The Relational 3C model for Research Supervision for Counsellors, Psychotherapists and Counselling Psychologists, by Dr Sofie Bager-Charleson, Dr Alistair McBeath, Metanoia Institute and Dr Julianna Challenor City, University of London.

Abstract

Research supervision remains an under-theorised, under-regulated, and often unsupported profession. This article focuses on what research supervisors and research supervisees regard as 'helpful' supervision on doctoral programmes in the field of counselling, psychotherapy, and counselling psychology. The paper is based on a mixed methods study consisting of an online survey (N=226) with closed and open questions and optional interviews (10) analysed by 'artfully interpretive reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun, Clarke et al 2022). In the survey questions respondents rated 'research knowledge' and 'empathy' almost equal. The free text comments and interview data added, in turn, deeper and more nuanced understandings into what both research 'knowledge' and 'empathy' might involve for different people – and at different stages of the research process. The analysis of free text comments and interviews moved iteratively back and forth across six stages typical for reflexive thematic analysis influenced by our interests into 'narrative knowing'. We started with the free text comments, then read the interviews – to return to our free text comment themes from new angles, which eventually was shared in two sets of focus groups with supervisors in training. The paper describes the development of a suggested 'relational

3C model' with clarity, containment, and compassion as key supervisory dimensions applied across 8 phases with actions from supervisory contracts to research completion.

Key words: Research supervision, psychotherapy research, counselling psychology research, qualitative research, narrative research, mixed methods, relational supervision, 3C model

Introduction

Whilst often described as essential for student progression, research supervision remains an under-theorised, under-regulated, and frequently unsupported professional role, especially in the field of counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology. When searching for literature about research supervision for psychotherapists, the responses were scarce - with 'clinical supervision' typically dominating the findings.

Positioning ourselves in the project. We have explored obstacles and opportunities to do research from the perspectives of counsellors, psychotherapists and counselling psychologists since 2016. This paper focuses on our latest study, funded by the professional member organisation United Kingdom for Psychotherapists (UKCP) and designed to offer a training guideline and a good practice framework for research supervisors in counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology. All authors are experienced research supervisors, working as programme directors on PhD and Professional doctorates for Psychotherapists and Counselling Psychologists. One brings special interest in narrative research, since doing a PhD in the field. She also speaks English as a second language, with research experience in multilingualism and critical theory. Another researcher was initially informed by quantitative research. As a therapist he developed an interest in qualitative research, with special focus on dialogues between qualitative and qualitative approaches in the inter-disciplinary field of psychotherapy. The third author brings counselling psychology expertise, with special interest in discourse analytic approaches. Although the study was triggered by the trio offering a staff research supervision training within the same institute in 2017, author 3 left

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for a new position at another university. She rejoined to add valuable fresh perspectives at the stage when actions were formulated to the relational 3C model (figure 5).

What makes research supervision constructive and helpful?

With an epistemological anchoring in Critical realism, this paper expands on a mixed methods study consisting of an online survey (N=226) with closed and open questions and optional interviews (10) analysed by reflexive thematic analysis. The study focused on the experience of research supervisors and doctoral students and graduates (present and past supervisees) within and outside of the UK (concealed 2021a; 2021b). The study received ethical approval via (concealed), with additional consent forms for those volunteering for interviews. The interview consent included information about the project aim, methodology and data-analysis. Sharing information about our interpretive frameworks was important to avoid 'doorstep consents' (Hollway & Jefferson 2012) where participants are unprepared for how the interviews will be analysed and presented. Each participant was consulted during the data analysis phase, to add input – change, delete or add, to our suggested themes and ways of re-presenting the interviews. The input included choosing pseudonym and details about place of work, research project and methodology.

We used an online brief survey inspired by the ethos of 'qualitative survey' (Braun, Clarke et al 2017) seeking a 'wide-lens perspective' on meaning makings and experiences of both individuals and groups. The brief survey developed with a focus group led by the 3 authors for 8 trainee supervisors. The survey was designed to stimulate reflection on practice (concealed 2022) with a carefully selected mix of closed and open questions via two question paths responded to by supervisors (112) and doctoral supervisees (114 students and graduates) generating 558 free text comments and 10 subsequent follow-up interviews.

We selected interview participants randomly, drawing 5 from each category of supervisors and supervisees. The qualitative data was analysed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke et al 2022) influenced by our special interests in narrative knowing (Polkinghorne 1988; Czarniawska 1998; concealed 2018). The overarching questions for the study were:

What makes research supervision on doctoral programmes for therapists constructive as opposed to non-constructive or unhelpful? What might supervisors learn from supervisees' experiences of supervision, and vice versa?

We have expanded on the quantitative data from this survey in more detail in an earlier context (concealed 2021). Here we will touch lightly on the quantitative data and focus more on the free text comments and the interviews, and on how our combined quantitative and qualitative findings formed guidelines piloted for feedback from trainee supervisors to eventually develop into a in this paper suggested 'relational 3 C supervision model' piloted and developed further over 2 years of supervision training.

Literature review

Our search among existing literature about 'psychotherapy training' *and* 'research supervision' indicated that studies into research supervision were scarce. Some, like Jervis (2012) and Stevens (2016) expanded on opportunities to draw on clinical supervision for research supervision, adding valuable angles to understand both the researcher's and the participants' defences, projections and countertransference processes during research.

To gain a broader understanding of the range and depth of existing literature in the field, we extended our search into various disciplines, including medicine, education and social work. Research supervision was often described as fundamental for both student wellbeing and progression (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009; Platow, 2011; Masek 2017; Akerlind

&McAlpine 2017; Roach, Christensen and Rieger 2018; concealed; concealed). Supervisors were, for instance, referred to as 'uniquely positioned to recognise the student's need for support' (Metcalf et al 2018) and regulatory frameworks described the 'supervisory team [as] key to successful completion of a research degree programme' (QAA 2018, p. 12). However institutional guidelines for supervision were scarce (Lee 2018; Taylor 2019; Erikson 2019; concealed). Earlier studies, like Bruce and Stoodley (2013) asserted that 'little is known to date of the teaching lenses adopted by supervisors as they go about their supervision'. Delany's (2009) review of literature on effective PhD supervision provides an extensive international overview of different approaches but concludes that 'although a rich array of supervisor models have been proposed…there is still a salient need for a program of coherent validation'. Later studies (Lee 2018) reiterate this point, suggesting that 'whilst the literature on learning and teaching has explored a conceptual approach in some depth… there has been little similar exploration for supervision'. The profession tends to remain conceptualised as something 'naturally built on the supervisor's own experience' (Lee 2018) and in need of a more explicit theorising (Petersen 2007; Taylor 2017, 2019; Wright 2020)

So, what makes helpful, constructive versus unhelpful research supervision on doctoral programmes for therapists?

Returning to the primary research forming focus of this paper, our recent mixed methods study addressed research supervisors and research supervisees (doctoral students and graduates, eg present and past supervisees) within and outside of the UK. We hoped to gain a deeper understanding into the supervision experience on psychotherapy and counselling psychology doctoral studies with potential guidelines in mind. We have as mentioned expanded on the quantitative findings in more detail elsewhere (concealed 2021a) and will focus on the qualitative findings in this paper.

Reflexive (Narrative) Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the 558 free text comments and the 10 interviews were guided by the 6-step process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) by the two researchers (concealed) across the following 6 phases:

• An initial immersion and in-depth familiarisation with the data. For the interview analysis this involved re-listening to the recordings, to include an 'experience near' (Hollway, 2011; concealed 2018) re-familiarisation from the interviews, adding embodied and emotional responses from the researcher.

• Preliminary 'coding' or highlighting of 'anything that stands out'

• Clustering and creation of themes from the 'codes' into broader sets of meaning. For the interviews this involved Researcher 1 contacting each participant to share and discuss themes, pseudonyms, and changes of personal details.

• Recognising a 'saturation' when no new codes or themes appear apparent.

• A combined individual and collaborate re-reading to review and compare themes, to agree on and confirm whether they remain meaningful and stable.

• Final writing-up of the themes.

We adhered to what Braun, Clarke et al (2022) refer to as 'artfully interpretive reflexive' analysis (in contrast to a 'scientifically' guided TA analysis) which requires attention to the positioning of the researchers. The Reflexive Thematic Analysis can highlight either or both surface, semantic and/or latent, underlying themes (Braun & Clarke 2006). Our positioning as researchers were informed by interests in 'narrative knowing', which involved paying attention to

• how participants, individually and collectively, organise experiences and events into a story – including attention to aspects like chosen protagonists, antagonists and 'valued endpoints'

• how the narratives may convey personal, social and cultural values and beliefs about self and others; and

• how the stories communicate and capture emphasis, pace and rhythm of the spoken words.

Our narrative interests included, for instance, spontaneously deciding to draw on metaphors during the interview phase – after that our first interviewee offered one to capture her supervision experience. To us, the use of metaphors broadened opportunities for participants to explain and represent something abstract or 'difficult to explain' and, in some cases, adding contexts to the experience.

Findings: Research Knowledge and Empathy

Breaking down the findings from the quantitative data showed, firstly, an unequivocal appreciation of research supervision across both supervisors and supervisees (N= 226). The quantitative data showed that 90% of the supervisees rated supervision as important, with 70% describing it as extremely important. We found it, further, interesting to note how empathy and research knowledge were rated almost equally. In a multiple response question to supervisees about 'key attributes of effective supervisors' supervisees rated supervisory 'research experience' (21%) highest closely followed by an 'ability to demonstrate empathy' (17%). 'Specific methodology knowledge' (12%) and 'topic expertise' (7%) stood out in comparison as less significant (figure 1).
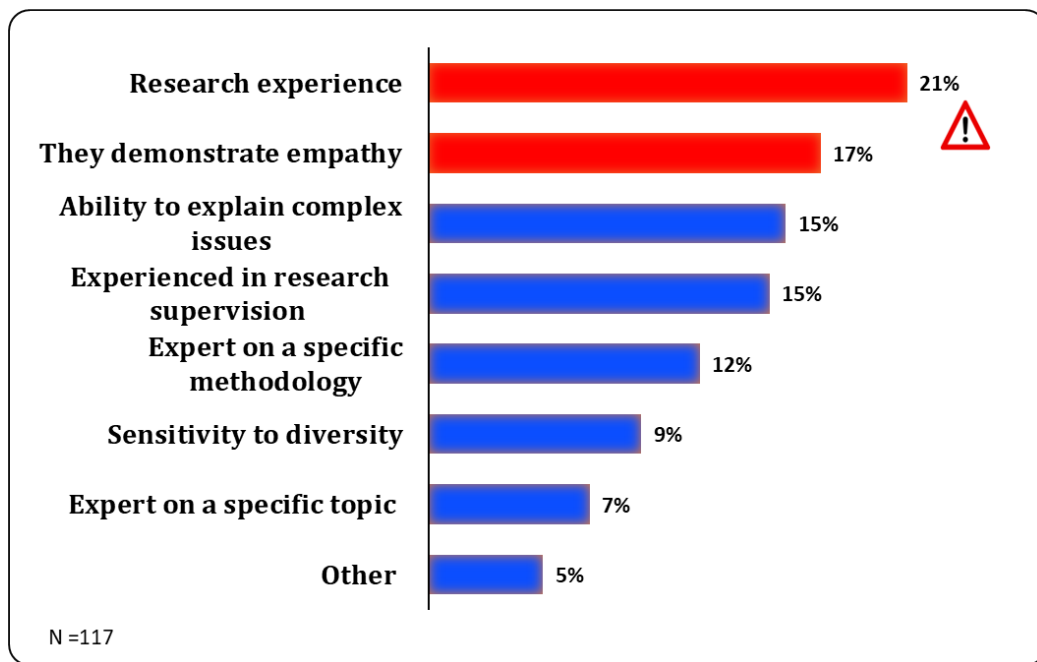
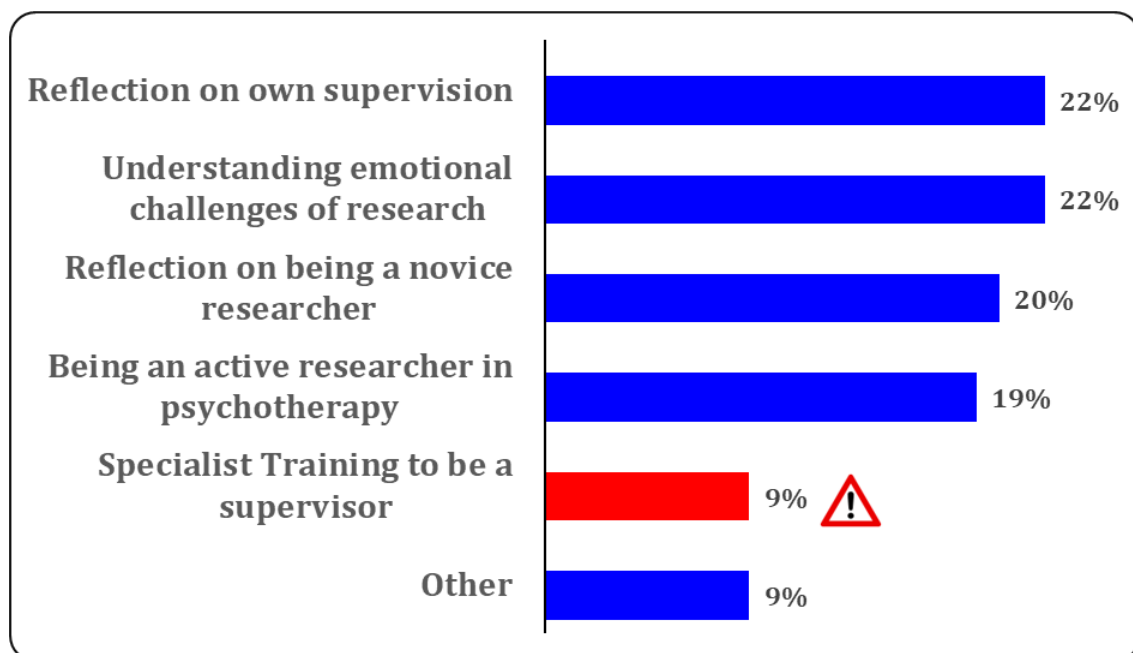**Fig. 1 Supervisees Views of Key Attributes of Effective Supervisors**

Figure 2. Supervisors on factors in becoming effective research supervisors.

Supervisors rated, in turn, emotional understanding even higher than the supervisees. In our multiple response survey question (fig. 2) supervisors rated an understanding of emotional challenges of research (22%) higher than bringing active research experience (19%). Having undergone own supervisor training (9%) was in turn rated less important that 'learning from being a supervisee' (22%) for effective practice.

Qualitative data: clarity, containment, and compassion across different research stages

The qualitative data added more nuanced understandings into what both research 'knowledge' and 'empathy' might involve for different people and at different stages of their research process. The analysis of free text comments and interviews moved iteratively back and forth across both the 'six phases' and the two sets of qualitative data. We started with the free text comments, then read the interviews – to return to our free text comment themes from new angles. One particularly influential example of us returning to the free text comments with new 'lenses' was after meeting the supervisor 'Maria' who summed up her role in terms of adding clarity, containment, and compassion. She said:

> I see my role as bringing clarity, containment, and compassion. My supervisor modeled a good relationship to research. It's … easy to shame someone in research because it's imbued in power and knowingness... whilst really, it's such an ambiguous, uncertain, and improvised path. We know and we don't know, and it's about making that okay.

To us, the final write-up was heavily influenced by this. Clarity, containment, and compassion seemed to capture a 'meeting point' across otherwise often varied experiences of research supervision – within and across the supervisees and the supervisors. The concepts helped to capture both the variety and the essence among the accounts. 'Clarity' covered issues addressed in both quant and qual data about the highly valued 'research knowledge',

across areas ranging from supervisor contracts to lit reviews, ethics, analysis etc to Vivas. 'Compassion' reflected in turn the collegial, supportive 'empathy' which had been emphasised in both quant and qual data, again across areas from supervision contracts to Vivas. 'Containment' summed, finally, up what had been emphasised in the interview data in particular in terms of a much needed 'holding' of the student in context of sensitive topics, intense workload and opportunities within the academic discipline. To sum 'learning the ropes' was helpful. One supervisee compared, for instance, her supervisor to a 'sailing instructor' – whilst others preferred 'supported freedom' to explore unchartered, sometimes epistemologically neglected area, choosing to compare their supervisor to a 'telescope' or a 'mountain guide'. At the end of this paper, we will refer to how the usefulness of a '3C model' was evaluated across two focus groups which described it as 'intuitive, accessible way that helps without making a supervision into a too formal tick-box exercise', and it being 'helpful to apply at different degrees across different areas of the research depending on the students and their topics and chosen methodologies'.

What supervisees said about supervision.

Containing, compassionate and clarifying broad, 'non-rusty' research knowledge across different research approaches and phases or stages.

In several free text comments broad and updated research knowledge were being emphasised. Table 1 illustrates some of the key findings.

Table 1: What supervisees said about supervision.

Helpful research supervision included:

Clarity

- by adding deep, broad knowledge, and showing options across the research cycle below:

✓ Supervision contract
✓ Initial training needs
✓ Research question
✓ Literature review
✓ Methodology and methods
✓ Analysis
✓ Write-up
✓ Viva
✓ Get practical support when needed

Compassion

- by adding support, empathy and encouragement across the above areas.

Containment

- by listening to and encourage; challenge if too ambitious project and facilitating discussions around how to amend ideas throughout the process.

One supervisee explained for instance about the importance of 'having a supervisor who is knowledgeable and up to date with the methodology you are adopting for your research'. The same supervisee continued:

> It's not containing for a supervisee to have a supervisor who admits to being "rusty" with regards to their memory or knowledge of the methodology being used … You feel very much alone and worried that what you are producing might be completely "off".

Another supervisee offered a contrasting examples:

> I had two formative experiences; one with a supervisor who only insisted on one methodology and another who helped me see options and how sometimes the research question require new methodological thinking. Without the latter I probably still would have been working on my PhD - or given up entirely.

One supervisee expanded on how adding a 'bigger picture' was an important aspect of clarity, saying "[i]*t wasn't just about passively feeding back on writing or checking in on project milestones, it was more of adding a bigger picture*".

Others referred to more tangible forms of clarity, at different stages of the doctoral process. One said:

> A really productive supervision experience to me was my supervisor provided me with relevant literature to inform my literature review.

Other referred to clarifying support with ethics, literature review and literature review.

Compassion

Empahty was clearly reiterated in our qualitative data too. In fact, the supervisory relational depth was a reoccurring theme in the free text comments:

> I have found that when working with a supervisor that demonstrates support, empathy and encouragement, the supervision experience is invaluable.

One supervisee said

> She [the supervisor] helped me more deeply understand what the proposed research meant to me and why I wanted to do it. This has anchored me [and] elicited a lot of thoughtfulness on my part about what I am trying to capture and how I will capture it'.

Containment

The issue of containment had, to our minds, been a theme throughout the accounts. Some more direct references to containment were expanded on for instance in terms of responses about a **'**normalising support**'**. One said

> when feeling lost and not good enough, getting normalising support from my supervisor helped me to regain confidence.

Supervisors' free text comments: Adding clarifying research knowledge combined with a compassionate, containing support for supervisees to connect with their own, inner resources.

The free text comments from research supervisors echoed the earlier emphasis on knowledge and empathy However, many emphasised the importance of helping the supervisee to his/her own inner resources. One supervisor described herself for instance as 'a midwife for ideas', whilst another described supervision 'as a collegial meeting of peers where the researcher is the expert on the topic, whilst I am the expert on research per se'. Another said, 'engaging academically with their [the supervisees'] ideas [means] encouraging them to trust in their own thinking more'. One said:

> I can't do their thinking for them but am always pleased to think with them…

Clarity across the research stages

The ability to 'assist in clarifying and focusing the research aims' was emphasised by several supervisors, again – as with the supervisees, across different areas as in table 2

Table 2: What supervisors said about supervision.

Helpful research supervision included:

Clarity

- engaging academically around ideas; supporting re-framing of ideas; adding 'bigger picture' and add research knowledge to the areas below:

✓ Supervision contract
✓ Initial training needs
✓ Research question
✓ Literature review
✓ Methodology and methods
✓ Analysis
✓ Write-up
✓ Viva
✓ Get practical support when needed

Compassion

- Attunement to the student; bring emotional depth and flexibility to different learning styles – keeping in mind what emotional impact research wise can have on the researcher may have in context of sensitive topics, intense workload and opportunities within the academic discipline.

Containment

- Meeting supervisees where they are, understand their 'blocks' in research and help the to find their research voice in context of topics, workload and the academic discipline as above.

Clarity can sometimes, as mentioned, involve helping the supervisees connect with and recognise own values and interests. One said:

> I'm helping the student to clarify what he wants to focus on, to make it as clear, precise and as possible - in tune with his methodological and epistemological commitments.

The same supervisor describes:

> Being able to talk about how the values my supervisee held (including her own personal reasons for conducting research in her area of focus and what she wanted the research to achieve) could ground and inform her choices around research methodology at a deep level.

As an example, the supervisor offers a scenario linked to narrowing down a research area and question:

> A student comes with some vague idea, e.g. that they'd like to research the therapeutic relationship. Together supervisee and supervisor brainstorm different possible angles/questions within that. Through dialogue they recognise that the real interest is in the embodied transferential process. That then becomes the focus of the research.

Finding ways to communicate methodology can be a challenge. Some supervisors stressed how 'too esoteric explanations seem to frighten or overwhelm'. One said:

> [It's] helpful to identify and share illustrative examples of how methodology can be used, I try to find some accessible 4-6 articles or book chapters of how methodology can be applied at the start of the supervision - and then speak about that… I learned to mostly just ask questions: What did you do there? Why did you decide to do XYZ? How is this answering your research question? etc.

Part of the progress involved contributing with a 'bigger picture'. One supervisor said:

> Being able to see a bigger picture is important. For instance, to co-explore how the philosophical background of different research methodologies and different positions within a particular research methodology would guide the research in different directions. And how that may or may not suit her research purposes.

Containment

Many supervisors emphasised a relational depth as a natural part of psychotherapy and counselling psychology research. One supervisor said;

It is important in Counselling Psychology research that the supervisee can be deeply reflexive; thus a safe space within the supervision relationship needs to exist.

However, same supervisor highlighted the value of boundaries, and continued:

Having clear boundaries and deadlines set with your supervisee, feeling like it is a collaborative relationship and a safe space for them and you to discuss research and any other personal issues that may be affecting them and subsequently the research process.

Compassion

A relational depth included compassionate considerations of different learning styles:

I first had to understand her [a students] strengths and anxieties, and time constraints. Then I prioritised the research process slightly differently to what I might have done for a more academic student.

Another supervisor described:

One student really struggled with her research, and we scheduled weekly but shorter supervision sessions over a period of time; she wanted very close guidance and lots of feedback, and she took it on board and it worked for her. This style did not work with another student, who needed more space.

. **Supervisee and Supervisors Interviews**

We recruited 10 volunteers from the survey for interviews, with equal distribution across supervisee- (5) and supervisor- (5) experiences. The supervisees' ages ranged from 35-

55, with 4 registering as females and 1 as male, who in turn studied for a PhD (1) and Professional doctorates (4).

The supervisors were, in turn, between 47 and 62 years old, 3 referring to themselves as females and 2 as males. Each had 15 years or more of experience supervising on PhDs (2) and Professional doctorates (3). The interview agenda was open, aiming to offer space for the participants expand on what came to their minds when asked the question 'what does supervision mean to you; how might it be helpful and/or not helpful from your experience and viewpoint?' . The themes were, in turn, discussed with the participants afterwards, with invites to add, develop or change.

'**In the boat with you, with a light hand on the tiller**'

Our first participant offered a spontaneous use of a 'sailing' analogy or metaphor. The supervisee 'Claire' compared her research supervisor to a 'sailing instructor' and described research as something that required skills and 'learning by doing' under often dramatic circumstances, she said:

It's difficult to explain research, it's so vast and can be scary with all the unknown… The wind can change, the tide can change... and so, yes... you want the supervisor in the boat with you, also being vigilant... with their hands on or over the tiller.

The interviews added overall depth and further perspectives on what 'knowledge' and 'empathy' might mean to different people at different stages on their research. The use of metaphors added also a 'story telling' dimension. Stories are often drawn upon in reflective practice to 'make explicit what we think about things' (Carten & Gradin 2001; concealed 2020) and to help 'see something of how values reveal themselves in a complex, varied and

shifting way in practice' (Bolton 2005, p.9). After 'Claire's' metaphor we decided to offer all participants the option of doing the same, towards the end of their interviews. All offered one. The supervisees described their supervisors as:

'Sailing instructor',

'Mountain leaders',

'Mountain guide',

'See-saw partner' and

'Telescope'

The supervisors used, in turn, the following metaphors:

'Driving instructor',

'Dancing teacher',

'Wild swimming partner',

'Horse whisperer' and

'Stethoscope

What supervisees said about supervision.

'Claire' is a 55-year-old integrative psychotherapist who researches therapists' professional development.

'Like a sailing instructor'.

Claire tried doing a PhD (in social work) 20 years ago but exited with an MPhil, recalling feeling 'fractious, fragmented feeling of not knowing what I'm doing'. She experienced a lack of compassion for her feeling out of her depth.

> [In my first PhD supervision] there was a hierarchy, a power imbalance…I didn't feel I could ask… and so, I felt I was 'winging it', I didn't know what I was doing... My [previous] supervisor wanted me to present at international conferences and told me *what* needed doing but never *how'*.

Reflecting on her learning, Claire continues:

> I think it's about being clear about the supervisee's training needs [and] being clear about what the work involves and what needs to be done…It was very stressful, extremely stressful. What I really would have needed [in first PhD] was an identification of training needs; there were no training at all, I really had to do it blind.

She compares with the clarity on her new programme:

> [On this PhD] there are lots of workshops and training that I can access, a huge range, particularly data collection, analysis, consent form... And a lot of freedom to pick and choose… I have two supervisors, with different areas of expertise so there's a clear demarcation. We meet once a month, we have 1.5 hour-long very focused meetings. I send in my work a week before with questions. [Afterwards] my primary supervisor checks of with me, 'was that feedback what you needed, tell me if anything is unclear'.

She continues:

> This [second] time I'm better prepared, but my supervision is also really different. My primary supervisor is good at giving credits, he'd say to me 'you are a very experienced psychotherapist, you've done research before - you know what you're

doing, you don't need to hold my hand for this'. So, I set the agenda and the discussions come from that; I am more in control, they listen to my ideas and give really helpful feedback.

'Like a see-saw partner'

'Gabriella' is, in turn, a 36-year-old psychotherapist and counselling psychologist from Spain who completed her professional doctorate in the UK two years ago. Instead of a fixed contract, Gabriella refers to an 'unspoken contract' about 'being flexible but always there.'

My supervisor and I didn't meet very often at first - but when I needed, she responded immediately. And she'd always let me know well in advance if she'd be away; I remember thinking, she's always there if I need her.

Her 'seesaw' metaphor captured her experience of research supervision as a grounding and contained yet exhilarating – with a a growing sense of own control.

The research process can be both extremely anxiety provoking and fascinating. I think of it as a seesaw journey... Initially I felt totally 'up there' - with my feet up in the air and no connection at all to the ground. But she was constant. I think that trust is the grounding aspect…and the growing knowledge.

Gabriella's supervisor added clarity when needed, for instance during the data gathering and analysis stages – whilst adding a bigger picture:

My supervisor was essential in helping with my analysis. She's very experienced [whilst] I was just in this own little bubble. She's been there before [and] helped me look at a much bigger picture…I did IPA on a topic that I had a lot of opinions on, and my real concern was always 'do I put too much of myself onto the participants? Am I going too far away from the participants own narratives?' She was just very good with that, always helped me to go back and look at participants own voices.

'Gabriella' expands on the broad meaning of clarity and containment; firstly from an EDI perspective and secondly with reference to psychotherapy and its multiple sources of knowledge::

> There are things in academia that are taken for granted or just not said, lots of unspoken things that you're meant to know. I come from a working-class background... I was really nervous about starting this doctorate, it was a different world where I didn't really belong. And I think that someone like [my supervisor] who's really transparent, really human and can put things in perspective, that's so important from a power point of view.

'Gabriella' continues:

> The 'seesaw' is also about … letting go. In psychotherapy you really need to be able to hold an element of 'not knowing' - without the 'not knowing' you're not getting anywhere in therapy research.

"Like a mountain guide…"

Contrary to the first supervisee 'Claire', neither 'Sadot', 'Fathima' or 'Juanita' regarded their 'introductory research training' very useful. They emphasised instead support to search for alternative research approaches. 'Sadot' is 55 and stressed how a 'good supervisor' was open for non-traditional approaches to new questions and under-researched areas. Sadot uses the term decolonisation:

> There is some useful equipment [methodology] but sometimes you have to be [innovative?] to decolonise research…I mean, the compass may not fit the climate or the context. So, some researchers go to landscapes that no one has ever been to before.

Sadot described his supervisor as a 'mountain guide' when he explored under-researched questions around decolonisation and mental health:

First, there was no real contexts to put Black history in. It's not polished, it's messy…

I was accessing generations of traumas, in relation to racism [and] you need to layer

the narratives…If I had had another supervisor, I might have given up [but] she was

really supportive [throughout]. I was properly scared.

Sadot's research supervisor brought broad research knowledge from the start, adding a

containing, compassionate clarity throughout.

My supervisor gave me books, articles…we used a lot of grey literature, well stuff I'd

never find otherwise… and then we talked about Afro-Caribbean history. Theory and

research practice… it sounds precise and tidy…but oh it can be so different when

you're in it!

"Like a teleoscope"

The supervisee 'Juanita' s a 35-year-old integrative psychotherapist on a Professional

Psychotherapy doctorate, and researched Arts therapy for torture victims. She has recently

changed supervisor. Like Sadot and Fathima, she also valued a containing, compassionate

clarity from an openminded supervisor with broad, flexible approach to research knowledge:

My previous supervisor wanted to play it safe, she wanted me to stick to IPA…But it

just didn't fit, my research just stalled. The new supervisor is so different, she

encourages and supports at the same time…I don't need someone to tell me what to

do, but I need someone to point in the right direction. I'd like my supervisor to be my

telescope... and help me to navigate...I can only see that far, but if you give me that

telescope it's like 'oh, I can see now!' And my topic is a in very new area, so I don't

expect my supervisor to have expert knowledge… but by giving me that telescope I

can see more, further…

Both Juanita and 'Sadot' recently completed their UK based counselling psychology

doctorate which only offered one supervisor, whilst 'Fathima', 45 recently finished another

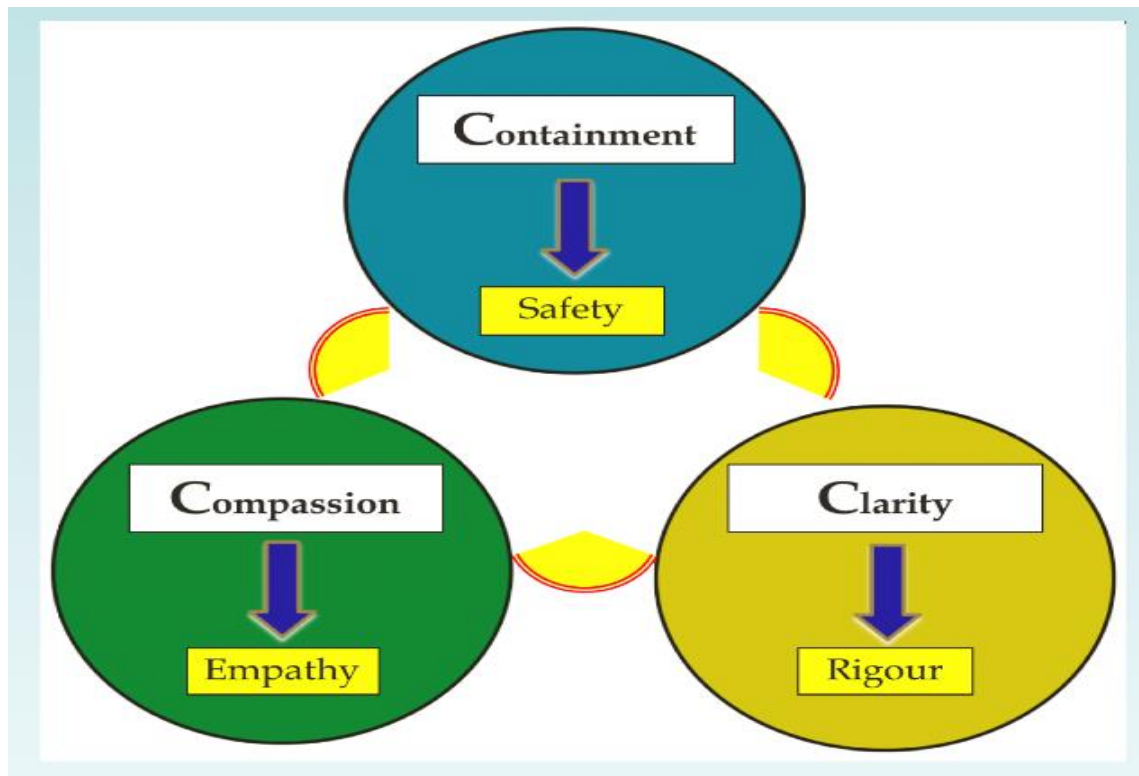UK based professional psychotherapy doctoral programme with a supervisory team of three. Fathima researched disability and therapeutic support for clients from Afghanistan, with particular containing support from her primary supervisor:

> She [main supervisor] knew how that therapy can become political…when linked to a culture […] I'm from Afghanistan and [finding a] supervisor who understands how countries vary was really important. It wasn't just the method…choosing methodology is so much more than reason or techniques.

Summary

The interviews illustrated a broad range of needs, with a balance between research knowledge and flexible holding throughout the process. The metaphors helped to contextualise and illustrate both the different needs and the value of an organically evolving supervision process towards independence, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The 3C's across different student needs towards independency.

'Sailing instructor'	'**Like a telescope'**
A helpful supervisor is in the boat with you, with a light hand on the tiller	*My supervisor is my telescope, navigating. I need freedom, but also the telescope; is it too far? Have I been looking in the wrong direction?*
• Much initial skills training; needs-analysis; training plan. • Firm contracts; clear maps • Trust and safety • Encouragement, empowerment • Growing, guided independency	• Sharing passion • Experienced, adventurous and not anxiously 'ticking boxes'. • Providing freedom • Acting as 'telescope' to add perspectives. • Navigating and adding direction when needed

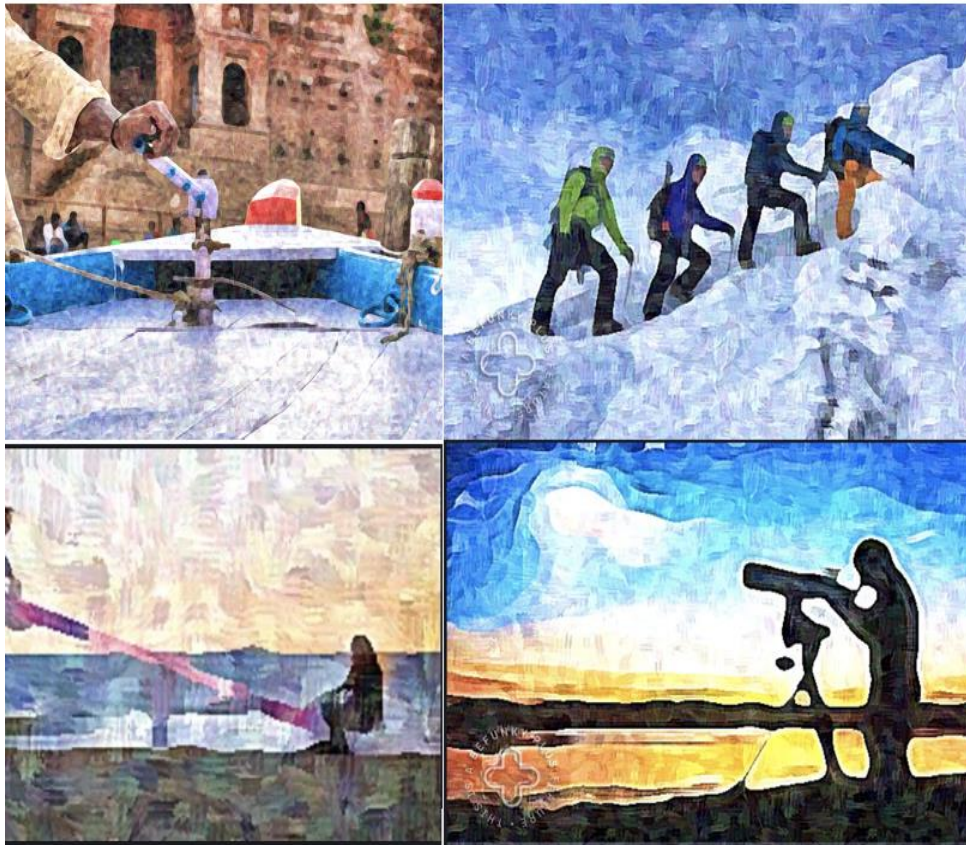**What Supervisors said about research supervision.**

From our survey, 58 supervisors volunteered to have follow-up contact. As with the supervisees, we chose approach approximately every 10th volunteer. The three female and two male supervisors were between 47 and 62 years old, and each one had minimum of 15 years' experience of supervision on either PhDs (2) or professional doctorates (3). All five lived in the UK but had supervised on PhD programmes in Denmark, Poland and the USA. One was supervising a PhD in New York. The metaphors used by supervisors included, as mentioned, 'Driving instructor', 'Dancing teacher', 'Wild swimming partner', 'Horse whisperer' and 'Stethoscope'.

The metaphors added opportunities to consider overlaps and differences both between and within the supervisee and supervisor categories, as illustrated in figure 4. The earlier mentioned 'Juanita' described for instance her supervisor as her 'telescope' – helping her to navigate and see far – whilst the supervisor 'Bengt' compared himself to a 'stethoscope':

> I'm seeing myself more like a…well, a stethoscope. I'm helping [my supervisees] to
> find their own pulse and connect with inner resources.

Bengt resonated, in turn, with the mentioned free text comments about supervisors as 'midwives for ideas', but also with what the other supervisors said in the interviews in terms of student motivations and the fostering of confidence for 'stormy' conditions.

Supervisees described supervisors as:

'Sailing instructor', 'Mountain leaders', 'Mountain guide', 'See-saw partner' and 'Telescope'.

The supervisors choose:

'Driving instructor', 'Dancing teacher', 'Wild swimming partner', 'Horse whisperer' and 'Stethoscope'.

Figure 4. Metaphors describing the dynamic nature of research.

Bringing clarity, containment, and compassion… 'like a wild-swimming partner'

The mentioned 'Maria' is a 48-year-old lecturer and experienced research supervisor, who also worked as a psychologist and psychotherapist in the NHS and in private practice. Maria's introduced the concepts clarity, containment, and compassion to us in the first place, which – as mentioned initially, influenced our reiterative readings:

I see my role as bringing clarity, containment, and compassion […] It's so easy to shame someone in research because it's imbued in power and knowingness... whilst really, it's such an ambiguous, uncertain and improvised path. We know and we don't know, and it's about making that okay.

Echoing with our quantitative survey data, Maria described how her own experience of research supervision had shaped her subsequent supervision work:

My supervisor modelled a good relationship to research. I felt regulated, safe enough to tell [my supervisor] when things were a mess, and I didn't know what I was doing... she never shamed me... She kept encouraging me to go to the edge of my discomfort - a bit like I am with my horses - saying 'it's okay, it's okay...'. My ongoing, growing edge as research supervisor is to balance my quite high expectations of my supervisees and remember that... like my own supervisors did, I really need to meet them where they are…

'The supervisor 'Maria' described, in turn, much of what Sadot, Fathima and Juanita had described- but now from the perspective of the supervisor. Maria's doctoral research also revolved around racism in the field of mental health. Maria planned originally to do outcome research within the NHS, but explored options and eventually settled for basing her doctorate on an Arts-based Autoethnograpy:

I [started] with this rather split internal discussion with myself between NHS service provision and my own internal confusions and traumas, [which] I think is quite common in research. In my case there were inter-generational, racist-related traumas in the background. I found methods and means [to research] because supervision gave me that space…I read and read and thought 'hold on, I can find a different quality in my research voice... and I took it to her [the supervisor] and she said 'absolutely', I think her words were 'this research will be safe in your hands' and I thought

'WOW'... and I felt like she was championing me, kind of galvanising me gently and I felt I can do this, maybe I can do this!

'Maria's reference to being a 'wild swimming partner' captured the value of containment when feeling out of her depth:

Research is a bit like wild swimming… You start out of your depths…There [is the initial chill shock] and the reeves and... and so you may not want to be a lone wild swimmer, you might want a pairing…

She continues:

Something happens in researchers so they can tolerate that cold water, there are those mini-states of mastering. There's something exciting about getting past the shock of the cold and the fears - you don't know what's hit you. There's an aliveness about it, which is incredible. The neurons are firing, there's lots of energy -the 'let's find out!!' [growling, laughter].

Joanne: 'supervision is like teaching someone to dance.'

The supervisor 'Joanne' also refers to an 'aliveness' in research. She specialises in discourse analysis – which she stresses requires motivation, will and aptitude. 'Joanne' is a 45-year-old psychologist and an assistant professor with 15 years' experience from some 30 PhD students. She compares research supervision to dance training, and emphasises that adding clarity is not enough -there must be an innate 'rhythm' and a commitment from the student:

You can't put your finger on what makes a good dancer. It's partly something already there, a motivation… and sense of rhythm, a 'je ne sais quoi' [laughing]. If they're not going to put in those extra hours, they're never going to learn, they're never going to switch… You [doctoral students] have to give up your weekend and your evenings and want to practice… When you're doing a PhD [it] should be your [students] life

She described enjoying a 'visible transition' in her supervisees as they gain confidence through a series 'lightbulb moments':

> There are two or three …marked shifts or changes in the students, some real lightbulb moments. The first point is the training bit [with] courses… and [when] developing their proposal and their ideas… You're pushing them all the time out of their comfort zone, making them do all the things they don't like doing - like presenting... and their '3-minute thesis' you know... can they summarise their thesis in 3 minutes for an external person […]at that point they are really lacking in ideas and in confidence... but there's a real shift after this full-time year.

Joanne refers to the challenge of qualitative research in terms of; "We mainly do qualitative research [which] is so much more than technical skills… Many falls into the trap of being too cognitive, because that's what they're used to". She incorporates peer group analysis work as part of her supervision, emphasising the value of clarifying, containing peer networking:

> PhD students can become very lonely, and so I'm arranging groups across universities because there are no other groups in that in my university. We're working with the analysis in groups with others – that's such an important part of the learning.

"I always say - you're the driver".

The supervisor 'Paul' said, finally, '*I look at it as if we're in a car together, and I say -you're the driver. I'll support you, give direction and advice when you need it, but I'm the passenger and you're the driver. I'll never take the steering wheel from a student".*

'Paul' is 54 years old and works as psychotherapist, senior lecturer and research supervisor on a UK-based PhD programme. He refers to supervision as a 'balancing act' between 'measuring, moderating and adapting to each student' and 'honing students' own capabilities.

Like Bengt, Maria and Joanne he stresses the importance of connecting the student to their own motivation and drive:

> I always try to help the student to move into a driver position, to be more proactive and recognise their own capacity… The difference between a PhD and a masters or degree programme is that the students ultimately design their own PhDs. Doing a PhD [involves] a combination of being open to learning and recognising [that] you have a lot to learn [but need to] have some fundamental self-confidence in telling yourself that you can do it'.

Paul expands on the theme:

> I'm like a broken record saying '…this is a doctoral level research project, so there must be a *question* that you, me and the world don't yet know the answer to yet; and 'so, what's that question?' I will always say, 'so, what do you hope to find out; what don't you already know?' There must be a hunger for learning in there …They *must* love the learning, there must be a real hunger for learning... a genuine thirst for it!

Paul also reflects on the 'special challenges' in psychotherapy-related research:

> Almost all of our research is connected to emotional and relational issues. It's a complex situation. If I was an historian supervising someone about their history project, I think it would be easier because I would be only an academic historian…

Containment is not the same as therapy:

> We need to be clear about that this is not counselling. We are research supervisors... There's a balance of being able to draw on our counselling skills and yet always stay focused on the research project, which is ultimately to produce a thesis aimed to show that this student is meeting academic standards for a doctorate degree.

However, containment can draw on counselling skills. Pauls refers for instance to self-sabotaging patterns among students, with blocks to overcome:

> I try to draw on my counselling skills about what's going on for that person and between us, and why we might be stuck here. If someone piles up the books without reading them, or suffer writing blocks and always agonises about the writing... or like when they don't go to the courses... I say, it's going to be painful if you don't work on that.

Clarity from the start

Similar to the supervisee 'Claire, 'Paul' refers to a structure with a first year's research skills training, combined with monthly team supervisory meetings consisting of a first and second supervisor. On Paul's programme students can however also join courses in other departments and disciplines, including sociology, social anthropology, mental health nursing and politics. Paul says:

> They [supervisees] often change methodology. We [the psychotherapy department] only really do qualitative research, but that can be anything from case study research - based on interviews or trying out new interventions, focus group, arts - people can be really creative in what they do.

Similar to the supervisor who 'Gabriella' described, 'Paul' seeks to help to help the student to 'negotiate the system':

> The recent maze or labyrinth of progress monitoring is difficult to navigate. I'm sure that the monitoring system is there for a reason, but students manifest their competence at different times, and I feel the system is not always sensitive to that and so part of my role is to help them to negotiate the system.

'Paul' emphasises the importance of being open to different ways of learning.

> Every student need something different. Some want critical feedback, and others they wither at any hint of that there's something wrong.

Discussion

The supervisee accounts ranged from supervisors 'teaching you sailing skills - and being in the boat with you with a light hand on the tiller' to acting as mountain guides, telescopes and seesaw partners -navigating, throwing new light, and balancing containment with exhilaration. Supervisors often referred, in turn, to their own roles as tapping into dormant capabilities and slumbering motivations. Introducing, connecting to and helping the student attune to research in the first place was frequently mentioned. The interviews highlighted, in turn, a discrepancy in terms of introductory research training and number of supervisors and types of contracts for meeting etc. Therapy research was however referred to in context of a complex balance between clarity (Claire) and phenomenological 'not-knowing' (Gabriella) and a social constructionist critique (Sadot, Fathima, Juantita) of power and what should guide new research in terms of 'relevant' knowledge and our 'reality' in mental health; different students valued different types of support – whilst all valuing containment. Most supervisors mentioned the importance of supervisees having a 'real thirst for learning', ongoing curiosity and a strong motivation and passion to succeed. To us, the concepts containment, compassion, and clarity helped to sum up key dimensions for supervision to adapt with different emphasis at varying phases throughout the research process – from supervisory contract to completion, as in Figure 4, below. The 8 'areas' referred to in Figure 4 aims to capture aspects address in our quantitative and qualitative findings. Clarity offers a broad term for 'knowledge', in terms of making it easier to see across different areas whilst retaining a collegial, collaborative approach. It can involve helping to see further or in new, different directions, but also add more practical support in terms of addressing learning descriptor, meeting frequency, ethics procedures and other aspects of the research.

Supervisors feedback on the 3Cs.

We were keen to explore the meaning and potential usefulness of a 'the 3C model' with others. At the end of our mixed study, we applied for ethics approval to include the write-up

of the findings in a supervision training covering a 3 half-days training. The training covered

four areas:

- Regulations around doctoral research and supervision

- Others' research in the field of research supervision

- Counselling, Psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology as 'disciplines' positioned between art and science

- Relational Research Supervision - research into how supervisees and supervisors experience 'constructive' supervision in therapy-related research

 The training involved feedback on the potential value and – if at all, areas for development

of the 3C model. Nine out of the in total 10 trainees agreed to participate with their written

feedback on 'helpful research supervision with the suggested relational 3 C's as a potential

guide'. The findings will be expanded on in more detail in a separate paper. In this paper, we

wish to highlight how the trainee supervisors helped to consolidate the 3Cs model through

their feedback, as highlighted in table 3.

Table 3: Feedback from Research Supervisor Trainee – some key themes about the 3Cs model.

Usefulness.

The 3C's relational model focuses on containment, compassion, and clarity in an intuitive, accessible way that helps without making a supervision into a too formal tick-box exercise.

The relational 3C's brings the kind of structure to research supervision that I wish I had as a supervisee. It immediately adds a lens which speaks to therapists. We can agree together on what to focus on, at different times.

What the 3C's meant to the trainee supervisors

Clarity through an updated knowledgeable supervisor with deep and broad methodology experience, suggesting options and enabling supervisees to retain focus. Clarity includes a 'bigger picture' input, like feedback on epistemology, methodology, and ethics, Clarity around boundaries is also helpful. For example, the supervisor's role is to be 'a driving instructor' [with] the student in the driver's seat with the project remaining their own.

Containment, enabled through a contractual agreement, facilitates structure, trust, and support. Containment also allows for both affirmation and critique and the flexibility to adapt to the needs of each supervisee.

The oscillation of the research journey is real. A supervisor expressing **Compassion** and empathy while listening, encouraging, and providing practical advice is not to be underestimated especially as …life events, such as bereavement, can happen to anyone on a research journey and bring added pressure.

Adding commitment

Commitment is an essential addition from both parties. Without that, nothing will happen.

An overarching element to the 3Cs model is **'commitment'**, it is crucial for an effective research supervision relationship to develop and thrive.

Metaphors

The metaphors are helpful and can be discussed at the start of the research supervision

The metaphors added a to us surprising layer to the 3C model – for instance to help aligning expectations and the first supervision session. One trainee supervisor said for instance:

> I think supervisors discussing expectations in terms of metaphors can be really helpful. What a great way to discuss expectations!

Another said:

> I immediately identified with the metaphors, especially the mountain guide (which focuses on emancipation, encouraging own control, embracing diversity, complex terrains). Working in an interdisciplinary field (philosophy, dialectics, psychology, cognition, and psychology of writing), I got lost many times. Guidance is needed on how much to deepen one's understanding of one area before integrating or rejecting it in the process of defining the relevant research area. When thinking from the supervisor's perspective, I identified with the wild swimming metaphor. I highly value the concept of 'attunement' and the significance of responding to one's needs rather than promoting own agenda (meeting them where they are).

Adding 'commitment' as an umbrella was, further, suggested. One trainee supervisor said:

> The commitment to co-create understanding and meaning with a supervisee combined with the deep desire to see them flourish in their work is essential […] whether it be in clinical practice or research practice […] [Both] involves collegiate and egalitarian approach […] for the unfolding and birthing of new knowledge as the research journey gets underway.

The input helped, as mentioned, to consolidate the 3C model and lead to us formulating

figure 5 with commitment overarching clarity, containment and compassion across areas for

supervision to address in an organically evolving way depending on student, topic and

research approach. The figure addresses tentative action points to consider during the process,

although with an emphasis on a relational, epistemological, and practical flexibility expected

to fit in within regular institutional guidelines for frequency of approximately 10-12 sessions

per year and in teamwork with between 1-3 supervisors.

	Commitment		
	Clarity ⬇	Containment ⬇	Compassion ⬇
Area 1 Contracting	Meetings schedule. Explore training needs.	Meet student on a 'relational level'. Discuss, if helpful, the different metaphors	Prepare student for 'wild swimming', not knowing and starting the research journey.
Area 2 Question	Support a for the student relevant and clearly communicated research question.	Reassure student that research questions can change; add a bigger picture in terms of links between question and methodology. Show a broad range of examples.	Return to the metaphors if helpful to discuss research interests, training needs and methodolological explorations.
Area 3 Lit Review	Ensure student knows how to search the literature.	Does the literature search use the right type of search engines for their method?	Support student in knowing when to stop searching the literature.
Area 4 Method	Ensure that choice of research method is aligned with their research question -and vice versa.	Have alternative research methods been considered?	Provide support around challenging topics, including epistemology and ontology.
Area 5 Ethics	Provide support for research ethics process.	Is research aligned with a code of ethics?	Support student to remain ethically sensitive and self-caring both of participants and self.
Area 6 Data	Ensure that data collection is robust and aligned with question and method.	Allow for discussions about relational dynamics in data analysis. Discuss reflexivity with respect for participants, self and overarching research in mind.	Support student to be immersed in their data and staying with the process without feeling overwhelmed.
Area 7 Analysis	Ensure appropriate analytic approach.	Is the analysis aligned with the research question and chosen methodology and method?	Provide reassurance and knowledge around data presentation.
Area 8 Write up	Support writing structure and preparation for viva Support writing structure and preparation for viva.	Help contain anxieties, promote networking. Help contain anxieties, promote networking.	Support student in final preparation for submission. Support student in final preparation for submission.

Figure 5. Relational 3 C model for Research Supervision guided by mutual commitment

Conclusion

Research supervision is often described as essential for student progression but remains an often under-theorised, under-regulated and unsupported profession – especially in the field of psychotherapy. This paper expands on a suggested 'relational 3 C research supervision model' to provide clarity, containment and compassion across research areas ranging from supervision contract to viva. We view it as an evolving, organic model which allows the supervision move back and forth across the areas, with different emphasis and focus.The model grew from firstly quantitative data highlighting how both supervisors and supervisees rated research knowledge and empathy as equally important for 'helpful research supervision' on doctoral programmes for psychotherapists and counselling psychologists. The free text comments and interviews highlighted, further, how knowledge and empathy cover a wide range of aspects, relating to broad aswell as detailed input whilst containing students who all referred to doctoral research as sometimes terrifying. Some thrives in turn from clear supervisory contracts whilst others prefer a contained freedom, although 'commitment' from both sides appeared essential. Like other multidisciplinary professions, researching in counselling psychology and psychotherapy involves negotiating science-informed evidence-based knowledge with methodologies associated with exploring subjectivity, meaning making, and social practices sensitive to multicultural, antiracist, gender-sensitive and decolonizing approaches to research. This involves, in turn, negotiating different sources of knowledge -with sometimes contrasting epistemological positioning, as part of 'evidence'. All accounts showed the value of a supervisor capable of containment this tension, as part of adding broad research knowledge. The supervisor 'Maria' who coined the phrase 'clarity, containment and compassion' summed, firstly, to use up the essence of knowledge and empathy - whilst highlighting the importance of 'meeting the supervisee where s/he is'. With parallels to many others, Maria described research as a mixture of being out of one's depth

and 'mini-states of mastering'. The suggested dimensions clarity, containment and compassions – the 3C's, run in this sense across different areas and with different focus and emphasis -starting with supervisory contract building, research problem formulation and literature review support to methodological, ethical, data analysis stages – towards research completion and public output.

Limitation of the study

Although our mixed methods study aimed to reach outside of familiar learning communities to gain a combined broad and deep understanding of research supervision, the respondents speak largely from a qualitative research background. All volunteering interview participants referred to qualitative research experience, which is likely to have influenced their views about the way they experience and construe research and research supervision. Would counsellors, psychotherapists, and counselling psychologists embedded in mixed methods, or in quantitative research -for instance randomised control trials and outcome measure orientated, reason differently in terms of the 'ever-changing' research landscape; and if so, what would that imply for the 3C model? Also, another theme of interest to follow up is EDI. Four out of the five randomly chosen interviewed supervisees referred to different angles of equality, diversity, and inclusion with reference to working class background and decolonisation. EDI was thuse clearly emphasised – raising questions about what happens when not considered in supervision. Several referred finally to earlier negative supervision experiences, which wasn't expanded on in this study. The issue of 'ruptures' in supervisory relationships – in terms of its causes and impacts, is however another interesting and for us remaining area to explore.

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