collective meaning attached to symbols produced among people. These symbols might enter the process of dream sharing and dream work in a group. Consequently, their creative articulation would invite the participants into the area of experiencing between

inner and outer reality – non-private, beyond-subjective, from-psyche-to-culture, transitional space. Creative space of the group might become an in-between area for the emergence of GDE, and the experiences evoked by the dreams might evoke liminal creativity in the group. This creative space between the dream and the group might open minds to new possibilities and resolutions, shifting their awareness from the private into the social world.

The connection between the dream, the individual and the group through creativity might be explained by Bion's (1962) concept of *linking*. He proposed that the coupling activity based on an innate predisposition to connect a container and its contents is the basis for, and the purpose of, internal mental creativity. Bion's understanding of creativity became an integral part of his *theory of thinking* (1962). He explained the thinking apparatus as the *container-contained*, which is operated via oscillation between paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions of mind (the concept borrowed by Bion from Melanie Klein), producing at times creative connections between thoughts and emotions. The later developments of this theory included the explanation of dreaming as an experience of a mental activity of *not-yet-thinking* (Bion,1992).

It might be proposed that a repeated chain of linking between mental contents is required in order to connect with internal and external reality: putting experiences into dreams, dreams into thoughts and thoughts into words. However, for the individual psyche, dreams full of assimilated raw data can be difficult-to-digest 'food for thought'. Sharing dreams in the group enhances access to external reality populated by a multitude of individual minds, which might help to 'metabolise' the dream further, as well as contribute to 'indigestion'.

Bion (1988) discussed the *attacks on linking* between internalised and externalised objects as a mechanism employed by the psyche to dispose of the ego fragments produced by its destructiveness, as well as the way to cope with the dual role of the container (nurturing and depriving). The creative space between the dream and the group might contain the dismantling of previous views and theories, allowing the formation of new ideas through the movement to-and-fro between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions.

Bion (1962) referred to creativity as a destructive force that fragments positive links between the container and contained in favour of reformation, which is a necessary aspect of human experience. He introduced the importance of *catastrophic change* for individual growth and development. According to Bion (1962) any new thought is felt by the psyche as potentially disruptive and shattering, and the ability to tolerate this is dependent on the individual's capacity to withstand fragmentation, anxiety and doubt. The creative space between the individual, the dream and the group might be a location where GDE emerges and gradually nurtures this tolerance and negative capability.

Oeser (2010) described creativity as ‘risky as war’ (p. 9) and pointed out that, despite the similarity in their destructive forces, in Western society people more readily engage in conflict than in communal creativity. He explained this by the culturally-nurtured developmental tendency to repress the ‘shadow-consciousness of childhood’ (p. 9) which, nevertheless, continues to survive, connecting people with each other. Oeser (2010) suggested that creativity between individuals can be accessed through dream sharing and can be compared to the artistic act.

Lawrence (2018) also saw dreams as a source of creativity in a group. He agreed with Freud (1933) who, in his revision of dream theory, recognised dreams as a particular form of thinking. Lawrence (2018) explained this further in the phenomenology of creativity and the unconscious infinite in dreaming. He suggested that the adaptation to the abstract universal principles in consciousness occurs through the transformation of an idea into a cryptic format. Due to the infinite possibilities of meanings of the dream, a singular mind might struggle to comprehend it on its own and therefore might be inclined to connect with others.

The movement between ordered and disordered states connects the dream, the individual and the group. The theoretical thinking, sampled above, also connects this oscillation to the process of creativity. It was also interesting to notice that male theorists often described creativity as a risky, challenging and disruptive force that leads to the production of something new. Crociani-Windland (2017) looked at creativity from the constructive and connective point of view. She reframed the narrative around oscillated states of mind, moving away from the concept of ‘dysfunctional’ towards the concept of ‘potentially creative’ (p. 251). She adopted the Deleuzian view to describe the process of identity formation through a dynamic openness to change and becoming, encompassing disordered states of mind as part of everyone’s make-up. In her reflections on the artistic act, applying Deleuzian theory, Crociani-Windland (2017) proposed viewing creativity as a process of production of new links between different ways of thinking about the same subject, giving power to creativity in reshaping people’s engagement with the world. This theoretical stance shifted attention from problem-solving to finding new ways of living with complexity by changing people’s relationship with it.

The creative space between the dream, the individual and the group might be a space where complexity unfolds giving rise to GDE. This space seems to have some resemblance to a *smooth space* (Deleuze and Guattari,1988), *liminal space* (Van Gennep, 1960, 1909) or *transitional space* and *potential space* (Winnicott, 1971). It represents self-organisation and free flow that generate new ‘rhizomes’ of thoughts and emotions. It reminds me of bamboo forests in Japan, where people and animals escape during earthquakes. It is thought that safety can be found here due to the robust bamboo root system – the rhizome. It is also known

as a place where the same species can source materials for creative survival (e.g. food and shelter) prior to and after the cataclysm.

2.2.2.3. Dreams in the play space of a group

In Western psychology the understanding of engagement with dreams has been heavily influenced by the psychodynamic metaphor of 'work' with its individualistic directionality. Nevertheless, throughout the historic paradigm of psychological theory (Winnicott, 1971; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962) there were consistent hints that the 'work' metaphor might be overshadowing the phenomenological complexity associated with dream sharing between people, and that the 'play' metaphor might be more applicable (Bulkeley, 1993). Rubien (1994, cited in Krippner *et al.*, 1994, p.219) in her presentation, *The Dream Group Process: Professional Training and a Community Application*, compared her experience of participation in the experiential dream group to play. She talked about 'letting go' of her desire to be an 'expert', 'the person with the right interpretation' and finding herself in a truly safe environment where, through play, she was exploring the relationship between unconscious and conscious material.

Group dream sharing and group dream work might activate or emerge from the group play experience (Bulkeley, 2020). According to Winnicott (1971) play can instigate the potential space. As discussed above, this is where GDE might arise from the Fabric of Complexity. He defined play as a universal human activity that facilitates communication, growth and, therefore, health. He suggested that 'psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist' (p. 46) highlighting the purpose of therapeutic interaction in enabling the patient's play. Nitsun (1996) developed these inferences in the context of the group. He saw the overlap of play areas being replicated among the members of the group and, therefore, powerfully stimulating the emergence of play even in the presence of individuals who were unable to play before. Nitsun (1996) associated this phenomenon with creativity as he noted that play often prompts group members to relax their unconscious processes and use the potential space in an imaginative way. Furthermore, according to Nitsun (1996) creative play enables groups to experiment. It could be proposed that the peculiar dream content may stimulate creative and imaginative play in a group. GDE could emerge in the play space where the individuals might interact with each other through dreams.

Furthermore, it could be thought that creative play space, where the group meets the dream, develops a sense of psychological or emotional safety. Edmondson and Lei (2014) referred to the concept of psychological safety as a shared belief amongst members about the

consequences of interpersonal risk-taking within the group. The creativity and the process of discovery were found to be connected to psychological safety (Kessel *et al*., 2012). Furthermore, it has been argued that the freedom from ordinary conventions and socially-prescribed behaviours, fostered in play, increases psychological safety through the rise of tolerance to new ideas, generated between people (Mainemelis and Ronson, 2006). West *et al*. (2013) suggested that play in the group removes social barriers and enables its members to make mistakes and take risks by putting their ideas forward without fear of reaction. In this context dreams shared in the group might be viewed as a stimulus for, and a product of, play where psychological or emotional safety is possible.

Dreams are saturated with sensory elements that, to some extent, resemble a symbolic construct. Considering the literature discussed above, these constructs might originate in the Fabric of Complexity that interweaves the individual and social elements, highlighting dreams' potential as semi-safe play stimuli and play product. Supporting this suggestion might be Jacobson's (1989) idea that through play, members of a group may experiment with symbolic representations of the problems before engaging with them in real form. Nitsun (1996) developed this thinking in his proposition that playing with abstract material could potentially pre-empt and modify the destructive intensity of the anti-group. On the larger socio-cultural scale Meili and Maercker (2019) observed the development of positive group responses to adversities through play with symbolism or metaphoric expression.

Ullman and Zimmerman (2017) pointed out that dreams can be viewed as powerful forms of abstract expression with their limitless potential for meaning when they become socially available through group interaction. They described playful creativity that the group engages in when its members are presented with raw materials of a dream medium. The group members rework social images available to them in order to achieve a unique arrangement and mould them into what fits into shared experience. The authors compared the dreamer and the artist in their creative acts which differ by the nature of the audience for whom the product is designed. They suggested that the artist appeals to the world at large and the dreamer is communicating to herself/himself. The audience of the dreamer changes in the moment when the dream is shared, thus the group might provide a creative space for further development of this product, e.g. into GDE.

Ullman and Zimmerman (2017) pointed out that 'the artist is self-consciously the artist, and the dreamer is an unconscious artist, an artist in spite of himself' (p.315). They went further to suggest that the role of the artist predetermines awareness of the relationship to the creative product, whereas the dreamers are faced with a challenge to bring that relationship into

conscious focus. The creative play space of the group where a dream is shared, may be seen as enabling in this process.

Nevertheless, play space and the processes that emerge in it must be considered with caution. Winnicott (1971) describes play as 'inherently exciting and precarious' (p. 61). Although play is usually pleasurable and enabling, due to its openness to both fantasy and reality, as well as uninhibited excitement, it can also create anxiety (Versluys, 2017). According to Nitsun (1996), playing can be seen as a solution to the anti-group; however, there are risks attached to this process too. In the group play space destructive interactions such as aggression, blaming and hurting might get out of hand and destroy play. To manage this, Nitsun (1996) invited group facilitators to develop awareness of a degree of dialectical tension between creativity and destructiveness. It might be proposed that GDE offers opportunities for this awareness to emerge, as its liminality introduces ultimate holding before any directionality takes place.

Furthermore, when considering dreams in the play space of a group, it is important to hold awareness of socio-cultural influences. In recent years the value and status of play as a necessary human activity within Western culture has begun to recover from the tradition of converting play into work (Bulkeley, 2020). Day (1984) was one of the first authors to ring the alarm about work ethics of Western society where play and playfulness were minimised for the purpose of achieving tangible evidence-based productivity, leading to the increase in mental health difficulties and antisocial behaviour. Krippner *et al*. (1994) pointed out that the climate in most graduate psychology and psychotherapy programmes made it very difficult for the new generation of mental health practitioners to cultivate a curious, spontaneous and playful approach to their work, which is considered to be important for the overall effectiveness of practice. It might be proposed that GDE can help in establishing this kind of climate that cultivates a play-focused, creativity-driven and therefore dream-friendly professional culture.

2.2.3. Dreams in the context of interaction between a group and an individual

2.2.3.1. The dynamism of plural entity

Group membership opens the door to diversity, plurality and novelty in the processes of exploration, externalisation of the group inside the individual, and development of the sense of belonging to something bigger than the self. It also challenges the individual's capacity to accept sameness, otherness and difference (Neri *et al*., 2002). Nitsun (1996) pointed out that these factors also create an impersonal field of great complexity and variability that is opposite to what the individuals might search for in a group, which is simplicity, unity and oneness. Furthermore, the group is created by its members via a sense of responsibility and

psychological effort invested through their participation. According to Pines (1978) this causes the ambivalence in reciprocity between a group and an individual. Yalom (1995) described the tension between interpersonal learning and interpersonal threat that can lead to disruption of the stability in a group.

When a dream is shared in a group polyphony occurs, where an unconscious process of exchange happens between multiple intrapsychic worlds, that at some point reach awareness of the individuals. This exchange resembles what Stern (1985) called *intersubjectivity* – the process of sharing internal states of perceptions, affects, cognitions and senses with the mind of another. In order to explain the subjective experiences of connections between people, Stern (1985) had to move away from the psychoanalytic perspective, which saw human development taking the trajectory of separation, towards the union of an originally separate embodied individual with others. Stern (2004) described intersubjectivity as a human motivational system involving the dual need to connect with the other and to individuate the self: 'a need to read the intentions and feelings of another and a need to define, maintain, or re-establish self-identity and self-cohesion to make contact with ourselves. We need the eyes of others to form and hold ourselves together.' (pp. 106-107). It might be assumed that GDE is emergent from this plural intersubjectivity, where through dreams the individual knowledge and awareness flex, allowing expansion into the group and into the social, where the social finds its way to the individual.

A dream appears within a group as an independent phenomenon in response to an interaction between the individual and a group (Neri *et al.*, 2002). Through this independence a dream allows communication of infinitely diverse and complex meaning between the individuals in the group. It might be proposed that a dream, an individual and a group are the sum of the independent parts that form plural entity, dynamic in its connectivity. This plural dynamism might manifest itself in GDE. To theorise about this, I found it helpful to use the similes linked to the social phenomenon of a family.

The interactions between family members in accordance with their role can be viewed as comparable to the exchange that happens in the plural entity comprised of a group, an individual and a dream. For example, in group analysis there is a strong tradition of describing the group as an embodiment of a mother who contains and nurtures her infants – the individuals:

> *At a very deep unconscious level this group, an entity greater than any one member, on which all are dependent, which all need to be valued and accepted by, which nourishes them with its warmth, which accepts all parts of them, that understands pain*

and suffering, that is patient yet uncompromising, that is destroyed neither by greedy possessive primitive love, nor by destructive anger, that has permanence and continuity in time and space, this entity is basically a mother.

Pines (1978, p.122)

This comparison can account for the duality of creative and destructive forces in the group and extends into wider symbolism of the relationship between the individual and the universe. Foulkes (1984) in his comparison of the group to the all-embracing mother suggested the expansion into the idea about relationships with the whole world. It is curious to notice that thinking about the plurality in a group allowed this theorist to introduce both, the integrative metaphor of a mother and the differentiated metaphor of the relatives. Foulkes (1964) equated the group members to siblings, who are more willing to accept from each other what would not be accepted if it came from the mother. The relational complexity that the group can hold at once might be something that predetermines the dream sharing and the role of the dream in the group.

The dream as a unit of knowledge, that can be a stimulus and a product, the container and the content, fits organically into the exchange within the plural entity of a group that resembles a complex family unit. The theorising, based on family metaphor, might also shed some light on the psychology behind the anthropological accounts of dream sharing traditions in different cultures. For instance, GDE might be viewed as a useful recourse for the insights that vary in nature as they circulate between individuals in a group promoting 'family' union or segregation.

2.2.3.2. Leadership and Deep Democracy

Dream sharing and leadership are the two parallel ways that the individuals can interact with a group. Leadership can become a function of the group, which works with dreams, as well as a function of the situation where the dream is entering the group. This process might stimulate its members to express and implement their leadership qualities at both conscious and unconscious levels. Training background, a group modality and the unique personal features of the individual members underpin the perception and enactment of leadership in the group (Hackman and Johnson, 2009).

Psychosocial perspective considers leadership as a process of conscious and unconscious integration of the group and the individual, where leadership function might be internalised through the models of normative behaviour and a figure of authority (Van Knippenberg, 2011). Leadership might be exercised by the group facilitator, the dreamer and/or other group members. The dream can be viewed as a 'vision' that is shared by the dreamer in the momentary leadership position within the group, who is there to embark on a 'task' of working

through this material for the purpose of development and preservation of integrity. Furthermore, the interactions, triggered by group dream sharing, may contain powerful and primitive elements aligning or conflicting with the leadership function in the group. Leadership might become a function of the situation, where it will expand into a collective responsibility that shifts among individuals in accordance with their knowledge and skills needed for contingency.

The main challenge of leadership lies in the complexity of the group dream sharing process and consequent GDE. As Brigham (1992) points out, the multiple membership might instigate the pull towards fragmentation. This might be intensified by the dream material, that is often disintegrated in nature. Therefore, it might be proposed that the leader has a crucial integrating function in these circumstances, but how this is done and the extent to which it is achieved, depend on qualities of the individuals, their training and the modality of the group (Dies, 1994).

Nitsun (1996) proposed that there is a need for the position of neutrality and balance. Furthermore, he suggested that when the group functions well, it usually provides this integrating function itself, but at the time of fragmentation there is an expectation of the leader to fulfil this role. This might not sit comfortably with everyone during group dream sharing. Therefore, the leadership role might be assigned to an individual with the relevant knowledge and experience, such as a psychotherapist responsible for the organisation of the group (Ringer, 1999).

In group Psychoanalysis the notion of conducting a group is preferred to that of leading. The analyst is expected to act as a catalyst and an observer, focused on making the group stronger (Foulkes, 1951). Conductors might assume a parental position in the unconscious life of the group, generating feelings that can later turn into resentment and disappointment when they struggle to live up to the condescending expectations of the group members. Dream sharing might introduce a transitional space where both the group and the conductor, may experience psychological or emotional safety, collaboration through creativity and ultimate satisfaction of the instinctive longing for connection and individuation.

In Gestalt groups the leaders have freedom to access three psychological levels: intrapsychic (the processes within each group member), interpsychic (the processes between the group members) and group (the processes within the group as a whole). The position of the leader is very flexible due to the presumed ability to move between these levels during the process of dream sharing, to bring the group and the individuals into the state of ‘here and now’, and to hold a bigger picture or see the Gestalt to its completion:

> *In contrast to the usual type of group meeting, I carry the load of the session, by either doing individual therapy or conducting mass experiments. I often interfere if the group plays opinion and interpretation games or has similar purely verbal encounters… In the Gestalt workshop, anyone who feels the urge can work with me. I am available, but never pushing. A dyad is temporarily formed between myself and the patient; but the rest of the group is fully involved, though seldom as an active participant. Mostly they act as an audience which is stimulated to do quite a bit of silent self-therapy.*
>
> Perls (1967, p. 309)

In SDM the leadership is represented through the role of a host. Lawrence (2011) suggested that the host is equal to the other participants in the group, with the exception of 'the ability to explore social dreaming and pursue the unknown through reverie by willing themselves into a dreaming state while listening to the unconscious' (p.330). The host is expected to be non-intrusive and deliberately 'blind' to the group dynamics, as SDM 'demands a different kind of leadership – one inspired by the recognition of the infinite, of not-knowing, of being in doubt and uncertainty, as opposed to knowing' (Lawrence, 2005, p. 40). The role of the host is to maintain negative capability, therefore he/she needs to forsake the control that is commonly associated with leadership. Another responsibility of the host in SDM is to make links between and among the dreams, and offer hypotheses relating to these links, which would enable new thinking (Lawrence, 2011).

The idea that GDE in which all participants are its contributors, despite the diversity of group modalities and the differences in leadership roles may be conceivable if the presence of the dream in the group can be considered a common factor. The dream as a stimulus for, and a product of, the transactions between the conscious and the unconscious (individual and shared) in a group, carries a potential for the infinite meaning-making process, which can accommodate group diversity and plurality. In the context of interaction between a group and an individual the dream might cultivate multilayered awareness. This awareness can be related to what Mindell (1992) called Deep Democracy. Its notion suggests that all voices, central and marginal, all states of awareness, and all frameworks of reality are important, and need to be understood as a part of the process in a group. It might be proposed that Deep Democracy is emergent through GDE and links the process of leadership to other processes in the group.

2.2.3.3. Social Design and GDE

The consideration of dreams in the context of interaction between a group and an individual has led me towards the concept of Social Design. It is usually associated with social

movements, social entrepreneurship and social innovation (Armstrong *et al*., 2014). Social Design has gained momentum in social sciences research during the last fifteen years. Its development can be tracked back to the writings of Margolin (2015), Whiteley (1993), and Papanek (1984). Social Design is an interactive process and an approach to understanding of the evolution in collective human potential. This approach views the group as a changeable reflective entity that pursues understanding, creation and expanding (Kang, 2016). The leader, facilitator or designer helps the group to move towards this change by taking responsibility for establishing and maintaining Deep Democracy, and, therefore, surfacing individual capabilities and perceptions that, in turn, contribute to the group's wellbeing and productivity (Sen, 2000).

The discussion of the literature above seems to gravitate towards the idea that GDE might harbour the productivity and creativity needed for the process of Social Design. In GDE the division between dreamers, facilitators, leaders, designers and producers, is reduced by the redirection and expansion of their capabilities and perceptions. Dreams are often viewed as a potent condensation of information from physical, conscious and unconscious sources. Hence, GDE might have a potential to fundamentally change group mindsets, working habits, and relationships, as well as to enable and cultivate inner development of both the participants and the facilitators. The Social Design theory allows GDE to be viewed as a designing force of the psyche with an autonomous capacity for healing, extending and connecting. The concept of Social Design might also help to appreciate the independence in the designing process within GDE that manifests in creativity, freedom, democracy and change on multiple levels (e.g. the level of the group as a whole and on the level of the individuals).

Perhaps through GDE psychotherapists are able to experience Social Design in the making and its implications for the individual, the group and wider society, as a bottom-up non-linear process of change. Furthermore, in this context Social Design may be viewed as a way to grow Human Architecture.

Human Architecture is a psychosocial dynamic whole that consists of connected self-knowledge of multiple diverse individuals. It is also viewed as a process that challenges human alienation and consolidates human realities in favour of a fair society (Bush *et al.*, 2019).

The magnitude and intangibility of Human Architecture as a construct, and Social Design as a process, create challenges for harnessing the awareness of them in the work of psychotherapists. In this case, it might be helpful to look across disciplines in order to learn the ways of being with similarly represented complexity. For example, Collective Computing is currently being developed by global computer scientists to tackle simultaneously extremely complex homogeneous and heterogeneous tasks for mass benefits (e.g. calculations for

vaccine development) by systemically linking multiple single computation devices (Li *et al*., 2018). Group dream sharing could be viewed as an analogy to Collective Computing, where Human Architecture is socially designed through GDE. Furthermore, in Collective Computing, due to the unpredictability associated with the complexity of the systems, traditional resilience and recovery strategies are considered to be insufficient. Therefore, the means for the development of *antifragility* are searched for within the complex systems (O'Reilly, 2020; Uzunov, Nepal and Chhetri, 2019). Antifragility is a property of systems to thrive as the result of learning through exposure to stress (Taleb, 2012).

Continuing the analogy with Collective Computing, it might be possible to propose that the dream is inbuilt in Human Architecture and through GDE it nurtures the psychosocial antifragility of this system. This capacity extends further than resilience of the individual members and robustness of the group as a whole; thus negative capability, tolerance of uncertainty and of negative eventuality are possible due to the deep awareness of survival and growth.

2.3. Overall Conclusions from the Literature Review

This study is an original contribution to the body of knowledge around the phenomenon of GDE. By combining the ideas about conscious and unconscious processes, dreams, groups, group dream sharing and group dream work, I attempted to build a theoretical foundation for the potential explanation of GDE emergence from the Fabric of Complexity in a group. This marks an original contribution to the field of psychosocial studies and Counselling psychology.

It was curious to notice that in the Russian language (one of my native tongues) the abbreviation GDE would translate as a question word 'where?' This question was present in my awareness throughout the process of reviewing literature as I was exploring the whereabouts of GDE. I reflected on the discourse in psychological literature, relevant to the subject of my research, and noticed that it is mostly focused on the answers to the questions 'what?', 'why?' and 'how?'. I wondered about the extent to which my scientific enquiry was shaped by the presence of the question 'where?': Where does GDE come from? Where can it be found? Where can its implications be noticed? I felt that this perspective opened for me a possibility to expand my literature search into other disciplines and formed a process of enquiry into complexity through locating the emergence of GDE.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Research Ontology and Epistemology

My epistemology corresponds with the philosophical foundations of heuristic inquiry, contextualism and critical realism. These theories of knowledge accept the idea of co-existence of the visible and rational, as well as the unseen and incoherent, while recognising the value of the subjective in the process of knowledge production. My research into complex experiences naturally aligns itself with this assumption. Furthermore, this investigation opens the pathway towards a theoretical integration of such components as the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams within the Fabric of Complexity (see Chapter 2).

In this study I was guided by knowledge generated from conscious processes such as critical evaluation and data analysis, grounded in the awareness of subjectivity and in the efforts of reflexivity; as well as by unconscious (individual and shared) processes channelled through the dynamics of the research encounter. I consider my research as a contextual, intersubjective and embodied act that is underpinned by the following assumptions about the generation of knowledge about GDE:

1. The source of thinking about GDE is the knowledge generated individually and collectively, consciously and unconsciously (see Chapter 2).

2. The integrative approach to thinking about GDE is required in order to account for the Fabric of Complexity that GDE emerges from and is part of (see Chapters 1 and 2).

3. The subjective experiences and their methodical processing are important for the development of knowledge about GDE.

These three assumptions co-exist and relate to one another, requiring the integrative epistemological approach.

Moustakas (1990), suggested that heuristic inquiry engages the self of the researcher in the deepening understanding of the wider world through the process of knowing. This process involves several phases (Kenny, 2012). It begins with the initial engagement of the researcher with the topic and question which are sourced from his/her autobiographical awareness. The immersion into the experience of the phenomenon is the next step, followed by the incubation of the knowledge. In this phase the researcher retreats from the intensity of questioning or collecting data, into areas unrelated to the research. This distancing often results in the illumination of the knowledge through the change in perception of the subject of enquiry. The explication of what became known to the researcher during the process so far, and what

meaning it might hold, are needed after the illumination. The last phase is the creative synthesis of many strands of experience and understanding that have emerged in the research, in order to develop a coherent whole.

The phases of heuristic inquiry map well on the journey of this research. My quest for a suitable way to approach GDE was deeply felt as I was looking for how to express the questions about it and the reflections on my experience of it. For several years I experienced the immersion into GDE in its different forms – being a participant, a facilitator, an interviewer of the individuals and of the group. I have collected a lot of questions and data related to GDE. Furthermore, as I was attempting to articulate this information, I had to manage the initial impulse to release the felt intensity of the experience, and external pressure to answer questions and offer interpretation. In an unplanned but rather 'forced-by-circumstances' manner, I entered the stage of incubation, detaching from the research by focusing on developing a set of paintings for an art exhibition. This period shifted my internal frame of reference in the GDE enquiry, expanding my researcher-practitioner perspective into the ideas of psychosocial infinity. This organically motivated me to begin the narrative about the knowledge I was collecting on this journey. I returned to the data analysis with a heightened creative desire to synthesise my understanding of GDE into an integrative narrative.

Heuristic inquiry as a method of knowing helped me to think about the process of this research and how I used my subjectivity to access a social phenomenon. Furthermore, it helped me to follow a subjective reality, which, in line with Olesen (2012), I consider a potent source of knowledge.

Moustakas (1990) emphasised the importance of openness to others which can aid authentic sharing between the researcher and the participants, revealing the researcher's internal frameworks that influence the choices and actions in the study. He defined the researcher as someone who 'discovers life, who he is, what he really wants, the meaning of his existence, the true nature of his relation with others' (Moustakas, 1990, p.8). The focus on the essence of the researcher revealed through these relationships, shows, to some extent, how the psychosocial phenomenon helps to access knowledge about the self – something that seems to emerge within GDE. However, even in the interpersonal context, the heightened attention to the self of the researcher distances heuristic inquiry from the essence of the social and its implications for emergent knowledge.

For this reason, I had to combine heuristic epistemology with the theories of thinking that account for the function of the social in the production of knowledge. For example, Bion (1962) described a capacity for knowledge production as an outcome of a metabolic process where

chaotic β-elements are transformed into α-elements (thoughts that are available to a thinker). This is due to the α-function of the external containing forces, such as a mother, a group, or a society. In other words, Bion's ideas suggest that in the internal search to know, the raw knowledge and the self-awareness are managed by relational processes. The combination of theories of knowledge opens the path to understanding from the individually-essential to a socially-universal perspective.

The subjective experiences of GDE explored via self-enquiry and dialogue with others can generate knowledge via methodical processing of the narratives. This assumption is based on the proposition of Clarke *et al.* (2015), that language reflects subjective reality lived by the participants. To extract the knowledge about this reality, it is essential to employ a systemic method that accounts for individual and collective experiences. Clarke *et al.* (2015) considered Phenomenological Thematic Analysis (TA) as a method that can satisfy this need. It is underpinned by critical realism (Edgley *et al.*, 2016) and contextualism (Madill, Jordan and Shirley, 2000).

The rationale behind the use of a contemporary critical realism in this research was the opportunity to explore the meaningful details, by going beyond the text, drawing on a range of evidence in a broader cultural and social context. According to Edgley *et al.* (2016), contemporary critical realism assumes that our knowledge of the reality is intuitive and separate from the reality itself. Therefore, the data is not a direct mirror representation of reality, but is influenced by the beliefs, expectations and thinking processes of people involved in its production. However, data has a capacity to tell us something about reality that can expand our knowledge of perspectives on it (Edgley *et al.*, 2016). The researcher adopting contemporary critical realism, therefore, is seeking to identify both necessity and possibility in the world of multileveled complexity and to explore the underlying mechanisms for the diverse ways of thinking about it (Sayer, 2000). This position invites the researcher to embrace different types of accounts as diverse depictions of reality that combine both the visible and invisible elements. This concept resonates with Bion's idea of Ultimate Reality and Lawrence's notion of Social Unconscious. During this study I collected data from interviews with experts, individual psychotherapists and a group of practitioners. I have engaged in the consistent reflective process to produce an introspective account, and also composed a comprehensive literature review. By doing this, I was hoping to extend the awareness of different perspectives on GDE, which, in itself, might be unrealistic to define, but could possibly be reflected in the diversity of its expressions.

The contextualist epistemology in this research is associated with the idea that knowledge is provisional and situational, hence the results of analysis would vary depending on the context

of data collection and processing (Madill *et al.*, 2000). This theory is similar to contemporary critical realism in the sense that both approaches postulate the relativity of knowledge. However, contextualism has an emphasis on the truth conditions of knowledge being dependent on different perceptions and implies that there are not just one, but many knowledge relations. Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) identified four contexts that influence the production of knowledge: (1) participants' own understandings (2) researchers' interpretations (3) cultural meaning systems which inform both participants' and researchers' understandings and (4) acts of judging specific interpretations as valid by scientific communities (p. 250). This epistemology helped me to think not just about the multitude of perspectives on GDE, but also to consider the dynamism between these perspectives.

By employing contemporary critical realism and contextualist epistemology in this research, I hoped to collate a 'bigger picture' of multiple dynamic expressions of GDE, and produce an inclusive and accessible narrative, which would account for the complexity of this phenomenon.

3.2. Reflection on the Experience of Being a Researcher into GDE

Doing the research into GDE meant coming 'to know' despite the limitations of language. For example, over time I recognised that it was imperative to analyse the non-verbal expressions of the participants and develop visual presentations of findings. Furthermore, as a researcher I had to engage with dream-like material and intuitive elements during the interviews and in the process of reflection and analysis. An integrative epistemological approach was particularly helpful. Heurism enabled my emersion, detachment, and creativity in the process of data gathering and handling. Contemporary critical realism and contextualism helped to account for multiple realities emergent from the dream-like material, highlighting meaningful details hidden beyond the text in a broader cultural and social context.

Furthermore, the data processing at times felt to me like an artistic act itself, as I was working on a constellation of information from multiple disciplines, from manual and computer data analysis to make sense of, and to create an accessible narrative about GDE. I perceived thematic maps as complex images. In order to express the concepts that emerged from this process I designed visual illustrations of themes (e.g. Figure 1. The Fabric of Complexity; Figure 4. The three aspects of GDE; Figure 6. GDE as a whole - the dynamic fractal constellation). I was utilising what Humphreys *et al.* (1993) called spatial visualisation skills to develop an understanding of a complex phenomenon and convey it to others. This was not something that I was aware of from the beginning of this research. In fact, the awareness of these skills and my sense of being an artist in the research process surfaced during the process of research. The findings from Humphreys *et al.* (1993) made me more confident to

trust to and value the strong visual element of my heuristic inquiry. The discovery of the relevant literature enabled me to normalise and utilise this experience.

According to Humphreys *et al.* (1993) the skills of spatial visualisation are often associated with creative arts and somewhat devalued in the scientific research. Traditionally linguistic expression and reasoning are considered to be the main predictors of successful engagement and completion in complex academic activities. Nevertheless, it has been found that spatially talented individuals are not only able to achieve excellence in science but also are more likely to remain committed to it (Humphreys *et al.*, 1993).

In the process of research into GDE, I had to consider the complexity around confidentiality. The outcome of engaging with this challenging task through systematic reflection, literature review and supervision was evident in confidentiality in situ, maintenance of privacy on the communal level and recognition of the chain of confidentiality (see the detailed discussion of these in 3.7.6. Reflection on the ethical dilemmas and decisions).

Reflexivity was an important part of this study, as I tracked my thoughts, feelings, dreams and reactions, while acknowledging their influence on my work. The changes in style of my narrative throughout this thesis might demonstrate the transformative process that this project has brought into my expression of the subject under investigation. It is as if I had to share a dream with the reading audience and tell the story that described my journey towards this research before, I could enter the reflexivity stage. This process in itself reminded me of the transition into broader awareness that the participants in this study spoke about. Moving from description of the details to reflection on the complexity, highlighted the need for the framework that would capture the sense of changing positions. I found useful the concept of *insider / outsider positionality*. Its application meant that I could construct meaning from the described experiences and contextualise them in this study, while tracking my sense of identity. Furthermore, it enabled me to study what I later identified as a specific population of people who were simultaneously open to the experiences of groups and dreams. My belonging to this group was also negotiated through this research.

I have a great passion for working with dreams in groups. Before and during this research I attended Gestalt, Psychodrama, group analysis, emotional freedom groups and SDMs. I engaged with GDE as both a group member and a facilitator. Identifying these dimensions in my professional identity was a starting point for my thinking around the insider/outsider positioning.

Due to my background, as a researcher, I made an assumption that I would be able to establish connection with participants, understand their experiences and develop a narrative to express these. I was also aware that this assumption had a potential to threaten the validity of my research and that I would need to step outside my passion to represent the unique experiences of the participants. I share a position described by Hammersley (2000) that postulates the inevitably of influence (conscious and unconscious) from the researcher's personal, social, historical and cultural backgrounds, on the study they conduct. My aspirations for this study were in line with the concept of the insider/outsider researcher. According to Rooney (2005) the insider researcher has direct personal links to the research setting, as opposed to the outsider who has very few commonalities with the participants.

As a part of my insider status determined by personal involvement and passion for GDE, I assumed that I would have a quicker access to potential participants; however, it was not the case. I was automatically applying Rooney's (2005) proposition that being an insider researcher is about having greater appreciation of the research group's culture, without deeper consideration of my differences. For example, my researcher identity might have contributed to my positioning outside membership of the group of practitioners. I have addressed this by highlighting my insider status through communication of my passion based on practical experience in GDE. I also questioned the possibility that my 'researcher outsiderness' was enhanced by the fact that I was significantly younger and less experienced than my participants. I felt that the participants in this study did not view me as 'an expert on the subject'. The power dynamic, which is usually associated with this (Tinker and Armstrong, 2008) might have occurred, but it did not seem to hold back the participants from sharing their authentic opinions and 'inviting' me inside their meaning-making.

I learned that the community of psychotherapists involved in group dream sharing and dream work was difficult to reach due to the 'closed-to-outsiders' network. It was interesting to note later in the participants' narratives, the descriptions of the sense of socio-cultural marginalisation associated with GDE. Leonard and Dawson (2018) discussed this phenomenon in the field of UK psychotherapy, identifying a need to raise awareness about it.

During the literature review I started wondering whether cultural background could have determined psychotherapists' participation in group dream sharing and dream work. Therefore, I decided to widen the search for participants to the international platform. Again, I found myself in a tricky position of insider/outsider: in the UK I was myself representing cultural diversity and for the participants based in other countries (e.g. Italy) I was representing the UK.

I have lived in the UK for the 12 years and consider Britain as my adopted country. Immersion into the British culture allowed me to gain understanding of general norms, beliefs and traditions. Nonetheless, I am a foreigner in the UK, therefore the application of insider/outsider status is not a simple matter of inclusion/exclusion within UK groups (e.g. UK psychotherapists) for me. O'Connor (2004) has highlighted this incomplete and unstable nature of insiderness. I share this viewpoint and see my insiderness/outsiderness as a dynamic fluctuation throughout the different stages in my life and in the process of this research. For example, during the engagement with the participants as part of this research process I reflected on how being Ukrainian and having an Eastern European accent would influence my relationships with them. With British participants I felt something that I have been experiencing during my life in general in the UK, which I call British subtlety. With non-British participants I felt that our accents and cultural backgrounds were moving to the periphery, as both sides were putting their best efforts into using a second language to communicate. In this reflection I noticed that actually the most prominent influence on the insider/outsider position was not stimulated by culture in this process, but by having a passion for GDE. This passion created a feeling of 'sameness' that transited across our cultures.

The notion of 'sameness' was originally used by O'Connor (2004) to describe the sense of like-mindedness that helps to develop trust and rapport. I felt that the perception of shared experiences and positive interactions helped me generate authentic and rich data. Furthermore, I felt that listening to participants' narratives about GDE had energised my confidence in this research. This was particularly prominent when I was hearing the words of appreciation for the opportunity that this research gave the participants to talk about something that they have not articulated before.

In the second stage of the research, I have gained access to a group of psychotherapists, recruited a focus group from it and attended one of their meetings prior to conducting the research procedure. The attendance of the meeting was an important requirement from the group itself. I felt as if I, the outsider, received an invitation into the inside of the group. I met the members of the group and also invited them inside my research by offering the opportunity to volunteer as participants. Such exchange of the insider/outsider invitations has been noted in sociological studies (Naples, 2003). Research with groups anticipates interactive negotiation with participants where the 'researcher inhabits the world that she is trying to explore with the participant' (Smith, 1987, p. 111). From this position I was able to validate the outsider/insider transition as a valuable source of information.

I felt that being closer to the data by having an attuned understanding of the GDE complexity was one of the strengths of being an insider in this project. However, there were some disadvantages associated with this position. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) warned insider researchers about the possibility of reduced vested interest in maintaining a degree of open-mindedness. This challenge contributed to my increased attention to every detail in the presentation of the participants. I noted that during the dialogue participants would often immerse themselves in deep reflective, dream-like thinking that was transformed at times into long monologues filled with figurative language, pauses and non-verbal expressions (e.g. laughter, gestures). It was as if they wanted to convey all the complexity of GDE to me as a researcher who was an outsider to their minds.

As recommended by Ritchie *et al.* (2009), the supervisory team in this research also supported the balance in the insider/outsider dichotomy. The principal supervisor was a white male Greek counselling psychologist, who had very limited exposure to GDE, and the Director of Studies was a white male British psychotherapist, who had a broad understanding of group dream sharing and dream work. The team reviewed the findings against the raw data to help me filter the assumptions generated by my positionality and minimise their influence. In continuation of my reflective practice, I kept a reflective journal and reflective dream diary, which contributed to the process of reflexivity on the conscious and unconscious levels. Before collecting the data, I wrote Chapter 1, which represented my personal journey to this research project and was reviewed by my supervisors. Its discussion helped me later to manage the temptation of matching the data to my own experiences, and to focus on the unique elements in the participants' narratives. Furthermore, I found the progression exam very useful as I had more input from the diverse perspectives to help me to balance my positionality; in particular, the triangulation of findings has been discussed in this context.

My passion for GDE has motivated me to choose this topic for my thesis. I was confident that this internal drive would sustain my perseverance in the process of research. My expression of the project has evolved over time, absorbing the diversity of ideas presented in visual-verbal format as well as the implications of my conscious and unconscious experiences. Just like a dream, it was a channel through my mind into the interaction with diverse groups of people (e.g. peers, clients etc.). It also shaped my understanding of myself as a researcher-practitioner. At times it felt like a balancing act between scientific quality, validity and my passion for GDE. To maintain my confidence in moving forward I mediated my insider/outsider positions by utilising creativity and open-mindedness when integrating knowledge from different disciplines for the purpose of producing a meaningful and accessible narrative.

3.3. Rationale for the Chosen Methodology and Research Design

This research project was motivated by autobiographical interest as well as by relevancy to Counselling psychology research and practice. I also noticed that the topic of GDE and its implications for practitioners were underrepresented in psychology literature in general. Considering this information gap, I decided to approach the topic from the position of a broad understanding, and therefore, was looking for a methodology that would offer a flexible and sensitive approach to a potentially very diverse data set. Whilst it was apparent that a qualitative methodology would be most useful for exploring the complexity of GDE, the exact type of qualitative method required deliberation.

Braun and Clarke (2006) implied that specific methods within qualitative research produce specific types of data. Therefore, the researcher needs to identify the type of data required to answer the research question, and balance this with the theoretical framework and method in an explicit decision-making process. Considering this, I identified three alternative well-established qualitative methods: Thematic Analysis (TA), Grounded Theory (GT) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

In order to follow the aim of this study, it was important to choose a flexible method that could combine semantic, inductive and deductive analysis without a commitment to produce a model or in-depth investigation of the individual experience. Furthermore, this research was focused on the accounts of multifaceted lived experiences related to both individual and social contexts. Therefore, I needed a method free of pre-existing theoretical frameworks, and capable of capturing the complexity. For this reason TA was chosen, consistent with the view of Braun and Clarke (2006, p.14), who suggest that 'through its theoretical freedom' TA can offer a flexibility and utility for processing rich, detailed and diverse data. Furthermore, in the context of my research, the application of TA also allowed me to contextualise GDE and accommodate psychological and social reflections on the data.

Also, TA made it possible to work within a participatory research paradigm, where the participants are viewed as collaborators (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Heron and Reason (1997) suggest that TA is flexible and adaptable enough to enable a researcher to conduct a joint inquiry with 'the fellow humans' (p.2). This positioning is congruent with my ontology and epistemology, and emphasises the scientific potency of participants' and the researcher's subjective experiences in the process of knowledge production.

The research design has evolved around the integration of the three types of subjective experience: personal and cultural, professional clinical, and professional organisational (Figure 2). The knowledge constructed through these interlinked and co-dependent

experiences was researched by using the methods of reflexivity and semi-structured interviews. The understanding of my researcher's role was also shaped by this construct (see Appendix 4).

Figure 2. The integration of subjective experiences into the research design

3.4. Data Collection

To explore psychotherapists' GDE, this study needed to adopt a method of data collection which could be flexible, facilitate understanding and allow for clarification. The rationale for using semi-structured interviews in this research was based on the assumption that conversation is more likely to be natural, leading to the production of richer and more realistic data, as well as establishing a rapport and gaining a mutual trust. These are important for sharing of the lived experience (Coolican, 2001). This is especially so, when this experience is articulated by the population of psychotherapists, who on one hand are open to reflexivity, and on the other hand are more reserved in relation to sharing their reflections with peers (Kumari, 2009).

Researcher-participant interactions during the semi-structured interviews can also reveal a complex interplay of power dynamics (Heath *et al.,* 2009). In this study all participants and experts were more experienced and older than me. Therefore, I used reflexivity to consider how these factors can influence the power relationships during the data collection process.

I had to accept that the outcomes of the interactions during the interviews cannot be fully predicted or controlled. I was guided by Gallagher's (2008) suggestion to maintain my openness to the unexpected. Flexibility is integral to semi-structured interviews; therefore, researchers must be prepared for the process to take a shape that may be different to the one envisaged. For example, participants may choose what position of power to take, depending on the content of the question asked. This will have an effect on the subsequent actions of researchers, who may need to adapt their approach to achieve a more effective research engagement (Gallagher, 2008). For example, I asked clarifying questions, developed with adaptability in mind. I view this 'untidiness' in the semi-structured interview as an important element of the process, that through its disruptive force, can generate new and unexpected insights.

To develop understanding of the subject and generate relevant and potent questions for the semi-structured interviews later used for data collection, three unstructured pilot interviews were conducted with experts in the field of group dream sharing and group dream work. One was a Jungian analyst and psychotherapist, one was a psychosocial researcher, and one was an organisational consultant. One pilot was held face-to-face and two via Skype. Two experts were selected through a search of the most recent literature on the topic, and the third was recommended by my supervisor. All three were invited for an explorative pilot interview as experts based on their exposure to GDE over 15 years of practice and research. The clarification of the definition of an *expert* and how it fits within the epistemology of this research is offered in Appendix 5 and Figure 3.

The expert knowledge represented in the pilot interviews was analysed and compared. Several themes related to GDE emerged, such as experience of democracy and safety associated with GDE. The responses of the experts contributed to the development of the questions in the semi-structured interview schedule for the research participants (e.g. the questions about the challenges of GDE).

The pilot interviews allowed me to experiment with the practical arrangements (face-to-face and Skype) of the procedure and to experience in-vivo the strength and limitations of two modalities and the planning associated with them. In order to access a wider range of participants and overcome the difficulties of logistics, after receiving consents for participation, I decided to conduct individual semi-structured interviews for data collection via Skype (see Appendix 6).

The availability of inexpensive, relatively easy-to-use technologies has made the potential to conduct and record online audio and video interviews more viable in recent years (Whale,

2017). Skype was chosen for this research as a software option to facilitate data collection. It mitigated the distance, enabling me to access the professionals who were abroad at that time (e.g. in Italy), or in distant parts of the UK (e.g. Cornwall, London and Scotland). Another reason for using Skype was the suggestion that online interviews may allow for more reflective responses (Morison *et al.*, 2015). The expert interviews indicated that this would be essential for conducting an inquiry into GDE.

The addition of the face-to-face focus group interview was considered during the progression exam, where the opportunity to study a unique social occurrence was discussed, along with the opportunity to gather more dynamic and reflective data. In the early stage of the data collection, I was concerned about the reserved reflexivity of the participants in the individual interviews, who were adopting an educational style in their narrative, possibly due to the power dynamics mentioned earlier. In the progression exam the idea of 'interviewing a group' was offered as a format that could stimulate reflections, as well as capture the social nature of the encounter. This is emphasised in the method of *focus group interview* (Cyr, 2016). The questions from the individual semi-structured interview were used to guide group conversation.

At this point I would like to clarify the term focus group interview used in this text. This data collection method is defined as a group interview that gives the researcher the ability to capture complex information more efficiently than individual interviews (Nagle and Williams, 2013). It is important to clarify here that the term *focus group* is used here to describe a social setting of the interview rather than a separate methodology.

The data collection fell into two phases: Phase 1 - individual interviews, and Phase 2 - focus group interview. There was a substantial gap in time between these phases, that allowed me to track a Social Dreaming group, which evolved during the time of this research as the result of an initiative of one of the interviewees. This group was already established for a year by the time I invited its members to be collectively interviewed about their GDE. The focus group interview was aiming to capture the complexity of GDE as a psychosocial phenomenon, which an individual might only partially reproduce in a one-to-one interview.

Except for the initiator of the group, the participants had never met with me before. I evaluated the specifics of the group (its professional background and brief encounter context) and reflected on the potential problems associated with the group dynamics. These included conformity, inhibition of expression and restricted disclosure, which Wooten and Reed (2000) suggest as issues to be aware of. In the discussion with my supervisors, these specifics of the group were considered as not significant.

3.5. Research Instruments

An interview schedule (see Appendix 7) was developed based on the research question, the literature around the topic and findings from the pilot interviews. The schedule listed broad open-ended questions and prompts, which were used to elicit narratives concerning:

- participants' experiences of working with their own dreams in a group.
- participants' experiences of working with their clients' dreams in a group.
- the implications of these experiences for the participants.

The interview schedule was not applied prescriptively. The aim was to develop a conversation with the participants, which enabled them to communicate relevant aspects of their experience, without guiding them. As the individual and group interviews progressed, the schedule was adapted according to the participants' narrative, including adding closed questions for clarification. For example, I noticed a tendency to avoid talking about the challenges of GDE. In consultation with my supervisors, the decision was made to produce prompt questions that would facilitate conversation beyond the optimism and enthusiasm of the participants. Consideration of the effect of these questions on the responses was also discussed in the supervision and is presented in Chapter 5.

The other research instrument used in data collection consisted of a basic demographic information questionnaire designed to record details including age, ethnicity, highest level of educational achievement, occupation, experience, engagement with group dream sharing and group dream work (see Appendix 8).

3.6. Participants

3.6.1. Sampling and recruitment process

The study focused on qualified practising psychotherapists who had been exposed to dream sharing and/or dream work for over 3 years after qualifying. This consideration was made based on a review of existing research. For example, Crook-Lyon and Hill (2003) found that those clinicians who had more training and experience, had higher estimated dream recall, more positive attitudes toward dreams, did more personal dream work and were more likely to work with dreams, in comparison to the less-qualified and less-experienced psychotherapists. Schredl *et al.* (2000) conducted a survey of psychotherapists in private practice and found a significant relationship between the frequency of the therapists' working

on their own dreams and the frequency of their work on dreams with clients. Furthermore, the outcomes from the expert pilot interviews indicated that the more-experienced psychotherapists are more likely to be exposed to GDE.

Despite this inclusion criterion, the decision was made to include the data from one participant in the focus group interview who was still in training, due to the following two reasons. She had the longest experience of participating in the group from which focus group interview participants were recruited, and she offered valuable reflections that stimulated focus group discussion during the focus group interview.

Most participants had experience of GDE as both a group member and a facilitator. This was potentially important for the current study as a contribution to the holistic overview of GDE and its implications for psychotherapists. All participants in this research were aware of the principles of reflective practice and methods for working with dreams. All shared positive a belief about the unconscious and dreaming as an essential part of unconscious processes. Furthermore, they viewed the group dream sharing and dream work as an important group activity. Reflecting on the participants' background, I wondered about their collective representation of a particular professional culture within the field of psychotherapy, which can be characterised by openness to the unconscious and dreams.

I noticed another potential cultural aspect in the population I was researching into. This awareness began with the appreciation of my own cultural background, which seemed to influence my professional interest in dreams. I also noticed that the major contributions on the topic of group dream sharing and group dream work in the literature to date were by authors from the USA, Italy and Israel. My interest in the link between GDE and culture grew and led me to expand my thinking beyond psychology into the wider social realm. In order to be inclusive, as well as to maximise the likelihood of encountering socio-cultural elements in my research, I welcomed participants from different backgrounds. I recruited participants from the available online database of the Tavistock Institute and The Institute of Group Analysis in London, using convenience sampling. Due to the established multicultural network in these organisations, it became possible to introduce diversity into my sample as I had two Italian and two Israeli practitioners who volunteered to participate.

The sample was not homogenous, as the focus of the research was not on the precise similarity of the demographic characteristics, but on acknowledging diversity and context. However, it represented a perspective of psychotherapists who are contributing to the network for group dream sharing and group dream work in the UK. All participants had experience of different modalities working with dreams in groups (Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and SDM).

Psychological work with dreams is not as widely as represented in UK psychotherapy practice and is considered to be marginalised in mainstream practice (Leonard and Dawson, 2018). This factor influenced the process of recruitment in that I felt as if I was an outsider trying to enter an 'underground' community, where one side wanted to have its voice heard, and the other was apprehensive about the enquiries. Despite free access to the large organisational databases mentioned above, I found the recruitment process slow and had to keep the sample size to what felt realistic in these circumstances. Eventually I was able to recruit and conduct individual interviews with seven psychotherapists, of whom two were female and five were male.

The potential participants were invited to take part via email (see Appendix 10) in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Potential participants expressed their interest in the research by email confirmation. I then provided information about the purpose, aim and format of the study, explaining the individual/group interview procedure, and asked them to give consent for the participation. The meeting date and time were then agreed, and confirmation and further information were emailed back.

For the focus group interview the participants were recruited from a group that had been initiated by one of the psychotherapists (the organiser), who was interviewed for this research a year before the group interview. Independently from this study he organised and promoted the Social Dreaming group aimed at psychotherapists. This group had evolved, grown and declined over three years. The group met once a month. The organiser sent an email prior to each meeting which clarified who was going to be attending, and who was going to be missing and why. The correspondence was also about the practicalities (e.g. there was a reminder about the door code to access the meeting and the start time). This was the main reason for the members to communicate with each other. At the time of the recruitment and the focus group interview, the participants were not closely connected in their personal or professional lives, but found each other as the result of participating in the Social Dreaming group. Initially I sent an email to all members of this group with the invitation to take part in my research. As the result, five members (one male and four female) responded and attended the focus group interview, which was conducted and recorded in the same setting where the original group was taking place. All participants in the focus group interview were British and representative of the experience of psychotherapists practising in the UK.

3.6.2. Presentation of demographic information

The current study collected data from interviews with seven participants on a one-to-one basis, and with five participants in the group setting. This can be sufficient for the exploration and comparison of the accounts, without a researcher being overwhelmed by the amount of data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Tables of participants' relevant demographic information are presented in Appendix 8. All names have been anonymised in accordance with participants' limitations of consent. In consultation with the research supervisors, it was decided not to present some details of demographics (e.g. occupation) to preserve confidentiality.

3.7. Procedure

3.7.1. Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of the West of England Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) (see Appendix 11).

3.7.2. Informed consent

According to The Research Ethics Guidebook (2018), an online resource available to social scientists, the standards of respect between the researcher and a participant are established via the consent procedure. The current research was internet-mediated and I needed to ensure that valid consent was given by the participants, to guarantee voluntary and fully informed involvement (BPS, 2017). Before interviews, the research aim and procedures were fully explained in an information sheet (see Appendix 12) and a consent form (see Appendix 13), which participants were asked to read, sign and return via email or post at their convenience.

To establish that participants had properly engaged with valid consent procedures, at the beginning of each interview a verbal cue (reiterating the consent form) was used to confirm consent, which was digitally recorded. Participants' rights, such as their right to withdraw from the research, were included in the information sheet and the consent form (see Appendices 12 and 13). Participants were also informed that they were not obliged to reveal any information they did not wish to. Most participants were experienced, qualified psychotherapists and one was a medical doctor currently undergoing psychotherapy training. All participants had a very good understanding of ethical procedures from their own experiences of conducting research. I also clarified to participants that the final results would be representing my understanding of their reflections.

3.7.3. Right to withdraw

Participants were informed about their right to withdraw in the letter, which contained the information sheet and consent form. If a participant were to decide that he/she wanted to withdraw from the research after completing the interview, they were asked to contact me via email quoting their study code (which they were assigned at the end of the interview). The participants were made aware that there were certain points beyond which it would be impossible to withdraw from the research – for instance, when I had submitted the paper for the conference where the analysis of the data would be reported. The participants were advised to contact me within a month of participation if they wished to withdraw their data.

3.7.4. Confidentiality

Participants were assured that all their personal details would remain strictly confidential. The data was collected between 2015 and 2017. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) the personally identifiable details of the participants were changed, and a study password was assigned to the data. The participants were made aware that they were not obliged to reveal any information they did not wish to. The access to the research data on the computer was restricted by the password, which was known only by me, in line with UWE ethical approval requirements. Personal names were replaced with pseudonyms in all transcriptions. In order to safeguard anonymity, the participants were reassured that all identifiable information would be removed or coded in the written parts of this study. For this reason, some details of demographics (e.g. occupation) and dreams shared during the procedure have been excluded. The full verbatim transcripts of the interviews (individual and group) are also not included in this thesis due to the dream material, that in combination with other interview details, can be identifying.

3.7.5. Overcoming the risks

The processes of risks identification and risk management were initiated and carried out in supervision from the design stage and throughout the course of conducting this research. The population under investigation is represented by psychotherapists who have insight and some degree of resilience to psychological distress due to training and experience of supervision and personal therapy (Tjeltveit and Gottlieb, 2010). The risks associated with the procedure of this research were assessed as relatively low. When qualitative research is conducted with sensitivity and guided by ethics, it becomes a process with benefits to both participants and researchers (Clarke, 2006). However, the current research encouraged participants to engage in reflective practice. This process has a potential to raise uncomfortable and distressing issues (Fisher, Chew and Leow, 2015). Hadjistavropoulos and Smythe (2001) explain that

qualitative research has ‘considerable potential of inducing negative psychological states’ (p.163).

Smythe and Murray (2000) identify one of the reasons for this distress as narrative ownership, i.e. who has control over the interpretation and presentation of data, as an ethical issue for which measures should be taken. Talking about their practice and professional identity, and offering this information for the interpretation of another practitioner could be anxiety provoking. Although the power dynamics might have been reversed in the individual and group interviews as I was less experienced and younger than the participants, this emotional impact, caused by reinterpretation, can still create a sense of undermining the participants’ authority over their own reflections (Hadjistavropoulos and Smythe, 2001). For this reason, I provided in the information letter some details of counselling and crisis support services, and ensured that the participants were welcome to raise any concerns with the research team and/or take them to their supervision.

One of the data collection modes was group interviewing which involved lone working of the researcher in an unfamiliar environment. However, the participants were psychotherapists who represent a low-risk population and the facility where the focus group interview took place was a public establishment with relevant safety arrangements (e.g. security, and health and safety procedures for the building). The research supervisor was informed about the date, time and location of the group. The individual interviews took place online via Skype, with all participants located at their home, and the camera-feed was used to monitor for potential distress. In the case of this occurring, the agreement was made with participants to stop recording and seek help in accordance with the procedure described in the information letter.

At the end of each group/individual interview, participants were thanked for their involvement and reminded about my contact details if they required further information about the study. Upon ending the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to provide further comments and ask questions. All participants wanted to express their appreciation of the interview as they found it insightful and surprisingly interesting in relation to their reflective practice.

3.7.6. Reflection on the ethical dilemmas and decisions

Qualitative research entails exposure to complex and unpredictable experiences (Read *et al.,* 2018). In this section I explore some ethical tensions and personal dilemmas which have emerged for me, as researcher-practitioner, beyond the approval process for this research procedure and arising throughout the research. Read *et al.* (2018) suggested that there are common features in the challenge of thinking and acting ethically as a qualitative researcher,

including ‘striving to maintain integrity and altruism, upholding autonomy in gaining consent and access, balancing protection of vulnerable participants with paternalism, managing multiple roles and power relations and avoiding harm in dissemination of findings’ (p. 74).

In order to grapple with ethical dilemmas and decisions in this study, I utilised my reflexivity. Shacklock and Smyth (1998) described reflexivity as the conscious disclosure of the core beliefs and values held by the researcher when justifying their methodological approach. From the epistemological perspectives of heurism, contemporary critical realism and contextualism, a reflexive approach allows a view of knowledge as developed throughout the research process and dependent upon subjective and situated understandings of reality.

I pursued transparency about my insider/outsider position as a researcher-practitioner, by offering critical insights into my personal ethical dilemmas drawing on the ethical principles of The Research Ethics Guidebook (2018), BPS (2017) as situational ethics (issues arising specific to context in the process of research) (Read *et al.*, 2018).

In situ ethics involved the decision making around the problems that emerged from complex relationships between the participants’ experiences of the research, the shared dreams and the process of sharing. For example, in the interviews participants spoke about their dreams, and/or dreams of their clients and/or colleagues in the context of GDE. In the process of reviewing data, the ethical dilemma about presentation of dreams in the write up emerged. The omission of dream material in the analysis of results and the discussion could have been viewed as a limiting factor. The examples of dreams might have brought a different angle to appreciation of the data, extending the thinking about the transaction between the conscious and the unconscious of the participants, the researcher and the readers of the thesis.

Nevertheless, there were also several reasons that moved me towards the decision of excluding the dream material from this thesis. The dreams in the data were considered as giving very specific details of the participants’ identity that had a quality of ‘fingerprints’ of the people who volunteered for this study and are known in the field of psychology due to their work legacy and/or current professional contributions.

Furthermore, during the interviews I noticed the frequent occurrence of an associative chain of dreams from GDE, where some material was from the participants in this research, and some was representing the dreams of other people shared in the original groups: talking about dreams from GDE meant talking spontaneously about other people’s dreams. In response to this observation in combination with the concern about ‘dream fingerprints’, I did not want to assume chain confidentiality. Instead, I decided to follow the researcher-practitioner gut feeling and stay on the side of caution.

Read *et al.* (2018) suggested that ethical dilemmas can continue beyond the study with dissemination of the findings as a part of the research process. One of my participants spoke about a challenging experience of making dreams shared in a group, public via publication of the results from research. Despite the precautions integrated into the design of his study, the participants experienced a lot of unease as a group. In reflecting on this material, I considered the possibility that the dissemination of dreams from GDE via research might have a potential to become a form of social intervention. In order to approach ethically this potentiality, I identified the need to present specific dreams from GDE via an attuned procedure, the design of which would have required a separate research process that would lie beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I developed an ethical exit from this research that enabled confidentiality as an outcome for all involved by not using dream material in the write up.

The principles of beneficence, non-maleficence and integrity guided this research process. I balanced these principles from the initial approval through to completion of the study and beyond by applying a reflexive approach. Through sharing my reflections and insights I hoped to raise awareness, not only of the challenges of conducting research into GDE ethically, but also of its value when conducted in a thoughtful and reflexive manner.

3.7.7. Transcription

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. In line with confidentiality considerations, real names were replaced with pseudonyms, and place names were replaced with an indication of the type of place (e.g. part of England) or blanked out. Non-verbal expressions or body language were not recorded consistently in the transcripts, although occasionally expressions such as laughing were noted.

3.7.8. Data analysis

The themes have been identified in a data-driven, 'bottom-up' way, on the basis of what is present in the data. This approach has been used to develop a detailed account of the phenomenon of GDE and its implications for psychotherapists. The responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using experiential TA in accordance with the procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2013). The six interconnected phases, described below, facilitated the systematic identification, interpretation and reporting of the salient features of the data.

First, familiarisation with the data was facilitated by each repeated reading of the transcripts. During this stage, any potentially interesting items related to the research question were noted. Comprehensive examination of the transcripts, and making unfocused annotations and comments, allowed me to become familiar with, and at the same time to step back from, the

whole data set. Willig (2012) suggests that noticing particular expressions over others should be viewed as an act of interpretation in itself. Supervision to discuss associations present in the data was particularly useful, helping me to remain grounded in the participants' words, as opposed to my own subjective lens.

Second, the important features in the data were manually coded using concise phrases (see Appendix 14).

Third, the data was migrated to the computer by using the software programme for qualitative data analysis, NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2016). This was done to help me take a different perspective, changing tangible and yet limited interaction with paper transcripts, to a more 'in-the-mind' point of view, with the benefit of a continued and intricate electronic processing. At this point I also had an opportunity to reflect on my ability to see beyond the words on paper page or screen of the computer. I acknowledged the dynamic space between me and the data as I was aware that I was the interviewer, the transcriber and the coder. This meant that parallel to the words, I could recall the non-verbal expressions of the participants and my own sense of the interview experience. In recognising my subjectivity and the participants' diversity during the process of coding (manual and computer) I was guided by my integrative epistemology based on heuristic inquiry, contextualism and critical realism.

Fourth, the codes were methodically reviewed in the electronic format (NVivo) to identify resemblance between them, such as frequent topics or issues, and significant broader patterns of meaning to form potential themes (see Appendix 15). Following this, analysis was conducted, involving organisation and interpretation of the data with the help of manually produced codes from the second stage. The data from each interview was electronically coded into a narrowed-down selection of emergent themes, which were scrutinised for thematic similarities. Each transcript was treated on its own terms, so the influence of earlier data could be minimised. Additionally, a table of the main themes, sub-themes and features was created that effectively captured the participants' experiences (see Table 1 in Chapter 4). Here, priority was given to themes considered as specific to GDE. Thus, the chosen themes were concerned GDE in all of the contexts revealed in the data.

Fifth, the scope and focus of each theme were analysed in detail. The analysis was conducted within the frameworks of heuristic inquiry, contextualism and critical realism, which aim to elicit and describe the experience, meanings and participants' perception of reality. Consequently, themes were identified at a semantic level and reflected the explicit content of the data (e.g. they mirrored participants' language and concepts). All themes were illustrated and evidenced through verbatim extracts from the original interview transcripts.

The final, sixth phase of analysis involved contextualising the analysis of the themes in relation to existing literature.

The quality and validity of the data analysis in this research were established by applying the principles of 'open-ended, flexible' quality, developed by Yardley (2017): a) sensitivity to context, b) commitment and rigour, c) transparency and coherence and d) impact and importance. The applications of these guidelines to this research are described further in Appendix 16.

3.8. Summary of the Key Points from Methodology

This research project was encouraged by autobiographical interest and relevancy to Counselling psychology research and practice, as well as the recognition of underrepresentation of the topic of GDE in psychology literature in general. The epistemological assumptions for this research corresponded with heuristic inquiry, contextualism and critical realism. They enabled the integration of knowledge about the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams, in the context of complexity associated with the research question about the psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

The research was designed with the consideration of insider/outsider perspective and evolved around the integration of the three types of subjective experience: personal and cultural, professional clinical, and professional organisational (as illustrated in Figure 2). As a qualitative researcher I view myself as a medium for the production of an understanding, with the addition of an interpretative element as a part of an interactive process. I adopt a position of a broad understanding, applying flexible methodology that caters for both a very diverse data set and the aim of this research to explore the diversity of GDE. I used semi-structured interviews with the assumption that conversation is more likely to evoke natural sharing of the lived experience (Coolican, 2001). I used reflexivity to consider the power relationships during the data collection process. The qualitative data from face-to-face and Skype interviews with experts, individual psychotherapists and a group of practitioners, the consistent reflective process and a comprehensive literature review allowed me to extend the awareness of different perspectives on GDE. An interview schedule was created following the research question, the literature around the topic and findings from the pilot interviews. It aimed to facilitate conversation with the participants about their GDE. These procedures helped to refine and then address the research question.

The sampling was focused on qualified practising psychotherapists who had been exposed to dream sharing and/or dream work for over 3 years after qualifying. The participants were

recruited from available online databases of established multicultural psychotherapeutic networks, using convenience sampling. Most participants had experience of GDE in both capacities – as a participant and as a facilitator. These factors were potentially important for the current study as a contribution to the holistic overview of GDE.

The research process has incorporated standard risk management, ethics procedures as well as in situ ethics to follow the best research practice and to respond to challenges emergent from the complexity of GDE. The careful refining of the research question went hand in hand with developing a more specific and situated ethical stance.

TA, theorised by Clarke *et al.* (2015), was considered to be a method which can satisfy a need for theoretical freedom and for the integration of diverse knowledge demanded by the research question. The themes have been identified in a data-driven, bottom-up way, on the basis of what is present in the data. Following six interconnected phases, described by Braun and Clarke (2013), a detailed account of the phenomenon of GDE was developed. The systematic identification, interpretation and reporting of the salient features of the data led to manual and computerised theme processing, which resulted in both visual and linguistic representations being used to answer the research question in an accessible way.

The quality and validity of the data analysis in this research was established by applying the principles of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (Yardley, 2017). As a consequence of adopting these strategies, the ways in which the research question is answered are transparent.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis

During the entire process of data collection and data analysis, I strived to find a middle ground between the voices of my participants and my voice as a researcher-practitioner, while mediating the complexity of the shared experience of the research encounters and my individual capacity to analyse it. Throughout this process I was fully aware of the challenges associated with the presentation of highly-textured interviews. The language used was a major limitation as most participants themselves struggled to describe their experience in a coherent way. After engaging with the data over time, I reflected on my general sense that the participants were doing their best to convey verbally what is yet to be known to them. The transcripts were full of hazy language of dreams or a stream of consciousness. It was curious to look at the most frequently used words across all data by utilising NVivo 12. The words 'dream' and 'group' were at the top of the list as anticipated. The next two most frequent words were 'know' and 'something'. This corresponds with what I think I observed – the identification of the participants with a role of knower of something undefined. I had to grapple with this complication, as 'knowing of something' was seeping through different dimensions of experiences. Furthermore, there was a sense of strong socialisation into GDE where all participants thought about it in relation to themselves, simultaneously converting this thinking into language to share it with me.

To manage this, I aimed to stay in the moment and allow flexibility and open-mindedness. Engagement with each task (e.g. data collection and its transcription, using manual and digital ways of processing data) meant that I was just concerned with the task, without holding a preconceived idea about the data. As I was entering the process of meaning emergence, I did not know what the information would be, nor how it would be generated. Naturally, this was giving rise to some of my anxieties, as well as excitement and a sense of freedom. Furthermore, the continuous engagement in reflection on the data as a whole and its specific fractions, meant that I could transit into and from deeper data analysis as well as my personal experience of it. For example, when approaching transcripts, which were all formed from the lengthy or ambiguous narratives, I would visit them grouped in different categories (in NVivo files and on paper cards) and on their own. I would listen to them to get in touch with my sense-making that happened during the actual interviews and reflect on how I viewed them now. This required a paradoxical functioning – being flexible, open to free flow and at the same time containing, retaining, and condensing. Therefore, reading this chapter also requires some degree of openness and flexibility with regards to the fluctuation of clarity and detail, as both of these characteristics are difficult to sustain when complexity is approached. Here I will try

to demonstrate to the best of my ability the retracing and reconstruction of a path towards the intricacy of GDE.

4.1. Overview of Findings

I have three major findings relating to GDE and its implications for psychotherapists. My arguments in support of these findings were based on raw data from two major data sources: individual interviews and a focus group interview (see 3.4. Data Collection). The grounds for the findings were apparent in both data sources, demonstrating what Hinshelwood (2013, p. 146) called 'a convergence of meaning'. They were also consistent with my underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions (see Chapter 3). While participants offered their own individual experiences for the research consideration, I found enough consistency to put forward the following three findings:

1. In-action GDE might be an experience felt in a moment of group dream sharing and dream work; it might have negative and positive connotations and can be associated with accessing unconscious processes.

2. On-action GDE can be associated with a lingering residue of the experience of group dream sharing and dream work that might have some implications for both individual and communal levels of psychotherapists' experiences.

3. GDE as a whole (that might be bigger than the sum of its aspects – in-action and on-action GDE) - that might have implications for meaning-making and Professional Maturation of psychotherapists.

The aspects of GDE described above were distinguished as the result of overseeing the whole data set across time – the privilege that I, as a researcher, held in this qualitative enquiry. This differentiation considered subtle differences of the experiences, depending where they were situated in time and space in the participants' lives, with the acknowledgement of the potential 'superposition' of all three aspects.

During interviews it became apparent to me that the participants and I were sharing awareness of something invisible, difficult to describe, similar to dreaming itself. I noticed that some of the participants were expressing more of their thoughts regarding in-action GDE, some were talking more about on-action GDE and some offered more material regarding GDE as a whole. However, as I reflected on each interview as a research event, I noticed the presence of all three aspects with varying amounts of time and words dedicated to them by the participants. I acknowledged this uneven distribution in the process of

selecting quotes for the illustration of analytical inferences. Although this is a curious occurrence, its full consideration can be a topic for the follow-up enquiry. In the current project I aimed to explore and make first steps to developing a narrative about GDE of psychotherapists. Therefore, at this stage it was important for me to prioritise the description of the variety of experiences. Nevertheless, I could not ignore the cumulative sense that I developed through the systematic review of the three main themes that was threading through my data. The idea that language might have been some sort of filter with a capacity to enable or restrict the attempts of the participants to describe their experiences of GDE, has become more prominent to me. Language in this research process was the only way to process experiences. When I was summarising my findings, I noticed that I, myself, gravitated to more symbolic and pictorial ways of expression in order to represent the three aspects of GDE, such as diagrams (see Figure 4). Hence, I held to the action word of *expression* in my analysis, so this openness regarding the ways it can be done was maintained.

Themes development involved different iterations where I engaged with data on linguistic and non-linguistic levels. I processed the transcripts manually and in the computer-assisted way (see 3.7.8. Data analysis) developing visual expressions of themes. For example, in Figures 4, 5 and 6 I utilised my visual capacity that helped me to heuristically 'map' or image the themes and a set of relationships between them (represented by shapes and colours) that have also been 'worked at' linguistically via thematic analysis. Given that part of my background is as an artist, I acknowledge that, this level of processing proved significant, the more so for summative moments such as the overall thematic summary expressed in Figure 4. I also hoped that such illustrations will enhance the accessibility to the complex information that I gathered and attempted to interpret during this research.

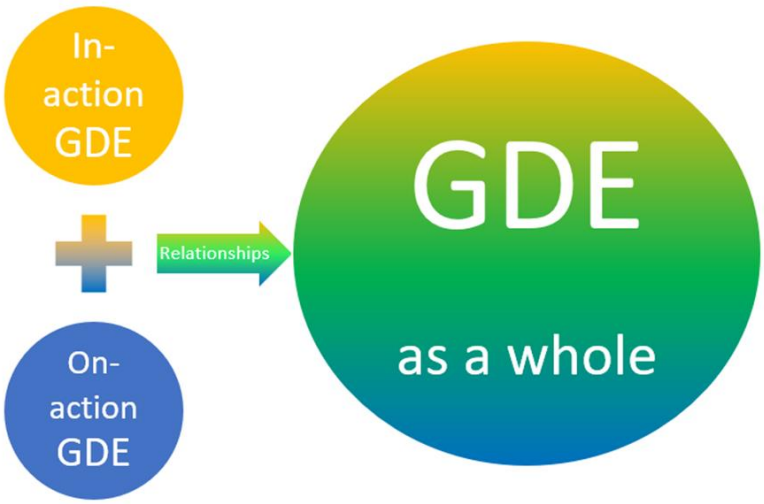

Figure 4. The three aspects of GDE

The analysis of the data set identified three main themes with a number of sub-themes emerging within each theme (see Table 1). This chapter will present a descriptive overview of each theme and its sub-themes, combined with analysis of some linguistic elements. The findings and the concepts extrapolated from them are then interpreted and discussed further in Chapter 5. These results present different aspects of participants' experiences and draw attention to similarities and variances in narratives. The reflections presented in this chapter are not an exhaustive analysis of the whole volume of data. The choice of examples was driven by prioritising the experiences that were specific to GDE.

Direct quotations from transcripts are presented in italics and used to evidence and illustrate findings (see Appendix 17). Some of the examples are quite lengthy. One reason for choosing them is to compensate for the absence (due to confidentiality issues) of the full verbatim transcripts. Another reason is the characteristics of some narratives that are impossible to shorten without compromising their meaning. This is due to the expressive style of some participants and ambiguity of the experience they are trying to describe.

Table 1. Main Findings: super-ordinate themes and sub-themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Sub-themes
1. In-action GDE (felt in the moment of group dream sharing)	1.1. Accessing the unconscious
	1.2. The Dark Side of GDE
	1.3. The Bright Side of GDE
2. On-action GDE (lingering residue of experiences after group dream sharing)	2.1. Implications of GDE on the individual level of psychotherapists' experiences
	2.2. Implications of GDE on the communal level of psychotherapists' experiences
3. GDE as a whole (that might be bigger than the sum of its aspects – in-action and on-action GDE)	3.1. Making sense of exposure to GDE
	3.2. Professional Maturation

4.2. The Near-theory Metaphor

In the pursuit of expression during the data analysis and theme identification, ideas from theoretical physics and astronomy, such as nebulae and black holes, were applied in the form of analogy. Although they were helpful in articulation of the information, they should not be viewed literally in the context of this research.

A nebula is a thinly spread cloud of interstellar gas and dust (NASA, 2017). This cosmic phenomenon can represent both birth (the formation of new stars) and death (supernova explosion) in the Universe. Nebulae are generally classified as bright or dark. Among the bright nebulae are cold clouds that reflect light from nearby stars (reflection nebulae) and hot, ionised clouds that glow with their own light (emission nebulae). Dark nebulae are cold clouds that absorb the passing light from background stars (absorption nebulae) (American Heritage Dictionary, 2005).

The nebula metaphor applied to GDE can illustrate the dynamism of the rise and collapse of the meaning in the interstellar of the unknown within the Fabric of Complexity and psychosocial infinity. The Dark Side of GDE might have absorbing capacity (similar to Bion's minus emotion) and the Bright Side might be able to reflect or emit the meaning and knowledge.

A dark nebula as a type of interstellar cloud is so dense that it obscures the visible wavelengths of light from objects behind it, such as background stars and other emission or reflection nebulae. The Dark Side of GDE might be compared to the dark nebula, where the density of discomfort, tension, unease, ambiguity and ambivalence makes it difficult to recognise the light elements beyond these states. The knowledge about the existence of the Bright Side of GDE might allow one to see beyond the Dark Side. This knowledge can be obtained through 'looking into' GDE, or in other words, exploration through exposure. Over time this process might 'extend' the 'vision beyond', the vision that is mature and antifragile.

As I, myself, struggled with the expression in this thesis, which was entirely dependent on words, I expanded my investigation of the linguistic nature of the term 'nebulous'. It prompted me to look into the language of astrophysics to aid my writing. A nebula can be a sign of a collapsing star in the universe that can generate a black hole (NASA, 2017). It was curious to notice how this concept was metaphorically close to the collapse of a meaning, which was felt by the practitioners when they were talking about the moments of sharing dreams in a group and their struggle to express their experience with words. It might be speculated that the

language may be a detectable sign of how complex, viscerally-felt meaning can crumble, while generating the black hole of GDE. This might also explain the moments of frustration when the individuals, who attempted this expression, felt misunderstood or misread by the group.

To conclude, the Dark Side and Bright Side of GDE can be metaphorically compared to the dark and bright nebulae in the Universe. The complexity of GDE itself might be similar to the phenomenon of the black hole, which is difficult to describe, but the presence of nebulae (or Dark Side and Bright Side) can indicate the proximity to it, as well as its existence in the individual and group experiences of people.

4.3. Super-ordinate Theme 1. In-action GDE

In-action GDE was experienced by psychotherapists in the moment of group dream sharing and dream work. It had negative and positive connotations and was associated with accessing unconscious processes. In-action GDE was mentioned by all participants, but the amount of attention dedicated to it varied in each interview. Psychotherapists spoke about their awareness and sensations felt during the engagement with the dream and the group or, in other words, in the midst of an action. GDE was described as something that decreased mental separation from the underlying Fabric of Complexity, allowing individuals to access its elements in the moment. GDE was felt by the participants as something dynamic and in-action. It might be said that it was a constituent part of a flow of what was happening in that time and space. My experience of some participants, when they were talking about in-action GDE, was as if they were sharing with me their state of enchantment, trance or dreaming – the states where the complexity edged in.

4.3.1. Sub-theme 1.1. Accessing the unconscious

In-action GDE was associated with a sense of accessing unconscious elements (thoughts, feelings, images etc.) which belong to the individuals and to the group. These elements would gather, thicken and bounce from one to another during the group interaction with a dream. Here I have tried to demonstrate how the participants talked about accessing the unconscious in the moment of group dream sharing and dream work.

All participants in some way or another emphasised the dynamism of this process where access is a momentary point of awareness of something intangible. For example, Ella, from the focus group, spoke with enthusiasm about her experience of group dream sharing as a '*mind gym*' where the '*unconscious muscle is exercised*', without full individual awareness, leading to an increase in vocabulary and creativity. She described her sense of '*practising as*

opposed to fixing', '*taking part and going with the flow*' as opposed to *'knowing how to do it'*. She emphasised the significance of accessing the unconscious through GDE: '*this is possibly the most useful thing that the person can be doing*'.

Caroline stressed that once a dream is shared in the group it belongs to everyone, opening the entrance to the unconscious which begins to trickle into the group through the personal experiences of its members. The enactment of the dream might expose them to the multiple probabilities of meanings, widening the window for the unconscious as well as allowing it to accumulate:

> *I feel that once a dream is brought into a group it belongs to everyone; each person has their own image and feeling, influenced by their own history and associations. I may ask people to say 'if this was my dream'. I also ask the dreamer to tell the dream slowly with a lot of detail, in the present tense. I have had people role play different aspects of the dream. It's a bit like play where the dream is something that group interacts with.* Caroline

Jason also explained his experience of becoming aware of how the unconscious accumulates around the dream in the group in a dynamic act and how articulation of group sense and individual sense of unconscious material becomes possible in this moment with some facilitation. He shared his belief that the individuals tend to determine directionality, shed complexity, and evade the accumulation of the unconscious, in favour of conscious thinking. In-action GDE allows, in contrast, these functions of the individual consciousness to be bypassed:

> *I don't think if it wasn't based on dreams then that it would happen because, what the basing it on dreams does, it bypasses or makes it much easier to bypass, erm the kind of … what you might call the ego functions.* Jason

As Jason immersed further into thinking, I noticed his hesitations, when he referred to the known-to-him theoretical terms for naming his experience. He slowed down his speech as if he entered a dream-like state, which seemed to be essential to enable his expression:

> *Ego-consciousness, I mean in Jungian terms, you might call it Apollonic thinking or Apollonic errr ways of being erm, ways of involving yourself in the world and, err, so that your engagement is is much less… is not so directed by some kind of notion of where you're trying to get to, because you have your idea of where the group is trying erm to get to so your kind of directionality if you like is irrelevant er.* Jason

Carlo, just like Jason, slowed down in the process of his reflection. However, instead of theoretical terms he used metaphors to talk about ambiguity, which resembled sharing of wisdom. Furthermore, metaphors seemed to also serve a purpose of a 'short cut' through the limitation of the language. Carlo viewed the dream as a possibility to connect to the shared unconscious. He spoke of '*the net*' to describe the capacity of a dream in the group, which allows free movement between individual and shared unconscious. '*The net*' is containing, separating, and providing exit and entry points for the individual mind to experience the immersion in the gathered unconscious that is dynamic and not final:

> *You want to fly a little bit, or you know, then or you want to, for example, now I see every dream as metaphor for a net, I am like a fish or like a batch of fishes in a net that still, I would like swim, and perhaps like that and I can go through the holes of the net - that's my idea… the dream is the possibility.* Carlo

Dante also acknowledged the sense of movement. He pointed out that in the process of group dream sharing and dream work, through the unconscious, the psychotherapist might '*move towards understanding on the individual and group level*'. Hence, accessing the individual and shared unconscious in one place highlighted for Dante the dynamism of mutual influence or overlap that he noticed in the components of complexity.

The dynamic unconscious for Janet was visible in the act of restoration. She noticed that during dream sharing it was possible to re-establish fractured connections between individual unconscious minds:

> *There was something about trying to make a way of reconnecting that would enable us both to be able to talk to each other during a time where our relationship was a bit fractured*. Janet

In-action GDE for Dave also was associated with moving through the unconscious:

> *That for me is something that, you know, which reaches across, in that sense, there's something.*

There was an emergent sense of the infinite potential in the accessing and moving between the individual and shared unconscious that is described by some participants. For example, Dante explained that dream comprehension can open '*the possibility of mind*' – something that is not static and not the end point:

So, you can really amplify your thought and you can explore at the edge of the sense of infinity. Dante

Accessing the unconscious via in-action GDE was described by some participants as the process of awareness that became broader, deeper, or denser as it absorbed human life represented in the dream, the individual and the group converging in that moment in time:

I guess I'd say it's about thickening up it's about enriching my awareness of er the whole of me, us, this as a as er er as the business of living of, is not just the business of living it's the business of being aware of the living that we're doing. Jason

Most interview participants in their unique way referred to the unconscious that is independent and needs space where it can be accessed. Participants' GDE seemed to accommodate these conditions. Furthermore, this process was free of application – it happened in a natural way: in-action. For example, the access to the '*autonomous psyche*' was spoken about in the focus group by the participants who seemed to share a moment of fascination with their collective recognition of this experience.

Furthermore, the connection to the shared unconscious was linked by some participants to the concept of social culture. All participants in some way spoke about accumulation of the universal lived experiences in the moment of dream sharing and dream work. It might be said that GDE was viewed as a portal where an individual gives up a solitary state in favour of attraction to a bigger whole:

In working with my dreams in a group is the awareness that dreaming is not only a private solitary experience belonging to the individual, but resonates with wider dynamics of the social system that individuals find themselves in. Mike

Because you can amplify and you can really create more connection and a new formal culture, personal culture or social view, so that's the way I consider an anthropological point of view, a part of a new experience in psychotherapy. Dante

I think that it might enhance the the experience in the group the depth and the being able to access unconscious material and that the group culture. Janet

Groups were experienced by some participants as one and as a constellation of multiple. Dream sharing was often viewed as the generator of these experiences. Although the encounters felt new each time, the culture (a collection of shared ideas, customs, and social behaviours) in each meeting seemed to be recreated consistently. For example, a culture of

acceptance of the ambivalence towards the unconscious – a mixture of negative and positive attitudes – was evident in the focus group. As each member offered their contributions, I experienced them holding this ambivalence and mutually agreeing on it in a subtle way, giving eye contact, laughing together etc. It is difficult to illustrate this effectively with words from the transcript. The participants were talking about their diverse experience of the unconscious in the moment of dream sharing and sending each other non-verbal signals. One of these moments was a discussion of the possibility of a random person appearing in the group unexpectedly, and how the group might feel as if a character from their dreams (‘*the pig’)* had joined them. The interplay of light and heavy unconscious processing was resembling play with dream images. This play was recurrent throughout the discussion, just like a ritual based on shared belief that this is a useful and tolerable experience ‘for their kind’ – the psychotherapists – as the representatives of a particular professional culture.

Some participants spoke about the psychotherapist’s role to encourage people to be curious about the unconscious – to want to be in touch with it. Dave spoke about his role as facilitator in the moment of group dream sharing where he found himself being a part of the process which ‘*relaxed the group into unconscious*’. With a smile on his face, he talked about holding this awareness as a ‘*lovely life-affirming kind of human experience’*.

Clara also felt positive as she noticed the reduction of the shared anxiety as her group became more open to the unconscious. She clarified that it was due to ‘*allowing the influence from all directions*’.

Moving between the individual and shared unconscious was considered as essential for professional work. For example, Janet spoke about this flexibility to access the unconscious being exercised by the therapists in GDE, resulting in them being able to see the accumulated unconscious in other contexts, such as daydreams and aspects of the individual’s internal world:

> *That’s part of my role, it’s it’s to encourage people to be curious about what’s going on unconsciously and what’s going on consciously and I think dreams are real kind of window into something that, that can be very useful, erm […] I don’t know, maybe, maybe it’s about something … the flexibility to, you know, deal with everything that the individual brings, to deal with whatever the individual brings whether it’s dream or a daydream, or any aspect of the internal world is useful and it’s what we, it’s what I feel is absolutely an essential part of the work.* Janet

Some participants acknowledged that GDE allowed them to approach their own individual unconscious and expand their awareness. They reflected on in-action GDE as something that was helping them to see different dimensions of the unconscious. For example, Dante talked about being more informed about his personal unconscious tendencies and being more accepting of others:

> *First of all, I can say that it's a good way even if you're a psychotherapist, you know, so it means more defensive thoughts I mean as a person I can I can accept more and better the others.* Dante

For Jason, GDE reinforced the sense of reality of the unconscious. In his reflection he acknowledged the shift from the individual unconscious into '*a stream of unconscious*' that is not just his, wondering where it is taking him. It seemed as if Jason was transported into the moment when this movement was happening and he was slowly attaching words to what was relived in-action:

> *It has done what it does do is it reinforces my sense of err, err, the,* [pause] *I was going to say importance but also the reality of, erm, of of* [pause] *unconscious erm,* [pause]*, erm, what would you say the unconscious something like that you know it's a thought. I, I, I might have dreams and think actually they're not my dreams I'm not I'm having a dream it's more a dream is happening and it has some, it's like the I'm caught up in it in some way, is a subtle shift of perspective is not so much the dreaming me is experiencing something and wondering what that means is more that my sense of myself, how do you put this in is like the the the centre of gravity of who I am shifts so it's not away from my conscious er ideas about who I am and what I wanna do, what kind of life I have, to I am a life being lived and I wonder where the hell it's taking me*. Jason

Carlo spoke about his sense of following the group thought, relying on the group in the process of acknowledging that the interpretation is not important as the group is in charge of accessing the unconscious, which is so different from the individually-focused dyad work:

> *It's not very important, the interpretation of the groups as you do in a in the classic setting, in the dual setting, so it's something that belongs to the group and is processed by that group.* Carlo

Carlo recalled his observation of how an individual's dreams dip in and out of a shared unconscious. Furthermore, he noticed that a group seems to invite the dreams of the

individuals. By using the metaphor of a net, he described the dream as a connective substance between these realms of the individual and shared unconscious. He proposed that '*through imagination the emotional distance and connection between people are adjusted*'.

Dave used the concept of *'a group mind*' to talk about accessing shared unconscious processes in the moment of GDE. He described a shift of awareness from individual into a group mind which he associated with *'real growth'*. His sense of reality was stimulated by multiplicity. He talked about his expanding awareness of something bigger and more universal. Dave also introduced the term '*meta-movement*' – moving between as well as beyond the individual and group unconscious, that is viewed by him as a counteracting force to *'silo mind'*.

In Janet's experience of in-action GDE '*a group mind*' also spoke through the individual. She explained that over time this experience is more noticeable:

> *… It is quite strange, you begin to feel like the group is speaking through the mouth of the individual even though what they're saying erm, and this feeling even you know what they're saying is, you know, coming out of their own personal experience or thoughts and as the group continues either on the one occasion on certainly over a period of time um that sense get stronger.* Janet

Both Janet and Dave entertained an idea of connection that unconscious processes seem to create between the individual and the group when dreams are shared. Dave attempted to explain this as a tendency of the individual mind to think, and the group mind to engage with more direct experience of the world, especially through dreaming:

> *The mind has the tendency to, whatever mind is, you have this tendency to thinking, thinking, thinking and behind that is a much more direct experience of the world. What you might call dreaming or the dreaming or something, so it's a group-based way of doing that.* Dave

To summarise, in-action GDE seemed to be associated by the participants with diverse processes of accessing the unconscious. The sense of transiting through and reaching out to something that is bigger than an individual and infinite in nature, was often mentioned in this context. In the lived moment of GDE the elements of complexity seemed to overlap, allowing psychotherapists to access their own and shared unconscious realities, reinforcing their awareness of both. The participants viewed dreams as an important component for this experience to take place.

4.3.2. Sub-theme 1.2. The Dark Side of GDE

In-action GDE was characterised by the participants' continuous experience of polarised psychological happenings during group dream sharing and dream work. The Dark Side of GDE was associated with discomfort, tension, unease, ambiguity and ambivalence. For example, Dave reflected on his experience of both positive connectivity and frustrating distancing of a dream from the personal elements:

> *…with ambivalence sometimes because ... I've just kind of said a lovely kind of flowery isn't it lovely this connective thing but equally it can sometimes, it can feel as if you do have a dream that feels personal to you, a dream and then it's taken up in a different direction with someone else's associations or links or um.* Dave

He also spoke about his uncertainty felt in the moment of GDE regarding his ability *'to hold not-knowing, curious space'*. In his reflection he emphasised the increase of exposure to this experience as something that might mitigate this discomfort:

> *I am kind of ambivalent about it anyway, so how much can you hold that not knowing that openly and you have experiences of, and er and I think the more experiences you have with that the backbone you kind of feel around holding that kind of not knowing, curious space which is really important to me in that sense.* Dave

Furthermore, Dave acknowledged the anxiety, which is competing for the facilitator's mind space in the moment of GDE, and which is triggered by the ambivalence towards dream sharing experience felt by group members:

> *My mind or at least a chunk of my mind is taken up with the managing the anxiety of holding it together with a bunch of people who are ambivalent about it.* Dave

Janet also pointed out the ambivalent feeling in an individual and in the group in the moment of dream sharing, where positive and negative feelings are blended into an experience of discomfort and unease. The individual is stepping forward exposing something sinister and evocative via a dream, and at the same time managing personal fear, temptation, and curiosity. The group was resonating this:

> *….she was both horrified and also a little bit tantalised by her dream wondering what it was about […] but the group the group was a little bit kind of fascinated and appalled at the same time and a little bit shocked that somebody, you know, whose external presentation is quite kind of gentle to have such a violent dream about the group*. Janet

As Janet spoke about this example, I noticed she was stopping to think. It felt as if she was conspicuously bringing attention to the memories about a moment which had been immobilising for everyone back then. This momentum might have been also a place where group members approached the unknown and instinctively reorganised their reactions to it. Janet talked about the state of gambling and taking risks as a step that individuals in the group might take by sharing their dreams in order to reduce the duress of the unknown:

> *I felt really, the group to think about that individual's dream, and what it meant and what it meant in her taking the gamble of bringing something very personal.* Janet

The sense of risk-taking was also conveyed by Jason, who defined the engagement with the unknown during SDM as '*a leap of faith*'. Part of this risk Jason placed on his hope that people in the group will not personalise what is emergent in the moment.

Janet emphasised the personal element in the dream as something that felt recognisable to her. As she immersed herself in the thinking about the group reactions, she reflected on later developments where a sinister dream was viewed as some sort of premonition for group actions – something that might have been channelled and expressed through the individual psyche. It was as if the personal was a default starting point for the sense-making in GDE - the personal content in the dream was 'known enough' to launch into thinking about the complexity that is shared. This automatic position (the individual content as a starting point) was more noticeable in the narratives of those participants who were not involved with Social Dreaming.

The subtle transformation in thinking of the participants became noticeable to me in the instances where they were talking about the unknown and about the discomfort that it might bring to the individual and the group. For example, Carlo, an experienced facilitator of psychodynamic groups, acknowledged that the unknown is scary and that in its presence safety is desired. However, in the process of the interview, on several occasions he affirmed the normality of this experience and suggested viewing it as a sign of engagement with unconscious material:

> *Whenever you say something that you don't really know what can it mean or when you say something that you don't know exactly where it will lead you so you are a little bit afraid but it's not about the relationship with the others participants but it is about the thinking itself and so when you get in touch with something we can call the unconscious or we can call all that's beyond you, you are a little bit afraid or scared, that's normal and it's not in <u>your</u> dreams only.* Carlo

According to Carlo, when you do not know the meaning of dreams you also cannot anticipate their connectivity and where it might lead the mind. The fear of the unknown is not unique to group dream sharing or group dream work, so it can be viewed by the practitioners as normal. Jason also spoke about the normality of not knowing what is going to happen and defined it as a common life occurrence, with dreams in the groups being one of those life events. Furthermore, he emphasised that it is normal for humans to feel not safe and that the discomfort of group dream sharing can be compared to the one-to-one work between a therapist and a client where the unknown generates similar experiences:

> *I don't actually think therapy is safe in a sense that you know it's painful, it hurts and you're never quite sure how you're going to be thought of or what or how people are going to respond to you*. Jason

I listened to Carlo and Jason (practitioners from different cultures, different generations, different schools of thought on group dream sharing and group dream work, interviewed separately at different times) stressing this normality again and again. It felt as if they were in the moment of reflection managing the emergence of discomfort by normalising and therefore reminding themselves of their own capacity to tolerate it, exercising their own resilience. Carlo spoke about keeping calm when catching himself not understanding something during the group dream sharing. He also linked this to patience and the effort not to try to understand - the experiences that were associated with discomfort:

> *10 or 15 dreams and of course it's quite difficult to get or even to remember all of them and so I think that I have to to wait and try not to understand.* Carlo

Dave identified a '*lurch moment*' in the process of group engagement with the idea of dream sharing. He talked about stumbling in the moment when the first dream enters the group. He described apprehension and anxiety linked to the experience of being on '*the cliff edge', 'jumping into unknown', 'oblivion'* – the process that, if it begins, will have a certain sense of fast moving development. Dave confessed that he had '*not yet had a bad experience with it*', but there was instinctual trepidation just about detectable in this admission.

Dave spoke about the experience of exposure to the unknown that suddenly dawned on him as he felt he had been *'parachuted'*, *'dropped'* into it. Furthermore, in the group, instead of the sense of facing it, there was a more overwhelming experience of being surrounded by it. In parallel to this internal state, he found himself witnessing the group enduring being in the midst of the unknown too: '*a whole bunch of people, kind of, sat there and wondering why they are doing that*'. He used a metaphor of a '*cooking pot in the middle*' to describe this experience:

I think where it becomes difficult it's the recent example where this kind of dreaming cooking pot in the middle of the room is just screaming stuff everywhere in a sense you know. Dave

This interaction with the unknown was felt as independent from the facilitator and as a semi-safe process. When this occurred in the group, Dave recounted a sense of containment parallel to the container spilling out the intensity. He spoke of his alertness combined with the acceptance that he needs to '*let it cook'*.

Dave reflected on SDM as a method of exposing the unknown, which can lead to a burst of emotions shared in a group as well as a shift to soothing and repair of '*the wreck*':

As I said it kind of bursts after an hour and, and everybody got really upset and then everybody suits each other. Dave

This was a particularly interesting example as Dave was talking about a group of psychotherapists that he facilitated. The state of long-term distress was ingrained in this group and seemed to spill out through dreams. He, as a facilitator, struggled to manage the fast moving, messy process:

They've been in a state of flux and lots of stuff around that, and that was all the dreaming, and it's there this dreamlike kind of old figure like coming in, getting ill, disappearing and a lot of distress, lot of messiness lots of incontinence in the dreams and stuff like that and and and the dreaming session was just, you know, it was hard to put a brake on it, you know it was free-flowing and associations, lots of links. Dave

Everyone in this group, according to Dave, reached a point when they felt a need for a break from the intensity. It was as if the group wanted to rest from dreams:

And we all know it and we, we're all in it and relating to it together and then we kind of put the lid back on and have a break and no one wants to kind of think about the pot being there or let alone kind of take the lid off, and just see, seeing what's in there, in a sense, and that's okay too. Dave

Dave found himself in solidarity with the group and acknowledging the shared exhaustion. It was interesting to notice a similar experience described in the focus group interview where the participants talked about the illusion that GDE stops when the group pause the intensity of group dream sharing. Actually, it keeps 'cooking' during the break but there is the real world

that is distracting and slowing it down, ‘cooling it down’. Dave also spoke about de-escalation via the group gravitating to the dream-like activity (mindfulness) of looking after each other.

When I was listening to Dave and the focus group explaining this continuation of GDE, I had a strong sense of déjà vu. What they were describing felt similar to an incident of dream sharing in the personal and professional development group during my training. I remembered myself alongside other trainees and the facilitator being left puzzled and startled by it. Within our training program throughout five years there was no space or content related to the experience of group dream sharing and dream work, which could have helped us to make sense of it, and yet we were continuing to engage in the same group as a mandatory activity. After the interviews, I wondered if I was in touch with something that resembled a cultural attitude to GDE in the context of training for counselling psychologists, and whether my past experience was one of the motivating factors for my research. I also acknowledged that it could have influenced my noticing of this detail in the data and subsequent integration of it into this analysis.

One point that many narratives in this research had in common was the sense of a fast-moving process, the speed of which was seemingly accelerated by the dream and sustained by the group. Janet recounted the quick emergence of hysterical, nervous, sarcastic and humorous responses based on individual defences against fear shared in the group towards a dream, as a group was attempting to contain the individual and the dream. She indicated that this process in itself was stress inducing.

For Mike ‘*group dream work is a free space which develops and evolves fast*’ where he had to ‘*manage the difficult feelings*’. He talked about the dynamics of revealing the group’s ‘*blockages and dysfunctions, hopes, fears and realities*’, reflecting on this fast-moving process, and stating that he enjoys working with dreams in groups. I wondered about the meaning of this positivity in the presence of ‘darkness’. Mike was one of the most experienced participants. The sense he was making resembled a hidden awareness or wisdom that there is a Bright Side with its long-term benefits.

Jason spoke about making a decision when to interfere with GDE in response to the individuals in the group feeling overwhelmed. This was a tantalising process as he had to struggle through his desire to prioritise the matrix and its continuation. In this parallel processing he was conveying the darkness of sacrifice, abandonment and expectations of coping from the individual, for the good of the group. In his narrative it felt as if he was moderating the negativity of these experiences by using words and phrases that were more

containing in nature (e.g. '*a bit of a challenge*'). Nevertheless, the expression was still indicative of a serious struggle:

> *It can be very difficult I mean when you have, I suppose, one of the real difficulties is and this happens when the matrix is open as well, one of the real difficulties is you can sometimes get situations where the participant becomes overwhelmed and you have to make a judgement call about whether or if and when to intervene to assist that individual in my experience it rarely happens I need someone might get very distressed but they managed the distress themselves you know so someone might take themselves out if they need to or stay and manage their distress in the presence of the group which is also fine but it needs to be managed in a way that the group that the social group, the social dreaming matrix still continues um and that can be quite tricky so that can be a bit of a challenge. Jason*

Furthermore, the distress in the group and the attempts of the facilitator to manage it, according to Jason, can lead to the breakdown of the process. He spoke about the individuals needing to exit or '*break out*' from the matrix. The collapse of GDE can be attributed to the moment in time when the individual is no longer managed by the process in the group. However, Jason was eager to reassure. He emphasised the rarity of these challenging events, affirming that most of the time he experienced bright free flow.

In the focus group the participants discussed the struggle with finding the language for expression. Sarah coined the term '*nebulous*', which was extended beyond the literal linguistic meaning of something being unclear, to an undefined occurrence. Sarah embodied the 'happening' element with her gesticulations as she was struggling for words to express the meaning. The term 'nebulous' was consequently used by the rest of the group in the interview.

> *I've been really reminded of that today, and it's a bit elusive but you* [Sarah] *were saying nebulous. How do you put your fingers on it?* Ella

Some participants found the transition from dreaming into thinking difficult. It might be speculated that in the moment of group dream sharing the unconscious transits into conscious awareness, where the invisible might become visible via the application of words. However, this transition seemed to appear at a cost of peace of mind for some participants:

> *It was hard, really hard. So I guess that's the other side of social dreaming because it can highlight something that is not thought about that's present to everybody to make the transition between between that kind of dreaming acceptance of that into some*

kind of reflective thinking interpretation of it and that's the one experience I've had that's really, really really difficult. Dave

Dante spoke about the appearance of '*the double*', when as the result of dream sharing, the negative, destructive elements from the unconscious enter awareness and become part of the conscious thinking process in the group. Janet spoke about some kind of sensitivity to such a transition, which might be managed by some group members staying on the surface with conscious material and not wanting to access the unconscious for the purpose of safety and security:

Especially if there's some conflict around or if there has been some conflict around the that puts people in the place with not working deeply, they're working on a surface where they can get some status quo back, some safety back where they can feel settled and secure again. Janet

This purposeful behaviour of the group members described by Janet also highlighted the individual's and group's capacity to cope with the transitions between the conscious and unconscious. For example, Jason noticed that members of the group differ in their capacity to cope with the distress that might spontaneously arise within in-action GDE. He talked about witnessing self-management when a person takes themselves out of the group or copes in the group:

They're not managed if they stay with their distress within the matrix that's fine because they're managing it themselves and it may be that being in the matrix actually helps them because there's an acceptance of non-intervention erm so there's if you like there's a place for them to be in with their distress. Jason

Furthermore, as this coping capacity has been assigned by most participants to themselves in their narratives, it might be important to consider the ability to manage the Dark Side of in-action GDE as a factor that determines the initial openness to it.

The coping capacity of group members seemed to be put to the test with the following aspects of the Dark Side of in-action GDE. Some choices that groups made regarding confidentiality seemed to disassemble the foundations of the professional assumptions and boundaries. For example, confidentiality, as an integral concept in therapeutic work that the practitioners are usually socialised into, was in the case of the focus group forsaken (see Appendix 18).

For most of the participants in this study bringing dreams into the group was an act of semi-conscious reduction in confidentiality. Some were talking about the trade-off between the need

to share something that is disturbing for the individual, with the hope that the group will offer containment, and the loss of the individual state where this disturbing information can be kept secret or private. The nervous 'gambling' away of the personal was at times experienced by some participants during group dream sharing or dream work, while describing with words the unconscious material of the dream:

> *People feel nervous about bringing something so deeply personal that's not about their narrative but about an experience they've had.* Janet

Furthermore, Mike pointed out that dreams shared in the group are technically made public. He talked about his facilitation of SDM and later publishing an article about that experience, which triggered the outrage of the dreamers, despite the original confidentiality arrangements made during the group and for the purpose of publication. As the extracts from the dreams appeared in writing and were disseminated beyond the group itself, Mike's group developed anxiety regarding the use of their dreams for further expression of research ideas and how actually recognisable they were despite the confidentiality procedures. A similar 'wake-up call' was also briefly mentioned in the focus group interview, where the members talked about the momentary realisation about the dream 'leaving' the dreamer in the group, and the consequent fear, suspicion, uncertainty and regret. Mike suggested that it is the facilitator's role to manage this phenomenon through explanation. However, in his reflection I sensed some frustration with, and maybe a deeper acceptance of this issue as something that cannot be fully addressed by an individual. This thinking led me to the decision to withhold examples of the dreams verbatim (see Chapter 3).

The above narratives emphasised a probability that the dream sharing in a group is not confidential. Once it has happened, the individuals and the group might find themselves at a point of no return, where they will have to face a potentially uncomfortable and destabilising aftermath.

Mike's example suggested that the group with its collage of dreams might act as one when there is an assumption of a threat appearing at the group level. Considering the inferences above, I wondered whether a type of wider culture, with a custom of communal dream sharing, has a collective coping capacity to offer, that might allow better mediation than confidentiality boundaries imposed by the act of professional facilitation.

The issue of the non-confidential state was linked to the loss of dream privacy. Caroline spoke about the dream sharing that is encouraged by the group and the facilitator. The group might ask the individual to extend sharing by eliciting the details of the dream and therefore inviting

her/him to endure the exposure. Furthermore, in Caroline's experience the dream might be role played, and therefore become attached to other individuals, loosening up connections with its original dreamer.

Dave described how he suffered the loss of individual energy in sense-making when he shared his dreams with the group: '*something being lost about your kind of charge in a dream or your sense-making too*'. The sharing of the dreams, as opposed to keeping them private and confidential, throughout the duration of the group session also meant for Dave that he had to accept his indistinctness. He pointed out that this can be a challenge for some people, as it amplifies the parallel need to somehow keep hold of the sense of self:

> *I felt that, er that I had kind of anonymity, anonymity which err meant I was part of something but not myself as a kind of constituent, constituent part of it.* Dave

Considering this tension that might be generated through co-existence of non-confidential and anonymous states, it was not surprising to hear some participants mentioning being protective over, or imposing their individual material in the group. Dave, for example, differentiated group members into two categories according to the roles they play in response to sharing dreams: those who are open to connecting through dreams with others, and those who are protective over the personal. Therefore, he viewed them either as protecting their minds or connecting through their minds. Furthermore, he admitted that he himself, as a psychotherapist in a group, migrated between these states of mind:

> *You sometimes see that in social dreaming groups or that kind of setting there'll be some people play different roles people who immediately want to make connections and, you know, those naturally in a group play roles, but there'll be other people who feel much more protective naturally of their own mind, of their own kind of association, in a sense, and I've had examples of both internally I guess.* Dave

From listening to other interviewees, I noticed that the abandonment, protectiveness or imposition of the individual content during group dream sharing or dream work were not posed as a dilemma, but expressed as an observation of a 'natural reflex' to a group. Janet spoke about her experience of facilitating a group of trainee therapists where a dream was shared that reminded her of her own recent dream and where she decided not to share it for the purpose of protecting her personal material. She was making seemingly a conscious choice to contain the unconscious. As Janet dived into reflection on her motives, I noticed that she stopped herself in a moment of expressing her thoughts, as if she was continuing to protect the individual content. It felt to me that I observed a moment between the surfacing of the

dream and the act of sharing it, where Janet's conscious decision had occurred. I wondered about the setting where this happened – the one-to-one interaction. I questioned whether therapists in general are accustomed to spot these moments, being in it with the other person and carefully selecting what to share from their own psyche. It also made me think about the potential implications that this awareness might have for psychotherapists' ability to connect with the Fabric of Complexity, when these moments occur in the group settin:

> *I s'pose, I'm very used to what, what would would bring as additional information as to what in the conscious way of functioning in a way, so it was very useful but… was very useful and very helpful… I didn't share the dream of her because I didn't… I felt something about it being quite personal also, personal to me.* Janet

Later in the interview, Janet spoke about a different experience when she had shared her dream despite feeling that she was taking a risk of exposure. She concluded that not protecting the personal and giving it to the group opened '*a window into what is happening in reality*'. This experience of protecting and letting go of the personal was also described by Dante. He stressed dreams being an individual way of thinking for a therapist ('*thinking in training'*), which he can share, but only with those people who belong to the same cultural group (e.g. other psychotherapists).

Jason had a similar opinion that group dream sharing in SDM format is a source of information about the group whole, group mind, group culture, but not about the individuals in the group. However, he noticed that personalisation was an easier platform for the function in the group and it was a real challenge for the facilitator to manage that. He used a strong expression - '*I hate*' - when describing this process. This could have been partially due to his personal and professional values and attitudes not being in line with such tendencies, and partially due to the real difficulty with managing this in the group. Furthermore, he spoke about the danger in facilitating and encouraging personalisation during SDM, which can activate the individual defences and protection of the individual minds, setting the group on the path of disconnection.

> *So for example, organisations you know it'll be about, so what does this tell us does this, tell us anything about what's happening in the organisation, about the direction the organisation is going about what problems there might be in the organisation you know, about might go it won't be about the individuals though you know about this particular manager or that particular director for this particular creative you know, it's not about the, about how you manage the structure of the organisation but it might tell you something about the groupthink, if you like, or the organisational culture erm yeah, and it can be very interesting as well and quite tricky because it can bring up things*

because people get, it much easier for people to get personalistic in, personalistic I hate that phrase to identify er at a personal level er either themselves or others with what's being said in that analytic section if you like. Jason

Managing the personal in the process of exposure to the unknown and connecting to the unconscious have been associated with the need for directions and opposition to non-directionality by some participants in this study. Dave spoke about his experience of getting lost in the process and accepting '*the idea of not getting anywhere'* which requires the management of frustration. Caroline reflected on her challenging experience of tackling the difficulty to mediate group members' expectations for directions and her own integrity in managing the unknown:

I am not intervening I might be saying things I might be making questions and obviously I I make interventions um but I'm not trying to make it go in any direction and, and often [laughs] *patients find that quite difficult because they come to me and they want me to put them in a direction and tell them what they should do and and I don't have a direction I don't know what they should do and I'm not saying that because you know that's what I've said it's because actually I really don't, what should I do here I haven't got the faintest idea, let's try and work it out.* Caroline

In the focus group interview the directionality was discussed in the context of reflection on the flow in the group. The members were talking with a sense of positivity and enthusiasm about their instinctual following of each other without pressure, scrutiny, or direction:

And there's I suppose a certain behaviour in the matrix that is followed so when people offer up a dream that they've had then they're not asked lots of questions about it or to expand on it, it's kind of offered up to the matrix and then people make their own associations and say what it is, and it's interesting that no one has challenged that framework or stepped out of that framework they kept with it so there is a sense of following a way of doing things which has kept things safe. Sarah

They noticed the emergence of this behaviour as something that kept the group safe. At some point in this discussion Libby pointed out that '*it is interesting that nobody has challenged this so far'*. Other participants 'played' with the idea that this is just a matter of time. While witnessing this, I gained a sense that this discussion raised awareness of everyone in a group about a worrying undercurrent associated with non-directionality. It was as if there was a parallel disruptive process that was growing alongside and despite group harmony.

The focus group also discussed competition between personal content and proving who is right. I wondered then if this development of the discussion was in response to the Dark Side of GDE that had surfaced earlier in the group thinking about its flow. In this instance it felt as if the focus group was applying out-of-the-group experiences as contrasting examples to confirm to themselves their acceptance of the non-directional flow as a peaceful alternative:

> Clara: *Yeah, yeah. I might say something about something in public, I might make a comment about it, and somebody might say no no no, that's not right it wasn't like that it was actually like this. It's like - Not relevant! You know.*
>
> Libby: *You do not get this in the ordinary conversation where two people speak at once, where two people in competition. One might say: my dream is more important!* [raises voice to accentuate].
>
> All: [laughing]

Some participants identified the structure of the process of group dream sharing as something that can be hindering and damaging to participants' experience. Dave explained that structure in SDM evokes censor mode in participants, where they feel the need to check whether what they are doing is corresponding with the structure of the group process. The structure of the session that had been laid out at the beginning felt restricting, forcing him to fit into a particular predefined experience. He pointed out that it was not congruent with his nature as a person. Thus he found himself not trusting the process as he felt that its structure obstructed the free flow of associations to the dreams. Dave acknowledged that this reaction was saying something about him as well as about the group where the dreams were the primary focus. I wondered if what he experienced was the sense of vigilance imposed by the structure on the group and felt via the individual:

> *And it was an experience for me of 'this is how you do social dreaming' and we are going to have a period now of doing it this way and have a period where there's no kind of spill over associations and we kind of move on to this and so internally I didn't, because of the way I'm made I didn't necessarily trust that, I had so much space just to wonder, you know, it felt more like a fitting-in kind of experience. [...] But then I felt more anxious I had that internal sense, it can be lovely that free-flowing moment in social dreaming where everyone is freely offering stuff but I was back in that kind of censor mode of having an association and I'd just check to see is this right, which is as much about me as about the group obviously.* Dave

Not having structure, or losing it during the session when the dreams are shared is a lot for a group to tolerate. Not everybody can do this. Therefore, Mike proposed that in group dream sharing it is important to make space for both the structure and for not knowing, so this '*delicate balance*' can maintain group integrity. Jason, in his point of view, seemed to agree with Mike's opinion on the loose structure as something that can be intolerable. He said that the absence of structure is '*a leap of faith*' for the facilitator who is hoping that the group will not misuse the exposing qualities of free flow. However, Jason also pointed out that in the case of group dream sharing the structure is '*a pointless attempt to colonise the unconscious*'. He strongly expressed his belief that it does not work in practice.

Furthermore, some participants noticed that irrespective of whether group dream sharing is structured or not, at some point within it the reflexivity will occur and it can be 'sticky' as it might be saturated with defences, difficult material and splits between group members. Dave differentiated between '*dream process*' (dreams shared in the group by associations) and the '*process of reflection on dreams*'. He noticed that the latter presents more challenges as this is where the defences of the individuals are the strongest and there is a need for skilled facilitation of this part of the session. Additionally, Jason and Mike spoke about '*a different level of challenge*' (Mike) when it comes to facilitating group reflection on dreams. They both pointed out that the therapist's general preparedness for dealing with difficult material might not be sufficient in this context as it will present a different level of tension and carry a different level of power because of dealing with '*the whole that is bigger than the sum of its parts*' (Jason).

According to Dave, the '*stickiness*' of reflection due to group defences can break down the process of GDE. He spoke about his experience of making futile attempts to draw attention to the dreams and facing the group denial: *'we're all ok'.*

At this point in the interview Dave's voice tone was conveying something resembling helplessness, as if the group defences were so powerful that the facilitator had no chance to get through them despite the skills. For Dave, the only way through it was to merge with the group as a whole.

Dave spoke with compensative optimism about the display of splits in the groups:

> *I think is a natural kind of containment that comes with social dreaming and erm, it can almost enable any present splits in the group to heal sometimes because you know, it's there in the dreaming maybe these different splits in a group or a kind of organisation and, but because it's a kind of contained dreaming session it's something*

> *that people can come close to, feel and imagine and then they've got some distance from it and in the reflective dialogue you can kind of relate to it rather than be in, kind of the emotion itself.* Dave

He referred to the proximity to the splits that was somewhat managed by active engagement with dreams, suggesting that '*coming closer via imagination*' and '*distancing via reflection*' from these splits had a potential to heal them. However, looking back at the constellation of his thoughts throughout the interview, I wondered whether it also meant that he was avoiding thinking about a possibility that splits can rupture further if the two protective capacities, the imagination and reflection, are obstructed by defences.

Janet also expressed positivity and initial enthusiasm about her openness to dreams in groups. However, as she continued to form her thoughts stimulated by these feelings, her apprehension seemed to rise too. I noticed that she became more hesitant by saying she will think about it, as if her own reflexivity became 'sticky' and emotions appeared more regulated. I wondered whether her reflection on what was happening for her during group dream sharing also put her in touch with something unsettling, therefore reducing the feeling of safety and forcing suppression.

In the focus group interview the issue was raised that GDE is often not articulated between practitioners. From different accounts in individual interviews, it was possible to collate a description of psychotherapists, as a population that might be frequently exposed to GDE in their line of work and have a lot of apprehensions around it. For example, Dante spoke about psychotherapists as the '*most defended participants*' of group dream sharing. Dave and Caroline both hinted that therapists are predisposed to anxiety around groups and dreams. Janet noticed that psychotherapists are more willing to share dreams with strangers than with fellow professionals. In general, psychotherapists were considered by the participants as individuals who, on one hand, are well prepared for GDE (in terms of personal and professional resilience due to their extensive professional knowledge, skills, qualities and experience), and on the other hand, are struggling and/or are reluctant to engage with GDE due to this preparedness. The Therapists' Trap was a term I developed in this research to describe this paradox.

Dave reflected on his observation of psychotherapists' perception of GDE as a threatening experience. He proposed that self-knowledge of psychotherapists is a 'double-edged sword': it enables practitioners to engage in GDE, but leads them to discover that this self-knowledge is limited in this context:

Therapists are a funny bunch in that sense in that there's just about … you know one-to-one supervision is okay or group supervision is okay if you're forced to do it kind of thing [laughter] *I don't know many therapists who'd sign up for being part of a big group and you know you have to get beyond that initial anxiety of, of what it might reveal about therapists, I think most therapists over time still fall into this trap of 'I'm a professional I know what I'm talking about' and so if your dream says that you're messy and you have no idea what you're talking about and you're dreaming about being at work and your insides are falling out and you're saying everything wrong that's quite a threatening thing for a lot of psychotherapists or for professionals to say, really.*

Dave

Dave also spoke extensively about his experience of facilitating SDM in the NHS team of psychologists where he was noticing something that might be called a group culture or group identity, which simultaneously bred dreams and defences against them:

… the dreaming session was just, you know it was hard to put a brake on it, you know, it was free-flowing and associations, lots of links. Erm, the reflective stuff was really sticky because I was… trying to draw attention to the things in the dreams in that sense and there was a group kind of defence against that of 'We're all ok, there'll be no winner, we're the highest performing psychotherapy department in the UK'. Dave

Mike and Carlo were the most experienced practitioners out of all interviewees in this study. It was interesting to notice how they conveyed their own realisations regarding participation in group dream sharing in an educative manner as if they were teaching me (a young professional with little experience) how to overcome something that might resemble the Therapists' Trap. Mike pointed out that psychotherapists by default focus on the development of the other and therefore segregate themselves from others by their professional awareness, which disadvantages them. Carlo spoke about his choice to engage with GDE as a means to fulfil the missing experience - the non-professional membership, which allowed him to discover that group dream sharing works, and, therefore, to become reassured as a professional:

In my opinion you can, you can be er a psychotherapist of a group without having been analysed in a group yourself, but something is missing... it's missing something rather important it's your experience to… participate as a patient…as a member of the group. You have the experience that it works and so as a psychotherapist you are much more assured. Carlo

Jason suggested that psychotherapists have professional habits (e.g. asking questions, wanting to explore) that are activated by the responses of the individuals during group dream sharing. He noticed that the practitioners by default notice first what happens for other individuals and then attend to their own responses. The professional diversion into the psyche of others might divert them from self-awareness and therefore prevent connecting with others on equal terms:

> *Takes a while for people I think to erm, get themselves out, or certainly therapists* [laughs] *to get themselves out of the habit of wanting to err explore and ask questions of an individual around what they're saying, rather than just pitching in their own responses.* Jason

To conclude, the participants in this research talked about their experiences of discomfort, tension, and ambiguity that might be identified with the Dark Side of in-action GDE. Among these experiences there were ambivalence towards GDE, the loss of the individual elements and confidentiality, exposure to the unknown and struggle with using language for the expression of GDE, longing for directions and opposition to non-directionality, and getting stuck in the Therapists' Trap.

4.3.3. Sub-theme 1.3. The Bright Side of GDE

The expression of in-action GDE in the interviews was often marked by the curious fluctuation between optimistic and challenging examples, almost creating some sort of rhythm which was necessary to convey participants' experiences. The Dark Side of GDE would often lead to the appearance of optimism and vice versa. In the participants' narratives the Bright Side of GDE was represented by flexibility, safety, play, creativity, containment and trust.

The sense of psychological safety felt by most participants was linked to acknowledgement of focus on the collective rather than personal aspects of dreams and the process of dream sharing. For example, for Caroline the experience of dreams as a property of the group felt safe. The interaction of the group with a dream meant that the focus was held on the shared experience between people in that moment. Carlo shared his observation of the groups where people were more willing to share dreams with others, as opposed to sharing examples from waking life which were considered more personal:

> *So I think that very often myself or participants in my group er tell a dream more willingly to others... than telling others about some some some episode, or something very personal*. Carlo

Shifting between the individual and the shared or simultaneously holding both elements were equally attributed to the increase in a sense of psychological safety. Carlo pointed out that dreams in the group feel safer because they have dual capacity to belong to the individual and to the group: '*a person can say something to the group through the dream indirectly*'. He gave an example of a dream about a car accident as an illustration of how the process of dream sharing stimulated a shift between the personal and the shared, thereby reducing the feeling of stuckness in the individual. This mobility, according to Carlo, increased the sense of safety in his group.

Jason, however, emphasised his paradoxical state in SDM where in the group, through dream sharing the personal is diffused and yet the individual still manages to maintain a strong sense of self. The focus group also spoke about their simultaneous shared feeling of safety and individual openness to an act of influencing others, or to being influenced by others via dreams.

Perceiving dreams as material that exists in two spaces – the personal and the shared – led some participants to make comments about a need for the individual to trust the group to share the dreams. Janet spoke about her experience of '*trusting enough*' in the group to bring herself into the open and discuss her dream. She found her group supportive and thoughtful. Caroline spoke about the trust between the members of her group not to be offended and to be selective about what was shared.

Carlo differentiated *'the layer'* of safety, distinguishing between the friendliness of the group and the trust that present differently in the interactions. He explained that the '*trust layer*' was accessed when something complex entered the group space, such as a dream. Carlo stressed that therapists should not avoid this occurrence.

It was interesting to observe how the focus group discussed the trust they have in each other that enables them to talk about dreams which might be misunderstood (see Appendix 19). Although they acknowledged a probability of the group cautiously responding to a dream with sinister content, they also emphasised the absence of *'a venue for someone to run with it'* due to '*an element of trust*.' The focus group participants agreed on the shared feeling of respect and non-judgemental dynamics between them as a possible foundation for the overall sense

of trust. Furthermore, the democracy, togetherness, equality, and freedom of choice seemed to propagate these feelings as I observed the group interacting in the interview.

Dave in his interview attempted to explain something similar by emphasising the need to trust '*dreaming reality*' in order to discover that it is not as dangerous as it might be perceived at first glance. In order to comprehend this, according to Dave, the individual needs to be in it and trust its flow. Janet also pointed to the benefits of trusting to what initially felt risky in a group, which resulted for her in reduced confusion and fear, and increased sense of safety.

Both Mike and Carlo encouraged trusting GDE because of its containing capacity. For example, Carlo used a metaphor of a net to describe GDE as a flexible container that allows mobility and freedom of exploration with the open option of going back into a safe space. It allows flexibility that helps to adjust the distances between people and their individual psychological states. According to Dave, the feeling of containment from dreams enabled him to move safely outside the individual into the communal psyche of the group he facilitated. He also perceived dreams shared in the group as having a holding capacity:

> *So we've got that as an intellectual container, a kind of thinking container to what we're doing so that holds people's minds to that sense.* Dave

Dave also pointed to a *'natural'* quality of this containment that enables the group to approach and distance from splits in a safe way. He contrasted this to the professional assumption that the group might act as a main container and the leader might facilitate this. This is not realistic, according to Dave, when it comes to dealing with dreams in a group, because it is difficult to consciously mind dreams amongst other elements of group interaction. It might be more reasonable to accept dreams as independent containers. The information about this might be communicated by the facilitator who would normalise and accommodate this via maintenance of flexibility on the individual level (modelling) and communal (inclusive facilitation of loose structure). Carrying out these responsibilities Dave also viewed as containing for the group.

Another containing element was associated by some participants with the loose, as opposed to rigid, structure of the group dream sharing sessions. For example, Dave, Jason, Carlo, Caroline and Janet stressed the need for flexibility with regard to the time spent on different parts of the session: introduction, dream sharing, reflection and break. Also, the expectations that are set for group dream sharing cannot be fixed, according to those participants that spoke about their experience of SDM.

Jason described his experience of holding the structure which does not guarantee safety but enables the process and the facilitator's role:

> *So in that sense this is not safe. Erm, but there is a holding, I think, which is set up by the structure and by the person who is running it.* Jason

He compared this experience to *'holding a bowl'*, emphasising it with hand gestures. He proposed that the 'bowl's content' is independent from both its structure and the facilitator, and requires openness to that:

> *It's a bit like you're holding a bowl but that you're not holding what's in the bowl. You're just holding the vessel and something else is taking place in that vessel and it's very important to have someone holding that vessel or it's very important that the vessel is there and it needs a person to establish that which is the opening the closing of the matrix er the which involves keeping an eye on time and things like that and the sense as a participant of that is also that there is a,* [pause] *it kind of reinforces to the participants that this is about, this is the matrix thing is not about a bunch of individuals talking about their individual stuff.'* Jason

Some individual participants as well as the focus group suggested that 'a ritual' can be an alternative to a structure, which emphasises shared traditions as opposed to the boundaries set by an individual. Furthermore, this comparison, associated with a sense of containment, led some participants to talk about play, creativity and imagination as containing elements. For example, Caroline compared dream sharing to a play where a group interacts with the dream as a play object. Dave pointed out that the interaction through imagination, that is possible in the dream sharing process, feels safer in a group than the interaction through emotion only. He spoke about a direct invitation to play as he was describing his experience of opening the group for dream sharing. He explained how he would go along with an open mind, adopting a playful approach and being explicit about it. He also compared this process with *'cooking'* and *'experiment'*:

> *So it just an invitation to say 'I wonder I wonder what this dreaming is, I wonder what's the backdrop to this?' do you want to come and play for a bit or, and if you don't that's fine just, just listen, go along and see what happens, in a way, so, erm the, that's usually so I think if you have a sort have a playful approach to it and you're explicit in that no one needs to say anything it's okay we're going to see what cooks up really and um, and if the pot's too hot just just just back off and watch it bubble it's okay it's not a problem.* Dave

I observed the focus group in their discussion of safety entering a playful state using elements of their dreams to mediate thinking about the probability of intrusion. It was as if they were playing in preparation for an unsafe situation, using their imagination and creativity to form a shared group reaction to ensure future safety. Furthermore, as I watched the focus group 'playing' with concepts of safety, I started seeing how their playfulness and imagination were reducing their apprehension about '*getting things wrong*' (Ella). They were using humour based on the imagery from the shared dreams and it was reinforcing their togetherness. During one of these moments, they laughed about their timekeeping, simultaneously reflecting on how it is similar to the experiences of play and dreaming, where the sense of time can be lost.

In fact, the focus group spent a lot of time in the interview speaking about playfulness (see Appendix 20). It was curious to observe how each member was expressing this through lively interaction, with light smiles and dreaminess in facial expressions and theatrical gesticulation. It felt at times, that this process expanded beyond the need to feel safe, into the free-flowing life-affirming experience, filled with freedom of expression and freedom from expectations (e.g. professional knowledge determining what to do with dreams); connection with others and belonging to something bigger than the self; joy, fun and pleasure.

The experiences of expansion and widening out have been shared by most participants when they were in the moment of reflecting on the Bright Side of GDE. For example, Carlo's metaphor of a net led him to talk about the shift *'through the holes'* into a wider space, outside the containment zone, where he saw a possibility for expanding thinking via imagination and flexibility of emotional distancing. He drew attention to the interdisciplinary connection as the way of expansion in sense-making from GDE. Dante also stated that the experience of expansion was '*consistent*' for him during the engagement with group dream sharing. Dave viewed '*the expansive movement into group mind*' as a positive experience that is enlightening for the individual mind.

The focus group agreed on the idea that dreams in groups co-exist with a multitude of perspectives of their members. This combination can be at the same time '*mind-blowing*' and '*eye-opening*' resulting in widening out of the individual horizon for meaning-making. Jason explained a similar experience using the terms '*thickening up*' and '*enriching individual awareness*', where GDE enhances, deepens, and extends the individual experience of living, via other people's dreams.

All participants in their different ways were able to convey a temporary, momentary, and yet very powerful sense of positivity that changes and cannot be assumed or predicted in the

process of group dream sharing. This is something that helped me to summarise the reflections on the elements of the Bright Side of in-action GDE. It might strengthen the individual sense of participation in social and cultural aspects of living, such as democracy, creativity, innovation and contribution to something greater than the self. The Bright Side of in-action GDE might occur frequently, but it will not permanently establish itself in a group.

4.4. Super-ordinate Theme 2. On-action GDE

On-action GDE is a lingering residue of experiences from group dream sharing and dream work that was associated with some implications for psychotherapists' lives on the individual and communal levels. It has been acknowledged by all participants in various ways. They spoke about the expansion of awareness that presented after sharing dreams in a group, which highlighted their own qualities and skills, as well as their engagement with different professional, social and cultural communities.

4.4.1. Sub-theme 2.1. Implications of GDE on the individual level of psychotherapists' experiences

In reflection on their on-action GDE most participants spoke about their qualities, skills, abilities, and capacities that seemed to undergo expansion in their individual lives. On-action GDE might have been experienced as a different aspect, or a continuation, of a phenomenon that was working away in the mind of the individual outside the group. For example, flexibility was observed in the descriptions of maintaining open-mindedness, applying negative capability, and accepting simplicity alongside complexity.

Dave spoke about his ability to '*hold lightly'* his own mind and own meaning taken from the dreams. He explained that suspending one's own judgement is a prerequisite of participation in SDM, however the full understanding of what it means comes to the individual after the participation. He noticed that he had to remind himself of this experiential awareness, as well as accept it, before starting new group dream sharing. Furthermore, he spoke about his skill of inviting others to '*just listen, go along and see what happens*' which emerged from his GDE. Dave also described his flexibility '*to switch between the channels*' comparing it to process work. He used a simile of becoming '*like a jelly*' in the description of his ability to let go of the structure of group dream sharing, emphasising that this can be difficult for some people.

Dave reflected on the conventional psychotherapy training that he had obtained over time. He found it was not applicable to his experience of SDM, because it was not focused on '*not knowing and curiosity*' as skills and qualities for practice. Dave introduced the concepts of

'*negative capability*', *'beginners mind'*, *'naked curiosity'* in the context of this reflection. These qualities and skills allowed him to make tentative connections in parallel with holding the not-knowing in other therapeutic and non-therapeutic contexts. Dave considered this as an important professional capacity that developed over time as a *'backbone'* and promoted his professional resilience visible to him and others:

> *Of course I'll get it wrong and then I'll fall into 'I think I know what's going on' and I set my intention again to be curious and then I set it again, and that's kind of, for me, the heart of social dreaming work, is to be able to do that with group of people so if you've got that skill and if you've got that backbone and it's visible then. It is both explicit in you and also implicit in just all those implicit ways in which we can communicate with each other.* Dave

Janet identified as a part of her role to encourage people '*to be curious about what's going on unconsciously and consciously*', and, therefore, applying flexibility from her work with dreams in a group in order to maintain a '*real kind of window into something that, that can be very useful*'. For example, her experience of flexing between symbolic or metaphoric thinking, and direct description of reality, she later interpreted as helpful for the facilitator, the dreamer, and the group. In on-action GDE Janet saw her flexibility as something that was enabling her to deal with complexity in general practice:

> *I don't know, maybe, maybe it's about something […] the flexibility to you know deal with everything that the individual brings to deal with whatever the individual brings whether it's dream or a daydream, or any aspect of the internal world is useful and it's what we, it's what I feel is absolutely an essential part of the work.* Janet

Mike spoke about his ability to refocus, exercised during group dream sharing, which promoted his flexibility of mind that he considered necessary for his research, consultancy and psychotherapeutic work. Dante introduced a concept of the everchanging *'frattale'* of mind – complex never-ending formation of meaning, based on past GDE, that allows one to work with dreams in a group on different levels, but does not stop there, expanding into other contexts of the life of a psychotherapist. Dante struggled to find a translation of *frattale* from Italian into English as he spoke. He focused on expression via visualisation, which helped me to understand that he was referring to a fractal (see Figure 5) a very flexible complex infinite pattern that is found in nature as well as generated by humans and computers.

Figure 5. 'Frattale' (fractal) in nature (this image was kindly offered for this research by the photographer, Jaume Porta)

Jason described his flexibility in maintaining the sense of self and acknowledging himself as '*undifferentiatedly diffused in a group*' at the same time. Furthermore, as he was reflecting on the challenges associated with managing a group by using non-directional interventions such as open questions, he pointed out that flexibility can be difficult for some participants as they might have specific expectations. He explained that his ability to manage this effectively is based on his confidence with not knowing.

On-action GDE was described by the practitioners in relation to their experience of reconnection with their own material on a deeper level and facilitation of the access to, or channelling of, the unconscious after GDE in the wider personal and professional context. The focus group spoke about a lingering feeling that stayed with them as the result of attending what Ella called '*a mind gym for psyche*'. These participants felt that their unconscious was enabled to function in their individual lives, and their awareness of this was psychologically uplifting (feeling positive emotions and stimulating thoughts). Caroline and Dante spoke about GDE as something that was on the periphery of their everyday practice – it was consciously kept away but used as a background for professional work with others or for self-reflection.

A playful approach and creativity were also considered by the participants as individual implications of on-action GDE. For example, Dave explained that his initial intention to be curious had driven him to be explicit about a playful approach from the start of a group session and to skilfully invite others to join. He viewed his playfulness as a preparation for the unknown, emphasising that this is '*something that we* [psychotherapists] *don't usually do much of*'. He hinted that this skill is not as common in the psychotherapy tradition as '*the working on an issue*'.

Janet spoke about her openness to a creative approach after GDE where dream-induced scary experiences were managed by her group with creative use of metaphors and symbols. Mike spoke about his on-action GDE as a *'delightful permission'* given by the dreams in a group to be playful. He reflected on his playfulness as an ability to relax awareness – being present with others *'but in a looser way with more personal disclosure than I would do normally when working clinically'*.

The skill or ability to manage one's own safety as a facilitator and a member of a group was mentioned by several participants as something that transited through GDE into the wider context of their lives. Carlo spoke about his experience of managing his own fears and the consequent impulse to interpret and search for hidden meaning, as tendencies that became more visible to him in group dream sharing. On-action GDE also allowed him to let go of those tendencies in favour of trusting the process and the group. Dante admitted that on-action GDE extended his ability to accept more of himself and others, and therefore feel confident in managing his own emotional safety.

Jason talked about managing his own intensity by conscious awareness and allowing the parallel processes to happen without moving into action, thus maintaining a personal state of connection:

> *I manage it, I clearly do, and that will be whatever across the range of positive and negative um fear, excitement wherever it might be I, I manage it by being.. just allowing it to be the way it is and riding, I suppose, you might say or being err, holding on to myself while it's happening as it were uh, and er and not acting on it I guess.. that's the crucial thing not moving it to action um as far as possible […] This ability of holding yourself back, with continuous awareness of the process, tracking its manifestations in sensations, emotions and imagination. Attending these aspects with the wondering approach, making links. State of connectivity as opposed to state of impulsivity.* Jason

The ability to manage psychological intensity was linked to the individual qualities of resilience and perseverance. For example, Carlo spoke about perseverance suggesting '*not to be scared*' and not to give into interpretation, but to relax into the idea that '*dreams are part of the conversation*'. I noticed how he was delivering these thoughts in the moment of the interview. He sounded reassuring, speaking from his experiential wisdom about his own strength.

Dave shared his experience of simultaneously managing personal anxiety and enduring managing a group that was very ambivalent towards dream sharing. He reflected on the residue from that GDE, acknowledging the complexity of his role, that is demanding in terms

of distribution of awareness. He explained how losing sight of the one process might endanger the other, and emphasised the need for resilience and perseverance. Jason also spoke about knowing that '*getting it wrong*' is part of the therapist's experience and that for him the recovery from it was crucial for group facilitation. This sense of candour was lingering for Jason from his experiences with SDM and seemed to fuel his personal strength.

When the focus group discussed their perseverance with their participation in the dream sharing, Sarah articulated the thought that resonated with other members:

> *Maybe there is some working out what it is and what it means, but almost more importantly is the recognition that there's a something going on and we don't know what it is but it's definitely alive*. Sarah

The group also agreed that this dynamic complexity can be *'scary'* and *'marginalising'* for the individuals. However, they were able to keep going by appreciating its nourishing and enlightening implications. The focus group members between themselves agreed that *'taking it lightly'* was sustaining their enthusiasm.

In the discussion of persistent engagement with complexity, some participants referred to their leadership qualities and skills. The style of leadership that those participants were implying can be described as collaborative and democratic in nature. For example, Dante talked about his tendency to enable groups to develop their own curious space:

> *In a group-based setting I tend to like scaffolding and then for the group to procreate the space.* Dante

In the interview I heard enthusiasm and confidence in Dante's voice. I also noticed how he was taking time to choose terms to describe his skills in this example, to convey his focus on levelled collaboration, despite his role as a facilitator with psychoanalytic positioning as an expert. There was something intuitive about this communication that was bypassing this prescribing factor.

It was interesting to observe similarities in the extent of being informed by sociological, cultural and anthropological theories that both Dante and Dave presented while talking about their leadership approaches. They were both suggesting that hierarchy in the group is based on individualised roles and that facilitation of group dream sharing was less about professional skills or role, and more about the facilitator as a whole person. Dave, as a native English speaker, was more verbally eloquent about this than Dante.

Carlo, Janet and Caroline were similar in their views on the leader's ability to engage with a group that is not restricted by their individual vision of purpose or destination. Mike and Jason spoke about this in the specific context of SDM. They pointed to the ability to feel comfortable in the position where personal directionality is not relevant. However, Mike defined democratic leadership as prescribed by SDM; whereas Jason shared his belief that the absence of coercion and distributed responsibility in SDM is dependent on the qualities of its host/s.

Jason and Dave were particularly focused on theorising around their ability as leaders to maintain a strong sense of self and refrain from projecting it into the group, as something that has developed in on-action GDE. They seemed to share the preference to not facilitate, but to be equally present with other participants in the group.

> *I'd much rather not facilitate the group because I'd much rather be in it.* Jason

> *And we all know it and we, we're all in it and relating to it together*. Dave

The expansion of the ability to facilitate *groupification* (moving away from personalising) was mentioned by some participants as an implication of on-action GDE. It seemed to equip the practitioners with some knowledge of the benefits of non-individualised dream sharing in the group, including containment and connectivity.

Janet reflected on how her openness to dreams and thinking about the non-individualised approach was enabling for the groups she was facilitating. She noticed some reduction in nervousness about bringing dreams into groups:

> *In in, my experience dreams don't come up that often, I think that it's something that…erm, for me it's becoming more prevalent, but I don't know if that's got something to do with my own shift in thinking about things* [groupification] *that is enabling something to shift in my groups as well.* Janet

Jason spoke about the situations when some people in the group might expect opportunities for personalisation, and the responsibility of the facilitator to manage this by emphasising a link to social context (SDM). He explained that the facilitator can use general psychotherapeutic skills (e.g. psychoeducation, boundary setting) to purposefully encourage participants not to personalise, so the group can benefit from '*widening it out from the group to the cultural, to the society or the community*'.

> *The facilitator can make a lot of difference to the er er the strength of the matrix um by doing things in a certain way that encourage the er er* [long pause] *the participants not to personalise let's put it that way.* Jason

Carlo explained that GDE highlights the need to manage different layers of group interaction, which might bring classic group challenges, such as aggression, fear and confrontation. In his view, psychotherapists need to accept this as part of their job and engage with the process with already existing skills:

> *Normally there are two layers. One is the fact that the group is very good socially. So they are very friendly they can sit here and are not aggressive and they try to understand and that's the first layer and then from time to time and they get in touch with something that is terrible and everybody is struggling. And that's part of the job because you're not here to do to do every good group you are there to try to work through the problems of course as you do it.* Carlo

Carlo sounded very assertive. In my reflection later I wondered about the origin of this persuasive power in his narrative and whether it was rooted in his culture or extensive professional knowledge and experience, or both.

In his example of facilitating SDM with a challenging group of psychotherapists, Dave acknowledged that group interaction looked unusual and extra-intense due to the shared dreams. Nevertheless, what he thought was helpful and what stayed with him after that experience was remembering that the general skills of group facilitation are just as applicable during SDM as during any other groups: '*But, you know, I guess, then it's also just about managing normal group dynamics*'.

On-action GDE led the participants to reflect on their personal qualities that might have predetermined their engagement in GDE in general. All participants spoke about themselves as individuals who had always been open to new experiences and had an interest in dreams. For example, Dave declared: '*This is just the way I'm made, I guess, I know I have a certain view on it in that sense'*. His fascination with dreams he described as independent from training and theoretical knowledge, that he developed later in life. He described his '*personal grain*' as non-conformist to the rules and structure. He talked about his professional history in trade and business and his reliance on '*gut feeling*' and dreams as his path to SDM. Throughout his psychotherapy career Dave admitted having '*the process'* as *'the initial impulse'* and guiding force. Furthermore, in his reflection on observation of a group faced with the unknown, Dave

hypothesised about people's perception of him. He identified a cultural stereotype that could have been automatically assigned to him by the group in the light of his presentation:

> *They are wondering why they are doing that, what it's about, thinking that I'm some kind of foolish hippie or something, partially true'* [laughs]. Dave

Dave was positively holding on to this self-identification as if it was helping him to move towards acceptance of this experience of judgement by a group of peers.

Jason also spoke about social marginalisation that might come with participation in SDM. He admitted with laughter that he liked this outcome. Jason linked this to his natural openness to the flow of the unknown, speaking of himself as somebody for whom dreaming had been important since childhood and who sustained this interest throughout his personal and professional life:

> *All the way through my training and before I trained, I've always had an interest, I mean since a child, you know, dreaming has been the most important and most interesting part of what I do. Always. It's always been there you know and that… which is not to say that every patient will bring dreams lots.* Jason

Jason also pointed out that the training might be guided by the theory, but the choice of his training was guided by his personal interests. He identified himself as someone who is '*holding a vessel*' for others and preferring equal participation over leadership. He also shared his basic assumption about the reality of the dream process that became a foundation for his personal and professional function:

> *There's a kind of er a base level assumption I'm making and assuming others would be making about the reality of the dream process reality for individuals but also reality for the group em and that is a shared understanding that this is a significant part of the way we as individuals and groups as a culture live do the business of living let's say em, so what's the relevance of that to my work er well it's part of my work, it's how I work, it's how I live…* Jason

Clara from the focus group spoke about herself as a '*linear-logic thinker*' who loves dreams. On-action GDE enabled her to feel free about this combination of qualities. She reflected on the culture shared in the UK psychotherapy environment which imposes professional expectations restricting what felt natural to her and others in the focus group - playfulness and creativity.

Dante and Carlo emphasised wider cultural norms that support dream sharing in everyday life:

> *You shift from a normal conversation to a dream. Perhaps it is different in England, but in Italy it is quite normal when you are, for example, on holidays in the morning when you see your family and tell about dreaming during the night during the breakfast.* Carlo

> *I start really from the morning. If I had some dream that I can consider very interesting for my life, yes, I try always to amplify my thought with my own dreams.* Dante

On a personal level Carlo described his preferences for cultural and creative experiences over rational processing of information. He identified these as integral to his abilities to '*think, dream and tell stories'*.

To summarise, on-action GDE amplified participants' awareness and expression of their personal and professional qualities, skills, abilities and capacities. Among them were flexibility, playfulness, creativity, resilience and perseverance. Some practitioners reflected on their ability to facilitate access to, and channelling of, the unconscious, enabling the shift away from the personalisation, managing group dynamics as well as their own emotional safety. The description of the styles of facilitating the groups where GDE has emerged was resembling democratic leadership. Most psychotherapists acknowledged their openness to experiences and dreams as a quality that preceded their occupational interest and preferences.

4.4.2. Sub-theme 2.2. Implications of GDE on the communal level of psychotherapists' experiences

Most participants shared their understanding of the implications of GDE for their engagement with different communities. These reflections represented organisational, cultural and social contexts. The participants indicated that exposure to group diversity has created a need for an accessible narrative that would enable participation in group dream sharing. Furthermore, some of these reflections referred to a process of relating to groups and communities in a way that resembled awareness of Social Design in the production of knowledge beyond psychotherapy.

Some participants reflected on training and involvement of psychotherapists in GDE. For example, Caroline has been delivering training at different universities for many years. She noted that group dream sharing is not a subject that was purposefully pursued in mainstream psychotherapy courses, nevertheless it did occur during training and eventually got attended to, similar to '*Gestalt flip'*:

> *Also I teach and it has come into training… Now I am thinking about it and it feels like it is not purposefully targeted in these settings, but it appears as a part of something else. Like Gestalt… it flips… it flips at some point to to foreground.* Caroline

It was interesting to acknowledge this comment in the context of Caroline's rationale for participation in this research. She was aware that dreams were present in the variety of groups she worked with (e.g. academic, supervisory etc.) but she could not remember anything specific, or did not have a chance before to make sense of this constellation of experiences, which expanded beyond the therapeutic context. She sent me an email after the interview wishing me all the best with my research and expressing her hope to read my findings one day as she realised that her individual reflections might not be enough for her to understand communal experiences of dream sharing.

Jason considered SDM in the context of training as a potentially valuable experience:

> *I think it would be interesting for anyone um and if there was a training which incorporated it in their training and I'm sure there must be I think that would be a very valuable part of the training, absolutely.* Jason

This might be associated with Jason's original interest in SDM, sparked by a public lecture. It led him to engagement with '*ten social networks, or matrices really, some of those have been at psychoanalytic conferences'*. In his opinion, prior clinical work and training exposed him to '*difficult material, unconscious stuff, strong feelings, resistances both in myself and in… patients*' which amplified and normalised for him the need to participate in and facilitate SDM.

Jason talked about his perspective on people's experiences of their individual status amongst others as something that he has developed over time in training and practice. His experience of GDE highlighted for him the disconnection on individual or communal levels that he as a psychotherapist works with on a daily basis. He reflected on his experience of noticing that this disconnection can sometimes be underestimated or overlooked by some organisations.

Jason spoke about his work with some clinical and non-clinical companies. He found that it was often driven by an expectation to find a direction for problem solving. However, according to Jason, GDE with its connectivity can illuminate not the solutions, but '*groupthink'* and the organisational culture. He pointed out that the true representation of this for some organisations or professional groups can be difficult to face, let alone trying to change it for the sake of problem solving. To contrast this experience Jason spoke about creative industries (arts, architecture, film) which he found being more culturally open to group dream sharing.

Dante explained that GDE helped him to '*amplify thoughts*', therefore enabling him to think about social, cultural, political, and religious contexts. He considered dream sharing as a '*best way*' to develop integrative understanding of others outside therapy. For example, the participation in group dream sharing evoked his interest in anthropology.

Dante also reflected on his experience of GDE that made him gauge what knowledge is typical for different contexts and match different modalities for group dream sharing with different settings. For example, SDM, in his view, is more suited for groups of scholars who have some awareness of how the mind works; while the psychodynamic approach is better for a clinical setting. Furthermore, in this reflection he shared his thoughts about the future where he saw different disciplines being integrated by offering alternative answers:

> *I think in the future this could be incorporated, the conception of matrix and group analysis that we know with anthropological answers.* Dante

Dave spoke a lot about the NHS as an organisation that makes cultural contributions to the understanding of mental health, and about the role of a psychotherapist. He described the NHS approach to group programme development as a positioning of a practitioner in the unsafe place of '*getting on with it*'. Dave also spoke of defence mechanisms that he viewed as ingrained in organisational cultures (e.g. the NHS) and disciplines (e.g. psychology). In addition to this, he also identified a focus on finding solutions as a 'pushing force' of some organisations. He found himself mediating this pressure and honouring group dream sharing in its own right. He referred to his personal experience of seeking safety in structure and preparedness and consequently developing anxiety towards groups. His participation in SDM seemed to reduce it. Furthermore, after his GDE with groups from different populations (commercial staff, GP groups, clergy, police, psychotherapy groups) he was able to relax into the idea of '*lurch moments*' (the inevitable struggle) and trusting the process.

Dave spoke about his developing ability for '*paying attention to the dreaming'* around him and within himself. He compared his experience of SDM to Zen practice and process work which emphasise the switch between the internal and external worlds of human beings. Dave spoke in a light manner about his initiative of setting up a new group that had a '*community kind of feel about it'* as opposed to a traditional psychotherapy group.

Mike differentiated between clinical and organisational settings where group dream sharing might occur. The differentiating criteria were the power, the authority and the dynamics which were culturally defined. He spoke about SDM as something that enabled a democratic process, where the focus was not on mental health, but on everyone sharing '*more or less*

equally in developing a new social awareness'. He noticed that a less formal communal approach made people in a group *'feel better'*. For Mike these experiences in the context of organisational consultancy, supervision, peer discussion groups and training, formed a bridge between theory (e.g. Freud's Psychoanalysis) and the reality of life. As a professional he was able to appreciate on a deeper level how and why the theory has evolved in practice.

Contemplating organisational, cultural and social contexts resulted in some participants talking about their consequent experience of tailoring their narrative about GDE to the populations they were engaged with. For example, Jason and Dave spoke about how their approach to introducing SDM in groups has evolved over time through recognition of the need to offer an accessible narrative.

Dave explained that the moment of introduction of dream sharing to the group might stimulate apprehension and preconceived ideas in the group about the process and the facilitator. Thus, for him it was important to utilise the occupational context as well as common dreamlike aspects of human activities. It seemed that Dave's customised narrative about SDM might also have been his way to connect with a group:

> *I try to find some kind of narrative around social dreaming that relates to the dreamlike aspects of what people are doing, just to kind of soften up this idea, of this, this kind of anxious idea around dreams and telling each other your dreams in that sense.* Dave

One of the specific challenges that Dave encountered in this process was associated with finding an accessible narrative for the practitioners from different psychotherapeutic backgrounds:

> *I had experience in* [part of England] *recently that was with a cognitive behavioural therapy department so of course I know I'm going in there and there's dirty words like the unconscious and stuff like that* [laughs] *tricky, I'm immediately going to bristle, so along the way I did a CBT training, so I was trying to find a way a narrative that links in with CBT.* Dave

Jason also noted that talking to professional colleagues about SDM was not always easy. He proposed that some practitioners are more socialised or curious about '*implicit intelligence'* and therefore might be more open to GDE. In particular, he commented on his observation that some professionals are not accustomed to a non-individualised approach and can find it hard to engage.

Carlo, reflecting on his extensive experience with group dream sharing, summarised that this activity demands openness to the possibility to *'use feelings, imagination, adjust emotional distance and relate to other human beings'* and that this combination might not be appealing to everyone. In Carlo's view, only those who have '*passion'* for these elements of the psyche, will engage with GDE. He specified that the psychoanalytic approach is the most promising base for this, as it views dream sharing as '*a particular way of the recruiting thoughts'*.

All participants shared their views on groups as entities with their distinctive characteristics, which need to be catered for when GDE is introduced or reflected upon. Nevertheless, some interviewees acknowledged that despite qualitative differences in the groups, there is a common tendency to pursue understanding, creativity and growth. Through the accessible narrative about GDE it might have been possible to access what Dave called '*a social layer of mind*' in order to generate what is truly accommodating for a group in the face of complexity. Dave was, in fact, the first participant to mention the concept of Social Design as an interactive process and an approach to understanding the evolution of collective human potential:

> *It's that movement into a social layer of mind and hidden kind of knowledge that then creates the design in a sense which is a bit like what we do in social dreaming, we are socially designing how we relate to the organisation or group or whatever, I like that, I like that as an idea.* Dave

Nevertheless, it was curious to notice that hints of Social Design were present in other interviews with the practitioners who were not actively engaged in Social Dreaming but facilitating psychoanalytic and Gestalt groups. For example, Carlo was fascinated with his observation of the speed with which his group participants would recognise the value of shared dreams and begin to use them resourcefully and creatively to engineer relatedness. Janet spoke about the group setting as a place where she felt safer to talk about dreams, partly because of the group's ability to produce '*the symbolism and the metaphor rather than the actual reality*'.

Dante talked about dreams as *'a foundation of thought*' that connects psychology to society. He proposed that groups are the best setting for working with dreams, to allow the extension of connections leading to the design of a *'new formal culture, personal culture or social view'*. Group dream sharing allowed Dante to explore *'the infinity of human motivation'* - the driving force which produces and resolves social, cultural, political and religious problems. Dante was visibly passionate about connecting disciplines as he proposed that *'psychological and anthropological answers need to be connected in the future'*. He commented on implications of this thinking for his work:

I can say that I started from dreams. I think that we can work with dreams as a part of Gestalt structure of thoughts, a part of a foundation of thought, so if actually a… psychologists can use some elements from anthropology, can work better I think with clinical disease or a cultural, erm I always say cultural problems, I mean because when I started studying society, I think that we have to see it as psychologists not as psychiatrists. Dante

Problem solving around complexity has been mentioned by most participants as something that groups are often faced with. For example, Dave noted that conscious innovation bypasses dream-like elements in the group or community around it. Group dream sharing was described by him as a transformational experience in the moment when the group is stuck. He saw transformation occurring on the level of group culture – not readily accessible and yet a fundamental level of the group's life, in Dave's view:

A kind of transformation project around transforming their culture and they were stuck basically usually with the social dreaming stuff I get these strange requests every now and again a usually if someone's really stuck and everything, or if there is some kind of innovation going on but they feel they were not quite getting it or if you like they are missing out on something so it's like it's got this positive 'We're innovating here but there's something dream-like we're not catching' or it's 'Everything's gone wrong', you know, which is obviously the more difficult [laughs]. Dave

Dave reflected on his life-affirming experiences of SDM hosting where he witnessed a group relaxing into the process of dream sharing. He contemplated his observation of the life of a group in the midst of creativity with the unconscious. Dave spoke about an example of a professional group which, through SDM, revealed its need to use individual talents to increase satisfaction with their work. He pointed out that SDM facilitates relating to dream material rather than '*being with it*', thereby promoting the sense of positive shared activity. According to Dave, SDM allows people '*to imagine the future together*', and the role of the facilitator he sees as stepping away from the expertness of designing, thus allowing the group to design their own product, from their dreams, thoughts and feelings.

Jason spoke about on-action GDE strengthening his '*sense of participation in social or cultural or communal group'*. He pointed out that group dream sharing is not about an isolated contribution, but about a whole presence where the individual is contributing and channelling the unconscious, while sharing the responsibility of dealing with it. He defined the participants as channels for life, as well as producers of a life of the group. The implications of on-action GDE for Jason were condensed in this awareness:

Let's say anyway err have a sense of your participation and contribution to a group which is not about your individual um skills or role, or production it's more about err how you as a person, including all of your unconscious stuff, um the whole of you becomes a err ... a participant in the sense of being a conduit as much as a err, err as being a producer, a conduit for the life of the of of the group or the community […] *I could say that's that what I got from it.* Jason

Jason shared his view on the culture of disconnected living in Western society where people are closed to the diverse expression of life and therefore developing a sense of uselessness. In GDE multileveled expression might be enabled allowing individuals to reconnect and rediscover their usefulness:

Quite often people I'm working with who who are disconnected, like most people in our culture are when there is a disconnect between their unconscious err intentions and wishes and hopes and fears, and, their conscious day to day life and they are disconnected from their unconscious ongoing living life which gets expressed in all sorts of different ways predominantly probably in our culture, anyway I won't go into that. When that disconnect is large erm that's when they have more problems or put it another way a sense of uselessness err, listlessness, disinterest, erm, or what gets called low self-esteem in many ways, I'm talking about the lighter end of things often is is is around a sense of they are only, they can only experience themselves in how they are in the world in respect of what they produce how they seen producing, their status rather than having a sense of themselves as rich individuals participating in in a life that is, err, living them and living the culture the community that they find, that they are in… Jason

Mike communicated something similar to Dave's and Jason's thoughts about distributed democracy in SDM, a sense of connection and ultimate generativity:

The process where everyone in the group shares dreams more or less equally and therefore producing new social awareness. Mike

His reflection on the implications of on-action GDE suggested that '*belonging to something bigger than an individual psyche'* is an enabling state, that allows people to express themselves and contribute to the community.

To summarise, the reflections regarding on-action GDE led some participants to the discussion of their awareness and their engagement with different communities. They spoke

about organisational, social and cultural contexts of their work, indicating the need for the development of an accessible narrative about GDE. Furthermore, the idea of Social Design was introduced to express the recognition of an interactive generative process that might occur in the group during the dream sharing and dream work, manifesting the evolution of collective human potential.

4.5. Super-ordinate Theme 3. GDE as a Whole

GDE as an experience that combines in-action and on-action aspects was reflected upon by some participants. They attempted to make sense of the overall experience of exposure to GDE, which was described as different, difficult to articulate, nebulous and visceral. Sometimes GDE as a whole was associated with the organic sense of meaning and a natural process. Some participants summarised GDE as a persistent, affirming, important and powerful experience. Furthermore, the constellation of reflections about the totality of experiences from group dream sharing resembled something that might be called Professional Maturation – the emergence of professional characteristics, qualities, skills and insights through psychological growth over time on the journey of becoming, where the unconscious is a guiding force, a subject of a study and a bridge into psychosocial infinity.

4.5.1. Sub-theme 3.1. Making sense of exposure to GDE

The exposure to GDE over time led some participants to reflect on the totality of this experience. Some participants admitted that this research was the first opportunity for them to gather their thoughts and reflect on their overall experience of group dream sharing. All practitioners, nevertheless, spoke about GDE as a whole as different (e.g. to other experiences of learning and development, as noticed by Jason), difficult to describe, nebulous and visceral. Many have expressed their struggle finding language that would help to express it.

Dave differentiated the process of sharing dreams in a group from other psychological activities, emphasising the expansion beyond interpersonal transactions between an individual and the therapist. However, he was struggling to clarify it further:

> *… group sharing of dreams is something of a different order really, because it's not, it's not just reduced to this kind of commentary on your psyche or the transference between you and a therapist, or the countertransference […] I could see how it could be used it could I think* [long pause] *it's difficult it's difficult to find the right language'.*
>
> Dave

Caroline talked about the powerful sense of GDE that was remembered but never had a representation in verbal description. She could not relate it to anything specific enough despite searching in her mind for a comparison for a few moments:

> *Dream work was included in my training, which was Gestalt. I was in a lot of groups and as part of it I worked on my own and others' dreams, however I can't remember anything specific* [pause]*. I just have this sense that it was powerful, but difficult to describe*. Caroline

Janet explained that her overall experience of group dream sharing was something that allowed her to witness the reduction of the individual fear and the emergence of multiple perspectives. She viewed GDE as a useful and '*essential part of work'*, comparing it to *'a window'* into something deep and everlasting. She was also struggling to describe this experience, doubting her capacity to do it after a thinking pause. She, like other participants, used the word *'something'* as a term that enables GDE to be articulated.

It was curious to observe the focus group trying to express their overall shared experience. Clara had to use her hands for communication as she was looking for words, sending non-verbal signals to others in an attempt to express it. These gestures looked as if she was trying to 'catch' the indefinable. As Clara was engaged in this expression, she acknowledged a change '*on micro level'* in her life which manifested in her later work with clients. She spoke about being receptive to something intangible, that was not noticeable to her before. Clara explained this by allowing space for emergence of the unconscious and its *'magic' 'weaving'*. She emphasised her understanding that there is no recipe for this experience as it is not dependent on procedure. Nevertheless, it is strongly felt:

> *I'm using my hands a lot […] I have to catch it, it sounds really nebulous after coming here there's something that changes in my molecules of my being that then comes out with clients. So it might be it's really intangible to say but it might be I will sometimes voice something that is beforehand since unspoken or I might just have put my fingers out and they might just be a bit more receptive to be picking up on something that I might not of picked up on before and I think that is happening because of allowing a space for things to emerge, dreams to work and all the unconscious stuff to work its magic for want of a better word, to work its weaving so I think it is happening is but there's no recipe for it either, it's not you know I've run a dream workshop and this this and this all happened as a result is not a tangible and measurable outcome from the group but is something that I feel happens*. Clara

Clara also spoke about her experience of faith in what will emerge without attempts to define, predict or pin it down - the enigma of a group talking about dreams:

> *Just let it sit there and whatever comes will come you don't have to put it down, just have faith, something will arise from this and that's making me think about someone I've been working with and I think something has just arisen from a dream he's had, without us needing to pin it down, the dream's been stated and then you know things have arisen from that yeah. The mystery of us talking*. Clara

Libby shared her summary of the exposure to GDE in SDM and expressed excitement at discovering that other people also wanted to engage with this experience. This fascination around GDE as a whole was not motivated by familiarity with the group, but by acknowledging the shared need to engage in this experience, which was hard to describe:

> *I am among a group of people whom I hardly knew and some people I did not know at all and it's been really lovely […] I did not know that other people want to do this sort of stuff! The sort of thing you couldn't explain to anybody.* Libby

Ella reflected on the total '*mysterious'* experience of dreaming as '*cleansing'*. She commented that despite the tiring impact of the day she always looks forward to *'something fun and mysterious and nourishing'*, something that is difficult to describe and define, something elusive and nebulous, and yet something that she considers significant as time goes on. She also referred to a visceral need to express it:

I'm also thinking just as something mysterious happen when we actually sleep, and our brain gets cleansed in some way through our dreams and conscious and whatever goes on at night. I wonder whether there is a similar thing that goes for us or for me, when we are here, you know, we come to almost, to the end of session and say that's really had a oh I'm really tired that's had an impact on me today, but we can't quite put our finger on exactly what it is, but we know there's something fun and mysterious and nourishing as you say, that's gone on so I think it's really hard to define it, but I think it, it is for me very significant for me actually and becoming more significant. I've been really reminded of that today, and it's a bit elusive but you were saying nebulous. How do you put your fingers on it? Ella

Ella also compared GDE to '*the mind gym*' where, over time, '*the unconscious muscle*' of the therapists is exercised '*without a need to fix anything*'. As if, in this regular activity, the practitioners were able to step out from their professional practice for the purpose of self-care

and development, and holistically enhance their sense of self in the world of complexity. She concluded that this is '*the most useful thing*' that therapists can be doing.

In the focus group Jason reflected on the interview for this research as an opportunity to talk about GDE as a whole, because '*there really is something here that I am not sure would've got articulated otherwise'*. He found words limiting for the expression of his experience, but eventually I got the sense of his reinforced participation in a group on social, cultural and communal levels. It was as if GDE as a whole strengthened his connection with others, and *'belonging to something bigger than self*'.

Jason reacted to my summative term of 'merging' by avidly clarifying his experience of '*connection without merging*'. He spoke about SDM where the individuals were sustaining their sense of identity. Later, listening to the focus group input, I was able to come close to what Jason might have meant by this insight: the exposure to GDE as a whole does not seem to destroy or deconstruct the individual sense of identity, but instead expand and enhance it through the addition of the multiple elements from others in the group. The openness to it, however, might be a sign of unconscious maturation – something that I might have undergone myself in the process of getting to this understanding through the interaction with my participants.

The combination of thoughts about the nebulousness and importance of GDE led some participants to reflect on the organic sense of meaning or natural process of meaning-making that they felt in GDE. This was particularly noticeable in the focus group interview. The participants resonated with the beliefs about eventual organic emergence of meaning from the total mysterious experience of the group talking about the dreams. They also shared a belief that there is no need for the effort of meaning-making in the group that shares dreams, but there is a need for *'space'* where the meaning and healing can emerge. Consequently, I observed the consensus in the focus group on the idea about '*the independence psyche*' or knowledge that can be appreciated after the exposure to GDE over time.

The focus group described these lasting implications of dream sharing as '*significant*' and '*affirming'*, where GDE is a '*steadying point'*; where time can be managed or slowed down and the complex experiences grounded. Ella voiced a sense of relief that exposure to GDE can bring over time. This resonated with the whole focus group.

The members talked about meaning from GDE as a whole that emerged for them after time had passed. When real-life events connected the focus group participants to the dreams

shared in SDM, they experienced a sense of 'prophecy' as some sort of clarification of '*the nebulous*' from the past SDM:

> *There is something happening but I do not know what it is. I often think about people's dreams, not just in the weeks after, but months after or sometimes I think, bloody hell,[…] like the London's burning […] before Grenfell Tower […] stuff like that.* Ella

The powerful sense of GDE was described by most participants as something that lingered over time without verbal representation and was associated with expansion, extension and widening out of the mind. It was implied that GDE as a whole, once experienced, stays with the person for a long time. For example, Jason named this phenomenon '*a lingering sense of developing self*'.

In summary, the exposure to GDE as a whole has been reflected upon by all participants with acknowledgement of its powerful, mysterious, nebulous, important, expanding and affirming aspects that linger in time and are difficult to express with words.

4.5.2. Sub-theme 3.2. Professional Maturation

Most participants in this research talked about expansion and development of professional characteristics, qualities, skills and insights over time that might have had implications for their personal and professional growth. For instance, some participants mentioned their extended recognition of the value of dreams, linking it to the development of a profound receptivity for the dreaming background of human life in general. Some practitioners noticed over time the transformation of their anxiety around groups and around the process of facilitation, into a deep appreciation of, and trust in, the life of groups' ecosystems. GDE as a whole seemed to energise the progression of the practitioners towards becoming less 'seasick' in the 'turbulent waters' of group complexity where the sense of control or steering, that a facilitator might be keen to have, is momentary and only relevant to some extent. This progression in time might have moved practitioners towards a threshold of awareness that lingers and expands into other areas of their personal and professional life – a phenomenon that I called Professional Maturation. It might be associated with the conversion of professional resilience into professional antifragility, where, in the face of infinite life stressors, some participants acknowledged their capability to thrive. This 'antifragile' belief in some cases might have been amplified by GDE as a whole.

For example, some participants spoke about their openness to the dreams and dream-like experiences in their personal and professional lives, and about a deep appreciation of

dreaming as a universal experience. Dave used a metaphor of an '*attuned ear*' that helped him to be more receptive to the process of living:

> *It gives that attuned ear to be listening out for the dreaming background of what's going on and not just in terms of night-time dreams but in terms of dream-like associations that people might make, or it might be dream-like movements, you know, in their body or stuff, you are just able to work with those with more confidence. I guess, I feel more attuned in a sense.* Dave

Caroline spoke about her experience of '*opening up*' to the work with dream-like material and over time noticing this openness in different contexts of her therapeutic work. Dante explained how his personal experience of dream sharing in groups over time has grown into '*link-making*' beyond the therapeutic context.

There was also a sense that the maturation into GDE itself has occurred over time. For example, Carlo said that he is now less concerned about working with dreams and utilising his own '*dream thinking'*, viewing these experiences as a '*revenue'*. Caroline stressed the importance of '*being familiar with how to work in unknown areas*' and how her openness to GDE has evolved over time. Dante acknowledged his developed 'looking glass' approach to GDE as a pathway to understanding: '*because you know with dreams you can work like in a mirror, you know*'. Mike also pointed to his experience of gradual change in understanding the interconnectivity of dreams and their social context. He shared his realisation that the democratic process of group dream sharing nurtures people in a different way to the conventional power dynamic in therapy. He stated that '*this can be only experienced over time*'.

Interestingly, Jason also emphasised the qualitative chronological change in professional phenomenology. According to Jason, it takes a while for the therapists to shift from the automatic professional habits of individualised inquiries and reflections around dreams, into the acceptance and tolerance of something bigger than the sum of individual parts. He viewed dreams as being '*absolutely fundamental*' to extending understanding beyond the self.

Dave spoke of his gradual increase in preference for group dream sharing as his previous experiences of working with dreams one-to-one felt too restrictive:

> *I now prefer that, that kind of setting, in that sense, because just to analyse my own dream on my own or with someone it seems like I'm putting too narrow of a container*

around it when there's creativity and connections to be made with other people, around dreams. Dave

In the focus group the participants discussed their realisation over time that other work of therapists cannot compensate for GDE from SDM as it is difficult to find an alternative.

The perspective on the work with groups was summarised by some participants as something that evolved over time. The anxiety, the trust and the application of learning were the main elements that seemed to reform gradually in the psychotherapists' experiences. For instance, Janet thought back to her training days, when exploring her thoughts regarding dream sharing and group containment. She acknowledged that progressively she developed a sense of a secure safe place, which consequently enabled her to experience enrichment as she was '*maturing into a role, working, and with people who also have a maturity in their profession*'.

Dave compared his past experiences with groups and acknowledged that his '*terror'* associated with the prospect of facilitating groups has been superseded by curiosity and trust in the processes that occur in the groups. He explained this by his gradual acceptance of dreaming in the group as a natural process, and a '*dreaming reality*' being there irrespective of the anxieties of the individuals in the group. Jason spoke of his move away from the facilitation as his anxiety reduced, and of how he has grown to appreciate '*being in the group'*. Dante started viewing the group as something more than the gathering of individuals, and rather as a window into cultural and social complexity – '*a part of a new experience in psychotherapy*'.

Carlo spoke about the development of his reliance '*on the group as a whole*', following the group and its thoughts without narrow pursuit of understanding. He stressed his belief that the process of dream sharing belongs to the group and the group belongs to this process. With his nurturing tone of voice, he implied that the facilitator could mature into this acceptance through exposure to GDE.

The focus group actively engaged in the discussion of the meaning of GDE as a whole outside the professional psychotherapeutic context. They spoke about their thinking together, consciously processing ideas and playing with tacit elements of their lives as people without professional expectations. They agreed that they did not find any other opportunities to talk about, or be involved with, dream sharing or unconscious process outside working as a psychotherapist. From this discussion it seemed that the therapeutic context imposed a purpose for those involved, whereas GDE allowed these participants '*not to work, but play and see what happens*'. For them it was not about helping or getting better, but about being in the

world as it is and being themselves – humans and dreamers. The focus group named it a '*nourishing experience*', '*grounding for the mind*', '*mind gym*' where the recognition that '*something is going on*' happens without definite knowing or obligation to know, hence promoting personal and professional growth.

To summarise, the overall experience of exposure to GDE was described by most participants as ambiguous. GDE as a whole was associated with a natural process of meaning-making, which was viewed as important and long-lasting by most participants. Moreover, the gradual emergence of professional characteristics, qualities, skills and insights corresponding with exposure to GDE, might have been followed by Professional Maturation.

4.6. Overall Conclusions from the Findings

The three major findings related to GDE and its implications for psychotherapists were associated with in-action GDE, on-action GDE and GDE as a whole. The participants spoke about their felt-in-the-moment experience of group dream sharing and dream work, associated with accessing the unconscious. The in-action GDE had 'dark' and 'bright' connotations for the practitioners. On-action GDE lingered into the individual and communal levels of participants' lives. The combined experience of GDE as a whole stimulated deep reflection by some psychotherapists where they implied a process that might be associated with Professional Maturation.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1. Overview

The aim of this study was to explore psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. The emphasis was on identifying and understanding the aspects of GDE, which is under-researched in the field of psychotherapy and Counselling psychology. It was carried out via migration between the 'insider' and 'outsider' positions to access participants' meaning-making processes; while remaining focused on the researcher's responsibility to interpret the data more broadly (Woolfe *et al.*, 2010). By following the integrative epistemology based on heuristic inquiry, contextualism and critical realism, I hoped to collate a 'bigger picture' of multiple dynamic expressions of GDE, and produce an inclusive and accessible narrative, which would account for the complexity of this phenomenon.

This study provides accounts from psychotherapists representing psychoanalytic, Gestalt and Social Dreaming approaches in group dream sharing and dream work. It details participants' thinking, feeling and sensing associated with GDE and how these contributed to their understanding of this phenomenon. The three aspects of GDE (in-action, on-action and as a whole) were distinguished as the result of overseeing the whole data set across time – the privilege that I, as a researcher, held in this qualitative enquiry. Using this view, I found it possible to discern subtle differences in the experiences, depending on where they were situated in terms of time and space in the participants' lives, with the acknowledgement of a potential for 'superposition' of all three aspects of GDE.

To discuss the main findings, I offered a theoretical sampling that seemed to work well in the process of illuminating the complexity of GDE. For example, I referred to those theories that I found helpful for translating GDE into scientific language and creating an accessible narrative. In the pursuit of identifying enough theoretical backing for this discussion, I encountered a 'poetic paradox' of saying less and meaning more. The nebulousness of GDE was difficult to pinpoint in the literature due to its paradoxical tensions and reinforcing cycles. To manage this, I wanted to avoid colonising complexity, so I approached the discussion of findings as an opening to the awareness about theoretical diversity around GDE. I also decided to introduce some details of theoretical complexity in Appendices 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 in order to keep the focus on the holistic view of GDE in the main body of the thesis.

In this chapter I also provided reflections on the implications of this research for Counselling psychology. The study's limitations were considered and suggestions for future research offered.

5.2. In-action GDE – Channelling the Flow of the Unconscious through the Oscillation between the Bright and Dark Sides

In-action GDE might be described as a dynamic phenomenon which decreases mental separation from the Fabric of Complexity and allows group members to access its elements in the present. For example, in-action GDE may accommodate the unconscious by making space for it and determining individual and group engagement with it (see a more detailed theoretical consideration of this in Appendix 21). Mindell's (2011) theory may be applied to suggest that participation in group dream sharing and dream work can be viewed as an opportunity for psychotherapists to channel this experiential flow.

For example, the focus group offered an interesting perspective on the process of accessing the unconscious through GDE. The participants spoke about the reduction of anxiety, and the consequent allowance for influences from multiple directions in the group. This development might be a manifestation of surviving the *attacks on linking*, which according to Bion (1988) occur in the group as the result of exposure to the unknown, emergent from the unconscious. When the new thought enters the individual mind, it is viewed as potentially disruptive and shattering (Bion, 1988). The ability to tolerate this is dependent on the individual's capacity to withstand fragmentation, anxiety and doubt. The dynamic transformational processes that might take place during group dream sharing or dream work have a potential to mediate the dismantling of previous views and theories, therefore nurturing resilience or a capability to manage emotional and thinking processes for the purpose of development when facing the unconscious. Furthermore, if GDE can be part of a rhizomatic process of change, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988), then the experience of openness to influence from multiple directions in the participants can be viewed as openness to a flow of knowledge from multiple points of awareness.

Right from the beginning of the data collection I noticed that, with some regularity, the participants would shift from an enthusiastic or deductive expression of their experiences into moments of 'dipping into' something hazy and uncomfortable. I considered different terminology for the linguistic expression of this phenomenon. I thought of the 'positive' and 'negative' as adjectives that may convey the qualitative difference between these experiences. However, these words felt too restricting and too theory-dependent, hence potentially compromising for the phenomenological complexity. Instead, I gravitated towards a metaphoric expression of the Bright and the Dark Sides, which felt appropriate as it was able to contain the embedded elements of positivity and negativity in both types of experience, as well as highlight the organic nature of these phenomena with their potential for transformation.

Furthermore, from my observations, the contrast between experiences was not based on the difference in the depth of reflection, with Dark Side being felt on a deeper level – something that might have been anticipated if a specific theoretical lens (e.g. psychoanalytic) was applied. In fact, the depth of reflection was generally sustained throughout interviews, with the exception of the 'warming up' period right at the beginning of an interview, which can be characterised as a more descriptive stage. What I noticed resembled a sense of side-to-side fluctuation between light and darkness as if in narratives the Dark Side had more potency to push back into the light and the Bright Side carried the inevitability to slide into the darkness. The Dark Side of GDE was associated with a struggle through exposure to the unknown and the Bright Side of GDE was linked to the widening of psychological horizons (see more detailed theoretical considerations of these in Appendices 22 and 23).

Jung (1963) spoke about the need for awareness of our own potential for darkness as well as light, in order for the individual to accept full reality. Bion (1959) theorised about valency of the love-hate-knowledge links and the value of the *minus emotion*, that represents the thing-in-itself. Polarised duality can also be found in group theories. Nitsun (1996) introduced the notion of the *anti-group* as a shadow of everything that is constructive and affirming within group life. At the level of society, contemporary psychosocial research has highlighted the relationship between creative and destructive experiences as integral to the functioning of macro-groups (Williams, 2021; Long and Manley, 2019).

Nevertheless, the observation of how this polarity has been approached by the participants in this research was particularly curious. I noticed that the Dark Side of GDE seemed to fail to manifest itself in a *negativity bias* (Rozin and Royzman, 2001). The negative potency of challenges in GDE did not seem to be dominant in the narratives. It is possible to argue that general optimism and positive bias originated from the experiences of group wholeness (Foulkes, 1964) or the production of countertheory (Nitsun, 1996). Kennedy *et al.* (2004) found that positive bias can be associated with the age-related positivity effect that is linked to the motivation for talking about past experiences: the older the adults are, the more positively they recall their memories of significant experiences. Furthermore, the positivity around the Dark Side of GDE might be the result of the development of Professional Maturation (see Appendix 27).

In the process of tackling the challenge of developing narrative about the dynamic nature of in-action GDE, I experienced the 'near-theory' generated metaphor, comparing GDE to a nebula (see section 4.2. The Near-theory Metaphor). It emerged from the focus group interview data, where the word 'nebulous' was frequently used to articulate GDE. Cognitive

linguists Lakoff and Johnson (2003) explained the emergence of such expressions of people's ideas about the world and their experiences of it, as embodied, unconscious and therefore metaphoric in their nature.

The dynamism of in-action GDE might lie in the fluctuation of awareness between Dark and Bright Sides. In this process the unconscious flow may be channelled, and new meaning might emerge. Prigogine's (1997) theory of order through fluctuation can be metaphorically applied here to explain this phenomenon (see Chapter 2) which marks the developmental journey of dreams, an individual and a group. Furthermore, this fluctuation can be considered as part of a transformational rhythm or flow triggered by complexity (Mindell, 2011). Hence the state of enchantment, trance or dreaming that was noticeable in some participants during the recall of these experiences.

5.3. On-action GDE – the Lingering Residue of Experiences

On-action GDE as a lingering phenomenon might extend into the individual and communal levels of psychotherapists' lives over time (see more detailed theoretical consideration of these in Appendices 24 and 25). It has been associated with qualities and skills of the practitioners, as well as engagement with different professional, social and cultural communities. My experience of the participants, when they were talking about implications of on-action GDE, was as if they were sharing with me their experience of prolonged knowledge absorption. It resembled cognitive processes of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration described by Piaget (1976). Assimilation might have involved the incorporation of new information from in-action GDE into the general pre-existing knowledge. Accommodation might have enabled the existing understanding to change while metabolising insights from in-action GDE. Equilibration might have allowed some participants to seek a balance between assimilation and accommodation. Overall, on-action GDE engaged psychotherapists in the process of learning adaptation from in-action GDE, and in contemplation of how the elements from the Fabric of Complexity might have been reflected in their wider living experiences.

Group dream sharing or dream work has been considered in contemporary theories (e.g. Lawrence, 2003; Hill, 1996; Ullman, 1994) as a potent space for individual development. For example, Mindell (2000) suggested that dream work in groups can aid the expansion of facilitators' own awareness and fluidity (the skill of moving from one role or viewpoint to another) as the attitude of openness is nurtured towards other people and their perspectives, as well as towards various dream images, and states of consciousness. This proposition might be helpful in explaining the flexibility that participants presented via their descriptions of maintaining open-mindedness, applying negative capability and accepting simplicity alongside

complexity. I speculated that GDE may also bring psychotherapists in touch with *yearning for the social* (Morgan-Jones and Eden, 2019) resulting in the expansion of what might be called a *community feeling* around their practices and personal lives.

Due to its lingering quality, on-action GDE might not fit into the categories of knowledge assigned by psychology. Following the metaphor of *'frattale'* produced by one of the participants, I chose to employ Fractal thinking theory in an attempt to capture the expression of on-action GDE. A fractal is a geometric form, which extends in vertical and horizontal dimensions in an analogous way. West *et al.* (1995) translated this concept from geometry into psychological studies. The application of their ideas made it possible to conceptualise on-action GDE as a phenomenological fractal or a complex flexible pattern of experiences from in-action GDE that infinitely expands into the different dimensions of the participants' lives. Acknowledging the implications from on-action GDE on the individual and communal levels of experience might thus be viewed as fractal development of meaning from in-action GDE.

5.4. GDE as a Whole – the Dynamic Fractal Constellation

GDE as a whole absorbs in-action and on-action aspects, while being represented in them. The participants in this research made sense of this wholeness by referring to the important, powerful, nebulous, visceral and natural process of meaning-making, which might promote Professional Maturation (see more detailed theoretical consideration of this in Appendix 27).

The theories of dynamic transformation offer a useful framework that can be applied to the experience of sense-making from GDE as a whole. For instance, the Gestalt model might allow consideration of the process of group dream sharing as an interaction between the foreground and background systems, where the Fabric of Complexity forms a unified field, and where the in-action and on-action experiences through their interconnectedness give rise to GDE as a whole. Bateson's (2002) ideas of mutual causality might point towards the circular nature of GDE as a whole, which is difficult to capture via conventional methods of expression. Gestalt and Cybernetics concepts of non-linear transformation might also be helpful in explaining the sense of expansion and widening out of participants' awareness and understanding. On-action and in-action GDE might be viewed as a feedback (constructive or destructive) between a system's components. The transformation as a process, according to Mindell (2011) and Maruyama (1963) is already inbuilt in the pattern of a system (e.g. the Fabric of Complexity). The sense-making of exposure to GDE as a whole, I approached as a continuous process in itself, where the transforming might occur through the struggle of expression.

The Nomadic theory by Braidotti (2011) guided by the Deleuzian ideas about dynamic transformations, navigated around the concept of becoming, which can be useful to the understanding of the experiences of Professional Maturation in the context of GDE. Braidotti (2011) theorised about becoming as movement away from linear growth towards multidirectional development. This can be compared to what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) described as rhizomatic process of change, where knowledge flows through multiple non-hierarchical points of entry and exit in the awareness. The experience of fluid becoming might be represented in Professional Maturation via GDE. It explains the spread of profound awareness across different areas of life (awareness of the Fabric of Complexity), antifragility, and the ability to move between the finite and infinite, that the participants in this research spoke about in their reflection on GDE as a whole.

The theories of dynamic transformation, such as cybernetic, Gestalt and dialectic theories, as well as quantum science, also inspired the focus of this discussion on the dynamic relationships that lie at the centre of the understanding of GDE as a whole. Livingstone (2017) pointed to the dominance of *reductionism* in modern Western society, where the complexity of the whole is conceptualised via the definition of its parts. He referred to Bortoft's (1996) vision of an alternative within a discourse from holistic science that allows one to rediscover wholeness through the parts by developing a *holistic mode of consciousness*, which is capable of abstraction as well as integration. In the discussion of GDE as a whole, I adopted Livingstone's idea of perception of a phenomenon that is not focused on categorising it into the whole or a sum of the parts, but acknowledges paradoxical processes within which unity of the whole and the parts can be conceived as the same phenomenon.

I theorised about on-action GDE by applying Fractal thinking. This holistic approach can also help with conceptualisation of GDE as a whole in terms of a *dynamic fractal constellation*, envisaging the totality of relationships between its aspects, that are infinitely expanding (see Figure 6).

Bortoft (1996) made a distinction between *authentic* and *counterfeit wholes*. This differentiation was drawn on the assumption that contemporary science tends to view the whole as being created via addition of its parts. Hence, a counterfeit whole is a concept that contains the denial of the primacy of the whole and implies that the whole emerges after the parts. The authentic whole, according to Bortoft (1996), is an entity which cannot have its parts separated into distinct positions, because it is ingrained in each of them and develops concurrently with their accumulation. Following this line of thought, it might be possible to compare GDE as a whole to an all-encompassing impression of the expanding relationships

between on-action and in-action GDE or, in other words, a dynamic fractal constellation (see Figure 6). This phenomenon is far more complex than a linear progression of experiences and it is likely that it constitutes an authentic whole. This might also explain why in reflection on the totality of experiences from group dream sharing and dream work, some participants commented on the natural emergence of GDE.

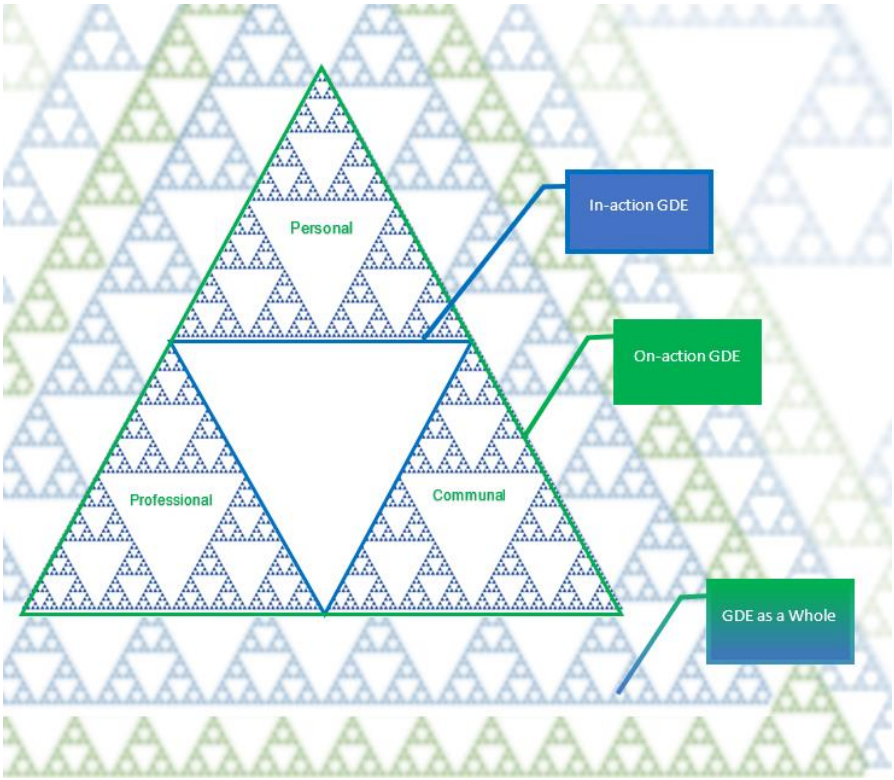

Figure 6. GDE as a whole - the dynamic fractal constellation

5.5. Overall Conclusions from the Discussion

In-action GDE, on-action GDE and GDE as a whole were conceptualised from the findings related to GDE and its implications for psychotherapists. In-action GDE was described as a dynamic phenomenon that is associated with a decrease in mental separation from the underlying Fabric of Complexity, allowing individuals to access its elements in the moment. In-action GDE might allow access to the unconscious during group dream sharing or dream work. It is important to consider its Bright and Dark Sides in order to account for the diversity of the experiences. On-action GDE was expressed as a complex flexible pattern of experiences from in-action GDE, that infinitely expands into the different dimensions of psychotherapists' lives – the individual (personal and professional) and communal levels of

experience. GDE as a whole was viewed as an authentic whole that absorbs in-action and on-action aspects and is represented in them. GDE as a whole might be compared to a dynamic fractal constellation.

5.6. Strengths and Limitations of the Research

A major strength of this study is the novel topic. Group dream sharing and dream work, despite having a long history of being represented in psychotherapy, education and organisation management, remain under-researched. Furthermore, GDE has never been explored from the perspective of the implications for the individual and communal levels of psychotherapists' experiences, nor in the context of Professional Maturation. The findings from this research contribute to the broader understanding of GDE and allow consideration of this phenomenon within the discipline of Counselling psychology. Moreover, this thesis aimed to illuminate the topic under investigation via accessible narrative incorporating varied means of expression and mindful integration of concepts from a diverse of range theories and multiple disciplines.

The use of triangulated data that came from the expert advisors, individual and group interviews, is another advantage of this research. The triangulation became a developmental part of this research, as the need arose to balance my positionality, while capturing the dynamic, dream-like, reflexive nature of the participants' input. The transition from the experts' input to the individual interviews, and eventually to the group interview, allowed me to follow gradual saturation in the themes. In this study the notion of triangulation is close to the concept of crystallisation, that anticipates the use of multiple sources, not so much to verify (in case there is no truth) but rather to reveal the information (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009). Triangulation helped me to enhance the qualitative richness of the data and to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It also increased my confidence regarding the results of this study as I was an inexperienced researcher.

One other significant strength of this research is a unique data set from the focus group interview. The participants were recruited from an exclusive group of experienced practitioners. The data collected from these participants was dynamic and reflexive in nature, partly due to the conversational nature of the interview, and partly because this was the first experience of articulating GDE in this group. This format also allowed me to capture the interactions associated with, and the consensus on, some thoughts, providing richer definitions of experiences. In the interview the group tackled complex ideas and dream-like expressions, while I was able to record this process of knowledge production directly, gaining insight into how the expression of GDE emerges from the group.

This thesis represents a heuristic inquiry which accommodated periods of an incubation of thinking, detachment from the data and re-engagement with 'fresh eyes' and deeper understanding of the content. In the first stage of this process the literature review was conducted, and the collected data was manually analysed to produce the first edition of results. The feedback from the first viva prompted further analytical procedures (e.g. the implementation of NVivo). After a break, when time and distancing from the data allowed a fresh perspective on it, the interviews were re-analysed and the new literature review was conducted to accommodate the deeper understanding of the data. Hence, the presentation of results about complex and nebulous GDE benefited from a two-stage data analysis (manual first and digital second) and comprehensive selection of supportive literature (see Figure 7).

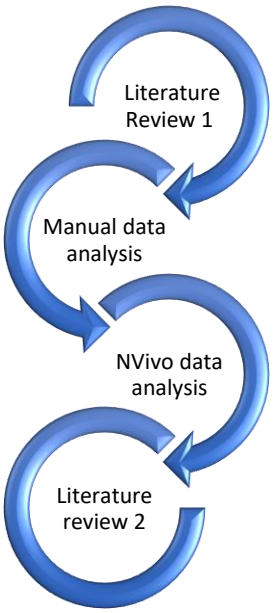

Figure 7. The process of advanced data analysis and literature review

Reflexivity is another benefit of this research. Throughout the whole process I have engaged in a multileveled reflection on the process and the dream-like experience of this research. I have negotiated the insider/outsider positionality to provide a balanced account of the findings. According to O'Connor (2004) this practice can enhance the validity of the data interpretation.

This research benefited from some consideration of the diverse professional, social and cultural backgrounds of the participants. This was accommodated by TA which does not require homogeneity of the sample. It was considered important to acknowledge the differences between participants that could help to understand their narratives better. For example, cultural diversity was thought through when speculating about collectivist and

individualist tendencies in the expression of meaning assigned to GDE by the Italian and British participants. Age and the number of years in practice were acknowledged when reflecting on Professional Maturation associated with GDE.

Nevertheless, it is also important to consider that the diversity represented by the participants in this study and my own background might have stimulated some problematic parallel processes. All participants and experts were much more experienced and older than me. Additionally, at the beginning of this project I considered myself as an inexperienced researcher, feeling unconfident about my professional identity. This might have introduced a possibility of parallel dynamics where the age and experience were automatic determinants of power and knowledge imbalance. However, the reality of intricate relations is inbuilt in any social interaction associated with a research process, where the actions of one individual affect the (re)actions of others (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, even though the imbalance might have occurred, it was an epistemological imperative for me to understanding the effects of power on the research process through my reflexivity. It helped me to identify and to differentiate the knowledge that was produced by power relations and the knowledge that was to some extent independent of them.

This thesis offers a constellation of GDE from different contexts. It was acknowledged that participants' GDE has been recalled from their experiences of group dream sharing and dream work in different modalities (Gestalt, Psychoanalysis and SDM). Furthermore, GDE had many connotations in the accounts of the participants: group workshops for organisations such as the NHS, supervision groups, groups for personal and professional development, clinical groups with clients. Although one study cannot capture the diversity of experiences associated with GDE, this research might be considered as a first step towards learning about it.

Whilst most participants, prior to participating in this study, had never spoken about their GDE, some participants had previously been indirectly involved in reflective thinking about group dream sharing and dream work as supervisors or researchers. This may have influenced participants' insights and given them a practised approach to expressing their thoughts during interviews in this study.

The individual interview participants volunteered to talk about GDE on Skype. This method generated rich and engaging data for this study. However, it is important to consider that the method of online semi-structured interviews has its limitations (see Chapter 3) and attracts certain types of participants. The disposition of participants always influences the data, and at any given time only certain discussions can develop. Furthermore, the nature and quality of the discussion is influenced by the type of communication, (e.g. remote via Skype) (Braun and

Clarke, 2013). Consequently, there might be other accounts of GDE containing valuable information that my participants could have produced, which were not captured in this study. The face-to-face focus group interview was one of the triangulation steps that was designed to compensate for such limitations.

Although some participants spoke about their dreams, or dreams of their clients in the context of GDE, this material was largely omitted in the presentation and discussion of the results. This could be viewed as a limiting factor as the dream material might have brought a different angle to appreciation of the data, extending the thinking about the transaction between the conscious and the unconscious of the participants. Conversely, the focus on the dream material could have channelled attention back to the individual and away from the social aspect of the research enquiry.

There were two reasons why the decision to exclude full dream descriptions from the write up was made. The first motive was associated with the dreams being considered as giving very specific details of the participants' identity that had a quality of 'fingerprints', which could have led to a confidentiality issue. This reason also influenced my decision to not include in this thesis full verbatim transcripts of the interviews.

The second reason was also linked to ethics. One of the participants spoke about the experience of making dreams shared in a group, public via research. Despite the confidentiality and ethics precautions adopted in that study, there was a lot of discomfort among the participants as they wanted to '*have their dreams back'* as a group. It might be proposed that the dissemination of dreams has a potential to become a form of social intervention. Considering this, the presentation of specific dreams from GDE might require an attuned procedure designed for this purpose, which lies outside the scope of this research.

5.7. The Sample

According to Braun and Clarke (2013) six to ten interviews for projects applying TA is recommended. Individual interviews with seven practitioners and a focus group interview with five psychotherapists were conducted for this study. Therefore, the data set can be considered as reasonably broad. At the beginning of the research the recruitment of participants was challenging due to the reasons described in the section 3.6.1. Sampling and recruitment process. At the second stage of interviewing more people came forward volunteering for the individual interviews. However, this opportunity could not be utilised due to the time limitations on the registration of this project with the University.

The nature of the research topic, as well as my insider/outsider positionality, may have contributed to the challenge of recruitment. Some participants were recruited from the network of contacts established via expert advisors initially interviewed to gain the directions for the research. Hence there is a possibility that some of the motivation for participation was a result of social relationships. This awareness led me to inform all participants that their genuine reflection was wanted. This point was given particular emphasis during the focus group interview, which was organised on the basis of a group that I met before administering the research procedure. Since this type of mutual influence is expected in dialogue-based qualitative research (Seidman, 2006) it does not negate the inferences gathered from this aspect of the project.

5.8. Transferability and the Implications of the Findings

The transferability of the research findings is limited due to the small sample size. Despite the triangulation (input from the experts as well as individual and group interview participants) the participant pool is still at the low end of the range that would be necessary to generate results applicable to the wider population.

The transferability of the findings from this study to different types of group dream sharing and dream work is also limited. Although in this study it was possible to recruit participants with experience of working in such modalities as Gestalt, Psychoanalysis and SDM, the sample remains too small to generalise from. Since the results of this study are the first step to the exploration of GDE, it still requires much more ongoing research examination, and a better-informed description of the diverse phenomenology.

The conceptualisation of GDE in this project bridged concepts from different disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology and physics in the attempt to understand the value of this experience for psychotherapists (e.g. Professional Maturation). This research endeavoured to form an accessible narrative that would illuminate the complexity of GDE and its possible implications. It might be useful for the extension of a contemporary discourse associated with psychotherapeutic approaches to working with dreams in groups, which might be shifting from one-to-one to social orientation, especially in the field of integrative practice. This research into GDE also offers a formulation of learning from complexity as an alternative to a position of reducing it, which can be helpful to consider in the discussions about cultural differences in some organisations and professional communities.

5.9. Application to Counselling Psychology

The findings of this study can be applicable to Counselling psychology from the perspectives of professional practice and theoretical understanding. These contributions have been considered at the level of identity, professional values, and the processes that counselling psychologists attend to in their personal and professional development and clinical practice.

Chappell *et al.* (2003) emphasised the importance of lifelong learning for the development of a sense of professional identity. In the context of counselling psychologists' training and practice it might be possible to introduce GDE as an experience of accessing the unconscious, the gradual expansion of multifaceted awareness and a potential progression towards Professional Maturation.

Professional development of counselling psychologists is orbiting around the integration of the personal insights into their identity. It is defined by practitioners' personal reflexive narrative and shaped by the relationship with others (Chappell *et al.,* 2003). In this context GDE might be perceived as an experience that enables Self embraces as well as Social embraces and, therefore, promotes exploration of counselling psychologists' professional identity.

Furthermore, the emergence of GDE might be linked to the process of accessing the unconscious, which can occur in counselling psychologists' training and practice (e.g. in the context of personal and professional development groups). This research contains examples of experiences that can help trainees and qualified practitioners to make sense of exposure to different aspects of GDE.

Integrating professional identity into practice is a value-based task. It might be proposed that GDE can endorse the values of Counselling psychology. One of these values is openness to the diversity of experiences. It is represented in the capacity of Counselling psychology to integrate different theoretical perspectives (such as Gestalt, Psychoanalysis, SDM etc.) and to accommodate complexity. This openness shifts the focus of Counselling psychology practice from tangible fixing into enabling growth. Woolfe *et al.* (2010) see the purpose of Counselling psychology as moving from problem solving and response identification, to redefining the problem and enabling potential. In the context of personal and professional development of counselling psychologists, GDE can be viewed as a useful experience that fulfils this purpose.

Furthermore, working with complexity is considered as both 'the biggest challenge and opportunity' for Counselling psychology (Lane, 2010, in Woolfe *et al.* 2010, p.459). In this

research GDE was associated with growing out of a narrow pursuit of understanding, individualisation, structuring and apprehension about dreams and groups, and growing into an appreciation of the texture and vibrancy of the Fabric of Complexity. It might be proposed that knowledge about GDE can extend counselling psychologists' ability to face complexity and learn from it. Moreover, this research bridges Counselling psychology with psychosocial studies by offering the engagement with 'beneath the surface' data and the relational expressions of its meaning. The psychosocial approach, represented in this enquiry into GDE, highlights the holistic awareness and flexibility that might be useful for Counselling psychology while it undergoes adaptations in the pursuit of sustainability in uncertain times (Goldstein, 2019).

Counselling psychology aims to widen its perspective on therapeutic change (Woolfe *et al.,* 2010). Lane and Corrie (2012) suggested extending this openness further to the idea that Counselling psychology has the potential to play a part in social change. Jones Nielsen and Nicholas (2016) acknowledged the increased involvement of counselling psychologists in the variety of services and multidisciplinary teams, which was explained partly by the evolution of their professional identity and partly by the need for maintenance of a strong representation of Counselling psychology among other applied disciplines in the Health and Social Care sector. Theorising about GDE allows one to advocate links with Social Design, which can be a useful framework for the contemplation of social transformation that counselling psychologists might identify with in their professional practice.

5.10. Further Research

The current research project has attempted to generate a broad understanding of GDE from the facilitator-participant perspective of psychotherapists, and as such was designed to guide future research into GDE. Although the existing research in the area of group dream sharing and dream work is very limited, there is a growing interest in this subject (e.g. Lang and Manley, 2019; Leonard and Dawson, 2019, 2018; Lawrence, 2018; Ullman and Zimmerman, 2017; Hill and Knox, 2010). I struggled to locate any research focused on GDE of psychotherapists, despite uncovering through this research a considerable need for the understanding of this phenomenon in the context of current developments in psychotherapy and Counselling psychology.

Although certain aspects of practitioners' GDE were articulated to some extent in this study, due to the complexity of this phenomenon, there is a lot of information is still left unexplored. For example, the current study explored GDE of the representatives from Gestalt, psychoanalytic and Social Dreaming approaches to group dream sharing and dream work.

Future research might consider exploring GDE from other modalities such as CBT and process-focused groups. It may be beneficial to research GDE represented in different cultural settings and different populations of participants. In the context of counselling psychologists' practice, the exploration of GDE might help to develop further accessible narrative about this phenomenon. Additionally, it might be useful to look into GDE of less-experienced practitioners as well as trainees. More specifically, there might be scope for a research project involving Counselling psychology trainees, exploring GDE in personal and professional development groups.

A more detailed exploration of in-action and on-action GDE and GDE as a whole, with larger numbers of individual participants and focus groups, might offer further clarifications of these aspects of GDE, as well as some processes within the Fabric of Complexity. Longitudinal research around GDE might be beneficial, especially in consideration of the implications for the individual and communal levels of psychotherapists' experiences and their Professional Maturation. Furthermore, the links between Social Design and GDE might be important to investigate further in the context of contributions to social change from psychotherapy in general, and possibly Counselling psychology in particular.

5.11. Overall Conclusions

The main motivation for carrying out this project was the contribution of knowledge about GDE to the field of Counselling psychology, as well as personal achievement and development of myself as a researcher-practitioner. This thesis argued that GDE is a complex experience which is hard to articulate. However, all participants in this study commented on its significant value and importance in their lives.

In-action GDE was expressed as an experience felt at the time of group dream sharing and dream work, which might have negative and positive connotations, and might be associated with accessing the unconscious. On-action GDE was viewed as a lingering residue of the experience of group dream sharing and dream work that might be associated with some implications for the individual and communal levels of psychotherapists' experiences. GDE as a whole was compared to the expanding fractal of relationships between on-action and in-action GDE, which might have implications for meaning-making and Professional Maturation of the practitioners. These three aspects of GDE have been identified as the result of overseeing the complete data set across time, and of careful consideration of subtle differences in the experiences of the participants with the acknowledgement of the potential 'superposition' and non-linear dynamics between all three aspects. Although these findings may not be transferable to the general population of psychotherapists, this knowledge has a

potential to assist some practitioners in developing reflexivity and the capacity of knowing from inside as well as outside (Stern, 2004).

In order to summarise my thinking about this phenomenon I would like to propose viewing GDE as an opportunity to approach and cross a certain threshold of awareness that expands into psychosocial infinity. Some cultures organically predispose individuals to this ‘crossing’ due to their communal features and beliefs about dreams, in other cultures this transition needs to be more overtly facilitated by certain practices, such as psychotherapy. Once this nebulous experienced is felt, it expands like a fractal into different dimensions of a human life.

As a researcher, I now have many more questions. Despite the limitations of this research, I am left with a scientific and personal interest in GDE, which I consider as a platform for inspiration and scholarly freedom. Further research into GDE might accelerate the movement towards a new discourse about the value of nebulous experiences in the Professional Maturation of psychotherapists. I believe that Counselling psychology has a lot to offer in terms of developing this enquiry because of its values placed on complexity and reflexivity, and the recognition of ‘tacit dimensions’ in the personal and professional development of the practitioners.

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Glossary

Antifragility: a nonlinear response to a stressor, leading to a positive sensitivity to increase in disorder (Taleb, 2012). Antifragility, as a phenomenon, extends beyond resilience or robustness, as it is not about resisting shocks and preserving the initial state, but about evolution. Antifragility is a property of systems to thrive as the result of learning through exposure to stress.

Conscious (the): viewed as a complex set of processes (e.g. sensations, perceptions, memories, feelings, and fantasies) which contribute to the awareness of, and responsiveness to, the surroundings. Human conscious experience of reality might arise from the integration of information in the human brain and is readily accessible for introspection. It can be viewed as a 'best guess' by the brain about what is causing sensory input, based on prior conscious experiences (New Scientist, 2017, p.20). There are two types of conscious that are considered within this study: the individual and the shared conscious.

Creativity: a process involving generation of a novel product or idea that is of value to either the individual, the group, or greater society (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010).

Culture: the constellation of ideas, customs, and social behaviours, shared amongst a group of people or society.

Deep Democracy: can be simultaneously viewed as an attitude, a principle and a process (Mindell, 2002). As an attitude, Deep Democracy focuses on the awareness of voices that are both central and marginal within group and individual experiences. As a principle Deep Democracy suggests that all (not just most) voices, states of awareness, and frameworks of reality are important for the understanding of complex processes and systems. Deep Democracy is therefore a process of relationship.

Dream: a sequence of images, thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations that typically appear in the mind involuntarily during certain stages of sleep (Pagel *et al.*,2001). Dreams are a product of transactions between the conscious and the unconscious (individual and shared) in the human mind (Bion, 1962).

Dream Sharing: the process where dreams are recalled from sleep and talked about between individuals in a social context.

Dream Work: the process where dreams are recalled from sleep, shared between individuals and psychologically processed for psychotherapeutic purposes.

Expert: a person who is very knowledgeable about or skilful in a particular area. Expert status often ascribed by researchers (Bogner *et al.,* 2009).

Fabric of Complexity (the): the multidimensional intersection of the levels of complexity (the unconscious, the conscious, the individual, the social) where dreams might be interweaved. Here it is viewed as a constellation of resources from which GDE might emerge.

Facilitation: a general term used in this thesis to describe a process of enabling others to interact with dreams in a group. Psychotherapists may engage in facilitation by thinking about the group as a whole constituted of individuals, by attending to the purpose of the group, and by staying in touch with themselves (Smith, 2009).

Focus group interview: a data collection method defined as a group interview that gives the researcher an ability to capture complex information more efficiently than individual interviews (Nagle and Williams, 2013). The term *focus group* has been used in this thesis to describe a social setting of the interview rather than a separate methodology.

Fractal: a geometric form, which extends in vertical and horizontal dimensions in an analogous way. It is found in nature as well as generated by humans and computers. It might be possible to view on-action GDE as a phenomenological fractal or a complex flexible pattern of experiences from in-action GDE that infinitely expands into the different dimensions of the individual's life.

GDE as a whole: an authentic whole that absorbs in-action and on-action aspects of GDE, while retaining its representation in these aspects. It might be possible to compare GDE as a whole to an all-encompassing impression of the expanding relationships between on-action and in-action GDE or a dynamic fractal constellation.

Group (a): three or more individuals assembled together or having some unifying relationship.

Group Dream Experience (GDE): a generic term to express psychotherapists' complex experiences of participation in, and facilitation of, dream sharing and dream work in groups. In this thesis it is assumed that GDE can be noted during a collaborative effort within a group to explore and share transpersonal meaning outside individual understanding of a dream recalled from sleep, for the purpose of gaining insight and awareness. The range of group techniques from different modalities for working with dreams, including Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and Social Dreaming Matrix may evoke GDE. In this study GDE is not considered as a methodology for practice or research but is viewed as an expression of experiences.

Group mind (the): the apparent consistency of individuals' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions presented in a group; the fusion of the individual minds into an entity that acts as if guided by a single consciousness (Overgaard and Salice, 2019). List and Pettit (2011) suggested that some groups have 'minds of their own'.

Groupification: in the context of this research, a process of moving away from personalising dreams during group dream sharing or dream work. This needs to be distinguished from Bion's (1961) concept of dependency culture.

Human Architecture: a psychosocial whole that consists of connected self-knowledge of multiple diverse individuals. It is also viewed as a practice of enquiry that 'tears down walls of human alienation and builds integrative human realities in favour of a just global society' and notes 'the creatively evolving spiral of their dialectical journey toward untapped human potentialities' (Bush *et al.*, 2019).

In-action GDE: a dynamic phenomenon, which occurs during group dream sharing and dream work, and which decreases mental separation from the underlying Fabric of Complexity, allowing individuals to access its elements in the moment.

Individual (the): an umbrella term that captures different phenomena, based on the processes and organisation of a person's sense of being in the world. This sense might be represented via individual conscious and unconscious experiences.

Intersubjectivity: a human motivational system involving the dual need to connect with others and to individuate the self (Stern, 1985).

On-action GDE: a lingering residue or a complex flexible pattern of experiences from in-action GDE that infinitely expands into different dimensions of a person's life (the individual and communal levels of experience).

Professional Maturation: the experience of a gradual shift of professional habits and the emergence of professional characteristics, qualities, skills and insights through a complex process of fluid becoming. Professional maturation in the context of GDE might be linked to the liminality, antifragility, informed acceptance, openness to psychosocial infinity, Deep Democracy, play, creativity and Social Design. The experience of professional maturation and GDE might be interlinked and perpetuate one another.

Psyche (the): a totality of the human mind, conscious and unconscious.

Psychosocial infinity: a rhythmical magnitude of endless psychosocial realities.

Resilience: the capability of an individual or a group to manage their emotions and thought process when facing challenges or adversity, and to move towards growth.

Safety or psychological / emotional safety: in the context of this research, a collective term which represents a felt freedom from psychological or emotional harm, that can be placed on a continuum from feeling threatened to feeling safe (Vincent,1994).

Shared conscious (the): a term that is used in this thesis to convey the sense of solidarity between individual conscious minds and explicit awareness of being part of a larger whole. The shared conscious is also used as an umbrella term for a variety of ideas such as the *collective conscious* (Durkheim, 1893) as a set of ideas, beliefs and morals that create a sense of unity between the individuals in a society; the *social consciousness* (Schlitz *et al.,* 2010) as a level at which one is aware of how he or she is influenced by others, as well as how his or her actions may affect others.

Shared unconscious (the) is a term that is used in this thesis to convey the sense of non-hierarchical union between individual unconscious minds at a moment in time, where the individual attributes are lost or fall into the background, and the communal and less personal systems emerge. In order to keep the narrative accessible, I have also used *shared unconscious* wording as an umbrella label for the range of ideas that capture different angles of this phenomenon. For example, *collective unconscious* (Jung, 1936) which points to the transient, inherited and fully-formed characteristics; *social unconscious* (Lawrence, 2011) with its infinite, universal and spiritual qualities; *autonomous psyche* or *objective psyche* (Corbett, 2012) which emphasises independence from the individual in its existence; *relational unconscious* (Gerson, 2004) as the fundamental structuring property of interpersonal relationships and a core element of intersubjectivity.

Social Design: an interactive process and an approach to the understanding of the evolution of collective human potential. This approach views the group as a changeable reflective entity that pursues understanding, creation and expanding (Kang, 2016). The leader, facilitator or designer helps the group to move towards this change by taking responsibility for establishing and maintaining Deep Democracy, and, therefore, surfacing individual capabilities and perceptions that, in turn, contribute to the group's wellbeing and productivity (Sen, 2000). The Social Design theory allows GDE to be viewed as a designing force of the unconscious with an autonomous capacity for healing, extending and connecting. The concept of Social Design might also help to appreciate the independence in the designing process within GDE that

manifests in creativity, freedom, democracy and change on multiple levels (e.g. the level of the group as a whole and on the level of the individuals).

Social (the): a collective term that covers different phenomena, based on the processes around and organisation of, a communal sense of being amongst others. This sense might be represented via shared conscious and unconscious experiences.

Superposition: the concept borrowed as an analogy from quantum mechanics to describe the ability of a phenomenon to be in multiple states at the same time until it is measured.

The Therapists' Trap is a term developed in this research to describe a paradox where psychotherapists were considered as group dream sharing participants who, on one hand, are well prepared for it (in terms of personal and professional resilience due to their extensive professional knowledge, skills and qualities); and, on the other hand, are struggling and/or are reluctant to engage with GDE due to this preparedness.

Unconscious (the): a complex set of automatic or instinctual processes in the mind of the individual or a group (e.g. thought processes, memories, interests, motivations, etc.) which are not readily accessible for contemplation (Westen, 1999). There are two types of unconscious that are considered within this study: the individual and the shared unconscious.

Appendices

Appendix 1. My reflection on the journey through training

In year one of my Doctoral training, I immersed myself in Western psychodynamic and relational theories that explained dreaming and dream work, highlighting the interpersonal experiences of transference and countertransference. This also was my first encounter with a subtle 'gravitation' towards the importance of social elements in contemporary developments of dream theories.

The second year of my training introduced the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach and evidence-based practice. Following my interest, I discovered CBT methodology for group dream work and the extended research by Patricia Hill and her team. I also met practitioners and researchers who believed that dreams are individual schemas with cognitive distortions and not useful for 'proper' scientific enquiry. They believed that dreams were appropriate only for psychoanalytic or long-term therapy, were 'too dangerous' for group work and were 'too far-fetched' for social consideration. This was challenging for my professional belief system as a researcher-practitioner. I experienced a sense of despair and isolation as I tried to balance my reflections on the presenting reality of professional attitudes, the literature, and my loyalty to dreams and their potential link to the social.

The integrative approach, in year three of the Doctorate, boosted my confidence and enhanced the depth of reflection on my chosen topic. I came across contemporary group dream work at the Tavistock Institute in London and participated in Social Dreaming matrices. I also communicated with topic experts whose valuable thoughts and ideas helped to shape the focus of this research and its methodology. I embraced the systemic way of working with groups and started looking at dreams from the perspective of Social Design. By applying the concepts such as process work (Mindell, 1995), social unconscious (Lawrence, 1998), quantum analogy (Lawrence and Biran, 2002), and rhizomatic learning (Long and Manley, 2018) I also considered the phenomenon of dreaming as a process occurring in a transition between the individual and shared unconscious. I noticed the expansion of my reflective capacity and the rise of anxiety associated with it.

Appendix 2. Sigmund Freud and the Individual Unconscious

Freud was first to theorise about the unconscious mind and how its dynamism is represented in dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud (1900) described the unconscious as the bottom layer in the organisation of the mind, containing fundamental experiences and formed early in life character traits. He viewed dreams as singularly subjective mental experiences which can help understanding of the unconscious (Glucksman, 2001). Above *the unconscious layer*, Freud identified *the preconscious* – the space where a censorship function is at play to differentiate between impulses from unconscious and conscious motives. *The conscious* layer was located by Freud at the top of this hierarchy representing the impressions from daily living, as well as their translations into actions and thought activities.

According to Freud, the dreaming process partially disconnected an individual from the outer world experiences. It weakened the preconscious, reducing its function to sleep-preserving disguise; and created outlet for primitive unconscious urges and repressed memories. These ideas were later related to Freud's *Drive theory* that explained *the manifest* and *latent* content of dreams. He proposed that unconscious drives, powered by *the libido*, incentivise behaviours that are often unacceptable in human society (Freud, 1961; Solms, 2005). Subsequently, manifest content was defined by Freud as a symbolic imitation of happenings, drives, and desires, remembered and narrated through dreams. The manifest content of the dream was seen as a vessel for the latent content representing the suppressed unconscious. *Dream work* was described as a process where latent content is tracked back from the manifest content through the interpretations of the analyst (Freud, 1961).

Despite Freud's extended thinking about dreams as a 'royal road to the unconscious mind' (Laplanche and Pontalis,1973), he limited the value of this 'road' to a discovery of tensions engineered by the individual unconscious (Freud, 1920). The dreaming process was considered as a dive into it where the connection with the outer world was lost or converted into units specific to an individual - manifest and latent contents. The focus was placed on the content of the conversation between the analysand and the analyst, with the dreamer in the centre of the process of the encounter and the dream as a background for it. Further narrowing down to the individual content was encouraged through Freud's methods of working with dreams, which positioned the expertise in the therapist as a more knowledgeable 'road' explorer. In his reflection on this positioning, Jung (1963) shared his experience of bringing his own dream about a multi-storey house to be analysed by Freud. Jung (1963) noted the inability of psychoanalysis at that time to recognise the aspects of the dreams which expanded beyond the individual.

Freud's individualistic stance in psychoanalysis could have over-shadowed the beginnings of his thinking about dreaming connectivity with others. For example, he acknowledged the impact of people's relationships in their waking lives on their dreaming. A group representation in dreams, was interpreted by Freud as a collation of multiple fractions of the self and as an inner audience owned by the individual, but constructed from the external interactions with others (Neri *et al*., 2002). This idea, prevalent in modern psychoanalytic group theory, suggests that 'the royal road' to the dreamer's unconscious can be identified through the inner audience with acknowledgement of changes in all those involved (Neri *et al*., 2002).

Freud went even further in his recognition of the connection between the self and society. He was first to propose the idea of mankind being represented in the individual and vice versa (this was later linked to dreaming by Jung):

> *If we consider mankind as a whole and substitute it for a single individual, we discover that it too has developed delusions which are inaccessible to logical criticism and which contradict reality. If, in spite of this, they* [the delusions] *are able to exert an extraordinary power over men* [or women]*, investigation leads us to the same explanations as in the case of the single individual. They* [the delusions] *owe their power to the element of historical truth which they have brought up from the repression of the forgotten and primaeval past.*
>
> Freud (1964, p. 269)

In this extract Freud started the narrative that links the individual and the social. Furthermore, he theorised about the connecting power between these aspects based on what he called *the element of historical truth*. It could be said that Freud begun the development of the language to express complexity that is extended via the unconscious beyond the psychoanalytic dyad.

Appendix 3. Carl Jung and the Collective Unconscious

The complexity of the connected unconscious in dreams became a potent ground for the development of the new psychoanalytical ideas by Carl Jung. In the 1900s he was working closely with Freud, engaging in the interpretation of each other's dreams. This experience marked an important stage in the diversification of Psychoanalysis as it led Jung to acknowledge human connectedness on the micro scale between the analyst and the analysand; and on the macro scale between the individuals in society:

> *A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious… It is, in other words, identical in all men* [and women] *and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.*
>
> Jung (1968, p. 3)

Although Jung agreed with Freud's idea that human psyche is multi-layered, with the conscious located above the unconscious, he also proposed that beneath the individual unconscious there is an archaic layer of *collective unconscious* that connects humankind in the world. The collective unconscious, according to Jung, is formed on the basis of the shared models of behaviour and experience which he called *archetypes* (Jung, 1964). Jung (1986) viewed dreams as a normal, creative manifestation of the unconscious mind that exposed archetypal material, rather than concealed latent content. Nonetheless, he stated that the collective content is not free of individual input and dreams 'are not entirely cut off from the continuity of consciousness, which have their origin in the impressions, thoughts, and moods of the preceding day or days' (Jung, 1974, p. 24). Instead, he distinguished between personal dreams, that hold meanings specific to the dreamer only; and collective dreams that hold universal symbols from the collective unconscious.

Unlike Freud, who bracketed off the timeline of human existence when theorising about the unconscious of patients and analysts, Jung saw it as an integral part, believing that the development of culturally transcendent archetypes was the essence of human evolution as a species capable of awareness of their unconscious (Van de Castle, 1994). This way of thinking influenced Jung's definition of dreams' content using more universal terms:

> *The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul opening into that cosmic night which was psyche long before there was any ego-consciousness.*
>
> Jung (1968, p. 144)

It might be that the historical truth that Freud briefly mentioned in his comparison of the social and the individual unconscious, has been further explored in Jung's theory of the collective unconscious represented in dreams. Jung emphasised its endurance in people's lives with the dreams being an entry point to developing conscious awareness. He linked this process to personal growth and individuation.

Although at first glance a diversion could be found in the works of Jung and Freud in the directions of their study of the conscious and the unconscious, with Freud gravitating towards the individual and Jung moving towards the collective, it is also evident that both considered dreams as a potent opening to something bigger than an individual. With their methods of exploration, they were choosing whether to move towards or away from this opening. Freud's technique of free associations invited patients to distance themselves from the content of the dream and dive into their individual unconscious. Jung, by extending free associations into the method of amplification, stayed with this dream content, drawing links with the collective. These differences could illustrate the possibility of epistemological choices in thinking about dreams, where the process of focusing does not eliminate an aspect such as the individual and the social, the conscious and the unconscious, but rather illuminates its location in a complex system.

Appendix 4. Role of the Researcher

To explain the research process, it is important to clarify my theoretical position in relation to qualitative research in general. I do not view qualitative research as a container for a 'perfect' theoretical framework or method. What is important for me as a researcher is the awareness of the choice and decision that I am making within this study. I make my position transparent throughout and aim to account for the dynamic nature of this inquiry.

I follow Willig's (2008) approach, which views the qualitative researcher as a medium for the production of an understanding, with the addition of an interpretative element as a part of an interactive process. However, this expression is challenged by the researcher's own experiences, assumptions and preconceptions (Heidegger, 1962), and this must be openly recognised and examined in the outcome of the research activity (Tufford and Newman, 2012). By committing to heuristic inquiry and contextualist epistemology, I accept the inevitability and the potency of introducing my personal and cultural perspectives into the generated results. The empathy provided by this shared humanity and common cultural understanding can be viewed as an important bridge between the researcher and the participants, and a valuable analytic resource (Madill *et al.*, 2000). For the reasons mentioned above, this research is based on two viewpoints: the ways in which the researcher accounts for the experiences of the subjects and of herself; and the ways in which study participants make meaning of their experiences. This position is also anticipated by the method of experiential TA.

This study has been designed with the consideration of insider/outsider perspective. This required internal addressing, such as consideration of how it would be possible to move away from the insider position to interpret the data more broadly, i.e. as an outsider taking an insider's perspective (Hellawell, 2006). In order to develop what Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) called 'an appreciation for the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human experience' and to enhance the validity of my data interpretation, I engaged regularly in reflective dialogue with two research supervisors.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that the ability to step outside one's own membership of identity aids the development of qualitative sensibility. Manderson *et al.* (2006) specify some aspects of the researcher's identity that are important to be aware of in the reflexivity; they include gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity. Thus, I developed a strategy for recording my assumptions, affected by these factors, while collecting and conducting manual analysis and interpretation of data. A reflexive journal, as recommended by Ahern (1999), made it possible to manage a potential researcher's influence. Furthermore, I kept a dream

diary to help me notice the parallel unconscious processes during my engagement with the research. Collected reflexive material has been used in Chapters 1 and 5.

Appendix 5. Clarification of the definition of an expert

I was aware that, as a researcher, I had some degree of freedom in my choice of criteria for the role of expert in the context of this study design. It is not uncommon in study design that involves expert interviews, for the researcher to attribute expert status to particular people (Bogner *et al.*, 2009). This attribution is determined by the characteristics that the researcher identifies as enabling for a formative discussion to scope the topic under investigation.

The expert as a term in this research refers to a person who has been involved in the process of knowledge transformation, and exposed to GDE, over a prolonged period. The transformation of knowledge is viewed as a process of organising, disorganising and reorganising its expressions around GDE over time. It refers to the process that became conscious through purposeful attention to, and depiction of, the Fabric of Complexity from which GDE emerges, and, therefore, predetermines individuals' ability to convey it through a narrative. In Chapter 2 I discussed the ambiguity of GDE and the challenges associated with creating a discourse about it. I experienced the start of this research and data collection as a process of harvesting the diverse expressions of knowledge been emerging from exposure to GDE, with a potential to form an accessible narrative about this phenomenon.

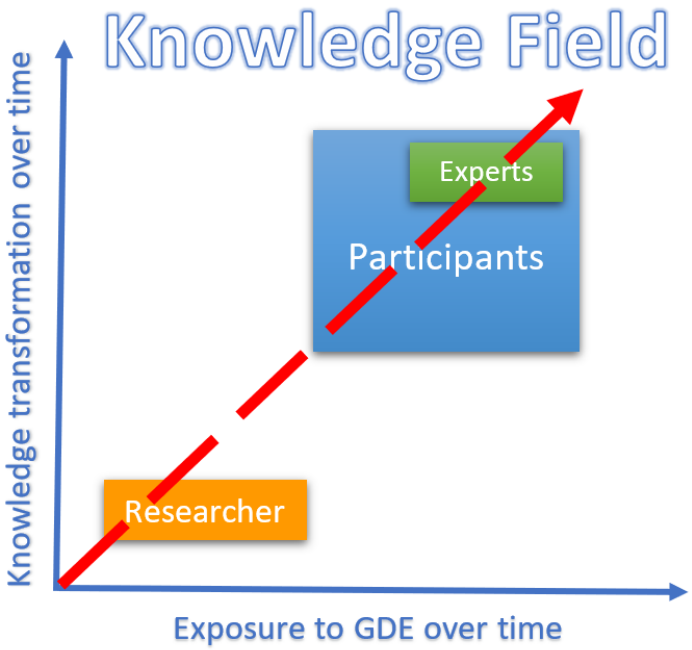


Figure 3. Differentiating between experts, participants and the researcher

This definition of experts was developed to outline the role that they played in study design and to differentiate them from the participants and the researcher. The Figure 3. shows the positioning of these three categories of people in the shared field of knowledge about GDE. This cart does, however, does not aim to capture the main inclusion criterion for the participants to be psychotherapists, as it is open to a broad representation of psychosocial knowledge field around GDE. The difference is notable on the experiential trajectory (red arrow) with the researcher having the least amount of exposure to GDE and the experience of knowledge transformation about it. Experts and participants share their positionality approximately, with experts representing a sample of people with larger amount of experience and longer exposure to GDE. Within this matrix I positioned myself as a researcher who immersed herself in the process of exploring and expressing GDE via narrative in collaboration with others in a particular time frame.

For the pilot interviews I developed a prompt sheet, however, it was merely the basis for a conversation, as I was hoping to develop the general understanding of GDE in conversation with people who have been involved in the creation and expression of narratives around this topic for a long time. It was not intended to be prescriptive, and certainly not limiting in the sense of overriding the expressed interests of the experts. They took the lead during the conversations and I noted the diversity of focus points.

Appendix 6. Overcoming challenges of Skype interviews

When experimenting with the modalities of the procedure during the pilot interviews, there were relatively few difficulties identified with the Skype method, in comparison with the benefits it could offer. Nevertheless, after the decision was made to proceed with Skype for the individual interviews some issues emerged that had to be addressed, including the technical problems. Stable internet connection, working webcams and audio are the main prerequisites of Skype video calls that could potentially stop working or cause interferences. Although most Skype interviews were conducted on computers used in quiet rooms with a stable connection, during two of the interviews, audio, video and connection problems were experienced, abruptly stopping the interviews mid-discussion. Despite the process being re-started, this interruption somewhat disrupted the flow of interviews and it took longer to re-establishing the depth of reflexivity in the participants. To minimise this effect prior to the recording of the interviews, all participants were informed that these disruptions could happen and the best solution for that was then negotiated. Most participants were happy to restart the conversation and have some time in reserve for potential technical disruption. One participant was limited in time and expressed a preference for rescheduling the interview for a different time of day.

Building rapport with the participants is a vital part of any interview, as it helps to facilitate greater trust and enables the generation of rich data (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007). Effective communication during the interview is also dependent on the ability of the interviewer to read non-verbal cues and body language, to acknowledge mood, the level of engagement, and to facilitate rapport. During Skype interviews, visual cues were restricted by the narrow field of the camera view, showing only participants' faces, or head and shoulders. In a few instances the video was 'lagging behind' participants' speech. In all interviews the participants at some point became relaxed, forgetting about the camera and expressing themselves with gestures and postures as if they were in the same room with me. Sullivan (2012) suggests that the authenticity level of verbal and nonverbal cues in Skype interviews can be compared with face-to-face interviews, because both allow the participants to engage in the process in a natural way. However, other researchers have suggested that in comparison to face-to-face interviews, such online interactions as Skype video interviews may increase presentation of self and authenticity (Bargh *et al.*, 2002; Ellison *et al.*, 2006).

Skype interviews have a number of benefits that might outweigh the challenges they present for qualitative researchers. One of them is less-restricted opportunities for participant recruitment and sampling. The organisation of face-to-face interviews anticipates the travel time and expenses, and, therefore, often restricts the recruitment of participants by location. This constraint was particularly challenging for me as I do not have a car and do not drive.

Conducting interviews by Skype eliminated this restriction. Furthermore, for this study, participants were recruited from across the UK and other countries (Italy and Israel), creating a desirably diverse sample for this research.

The process of gathering qualitative data requires the researcher to consider participant control and power dynamics (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Fostering rapport and facilitating reflection in the interviews with participants who were significantly more experienced as researchers and practitioners, as well as much older (on average by 20 years) than myself were challenging. The Skype interviews offered a sense of distance and choice of comfortable space that were beneficial for both, the researcher in terms of her confidence, and for the participants in terms of the level of their reflexivity. It might be that this virtual distance had an enabling effect on both sides. For instance, Morison *et al.* (2015) reported similar observations of increased reflective responses with online interviews.

Appendix 7. Interview schedule

1) To begin with, can you say something about your experience of sharing/working with your own dreams in a group?

Potential prompting questions: How did you experience the input from the group in response to your dream? What positive/useful things did you take from this work? Have you experienced any difficulties or challenges during this work? Can you tell me a bit more about the personal qualities that you might have developed or extended while working on your dreams in a group? Can you tell me a bit more about the professional knowledge, qualities or skills that you might have developed or extended while working on your dreams in a group?

3) Can you tell me something about your experience of sharin/working with your clients dreams in a group?

Potential prompting questions: Can you tell me a bit more about the professional qualities or skills that you have developed or extended while facilitating group dream sharing/work? Was there anything positive/useful that you might have taken from this work? Have you experienced any difficulties or challenges during this work?

4) Are you aware of any other professional practices/contexts where you had experience of group dream sharing/work?

5) Can you tell me your thoughts based on your own experience over time about the potential of group dream sharing/work for training or continuous professional development of psychotherapists?

Appendix 8. Demographic information questionnaire

Demographic information:

1 What is your age?

2 How would you describe your race and ethnicity?

3 What is your current relationship status?

4. What is you highest level of educational achievement?

5. What is your current occupation?

6. How would you describe your social class?

7. For how long after qualifying as a psychotherapist have you been in practice (private or organisational)?

.....

8. For how long have you been working with groups?

.....

10. Please indicate with ☑ if any examples listed below relate to you.

What group dream sharing/work have you had experience of:

a) Working in a group with clients on their dreams

b) Working in a group of peers on your own dreams

c) Working in a supervision group on your own dreams

d) Working in a supervision group on client's dreams

e) Other (please describe) …….

.....

Appendix 9. Demographic information from the participants

Individual interviews

Number	Anonymised Name	Gender	Age	How would you describe your race and ethnicity?	What is you highest level of educational achievement?	What psychotherapeutic modalities/ approaches do /did you use in your practice?	For how long after qualifying as a psycho-therapist have you been in practice?
1	Mike MS	M	78	White Israeli	Phd	Psychoanalysis	40
2	Caroline CB	F	63	White Israeli	DCPsy	Gestalt, Integrative	26
3	Dante DA	M	37	White Italian	MSc	Psychoanalysis Gestalt	5
4	Janet JG	F	47	White British	MSc	Psychoanalysis Gestalt	18
5	Dave DL	M	49	White British	BAhon	Psychoanalysis Integrative	20
6	Jason SJ	M	54	White British	BAhon	Jungian Psychoanalysis	14
7	Carlo CN	M	67	White Italian	PHd	Psychoanalysis	32

The focus group interview

Number	Anonymised Name	Gender	Age	How would you describe your race and ethnicity?	What is you highest level of educational achievement?	What psychotherapeutic modalities/ approaches do /did you use in your practice?	For how long after qualifying as a psycho-therapist have you been in practice?
1	Jason JS	M	54	White British	BAhon	Jungian Psychoanalysis	14
2	Ella EB	F	49	White British	MSc	Integrative	7
3	Clara CH	F	52	White British	MSc	Jungian Psychoanalysis Integrative	23
4	Libby LB	F	55	White British	MSc	Jungian Psychoanalysis	N/A (in training)
5	Sarah SA	F	42	White British	MA	Jungian Psychoanalysis Integrative	13

Appendix 10. The email recruitment message

Dear …..
I am Maryna Bentley, a trainee counselling psychologist and a researcher at the University of the West of England in Bristol. I am writing a doctoral thesis on the subject of group dream sharing and work. The title of my thesis is: A qualitative study of psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. The aim of the study is to explore psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

I am looking for the participants to take part in an interview (approx. 60 min) that can be arranged on Skype. I will audio-record the interview, but all details will be kept confidential, and destroyed after submission of my findings.

If you are interested to take part, please let me know as soon as you can.

My supervisor is also available for you to contact.

I am looking forward to hearing you.

Kind regards,
Maryna Bentley

Appendix 11. Ethical approval letter

REMOVED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS

Appendix 12. Participant information sheet

Title of research project: A qualitative study of psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

Participant Code:

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

The current research is aiming to explore psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

2. **Who is the researcher?**

I am Maryna Bentley, a student on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology program. As a trainee counselling psychologist, I have been working in relational, psychoanalytical, CBT and integrative modalities one-to-one and in groups for four years.

3. **Why have I been chosen?**

It is planned to recruit approximately six qualified practicing psychotherapists who had experience of group dream sharing and dream work (as a group member and a facilitator, as both types of experiences are of potential importance for this research). You have been chosen for this research as you satisfy these selection criteria.

4. **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

5. **What will happen to me if I take part and what do I have to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be expected to participate in the Skype interview, which will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. I will contact you to arrange the interview day and time preferred by you. The interview answers will be audio-recorded.

6. How will the data be used?

Your interview will be audio-recorded and only the research team will have access to this recording. The audio-recording will be erased following transcription. The data will be anonymised (i.e., any information that can identify you will be removed) and used for research project; extracts from the data may be quoted in any publications and conference presentations arising from the research. If you are taking part in the interview, I will send you the transcript of the interview before the analysis to allow you to ensure that you have not been misrepresented.

7. Confidentiality

The information you provide will be treated confidentially. Any personally identifiable details will be changed, and study password will be assigned to the record of your interview. I would like to remind you that you are not obliged to reveal any information you do not wish to.

8. How do I withdraw from the research?

If you decide you want to withdraw from the research after completing the interview, please contact myself, the researcher Maryna Bentley, via email quoting your study password (which you will be prompted to create at the end of the interview). Please note that there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from the research – for instance, when I have published papers reporting my analysis of the data. Therefore, it is a good idea to contact me within a month of participation if you wish to withdraw your data. Please make sure you write down your study password to help you do this.

9. Is there any risk from taking part?

I don't anticipate any particular risks to you with participating in this research; however, there is always the potential for research participation to raise uncomfortable and distressing issues. For this reason, I have provided information about some of the different resources which are available to you. See: http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/ for details of counselling and crisis support services.

10. What if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns regarding your participation in this study, you should contact myself, the researcher Maryna Bentley or my research supervisor to discuss the possible lines of actions.

11. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The participation in this study might benefit you from the insights in your experience of group dream sharing and dream work. The interview will allow you to reflect on the processes and changes you might have experienced.

If you have any questions about this research please contact: Maryna Bentley

Appendix 13. Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Title of research project: A qualitative study of psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and agree to take part in this study. I consent that:

Please initial

- ☐ The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me
- ☐ I understand that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary
- ☐ I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study within the limits specified on the Participant information sheet without the need to give a reason
- ☐ The use of information that I provide has been explained to me
- ☐ I am aware that my anonymity will be maintained and no personal details will be included in any write-up of the study
- ☐ I understand that information I provide will be treated confidentially
- ☐ I agree to the study procedures
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher at any time if I have any queries about the study
- ☐ I confirm that I have been provided with information about this research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

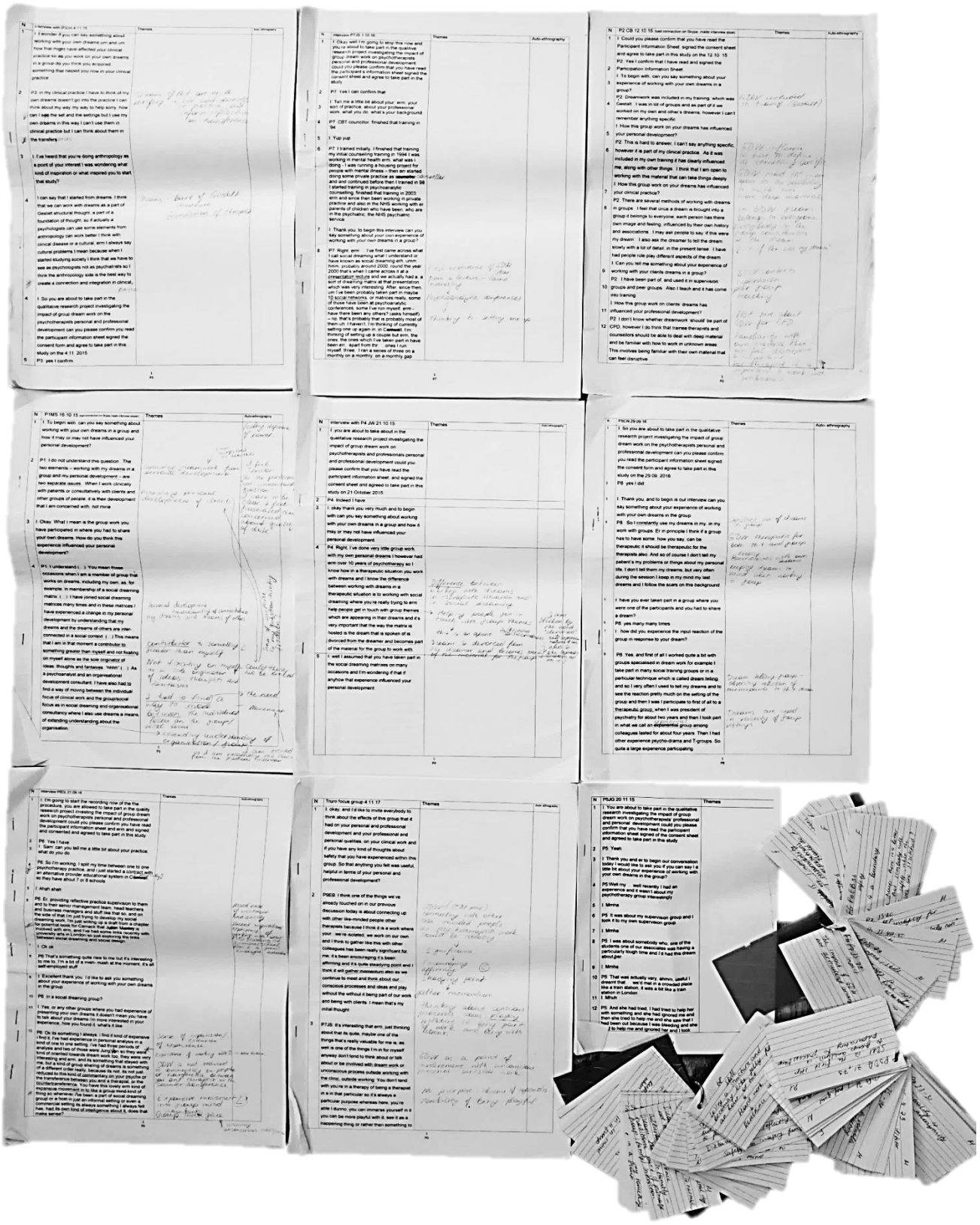
Name of the participant (Please print) _____

Signature of participant _____ Date_____

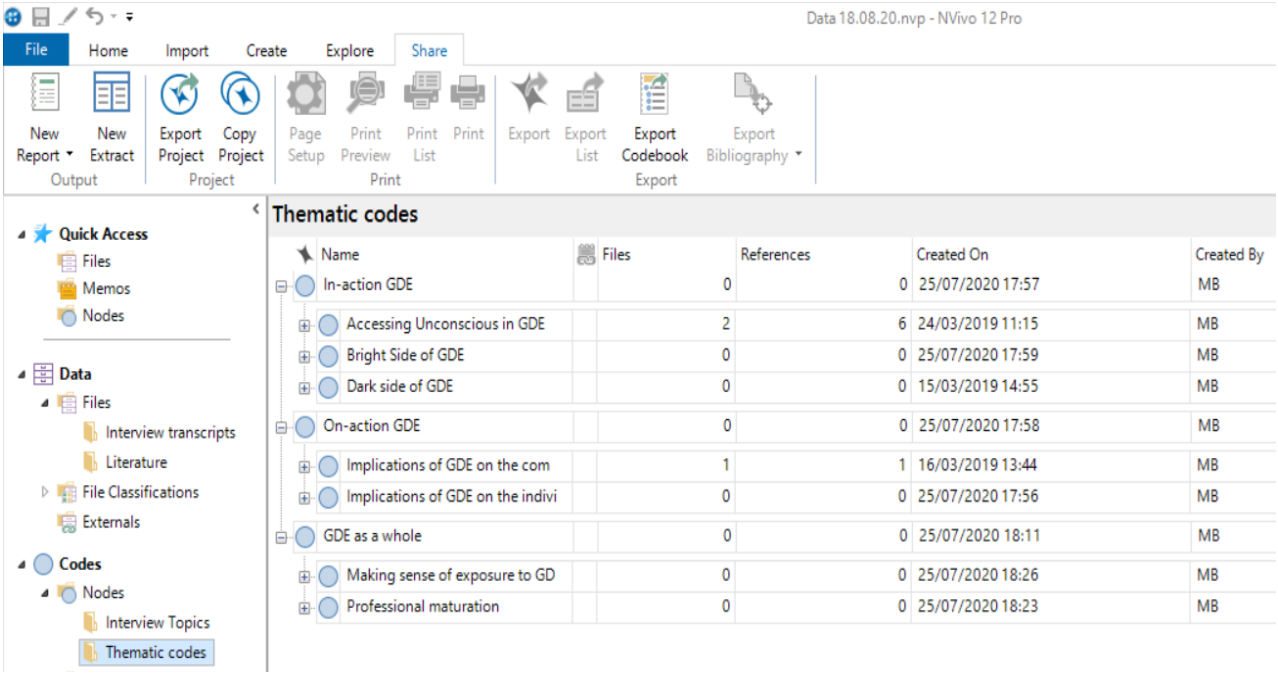
Name of the researcher (Please print) _____

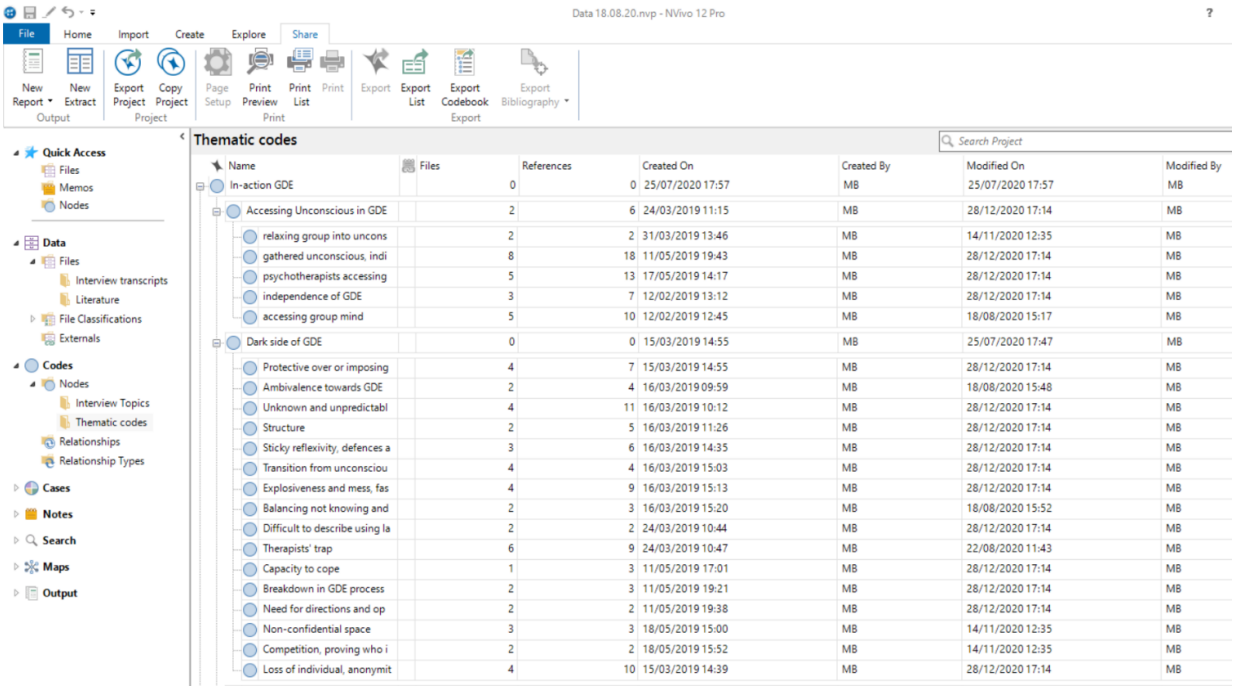
Signature of researcher _____ Date_____

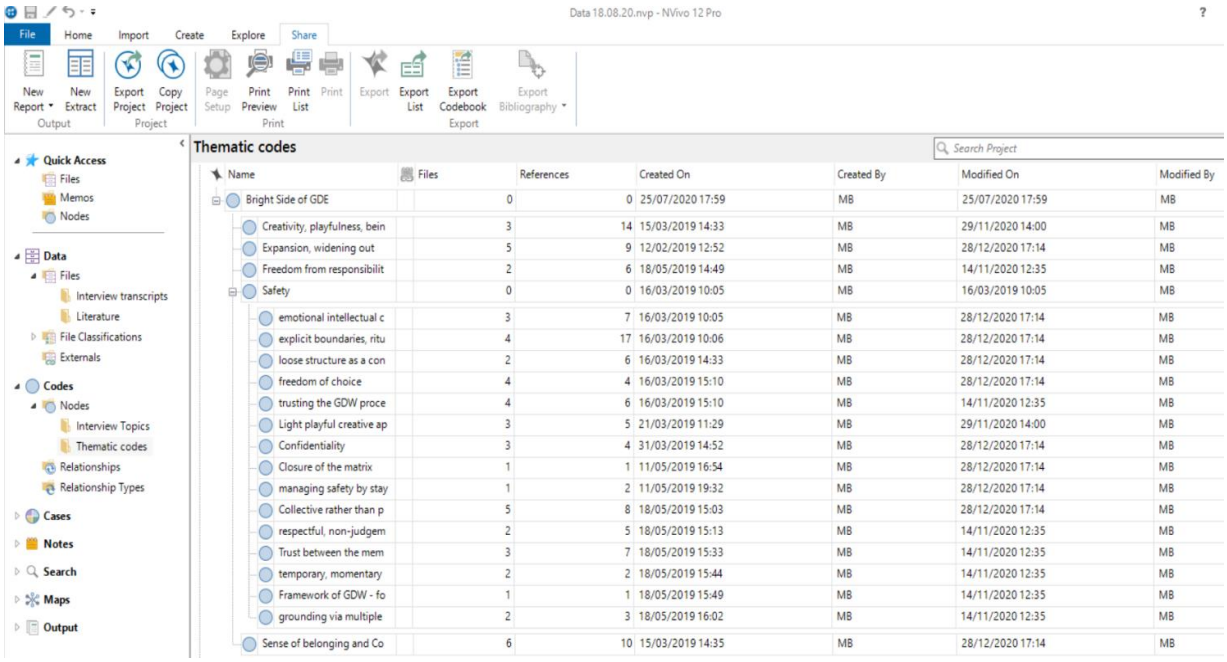
Appendix 14. Hard-copy coding cards system



Appendix 15. Examples of the NVivo software analysis



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Data
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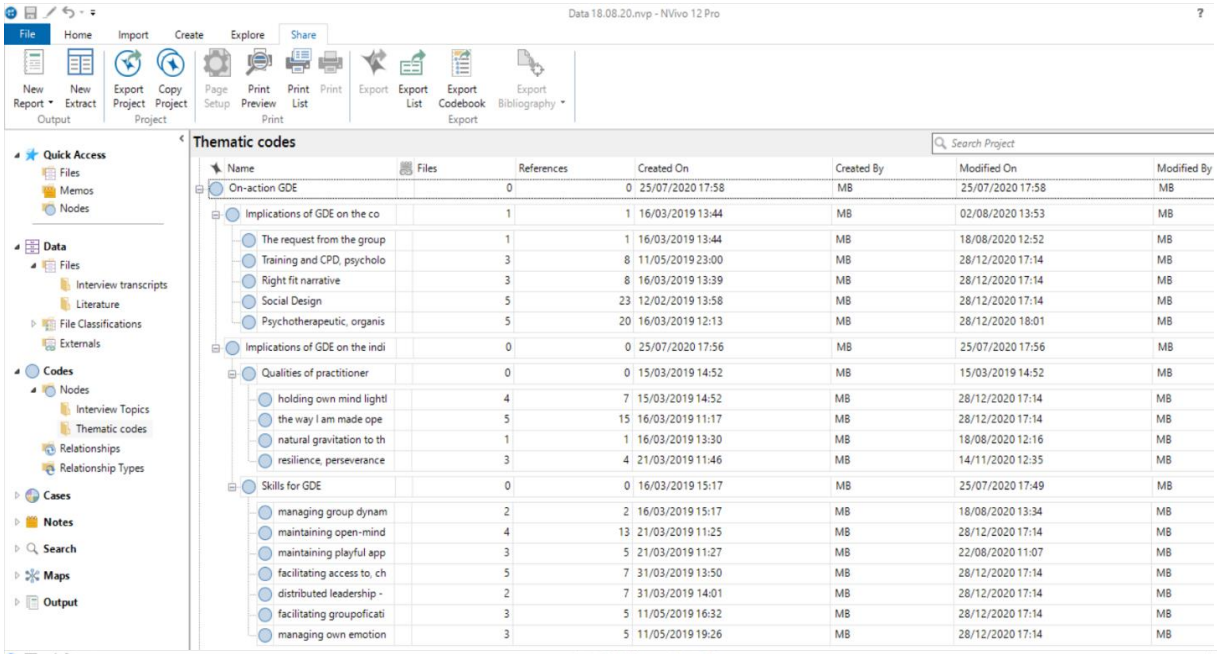
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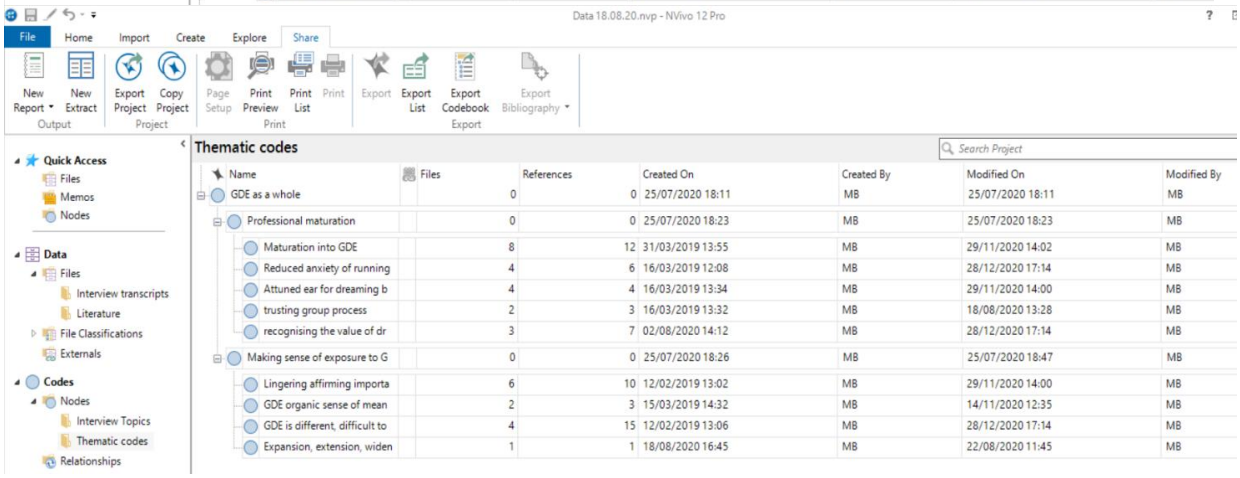
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Appendix 16. Application of Yardley's (2017) principles for qualitative research

The quality and validity of the analysis in this research was established by applying the four broad criteria of assessing qualitative research as described by Lucy Yardley (2017).

a) Sensitivity to Context

As an insider, I was familiar with many aspects of GDE, and took great care to collect data with heightened awareness of my passion for the subject that could have influenced the responses of the participants. Sensitivity was also applied during the data analysis and write up process to ensure the appropriateness of interpretations and claims to the sample. I used illustrations in the form of verbatim extracts to stay close to the narrative offered by the participants. I wrote an extensive reflexive account of my own journey towards conducting this research in Chapter 1, which helped me to safeguard my sensitivity to the diverse experiences and perspectives of the participants. I also provided a reflexive section on my insider/outsider positionality in Chapter 5. To contextualise the study, I collated a comprehensive literature review.

b) Commitment and Rigour

My commitment to this study and motivation for high quality input was based on my personal investment into the subject as an insider and demonstrated through the passion for exploring the topic, obtaining and disseminating the findings. I used a flexible method of Thematic Analysis that does not anticipate strict ties with the theory. Nevertheless, I was clear and explicit about all aspects of this method and provided the rationale behind it. The 'rigour lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter' (Reicher and Taylor, 2005, p.549).

c) Transparency and Coherence

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I have described and reflected upon all steps of the research process, while demonstrating the transparency and coherence of this enquiry. My insider perspective has triggered the need to include a reflexive Chapter 1 and a section on my positionality in the Chapter 5. Yardley suggests that the consistent coherence of the qualitative research should be demonstrated in the attunement between the research question, the theory and principles of the method and discussion of themes. This requirement was met through triangulation method, the systematic reviewing of the draft of the thesis and dissemination of findings.

d) Impact and Importance

According to Yardley, the validity of qualitative research is dependent on its impact and importance for the intended audience. I hope that this thesis is justified and has a strong

purpose in telling something useful and interesting about psychotherapists' GDE, that might have a potential to challenge stereotypes around GDE and provide an accessible narrative addressed to counselling psychologists and Counselling psychology training providers.

Appendix 17. The transcribing and quoting keys

The following keys are used to indicate changes in the flow of speech.

The Symbol Keys:

.. – a very short pause

… - a break in the flow of the narrative.

[…] - a section of less relevant data has been removed to save space.

[loughs] - a significant to non-verbal expression.

What? - Underlined word indicates participant's emphasis in the speech.

and and – a staccato, repetition of the words in the speech while a participant is thinking.

The use of italics and inverted commas in text:

'*the double*' = the direct quotation of words from the transcript

'cooking' = the indication of the indirect meaning of this word

latent content = adopted theoretical term

Appendix 18. Discussion of confidentiality in the focus group interview

Sarah in the focus group reflected on the momentary sense of freedom and possible consequences associated with the group's choice to meet in a place where occasionally non-members would enter and exit in order to cross to the other side of the building.

> Sarah: *It's a good question because the usual framework isn't there in the sense it's not confidential space. I mean the biggie of therapy has just been thrown out the window because we have chosen a space which is not confidential.*
>
> Jason: *Maybe if random people just pitched up it would be interesting to see how safe we felt, that would be interesting to know. I think it wouldn't bother me but then my mind goes well, what if someone from the C* [name of the newspaper] *pitched up and then published something about all these therapists getting together you'd never guess what they were talking about then oh shit actually it may not feel so, feel so safe.*

This choice was viewed by the members of the focus group as the inevitable pull to self-sabotage and as a fuel for change and mobility of the unconscious in the shared space. Furthermore, they reflected on how in the moment the group might not be concerned with the intrusion but instead would 'absorb' the individual. Nevertheless, two members of the focus group admitted that they might start having anxious thoughts about a potential disturbance. It was curious to notice some sort of fluctuation between single and collective minds, where 'the group mind' was open to wider living experience but was suspended at times by the individual's mind holding on to thinking about consequences.

Appendix 19. Discussion of trust in the focus group interview

> Sarah: *Because, you know, we're all in it together, I think, I don't know, I hope, what other people think, but it feels like we are all on an even level…*
>
> All: *umh* [in agreement, nodding]
>
> Sarah: *…there's no one who is in charge, or ruling it, or defining, you know, it's very horizontal there's no kind of power, or structures of […] and we're all kind of accepting, we have responsibility for what we say, no one's asking us to say anything.*

The focus group reflected on the non-confidential space where they were meeting that felt safe because of their trust in each other, the matrix that they are part of and the focus on dreams, which the group as a whole subscribes to:

> Sarah: *People can, could come and sit and listen to us, it's not confidential space* […] *I feel safe when I'm in amongst you all and when I'm in the matrix. Erm. I think for me it's a signing up to our sense of.. this is why I've come here today to work on dreams and there's a focus of working on dreams. Erm. What makes, what helps me feel safe.*
>
> All: *umh* [in agreement, nodding]

Sense of trust expanded into the idea of trusting GDE as the participants engaged more in thinking about this aspect of group dream sharing. In the focus group Clara pointed to the mutual trust in their group to the process of multidirectional influencing, which felt safe to them

> Clara: *I don't know whether it's because it's about the collective rather than the personal so it feels like you have every right to let everything in and everything influence what you're doing, I agree, it does feel safe*.
>
> All: *yeah* [thoughtful]

Sarah spoke about her personal experience with a multitude of perspectives on the shared dreams. This experience felt astonishing and grounding to her at the same time. She pointed out that the benefits of this expanded to her feeling safe in other personal and professional contexts:

> *I might like woah! and it blows my mind sometimes to see how many ways there are to see something and so that gets, that's really grounding my mind in my personal life and professional life, yeah.* Sarah

Appendix 20. Discussion of playfulness in the focus group interview

Sarah*: I do therapy, I work as a therapist and I come here and there is all this is other way of being with dreams and unconscious material that I find really freeing and playful. Playful today maybe in particular, but sometimes play isn't always playful, but there is playfulness today but there is the opportunity to be with it may in a more free way and then I feel that by coming here.*

Jason: *I would say I really liked doing it…*

Sarah*: Yeah* [laughs] *it's fun it's fun…*

Jason*: Just being in a room with people doing the strange thing and also actually doing it with the same people on a regular basis it's really really erm […] Yeah, lovely.*

Clara*: I suppose for myself I love dreams, I've always loved dreams, but in terms of the work I feel I'm not very good at it* [laughs] *I'm quite a linear-logical type of thinker I think the something about sort of free myself up and be able to (sigh) make looser sort of is hard to say to be more playful[…] yeah um. I dunno. A more creative way of thinking…*

All*: Umm* [agreeing, nodding]

Clara*: … and I can get that here but I think still in the work of a therapist it is really difficult to get in to that place of being up to do what we do here yeah…yeah.*

Ella: *I wonder if it's something, is almost likely something weightless about being here.*

All*: Yeah* [light smiles in everybody in the group]

Clara: *You know about, I don't know whether it's my expectation or think other people have this expectation, that I should be able to decode or pin down a dream um, but, I mean I was in a room full of colleagues, work colleagues the other day, they said you're a psychodynamic therapist, you, you erm work with dreams, tell me what this dream means and I was like oh my God, how do I get out of this one!*

All: [laughing, smiling and nodding]

Clara: …*and it's just really helpful what Jason just said to me about just let it sit there and whatever comes will come you don't have to put it down, just have faith, something will arise from this and that's making me think about someone I've been working with and I think something has just arisen from a dream he's had, without us needing to pin*

it down, the dream's been stated and then you know things have arisen from that yeah. The mystery of us talking.

All: *Ummh* [agreeing]

Appendix 21. Accessing the unconscious and channelling the flow

In-action GDE was associated by the participants in this study with a dynamic process of accessing the unconscious. This section explores different aspects of this dynamism in relation the theories and research highlighted in the literature.

In the context of GDE it may be possible to view the access to the unconscious as a momentary emergence of awareness of something non-tangible and yet meaningful to the individual and the group. This phenomenon might be represented by different elements such as thoughts, feelings, images etc. Through GDE these elements would gather, thicken and bounce from one to another, and become accessible to the awareness. The layers of consciousness proposed by Freud (1915) may be useful for the potential mapping of the access as a process. Perhaps the unconscious can be reached via circulation of awareness stimulated by group dream sharing, that transits through conscious thinking about dreams into the preconscious mind space, where the impulses from the conscious and unconscious meet and are mediated, followed by the emersion into the unconscious elements, and consequent retracing of the steps back into the conscious thinking. Hence, making visible what was once invisible to the participants' minds (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, it is possible to assume that there are liminal spaces between these layers of consciousness that promote transformation of meaning and sustain circulation of awareness. The Nomadic theory by Braidotti (2011) might be able to account for the process of emergence, which is situated in the 'in-between' spaces, and is non-linear and multidirectional. Hence, the process of accessing the unconscious in GDE has been associated with such characteristics as connectivity, ambivalence, accumulation, expansion and infinite potency in this study. The emergence of GDE may signify the area of experience or a transitional space, where the unconscious can be accessed, and its elements can stretch across inner and outer reality of the individual and the group. For example, this may be something that Dave, the interview participant, spoke about in relation to his sense of a process that '*reaches across'* or *'moves through'*.

During the data gathering stage, I made several observations of the participants in the moments when they spoke about GDE. It was as if they were entering a dream-like state and at the same time continuing consciously using language to describe their past experience of group dream sharing. I was wondering then whether this state was essential for the expression of this experience and whether the access to the unconscious was part of it. The neuropsychological principles of parallel distributed processing may be applied to explain this phenomenon. According to Huprich (2011) accessing the unconscious on the level of neural

functioning involves parallel processing of information and distribution of representations in the brain, which have been described by Hameroff and Penrose (2014) as quantum cognition or unconscious computing. Such theoretical grounding regarding the functioning of the human brain might also help to explain why some participants associated GDE with the enhanced sense of reality of the unconscious.

In my reflection on the dream-like state of expression, I wondered about the participants' awareness of GDE, which once was sourced through their interaction with a group; or, in Jungian terms, the ego-consciousness, that might once have been in close proximity to the collective unconscious. I speculated that in this case the process of accessing the unconscious may have been shaped by these circumstances. Following the analogy from physics and computer science cited above, it is possible to explain this by comparison to Collective Computing or a systemic linking of multiple minds in the process of accessing the unconscious for the purpose of being with and/or learning from complexity. Furthermore, this explanation can be helpful in understanding of possible reasons why some participants stressed on the value of equal participation in GDE. The process of accessing the unconscious during group dream sharing and group dream work may not require group members to be agents of change, however it might anticipate existential openness and appreciation for the diversity and multitude of experiences. Mindell (1992) suggested that dream sharing is one of the pathways to Deep Democracy that allows fluidity of experiences between people. This concept of fluidity may be useful to apply in the explanation of the process of accessing the unconscious through GDE.

Perhaps, in the process of talking about GDE the unconscious was accessed by some participants via the use of metaphors. According to Rasmussen (2000) metaphors '*bridge the worlds between what is known and unknown, verbal and non-verbal, real and unreal, fact and fiction, past and present, and conscious and unconscious*' (p. 357). Furthermore, Rasmussen (2002) attempted to draw theoretical links between dreams and metaphors on the basis of the Continuity hypothesis, suggesting that both can aid access to the unconscious elements of the individual mind. Hence in the context of this research, the emergence of the metaphors such as '*the net'* or *'cooking pot'* might be explained by the established circulation of the information from the unconscious that is continuous from the group dream sharing experience.

Dreams may be one of the access points for the unconscious in a group. Once a dream is shared, it is no more a property of the individual, but it becomes a window into what Bion (1992) called the *infinite unconscious*. Furthermore, a dream might allow the unconscious to seep into a group through the personal experiences of its members. With the help of quantum

analogy, it could be thought that the dream allows delivery of the reality of the unconscious, but this happens at the expense of its representation, as it becomes fixed when the dream is shared via the dreamer's expression with the group. Nevertheless, the group might allow restoration of multiple probabilities where the dream might have resided before the sharing (see Chapter 2). Additionally, when dream is shared, the group might allow to bypass the limitations of the individual minds on the journey towards discovering information within the Fabric of Complexity. Poincaré's theory and Bion's adaptation of it in his thinking about dreaming might provide some support for this explanation (*Glaveanu 2019*).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the ambivalence, or mixture of negative and positive attitudes that has been expressed by the participants in this research towards accessing the unconscious via dreams. For example, the focus group engaged in a discussion of probabilities of meaning where the hope for new discovery, and threat to the integrity of the group were felt through the collectively imagined dream character joining the group. Perhaps, in this case, the shared group culture, which promoted the perseverance with the unconscious, and the trust to the process of dream sharing, helped its members to mediate this tension. According to Schein (1991), group culture is acquired through the learning processes of enculturation and socialisation to the shared values and beliefs. The cultural norms of tolerating ambivalence towards the unconscious accessed via GDE might have evolved over time in this group as this foundation was validated through its workability.

It is also important to acknowledge that GDE might allow the individuals to approach their own unconscious processes. Some participants emphasised how they became aware of different dimensions of the unconscious and developed the acceptance of diversity around them. This progression might be compared to what Jung (1963) saw as *Self embraces* or the development of knowledge about the shadow of the self, acceptance of the full reality, and openness to the diversity of human life around the individual without the desire for it to change.

The unconscious might surface to the level of conscious awareness in the process of restoration and reconstruction of links between people when a group engages with a dream. For example, Janet, one of the interview participants, reflected on her experience of sharing a dream about her client in a group. She felt that this process enabled her to re-establish fractured connections between her and her client's unconscious minds. Bion (1962) theorised about the fragmentation of positive links between the container and contained, which he associated with the unconscious pull towards reformation, as a necessary aspect of human experience. Bion (1962) defined this process as a *catastrophic change*, that is integral to human growth and development and that is driven by the higher-order link making associated

with knowledge or K. Considering Bion's theory, I speculate that GDE promotes access to the unconscious in the space where the catastrophic change can occur with the potential for reconstruction of positive links. In this context, a dream might be regarded as a connective and reorganising element emergent from the Fabric of Complexity, which has a potential for K linkage. The explanation of the access to the unconscious in the restorative process can be also supported by the theories of dynamic transformation and fluctuation between the states of organisation and disorganisation, which are co-dependent in their generativity (Morgan, 1986).

Jason, an interview participant, spoke about his experience of *noticing 'the accumulation of the unconscious around the dream in the group'* in the moment of dream sharing. This example might allow to introduce the theoretical understanding of GDE as a 'portal' where the unconscious can accumulate and be accessed, exposing the individuals to a bigger whole or the infinite (Lawrence, 2018). Also, it is possible to propose that people share the evolutionary tendency to avoid the accumulation of the unconscious, to reduce complexity, to favour conscious thinking and to determine directionality, which might provide short-term safety from the chaos of the Universe around them but promote discontent long-term, as the complexity persists. Perhaps GDE allows this tendency to be bypassed, and offers an opportunity to connect to, and grow from, what has not been accessible before.

The sense of to-and-fro motion in relation to the individual and shared unconscious has been discussed by some participants in this research. For example, Carlo reflected on how the group seems to invite the dreams of the individuals, allowing the information to circulate between the unconscious minds. He offered an integrative metaphor of '*a net'*, which described the dream as a connective substance between the individual and shared unconscious. It might be said that there is an existing tradition in psychology to tackle the challenge of explaining this dynamism using metaphors. One of the best known examples is the interaction between Oedipus and the Sphinx. Freud (1899) first officially used this figurative comparison in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which emphasised the Oedipus perspective of the individuals with their desire to produce knowledge, unexperienced curiosity and the need for resolution as an entry point to the unconscious. Bion (1961) reversed this position by focusing on the Sphinx as access to the transcendent knowledge that already exists and is experienced as the collective unconscious. Lawrence (2003, p. 610) furthered Bion's ideas by suggesting that the Sphinx perspective '*grants freedom from the individual psyche*'. The effort of these theorists to engage with this metaphor failed to account fully for the potential connectivity and interdependence of the individual and the shared unconscious. Carlo's '*net'* metaphor therefore is more congruent with the Complexity theory which views

each component of the phenomenon as being motivated by interaction, migration, exchange, interplay and connectivity (Edelman and Tononi, 2000).

The focus group offered an interesting perspective on the process of accessing the unconscious through GDE. The participants spoke about the reduction of anxiety, and the consequent allowance for the influences from multiple directions in the group. This development might be a manifestation of surviving the *attacks on linking*, which according to Bion (1988) occur in the group as the result of exposure to the unknown, emergent from the unconscious. When the new thought enters the individual mind, it is viewed as potentially disruptive and shattering (Bion, 1988). The ability to tolerate this is dependent on the individual's capacity to withstand fragmentation, anxiety and doubt. The dynamic transformational processes that might take place during group dream sharing or dream work have a potential to mediate the dismantling of previous views and theories, therefore nurturing resilience or a capability to manage emotional and thinking processes for the purpose of development when facing the unconscious. Furthermore, if GDE can be part of a rhizomatic process of change, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988), then the experience of openness to influence from multiple directions in the participants can be viewed as openness to a flow of knowledge from multiple points of awareness.

Dante, an interview participant, talked about '*the possibility of mind'* as an emergent sense of the infinite potential. It was associated with accessing and moving between the individual and shared unconscious. This experience might be close to '*the infinite possibilities of meaning'* identified by Lawrence (2011, p. 334) in his reflections on SDM. It encapsulates the potential of dreams shared between people to carry fragmented meaning from psychosocial infinity through the individual minds. This can also explain why during dream sharing the state of negative capability might have been preferred by some participants over the directionality and the search for the hidden variables (e.g. latent content).

Furthermore, some participants described accessing the unconscious in GDE as an expansive process. I speculate that dream sharing in the group promotes link making between internal and external reality, and consequent acknowledgement of complexity. Hence, the possibilities to 'see' the unconscious 'threads' in a dense and textured Fabric of Complexity might arise, expanding the sense of awareness. It could be argued that psychotherapists are involved in similar processes on a daily basis. Through the professional interactions they broaden their awareness on conscious and unconscious levels. Besides, there might be a professional expectation to undergo and withstand this process. GDE might be one of many ways to fulfil

this professional need. Hence, most practitioners in this research acknowledged it as an essential experience.

The sense of expansion might also follow from GDE due to the individual and shared unconscious being accessed simultaneously in one place. For example, Dante, the interview participant, acknowledged the sense of movement between the individual and group unconscious elements, which extended his understanding of their overlap. It can be argued that the 'superposition' of a dream allows for this access to occur. If the dream can be figuratively compared to a quantum particle, then it might have a potential to be in multiple places (the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social) concurrently. When dreams are shared, they are forced into a particular location, but the blueprint of other positions might be just within reach.

The subject of facilitating access to the unconscious was raised in some interviews. Several practitioners spoke about psychotherapists' role to encourage people to be curious about the unconscious and to relax into it. Curiosity about the unconscious is prominent in Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and Social Dreaming approaches, that the participants in this research subscribed to. Therefore, the pursuit of such facilitation might have been associated with the professional background of the participants. Perhaps the wider facilitation of responsibility and leadership can be amplified by exposure to GDE (these will be discussed further in the section 5.3.1.).

Nevertheless, the facilitation of accessing the unconscious is important to consider in parallel with the experiences where the group is perceived as being in charge of this access. For example, most participants in this study spoke about their sense of following or relying on the group during dream sharing. This experience might be explained by Nitsun's (1996) idea of commitment to the group, which is delicate in nature and can be dismantled under the influence of directionality in the individual. This commitment might be associated with the unconscious resolution experienced by the facilitators of an internal conflict about group belonging or 'the war of a group animal' (Bion ,1961, p.131). It might be suggested that GDE, through the established circulation of the unconscious, can enable the individual to trust and commit to a group via dream sharing. Perhaps the group as a space might have a power to facilitate these experiences. Lawrence (2003) suggested that some groups might cultivate non-individualistic culture, by creating boundaries that accommodate fluidity of a process, by placing the locus of control into the interpsychic, and maintaining a self-other relationship free of authority in understanding.

However, the sense of following and relying on the group when accessing the unconscious through GDE might also be associated with the experiences of a *group mind*. Some participants in this research directly mentioned this term. According to Pettit (2010) groups have 'the mind of their own', or an entity that is bigger than the sum of the psychological experiences of its members. It can be proposed that, when the dreams are shared, the individual mind might gravitate towards thinking about experiences of the unconscious, while the group mind may be more open to the direct experience of it, because it is more equipped to accommodate multitude, 'fragmentation' and 'superposition'. This might be something that Dave in his interview associated with *'meta-movement from the silo mind'*. It is worthy to point, as suggested by Overgaard and Salice (2019), that accessing the group mind can be both helpful and disruptive for the individual. If group dream sharing and dream work promote access to the unconscious via the group mind, it may be necessary to consider the Bright and Dark side of GDE.

Another approach that can explain the group role in accessing the unconscious during GDE is offered by the application of the Complexity theory. Rubenfeld (2001) postulated that therapists need to understand and accept groups' ability to self-organise in unique and unanticipated ways. He applied the Complexity theory to explain the relationships between the individuals as nonlinear, turbulent or unpredictable. These relationships, according to Rubenfeld (2001), promote fluctuation between order (directionality) and disorder (uncertainty, randomness and instability) and the consequent emergence of a higher level of organisation such as the group-as-a-whole. Schermer (2012) supported the idea of the existence of such a phenomenon by drawing upon examples of nature's large adaptive living structures. Therefore, it can be suggested that the accessing the unconscious in GDE might be facilitated by the group-as-a-whole as opposed a single individual in a leadership position. Furthermore, the understanding of the processes within this structure might require observation and participation in it. This might explain why several participants in this research spoke about the decline of the facilitator's need to interpret dreams in a group. Some stressed the qualitative difference in accessing the unconscious in the group environment, comparing to the individually-focused dyad work. It can be suggested that the focus on observation in GDE, as opposed to interpretation of the unconscious, opens a possibility for the individuals to connect with the Fabric of Complexity and withstand the turbulence channelled by it. Hence, Ullman's (1996) invitation not to interpret but to appreciate the dreams can be applicable, when considering the experiences of accessing the unconscious during group dream sharing.

The theoretical inferences introduced above promote the view that the unconscious might be an independent entity, which may require a space where it can be accessed by the human

minds. Accessing the unconscious through GDE might involve making space for it and determining the attitude to it. In this research, participants' GDE seem to accommodate these conditions. Furthermore, this process was described as free of application, as it happened in a natural way during group dream sharing or dream work. It was also considered as multi-directional and rhizomatic flow without determined entry points nor a finishing line. Mindell's (2011) theory might be applied to suggest that participation in group dream sharing and dream work can be viewed as an opportunity for psychotherapists to channel this flow.

Appendix 22. The Dark Side of GDE – a struggle through exposure to the unknown

The Dark Side of in-action GDE can be characterised by the experiences of discomfort, tension and defensiveness, which might be associated with the psychosocial complexity and messiness of group dream sharing and dream work. It includes the struggle with parallel processes, ambivalence towards GDE, exposure to the unknown and uncertainty, challenge of using language for expression, longing for safety and directions, and the Therapists' Trap.

A number of parallel processes might be activated during group dream sharing and dream work, which can lead to potential discomfort or distress of the members. One of them is the combination of positive connectivity with others and distancing from the personal elements, which some participants found frustrating. This dual process highlights the dynamism of the plural entity constituted from dreams, the group and the individual. The discomfort within the individual can be associated with the rise of intersubjectivity (Stern, 1985). According to Neri *et al.* (2008) group dream sharing and dream work nourish individuals with benefits of diversity and a possibility of belonging to something bigger than the self, and at the same time, challenging their capacity to accept these prospects. Nitsun (1996) pointed out that some individuals would hope for the polar opposite experience in the group and therefore experience negative affect. The tension between interpersonal learning and interpersonal threat might be an externalised extension of this process (Yalom,1995).

The personal content may be perceived as a default starting point for sense making during group dream sharing for some practitioners due to their theoretical orientation and personal preferences. Furthermore, personalisation can be used as a safer and easier platform for function in the group by its members. Although this choice can be a useful launch pad into complexity, it cannot stop the parallel process of distancing from the self (Mindell, 2011).

The discomfort with this might also be promoted between the reality of the process and the cultural norms embedded in the individual and the group regarding dream sharing. Shuttleworth-Jordan (1995) compared dream sharing to the idea of the trusting a precious possession. Individualistic cultures might emphasise the need to hold on to it while collectivistic cultures would encourage the individuals to share (Wang, 2021). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2017) found that individualism can increase the sense of loss aversion leading to anxiety and defensiveness. People without cultural sympathy might struggle with the potential value clash, breeding misunderstanding and prejudice in the group. Consequently, the need to extend the depth of awareness can present a challenge to group facilitators, evoking frustration and personal struggle.

The dual process mentioned above might provoke varied responses to it during GDE. Some examples can be the abandonment, protectiveness or imposition of the individual content. It was interesting to notice that participants in this research offered their observations of these reactions as natural reflexes**,** as opposed to a conscious grappling with a dilemma. The instinctual nature of this experience has been considered by Bion in his theory on linking. Bion (1961) saw the individual as 'a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal' (p.131). Hence the group has a capacity to provoke what he called *basic assumptions* of depending, fighting or fleeing, or pairing, which are rooted in biological inheritance of the human species. Bion proposed that each individual has an innate capacity for linking up with other individuals, and for being at war with these links.

Most of the struggle above might be applicable to both the facilitator and the members of the group. However, there were some examples of challenges that were experienced by people due to their leadership position. For instance, the tantalising holding of distress in the group and perseverance with the dream sharing process, were associated with mental struggle, sacrifice, abandonment and expectations of individual for the greater good of the group. GDE might also trigger ambivalence, experienced in the form of competition for the mind space between awareness of the group process and the individual anxiety associated with it. This might be explained by the fragmentation and disintegration induced by the complexity of in-action GDE, forcing the leaders to perform an integrating function at the cost of their own comfort (Brigham,1992). The ability to follow it through might depend on qualities of the individuals, their training and the modality of the group (Dies, 1994). Furthermore, this dual process might tap into the interplay of links that are developed and 'attacked' within the leader as an individual, inducing a *catastrophic change* in his or her mental state (Lombardi, 2009).

The challenging parallel processes also occur on the level of a group as a multiple entity. Nitsun (1996) suggested that the development of disruptive process alongside, and despite, shared harmony is inevitable. He developed the concept of the anti-group in an attempt to consider a possibility of the balance between oppositional forces in the group, while bridging the existing theory that was either idealising the group's potential to survive (Foulkes, 1964) or overfocused on regressive elements and destructive impulses (Bion,1962). Nitsun (1996) proposed viewing the conflict between creative and destructive as a generative process.

In-action GDE exposes people to uncertainty and the unknown, which can induce anxiety. Furthermore, holding the not-knowing can be a disturbing process of some. The *uncertainty principle* might be metaphorically applied to GDE, where the meaning cannot be precisely pinned down to a particular location (within the Fabric of Complexity) at a particular time. It

can help to argue for the need to relax into negative capability (Keats, 1970). Nevertheless, the pull towards certainty and clarity, or a search for the hidden variable, can be incredibly strong due to their origin in basic needs (e.g. safety and stability). It might be proposed that different modalities (e.g. Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and Social Dreaming) vary in how they approach this challenge depending on where the observation of complexity begins in group dream sharing and dream work: the individual or shared content.

In the process of thinking about this I acknowledged that this research influenced my attitude to the entry point for thoughts about complexity. As I found myself in the privileged position to review holistically the collection of diverse accounts, I was not preoccupied with the identification of an exact starting point of this thinking. Furthermore, I became convinced that it did not make any difference from which direction the meaning emerged in the context of group dream sharing or group dream work. This approach felt accommodating to the idea of parallel processes. It seemed to me that GDE could appear from the Fabric of Complexity where the individual and the communal, the unconscious and the conscious, might be multiple channels for the transition of meaning.

The struggle with finding the language for expression can be another aspect of the Dark Side of GDE. This may be linked to the attempts during group dream sharing to deeply consider the Fabric of Complexity which might emphasise the limitations of human language to express this experience. While verbalisation depends upon the acceptance of conscious attribution of meaning by people, the large proportion of it can remain outside conscious awareness, and yet still have strong influences on the experience of the narrator. The struggle to express this can be distressing (Leitch, 2006). There might be a need to recognise the value of embodied knowledge in GDE as a way of knowing that goes beyond the conscious and rational mode of thinking, as it allows the wider life experiences located in emotions, physical sensation, culture and society to be conveyed (Derry, 2005). For example, I observed Sarah in the focus group struggling to describe GDE, using the word '*nebulous'* in combination with active hand movements that were resembling grasping or catching. Furthermore, the other members of the group have adopted both the word and gesticulation in the later discussion.

As I myself struggled with expression in this thesis, which was entirely dependent on words, I expanded my investigation of the linguistic nature of the term 'nebulous'. It prompted me to look into the language of astrophysics to aid my reflexivity (see Appendix 29). Putting the language difficulty aside, it would be reasonable to state that talking about the unknown as a subject can lead to a discomfort. For example, Carlo acknowledged that the unknown is scary, and approaching it might force people into safety-seeking behaviours. Carleton (2016 p. 39)

proposed that 'the fear of the unknown may be a, or possibly the, fundamental fear' that rules all other human discomforts. He differentiated between 'the fear of unknown as an individual's propensity to experience fear caused by the perceived absence of information at any level of consciousness or point of processing'; and the intolerance of uncertainty as, 'an individual's dispositional incapacity to endure the aversive response triggered by the perceived absence of salient, key, or sufficient information, and sustained by the associated perception of uncertainty' (Carleton, 2016, p. 31). In GDE these elements were both felt and expressed by the individuals and the group as a whole, which can be a great challenge to endure for all.

Some theorists have suggested that the experience of fear of the unknown might be linked to the individual differences. The tendency to respond to unknown with fear was called *neuroticism* by Freud (1924) and *trait anxiety* by Spielberger (1975). These theories also suggested that this fundamental fear is a factor in human evolution, therefore it is natural to fear the unknown. Furthermore, the development of *negative capability* might be motivated by this (Barlow, 2002).

Being in the midst of the unknown that unfolds through GDE is a difficult experience. There might be a sense of being '*parachuted', 'dropped'* into it, facing it, and being '*surrounded'* by it. The endurance that some participants have noticed in themselves and in groups, might be explained by the Dark Side of GDE. Hamby *et al.* (2018) suggested that exposure of groups to difficult experiences, adversity and complexity promotes psychological endurance, generativity and compassion.

In my research some participants were able to recognise the implications of exposure to the unknown in the possibility of emotional outburst, explosion, and messiness. This amplified my awareness of extensive fragmentation and exceptional pulling force of the unknown in relation to human psychological functioning, which might be compared to the unconscious forces. Another comparison might represent the unknown as a *black hole* riveting and frightening people's minds during group dream sharing and dream work, by putting them in touch with the unconscious fear of death. This analogy enabled me to think of GDE as cognitive, emotional and visceral experiences of the participants as the movement in space around the unknown that might indicate the proximity to it.

The exposure to the unknown in GDE might be possible through accessing the unconscious. The participant Dave compared it to a '*lurch moment*' when the dream enters the group. Accessing the unconscious might feel similar to jumping off '*the cliff edge'* into '*oblivion'*. This process might be fast and furious. Hameroff and Penrose (2014) contrasted conscious and unconscious processes in the human mind. They offered to view conscious influences as

being rather slow, and unconscious processing as incredibly fast, comparing the latter to a form of quantum. Some research indicated that dreams, as connective material to the unconscious, might accelerate the access to it (e.g. Richarz and Römisch, 2004; Goelitz, 2002); however some individuals might not be ready for such a 'fast ride' (Rutan *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, the speed, with which distress from exposure to the unconscious and the unknown, might be amplified by the group's communication, which dreams are part of (Hinshelwood, 2007).

The intensity of GDE may also be associated with the group context that Berman (2019) considered as *semi-safe place*. While the access to the unconscious and the interaction with the unknown unfold in this space, the tension between the sense of security and the sense of vulnerability in group members is produced. Parallel with dreams, the challenge of being in an unexpected and not fully protected environment can also be shared.

People differ in their ability to cope with distress and intensity, especially when these arise spontaneously. The theory of individual differences might explain this (See Section 5.3.1.). The group characteristic might matter too in this context. Reviewing the accounts where participants talked about coping with the unknown and the unconscious, I noticed a trend: the less interpersonal the group, the more there is a need for the individual to be able to cope with the intense feelings or powerful response to dreams. Some modalities, such as Social Dreaming Matrix, allow space for sitting with distress as there is no anticipation of intervention or guidance, however I questioned whether this is something that helps or strains the individual coping that the participants were talking about.

The Dark Side of GDE may also manifest itself in the breakdown of the process that began during group dream sharing or dream work. The interaction of people with the process itself can be at the heart of this problem. The breakdown might happen when the process gets neglected by the minds of the people in the group, or when there is little trust placed on it or when the structure is too oppressive. Prigogine (1997) opposed the idea of stability in favour of change and transformation that process prone to create spontaneously, shifting systems from one coherent state to another. When the process breaks down, it might be helpful to see this rhythm as part of entropy, which also has potency for reorganisation (Vassiliou, 2005).

Mindell (2011) emphasised the independence of the process, which is capable to recreate its channels of flow. This might explain why participant Jason was so confident in his statement that breakdown of the process is rare and that free flow is more common. However, I was left wondering about the irregularity of the process breakdown that, despite its unpleasantness, can illuminate the Dark Side of GDE. Does it mean that practitioners know less about it,

therefore, feel less familiar with it when it occurs, and consequently struggle with it more? Onyett (2012) suggested that leadership represented and facilitated by the psychologists needs to be informed by the complexity. Although GDE can allow to engage with it, there is a need to recognise the different sides to this opportunity and the irregular manifestation of them.

The transitions within the process of group dream sharing can also be challenging. One example of this is a transition from '*dreaming acceptance*' into '*reflective thinking*' or the transition of unconscious elements into conscious awareness where the invisible might become visible via various expressions. According to Nitsun (1996) transition in the group can be anxiety provoking as transformation is enforced. In this case the dreams' elements, such as images and symbols shared in the group, can be viewed as transitional objects that might smooth the transformation of the unconscious into the conscious. Winnicott (1971) suggested that only *good internal objects* can become transitional objects. This might be problematic as dream content presented in the group can vary in its characteristics. For example, some participants in this research have shared dreams with horrifying images.

Lawrence (2018) explains that the group crafts the meaning of dreams via creativity and play. Nevertheless, there might be barriers to this resolution. For example, Janet spoke about some kind of sensitivity to the transition between the unconscious and conscious, which might manifest in some group members through their persistent clinging to the surface level and avoiding accessing the unconscious, in order to amplify the individual sense of safety in the group.

Yalom (1985) highlighted the issue of safety as a major obstacle, as some people might be fearful of their dreams revealing their deepest secrets or deficiencies, which will be scrutinised in front of others in a group. The group is a non-confidential space where intersubjectivity can thrive (Stern, 1985). The dreams, shared in a group, activate group's polyphony, allowing the unconscious exchange between people. This will eventually reach the awareness of the individuals and in some cases it can become 'a wake-up call' about the individual unconscious being made public. This might become a tipping point. The irreversible consequences might emerge from the psychosocial infinity, which distributes and propagates the information from the dream within a multitude of conscious and unconscious interactions between people. Consequently, the shift of power and power imbalance might be inevitable. Some participants mentioned this experience and how it triggered the state of distress, fear, suspicion and regret in those 'awoken' individuals or the group as a whole. Furthermore, the facilitators of the group might have had to face a challenge of accepting that this element of GDE cannot be predicted, avoided or fully addressed.

The intensity of GDE might evoke the shared need to pause it. However, considering the idea of the independent process flow, despite the group or individual longing for break out, the stop might be only illusionary. According to Nitsun (1996), the group space is incomplete, therefore the intensity might spill out into life beyond the group. In this context, the metaphor of *'cooking pot'* was used by Dave, which can explain the continuation of the process even during the assumed break, the world slowly 'cooling it down' for the group as a whole and for the individuals. This can explain an example from the data where a group was described as shifting to the de-escalating dream-like activity of mindfulness.

Another aspect of the Dark Side of GDE might be found in the conflict of needs to have directionality and structure, and to commit to the flow of the rhizomatic process. This conflict might be experienced by the facilitators, the group and its individual members. For example, the feeling of vigilance was linked to the imposition of structure, which seemed to disconnect people from the process of group dream sharing. Brown (2000) associated structure in the group with a sense of power and control which are divisive in nature. However, not having structure or losing directions, while maintaining the free flow of dream sharing was also associated with discomfort or struggle to tolerate this. Some participants in this research saw a possible resolution for this in the approach to facilitating group dream sharing. Krippner *et al.* (1994) proposed that the more unstructured the group, the more there is a need for it to be managed by a skilful facilitator.

With the directionality and structure being under question during GDE, the experience of taking a leap of faith, gambling or risking might become a way of dealing with discomfort from the unknown in the process. For example, these might manifest in the decisions to share a dream with disturbing content. Bougheas *et al.* (2015) found that free communication in the group leads to the probability heuristics where people are less guided by logical evaluation of gains and losses, and more by social preferences. Hence, the risk taking and gambling during GDE might be explained by the sharing as an influencing factor in managing or inducing discomfort during GDE. According to Berman (2019) the act of risk taking (such as dream sharing) has also a potential to produce safety if the practice is mutually accepted in a group. Furthermore, he suggested that the lack of risk taking can intensify doubt and fear amongst group members.

The conception of risk or threat in a group might give rise to a variety of defence mechanisms (Nitsun, 1996). The deployment of these defences in the context of in-action GDE might distort the understanding obtained through the relationships between dreams, individuals and the group as a whole. From the very beginning of data gathering I noticed something that I later referred to as 'sticky reflexivity' – the participants' reflections on GDE which seemed to be

saturated with sophisticated defences. For example, when some participants spoke about challenging experiences they seemed to rely a lot on optimism, which might have compensated for their failure to recognise the Dark Side of GDE. The imagination and reflection were mentioned as protective capacities of the group against splitting and polarisation. However, by theorising about this, some participants may have also avoided thinking of the barriers to these helpful capacities. This avoidance might have been promoted by the extended complexity (e.g. due to the parallel processes) and/or possibly linked to hopelessness against group defences identified by Nitsun (1996). Furthermore, following Mindell's (2011) ideas, the participants might have been channelling the defences of the group in the interviews.

In several interviews I noticed that initial positivity and enthusiasm about GDE gradually subsided into what might be described as more reserved and controlled reflexivity. I wondered whether reflection on the experiences from group dream sharing had gradually 'thickened up' the affect and made the expression 'sticky'. In this case the suppression as a defence mechanism might have been evoked. Furthermore, some participants possibly made a conscious attempt to contain their unconscious. What I might have observed was similar to the moment between the surfacing of unconscious experience and the act of expressing it, where a conscious decision has occurred. I questioned whether therapists in general are professionally socialised to this process, where they are able to spot such a moment, be in it with the other person and carefully select what to share from their own mind. It also made me think about the potential implications that this awareness might have for psychotherapists' ability to connect with the Fabric of Complexity, when these moments occur in the group setting where the dreams are shared.

Conscious withholding or colonising of the unconscious has been linked to the culture that occupies the minds of individuals for the purpose of controlling the unconscious and hopefully preventing it from developing independently (Seligman, 2015). It has been contrasted to mentalising, which is more about making space for the unconscious, the thoughts and reflections about it (Bion, 1962). The implications of the Dark Side of GDE might be recognised in the fluctuation between mentalising and colonising processes in the mind of the psychotherapists.

This trajectory of communication was very familiar to me: starting with personal experiences, moving into reflexivity, the enthusiasm and optimism, the unease, and the discovery of the proximity of the 'black hole' of the unknown. It resembled somewhat my journey as a researcher carrying out this project, where I might have moved between the attempts to

colonise and mentalise about the unconscious accessed in this process. I wondered about the reasons why some practitioners would stay on an 'uneven' path and some would exit it after the first exposure to the fluctuation.

Some participants spoke about a probability that GDE would highlight something that is not thought about, make it public without any warning and deconstruct whatever meaning was there before it. This experiential 'explosion' (in metaphoric terms, the nebula made up of seemingly random sensations, thoughts and images that indicates the location of a 'black whole' of the unknown) can be hard for some people to tolerate or live through. It might feel so sudden and shocking, that the individuals may not have a chance to utilise their existing resources for resilience or may find themselves completely unequipped to deal with it. If these individuals are psychotherapists, this experience might present several issues, including the paradox of being prepared and unwary at the same time; the revealing capacity of GDE, that seems to be independent of psychotherapists' intentions; and the awareness of the Dark Side of GDE without a formulated narrative for it.

The participants in this research referred to psychotherapists as a population that, on one hand, is well prepared for GDE (e.g., resilience associated with extensive professional knowledge, skills, qualities and experience); and, on the other hand, is struggling and/or is reluctant to engage with GDE due to this preparedness. To aid theoretical thinking about this phenomenon, I introduced the concept of the Therapists' Trap as something that might be highlighted by the Dark Side of GDE.

I speculated that the Therapists' Trap has a capacity to intensify the Dark Side of GDE for the practitioners or vice versa. Maslach *et al.* (2001) suggested that long-term distress and emotional exhaustion are major problems that are deeply ingrained in the experiences of psychotherapists, and therefore might influence their practice. Altabef *et al.* (2017) identified some professional characteristics (such as the need for control and responsibility) that might be expected of the practitioner in some organisations that can contribute to long-term stress or even burnout. One of the participants in this research shared an example of facilitating a group of distressed psychotherapists who wanted to share dreams but, after exposure to what might be recognised as the Dark Side of GDE, struggled with this activity due to professional preconceptions and personal defences. This group gravitated to the dream-like activity of mindfulness at the end.

The discussion so far suggest that the professional group identity and psychotherapy culture have a potentiality to simultaneously encourage practitioners' minds to work with dreams in groups, and to breed defences against them. Furthermore, professional habits such as asking

questions, noticing first what happens for others and then for themselves might be applied during group dream sharing or dream work. These tendences might channel psychotherapists' awareness towards development of others and away from awareness of transformative processes that are equally shared and available to everyone. The two most experienced participants in this research spoke about *'the missing experience'* of non-professional involvement in group dream sharing. This might mean that psychotherapists need to take part in this activity in the non-expert state, maybe in the learning mode. Moreover, most participants in this research admitted that it is a real challenge to find a place for the professional articulation of GDE. Goodwyn and Reis (2020) summarised that psychotherapists often 'depend on self-directed, post qualification continuing professional development and supervision to build dream work skills, often prompted by client initiation of dream material' (p. 187). To conclude, in order to further understand the issue of the Therapists' Trap, which could be illuminated by the Dark Side of GDE, the development of group dream sharing theory and the spaces where GDE can be professionally articulated (e.g. in training) might be needed.

Appendix 23. The Bright Side of GDE – widening of the horizons

In-action GDE through its proposed rhythm of oscillation between positive and challenging experiences might allow its Bright Side to rise to the surface of practitioners' awareness. For example, participants referred to the sense of safety, containment, trust, play, creativity and expansion of awareness, as some possible signs of the Bright Side of GDE.

The Bright Side of GDE was linked to safety, which is a complex phenomenon to define, especially in the context of this research. After careful consideration, I have selected some theoretical formulations to explore it. For example, Vincent (1994, p.76) put 'a perceived freedom from psychological harm' on a continuum from feeling threatened to feeling secure. This might explain the variation and subtle changeability in the sense of safety within GDE that some participants might have tried to convey.

Edmondson and Lei (2014) referred to the concept of psychological safety as a belief about the consequences of risk taking. For instance, several participants shared their observations regarding their groups where some people felt safer sharing dreams as opposed to experiences from their waking life. This could be due to their beliefs around the sharing what is perceived as real and not real. The sense of reality or truth can be disturbing to the individual, so approaching it and engaging with it in the presence of others might feel daunting (Nitsun, 1996). Dreams might be perceived as less real and therefore viewed as 'safer' for sharing in a group that might already feel semi-safe, especially for those who are less aware of the mechanisms behind dreaming, e.g. people without psychological training. Yalom (1995) highlighted that people in the group might anticipate reduced or incomplete safety when deciding to take part. However, the anticipation of risk associated with dreams might be less apparent, especially when an individual is seeking help with them. The systematic literature review conducted by Hackett (2020) concluded that any client who is interested in sharing a dream may benefit from it. This general prospect of gains (that can be supported by anthropological history of human dream sharing tradition) might be also responsible for the sense of anticipated safety in GDE.

Cumulative Prospect Theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1992) can be useful to explain further this interplay of feeling safe and the sense of gain. It postulates that people derive value from the evaluation of gains and losses, such as the relief from confusion or terror induced by a dream, and the loss of confidentiality and privacy due to sharing it with the group. The state of safety might be related to the natural tendency of individuals to seek profits and avoid losses. Groups in which the shared beliefs assign value function to dream sharing as a potential gain

might promote individual capacities for dream sharing, and the sense of safety might be associated with risk acceptance or high tolerance for risk.

Berman (2019) proposed that a group is a semi-safe space where 'co-created, basically safe and mutually accepted infrastructure' allows individuals to tolerate their vulnerability and threatening environment enough to be able to feel safe. This proposition can explain the emergence of safety in those instances when the focus of the group during dream sharing is more on collective than personal aspects of dreams. It can also highlight semi-safe mutual arrangements in the group. Democracy and freedom of expression can also be linked to the sense of safety during group interaction (Bougheas et al., 2015). The act of dream sharing in this research has been associated by the participants with these two factors, which can also be considered as parts of a semi-safe infrastructure in the group according to Berman (2019).

The participants conveyed something that might be described as 'grounding in multitude', that during GDE was represented by the multiple perspectives on the shared dreams and by the multiple elements of the Fabric of Complexity that GDE emerges from. The sense of safety associated with this was also distributed across other contexts of the participants' personal and professional lives. This might be explained with the help of an analogy: the 'superposition' of a phenomenon. If the dream can be figuratively compared to a quantum particle, then it might have a potential to concurrently be in multiple places (e.g. the minds of different people, the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social). Group dream sharing forces the observation of this particle, which therefore loses its 'quantum properties'. However, what gets established is the radical acceptance of what is incomplete. This state might give rise to the sense of safety around the knowledge about 'superposition' of the dream. This might be creatively compared to the 'multiple harbours' where the psyche can 'sail' to, moved by the 'wind' of the dream, on the 'sea' of the unknown.

According to some participants in this research, the process of dream sharing in a group can stimulate a shift between the personal and the shared, and therefore reduce the feeling of being stuck. Lindemann (2016) utilised Winnicott's concepts of *holding* and *letting go* to propose that the sense of progress can be felt through the understanding of how to hold and when to let go. The movement between the individual and the social in GDE might be based on similar processes. The individual and the social might be held and let go via group dream sharing and dream work, as both a dream and a group have capacity to contain and to constitute a safe enough environment.

This mobility was associated with the sense of safety and was specifically emphasised in the discussions of SDM groups. This 'increased circulation' might be explained by what Lawrence

(1991) observed in his own journey from the individual focus in dreams, to the social, opening up to a wider pathway of discovery together with others. He stated that he was reassured by the anthropological evidence and quantum theory, that this might be a safer route for humanity towards the unknown. This approach, in combination with Lindemann's (2016) ideas, can also explain the SDM paradox, that two participants mentioned in their interviews, where in the group through dream sharing, the personal is diffused, however the individual still manages to maintain a strong sense of self.

The feeling of safety in GDE might be shared as the individuals exercise openness to an act of influencing others and act of being influenced by others via dreams. Jung (1953) in *Psychological Reflections* mentioned that dreams open the individual's awareness of influences beyond her/himself. It can be argued that this openness, combined with the sense of safety, is linked to the feeling for trust that might emerge from in-action GDE.

Some participants shared their experiences of trusting others during group dream sharing and dream work. Trust is an attitude that results from a positive assessment of facts, circumstances, and relationships; it leads to reliance on others with a feeling of safety even in potentially ambiguous situations (Antoldi and Cerrato, 2020). Nitsun (1996) spoke about the reality of a group as a less than idyllic setting, where the application of trust and mistrust should be balanced. Furthermore, the struggle with trust in the group might also be exacerbated by dreams (Neri *et al.*, 2008). It might be proposed that what participants in this research were talking about, can be conceptualised as 'trusting enough' and associated with heurism which is deeply ingrained in the process of dream sharing.

Koole (2020) drew links between trust and reflexive learning by defining the circular transformative process of trusting to learn and learning to trust. In groups, where dreams are shared, the organic processes of reflexivity and learning might occur. Trust, therefore, can be seen as an input or condition in these processes, as throughput in the sense that it makes these processes accessible, and as output because it can grow through successful learning and reflexivity. Furthermore, the coexistence of the Dark and Bright Sides of GDE might correspond with the paradoxical nature of trust: the elements of experience that increase the need for trust, can also be minimised by trust (Koole, 2020).

The participants Carlo reflected on the experiences of complexity and the unknown during GDE that led his group to accessing '*the trust layer*'. This experience might be associated with people's tendency to draw inferences from past exposures to the unknown and the attempts to reduce complexity (Luhmann, 1979). The familiarity can be complementary to trust or form a base for it, especially in the context of routine-based practices (Wenger, 1998). Hence, it

can be argued that the trust layer might be embedded in the routine of dream sharing and familiarity with GDE.

Trust was also linked to the shared feelings of respect and non-judgement by the focus group participants. As I observed the group interacting in the interview, I acknowledged how democracy, togetherness, equality and freedom of choice seemed to propagate these feelings. The practitioners in this interview reported connecting with each other as equals via a *'dreaming level of mind'*. Mindell (1992) proposed that increased awareness of diversity without judgement can bring democracy to life. He also advocated that dreams in the groups can be a potent invitation for Deep Democracy, as dreams connect people with all aspects of human experiences (Mindell, 2011a). Social Dreaming theory also offers an explanation of the rise of democracy, openness and power equalisation during group dream sharing. It is viewed as the way of processing individual suppositions for the purpose of synthesis of the assumptions that are shared and constitute the group culture (Lawrence, 1998). In the focus group interview conducted with participants of SDM, democracy was discussed by psychotherapists using phrases such as '*we are all in it together', 'all on even level', 'no one is in charge', 'horizontal interaction', 'no power imbalance', 'sense of following'* and *'absence of competition'*. These examples might point towards a certain culture established in this group.

The sense of safety was also linked by most participants in this research to trust in the process of group dream sharing or group dream work. It may be determined by the shared faith in what the group is doing and how it is done. Hence, it is important to recognise that different modalities place a different value on group process. It can be argued that Psychoanalysis, Gestalt and Social Dreaming (represented in practices of psychotherapists involved in this research) encourage trust in the process in general, which might contribute to the feeling of safety in the groups. Mindell (1995) suggested that safety can be considered as a collective process experienced and universally desired at different times and in different ways in the moments of vulnerability. It cannot be orchestrated by the expert facilitators, but it can be tentatively observed in a space open to diverse perspectives, so safety can emerge from the trust to the process. Furthermore, GDE might arise within the Fabric of Complexity in the form of a rhizomatic process. It can highlight trust and safety as factors that lie in the horizontal plane, with non-hierarchical interaction between group members and dreams.

Trusting the process of GDE may require flexibility from both sides: the participants and the process. One example of this is adjustment of the distances between people and their individual psychological states during the group dream sharing or dream work. Carlo, the

interview participant, used a metaphor of a ‘net’, which might have represented the Bright Side of GDE as a flexible container.

The containing capacity of GDE and containing function of dreaming can be linked. Bion (1962, 1991, 1992) formulated the ideas about containment as well as explanation of α-function in the context of dreaming. Although, he has not formally integrated these two theoretical elements, Grotstein (2018), who reviewed Bion’s theoretical legacy, suggested that this is imperative. Bion (1992) viewed dreams as a product of the metabolic α-function that allows to process individual experiences of the infinite unconscious (*the O, Ineffable Unknown*, a source of thoughts without a thinker). Hence, dreaming is a process that promotes non-avoidant modification of frustration and enables thinking. Grotstein (2018) suggested shifting theoretical attention from the content of dreams to the processes associated with them, in order to approach dreaming from Bion’s perspective on the container ↔ contained. Ogden (2004) clarified these concepts by suggesting that 'container' is a transformative process for the ‘contained’, which are the thoughts (in the broadest sense of the word) and feelings derived from lived experience. Considering these theoretical inferences, I propose that containing capacity of GDE might be rooted in the dynamic transformation of the container ↔ contained process in dreaming, which according to Bion (1992) is continuous and not limited by awakening from sleep. Furthermore, in his theory of dreaming, Bion (1992) emphasised the limitations of the individual conscious mind to comprehend complexity when facing new information. He also postulated that the presence of others can address this limitation through containing function of the group (Bion, 1991). I speculate that GDE might be a reason why people over centuries engaged in group dream sharing; and, conversely, the biopsychosocial tendency of humans to group might explain why GDE has emerged.

Ogden (2004) differentiated between Bion’s (1962) concept of containment and Winnicott’s (1956) idea of holding. The latter might be relevant for the explanation of the participants’ experiences associated with the structure in group dream sharing and dream work, as well as the role of facilitator. According to Winnicott (1956), holding is a principal function of the mother, which includes early psychological and physical insulating of the infant in her/his state of *going on being,* from the uncertainty and the unknown. The phenomenon of holding might be viewed from the perspective of an embrace or cradling, or from the position of the holder (the mother). Ogden (2004) emphasised that the main difference between holding and the container ↔ contained is in the contrast between constancy (in the first instance) and dynamic transformation (in the second instance).

In the context of group dream sharing or dream work, the structure and the facilitator might be perceived as relatively constant elements, and GDE as a dynamic phenomenon. For example, Jason, a research participant, compared his experience of holding structure, which does not guarantee safety, but enables the process of dream sharing, and the facilitator's role of '*holding a bowl*'. During the interview I noticed Jason's hand gestures that also resembled holding. He was stressing the independence of the 'bowl's' content from the 'bowl' itself. These expressions seemed similar to what might have been described by Winnicott (1956) in the theory of holding. However, this similarity might not grant equalisation of 'holding' GDE to the maternal embrace. Partly it can be due to the experience of holding was being shared by a male participant; and partly because the holding of GDE might has a qualitative difference to holding in the context of the caregiving. The independence of GDE might already be in existence prior to the act of holding by the facilitator or be independent from the cradling structure. The holding experience as a part of the Bright Side of GDE might be considered as a state of proximity to what is already there and being there before the human mind – the *infinite unconscious* (Bion,1992) and the *unspoken in the known* (Laurence, 2002).

The theorising about the distinctive features of holding GDE via structure and the role of the facilitator might also help to explain why most of the participants emphasised the importance of flexibility in both. The holding of the processes during GDE might organically promote the emergence of the transitional, liminal or smooth spaces, which require flexibility of all elements involved. Loose structure (which accommodates familiarity but does not oppress the process) and the flexible facilitator (who is there to hold the process with the application of negative capability) might be the prerequisites for the illumination of the Bright Side of GDE. The absence of these two components might therefore highlight the Dark Side of GDE. This may also be why some participants in this research spoke about the alternative arrangements in group dream sharing and group dream work, which can promote flexibility, such as 'a ritual' as opposed to a structure, and a facilitator who is also an equal member of the group, adopting a beginner's mind.

Flexibility in structure and facilitation might foster play, creativity and imagination. These experiences can also be perceived as contributors to the containing capacity of GDE. Due to their transformative nature, play, creativity and imagination can allow individuals to approach complexity in the group with some degree of safety, and engage in learning from it (West *et al.*, 2013; Kessel *et al.*, 2012; Mainemelis and Ronson, 2006). Group dream sharing and dream work might simultaneously stimulate, sustain and validate play, creativity and imagination, through which the transitions might happen and discovery opportunities might emerge (Winnicott,1971); the container and contained might be linked (Bion, 1962); the

pathway to social infinity might open (Lawrence, 2018); and the art of connection between people might be produced, by being, rather than having, and by acquiring knowledge, rather than power (Ginger, 2018). These propositions can help to explain why play, creativity and imagination were frequently mentioned and occasionally enacted by the participants in this research. Furthermore, the continuity of transformation behind these processes in GDE might be associated with sense of expansion beyond containment, or the sense of safety into the free flow of life-affirming experiences of connection with others and belonging to something bigger than the self.

The experience of expansion of awareness and widening out the horizon for meaning-making might be another manifestation of the Bright Side of GDE. The participants in this research referred to GDE that might have consistently enhanced, deepened, and enriched their individual experience of living, via other people's dreams. These reflections correspond with some theoretical ideas that link the internalisation of multiple perspectives during group dream sharing and the expansion of the individual awareness. For example, Pines (1999) spoke about group dream sharing as a way of extending the individual worldview or *widening vision.* Lawrence (1998) highlighted the recognition of a *multiverse* during SDM as the main benefit for the individuals in groups. Foulkes (1985) linked the expansion of awareness via engagement in dream work, with the development of knowledge about the self and others. Mindell (2000) pointed out that dream work can nurture the attitude of openness towards other people and their perspectives, as well as towards various dream images and states of consciousness, which consequently can promote the expansion of fluidity (a skill of moving from one role or viewpoint to another). Considering these perspectives, I propose that the experience of expansion and widening out might be linked to the implications of GDE on the individual and communal levels.

Appendix 24. Implications of GDE on the individual level of psychotherapists' experiences

On-action GDE may have continued working its way in the mind of the individuals outside the group where the dreams were originally shared. This experience could have manifested itself in the expansion of personal and professional qualities, skills, abilities and capacities. Group dream sharing or dream work has been considered in contemporary theories (e.g. Ullman, 1994; Hill, 1996; Lawrence, 2003) as a potent space for the individual development. For example, Mindell (2000) suggested that dream work in groups can aid the expansion of facilitators' own awareness and fluidity (the skill of moving from one role or viewpoint to another) as the attitude of openness is nurtured towards other people and their perspectives, as well as towards various dream images, and states of consciousness. This proposition might be helpful in explaining the flexibility that participants presented via their descriptions of maintaining open-mindedness, applying negative capability and accepting simplicity alongside complexity.

The flexible movement between states or levels, switching between channels, was mentioned by different participants, as well as by experts in this study, as an ability that was practised during dream sharing in the group, but later expanded into other aspects of personal and professional life. Several explanations for this can be offered based on different psychological theories, which mostly stress the flexible movement in the process of encounter. I would like to argue that the data I have gathered, indicated that there is a lingering residue of these experiences that extends beyond the actual moment of group dream sharing or dream work.

In Psychoanalysis the capacity to free the movement between conscious and unconscious experiences of dreaming and waking life has been linked to the practitioner's experience of dreams sharing. Ogden (2017) suggested that it allows working across the contact barrier, establishing communication linkages through which an individual mind could grow by integrating in life the presence of both imaginative and cognitive aspects. In the Gestalt position the practitioners are encouraged to embrace the freedom of accessing intrapsychic, interpsychic and group levels of mind (Perls, 1967). During group dream sharing the flexibility of moving between these levels secures the *Gestalt completion*. In the context of SDM the function of the host is perceived in link making, that requires moving away from judgement and interpretation of meaning, into the state of connectivity (Manley, 2014). Mindell (1996) spoke about therapists' ability to work with different signals in various channels and the need for flexibility in moving between them. He viewed dream sharing and dream work as enabling for individual awareness of the flow in alternative channels, which, if not repressed, promotes

personal growth. The above examples of theories demonstrate the processes of development of flexibility of moving between different aspects of psychological presence. With the help of dynamic transformation theory, I would like to propose that these experiences might be extended, broadened, and expanded beyond the original dream sharing encounter, in the lives of psychotherapists. This means that on-action GDE might promote this growth on the individual level.

The concepts of curiosity and negative capability have been mentioned by some participants. These qualities and skills, facilitated through group dream sharing and group dream work, later allowed the practitioners to make connections, while holding the not-knowing in different therapeutic and non-therapeutic contexts. For example, Dave considered these as important professional capacities that developed over time as a *'backbone'*. It might be proposed that psychotherapists' flexibility and heuristic mindset entangle through GDE.

The Fabric of Complexity, that GDE might emerge from, demands that the participants suspend their search for the truth or finite and, instead, liberate themselves to experience a multitude of meanings and the infinite. According to Bion (1970) this can be achieved when psychotherapists are able to get beyond their memory and desire, which represent past and future, and therefore overshadow the unknown meaning of experiences. Due to this Bion (1992) proposed that work with dreams requires negative capability – the concept originally borrowed from Keats (1970). Following this line of thought, Yerushalmi (2019) proposed that the combination of flexibility and negative capability has a potential to enhance psychotherapists' capacity to make meaning.

Furthermore, it may be proposed that the expansion of flexibility, negative capability and refocusing in on-action GDE might manifest in how complexity is approached by the practitioners. For example, in the context of on-action GDE, some participants spoke about their ability to flex between symbolic or metaphoric thinking, and direct description of reality when working with complexity. Stacey (2020) suggested that such flexibility might mediate the human struggle with comprehension of reality where complexity lies in the connection between subject and object. The enhanced access to this mediation might be considered as an implication of GDE.

The ability to maintain both the sense of self and the sense of undifferentiated group membership has been linked to GDE by some participants. It might be explained by the expansion of flexibility that has been discussed above. This expansion might relate to the experience of plural dynamism in the group where dreams are shared, which can be

internalised and incorporated into a person's global sense of self, resembling multiple social identities.

Haslam *et al.* (2008) found that the ability to access the internalised social diversity can increase the sense of existential security and enhance mental resilience. Considering this line of thought it might be possible to explain why some participants spoke about extended tolerance and openness to the unknown in on-action GDE. Firstly, I speculate that the internalised plurality has become a type of social capital that allowed psychotherapists to cope with the fear of identity loss. Second, their vulnerability in the face of the unknown might have been reduced, because their sense of self was not invested exclusively into one function in the group. Some participants acknowledged that achieving this 'superposition' of self is not easy, it requires advancement in the tolerance of intersubjective tension and a deep appreciation of the benefits of flexibility.

At this point I would like to refer to the concept of *Self*, proposed by Jung as the deepest and highest reaches of the psyche - the archetype of wholeness. According to Jung (1968) the Self is a sum of everything the person is now, and everything they once were, as well as everything they could potentially become. Jung (1968) believed that the purpose of human life is to experience this coming together as a whole or what he called *Self Embraces*. He postulated that the integrated Self can allow the individual to hold firm against the collective unconscious. By considering the implications of GDE on the individual and communal levels combined, I wondered if the more contemporary take on Jung's theory might be that the total self does not have to be held against, but accept its existence within the collective unconscious, utilising the potential of the infinite and multiple. As a mediation between theoretical approaches, there might be a need for a new term: *Social Embraces*, which can be useful for explaining some experiences described above.

In the focus group the experience of GDE was compared to *'the mind gym'*, where psychotherapists can exercise *'the unconscious muscle'*. I propose that engagement in GDE may develop psychotherapists' ability to facilitate the unconscious in their lives. My proposition might be supported by Bogzaran and Deslauriers (2012) statement that 'the impact and exploration of dreams can eventually translate into deeper self-knowledge. As a result, insights, creative acts and new perspectives inspired by dreams can increase self-perceptual depth and shape the contours of our waking life' (p. 117).

The enabling of the unconscious is a skill that might have been extended in the group dream sharing context via play, as opposed to being seen as work. The participants in this research talked about their experience of letting go of their expertness and freeing their creativity and

playfulness. These expressions were remarkably similar to a playful approach in group dream sharing described by Rubien (1994, cited in Krippner et al., 1994) which helped her to explore the relationship between the unconscious and conscious material.

According to Bulkeley (2020) group dream sharing might activate or emerge from the group play experience. It can relax unconscious processes, allowing the group to utilise the potential space in an imaginative way (Nitsun, 1996). Peculiar dream content might stimulate creative and imaginative play in a group, giving rise to GDE in the paly space where the individuals can face the unknown. In this context, playfulness and creativity may be considered as psychotherapists' skills and abilities for approaching the unknown and facilitating the unconscious, with GDE expanding these proficiencies further.

The extension of skills and abilities for self-regulation were also mentioned by the participants. Some examples included managing their own psychological safety as a facilitator; managing their own fears and the consequent impulse to interpret; letting go of control tendences in favour of trusting the process and the group; deepening self-acceptance; managing the intensity associated with parallel processes; maintaining a personal state of connection without action. The complexity of self-regulation during group dream sharing and dream work may be explained with the help of cybernetic theory, that allows it to be viewed as a process within the internal psychological system of the individual that is engaged in feedback loops and interconnectivity with the external systems (MacKenzie *et al.,* 2012). Furthermore, the change can occur as an integral element of systemic interaction (Maruyama,1963). Perhaps the individual, the group and the dream can engage in a circular transformative relationship. Therefore, self-regulation during GDE might result in transformation of those skills, for example, developing resilience and antifragility.

The implications of GDE on the individual level might need to be considered in the light of individual differences. Such variables as personality traits, cognitive abilities, learning experiences, age and gender can influence personal preferences, beliefs, skills and habits (Motowildo *et al.,*1997). All participants spoke about themselves as individuals who had always been open to new experiences, interest in dreams and belief in unconscious processes. Dave summarised this by a statement: '*This is just the way I'm made'.*

Schredl and Göritz (2017) conducted a large-scale study to investigate the link between personality traits and attitudes to dreams and dream sharing. They found that people with higher neuroticism scores had more positive attitudes to dreams. The more detailed consideration of this link has revealed that the people who were more open to dreams had more general interest in developing coping skills and learning about themselves. Schredl and

Göritz (2017) concluded that with age the neuroticism scores tend to decline and openness to experience scores increase, which might promote the individual interest in dreams. Furthermore, Tan *et al.* (2019) found that openness to experience enhances creativity, and engagement in creativity promotes openness to experience. This research evidence supports Schonbar's (1965) *lifestyle hypothesis* which conceptualised dream recall as a part of a lifestyle that is related to creativity and openness to experience. These examples of the studies may be relevant to the explanation of possible links between individual characteristics and life experiences, and involvement in GDE. These findings might explain why my participants spoke about their natural long-term openness to group dream sharing and group dream work. For example, age, possible personality traits and personal preference for creativity are factors that might have predisposed practitioners to some implications from GDE discussed above.

Some participants have mentioned their experiences of social marginalisation as the result of involvement in group dream sharing and group dream work. It was especially emphasised in the narratives of about participating in and facilitating SDM, working in the NHS or geographically defined cultural differences. In the context of these experiences, practitioners spoke about their ability, utilised via on-action GDE, to manage social stereotyping.

Leonard and Dawson (2018) pointed out that dream work in psychotherapy remains largely marginalised in Western countries due to cultural preference for the positivist approach and evidence-based practice that can lead to specific treatment outcomes. This limits UK psychotherapists in their opportunities to engage with GDE in training and practice. The lack of knowledge about this experience and about the professional communities that promote it, might lead to prejudice (Smith and Pitts, 2007). Hence, the experience of GDE might have implications for development of the ability to withstand and accept this social challenge.

Marsiglia *et al.* (2021) theorised that diversity, oppression and change are the components of social evolution. Different cultures cultivate a different balance between these components. Therefore, the overall cultural norms regarding dream sharing might be differentiated into permitting and oppressing, depending on where and how the culture has evolved. For example, Morewedge and Norton (2009) found that the attitude towards dream sharing differs in individualistic and collectivistic cultures, with collectivistic cultures showing more openness to dream sharing. This can explain why the Italian participants spoke about GDE as a part of cultural normality for them, whereas the British practitioners were positioning themselves outside the norm in their practice. The reflection on GDE might bring this experience to the surface of their awareness, as well as strengthen their ability to accept it.

In the discussion of perseverance with GDE some participants spoke about their experience of leadership. The elaboration of this topic revealed participants' understanding of leaders in the group dream sharing process that was less about professional skills or role, and more about focusing on a person as a whole. It might be proposed that implications of GDE on the individual level can be seen in meaning-making from the leadership experiences. Clapp-Smith *et al.* (2019) identified an alternative theoretical approach to the traditional skill-based or role-based thinking about leadership, which centralises the leader's identity. This perspective is focused on the integration of the multiple dimensions (the personal, the relational, and the collective) that are internalised during the leadership process. GDE might promote such an integrative stance, because the traditional view on leadership might not be sufficient to cater for the Fabric of Complexity that participants get exposed to through GDE. Furthermore, this might also explain why the leadership identity, emergent from GDE, is not associated with the strengthening or empowering of the individual. In fact, the participants spoke about the pressure to maintain a sense of self, to refrain from projecting it into the group and to manage projective identification of the group at the same time.

Miscenko *et al.* (2017) noted that leader identity strength varies across time and situations and often dips before it grows. This is particularly relevant in the context of GDE where the practitioners who had experience of leadership in other contexts, got involved with group dream sharing and dream work. GDE might require shedding those prior leader identity constructs due to the activated process of dynamic transformation, resulting in participants' sense of 'letting go' of personal directions and power. On-action GDE may have prompted participants to reflect on this experience, leading to an inference that facilitating group dream sharing and dream work, might be part of psychotherapists' wider work with complexity or in participant Carlo's words '*it's part of the job'*.

Despite different titles (e.g. facilitator, conductor or host) assigned by different modalities to the individuals who managed dream sharing or dream work in groups, there were similarities in characteristics of the style that they adopted, often associated with general reliance on collaboration and democracy. Therefore, GDE might be linked to the experience of collaborative and democratic leadership, which entails meaningful participation, respect for and expectations of everyone in a group as equally ethical beings. Woods (2004) spoke of the inner distance as essential for the collaborative and democratic leadership. This capacity has similar characteristics to what the participants in this study described when they spoke of maintaining both a sense of self and of group membership in GDE. Inner distancing requires deep awareness of the benefits of group polyphony and the ability to adhere to ethical values for enabling it, despite the challenges that multiple entity might present.

The capacity for inner distance in the psychotherapists who were involved in managing group dream sharing might have enabled them to exercise some degree of inner authority and genuinely participate in the democratic process. Perhaps GDE promoted something that might be called *organic governance*, which locates the power outside the leader and within the systemic interaction (Woods, 2014). Organic governance has a potential to aid the application of leaders' existing group management skills and abilities (e.g. establishing group norms and boundaries, managing expectations, distress and disclosure, modelling resilience and tolerance of 'not knowing', etc.) because democratic interaction can facilitate internal and external integration.

Furthermore, in-action GDE might expose the practitioners to the experience of Deep Democracy, which may be processed in on-action GDE leading to the expansions of qualities and skills for embracing this phenomenon. For example, some participants commented about their contentment with the position in a group where personal directionality is not relevant, where coercion is absent, and the responsibility is distributed. I wondered whether the ability to facilitate *groupification*, mentioned by some participants, had a potency to grow into the ability to manage Deep Democracy in on-action GDE by building the conditions for it and acting on it.

Appendix 25. Implications of GDE on the communal level of psychotherapists' experiences

The implications of GDE on the communal level of psychotherapists' experiences might have manifested through the illumination of culture and tuning into social background. Most participants recognised that different groups and communities might require a right fit narrative to make the information about GDE more accessible (the accessibility approaches discussed below). This suggestion was based on their experience of group dream sharing and dream work with different populations (commercial staff, GP groups, clergy, police, psychotherapy groups). The expansion of awareness into the collective space might have led the participants to contemplate the community feeling about psychotherapy and a possibility of Social Design. Training has been mentioned as a valuable communal entry point to the understanding of GDE.

Through GDE, group dream sharing and dream work might illuminate *groupthink* or the dominant culture of a group and the society it is located in. Valine (2018) proposed that for the purpose of safety and containment groups can cultivate similarity, which can put them at risk of groupthink or a set of rigid beliefs. The true representation of these for some groups can be difficult to face, as it highlights cultural failure as well as personal defensiveness (e.g. irrationality, prejudice, marginalisation) (Valine, 2018).

Creative space between the dream and the group might stimulate the dismantling of previous views and theories in favour of new alternatives. This transformation, that Pines (1999) called 'widening vision' (p.7), can also promote 'attacks on linking' (Bion, 1988) and the emergence of an anti-group (Nitsun, 1996). The processing of these profound collective experiences might be part of on-action GDE. For example, some participants commented on the culture of disconnection in Western society where the sense of uselessness in individuals, coupled with isolation, is on the rise and how through group dream sharing (e.g. SDM) this problem can be addressed. Such reflections were further generalised by some participants, who suggested that this problem is what psychotherapists work with on a daily basis – internalised issues that are of the social origin.

The NHS is an organisation that makes cultural contributions to the understanding of mental health and the role of psychotherapy in the UK (Fleming, 2020). It is also a major employer of psychologists and psychotherapists. The power dynamic between the individuals, organisation and the community might be described as 'top-down', where the culture of the NHS is passed on to the community via professionals. This culture can be characterised by heavy reliance on empiricism and an individualistic medical model of health, which sustains

disconnection on the individual and social levels. Furthermore, the NHS tends to prioritise cost-cutting and to reduce complexity by promoting structures, procedures and minimising access to the alternatives associated with process, connection, openness and ambiguity. There is also a profound mistrust of the public. On the level of practitioners this might translate into defensiveness against, and marginalisation of, non-structured approaches and connecting experiences (Knight and Thomas, 2019). Bailey and Burhouse (2019) suggested the NHS needs to change the way the practitioners are viewed by reframing the role of 'super-heroes' into 'super-connectors'. According to Bailey and Burhouse (2019) this aspiration can be achieved via changes in leadership, which has the potential to influence culture. Pearce e*t al.*, (2017) proposed that shifting cultural focus towards diversity and democracy in the community might be the future of mental health services in the UK.

The disconnect between the individual and society has also penetrated the culture of psychological theory and practice. Freud and Psychoanalysis were products of their time, creating a space for the study of individuals and of their psychic world with dreams as the royal road to the unconscious. In the same way, GDE might be considered by contemporary psychology as a part of response to current need for questioning an excessive focus on the individual, the fragmentation of knowledge and psychosocial infinity. On-action GDE can offer psychotherapists an option to reconsider the centrality of the individual to the processes around them, and to open up to the idea of communal entity.

The consideration of social and cultural diversity led some participants in this research to share their thinking about accessible narrative. The implication of GDE on the communal level of the psychotherapists' experiences might be seen in their attempts to tailor communication about GDE to different populations, making the pathways to understanding of this experience more accessible. Additionally, the experience of Deep Democracy in GDE might promote the pursuit of inclusivity in these narratives.

GDE is difficult to define, therefore adapting its explanation to cater for social and cultural diversity is especially challenging. The participants in this research spoke about their attempts to predict what knowledge was typical for different communities in order to integrate it into a narrative about GDE that would make sense to them. This instinctual approach resonated with Bateson's (2007) proposition that individuals and communities orient themselves to the future by constructing narratives based on known to them past experiences. However, this might be problematic. Although the familiar elements in the discourse can reduce the prejudice towards the new experience, the dynamic transformation associated with it might be also obstructed by them.

Furthermore, the use of analogies, allegories and integration of other disciplines was contemplated by the participants as a way of fitting the narrative into the public understanding. I also acknowledged a gravitation towards this approach in constructing a narrative in this thesis for psychotherapists and psychologists in general. I introduced the concepts of complexity, the unknown and the psychosocial infinity, assuming that these are the essences that these populations might be grappling with. To cater for the openness of Counselling psychology to the integration of knowledge, I used multiple analogies from different disciplines. I also attempted to address the wider culture in psychology, by developing a narrative that offers an alternative to the existing approaches that are reliant on directionality and individualisation.

By stimulating focus on diversity and accessibility, GDE might also amplify psychotherapists' awareness of the Social Design process or the progression in collective human potential. For example, some participants commented on the fast expansion of connections, resourcefulness and productivity during group dream sharing or dream work. In GDE the social division might be reduced through utilising a multitude of perspectives and capabilities; dreams might be viewed as a potent source of information and creativity; and the group might be considered as a creative space where the designing process within the Fabric of Complexity can prevail through the members' *'social layer of mind'*, *'infinity of human motivation'* and pursuit of imagining *'future together'*. In visual terms, this can be seen as a constellation where the complexity is a background, the group is a foreground and GDE is a connective channel for the dreams to circulate.

The Social Design might be a group response to the complexity introduced through the interaction with dreams. It can also be viewed as an essence of group transformational process postulated by the models of Gestalt, Cybernetics, Dialectics and autopoiesis. The sense of being a part of something bigger than the self might be an indication of psychotherapists' awareness of this process after exposure to GDE. Furthermore, it might explain why some participants in this study talked about their longing to extend their connection with different communities and the society.

Morgan-Jones and Eden (2019) spoke about the desire for social context as an ever-present yearning. Once this feeling is brought into individual awareness, it is felt like a hunger. It stimulates the search for a way to satisfy it and to remove feelings of loneliness, as well as the search for the sense of self that is emergent from intersubjectivity. The desire to belong to a maternal body larger than one's own can be linked to Bion's (1961) *basic assumption theory* of group dynamics and idea of valency. The instinctual capacity to combine conflicting

emotional experiences of love, passion, curiosity, anxiety, fear and hate drive people to connect with others. Considering this line of thought, I speculate that GDE may bring psychotherapists in touch with yearning for the social, resulting in the expansion of what might be called a *community feeling* around their practices and personal lives.

The community feeling might be associated with a shift in understanding from the individually-essential to a socially-universal perspective and consequent questions like: how to apply it fairly to different populations? what would actual calibration look like? how to retain consistency in the inclusive communication? This psychological state might be compared to a near-theory experience (Fryer, 2001) and might also explains the importance of developing an accessible narrative for the participants in this study.

The context of training was discussed in the interviews. Some participants saw it as a potentially valuable experience. Considering that training of psychotherapists is often conducted in groups and possibly creates a communal experience, it might be proposed that group dream sharing and group dream work may fit this setting. Furthermore, GDE can occur in training without purposeful targeting by the curriculum. Perhaps education about GDE can spark professional interest and demystify this experience in the community of psychologists and psychotherapists. Ullman (1994) suggested that training might promote greater security in professionals to pursue group dream sharing and dream work on personal and communal levels.

The engagement of some psychotherapists in this research was partially motivated by the opportunity to learn more about GDE. This made me wonder whether research into GDE might be considered as an educational initiative with the potential to be a connecting tool for the wider community of the practitioners within psychological disciplines and beyond.

Appendix 26. Making sense of exposure to GDE – the natural experience

GDE was viewed by the participants in this research as a different, difficult to describe, nebulous and visceral experience, which expanded, extended, and broadened their awareness and knowledge about psychosocial complexity. These reflections were often offered to me as summarising statements about the perceived totality of GDE. I spent a lot of time immersing myself in, and stepping back from, the data in an attempt to translate this emergent phenomenon into a cohesive narrative. Eventually, I gravitated towards the understanding of GDE as a whole that is bigger than the sum of its two parts – in-action GDE and on-action GDE. This formulation allowed me to explain participants' hazy explorations of relationships between their experiences in the moment and following group dream sharing.

The theories of dynamic transformation offer a useful framework that can be applied to the experience of sense making from GDE as a whole. For instance, the Gestalt model might allow consideration of the process of group dream sharing as a system interaction, where the Fabric of Complexity forms a unified field and where the in-action and on-action experiences through their interconnectedness give rise to GDE as a whole. Bateson's (2002) ideas of mutual causality might point towards the circular nature of GDE as a whole, which is difficult to capture via conventional methods of expression. Gestalt and Cybernetics concepts of non-linear transformation might also be helpful in explaining the sense of expansion and widening out of participants' awareness and understanding. On-action and in-action GDE might be viewed as a feedback (constructive or destructive) between system's components. The transformation as a process, according to Maruyama (1963) and Mindell (2011), is already inbuilt in the pattern of a system (e.g. the Fabric of Complexity).

I considered making sense of exposure to GDE as a whole, as a continuous process in itself, where the transforming might occur through the struggle of expression. The nondifferentiated word '*something'* was frequently used by the participants to describe the wholeness of their experience. Over time it seemed to me as if this verbalisation was more grounded in pre-metaphoric sensing by the participants, as opposed to logic or prior knowledge.

Sometimes I experienced the participants as if they were confessing to themselves about their overall experience of a 'window' into something deep and everlasting. The interaction via Skype might have contributed to the distancing from me as a researcher and enabled the participants to present their process more authentically (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons, 2002). The sense making around the exposure to GDE as a whole might have incorporated the acceptance of witnessing a process which was different to what has been known to the participants. By using Mindell's (2011) idea about an alternative

view on the process participation, that emphasises channelling as opposed to control seeking, it might be possible to explain this observation. For example, witnessing GDE and accepting its flow through the individual might have meant for some participants that they had to uncover a personal experience that has not been spoken about before.

Husserl (1973) proposed that when people attend intentionally to a phenomenon in an attempt to understand it, they get involved with its essences, or properties that constitute the uniqueness of this experience. The intentionality of the sense making from exposure to GDE as a whole, according to this theory, might have led the participants to a struggle with grasping the essences of their experiences. This process might explain the shared sense of doubt in the individual capacity to describe GDE, and appearance of comments in the interview or outside the research about the longing to hear the views of others.

This research might be considered as a beginning of putting together a constellation of essences from GDE. In this proposition, the application of Husserl's (1973) ideas aligns with the *uncertainty principle* borrowed as an analogy from quantum physics. These lines of thinking assume that all phenomena, concretely experienced or imagined, can take different forms, if people think of, imagine, or in other ways intend them. Therefore, the process of this research in general and the interpretation of the data in particular, can be viewed as a collective expression of modified objectivity, converted into arbitrary examples which simultaneously absorb the characteristics of essences of GDE, and produce an infinitely-open multiplicity of its variants.

Some participants were engaged in non-verbal communication during the interviews, which can be viewed as embodied expression and an aid to sense making about GDE as a whole. For example, Clara was using her hands as if she was trying to 'catch' the indefinable. These embodied gestures are significant because they take place in what phenomenologists call the pre-reflective register (Mondada, 2011).

> *When I reflect, there is always something missing about my experience which will evade my reflective grasp.*
>
> Husserl (1973, p.9)

The embodied expression of meaning might be viewed as a process of '*doing understanding'* (Sacks, 1992, p.543). This might be necessary when individuals or a group are invited to share their experience of a dynamic phenomenon, emergent from the Fabric of Complexity. The understanding that is embodied, circular and variant might be an achievement from the exposure to GDE as a whole. Ullman (1996) explained successive transformations of the

information emergent from the ‘black hole’ of psyche during group dream sharing by using Bohm's (1952) theory of circular conversion of the invisible and visible in a process of expansion. The process of demonstrating the understanding of GDE might promote the transformation via expansion of awareness, creativity and connection with others. This line of thinking promoted links with Social Design, as a process that tackles challenges of profitable articulation of GDE across mind and body, individual and society, time and space. The designing force within GDE might manifest via creativity, freedom of expression, democracy and change on group and individual levels. It might also contribute to the development of receptiveness to something intangible, and to accumulation of an ‘intangible assets’. Considering this, it might be necessary for the practitioners to retain openness to Social Design embedded in GDE without an expectation of a recipe or a strategy.

In the context of the discussion above it might not be surprising that some participants talked about their experience of faith in GDE as a whole as opposed to doubt. Many practitioners mentioned their trust or confidence in group dream sharing or dream work as something that resulted from repeated exposure. It might be proposed that this faith emerged from experience, and converted into the emotion that was held by the psychotherapists. Mosak and Bluvshtein (2019) stated that faith should be viewed as a feeling shared between people in psychological process. This might also explain why some participants felt marginalised or stereotyped for their openness and tolerance towards GDE.

It was curious to notice that the fascination of some participants with GDE as a whole was not associated with a discovery of a shared need to engage in the same process. I reflected on this finding in the context of the wider literature. The need to engage in collective experience has been variously addressed in different psychological perspectives. Freud (1900/1961) acknowledged the need of therapists to engage with transference; Jung (1963) has suggested being immersed in the collective where the therapist and the patient are no longer divided; Perls (1969) spoke about confluence or the flowing together. Historically, different strategies (e.g. structuring, narrowing the focus on the individual content, the interpretation and search for clarification) have emerged to shield psychotherapists from the processes which can be unpredictable in the moment of exposure to complexity during interaction with others. Nevertheless, in contemporary theory there is more recognition that shielding from these processes does not stop them as the application of finite to infinite might not be realistic (Ullman, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1994; Lawrence, 1982, 1998, 2003; Mindell, 2011a, 2011b). For example, Lawrence (1997) spoke of a mind revolution:

> *We are living in a time when our experiencing minds are eroding the limits between what we have known as the finite and what we construe to be the infinite, not only in terms of public knowledge but also in terms of personal insight and thinking. And this process will continue if we make ourselves available for the necessary transformations invoked. (online)*

The revival of interest in group dream sharing and dream work might be associated with these developments. The motivation of practitioners to expose themselves to GDE could be linked to their receptiveness to a wider social shift from ownership, separation and compartmentalisation, towards shared understanding and the sense of connection.

The exposure to GDE as a whole did not destroy or deconstruct the individual sense of identity in the participants. Instead, it seemed to influence the expansion and enhancement of their identities via the diversity and multiplicity represented in group dream sharing or dream work. The process of making sense from GDE as a whole might indicate learning from complexity for the purpose of sustainability and development of psychotherapist's identity. This might also explain why most participants in this research spoke about exposure to GDE as something that reinforced their sense of being with others on social, cultural and communal levels. Furthermore, this development might be something that contributes to the motivation to be exposed to GDE or, in Ella's words, attend the *'mind gym'*.

Some participants commented on the organic sense of meaning or natural process of meaning

making that they noticed during group dream sharing or dream work. For example, the focus group referred to it as a significant and affirming steadying point, where time can be managed or slowed down, and the complex experiences grounded. Furthermore, a sense of prophecy as a clarification of *'the nebulous'* from the past SDM was conveyed in this reflection. The reminiscences of these experiences persisted over time without verbal representation. This persistent sense of GDE as a whole might be explained by applying the ideas of flow, continuity and circular transformation. The meaning-making from GDE might be in a continuous motion from standing as one thing to becoming another, something that also can be associated with autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1980).

Appendix 27. Professional Maturation

During the literature review stage, besides harvesting the useful ideas of the core contributors in the theories of dreaming, dream work and the unconscious, I began noticing a curious tendency in the experiences of these people. For example, Freud and Jung developed their theoretical beliefs around the importance of working with dreams as the result of their personal involvement in this activity. The experiential immersion into dream sharing and dream work led many theorists to promote openness to such group activity in the realm of psychotherapy and beyond. I wondered whether the group dream sharing and dream work allowed them to note the value of something that otherwise remained nebulous and unspoken. Furthermore, I questioned the implications that this experience might have had on the personal and professional development of these theorists.

The participants in my research were experienced psychotherapists with rich clinical and academic backgrounds. Most of them noticed over time a progression, seemingly energised by GDE as a whole, towards becoming tolerant and resilient in the face of complexity illuminated in a shared place and moment by the group and the dreams. Over time, this progression might have moved practitioners towards a threshold of awareness that lingers and expands into psychosocial infinity. In this context I proposed to call this phenomenon Professional Maturation, which might be associated with the conversion of professional resilience into professional antifragility. Some reflections on GDE shared by participants, were based on their extended professional experiences. In essence, they acknowledged their own capability to thrive in the presence of infinite life volatility, randomness, disorder, stressors, risk and uncertainty. This belief may have been amplified by GDE and might be considered manifestation of Professional Maturation, from which there is no return due to the acquired insights, which promote the expansion of the phenomenological fractal.

Taleb (2012) defined *antifragility* as a nonlinear response to a stressor, leading to a positive sensitivity to an increase in disorder. He viewed antifragility as a phenomenon that extends beyond resilience or robustness, as it is not about resisting shocks and preserving the initial state, but about evolution. Psychotherapists in their work regularly face three main human stressors that emerge in different forms from the Fabric of Complexity: death, other people and their own minds. Their ability to withstand and evolve from this exposure might be considered professionally necessary and personally difficult. The evolution of leadership in the context of GDE might be one example of this development.

Group dream sharing and dream work might present a combination of challenges for psychotherapists. GDE as a whole might indicate practitioners' processing of this exposure over time. This potentially can result in the emergence of the 'antifragile' beliefs and transition into Professional Maturation. Following the circular transformation ideas from Cybernetics it might be suggested that Professional Maturation encompasses the developing mental fitness from in-action GDE, on-action GDE and GDE as a whole. Therefore, the experience of Professional Maturation and GDE might be interlinked and perpetuate one another.

Some participants in this research spoke about gradual change in their recognition of the value of dreams in human life, developing a subtle 'attunement' to the dreaming reality that enhances receptiveness to the process of living in general. This complex transformation of awareness might be associated with Professional Maturation that allows practitioners to see a dream as an inbuilt component in Human Architecture and GDE as one of the nurturing processes for the psychosocial antifragility of this system, which has been applied since tribal living. Through Professional Maturation practitioners may be able to hold on to negative capability, tolerance of uncertainty and negative eventuality due to the deep awareness of survival and growth. They also might develop capacity to let go of knowledge in favour of getting into the rhythm of life.

GDE might be considered as a liminal experience where ambiguous phenomena get accessed by the minds. It can be argued that this experience enables growth of new awareness, which allows one to 'see' what before was inaccessible or invisible. The wisdom of the liminality leads to transformation, evolution and becoming (Deane-Drummond, 2014). The liminal experience can move a person across the limits of previous understanding into an emergent meaning (Turner *et al.,* 2017). This transition might be a phenomenon that links Professional Maturation and GDE.

The Nomadic theory by Braidotti (2011) guided by the Deleuzian ideas about dynamic transformations navigated around the concept of becoming, which can be useful to the understanding of the experiences of Professional Maturation in the context of GDE. Braidotti (2011) theorised about becoming as movement away from linear growth towards multidirectional development. This can be compared to what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) described as rhizomatic process of change, where knowledge flows through multiple non-hierarchical points of entry and exit in the awareness. The experience of fluid becoming might be represented in Professional Maturation via GDE. It explains the spread of profound awareness across different areas of life (awareness of the Fabric of Complexity) and the ability

to move between the finite and infinite, that the participants in this research spoke about in their reflection on GDE as a whole.

Professional Maturation might be a gradual process that psychotherapists go through in the *liminal space* (Van Gennep, 1909) or *transitional space* or *potential space* (Winnicott, 1971) of the group where the dreams are shared. Practitioners might move at different pace away from automatic professional habits such as narrow pursuit of understanding, individualisation, structuring, apprehension about dreams in a group. It may also take time to develop trust to the process of group dream sharing as well as the application of learning from GDE. Some participants in this research spoke of growing out and beyond the anxiety and terror into the appreciation of '*dreaming reality'* and '*being in the group'*, and consequently appreciating the benefits of looking into the 'window' of communal, cultural and social complexity.

The focus group talked about the experience of growth linked to the process of not working but 'playing' with dreams and seeing what would happen. During SDM this group of psychotherapists stepped away from the professional obligations of helping someone to get better or to know something, and the power dynamics of expertness, allowing themselves to be in the world as it was, being themselves, being humans and dreamers. This arrangement, nevertheless, was informed by their professional knowledge and awareness about psychology, groups and dreams. They explained that, in this context, group dream sharing was a '*nourishing experience', 'grounding for the mind'* that can be compared to a *'mind gym'* where *'the unconscious muscle'* (so important for the professional life of the psychotherapist) can be exercised with the sense of freedom and equality. Their Professional Maturation might have manifested in the shared realisation of the value of this experience over time that, according to the focus group, cannot be easily replaced by an alternative activity.

Professional Maturation may be nurtured by other experiences within GDE, such as polyphony and Deep Democracy. The ideas of Bion and Foulkes on the interaction of the individual and the group can be associated with either mother-child or family-child nurturing. The conventional dyad nurtures the appreciation of uniqueness in the individual (Bion,1988), whereas in a 'family setting' the individual is nurtured to realise that others hold similar perceptions about their uniqueness (Foulkes, 1964). Group dream sharing might cultivate the understanding that individual uniqueness can be an expression of social wholeness.

Blagrove *et al.* (2019) found that frequent exposure to dream sharing activities is positively correlated with an increase in empathy of the participants towards each other. The authors attempted to theorise about wider social applications of these findings for the purpose of changing the culture of intolerance to social diversity. In the light of this academic thinking,

Professional Maturation might be viewed as a part of GDE that can extend the empathic connection of the psychotherapists with the world and enable them to contemplate Social Design in their professional work. Via GDE practitioners might be able to appreciate the designing force of the unconscious and its autonomous capacity for healing, extending and connecting; thus countering the overly-individualised nature of the professional socialisation of therapists.

Throughout the research process I encountered a consistent sense of optimism as I listened to the participants talking about GDE as a whole. In data analysis I attempted to look at it from different angles – e.g. personal defences, shared creativity, play, etc. The concept of becoming offered another avenue for understanding of this aspect of GDE. Braidotti (2011) suggested that the experience of becoming is optimistic in nature and all forms of thinking about it should be considered as affirmative activities. Furthermore, this optimism can be a surface representation of what lies beneath Professional Maturation in the context of GDE - the liminality and becoming; antifragility and informed acceptance; openness to psychosocial infinity and Deep Democracy; play, creativity and appreciation for Social Design.

Research Summary

Exploring the value of group dream experience (GDE): a qualitative study of psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work.

Abstract

Despite the longstanding interest of psychological research and practice in group dream sharing and group dream work, little research has been conducted examining group dream experience (GDE) of psychotherapists. Furthermore, GDE has not been considered in the context of Counselling psychology.

In this research GDE as a term was used to refer to a generic expression of psychotherapists' complex experiences of participation in and facilitation of dream sharing and dream work in groups. It was assumed that GDE can be noted during a collaborative effort within a group to explore and share transpersonal meaning outside individual understanding of a dream recalled from sleep, for the purpose of gaining insight and awareness. The range of group techniques from different modalities for working with dreams may evoke GDE.

This study explored psychotherapists' GDE from psychoanalytic, Gestalt and Social Dreaming groups. The qualitative method of Thematic Analysis was used to process the data from individual interviews conducted via Skype with seven participants, and one face-to face focus group interview conducted with a group of five psychotherapists.

Three overarching themes were identified: In-action GDE, On-action GDE and GDE as a whole. These three aspects of GDE were distinguished as a result of overseeing the whole data set. This differentiation considered subtle differences of the experiences, depending on where they were situated in time and space in the participants' lives, with the acknowledgement of the potential 'superposition' of all three aspects. The findings were contextualised through the integration of theoretical literature and useful analogies from different disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, physics, and computer science.

This research argues that GDE is a complex nebulous experience which is hard to articulate. It involves the processes of construction, deconstruction, and re-construction of meaning,

which might be facilitated by dreams shared in a group. Based on the findings from this research, GDE is viewed as an opportunity to approach and cross a certain threshold of awareness that expands past everyday reality, thereby playing a part in promoting Professional Maturation.

Introduction

Since Freud's (1961,1900) innovative work with dreams, many counselling and psychotherapy theories have evolved utilising research findings about dreaming as an important neuropsychological process. Nevertheless, the translation of these findings into the context of group theories has taken longer and generated less intense research interest. This, in itself, presents a paradox, considering that a group setting is a common space for dream sharing in many societies. The importance of this group activity has been appreciated from an anthropological perspective. According to Arden (1996), many socio-cultural systems across the world have used dream telling over centuries as a source of transpersonal information sharing.

It could be argued that different psychological approaches acknowledge and emphasise different benefits and limitations of working with dreams in a group. Furthermore, researchers and practitioners representing various theoretical perspectives can hold different beliefs and attitudes towards the status of dreams in a group (Bontempo e Silva and Sandström, 2020). Thus, in some groups, dreams are a reoccurring stimulus in the interaction of participants, while in other groups dreams are rarely explored (Corey and Corey, 1992).

The complexity within the process of group dream sharing and dream work is constituted from dreams, the conscious and the unconscious, the social and the individual. This study introduced a concept of the Fabric of Complexity to capture through language a multidimensional intersection from which group dream experience (GDE) might emerge. GDE has been used as a term for the generic expression of psychotherapists' complex experiences of participation in, and facilitation of, dream sharing and dream work in groups.

The theories of dream content and function proposed by Freud (1920) and Jung (1968) became an example of conscious and rational thinking about a multifaceted phenomenon – an example of cutting through complexity by identifying a direction. In the 20th century, recognising the need for a looser focus to acknowledge complexity, stimulated a shift of thinking in the academic community. Ideas about the infinity of the unconscious and the multi-functionality of dreams encouraged cross-disciplinary consideration, where psychology had to stand side by side with sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, and physics. Furthermore, to

engage in the discussions around these topics it became necessary for the theorists and researchers to construct dense and non-linear narratives where the Fabric of Complexity can be acknowledged.

Wilfred Bion (1962) was one of the theorists to offer such an explanation about the interplay of the conscious, the unconscious, the individual, the social and dreams. In Bion's theory this complexity was depicted via connecting processes of transition and transaction of knowledge. Bion's theory became an invitation to shift the focus of psychological science from the comprehension of the complex processes related to dreams, towards the observation and exploration of diverse experiences. This made it possible to discuss GDE in the context of the exposure to newness and going beyond knowledge with the help of social context.

Gordon Lawrence (1993) followed the ideas of Freud (dreams being central to the individual's psychic life and to the cultural tradition of society), Jung (the collective unconscious) and Bion (the infinite unconscious). He attempted to explore further the phenomenon of the unconscious in dreams by developing a method of Social Dreaming. Lawrence (1998, 2003) defined Social Dreaming as a collective technique that helps to reveal and process the unconscious links between individuals and society. Lawrence and Biran (2002) utilised the theory of quantum physics to develop thinking about the complexity of dreaming. Lawrence (2011, p. 334) theorised about the emergence of *'the infinite possibilities of meaning'* and justified the application of Social Dreaming for developing understanding of groups and organisations; thus, utilising the one type of complex systems to study the other type. This manifested a considerable shift of the dream theory towards psychosocial research, where simplification as a process of knowledge production about complexity, was replaced by learning from the complexity.

Gestalt and Cybernetics offered ideas about transformation and change, that supported the move towards complexity. Instead of applying a linear thinking about social systems as sequences where an individual is an initial stimulus, these models postulated that the self is only a small part of a much larger whole, where stimuli for change might be presented as feedback (constructive or destructive) between its components. Maruyama (1963) proposed that the stimuli that set this change (balancing or unbalancing) trigger transformation, which is already contained in the pattern of a system.

Based on the theoretical considerations presented above, it was proposed that GDE emerges from the Fabric of Complexity which offers the potent in-between space where the process of transformation can become detectable. Furthermore, the psychosocial approach to exploring GDE might be suitable, due to its capacity to consider the Fabric of Complexity and therefore

satisfy Counselling psychology theory and practice driven by the accountability beyond the border of this discipline (Goldstein, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research was to explore psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. The participants were invited to identify and explore their experiences of sharing their own dreams in a group; their experiences of working with their clients sharing dreams in a group; and to reflect on the potential implications of these experiences. This study attempted to capture and develop a narrative that would help counselling psychologists and psychotherapists to shed light on the complexity and value of GDE.

Research Questions

Consistent with the purpose of the study, the overall research question considered the psychotherapists' experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. There were three subordinate research questions as follows:

Question 1: What is psychotherapists' GDE as a participant?

Question 2: What is psychotherapists' GDE as a facilitator?

Question 3: What are the implications of these experiences for psychotherapists?

Methodology

Research Design

The current research was motivated by the need for exploration of psychotherapists' GDE and creation of an accessible narrative relevant to Counselling psychology. A qualitative methodology was employed to examine participants' accounts of their experiences of group dream sharing and dream work. Thematic Analysis (TA) was chosen as a flexible method that is not bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework and is capable of capturing the complexity of data gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Research Instruments

An interview schedule was developed based on the research question, the literature around the topic and findings from the pilot interviews. The schedule listed broad open-ended questions and prompts, which were used to elicit narratives concerning:

- participants' experiences of working with their own dreams in a group;
- participants' experiences of working with their clients' dreams in a group;
- the implications of these experiences for the participants.

The interview schedule was not applied prescriptively. The aim was to develop a conversation with the participants, which enabled them to communicate relevant aspects of their experience, without guiding them. As the individual and group interviews progressed, the schedule was adapted according to the participants' narrative, including adding closed questions for clarification.

The other research instrument used in data collection consisted of a basic demographic information questionnaire designed to record details including age, ethnicity, highest level of educational achievement, occupation, experience, engagement with group dream sharing and group dream work.

Participants

The current study collected data from the individual interviews conducted with seven participants (three British, two Israeli and two Italian) and from the focus group interview with five participants (British). Most participants were psychotherapists practising for at least three years after qualifying. One participant in the focus group interview was still in training. The participants were expected to have experience of engaging with GDE as both a group member and a facilitator.

Procedure

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of the West of England Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC).

Recruitment

Participants were selected from the online database of the Tavistock Institute and The Institute of Group Analysis in London. The chosen participants were invited to take part via email in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Potential participants expressed their interest in the research by email confirmation. They were provided with information about the purpose, aim and format of the study, explaining the individual/group interview procedure, and asked to give

consent for the participation. The meeting date and time were then agreed, and confirmation and further information were emailed back.

Data analysis

The themes were identified in a data-driven, 'bottom up' way, on the basis of what was present in the data. This approach was used to develop a detailed account of psychotherapists' GDE. The experiential TA was applied in accordance with the procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2013). The six interconnected phases facilitated the systematic identification, interpretation and reporting of the salient features of the data.

Findings

The analysis of the data set revealed three main themes with a number of sub-themes emerging within each theme (Table 1). The findings and the concepts extrapolated from them were then interpreted and discussed further. These results present different aspects of participants' experiences and draw attention to similarities and variances in narratives. The reflections presented in this research are not an exhaustive analysis of the whole volume of data. The choice of examples was driven by prioritising the experiences that were specific to GDE.

Table 1. Main Findings: super-ordinate themes and sub-themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Sub-themes
1. In-action GDE (felt in the moment of group dream sharing)	1.1. Accessing the unconscious
	1.2. The Dark Side of GDE
	1.3. The Bright Side of GDE
2. On-action GDE (lingering residue of experiences after group dream sharing)	2.1. Implications of GDE on the individual level of psychotherapists' experiences
	2.2. Implications of GDE on the communal level of psychotherapists' experiences
3. GDE as a whole (that might be bigger than the sum of its aspects – in-action and on-action GDE)	3.1. Making sense of exposure to GDE
	3.2. Professional maturation

Super-ordinate Theme 1. In-action GDE

In-action GDE was experienced by psychotherapists in the moment of group dream sharing and dream work. It had negative and positive connotations and was associated with accessing unconscious processes. In-action GDE was mentioned by all participants, but the amount of attention dedicated to it varied in each interview. Psychotherapists spoke about their awareness and sensations felt during the engagement with the dream and the group or, in other words, in the midst of an action. GDE was described as something that decreased mental separation from the underlying Fabric of Complexity, allowing individuals to access its elements in the moment. GDE was felt by the participants as something dynamic and in-action. It might be said that it was a constituent part of a flow of what was happening in that time and space.

The in-action GDE was linked to a sense of **accessing unconscious** elements (thoughts, feelings, images etc.) which belong to the individuals and to the group. These elements would gather, thicken and bounce from one to another during the group interaction with a dream. All participants in some way or another emphasised the dynamism of this process where access is a momentary point of awareness of something non-tangible. For example, Ella, from the focus group, spoke with enthusiasm about her experience of group dream sharing as a '*mind gym*' where the '*unconscious muscle is exercised*', without full individual awareness, leading to an increase in vocabulary and creativity. She described her sense of '*practising as opposed to fixing*', '*taking part and going with the flow*' as opposed to *'knowing how to do it'*. She emphasised the significance of accessing the unconscious through GDE: '*this is possibly the most useful thing that the person can be doing*'.

In-action GDE was characterised by the participants' continuous experience of polarised psychological happenings during group dream sharing and dream work. **The Dark Side of GDE** was associated with discomfort, tension, unease, ambiguity and ambivalence. For example, Dave reflected on his experience of both positive connectivity and frustrating distancing of a dream from the personal elements:

> *…with ambivalence sometimes because ... I've just kind of said a lovely kind of flowery isn't it lovely this connective thing but equally it can sometimes, it can feel as if you do*

have a dream that feels personal to you, a dream and then it's taken up in a different direction with someone else's associations or links or um. Dave

He also spoke about his uncertainty felt in the moment of GDE regarding his ability *'to hold not-knowing, curious space'*. In his reflection he emphasised the increase of exposure to this experience as something that might mitigate this discomfort:

I am kind of ambivalent about it anyway, so how much can you hold that not knowing that openly and you have experiences of, and er and I think the more experiences you have with that the backbone you kind of feel around holding that kind of not knowing, curious space which is really important to me in that sense. Dave

Furthermore, Dave acknowledged the anxiety, which is competing for the facilitator's mind space in the moment of GDE, and which is triggered by the ambivalence towards dream sharing experience felt by group members:

My mind or at least a chunk of my mind is taken up with the managing the anxiety of holding it together with a bunch of people who are ambivalent about it. Dave

The expression of in-action GDE in the interviews was often marked by the curious fluctuation between optimistic and challenging examples, almost creating some sort of rhythm which was necessary to convey participants' experiences. The Dark Side of GDE would often lead to the appearance of optimism and vice versa. In the participants' narratives the **Bright Side of GDE** was represented by flexibility, safety, play, creativity, containment and trust.

The sense of psychological safety felt by most participants was linked to acknowledgement of focus on the collective rather than personal aspects of dreams and the process of dream sharing. For example, for Caroline the experience of dreams as a property of the group felt safe. The interaction of the group with a dream meant that the focus was held on the shared experience between people in that moment. Carlo shared his observation of the groups where people were more willing to share dreams with others, as opposed to sharing examples from waking life which were considered more personal:

So I think that very often myself or participants in my group er tell a dream more willingly to others... than telling others about some some some episode, or something very personal. Carlo

Super-ordinate Theme 2. On-action GDE

On-action GDE is a lingering residue of experiences from group dream sharing and dream work that was associated with some implications for psychotherapists' lives on the individual and communal levels. It has been acknowledged by all participants in various ways. They spoke about the expansion of awareness that presented after sharing dreams in a group, which highlighted their own qualities and skills as well as their engagement with different professional, social and cultural communities.

On-action GDE might have been experienced as a different aspect or a continuation of a phenomenon that was working its way on the **individual level of experience**. All participants spoke about themselves as individuals who had always been open to new experiences and had an interest in dreams. For example, Clara from the focus group spoke about herself as a '*linear-logic thinker*' who loves dreams. On-action GDE enabled her to feel free about this combination of qualities. She reflected on the culture shared in the UK psychotherapy environment which imposes professional expectations restricting what felt natural to her and others in the focus group - playfulness and creativity.

Most participants shared their understanding of the implications of GDE for the **communal level of their experience**. These reflections represented organisational, cultural and social contexts. The participants indicated that exposure to group diversity has created a need for an accessible narrative that would enable participation in group dream sharing. Furthermore, some of these reflections referred to a process of relating to groups and communities in a way that resembled awareness of Social Design in production of knowledge beyond psychotherapy.

Some participants reflected on training and involvement of psychotherapists in GDE. For example, Caroline has been delivering training at different universities for many years. She noted that group dream sharing is not a subject that was purposefully pursued in mainstream psychotherapy courses, nevertheless it did occur during training and eventually got attended to, similar to '*Gestalt flip'*:

> *Also I teach and it has come into training… Now I am thinking about it and it feels like it is not purposefully targeted in these settings, but it appears as a part of something else. Like Gestalt… it flips… it flips at some point to to foreground.* Caroline

Super-ordinate Theme 3. GDE as a whole

GDE as an experience that combines in-action and on-action aspects was reflected upon by some participants. They attempted to make sense of the overall experience of exposure to

GDE, which was described as different, difficult to articulate, nebulous and visceral. Sometimes GDE as a whole was associated with the organic sense of meaning and a natural process. As an example of **making sense of exposure to GDE**, Ella reflected on it as the total '*mysterious'* experience of dreaming which felt '*cleansing'*. She commented that despite the tiring impact of the day, she always looks forward to *'something fun and mysterious and nourishing'*, something that is difficult to describe and define, something elusive and nebulous, and yet something that she considers significant as time goes on.

Furthermore, the constellation of reflections about the totality of experiences from group dream sharing resembled something that might be called **Professional Maturation** – the emergence of professional characteristics, qualities, skills and insights through psychological growth over time on the journey of becoming, where the unconscious is a guiding force, a subject of a study and a bridge into psychosocial infinity. Professional Maturation might be associated with the conversion of professional resilience into professional antifragility, where, in the face of infinite life stressors, some participants acknowledged their capability to thrive. This 'antifragile' belief in some cases might have been amplified by GDE as a whole.

For example, Caroline spoke about her experience of '*opening up*' to the work with dream-like material and over time noticing this openness in different contexts of her therapeutic work. Dante explained how his personal experience of dream sharing in groups over time has grown into '*link-making*' beyond the therapeutic context. There was also a sense that the maturation into GDE itself has occurred over time. For example, Carlo said that he is now less concerned about working with dreams and utilising his own '*dream thinking'*, viewing these experiences as a '*revenue'*.

To conclude, the findings related to GDE and its implications for psychotherapists were associated with in-action GDE, on-action GDE and GDE as a whole. The participants spoke about their felt-in-the-moment experience of group dream sharing and dream work, associated with accessing the unconscious. The in-action GDE had 'dark' and 'bright' connotations for the practitioners. On-action GDE lingered into the individual and communal levels of participants' lives. The combined experiences of GDE as a whole stimulated deep reflection by some psychotherapists where they implied a process that might be associated with Professional Maturation.

Discussion

The dynamism of in-action GDE might lie in the fluctuation of awareness between Dark and Bright Sides. In this process the new meaning might emerge. Prigogine's (1997) theory of

order through fluctuation can be metaphorically applied here to explain this phenomenon which marks the developmental journey of dreams, an individual and a group. Furthermore, this fluctuation can be considered as part of a transformational rhythm or flow triggered by complexity (Mindell, 2011).

When the participants talked about on-action GDE, it was as if they were sharing their experience of prolonged knowledge absorption. It resembled cognitive processes of assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration described by Piaget (1976). Assimilation might have involved the incorporation of new information from in-action GDE into the general pre-existing knowledge. Accommodation might have enabled the existing understanding to change while metabolising insights from in-action GDE. Equilibration might have allowed some participants to seek a balance between assimilation and accommodation. Overall, on-action GDE engaged psychotherapists in the process of learning adaptation from in-action GDE, and in contemplation of how the elements from the Fabric of Complexity might have been reflected in their wider living experiences.

Due to its lingering quality, on-action GDE might not fit in the categories of knowledge assigned by psychology. Following the metaphor of *'frattale'* produced by one of the participants, Fractal thinking theory was applied in an attempt to capture the expression of on-action GDE. Fractal is a geometric form, which extends in vertical and horizontal dimensions in an analogous way. West *et al.* (1995) translated this concept from geometry into psychological studies. The application of their ideas made it possible to conceptualise on-action GDE as a phenomenological fractal or a complex flexible pattern of experiences from in-action GDE that infinitely expands into the different dimensions of the individual's life. Acknowledging the implications from on-action GDE on the individual and communal levels of experience, might thus be viewed as fractal development of meaning from in-action GDE.

GDE as a whole absorbs in-action and on-action aspects, while being represented in them. The participants in this research made sense of this wholeness by referring to the important, powerful, nebulous, visceral and natural process of meaning-making, which might promote Professional Maturation.

The advancements in theories of dynamic transformation and quantum science, inspired the focus of this discussion on the dynamic relationships that lie in the centre of the understanding of GDE as a whole. Livingstone (2017) pointed to the dominance of reductionism in modern Western society, where the complexity of the whole is conceptualised via the definition of its parts. He referred to Bortoft's (1996) vision of an alternative within a discourse from holistic science, that allows one to rediscover wholeness through the parts by developing a holistic

mode of consciousness, which is capable of abstraction as well as integration. In the discussion of GDE, Livingstone's idea was adopted. It emphasises the perception of a phenomenon that is not focused on categorising it into the whole or a sum of the parts; but acknowledges paradoxical processes within which unity of the whole and the parts can be conceived as the same phenomenon. Fractal thinking is a holistic approach that can help with conceptualisation of GDE as a whole in terms of a *dynamic fractal constellation*, envisaging the totality of relationships between its aspects, that are infinitely expanding.

Strengths and limitations of the research

A major strength of this study is the novel topic that is considered in the context of psychotherapy in general and Counselling psychology in particular. The findings from this research contribute to the understanding of GDE with a potential to develop an accessible narrative about it.

The use of triangulated data that came from the expert, individual and group interviews, is another advantage in this research. The triangulation became a developmental part of this research, as the need arose to balance the researcher's positionality as well as to capture the dynamic reflexive nature of the participants' input. In this study the notion of triangulation is closer to the concept of crystallisation, that anticipates the use of multiple sources, not so much to verify, but rather to reveal the information (Jonsen and Jehn, 2009).

One other significant strength of this research is a data set from the focus group interview with a unique group of psychotherapists that emerged and developed for the purpose of group dream sharing in the format of Social Dreaming Matrix. This data represented the combination of factors relevant to this study: e.g. psychosocial setting, exposure to GDE and participants' psychotherapy background.

Reflexivity is another benefit of this research. The researcher throughout the whole process engaged in multileveled reflection on the journey and the dream-like experience of this study. The insider/outsider positionality was negotiated in order to provide a balanced account of the findings. According to O'Connor (2004) this practice can enhance the validity of the data interpretation.

In this research the consideration of the diverse social and cultural contexts for the participants is very limited. It is important to acknowledge the differences between participants, which have undoubtedly influenced the data about their GDE.

It is worth acknowledging that participants' individual experience of GDE differed in terms of modalities (Psychoanalysis, Gestalt, SDM) that anticipate different engagement with dreams and groups. Furthermore, GDE had many connotations in the accounts of the participants – from group workshops, to supervision groups, to process groups, which all involve working with dreams. One study cannot capture the diversity of experiences associated with this, therefore, more research is needed to account for this.

Whilst most participants, prior to participating in this study, had never spoken about their GDE, some participants had previously been indirectly involved in reflective thinking about group dream sharing and dream work as supervisors or researchers. This may have influenced participants' insights and given them a practised approach to expressing their thoughts during interviews in this study.

The individual interview participants volunteered to talk about their GDE on Skype. This method generated rich and engaging data for this study. However, it is important to consider that the method of online semi-structured interviews has its limitations and attracts certain types of participants. The face-to-face focus group interview was one of the triangulation steps that was designed to compensate for such limitations.

Although some participants spoke about their dreams or dreams of their clients in the context of GDE, this material was not brought into the discussion. It could be seen as a limiting factor as the dream material might have brought a different angle to the analysis where the transaction between the conscious and the unconscious of the participants could have been discussed. Conversely, the focus on the dream material could have channelled attention back to the individual and away from the social aspect of the research enquiry. There were ethical reasons why the decision to exclude full dream descriptions from the write up was made.

Conclusion

The main motivation for carrying out this project was the contribution of knowledge about GDE to the field of Counselling psychology and the development of an accessible narrative about this experience. Three aspects of GDE (in-action GDE, on-action GDE and GDE as a whole) have been identified as the result of overseeing the complete data set across time, and of careful consideration of subtle differences in the experiences of the participants with the acknowledgement of the potential 'superposition' and non-linear dynamics between all three aspects. Although these findings may not be transferable to the general population of psychotherapists, this knowledge has a potential to assist practitioners in developing reflexivity and the capacity of knowing from inside as well as outside (Stern, 2004).