

**A PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT
OF THE THERAPISTS CLOTHING IN THE ROOM**

By

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ABSTRACT

As personal clothing choices influence our everyday life, clothes that psychotherapists wear while working with clients do have a significant impact on client/psychotherapist relationship. This research seeks to make sense of the psychotherapists' experience and understand their perceptions of their clothing choices in the psychotherapeutic space. The methodology used was focus groups with trainee psychotherapists who have recently started working with clients. Three themes emerged from the interviews which are psychotherapists choices of attire in the psychotherapy room, the impact of clothing on the client/psychotherapist relationship and transference and countertransference issues in the therapeutic space. The research suggests that clothing does have an impact in the therapeutic space and psychotherapists need to be aware of the way they dress while working with clients.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Clothing communicates information about the wearer and first impressions can be heavily influenced by the messages conveyed by attire. Clothing that the psychotherapist wears is a necessary tool that has an impact on the therapeutic space with the client. Dress may function as the need for adornment, protection or modesty or all of these in changeable measures. However, there are also disadvantages that can be argued against these functions. In response to clothing as a need for protection, this may vary in different societies, cultures and even within the same culture (Barnard, 2002). Rouse (as cited in Barnard, 2002) mentions girls in the 1960s who would brave below freezing temperatures and snow drifts dressed only “in the briefest of miniskirts and coats.”

The current study sets out to provide a better understanding of how dress practices can influence a psychotherapist’s sense of self. Cadwgan-Evans (2014) believes that providing a therapeutic encounter, accomplishing a suitable presentation, and negotiating identities in both the personal and professional fields are what therapists are unconsciously aiming to achieve. The psychotherapists are intent on making the right clothing choices for their practice of therapy, despite feeling anxious about the amount of reflection they pay to it (Cadwgan-Evans, 2014). They perceive their clothing to have important meaning for their understanding of the therapeutic encounter with clients, and additionally, for their feelings and thoughts about actually being a therapist (Cadwgan-Evans, 2014). Therapists sense of self can influence their clothing choices and the way they behave and intermingle with their environment (Barnard, 2002).

There has not been a lot of research and studies undertaken in the area of clothing. Some studies examine the influence of psychotherapist's attire on the psychotherapist/client relationship, and the findings of those studies are mixed. This is due to the fact that studies on clothing bring in other variables such as therapist behaviour, therapist expertise and office furnishings (Amira & Abramowitz, 1979; Hubble & Gelso, 1978, Stillman & Resnick, 1972).

In undertaking this research, words such as "clothing," and "fashion" were not suitable terms to obtain information from the research papers, however, "attire" seemed more appropriate in the American environment which provided some papers for review. The investigation into the area of psychotherapists' clothing has received limited notice in the psychotherapy collected works. Based on the literature reviewed to date, the current findings are principally outdated, which are developed from the majority of quantitative research methods. This present research seeks to offer a qualitative understanding of how psychotherapists in training comprehend psychotherapists' clothing in conjunction with their experiences of being psychotherapists in training and what this means to them.

However, a salient question does arise in this respect, in that does the attire or dress code of the psychotherapist influence or have an affect on the progression of therapy with their clients. This is the core topic of this research and in addressing the question, the following is anticipated to be achieved:

- To conduct a widespread literature review, including examining any similar relevant research and its conclusions on this topic.
- To explore the trainee psychotherapist's experience of personal perceptions of their choice of attire as well as the impact on their work with clients and their training (based on a trainee psychotherapist group).

- To assess whether self-reflection on the psychotherapists' choice of clothing can influence their sense of self.
- To list relevant observations and recommendations for future research.

In summary, this study explores the experience of humanistic and integrative trainee psychotherapists. Minor clothing changes can give rise to considerably different implications. Even small changes in clothing choice can convey diverse information to a receiver. The purpose is to focus on the role of psychotherapist attire with trainee psychotherapists and investigate whether self-reflection on the psychotherapists' choice of clothing can influence their sense of self. The author aims to make sense of the psychotherapists' experience and understand their perceptions of their clothing choices. The author also intends to verify that their sense of self has an impact on the clients and examine if there would be a different view between what the psychotherapist unconsciously shows from their private and professional persona to the client.

This research explores the impact of clothing through examination of some of the literature available including the writings and studies by those who are dominant in this field. It offers a psychotherapeutic investigation of the impact of clothing with trainee psychotherapists. The research gives a deeper exploration of the conscious and potential unconscious experiences of participants by using two focus groups and scrutinising this via thematic analysis. Focus groups are used to obtain the data from the partakers due to the limited research that is out there. One of the strengths of the focus group is that the use of open-ended questions allows participants to select the manner in which they respond. It also encourages interaction among the participants and allows people to change their opinions after discussion with others.

Regarding the structure of the research, the literature review chapter analyses the connection between the self and the clothing choices individuals make, where first impressions, perceptions and judgements play an important part. It also deliberates on the relationship

between the psychotherapist and the client in which self has an impact on clothing choices which can lead to transference and countertransference. The next chapter explains the design of the research, including the data collection, data analysis and ethical concerns. Subsequently, the results of the interviews with the practitioners are presented. This leads the research into discussion which examines the findings of the study with the literature review. In conclusion, any areas that may require further assessment, research or development which may be of assistance to the psychotherapists and course directors are highlighted. This study identifies some gaps in current research into this area and highlights the awareness of the importance of the clothing choices in the psychotherapeutic environment.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review begins with the examination of how personal clothing choices can influence individual's sense of self. It then moves to discuss nonverbal cues such as first impressions, perceptions of the attire by both the psychotherapist and the client and judgements that can arise in the process. Next, it progresses to the relationship between the psychotherapist and the client in which self has an impact on the choices of clothing. And finally, as the psychotherapeutic space is an intersubjective space, this chapter considers at transference and countertransference issues.

2.2 Clothing and the Self

Nowadays, psychology presents a view of our identity or sense of self that differs from everyday assumptions. Under microscopic contemplative inspection, what was previously assumed to be a moderately dependable, everlasting self-sense (self, self-construct or ego) is known as a continuously changing instability of emotions, images and thoughts (Corsini and Wedding, 2011). Engler (1983) proposes that "what we take to be our "self" and feel to be so present and real is actually an internalised image, a complex representation, created by an imaginative and selective "remembering" of historical encounters with the object world. He claims that, in fact, the self is being made afresh from moment to moment (Engler, 1983).

Clothing is defined as the "visible self" by Roach and Eicher (1972) and as a "second skin" by Horn and Gurel (1981), therefore clothing preferences play significant role in the enrichment of self. When used positively, clothes can contribute to feelings of self-esteem and self-acceptance (Kwon,1991). Clothing choices of individuals are an indication of how they want others to feel about them or how they feel about themselves (Kwon, 1991). Kwon (1994b) claims that optimistic feelings about one's clothing improve self-perception and emotions

while negative feelings reduce one's sociability and occupational competency. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory validates this. Festinger (1954) proposes that people have a drive to authenticate their abilities and opinions, achieving this through unconscious or conscious comparison with relevant others. When others justify the appearance of the body, self-esteem or self-worth is intensified (Festinger, 1954).

Adam and Galinsky (2012) suggest that clothes have a psychological influence on the person dressed in them. The researchers claim that this influence can arise from a significant meaning ascribed to the clothing as well as with the genuine wearing of the clothes which they define as "enclothed cognition" (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). Enclothed cognition encapsulates the logical effect that clothes have on the wearer's mental progressions (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). The research finds that while wearing a lab coat to perform certain tasks, participants made significantly fewer mistakes than those who wore their own clothes. Those who were dressed in the white coat thought to be a doctor's coat achieved better on a task than those who were dressed in the coat but thought it was a painters' coat from a representative meaning of the clothing. Adam and Galinsky (2012) acknowledge that clothing embraces symbolic meaning and ascertain that the effect of clothes determines both the wearing of the clothing and the sense it arouses in wearer's psychological schemas. People generally attribute a symbolic importance to the piece of clothing and truly wear it, for that clothing to have any quantifiable result (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). Likewise, Zimbardo (1969) establishes that wearing a cape and a large hood could boost an individuals' probability to oversee electric shocks given to another person. And employees are reported to function better wearing glasses on intelligence tests even though their genuine functioning was not any better after wearing glasses (Kellerman and Laird, 1982).

Peluchette and Karl's research (2007) finds that individuals describe themselves using clear adjectives depending on what they wear. Respondents in the study reported to feel more

competent, trustworthy and authoritative while dressed in formal business attire, but approachable when dressed in casual attire (Peluchette and Karl, 2007). Moreover, Hanover and Kuhen (2006) maintain that people clothed formally use more formal language to characterise themselves in contrast to those that dress more casually. Thus, evidence implies that not only does what one wears have an impact on self-perception, but clothing can also have an absolute effect on individual's performance and behaviour (Damhorst, 1990). Damhorst (1990) summarises that personalities are inherent in clothing.

2.3 Nonverbal Communication

When people form impressions of others, they are often swayed by nonverbal behaviours of another person and incline to depend more heavily on these when verbal information is ambiguous or absent (Cassell, McNeill and McCullough, 1999; Ekman and Friesen, 1972; Mehrabian, 1968). First impressions, perceptions and judgements made by both parties all play an important role in the psychotherapeutic process.

2.3.1 First Impressions

Nonverbal behaviours are mainly focused on initial impressions (Dacy and Brodsky, 1992). Hubble and Gelso (1978) claim that two aspects that communicate substantial information about an individual involve their clothing and posture. Sue and Sue (2008) believe that differences in nonverbal communication can inhibit psychotherapist and client encounter and lead to misconceptions in the psychotherapeutic setting.

A specific nonverbal cue that has received only modest attention in the psychotherapeutic literature is the therapist's attire. Impressions formed during the initial interview between a psychotherapist and a client often are seen retrospectively as having minimal effects on the therapeutic process once this process takes hold (Hubble and Gelso, 1978). However, the initial interview frequently determines if the client returns and may determine how receptive he/she

will be to the psychotherapist's influence (Garfield, 1986). According to Kerr and Dell (1976), the perceived general expertise of the psychotherapist is equated with more formal or professional clothing. Clients associate more formal attire with trustworthiness and helpfulness (Roll and Roll, 1984), and respond more positively to counsellors who wear clothing one degree more formal than their own (Hubble and Gelso, 1978).

While clothing has been explored, and found to be an important factor in impression formation in general (Forsythe, Drake and Hogan, 1985), Dacy and Brodsky's (1992) research state that attire is not a consistent aspect in promoting perceived attractiveness or client disclosures. Moreover, psychotherapists can easily control many nonverbal behaviours associated with these first impressions (Dacy and Brodsky, 1992). Stillman and Resnick (1972) agree that more formal dress style does not influence client disclosure, and less formal clothing contributes to a sense of greater satisfaction with a psychotherapist (Tessler, 1975).

2.3.2 Perception

Peluchette, Karl, and Rust (2006) and Cardon and Okoro (2009) address how others form perceptions of individuals through clothing choices. These choices convey an underlying meaning and can manipulate an individual's impression formations of the wearer (Peluchette, Karl and Rust, 2006). The way people dress can influence their actions and thoughts, and shape how they are observed by others (Gurney, Howlett, Pine, Tracey, and Moggridge, 2016). For example, individuals may be perceived to be extra aggressive when they are wearing a hood and cap (Zimbardo, 1969) or a black sports kit (Frank and Gilovich, 1988), while women are perceived as less aggressive when they are wearing a nurse's uniform (Johnson and Downing, 1979).

Some studies examine patient's feelings towards attire in medical professions, while others look at the insight moulded by recruiters in job interviews. Kelley, Blouin, Glee, Sweat and

Arledge's (1982) study finds that clothing appearance often becomes an important element in supervisory assessments when the abilities of two employees are equal and when employees interact with clients. Similarly, women dressed provocatively in high profile (managerial) jobs are evaluated as less capable than when they are dressed more unconventionally, nonetheless this effect is not considered when they are in a low profile (secretary) jobs (Glick, Larsen, Johnson, and Branstiter, 2005). These effects are duplicated even with slight clothing changes. Howlett, Pine, Cahill, Orakçioğlu, and Fletcher (2015) outline that women in high-status roles are assessed as being less capable (intelligent, trustworthy, confident, authoritative, responsible, and organised) when they wear a shorter skirt with an extra shirt button undone, and more capable when dressed more predictably (longer skirt and shirt buttons are fastened). Again, this effect is not detected for women in less senior roles (Howlett *et al*, 2015). These outcomes reveal that even slight variations in clothing can influence the way women, in particular, are perceived by others and that such insights can vary according to context (Howlett *et al*, 2015).

Barrett and Berman (2006) explore psychotherapist's perceptions which indicate that clients report lower levels of distress over four therapy sessions when the psychotherapist wears formal attire compared to being dressed informally. Interestingly, results also demonstrate that psychotherapists feel more comfortable in formal attire, suggesting an impact on the way they feel about themselves as being influential in the treatment (Barrett and Berman, 2006).

2.3.3 Judgement

Judgements are frequently made in the first few moments of an interaction (Goldstein, Chance, and Gilbert, 1984) based on visual cues and verbal information. Fashion and clothing are often used to indicate and communicate social worth or status. According to Veblen (1953), clothing does more than shield the body. He claims that clothing worn by women epitomises some of the core values of society (Veblen, 1953). People often make judgements concerning other

people's social worth and status by what they wear. Clothing can be seen as an association to a cultural group to show those who represent part of that group and those who are not part of that group (Veblen, 1953). It is a social process that forms cultural meaning and is an important part of communication in social interaction (Veblen, 1953).

2.4 The Psychotherapeutic Relationship

Jacobs (2010) maintains that the quality of relationship between the psychotherapist and the client is undoubtedly the most significant aspect in promoting change. Establishing trust in the initial phases of the psychotherapeutic relationship is vital and Gass (1984) suggests that clients often drop out of therapy as the initial impression formed is that the counsellor is untrustworthy and incompetent. This denotes great significance for the type of clothing that the psychotherapist wears and it implies that psychotherapists need to consider and reflect on their attire and what it represents as an influence on the dynamics of the relationship including transference and countertransference (Taber, Leibert and Agaskar, 2011).

2.4.1 Establishing the relationship

The first goal of psychotherapy is to establish a "therapeutic alliance" between the psychotherapist and the client and use this relationship effectively (Jacobs, 2010). This enables the psychotherapist to see how the client reacts inside that relationship which gives an indication of how he/she reacts, feels, and interacts in other relationships (Kahn, 1991). This, in its turn, gives the psychotherapist the key to understanding and working through the relational difficulties which the client is experiencing in life (Kennedy and Charles, 2001). Establishing the relationship built on trust takes time and the more severe the client's presenting problems are, the more time it will take. A therapeutic alliance requires intimate self-disclosure on the part of the client and an appropriate and empathic response from the psychotherapist. The psychotherapist normally takes an attitude of unconditional acceptance and holds the client

in high regard because he/she is a person, no matter what the problem is. The psychotherapist uses interpretations in order to help an individual to become more aware of unconscious feelings that might influence the present situation. Those interpretations, however, should be made in appropriate time so the client is ready to accept them (Jacobs, 2010).

The whole relationship is comprised of the self of the client, the psychotherapist being depersonalised for the purpose of therapy into being “the client’s other self” (Rogers, 2003). It is this readiness on the part of the psychotherapist to lay his own self momentarily aside, in order to participate in the experience of the client, which makes the relationship a distinctive one, unlike anything in the client’s previous experience (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) also feels that another aspect of the relationship is security which the client feels. It is the assurance that there will be no probing, no personal reaction, no evaluation, no interpretation by the psychotherapist, that gradually allows the client to experience the relationship as one in which all defenses can be dispensed with (Rogers, 2003).

Hubble and Gelso (1979) state that the initial or early phase of counselling is crucial in establishing good rapport between counsellor and client. Taber, Leibert and Agaskar (2011) suggest that the lack of congruence between the client and psychotherapists’ personality might explain why some clients have difficulty in establishing a bond with a psychotherapist. If the psychotherapist is not successful in engaging with the client during this phase, then the client will stop seeing the psychotherapist and not get the help needed (Taber, Leibert and Agaskar, 2011).

Wolberg (2013) claims that clients are persistently watching for cues in the psychotherapist and the therapy surroundings to facilitate gathering information regarding the psychotherapist. Thus within this field, clothing can be considered a powerful nonverbal cue in the establishment of the relationship (Wolberg, 2013). Kleinberg (2011) suggests that the atmosphere for

personal and interpersonal reflection for the client can be communicated through appropriate attire of the therapist and suggests wearing casual but neat attire for the purposes for seeing the client. According to Stillman and Resnick (1972), practicum supervisors also advise a tie and jacket as the most appropriate attire for a male counsellor. More casual attire tend to be interpreted by interview observers as a sign of inexperience (Schmidt and Strong, 1970).

However, slightly conflicting results are presented by Dacy and Brodsky (1992) who indicate that psychotherapist's attire is not a consistent feature in promoting perceived attractiveness or client disclosure, but it is a significant factor associated with the establishment of the relationship such as perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and helpfulness.

2.4.2 Intersubjectivity

The therapeutic space is an inter-subjective space, through which both the client and the psychotherapist are influenced and affected by the conscious and unconscious subjective of the other (Wallin, 2007). Thus, it is essential that the psychotherapist is aware of the dress (attire) choices that they make can influence the therapeutic process in the room. Clients view the psychotherapist through their principles, therefore, offering the psychotherapist a chance to assist them replicate those principles (Kahn, 2001). Psychotherapists view their clients through the lenses of their principles. Although it seems unlikely that the psychotherapist's principles will ever become conscious in the relationship, the psychotherapist should continually strive to become more and more aware of them (Kahn, 2001). One implication of the intersubjective view is that the psychotherapist's nondefensiveness is heightened (Kahn, 2001). Some of the client's responses reflect transference and some are reality based in that all perceptions are categorised through the organising principles (Kahn, 2001). Kahn (2001) believes that once this is understood, the client's replies to the psychotherapist deliver a rich opportunity to aid the client to reflect and examine their organising principles. As the intersubjective view gains influence, the psychotherapist may become more spontaneous and expressive and

countertransference happens. The psychotherapist does not know what is happening but they are there to assist the client in learning what is going on in the inter-subjective space (Kahn, 2001).

2.4.3 Transference / Countertransference

Moreover, effective use of the therapeutic relationship depends on an understanding of transference. Transference is the process of transferring important characteristics of unresolved conflicted relationships with significant others onto the psychotherapist (Jacobs, 2010). Clients will bring assumptions and expectations based on their experiences of life that will influence the way in which they perceive the psychotherapist (Jacobs, 2010). They are feelings appropriate to previous, significant people in their lives, such as parents, or care givers (Kennedy and Charles, 2001). These feelings get transferred to the psychotherapist, where they can be negative or positive in tone. Through resolving the transference, there can be some reworking of past experience and of current relationships (Jacobs, 2010). Effective transference is facilitated by the psychotherapist persistently withholding self-disclosure, presenting as a virtually unbiased blank slate wherein the client is free to transfer his or her feelings for a significant person in his or her own life onto the neutral psychotherapist (Jacobs, 2010). Transference is a phenomenon in psychotherapy characterised by unconscious rerouting of feelings from the client to the psychotherapist (Prasko, J., Diveky, T., Grambal, A., Kamaradova, D., Mozny, P., Sigmundova, Z., Slepecky, M., Vyskocilova, J., 2010). Whenever a person perceives something, in order to recognise it, they must compare the present with the lived past (Jacobs, 2010).

Some of the understanding of the client's possible issues comes through the feelings that the psychotherapist has about the clients. This could be the emotions that are stirred up in the psychotherapist in their collaboration with the client which is known as countertransference (Jacobs, 2010). The psychotherapist often uses how they feel in the room as a guide to how the

client might be feeling (Jacobs, 2010). Countertransference often operates at the unconscious level. Therefore the psychotherapist maintains a supervisory relationship and develops personal strategies that facilitate the client to bring unconscious material into conscious awareness (Hunter and Struve, 1998).

When a psychotherapist changes the style of clothing worn when seeing one client from the type of clothing worn with other clients, it is a sign the relationship has begun to move into the realm of therapeutic decay (Hunter and Struve, 1998). A psychotherapist who chooses not to set a limit with a client who is wearing over revealing clothing to sessions is equally at risk for jeopardising the therapeutic relationship. A psychotherapist who removes any item of clothing during a therapy session may contribute to boundary confusion for the client and may unwittingly undermine that clients sense of safety (Hunter and Struve, 1998).

2.5 Summary

Nonverbal communication and first impressions play an important factor in how people perceive others through their clothing. People make judgements on their clothing based on their social status. It is in the establishment of the relationship that the psychotherapist needs to build an alliance and clothing is seen to have an impact during these initial sessions. Psychotherapists express themselves through their attire and in turn watch their clients express themselves through their clothing. Transference and Countertransference issues arise during the sessions which can appear unconsciously in the relationship. Matkin, Riggan and Puckett (1984) reported that psychotherapist should recognise a need for more concern about what they wear.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the purpose for choosing qualitative methodology as the most appropriate process for this particular study. It also describes the design, the sample and recruitment procedure, the data collection, data analysis method, outlines the ethical considerations of the research and, finally the limitations

3.2 Design

For the purpose to investigate the trainee psychotherapists' impact of clothing choices in the therapeutic space, the current research study uses the qualitative approach of a focus group. Giddens (1976) argues that qualitative researchers understand events in the perspective of the meanings participants bring to them, thereby participating in what's known as 'double hermeneutics'. Qualitative research has proved most useful in studying areas of subtlety and complexity, as it invites a focused exploration on a topic, which fits well with the aims of this study (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). McLeod (2011) defines qualitative research widely used in counselling and psychotherapy field as a form of narrative knowing rooted in a phenomenological experience of everyday social life. The use of the qualitative interviewing style means the research is exploratory and open (Coolican, 2004). As qualitative research functions as a discovery tool, its purpose is not to test or agree with existing theories, but to extend the possibility of understanding of a particular subject and following the data wherever it may lead (McLeod, 2003). Furthermore, it strives to develop the theory by valuing opinions and ideas of those individuals who have a subjective experience with the research in question and giving them a chance to express their meaning (McLeod, 2011). The qualitative method is more respectful and empowering, allowing the interviewee to construct a narrative, rather than constructing it for the interviewee (Morgan, 1997). Phenomenological approaches investigate the personal and distinctive world of the person gaining the essence of a participant's felt

experience (Kirshenbaum and Henderson, 1989). This form of inquiry generates a rich knowledge base and provides an understanding of phenomena when little is known in an area (Silverman, 2005).

3.3 Sample

Due to the lack of research which has been carried out on the topic of clothing choices in the therapeutic space, this research study focuses on the subject from a trainee psychotherapeutic perspective through the use of focus groups. Two focus groups were utilised for this research to help establish what's known as "group to group validation" (Morgan, 1997). In this, topics consistently arise across repeated focus groups, thereby supporting the findings. The participants in both focus group are trainee psychotherapists who are practising in the humanistic, integrative, and psychodynamic orientation. The difference between both focus groups is that the participants in one focus groups have been working with clients for two years and the participants from the other focus group have been working with clients for one year. The first focus group consisted of four participants in which two were female and two were male. In that group, one of the participants works in the prison services and another had worked in the fashion industry previously and wanted to partake in this study. The second focus group consisted of three participants and they were all female. They acknowledged that they would have liked to have a male perspective in the group but this did not transpire from the volunteers.

The participants were recruited using the purposeful method of sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique extensively used in qualitative research for the detection and collection of information-rich cases for the most efficient use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposeful Sampling involves detecting and choosing groups of individuals that were experienced or knowledgeable with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to experience and knowledge, Bernard (2002) note the importance of willingness and availability to participate, and the ability to communicate opinions and experiences in a

reflective, expressive and articulate manner. This sampling method allows the researcher to recruit a group of participants from one resource. Although the sole principle for the group is that participants are trainees' psychotherapists, the fact that the sample is recruited from one source means that there are various characteristics common to the members. For example, the majority of the sample is currently in education part time, they are all studying the same field, and they are all working with clients for a short period. The sample size ensures that each participant is given space to give a detailed account of their knowledge and understanding, while still acquiring knowledge from the collaborative energy of the group. The researcher organised the research in the location where the group meet on a regular basis. The location allowed for an area that is familiar, easy for the participants to agree to and have a place that is comfortable.

Information relating to pseudonyms and characteristics of the groups are listed in *Table xx* below.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Number in Group	Gender	Approach	No. of years working with clients
FG1	4	2 Female 2 Male	Humanistic & Integrative	2
FG2	3	3 Female	Humanistic & Integrative	1

3.4 Recruitment of Sample

Presently, the researcher is a trainee psychotherapist in a private college which provides some courses in psychotherapy where client work is part of the curriculum. The sample was recruited from the college. The researcher's thesis supervisor provided the idea of asking a particular course in the college for volunteers for the focus group. The researcher sourced out the volunteers making sure that they met the criteria for the study. The researcher attended two groups in college to extend her requests to take part in the study. A sheet where the volunteers could put down their names and email addresses for participation in the research was passed around. Volunteers were found in both groups. Each volunteer was contacted by e-mail (See Appendix 5) and a list of available dates and times was proposed. To arrange the dates and time that suited every participant in the focus group two, a tool called Doodle which allowed the participants to pick the dates that suited them was utilised. This tool assisted in picking the best time and date for this group. The researcher followed up with the college to obtain a room and with the support of the thesis supervisor and head of research, she was able to get a room for both groups on the dates agreed. Everyone who decided to attend the focus group attended bar one due to illness.

3.5 Data Collection Method

The primary research method was the narrative style and data was collected about the psychotherapeutic exploration of the impact of the therapists clothing choices through a focus group in a classroom, in the college (Quinn Patton, 2002). While using this method, the researcher's interest has the possibility to influence the answers specified by the participants (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, the focus group in the current research takes on the format encouraged by Burgess, of a *conversation with a purpose*, integrating an element of changeableness and elasticity (1984, p. 102). Although questions are developed to act as starting points, the researcher is equipped to design and accomplish any unexpected elements

(Mason, 2005). Fourteen broad and open-ended questions (see Appendix xx) were devised which were informed by the literature review and by the researcher's interest in the topic (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The questions were revised and rephrased following recommendations by peer colleagues and supervisors to ensure the best possible outcome.

Initially, respondents were asked to review the information sheet and the consent sheet (Appendix 1 and 2) before the taped interview. The researcher facilitated the focus group which lasted between 45-75 minutes. The facilitation served to focus the discussion. Focus Group is addressed independently hereunder.

3.5.1 Focus Groups

The focus group method is a discussion with several people on a particular topic of the issue at the same place and at the same time (Bryman 2004). They provide insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. Focus groups are group discussions that give the researcher the capability to capture more in-depth information more economically than individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). Focus group interviews (FGIs) allow the researcher explore group norms and dynamics around the issues and topics under investigation. The researcher is interested in how participants discuss a particular issue as members of a group rather than simply as individuals. The researcher is drawn to how people respond to each other's views and builds up a view from the discussion that takes place within the group. This reflects a constructionist's ontology. Focus Groups are open-ended, discursive, and are used to gain a deeper understanding of respondents' attitudes and opinions about a phenomenon (Bryman, 2004).

By allowing the researcher to interact directly with participants, it provides chances for the clarification of answers, for follow-up questions, and for the exploratory of responses (Morgan, 1997). Respondents can qualify responses or give contingent answers to questions. Also, it is

possible for the researcher to observe nonverbal responses such as smiles, frowns, gestures, and so forth, which may transmit information that supplements or contradicts the verbal response (Morgan, 1997). The open response presentation of a focus group offers an opportunity to achieve generous amounts of data in the participants' words (Bryman, 2004). The researcher can reach deeper levels of meaning, identify subtle nuances in meaning and expression and make valuable connections (Bryman, 2004). Focus groups allow participants to build upon and react to the responses of other group members. This combined effect of the group setting may result in the production of ideas that might not have been found from individual interviews. Focus groups are very flexible and can be used to scrutinise a broad range of topics with a variety of people and in a variety of settings.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

For this particular research, thematic analysis was chosen as the method of data examination advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is an accessible, flexible and straightforward process of extracting sense from the interview transcripts (McLeod, 2011). This method of analysis is preferred because the participants are viewed as collaborators in the research (Braun and Clarke 2006), consistent with the topic at hand and a primary goal of the qualitative technique. Additionally, the outcomes of a thematic analysis can encapsulate the main points of a large body of data, rendering it appropriate for the current study. Thematic analysis can also be a foundation of previously unanticipated learning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). With this method, the codes themselves develop from the data rather than being pre-set, so the researcher may discover themes and issues that are unforeseen (Ezzy, 2002). After reading the material, the next step is to categorise or utilise the coding frame. Coding is a way of organising the data according to the researcher's understanding of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Exploring the properties and dimensions of the codes allows the researcher to arrive at the themes evolving from the dataset (Boyatzis, 1998).

For this study, two focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The time-consuming process of transcribing and repeated reading of the text assisted the researcher in getting to know the data in detail. Then the material was coded, and the codes examined for common themes emerging from the therapists' experiences. The themes were chosen because they represented the accurate perspective of the trainee psychotherapists' impact of clothing choices. The researcher ensured that evolving themes were consistent with the data obtained during the interviews and were not solely shaped by the knowledge gained from the literature review or by personal biases (Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold, 1999). These themes also featured in all of the interviews consistently as opposed just occurring in just one particular account.

3.7 Ethics

Before the research was undertaken, ethical approval for the research was given by the Dublin Business School ethics committee. The researcher guarantees that the study conforms to the following ethical principles such as participants' anonymity, avoidance of harm, confidentiality, obtaining the informed consent and objectivity (McLeod, 2011). All participants had the right to have the information that they gave, remain confidential. The use of pseudonyms in the research enables the participants to remain anonymous. The researcher has removed any identifiers such as other people's names, place names, participants names, and so forth from the vignettes that are used in the present research. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and what was involved in taking part in the research through the use of an Information form. (See Appendix 1). The researcher also provided a consent form which the participants reviewed and signed at the start of the process. (See Appendix 2). These forms are used to inform the participants of the purpose of the research, confidentiality, of their right to retract from the focus group and of their right to have any information eliminated from the study. This allowed for the participants to be given informed

consent in which they signed, and the researcher has also kept a copy. The information sheet and consent form were also explained at the beginning of the focus group. The participants were given time to read and clarify any queries that they had before the focus group started. Participants received a copy of these forms which contained the researcher's details should any clarifications be required. Participants were verbally informed that they are free to talk, but that there is no pressure on them to talk or reach consensus (Litosseliti, 2003). Participants were notified of a few focus group ground rules such as all mobile devices are to be turned off, not talking over each other, and allowing time for everyone to participate if they wished. Participants are also informed of their right to disclose or withhold personal material at their discretion.

3.8 Summary

In order to explore the impact of clothing choices on the client and psychotherapist relationship thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this qualitative research. This study has utilised focus groups as the method of data collection. Interviews were undertaken in two focus groups with three and four trainee psychotherapists respectively. During the process of interviewing and working with the data obtained from the participants all the ethical considerations of the study were addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the impact of clothing in the psychotherapeutic space which was explored through the lived experience of seven trainee psychotherapists by the use of two focus groups. Focus Group 1 (FG1) were trainee psychotherapists in their second year of working with clients and they are named as Ann, Bart, Eric and Teresa. Focus Group 2 (FG2) were trainee psychotherapists in their first year of working with clients and they are named as Patricia, Carol and Mary. The in-depth interviews yielded rich data on their experiences. Thematic analysis was utilised using the method described by Braun and Clarke (2006). On close analysis three themes conveying core aspects of the psychotherapists' experiences were identified.

In the process of working on this chapter it was observed by the researcher that the participants in FG2 when answering the questions about the impact of clothing in the psychotherapy room had less descriptive personal examples of their experiences. This could be due to the fact that their personal awareness may not be as developed compared to the trainee psychotherapists from FG1 who are in their second year of client work.

The data revealed that the awareness of the impact of the clothing in the psychotherapy room was more prominent in FG1 than FG2. This could be explained by the fact that trainee psychotherapists in FG1 have more experience with practicing with clients.

Despite the variety in the interview answers, three main themes emerge regarding the impact of clothing in the psychotherapeutic space. The vignettes from interviews were selected to demonstrate the main generated themes. These themes are as follows:

- Theme One: Psychotherapists' choices of attire in the psychotherapy room

- Theme Two: The impact of clothes on the client / psychotherapist relationship.
- Theme Three: Transference / Counter Transference issues related to attire.

4.2 Theme One: Psychotherapists' choices of attire in the psychotherapy room

The research found that participants would express themselves through their attire in the psychotherapy room. Both groups discussed how clothes can be the means of expressing oneself and how they would make conscious or unconscious decisions on their clothing. It also addressed the influence of their clothing choices by supervisors and personal therapists as role models.

4.2.1 Clothes as an expression of self

The participants indicated that they would normally wear smart casual and not too formal clothing when they are in the session with their clients. For males, the choice of clothes would be jeans and a shirt or a tee-shirt, smart trousers with a sweater or cardigan or zip up jacket. For female participants, the clothes choices varied from office clothes such as dresses, skirts, trousers with a cardigan or jacket. Most of the females preferred not to wear jeans as they found them to be too casual. The interviewed communicated that they would use clothes as a way of expressing themselves.

FG1: Teresa: I think for me... I used work in the fashion industry, I was a buyer in the fashion industry. So I always had an interest in clothes and for me it is an expression of myself.

FG1: Bart: Dress like I suppose I normally do. Dress with jeans and a jumper and / or a tee-shirt underneath... Kind of smart casual... clean... not overly formal.

FG1 in particular, felt that the nature and style of their clothing represented their personality and felt that their sense of self is reflected through their clothing.

FG1: Bart: I was just about to say... Ann was saying you should be yourself in what you are wearing as long as it matches your personality...

FG1: Eric: I think, it very much depends on the person, their personality, their style, their nature...I know quite a few therapists and they each have their own individual way of how they dress, how they style themselves, what they feel comfortable in. Yeah, I think it is very much down to the personality.

Teresa (FG1) also strongly believed that psychotherapists should be authentic and true to themselves in their choices of clothes. She did not feel that therapists should change their style of clothing just to suit the client.

FG1: Teresa: I would feel very strongly that you know... when I am sitting with people... they are sitting with me and this is me... and if I am dressing like this.. This is who you are meeting... me... if I meet 10 people in a day, they are all going to look different, they are all going to express themselves differently... and if there is a congruent relationship... and if I am being genuinely myself... I don't want to tone down... I don't want to have to feel that I have to change that... that if you are going to come in and sit with me... this is me... this is how I look and you are meeting me and not the clothes... And if this is the way I choose to express myself... then meet me there and I will meet you where you are at...you know. I don't want to be a therapist like that... I want to be who I am and that is the way I present... I do believe that we should be clean. I don't necessarily think that someone should iron their shirt if they want to pick up something out of the bottom drawer, and it that is who they are on the day.

Showing one's personality and being consistent came up for participants in both groups. Carol (FG2) explained that she wanted to be consistent in the way she dresses for the client work and would keep her attire unsophisticated but with a little bit of personal touch, such as some jewellery, for instance.

FG2: Carol: I usually wear a skirt and tights in the winter anyway and flat kind of shoes ... I just wear just a wedding band ... I just think sometimes it is a bit flash my ring is... I would be conscious of it. I wear a little bit of jewellery on my neck, so I keep it kind of simple... I would keep it kind of consistent with a little bit of effort into it.

Some participants had a strong sense of their personal style and would not conform to outside influences. They were either, becoming comfortable with what they were wearing or were

happy to meet the client in the attire that they are most comfortable in. Teresa (FG1) reflected that shorts and hoodies would not be her sense of style but that kind of attire was more individualistic.

FG1: Teresa: No I think it is who I am... I think... it is not my sense of style - shorts and hoodies - but I love the fact that he [her therapist] can express himself and he doesn't conform to anything else. So, it is not a fashion industry thing... it is more individuality which I think is great.

It was proposed by all the participants that they would use colour in their clothing as the way of showing their mood. FG2 preferred to wear neutral colours (black, navy and grey) in to meet the clients, whereas with FG1, the colour of the clothes worn, would be dependent on the mood of the participant.

FG2: Carol: I would wear normally what I am wearing now ... like Patricia... I like navy and well... I like black and I like grey... So, that is what I would feel comfortable in.

FG1: Teresa: ...I might wear something more colourful if I was feeling really, particularly happy that morning and something a bit more fun maybe on a particular morning... Like I have a jumper with an egg on it... sometimes I just like to wear that... just for a bit of fun and in particularly happy mood.

4.2.2 Trainee psychotherapist's conscious and unconscious choices of clothing

Throughout the research, environmental factors and functionality of the clothing were major reasons for choosing what the participants would wear. Half of the participants would make conscious choices of what they would wear to work with their clients and take time to decide on what to wear. Others would not be as conscious as they would wear the same clothes going from their main places of employment to their clients. The majority of the participants were looking for comfort because they wanted the attire not to deflect from the work with the clients.

FG2: Patricia: Yeah I think the most important thing is to feel comfortable...Because then you are not preoccupied, you are not uncomfortable sitting there, if you are comfortable then you are present...

FG2: Mary: I always think before a session... oh what am I going to wear, what am I going to wear sort of thing. But then again it would be clothes that I am going to wear going to work.

The functionality of the clothes was what made Teresa (FG1) consciously choose what to wear with her clients. She worked around her schedule in order to accommodate not only the clients but also her professional and personal life in her clothing choices.

FG1: Teresa: Well, for me... I pick up kids after... so, I always have to think about what is happening after because I am usually quite rushed with both places I work in. So, I definitely would be conscious of my footwear... cause I am running around and picking up anywhere between two and five kids after my clients. So, footwear would be a conscious decision, no matter what I have to do. I am going to be probably with the kids, so I have to be comfortable.

Another participant, Ann (FG1), expressed that she was very conscious of the fact that she would not wear a skirt for male clients. She has a certain sense of style (hoodies and Doc Martins) that she feels would not be professional when she is working with clients. However, it was not mentioned why she preferred to wear trousers in the sessions with males.

FG1: Ann: I would pay attention when I work with male clients, that I don't go dressed to... like going to wearing a skirt when I am working with a male client. I don't know... it's my own thing... I wouldn't feel comfortable like that. And I do pay attention, I spend some time before going out for sessions with my clients to think what I am going to wear and is it... I say it is because of this style that I would normally have is not really kind of professional

Eric (FG1) would not see any distinction in his personal dress style when it came to working with different genders. He felt that he would make the same effort for both male and female.

FG1: Eric: I know you said (Ann) work with men and women... I don't...within the prison I only work with all men. So, I don't have to necessarily think about a gender I will be dealing with. But even with the other agency I work with... I have some female clients and again...I take the same approach...I don't go overboard... I don't make extra effort to approach one gender against the other. What you see is what you get.

However, all of the participants wanted to look professional for their clients and care and preparation would be a part of their process.

FG1: Eric: ... Yeah there is an element of care and time taken to it but that is also a process of how my day starts and what way my day starts. I give myself the time in the morning so that I will not be harried, or hassled or rushed going out the door. There is an element of preparation to it and also thought put into it.

Eric (FG1) made a conscious decision in the way he dresses to separate himself from the prison environment where he works. His casual style distinguished him from the prisoners, prison officers and governors.

FG1: Eric: For me, the jeans, the tee-shirts or the shirts or casual, it separates me. I work in the prisons, so going looking too formal or working too formal an outfit when I get up would align me with the organisation or the Irish Prison Service itself. So, because you got prison officers in uniforms, you got governors in suits. So, I like to stay away from that to make sure that the clients are comfortable with me coming in. So, that jeans and casual is a lot easier for me to distinguish between myself from the prison environment itself.

It was also observed by the participants, in particularly, in FG1 that the attire of the psychotherapist can reveal his or her belonging to a certain social economic group. Eric (FG1) raised a concern that all psychotherapists should be aware of their own clothing in the psychotherapeutic space and not risk the occurrence of a class division between the client and psychotherapist. He stressed that overly branded attire can cause feelings of inferiority in the client.

FG1: Eric: I suppose in some ways, if you are talking about uniforms or outfits and things like that... I mean... again you don't want the client... well I certainly don't... I would love to breeze in or have a couple of Armani suits hanging in the wardrobe... but would I wear them in front of clients? I don't think I would... again it sets up... again it could... or would set up a class division...or I am better than... or I am less than...

Bart (FG1) reflected that clothing should not be seen as a barrier or a distraction from the work. He believed that psychotherapists belonging to a social economic group should not be revealed in the clothes that are worn in the session.

FG1: Bart: the way I dress... it is sort of casual, almost relaxed way...not to put up anymore barriers from one social economic group to the next... it is to make sure that the client is comfortable in the room themselves with me as I am.

4.2.3 Supervisory influence on establishing the trainee's psychotherapist's sense of dress.

The interview process revealed that although most participants did not see major difference in the way they would dress in the daily life and for the client practice, others struggled with this. It was evident that some trainee psychotherapists were influenced by supervisors and college lecturers while establishing their dress style for working with clients.

A participant in FG1, Ann, remembered emotionally that her supervisor expressed some concern on her dress sense before she started practicing. She shared that she wanted to have some guidance in the beginning of starting to practice and her style of dressing for client work since evolved into more congruent with her usual style.

FG1: Ann: My supervisor asked me at one of our sessions... What? Are you dressed like that? ... When I work with my clients. My group supervisor asked me. I said: No... there was a bit of (gets emotional)... a bit of concern that if I would... it would be a problem. I'd like to believe that it wouldn't... but there is a part of me that wants to follow up somebody's guidance... at least at the beginning. But like I said... it [sense of style] has evolved since and I am getting more and more relaxed into what I wear there. I didn't wear a hoodie yet... (Laughs)... but I don't know...I do feel better in the

room... and I like...my own notice... is that it is then easier to be genuine with the clients. To me, to dress the way, I was dressing in the beginning... it was like... there was enough tension about starting the client work and this was just another restriction.

Carol (FG2) recalled a time when she felt that her supervisor was judging her when her dress sense was brought into question. The supervisor believed that Carol's look was too sophisticated and needed to be "toned down". However, Carol (FG2) felt that she would not be authentic with her clients if she agreed with her supervisor.

FG2: Carol: And it is kind of about being authentic. And I remember XXX (supervisor) talking about me and saying... she said to me... remember she said to me once... She said: "You know Carol like... when you lose the gloss?" ...and I felt she was judging me...because I didn't feel like this is with XXX, our lecturer. I felt she was judging me... because I think...this is me...being my authentic self and I think if I tried to dress down or I tried to.... I would feel like a bit of a fake.

Teresa (FG1) acknowledged that she had different styles of dressing for her clients and when she is with friends and family. She thinks her style can be very expressive and took guidance from other people to simplify her look when going to meet the clients.

FG1: Teresa: I was a buyer in the fashion industry. So, I always had an interest in clothes and for me it is an expression of myself... So, when I said earlier about the mood thing... for me it is a way of expressing myself... I found that with clients I have to tone it down somehow because sometimes the way I dress can be... maybe a bit out there... sometimes for people... and people maybe notice it too much. It has been said to me. People will comment on my clothes when I express myself the way I want to. I feel... I have to tone it down slightly for clients and be less expressive... conform a little bit more... simplify it a bit. So, when I am with friends and family I would express myself open, you know, the way I want to through my clothing... but with clients I feel I cannot do that as openly at the moment.

Mary (FG2) shared that in her clothes style she was influenced by her own personal psychotherapists. She felt that it could be portrayed further down in her career.

FG2: Mary: The therapist I have now would be kind of quite smart... you know... kind of Marks and Spencer's smart. There is another therapist that I see in the centre and she always has fantastic clothes on and when I "grow up" I want to wear clothes like her.

4.3 Theme Two: The impact of clothes on the client / psychotherapist relationship.

The second theme which was quite prominent throughout the interview process was the impact of psychotherapists' attire on the client/psychotherapist relationship. This was discussed by both groups where an understanding of the impact of the first impressions and the dynamics of relationship between the client and therapist was highlighted.

4.3.1 First Impressions

All participants expressed that it was very important to have a genuine relationship with the therapist and that clothing plays a significant role in creating those first impressions between the psychotherapist and the client. It was also mentioned that establishing trust is essential and nonverbal clues such as clothing can facilitate or dampen this process.

FG1: Patricia: I actually think... as well sorry ... the trust, you know ... you trust someone that kind of that says something even nonverbal or by the way they dress, you just, you know you speak not only by word but by whatever you represent, how you dress and I think automatically you are just going to maybe trust this person or not. Now trust then builds up... you know ... in a long time you know ... and whatever and the first connection is made and everything counts.

It was noted in both focus groups that unkempt, untidy or non-ironed clothes can raise questions about therapist's professionalism and send out messages of incompetence and poor attitude. Carol (FG2) and Ann (FG1) both recalled examples of their first impressions of the psychotherapist being bad.

FG2: Carol: I brought my son recently to be assessed ... and I noticed that she had a huge big ladder in her tights and it really distracted me and I felt "God, almighty!" she

just looks like she fell out of bed and did she know we were coming? ... It kind of irritated me and distracted me. I really didn't feel she was ready or prepared... You know I can't cope... Jeess, giving you 60 quid and look at you...

FG1: Ann: You see I would like to believe there is no impact but I have in mind a friend who was doing a group therapy in somewhere in Dublin and there was two therapists facilitating them, the group work. And this client, that friend of mine, said to me, I can't trust this therapist to help me look after myself if I can see her having clothes which are not ironed, and which are not matched well, or that something is dirty, If I can see she is not able to look after herself, there is no way I am going to trust that she will help me to look after myself, so there is some impact, even though I would like to believe there is none.

Eric (FG1) gave an example of a failed attempt to establish a relationship with his client in the prison setting which was influenced by an element of his attire (i.e. boots). The boots led the client to work out that Eric was a settled person in contrast to the client's personal background which was a traveller's background and the client did not return for the further sessions.

FG1: Eric: I only ever once had a client make a comment and that was about the boots I was wearing... I couldn't figure it out but it went on for 20 minutes about the boots but I think it was more about, he was of traveller background, And I think it turned more towards about class, race, my background, my accent, where I came from, yeah it was more of the difference between himself and myself and it did actually, well now when I recall back it was more about him being a traveller and me being a settled person which was kind of an interesting conversation, he never came back.

4.3.2 Relating to the client

The significance of clothing was acknowledged by the participants when it came to establishing the interaction with the clients. The participants expressed that they found the particular dress choices can set up an equal footing between a client and a psychotherapist. The value of the awareness of the process was also emphasised.

Ann (FG1) shared a memory of her first therapist to whom she could relate very easily because his style of clothes was similar to hers.

FG1: Ann: The first therapist I ever met in my life was when I was a teen something fifteen or sixteen and he was working with my younger brother and he was wearing hoodies and he made us all feel really comfortable around him

Eric (FG1) emphasised the importance of setting an equal relationship with the client. He pointed out that psychotherapists needed to be aware of the nonverbal messages that attire can send out to the clients and seek balance in their clothes choices.

FG1: Eric: Yeah, trying to get an equal, be on the same footing as the client where you are, it's one to one and not something above or less than, you are not trying to get the client to be less than, you want to meet the person in the room, so that is where I would definitely be kind of coming from with the way that I would dress.

Further, Eric (FG1) believed that although psychotherapists dress style can help the client to relate to the therapist, there was a danger of over identification with the client, especially, in the environment that he works in. He expressed that he would not mind to dress more casually but he also need to maintain a professional look in front of the authority figures.

FG1: Eric: There are occasions when I do have to take into consideration, I have to encounter governors and chiefs and I have to present a professional face. So showing up in a hoodie and shorts to deliver therapy in the prison setting, I don't think it would go over very well with my own company but not also because the officers in the prison and staff themselves, I think they would see me as relating too much to the client... oopps no...it's a little bit going too far.

Teresa (FG1) pointed out that psychotherapeutic encounter is an intersubjective space and both the client and the psychotherapist are influenced by their choice of clothing. She believed that when the client comes to a session, they should be meeting the genuine therapist in whatever attire they are in and this would form part of building the relationship.

FG1: Teresa: There are hundreds of therapists out there, they are all very different, they all look different, they all work differently ... it's the relationship so it has to work, but I think you know the therapist has to be very much themselves as well as (the client) because the client is bringing their stuff, the therapist is bringing their stuff, but it is very much individuals meeting side by side.

Bart's (FG1) awareness of the impact of the clothing in the psychotherapeutic space only came to him towards the closing of the interview. He realised that he was judging his clients on their clothing choices and vice versa, the clients were judging him on his attire.

FG1: Bart: ...I myself didn't really see clothing as a major role or an impact in the therapeutic space however at the same time... I have judged my clients on the clothing they were wearing...and I judged them on their mood and their... self-care... so obviously, it does, so I wasn't relating it back to myself at all and I was definitely judging my own clients so obviously, they are doing the same. So, it does play an important role.

4.4 Theme Three: Transference and Countertransference Issues Related to the Attire

The data collected highlighted the complexity of the transference relationship and the significance of the impact of countertransference reactions related to the attire in the psychotherapeutic space. The participants' awareness of their transference and countertransference and its appearances in the psychotherapeutic setting was clear from both focus groups. Participants in both groups gave examples of the transference and countertransference which transpired from clothing.

4.4.1 Transference and Countertransference Issues

Participants in both groups had been exposed to situations where their clients had used an item of their clothing or the entire image that reminded them of a significant person in the clients' past such as a parent, daughter or an old friend. Hence the client began to relate to the psychotherapist as the client would to the parent, daughter or an old friend.

Eric (FG1), who works with clients in the prison setting, explained that he had to be mindful of the transference messages that his attire can send to his clients. His casual style in clothes allows his clients to see him as a father figure or a “role model” and not as part of the suppressive prison system.

FG1: Eric: the casualness... the way I dress is to kind of lessen that kind of age gap... transference and the countertransference would be... sometimes I would find myself in a kind of a father role... uncle role... a role model... that is something that I have to be very careful of. I don't want to come across as someone as a part of the system [prison]. So yeah... it has a huge impact on clothing in the environment that I work in.

Patricia (FG2) recalled an experience with her client who made comments about her wearing or not wearing a wedding ring. The client had made an assumption that Patricia was not married because she was not wearing a wedding ring.

FG2: Patricia: One of my clients actually said to me... I know that you are not married... I say: Why would you say I am not married? Because your wedding ring... Now, in Spain we have to wear the rings on the other hand... I noticed in the transference and I actually told about not being married... because she told me that she saw me like a like an old friend and she was just kind of letting me know... because I am sure you are not married...

Teresa (FG1) revealed her experience of transference and countertransference dynamics with one of her long-term clients. Teresa's client was an 84-year-old lady who had a very glamorous sense of style and Teresa unconsciously started “dressing up” when coming to sessions with that particular client. The participant found herself in a competition with that lady and wanted “to dress up” to be liked by her client.

FG1: Teresa: I have one client and there is a huge transference through the clothes... I have been seeing her for 40 sessions... but from the beginning she would always comment on what I was wearing and I started to dress up for her almost. I started to become more aware of what I was wearing ... I liked what she was saying... She made me feel... like I looked great... But she dresses in the most beautiful clothes she has and I think she is dressing up for me...I wanted to dress up for her. It was like... we were mirroring each other to some point. She, as the weeks went on, she was coming

in with different scarfs, different dresses. She is 84 and she was wearing the most glamorous of clothes and so I had to stop and go... What am I doing here? Because I was beginning to notice it wasn't a conscious decision... I wasn't aware that I was thinking about what I was going to wear because of her... I was thinking more that morning about my choice of what I was going to put on me and I hadn't done that in the past.

With the help of supervision and personal therapy Teresa was able to recognise that this client in countertransference represented her mother and this way unconsciously, as a daughter, she was looking for approval from her client.

FG1: Teresa: the countertransference for me was me always being the daughter

4.4.2 Dealing with Transference and Countertransference issues

Both focus groups explored how they would deal with the issue of transference and countertransference elicited by clothing in the psychotherapy room. The responses were mixed in both groups. Some of the participants believed that it could be beneficial to bring in the discussions about clothes into the session and work through the transference whereas others preferred "to brush it over". Some of the participants explained that they would not address the comments on their clothing because they felt that it would be taking away from the client work.

FG1: Ann: I like to believe that I will get engaged with them and work on them and... in terms of clothing...because clothing was a journey for me thorough my life

FG2: Patricia: Just kind of kept referring it back to the client

FG1: Eric: it was not something that I would have paid a huge amount of attention. It would have been deflecting away from what was happening for him [the client]

Due to personal experience with her client, Teresa (FG1) strongly felt that being aware of the transference and countertransference dynamics caused by the clothing in the psychotherapeutic space could be an excellent tool for work with the client as well as for

personal insight and development. However, she admitted feeling anxious to be bringing the subject up with her particular client (a glamorous 84-year-old lady) and avoided discussing it so far.

FG1: Teresa: comment on the therapist's clothes. What does the client need from the therapist? Who do they represent? Like it is the transference piece again ...you know...There is something about the client wanting the therapist to like them or something... by saying this all the time ...I definitely think that it should be brought into the room... not just a once off comment... but if something is being said on a weekly basis then it needs to be worked on...If I could just say that I... my own experience... I think it can be a distraction...but it can also be a tool...and a really useful tool...to open something else up

FG1: Teresa: I have brought it to therapy and supervision but I haven't brought it into the room with her [client]. Why not? I probably ... I think in some ways I am kind of quite frightened of it ...and I have been trying to avoid it... there is a part of me who is afraid of her. So I am still working on how I am going to challenge myself in trying to work on that, yeah.

4.5 Summary

The participants of this research expressed that they see clothes as the extension of the self and they are trying to convey their personal and professional image in the clothing. They elaborated on their conscious and unconscious choices of the clothes that they would wear while working with clients. Quite a high awareness of how the clothing choices influence the psychotherapeutic encounter was also shown. All participants expressed that it was crucial to understand that consistency, equality and individuality that can be portrayed through their professional image are important in establishing the trustful relationship between the client and the psychotherapist.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter compared the research from the literature reviewed on the impact of clothing in the therapeutic space with the results of the data collected from practitioners who are currently working with clients as trainee psychotherapists. In conclusion, the limitations of the study are addressed, and recommendations are made as to further possible areas of research.

5.1.1 Psychotherapist's choices of attire in the psychotherapy room

This present research revealed that practitioners portrayed themselves through their clothing in the psychotherapeutic setting. It was predominantly agreed by the psychotherapists that they would wear smart casual and not too formal clothing when they met their clients. Clothes were used as a means of expressing themselves. This was in agreement with Adam and Galinsky (2012) who claimed that clothing choices are influenced by the person wearing them and have a significant meaning to them. They claimed that people symbolise the importance of the clothing to have a quantifiable result (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). Peluchette and Karl (2007) went so far as to say that when individuals describe themselves by clear adjectives, it can be influenced by their clothes styles that they wore. Approachable was described for casual attire (Peluchette and Karl, 2007) and this is what the participants are agreeing with in the research.

The research showed that the style and nature of clothing represented the wearer's personality. This was described by Eric who is aware of psychotherapists who have their own individual style of dressing and are comfortable in what they wear. Damhorst (1990) would concur with this statement in that personalities are characterised in clothing. The research also showed that participants used colour to express the mood they were in through clothing. Carol (FG2) preferred to wear neutral colours whereas Teresa (FG1) wore colourful clothing or something

more fun such as a jumper with an egg. The literature did not go into this much depth which could suggest that this is a new area of research.

The participants assumed that being true to themselves and authentic in their clothing styles was more beneficial to clients as they were displaying their true self in the session and with themselves. This was described by Festinger (1954) who considered that people have a drive to validate their capabilities and ideas, and achieved this through unconscious or conscious comparison with relevant others. He believed that self-esteem was defined as overall feelings of self-worth (Festinger, 1954). The participants also thought that being consistent and comfortable for their clients was more valuable. Kwon (1991) assumed that that clothing choices indicated how they felt about themselves.

The literature reviewed suggested that clothes can reveal the social status of the wearer. Veblen (1953) believed that people make judgements on people's social status from what they wear. The research correlated with the literature review and the risk of existence of class division in the psychotherapeutic space was noted as well. Clothing was seen as an association with a culture group where it was described as the visible self (Roach and Eicher, 1972). The research stressed that clothing should not be seen as an obstacle or a disruption to the work.

Some participants stated that they would make conscious choices on what they would wear to work with their clients and take time to decide on what to wear whereas others went from their place of employment to their clients which was not as conscious as others. The functionality of the clothing was expressed by participants who chose clothing to accommodate not only their clients but their personal and professional life. This was mentioned in the literature where Cadwgan-Evans' (2014) research stated that psychotherapists tried to unconsciously achieve an appropriate presentation and collaborated identities in both the personal and professional fields.

The literature review was limited with the remaining findings from the research. Gender difference in clothing choices was another factor that was not highlighted in the literature research. Ann (FG1) was consciously aware that she would not wear skirts for male clients. It was not disclosed why this was the case. However, the male participants did not see any dissimilarity in their personal dress style when it came to male or female clients, they believed that they would dress with the same effort for both genders.

Supervisor and personal psychotherapist influence was a factor that was highlighted in the research that helped establish a sense of dress for the participants, however there was little mention in the literature reviewed. Ann's (FG1) supervisor expressed concern over her dress sense and she looked for guidance at the start of client work. This has evolved into being more congruent with her usual style. Carol's (FG2) dress sense was brought into question by her supervisor who believed her style was too refined but she felt that she would not be authentic with her clients if she dressed down. Mary (FG2) aspired to her personal psychotherapist's style and would like to develop a similar sense of dress when she is more experienced.

5.1.2 The impact of clothes on the client / psychotherapist relationship

The data collected from this research suggests that the majority of the participants have an understanding of how the clothing can impact on the psychotherapeutic relationship. The participants stated the clothes that the psychotherapist wears, played a part in forming first impressions with the clients. Ekman and Friesen (1972) believed that people use nonverbal communications more when they are forming first impressions, especially when the verbal communications was vague. The findings of the research confirmed that statement. Hubble and Gelso (1978) and Forsythe *et al* (1985) ascertained that clothing communicates more information about an individual than verbal communication and that clothes play a significant aspect in forming impressions of clients. Goldstein *et al* (1984) claimed that judgement on visual cues and verbal information was made in the first presentation. Bart (FG1) realised

towards the end of the interview that he judged his clients based on their clothing and mood and hence clients were doing the same to him. Hubble and Gelso (1978) also believed that once the therapeutic process began, clothing had minimal effect on the process. Nevertheless, the first few sessions would determine if the client returned and how influential the psychotherapist was (Garfield, 1986). The research validated this thought through Eric (FG1) who described a situation where a client focused on his attire (i.e. boots) to form his first impression and did not return to continue the therapy.

First impressions were seen by both the current research and the literature to be an important factor in establishing trust. Roll and Roll (1984) believed that more formal attire was seen by the clients as helpful and trustworthy. The research confirmed this statement. The participant preferred to be dressed in a smart casual professional style when they saw a client. In the literature review, it was also identified that clients responded to the psychotherapist in that attire especially when they wore a slightly higher degree of formal attire to the client (Roll and Roll, 1984).

Negative perception was raised by some of the participants in relation to the clothing that the psychotherapist wore. They believed that dressing unkemptly would send out a message of ineffectiveness and poor way of behaving. This was highlighted by Barret and Berman (2006) who proposed that clients displayed low levels of distress when psychotherapists wore formal attire compared to psychotherapists who wore informal clothing. This was conveyed by the psychotherapists similarly when it came to being comfortable. Interestingly, the research highlighted that smart casual was the main style that all participants preferred to work in.

The research showed that establishing a relationship with the client can be affected by the clothing that the psychotherapist wears in the psychotherapeutic space. Ann (FG1) recalled where she felt she could connect to her psychotherapist by his dress style as it was similar to

her own. Rogers (2003) felt that if the client felt secure in the relationship, they would participate more in the psychotherapeutic setting. The client would gradually experience the relationship as one in which all defences can be dispensed with (Rogers, 2003).

The participants conveyed the significance of setting an equal relationship with the client. They believed that psychotherapists need to be aware of the nonverbal messages that attire can emit out to the clients and that they need to seek balance in their clothes choices. Hubble and Gelso (1979) concurred that the early stages of psychotherapy are crucial in establishing a good rapport between the client and the psychotherapist, otherwise the client will stop coming. Taber, Leibert and Agaskar (2011) agreed with this statement in that lack of congruence between the client and psychotherapist's personality can result in an unequal relationship and can clarify why some clients have trouble in establishing a connection with the psychotherapist.

A danger of overidentification through the clothing with the client came up in the research. Psychotherapists have to be aware of the choice of their clothing in the psychotherapeutic setting which could be seen as identifying too much with the client. This was not mentioned in the literature review.

The research also noted that the psychotherapeutic setting was an intersubjective space (Wallin, 2007) and the client and psychotherapist were both affected by their choice of clothing. Wallin (2007) defined it as a therapeutic space where the client and psychotherapist are guided and modified by the conscious and unconscious biases of the other. Moreover, the participants believed that irrespective of the psychotherapist's style of dress, the client should meet the genuine person in the room and this should be incorporated into the establishment of the relationship.

5.1.3 Transference and CounterTransference Issues related to the Attire

The bulk of the literature did not take into consideration the transference and the countertransference that emerges once clothing becomes incorporated to the therapeutic session. This present research examined the impact that clothing has on the transference in the relationship and the countertransferential learnings for the psychotherapist in both focus groups and suggested that an impact does exist.

The research described situations where clothing on the psychotherapist was a reminder of someone who was significant in the client's life. One participant was mindful of what clothing he wore in the work environment as he did not want to present transference messages that would have enmeshed him in the prison environment. This would concur with Jacobs (2010) who believed that appropriate transference would be assisted by the psychotherapist concealing self-disclosure and presenting a blank canvas where the client can freely transmit their feelings for an important person in their life onto the psychotherapist. However, the literature review was very limited where transference related to clothing.

Countertransference was highlighted in the research where clothing was used as competition between the psychotherapist and the client. One participant recalled dressing up unconsciously for her client. This related to Hunter and Struve (1998) who believed that countertransference functions at an unconscious level. To escort clients efficiently in realising their thoughts and communicating their feelings, the psychotherapist needs to have a grounding of skills for identifying, classifying, interpreting, and expressing their own emotions (Prasko *et al*, 2010). To comprehend their limitations, their own resistance to change, was essential to discover more about the client and themselves; as they learn how the client's conduct influenced their own countertransference, they also learnt how the client affects others (Prasko *et al*, 2010).

The research also explored how the participants dealt with the transference and countertransference issues. The research was quite interesting as all participants came from psychodynamic training, however, they dealt with transference differently. Psychodynamic psychotherapists view transference as a powerful tool in understanding the client and finally achieving change (Prasko *et al.* 2010). Some participants would “brush it over” as they felt that discussing the clothing would take away from the client work, whereas others worked through the transference and discovered that it brought a deeper understanding of the relationship between the client and the psychotherapist. One participant, in particular, described an experience of both transference and countertransference and this led to other participants in that group beginning to see the impact that clothing can have in the therapeutic space. The literature review did not expand on the phenomenon of transference and countertransference and how they can impact the therapeutic relationship as what was discovered in the research.

The literature review did explore that when a psychotherapist changed their sense of style in the therapeutic space from one client to another, it can cause a move towards therapeutic decay (Hunter and Struve, 1998). This did not come up in the research. What did transpire was that the participants especially in one focus group wanted to be consistent in their clothing styles with their clients and not deviate between sessions.

5.2 Summary

In the discussion section, the responses of the participants in this research were linked to the literature revised on the impact of clothing in the psychotherapeutic space. The psychotherapist’s choices of attire in the psychotherapy room was seen as an expression of self, the trainee psychotherapists made conscious and unconscious choices of what they wore and they allowed supervisors to influence their sense of dress. Additionally, the impact of the clothing in the psychotherapeutic relationship was linked to first impressions and related to the

client. Finally, awareness of the trainee psychotherapists transference and countertransference and its appearances in the psychotherapeutic setting was evident in the research.

5.3 Conclusion

The present research examined the impact of clothing in the psychotherapeutic setting. For this purpose, two focus groups which comprised of seven trainee psychotherapists in total who are working with clients were explored using thematic analysis. The findings of the research suggested that trainee psychotherapists expressed clothing as an extension of self and their clothing choices are influenced by their role models who are their supervisors and personal psychotherapists. The research found that trainee psychotherapists made conscious and unconscious decisions when it came to conveying their personal and professional image to the client. They found that clothing has an impact based on first impressions and that the dynamics of the relationship between the client and the psychotherapist can be affected. What was highlighted in the research was the complexity of the transference relationship and the significance of the countertransference reactions. The research also conveyed that trainee psychotherapists need to be very aware of the impact of clothing when it came to transference. The interview process highlighted for some participants that they would not have seen the impact until they participated in this research. In conclusion, the psychotherapists clothing may have more of an impact than what the literature has surmised.

5.3.1 Limitations

There were a number of limitations that came up carrying out this study

- The literature for this subject was very limited, dated and mainly generated from American researches and sources.
- While the interviews offered rich data, it is not possible to generalise this to the larger population, due to the subjective and qualitative nature of the findings.

- To show the wider social context qualitative research looks for a fair representation of genders in the sample (McLeod, 2011). If there would have been more representation of the male gender in the focus group 2, the data could have been more diverse.
- If the participants had more than two years' experience, there could have been richer material to work with.
- The participants sense of style in focus group 2 was not as established as in focus group 1, therefore more experienced psychotherapists could have augmented the data obtained.

5.3.2 Recommendations and Considerations for Further Research

A number of recommendations to trainee psychotherapists who are starting practicing with clients were identified from both the findings of this study and the literature research reviewed:

- Future research could be carried out by taking a consistent sample of similarly experienced psychotherapists who would have more knowledge and this would build a more comprehensive picture on the impact of clothing.
- It could be recommended for trainee psychotherapists who are starting off working with clients to be more aware of the clothing choices in the psychotherapeutic settings. They should take into account first impressions, perceptions, judgements, transference and countertransference.
- Future research carried out with more male participants could be useful to get a more gender diversity in the research.
- There is a need for further qualitative and quantitative research on the impact of clothing in the psychotherapeutic setting in the Irish and British context as there is currently no recognition that there are transferential and countertransferential issues in the therapeutic space.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Participant Information Leaflet INFORMATION FORM



My name is Marie McCarthy and I am currently undertaking an MA in Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School. I am inviting you to take part in my research project which is concerned with a psychotherapeutic exploration of the therapists clothing choices. I will be exploring the views of people like yourself who work with clients.

What is Involved?

You are invited to participate in this research along with a number of other people because you have been identified as being suitable, being a trainee Psychotherapist. If you agree to participate in this research, this should take no longer than an hour to complete. During this I will ask you a series of questions relating to the research question and your own work. After completion of the focus group, I may request to contact you by email if I have any follow-up questions.

Confidentiality

All information obtained from you during the research will be kept anonymous. Notes about the research and any form you may fill in will be coded and stored in a locked file. The key to the code numbers will be kept in a separate locked file. This means that all data kept on you will be deidentified. All data that has been collected will be kept in this anonymous manner and in the event that it is used for future research, will be handled in the same way. Audio recordings and transcripts will be made of the interview but again these will be coded by number and kept in a secure location. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any point of the study without any disadvantage.

DECLARATION

I have read this consent form and have had time to consider whether to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary (it is my choice) and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage. I agree to take part in this research. I understand that, as part of this research project, notes of my participation in the research will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified in any use of these records. I am voluntarily agreeing that any notes may be studied by the researcher for use in the research project and used in scientific publications.

Name of Participant (in block letters) _____

Signature _____

Date 01 / 04 / 2017

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Gráinne Donohue, Research Co-ordinator, Dept. of Psychotherapy, School of Arts, Dublin Business School grainne.donohue@dbs.ie

APPENDIX 2: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Protocol Title:

A psychotherapeutic exploration of the therapists clothing choices

Please tick the appropriate answer.

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Leaflet attached, and that I have had ample opportunity to ask questions all of which have been satisfactorily answered. Yes No

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely **voluntary** and that I may withdraw at any time

Yes No

I understand that my identity will remain confidential at all times.

Yes No

I am aware of the potential risks of this research study.

Yes No

I am aware that audio recordings will be made of sessions

Yes No

I have been given a copy of the Information Leaflet and this Consent form for my records.

Yes No

Participant _____

Signature and dated

Name in block capitals

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or his nominee.

I the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explained to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that he/she could understand. We have discussed the risks involved, and have invited him/her to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signature

Marie McCarthy
Name in Block Capitals

01/04/2017
Date

APPENDIX 3: Participant Questionnaire

Pseudonym	Number in Group	Gender	Approach	No. of years working with clients
FG1	4	2 Female 2 Male	Humanistic & Integrative	2
FG2	3	3 Female	Humanistic & Integrative	1

Psychotherapeutic exploration of the therapists clothing choices

1. Can you describe what you would wear when you are meeting your clients and why?
2. Do you consciously choose particular clothing to wear for client work? What is the reason for that?
3. Do you dress differently for different clients? Does this impact the relationship?
4. Would your clothing be the same or different in other situations such as meeting up with friends or family? Why?
5. What are your thoughts about the nature and styles of clothing in psychotherapy? Why do people dress in a particular way with clients?
6. What did you think of your therapist's clothing when you were a client? Were you aware of it?
7. What do you think the client thinks/sees when they see what you are wearing?
8. What would you say is the impact of therapist clothing in the therapeutic relationship? Why?
9. Would there be positive or negative implication in your practice in relation to what you wear?
10. Do you believe that a psychotherapist should be aware of their own clothing and why?
11. Have you ever felt self-conscious about your clothing in a session? Why do you think that was?
12. Has a client ever commented on something that you have worn? How did you deal with that?
13. How would you deal with transference or countertransference responses that may be elicited as a result of what you are wearing?

APPENDIX 5: Email Communications

Hi Eric, Teresa, Ann, Bart,

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group for me. As mentioned on the 7th March, it is a psychotherapeutic exploration of the therapists clothing choices. The duration of the focus group will be 1 hour. I am looking to accommodate your availability by working it around your timetable in xxxx, as I know how busy you all are at this time.

I was wondering if any of the following will work for you all

- Friday 17th March between 10am and 5pm
- Saturday 18th March from 10am to 5pm
- Tuesday 21st March from 5pm to 6pm
- Tuesday 28th March from 5pm to 6pm
- Friday 7th April from 5pm to 6pm

Once we agree on a date and time, I will request a room in xxx and let you know.

Can you please confirm that you received this email also, just so I sent this email to the correct people?

Thank you again for agreeing to participate

Kind regards,

Marie McCarthy