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**Online Counsellors' Experiences of the
Therapeutic Relationship with Young
People. An Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis.**

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Requirement for the Award of
Professional Doctorate in Counselling
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Abstract

There is good evidence that the use of online counselling is increasing and related to this has been an expansion of services and individuals offering online counselling services. However, there is a dearth of research which has investigated processes occurring during online therapy and very little research investigating processes between young people (defined in this project as those aged between 11 and 25) and their online therapists. This project utilised the qualitative approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Online interviews were conducted to investigate eight online counsellors' experiences of online therapeutic relationships with young people. Online counsellors discussed how the role of anonymity and adapting methods to the online environment had an impact on the therapeutic relationship. They also discussed how practical implications, challenges and limitations and similarities with conducting therapy face-to-face related to their understanding and experience of the therapeutic relationship with young people. In addition, the novel method of data collection, the researcher's experience of this and the implications of the findings for the practice of online therapy and further research were discussed.

1. Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene: An overview of some salient themes

Some key themes to debates and controversies in the literature surrounding online counselling are summarised in this section. While this overview is not exhaustive of themes and topics, it is considered that this does provide a summary of key themes relevant to the research area, which leads to consideration of the relevant literature in the following section.

Online counselling is not an area without controversy and is becoming of increasing interest to researchers and practitioners. Shaw and Shaw (2006) highlight that since online counselling began, the practices of therapists are now 'displayed in a new arena' (P.41). They consider that the way online counselling is presented to the public, including its values, practices and level of professionalism should be of 'great concern to all counsellors.' This perception of increased accountability of practitioners working in mental health is perhaps one reason why online counselling has become an important topical area within the psychological and counselling literature. Consideration of this issue appears even more prudent when one reflects on the rate at which the internet and internet services are expanding. Anthony (2003), for example, comments that since 1995 when the first recorded person paid for online counselling, the use of the internet has expanded and correspondingly, the use and availability of therapeutic services has also increased. Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds (2009) comment that the Samaritans report that their email support service has increased hugely saying that it received and responded to 36500 emails in the year 2000 and this increased to 72000 during 2002; by 2006 they received 184000. Further, the Samaritans own website highlights that email now accounts for 54.1% of services (Ferns & Stace, 2007).

It seems apparent that while there are a range of people who may appear ardently opposed to online counselling, there also appear to be those who are diametrically

enthusiastic about the development of this area (see for example, Mallen & Vogel, 2005 for further discussion of this). This relates directly to the perceived efficacy and effectiveness of online counselling. However, before summarising studies discussing this in the literature review below, consideration will be given to some of the key queries and controversies often mentioned in relation to online counselling as a method of providing therapy. One of the primary clinical concerns is the possible difficulty or even inability of the therapist to engage in a strong therapeutic relationship with the client without typical non verbal cues pertinent to the face-to-face environment. This is investigated further in the section below discussing the therapeutic relationship online. For now, however it is important to note that the therapeutic relationship itself is often said to be essential, because clinical evidence suggests that the relationship is the largest and most consistent factor predicting successful outcome of therapy (Lambert & Ogles 2004; Wampold, 2001). Leibert, Munson, and York (2006) cite how studies such as those by Altman and Taylor (1973) and Alleman (2002) highlight how nonverbal cues are critical to the development of the therapeutic relationship that they consider necessary for a counselling relationship to exist. A further study by DeGuzman and Ross (1999) involved interviewing 16 experienced HIV/Aids online counsellors and commented that the lack of visual and verbal cues interfered with the development of the therapeutic relationship through participant's difficulty forming rapport with their clients. These studies support the idea that nonverbal cues are of critical importance and raise the important question of how online therapists without the benefit of nonverbal cues may form productive therapeutic relationships.

A number of authors also cite the issue of confidentiality. Shaw and Shaw (2006) comment that they consider a 'clear disadvantage' of conducting therapy online is 'maintaining confidentiality over the internet' (p 42). However, it is noted that not all authors consider this is necessarily a 'disadvantage' although it may present as a 'challenge' or 'concern' (eg Oravec, 2005, p. 129). Similarly to Shaw and Shaw, Sanchez-Page (2005) consider that online counselling also raises broad ethical concerns about confidentiality, record keeping, and scope of practice. They consider that there remains a 'tremendous potential liability' involved in working

with high-risk clients, including those who are self injurious or suicidal. They state that 'until these factors are addressed thoroughly, counselling psychologists should refrain from using the Internet as a primary therapeutic intervention tool' (p. 897). However, there are also many authors who challenge this view. King et al. (2006) comment that online counselling provides adolescents with emotional support and allows disclosure of information 'without breach of confidentiality' (p.169). Oravec (2005) considers that privacy and confidentiality issues related to online work mean that clients should be told about how their records of online sessions will be stored and cites Bonnington and McGrath (1996) who comment that there is an onus on supervisors to alert those they train to issues regarding the electronic transfer of clients confidential information. Oravec also points out that as a result of the ongoing development of online services and this being a relatively new area, there is also an onus on mental health professionals to stay abreast of the changing regulatory scene. It is then clear that there is controversy over issues such as confidentiality in online counselling and one suggestion might be that professionals refer to their regulatory bodies for guidance.

It would then appear sensible for online practitioners to keep abreast of regulatory bodies statements and guidelines (see Anthony & Goss, 2009 for details of guidelines) on online counselling given the range of controversies surrounding this. However, given that there are conflicting views by regulatory bodies, it is not possible to assert a unanimous perspective. As such, it is worth mentioning some key organisations which have commented on regulatory aspects of the provision of online counselling. The International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO) provides best practice guidelines and identify for example a number of principles for the online provision of mental health services (ISMHO, 1997). The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2001) and The American Psychological Association (APA, 1997) also provide guidance. Skinner and Latchford (2006) highlight however that there is no unified guidance when one investigates the views of these leading regulatory bodies in the field of psychology and counselling. They discuss that the American Counselling Association (American Counselling Association, 1999) recommends that possible clients of online counsellors 'should be warned of

potential limitations and risks, but cite no evidence for their concern' (p.159). They also consider that The British Association for Counselling's report on e-therapy noted the 'feeling' that electronic counselling omitted therapeutic elements vital to successful relationship building, whilst simultaneously observing that there was some evidence that people 'disclosed more to the machines than to their human interviewers' (p. 159). Both the United States and British professional psychology organisations have issued guidelines to their members urging caution (APA, 1997; BPS, 2001). However, Skinner and Latchford highlight that 'a more positive' (p 159) code of practice for online treatment has been produced by the International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO, 2000).

There are a variety of ethical concerns and many other controversies and debates related to online counselling. Leibert et al.'s (2006) study identified some often cited advantages and disadvantages, which highlight key areas arising when considering the relative pros and cons of online counselling. Advantages cited for online counselling include the level of convenience such as being able to access counselling from home, the ability to reread and edit communication, the relative inexpensiveness of the service and interestingly the anonymity afforded through using this modality (Cook & Doyle, 2002; Lange, Van de Ven, Schrieken, & Emmelkamp, 2001). Leibert et al. cite studies where researchers have hypothesised that anonymity of the contact is especially appealing for introverted people (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000); people with anxiety disorders, such as agoraphobia and social phobias (Bouchard et al., 2000); and problems surrounding body image or eating (Rochlen, Zack & Speyer, 2004). The impact of anonymity is an often cited issue and is particularly interesting because it relates to the lack of face-to-face cues, which is commonly referred to as a disadvantage of communicating using the online medium. My earlier research (Fletcher-Tomenius & Vossler, 2009) for example highlighted how the anonymity involved in this form of communication impacted both client and therapist and could be seen in a positive light aiding the development of the relationship through, for example, reducing the chance that judgements or stereotypes are formed on the basis of appearance. However, the anonymity of the therapist was also cited as a possible concern regarding the

accountability of therapists. Perhaps related to this, Shaw and Shaw (2006) comment that their study found that 'fewer than half of online counsellors were following accepted practice' (p. 41) on a number of checklist items on an ethical intent checklist. They did, however, also comment that this figure was far less for those counsellors identifying themselves as licensed or association members. However, one may query if the relative anonymity afforded on the internet is a factor which may relate to the proportionally large number of counsellors not following accepted practice when practicing online.

Other often cited problems with working using the online medium are discussed in the work of Rochlen, Zack and Speyer (2004). In addition to the concerns associated with lack of typical face-to-face cues, they also comment on the increased likelihood of miscommunication, the time delay when using email, the importance of computer skills of both therapist and client, the difficulties and implications of cultural factors online and issues of identity, particularly the possibility that someone could present as a different person to whom they really are.

The literature highlights that there are some groups which deserve particular attention when considering the impact of online counselling. This is notable for young people who have been the subject of articles citing both advantages and disadvantages of young people's involvement in technology. Young people are a vulnerable group and there is a need for protection in many spheres related to digital technology. Austin and Reed (1999), for example, highlight the problems of internet advertising that specifically targets young people and the need for guidelines around this. Unfortunately, technology has also been used in much more abusive ways as highlighted in an article by Godejord and Smith (2008) who discuss the extent of sexually abusive content on the internet and the measures that have been taken to try and prevent this. In the field of mental health, the internet has offered a new medium, which some researchers conclude provides a more desirable form of communicating than face-to-face. Rideout (2002) for example discusses how the provision of confidential services for young people is particularly

important because they may be particularly reluctant to talk about issues to do with personal health. This has led to the creation of services utilising other mediums instead of face-to-face counselling such as Kooth (<https://www.kooth.com/>); Winston's Wish (<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>) and Connexions (<http://www.connexions-direct.com/>)

Related to the development of services, which have been developed to provide information, advice and counselling for young people, there have been research projects designed to investigate the efficacy of these services and the processes involved. This project aims to build on the small body of research, which has investigated the online therapeutic relationship between young people and their therapist. Some studies have been completed on this already (eg. Bambling, King, Reid & Wegner 2008) but there is a lack of studies investigating processes between client and therapist in this arena.

This introduction provides an overview of some salient themes in online counselling to try and help orientate the reader to the material below. The literature review continues to focus on key issues, which this raises. Firstly, the question of outcomes of online counselling is explored. This issue is important for the reason that online counselling is expanding in use and as such it is necessary to consider if the evidence base supports this expansion. A key issue of debate has been that of the therapeutic relationship and the question whether the online counsellor is able to form a therapeutic alliance in the absence of traditional cues. This highlights the importance of considering both process and outcome research in face-to-face therapy.

A number of other issues were raised in this overview including ethical issues, which highlight numerous interconnected topics including confidentiality, monitoring and regulatory matters. Other key themes highlight the role of technology, the user's interface with this and the role of anonymity. In addition, there are studies which highlight how certain groups are in need of particular attention when researching online therapy. One such group is young people. The

lack of studies in this area particularly around how a therapeutic relationship is established online emphasises a gap in the research literature, which the literature review continues to explore in more detail.

1.2 Terminology

Throughout the research project, there are a number of key terms which are used and it is necessary to provide definitions of these to ensure clarity. It is also noted that for the purposes of presentation of the work, some terms are used interchangeably as discussed below.

Online counselling and online therapy

The term 'online counselling' or 'online therapy' is a form of computer mediated communication (CMC) and is also referred to under a number of other names, such as 'Virtual Counselling,' 'Web Counselling', 'Cyber Counselling' or 'e-mail therapy' as discussed by Oravec (2000). The terms online counselling or online therapy will be used interchangeably throughout this research.

Online counselling is distinctive in its approach to therapy through utilising an internet connection. There are a variety of methods of conducting online therapy, which can be usefully categorised under the terms 'synchronous' or 'asynchronous'. During synchronous communications all participants are online at the same time, while asynchronous communication occurs without time constraints. Examples of synchronous online counselling include the use of 'chat' software available through providers such as 'MSN' or 'Skype', which allow the use of video conferencing and instant messaging. Examples of asynchronous online counselling include the use of standard e-mail where the message can be replied to at any time subsequent to it being sent.

Therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic alliance

This will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent literature review. However, it is useful to provide some description of the meaning of the terms therapeutic relationship and therapeutic alliance, which are used throughout this work. The 'therapeutic relationship' is referred to in psychology and counselling texts from a variety of different perspectives such as psychodynamic, humanistic and cognitive behavioural. Each approach gives differing importance to the concept of the therapeutic relationship but for the purposes of this work it can be viewed as the relationship between therapist and client. The therapeutic relationship is the means by which the therapist hopes to engage with, and effect change in a person. The 'therapeutic alliance' or 'working alliance' is considered a key aspect of the therapeutic relationship. Definitions of this vary but all refer to the key importance of collaboration or partnership between the therapist and client which is facilitative of the approach or technique utilised in therapy.

Young people

The term 'young people' is often used generically and can mean different age ranges depending on who is using this term. This project investigates online counsellors working at the organisation Kooth. Kooth define young people as between ages 11-25 (Kooth, 2009). Other terms such as 'adolescents,' 'clients' and 'service users' are also used to describe young people referred to in this work.

1.3 Supporting organisation: 'Kooth'

The organisation 'Kooth' state on their website that it is 'a safe online place', which offers 'help, advice & support'. It also offers to help 'find out about local services, events & news' (Kooth, 2009). Kooth's website suggests that topics users may wish to talk about include 'problems at home, problems at school, drink and drugs, sexual health and sexuality, anxiety, stress, eating disorder and relationships'. It also states that these areas are not exclusive and that young people are welcome to

discuss any other issues that are concerning them. The web site highlights that it is funded to provide counselling to a number of geographic areas and that it is free for young people to access. Kooth is the organisation from which all of the online counsellors who were interviewed for this study were recruited.

Hanley (2008) highlights that services offered through the Kooth website range from informative resources to direct contact with peers and professionals. Services also include an online magazine for young people, moderated forum spaces for young people to discuss issues they feel are important to them, and access to a wide variety of other services. Hanley also notes that this latter aspect differs for each area that Kooth provides support for and the organisations that young people can access are tailored specifically to each region. This flexibility enables users to access professionals with hands-on knowledge of the local area and also enables them access to direct face-to-face services in their area. It provides young people with a single access point to what Hanley considers is an 'incredibly varied group of professionals' (p. 14), which include drug and alcohol workers, sexual health workers and domestic abuse specialists. The common element for all of the regions that Kooth offers a service for is that it provides access to professional counsellors. Therapy is offered online using asynchronous methods (commonly associated with email) and synchronous methods (commonly associated with chat rooms).

Vossler and Hanley (2010) who have been involved in numerous research projects investigating online counselling with young people provide further background details to Kooth. They highlight how the Kooth service comprises of a number of different aspects that include 'one-to-one counselling, direct access to other appropriate support agencies, moderated peer support and specially written self help information' (p. 5). Of particular relevance to this project are the details of one to one counselling. They highlight that users of this service can directly contact a counsellor to talk about issues. Individuals may choose to arrange a real time chat with a counsellor or work through the website's internal asynchronous messaging system. They discuss that the sessions are facilitated by individuals with appropriate therapeutic training who have received additional training in offering

online counselling. They also highlight that during the year 2006/7, 885 hours of synchronous chat counselling were provided and 2,134 private messages were sent to counsellors (these received 2,211 responses from counsellors), emphasising the extent of services which Kooth provides.

This brief introduction to the project now leads on to the literature review where some key research relevant to this study is discussed in more detail.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is designed to give a comprehensive overview of the key areas relevant to this research project, which leads on to the description of the research question and the methodology. The literature review includes a discussion of studies investigating effectiveness and efficacy of online counselling and the therapeutic relationship in face-to-face and online therapy. It is important to discuss the face-to-face literature in addition to research investigating online therapy because there is less published research investigating outcomes or processes in online therapy. Consequently, a key factor helping to understand online therapy involves considering how online therapy compares with face-to-face methods of providing therapy. In the context of discussing these numerous subject areas, the literature review also considers debates around issues of process and outcome oriented research although this is considered in more depth in the subsequent methodology and discussion sections.

2.1 Online counselling

2.1.1 A discussion of studies investigating outcomes

To begin with, it is useful to consider how one should evaluate studies on online counselling. A useful starting point is to review the issue of 'efficacy' versus 'effectiveness'. Aveline, Bernhard and Stiles (2008) comment that outcome studies can be divided into those determining the efficacy of a treatment versus those focussing on a treatment's effectiveness. Aveline et al. describe how efficacy is

determined by randomised controlled trials in which as many variables as possible are controlled in order to demonstrate the relationship between treatment and outcome unambiguously and potentially infer causal relationships from the findings. As many variables as possible are controlled and efficacy studies emphasise the internal validity of the experimental design through random assignments to treatments controlling the types of patients included with respect to this. Conversely, effectiveness studies highlight the external validity of the experimental design through focussing on clinical situations and implementation of a treatment in clinical settings. One consideration when reviewing the literature is whether studies demonstrate both efficacy and effectiveness when discussing the evidence base underpinning online counselling.

Aveline et al. (2008, p. 455) considers that 'process' research involves issues such as what happens in psychotherapy, how do therapies differ, what are the effective 'ingredients' of therapy, what are the common factors across therapies and what happens when patients improve? To answer all of these questions is not possible in the space available. However, the section below considers some literature on process with a particular emphasis on understanding the therapeutic relationship in online counselling.

In psychotherapeutic literature 'outcome studies' refer to those studies, describing changes that are made as a result of intervention. Early quantitative research investigating communication using distance technologies focussed on the study of telephone counselling. Mallen, Vogel, Rochlen and Day (2005b) summarise the literature on telephone counselling highlighting that there are studies showing the telephone can be used effectively for goals such as outreach, short-term treatment and relapse prevention. Interestingly, although internet-based technologies are increasing, they highlight that studies on the use of the telephone in distance technology has been discussed in the literature for over 30 years. More recently, quantitative studies have been conducted specifically investigating online counselling.

A key paper published by Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds (2009) presents a review of quantitative research into online outcomes and alliances within text-based therapy. The paper provides (at the time of writing) the most up to date literature on empirical research in this area. The article is particularly relevant to this research because it specifically examines quantitative research conducted to explore therapeutic outcomes related to both outcomes and the therapeutic alliance (the latter is discussed further below). The paper includes a review of Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim and Shapira's (2008) comprehensive review of internet based psychotherapeutic interventions. Barak et al. comment that in their study they collected all of the empirical articles published up to March 2006, which examined the effectiveness of online therapy of different forms. They then performed a meta-analysis of all 92 studies, reported in them. The studies involved a total of 9764 clients who were treated using a variety of internet based interventions for various difficulties. However, Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds comment that when limiting the work examined to only the effectiveness of one to one therapy, only 27 of the studies in question represented work conducted synchronously or asynchronously with a therapist. Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds also comment that if studies highlighting interventions, which reflect more sensory rich environments such as audio and webcam are excluded there were only 16 relevant studies, representing a total of 614 clients. When considering Cohen's (1969) rule of thumb that 0.2 is a small effect size, 0.5 is a medium effect and 0.8 is a large effect size, a moderate effect size was found for text based interventions using email (asynchronous communication) and chat (synchronous communication). These effect sizes were 0.51 and 0.53 respectively. Interestingly, Barack et al. (2008) point out that the mean overall weighted effect size of their research was 0.53, which is quite similar to the average effect size of 'traditional face-to-face therapy' (p. 109). However, Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds consider that there are a number of other limitations to Barak et al.'s study. They point out that further consideration reflects that the meta-analysis pertains to more technical approaches to therapy such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) rather than approaches which arguably place more emphasis on the relationship, such as person-centred therapy. This means that a key limitation of this research is that it is biased to these more technical approaches

and as such cannot be generalised to other therapeutic approaches, which emphasise a more relational approach. However, it is also important to note that Barak et al.'s study did comment on two projects, which both reflect therapy conducted through chat and used an 'unspecified' therapeutic approach and a client centred form of motivational interviewing. Barack et al. (p. 111) concludes that their study provides 'strong support for the adoption of online psychological interventions as a legitimate therapeutic activity'. These found effect sizes of 0.86 and 0.56 respectively. While this suggests a positive outcome for individuals using more relational approaches, the limited number of studies means that no firm conclusions can be drawn. The key limitation of the study is that it refers to only a small number of research projects and although it supports the contention that online therapy produces comparable effect sizes to face-to-face therapy, the small number of studies in question also means that any conclusion that the outcome of online therapy is comparable to face-to-face therapy would not be justified.

While Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds (2009) conclude that there is growing evidence online therapy is effective for some people, they also comment that there is 'still much evaluative work to be undertaken' (p. 8). Related to this point, the study by Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds does not address qualitative studies which could further inform these findings, although they do highlight that further research is needed from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to understand this in more detail. This leads us to a consideration of other qualitative work which has been undertaken and is discussed in the section below.

2.1.2 Online counselling. A discussion of studies investigating process

In addition to concerns around issues such as confidentiality, ethics and accessibility, some authors highlight the question of whether online counselling is able to re-create the important qualities of the face-to-face relationship that lead to change (Goss & Anthony, 2006). Similarly, West and Hanley (2006) highlight that practitioners must be careful to avoid assuming that there is a direct relationship between interactions with clients in a face-to-face situation and online situations as

there are vast differences. Skinner and Latchford (2006, p. 159) discuss how The British Association for Counselling's report on e-therapy noted the 'feeling' that electronic counselling omitted therapeutic elements vital to successful relationship building. Interestingly however, they also noted that there was some evidence that people 'disclosed more to the machines than to their human interviewers'. This emphasises the need for process research to investigate this further.

Maheau and Gordon (2000) comment that, although there are studies suggesting that online counselling can be an effective method of helping people, we do not know why this is the case. The authors highlight that no clear understanding exists of the therapeutic effectiveness or appropriateness of using e-mail as a therapeutic endeavour and feel more research is needed to enable a thorough understanding of the benefits and limitations of this method of providing counselling services. They suggest that it seems reasonable to question if online counselling and face-to-face counselling are equivalent services and that much more research is needed to study the actual online-counselling process and the different aspects of online-counselling relationships. They conclude that such questions need attention and should be the focus of future research. An article by Haberstroh, Duffey, Evans and Trepal (2007, p. 280) highlights the importance of research in this area, stating that technological advancements have the potential to 'profoundly impact the field, broadening its scope, practice, and range of creativity'. The authors discuss that as a result of this, there is a continuing need to examine perceptions of this process.

It is notable that similarly to the above section which discusses outcomes in online therapy, there is limited literature around the process of online therapy. A key aspect to 'process' in online therapy is the therapeutic relationship. As highlighted above, a number of important studies on this, have been summarised by Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds (2009). Their paper also provides a useful point of reference to highlight these works. This section focuses on discussing these studies with reference to both the original works themselves and Hanley D'Arcy and Reynold's comments on this work. This section also involves consideration of additional qualitative studies which are of particular relevance.

Hanley et al. (2009) conclude that of the five studies they discuss, a total of 161 clients took part in online therapy treatment conditions. They highlight that of the five studies all but one compared their data to face-to-face comparison groups. Prado and Meyer (2006) compared their findings to those of individuals who withdrew from therapy at earlier stages. Hanley D'Arcy and Reynolds state that all five studies support that a good therapeutic alliance can be developed online. They discuss that scores within the studies generally indicated that clients perceived the alliance with their therapist to be moderate or strong. They also comment that it is notable that in three of the four studies making comparisons to face-to-face equivalents, the online alliance proved higher than the comparison group. They conclude that 'such findings provide persuasive evidence supporting online therapy and challenge theoretical assumptions that relationships of sufficient quality to create therapeutic change cannot be developed online' (p. 8). However, there are limitations to be considered when citing this work. A key limitation is that it is only a very small number of studies which are highlighted. It is not possible to compare these findings with those of face-to-face meta-analysis investigating the therapeutic alliance. Horvath and Symonds (1991) for example compared 24 studies in their meta-analysis before concluding that a moderate but reliable association between a good working alliance and positive therapy outcome was found. Martin, Garske, and Davis (2000, p. 438) reviewed 79 studies (58 published, 21 unpublished) and found that the overall relation of therapeutic alliance with outcome is 'moderate but consistent, regardless of many of the variables that have been posited to influence this relationship'. As such, it is only fair to conclude that while the evidence cited here suggests that a meaningful and productive therapeutic alliance can be formed online, this research is still in its infancy when compared to similar research investigating alliance and outcome in face-to-face scenarios and only limited conclusions are justified in the light of the limitations of these works as discussed here. A further limitation, which can be levied towards Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds's research as mentioned above is that they focus only on quantitative studies. There are many potential criticisms with regard to a purely quantitative study but perhaps one key criticism particularly relevant to this research project is

cited by Haverkamp, Susan and Ponterotto (2005, p. 124). They use a metaphor to make an observation about purely quantitative research: 'Quantitative research, like photography, excels at producing images characterized by precision. Qualitative research, like portraiture can offer a glimpse of 'what resides beneath.' This quotation also seems particularly relevant to counselling psychology, which emphasises the importance of subjectivity and the therapeutic relationship in addition to relating the available evidence base to help understand a client, couple or group. This could be contrasted to approaches which might focus only on the particular therapeutic technique employed. This includes the counselling psychologist attending to not only how a person's presenting problem might fit with a particular theoretical model but also how the counselling psychologist themselves are reacting and the value of an approach based on an idiosyncratic formulation, not merely a diagnosis. We might also understand the link with counselling psychology's approach and the importance of understanding the depth of a presenting problem or 'what resides beneath'.

Hanley, D'Arcy and Reynolds (2009) comment that they believe the findings from the five studies 'argues against the notion that mental health professionals are unprepared for technological advances' (p. 9). However, it might also be concluded that although the studies cited do support that a meaningful therapeutic relationship can be formed online, there are numerous other issues, which have not yet been addressed fully. One consideration is that given it is acknowledged (even by advocates) that there are still some 'concerns' about online counselling and that there does not appear to be a consistent approach from governing bodies; it may be reasonable to assume that there is still further work to do in the process of fully preparing for further technological advances in online counselling and its continuing growth.

A previous research project which I completed investigated a specific aspect of the therapeutic relationship (Fletcher-Tomenius & Vossler, 2009). This research investigated trust in online therapeutic relationships and is considered important in the context of this research because it highlighted some interesting themes, which

have relevance to the findings from this research project. In this previous qualitative study, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed to investigate online counsellors' experiences of trust in their online work. The study found three key themes related to forming trust, the role of anonymity, the medium of communication and 'similar issues to forming trust' in face-to-face counselling settings. It was emphasised that online counselling relationships appeared to 'subvert traditional power relations' (p. 9) suggesting that there may also be beneficial aspects to using online forms of counselling over face-to-face approaches. The findings are supported by other research, which has also found that anonymity is important and can be beneficial in online relationships, (eg. Colon, 1996; Gray, Klein, Noyce, Sesselberg, & Cantrill, 2005). The article discussed that the anonymous nature of the contact between client and therapist had numerous effects on the development of trust. One comment was that interviewees reported that the relative anonymity they experienced online appeared to increase the speed of the initial process of therapy with a client referring to the 'immediacy of trust'. The article also discussed a sub-theme of anonymity, which was termed 'leap of faith' (p. 26). This involved a discussion of how interviewees commented on how one way to cope with the uncertainty of the other through trusting their own 'mental picture' of the client in the absence of verbal and non-verbal cues. However, although it was commented that interviewees felt this could 'aid the development of a meaningful therapeutic relationship,' (p.27) it was not discussed whether this could be a potential limitation of the online environment. It is considered here that this 'leap of faith' could also potentially be interpreted as a limitation of the online environment. One could argue that online counsellors were proceeding on the basis of a 'leap of faith' as opposed to on the basis of clinically informed decisions and a well informed assessment. However, although one might levy this argument, it could also be suggested that there may 'always' be an element of a therapist taking a 'leap of faith' in the initial stages of therapy with a client regardless of the medium employed. Indeed, one could make a parallel with Carl Rogers person centred approach, which, as Kirschenbaum and Henderson (2003, p. 136) comment holds basic trust in the person as 'central' to the approach. They comment that the belief

in the 'actualising tendency', the tendency of humans to grow, develop and realise their full potential represents the person centred therapist's trust in the 'constructive directional flow of the human being toward a more complex and complete development'.

A study by Skinner and Latchford (2006) lends some support to Fletcher-Tomenius and Vossler's results but suggests further work is necessary. Skinner and Latchford found a negative correlation between high self-disclosure and perceived potential advantages of invisibility and anonymity. They comment that those with a greater tendency to self-disclose saw anonymity and invisibility as less likely to influence them and consider this could be 'because they are less in need of these reassurances' (p. 162). However, they did not find any associations with anonymity and low self-disclosing style which would be expected if anonymity is also related to processes of disinhibition as Fletcher-Tomenius and Vossler also comment.

Similarly to Fletcher-Tomenius's and Vossler's study, other research also supports that the medium of communication itself is integral to the online relationship and that this can be a beneficial, therapeutic aspect to the counselling. Fletcher-Tomenius and Vossler, for example, comment that they found the ability of the participants to be able to re-read text may assist a process of internalisation aiding development of the online therapeutic relationship. Supporting this idea, Haberstroh et al. (2007) comment that an established body of research suggests that writing during times of physical and social distress provides clients with a 'vital avenue' (p. 270) for emotional healing and cite studies by Penn (2001) and Soper and Von Bergen (2001) supporting this. Wright (2002) also highlights that 'writing therapy' (p. 286) has history that goes back further than just the use of the internet. She describes how Lange (a psychologist) published case studies of work with patients who had used structured writing to overcome symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. Wright also comments on a number of authors (e.g. Bower, 1999) whose works include meta-analysis showing the beneficial effects of self expressive writing, which Wright says have been 'precisely recorded' (p. 287).

Other qualitative studies also support that it is possible to form productive therapeutic relationships online. Anthony (2000) comments that she concludes that from a relationship model stance, the online relationship between client and counsellor is therapeutic and may be considered counselling through a medium-led, text-based orientation.

2.1.3 Summary. Online counselling, process and outcome studies

The section above suggests that online counselling is a topical but controversial area in the academic literature. Online counselling is clearly growing in use and while there are many who advocate this, there is also opposition to its growth and appears to be a strong desire for caution. This desire for caution seems fair when one considers the range of issues this new medium has raised. Issues of confidentiality and the technological challenges, the role of supervision and the issue of regulation are just some of these.

Outcome studies suggest online counselling is effective and that productive therapeutic relationships can be established online but it is limited how much can be concluded from this to date because there have not been a sufficient number of studies conducted to conclude that online counselling has efficacy and is effective. Qualitative studies have begun to investigate processes involved in the online therapeutic relationship. This has yielded interesting results. Some studies suggested there are new advantages to this medium of communication, which may revolve around themes such as the role of anonymity, the role of the medium of communication itself and the action of typing. However, it is unclear what the common factors are that are thought by some to make online counselling an effective means of providing therapy.

2.2 The therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic 'alliance'

This section seeks to explore some of the key literature on the concept of the therapeutic alliance. Traditional understanding of this is then considered in the

context of online counselling, which challenges some traditional explanations of what is needed to form an effective working alliance.

Firstly, to put the concept of the therapeutic relationship into context, it is important to consider why the idea is itself important. This has become a key topic in the research literature for a number of reasons. One reason is the lack of evidence supporting the superiority of any one psychotherapeutic intervention over another, although this point is debated with new approaches and research arguing the superiority of one or another therapeutic approach. A further reason is the emphasis on common factors research, emphasising that the relationship itself is a key area worthy of study. A third reason is that a number of mainstream psychotherapeutic approaches such as person centred, CBT and psychodynamic emphasise the role of the therapeutic relationship in assisting people with their difficulties in psychotherapeutic practice.

2.2.1 Face-to-face psychotherapy research Studies

To begin with it is necessary to consider what is effective in therapy and if one therapy might be considered any better than another. This is important because if therapy is merely about providing the 'right' therapeutic intervention, the notion of a relationship may not seem to be an issue worthy of study. It has been shown that therapeutic intervention is better than no therapeutic intervention at all (Lambert & Bergin, 1994). However, there is still controversy over the relative merits of the available techniques.

Key to this is consideration of the 'Dodo bird verdict' (Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975, p. 995) or the 'equivalence paradox' (Stiles & Shapira, 1994, p. 165). Luborsky et al. comment that different treatment interventions have been tested in comparative studies and this has shown there to be more or less an equivalently positive outcome despite the differences between treatment techniques. This has also been summarised as the Dodo bird verdict: 'Everybody has won, and all must have prizes' (Carroll, 1946, p. 28). However, Beutler (1991, p. 226) in his paper titled

'have all won and must all have prizes' considers that it is 'premature to give up the search for differential effects'. Indeed, as commented by Aveline et al. (2008), there are exceptions to this. In vivo exposure for phobias and anxiety disorders has consistently been shown to be more effective than other methods. Aveline also cites meta-analytic studies, which have generally shown an advantage for cognitive behavioural treatment models over psychodynamic, process-oriented and interpersonal therapies. Arguably, this is also reflected by National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, which highlight this evidence base in their guidance for the use of CBT for a number of mental health difficulties (NICEa, 2009). However, a number of meta analyses have been conducted, showing that equivalent results are found when using different interventions. A key study by Wampold et al. (1997) for example found that effect sizes were homogenously distributed as expected under the dodo bird hypothesis. They also concluded that effect sizes were not related to publication date, indicating that improving research methods were not detecting effects and that dissimilar treatments did not produce larger effects as would be expected if the Dodo bird hypothesis was false. Interestingly, Wampold et al. (1997) highlight that such a finding is only 'painful' if one 'buys into the necessity of validating psychotherapy based on the active ingredients'. They question:

'Why is it that researchers persist in attempts to find treatment differences, when they know that these effects are small in comparison to other effects, such as therapist effects or effects of treatment versus no-treatment comparisons?' (p. 211)

This question is pertinent to this research project because it emphasises that understanding of factors common to all therapeutic approaches may be a more profitable line of enquiry than emphasis on clinical trials, which try to prove the efficacy of one treatment over another. Discussion of the Dodo bird hypothesis arguably has particular importance for this research project, since it is aimed at helping further understanding of the therapeutic relationship between online therapists and their clients. It is not for example aimed at determining the efficacy

of a particular treatment approach. Similarly, Ahn and Wampold (p. 251) considered as 'Neo Dodo bird proponents' (Aveline et al., 2008, p. 454) state that the controversy about whether the beneficial effects of counselling and psychotherapy are due to the specific ingredients of the treatments or to the factors common in all therapies is a central issue. The findings from their meta-analysis of 18 years of 27 component analysis studies revealed that 'theoretically purported important components are not responsible for therapeutic benefits' and they conclude 'the results cast doubt on the specificity of psychological treatments' (Ahn & Wampold, 2001, p. 251) . Ahn and Wampold also suggest that continued outcome research will only support that general pattern of results and provide little informative evidence about counselling and psychotherapy. They continue:

'Rather, the focus of counselling research should be on the process of counselling and on the common factors that have historically interested humanistic and dynamic researchers and clinicians.' (p. 255)

Key research which is often cited when discussing common factors research and the importance of the relationship is the work by Lambert and his colleagues. (see for example Lambert & Bergin, 2002). Lambert's common factors research suggests that relationship factors are the single largest variable over which therapists have some control, accounting for approximately 30% of therapeutic outcome across therapist theoretical orientations. They found that 40% of factors impacting therapeutic progress were 'extra therapeutic' referring to such factors as specific client characteristics and events external to the therapy with the client. They also found 15% of factors related to 'expectancy' effects accounting for placebo effects such as the client's belief that their therapy would be effective. A further 15% of effects were found for the 'techniques' used, which referred to the idiosyncratic elements of the model of therapy. This suggests that many of the factors impacting on therapy are actually out of the therapist's control but a significant factor, which can be at least be partly controlled is the relationship itself.

The review of evidence to date does then suggest that a research focus on process factors is important for psychotherapy research. This highlights the role of understanding the therapeutic relationship, and how this might be understood in the context of the online medium.

2.2.2 The therapeutic relationship

The therapeutic relationship is given varying importance according to which therapeutic orientation is consulted. It is then important to consider how some of the key therapeutic approaches discuss the therapeutic relationship in the context of person-centred, cognitive behavioural and psychodynamic therapeutic orientations. However, it is highlighted by a number of authors that research does suggest most counsellors trained in varying orientations do think the therapeutic relationship is of fundamental importance (e.g. Howe, 1993).

Person centred literature is a key approach, which highlights the centrality of the therapeutic relationship. Mearns and Thorne (2004, p. 22) comment that the distinctive feature of the person centred approach is that it does not 'just pay lip service' to the importance of the relationship but it 'takes that as the aim of the counselling process' with each client. In discussing the therapeutic relationship, Mearns and Thorne consider the key core conditions of Carl Rogers and that it is through application of these core conditions particularly congruence, empathy and positive regard which facilitates change (Rogers, 1951).

The six core conditions as outlined by Carl Rogers

1. Two persons are in psychological contact.
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.

5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved.'

(Rogers, 1957, p.96)

Rogers considered that these core conditions were essential to therapy and placed relatively little importance on therapeutic technique. For example, he is quoted as saying 'the techniques of the various therapies are relatively unimportant except to the extent that they serve as channels for fulfilling one of the conditions' (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 2003, p. 102). In addition, Rogers argued for the importance of the therapeutic relationship over the method of intervention used. Rogers (1951) maintained that it was the therapist's affirmation of the client that produced therapeutic change, suggesting that:

'The client moves from the experiencing of himself as an unworthy, unacceptable, and unlovable person to the realization that he is accepted, respected, and loved, in this limited relationship with the therapist. . . as the client experiences the attitude of the acceptance which the therapist holds toward him, he is able to take and experience this same attitude toward himself' (p. 159–160).

Kirschenbaum and Jourdan (2005) comment that since Rogers published his first works he has remained a key figure through both the volume of his published work, the institutions and journals dedicated to the person-centred approach and the common factors research, which supports and validates 2 or 3 of Roger's core conditions – empathy, positive regard and 'possibly' congruence as being critical components in effective psychotherapy.

Kirschenbaum and Jourdan highlight how the behaviourist position contrasts starkly with that of the person-centred one. They discuss how the behaviourist view emphasises the importance of human behaviour being under the control of

external forces as opposed to Rogers who while he agreed that it was possible to set up external conditions to bring about change, considered that people possess a 'self-actualising' potential. Rogers discussed that for an individual to fulfil their potential they need the key qualities of interpersonal relationships, which involves the use of 'core conditions'. Behaviour therapy however highlights the primary emphasis on the development of techniques where the relationship is viewed as less important. Such an approach is further illustrated by reference to the work of Lang, Melamed, and Hart (1970) who presented participants with a tape, which highlighted pre-recorded anxiety stimulating situations and involved no contact with a therapist at all. However, Lejuez, Hopko, Levine, Gholkar and Collins (2006) comment that despite behaviour therapy traditionally proceeding with 'minimal regard for the therapeutic alliance as a key mechanism of change... basic behavioural principles are fundamental both to the development of a strong therapeutic alliance and to the provision of more specific behavioural applications that are based on these principles' (p. 466). It does seem then that more modern academic works do stress that contemporary behaviour interventions such as Dialectical Behaviour Therapy or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, (DBT & ACT) do emphasise that therapeutic relationship variables may in fact be integral to understanding behavioural interventions.

The relationship in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is commented upon by Leahy (2008, p. 769) who considers that CBT has 'often been criticised for ignoring the role of the relationship'. However, he highlights how consideration and understanding of relationship factors is key to overcoming difficulties in therapy. He comments that resolving 'ruptures' in the therapeutic relationship provides an often essential opportunity for using the relationship as a means to modify cognitive and emotional problems. Leahy also considers however that in light of the emphasis on 'empirically supported treatments' (such as CBT) there is the risk that the alliance in therapy may be foreshadowed by the techniques and protocols used in CBT, perhaps giving credibility to Mahoney's (1991) earlier claim that therapy can become 'technolatry'. Interestingly, a study by Keijsers, Schaap and Hoogduin (2000) involved an overview of five studies which examined client's perceptions of

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. They concluded that participants 'consistently reported that patients had found the relationship with their therapist more helpful than the cognitive-behavioural techniques that were employed' (p.267).

Goldfried and Davilla (2005) highlight the role of the relationship in psychoanalytic therapy discussing that technique was emphasised over the relationship in early forms of this but that as psychoanalytic thinking broadened to include more relational perspectives, the importance of the relationship has dramatically increased. Although it is also notable that as pointed out by Horvath (2006) the concept of the relationship in therapy goes back to the middle period of Freud's writings (Freud 1913). Goldfried and Davilla highlight the work of Messer and Warren (1995) who describe how contemporary psychodynamic approaches place the emphasis on the client therapist relationship at the centre of the therapeutic change process. They also highlight how object relations theory (Klein, 1952) provides a way to understand how the therapeutic relationship itself can lead to change and that this is independent of a role of mere interpretation. Goldfried and Davilla (2005, p. 423) highlight McWilliams (2004) who suggests that one of the core assumptions of psychoanalytic therapy is '... the raw emotional power of the here-and-now therapeutic relationship'. They conclude that although more traditional psychoanalytic approaches may have been more technique oriented, contemporary approaches are strongly relationship based. It is important to also note that the idea that the relationship between client and therapist had a significant impact on the outcome of therapy was highlighted in Freud's (1913) writings.

It can then be concluded in this brief section that different therapeutic traditions give differing significance to the therapeutic relationship. The person-centred tradition appears to give most importance to the therapeutic relationship but it also seems that over time, other therapeutic models have given increasing importance to the relationship. It is important to consider these differing approaches in the context of the findings of this research project. As will be discussed later, the interviewees for this research all had their own particular theoretical orientations

and individual training experiences and it is clear from here that these are also factors impacting the therapeutic relationship.

2.2.3 The therapeutic 'alliance'

It is notable that the therapeutic 'relationship' and the therapeutic 'alliance' are sometimes used interchangeably in some of the literature. This probably relates to the lack of consensus about the nature of what the therapeutic alliance actually is and how it manifests in therapy. Horvath (2006) highlights a number of questions which remain an issue of debate. He discusses whether the alliance is a conscious 'real relationship' (p. 259) or is transference based. He also discusses the debate over whether the effect on therapy outcomes is impacted by the quality of the alliance or if the alliance would be more fruitfully understood as providing the opportunity to put into effect strategies that are in turn responsible for positive changes. These comments relate back to the discussion of the therapeutic relationship in general and in turn also show there is an overlap between the use of these terms. As a result it seems important to give a definition to the term 'therapeutic alliance' as it has been established that many interpretations of this exist. Castonguay, Constantino and Holtforth (2006) discuss how such convergence of interest in the therapeutic alliance has led to a definition, which has been adopted on by the American Psychological Association (APA) which created a 'task force' (p. 272) aimed at disseminating the empirical evidence supporting the role of the relationship in therapy. Castonguay et al. highlight that consistent with the task force, the alliance can be viewed as a 'component' of the therapeutic relationship along with a number of other key therapeutic constructs. Notably, empathy, positive regard and congruence are cited. They comment that:

'it is generally agreed that the alliance represents interactive, collaborative elements of the relationship (i.e., therapist and client abilities to engage in the tasks of therapy and to agree on the targets of therapy) in the context of an affective bond or positive attachment' (p. 272).

This is consistent with the definition of Bordin (1994; 1979) who presents the consideration of the common elements of 'goals', 'tasks' and 'bond' of therapy as a pan-theoretical model of the therapeutic alliance. Central to the model is the idea that the formation of a therapeutic alliance is done collaboratively. Bordin highlights how there are four propositions, which provide a conceptual framework for understanding the differences among different theories and approaches to psychotherapy:

- 1) All genres of psychotherapy have embedded working alliances and can be differentiated most meaningfully in terms of the kind of working alliance each requires.
- 2) The effectiveness of a therapy is a function in part, if not entirely, of the strength of the working alliance.
- 3) Different approaches to psychotherapy are marked by the difference in the demands they make on patient and therapist.
- 4) The strength of the working alliance is a function of the closeness of fit between the demands of the particular kind of working alliance and the personal characteristics of patient and therapist. (Bordin, 1979, p. 253).

The working alliance construct has then been defined in a number of different ways but one can conclude from a review of the literature that a broad recurring definition is that of 'collaboration between therapeutic participants to facilitate healing'. (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999, p. 136)

Many studies suggest that the working alliance is a crucial factor in facilitating positive therapeutic change. This finding has been replicated in many studies as discussed above and in contemporary research. Emmerling and Whelton (2009), for example, investigated if progression to a higher stage of change was associated with an enhancement in working alliance. They found that in an analysis of 56 adult clients who had received counselling at a community mental health clinic, a

multivariate analysis of variance found that stronger working alliances were found with increased symptom improvement and concluded that their results offered further support that a strong working alliance in psychotherapy is important. Studies such as this utilise a variety of questionnaires used to measure the quality of the therapeutic alliance. For example, The Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) consists of a 36 item questionnaire rated by a 7 point likert scale and has versions available for the client, therapist and independent observer. Such scales have been used to help evaluate therapy. A number of studies (eg. Hatcher, Barends, & Hansell, 1995; Safran & Wallner, 1991) have consistently found that the strongest correlation is between clients' view of the therapeutic relationship and outcome (as opposed to independent observer and/or therapist and outcome).

Cook and Doyle (2002, p. 96) summarise some key findings from research on the face-to-face working alliance. They highlight for example that, although the severity of clients' pretherapy symptomatology has been found to be unrelated to establishment of alliance, the quality of past relationships does appear to have an impact. They discuss that clients who have had a history of difficulties in interpersonal relationships have been found to be less likely to develop strong alliances. Research has also found that therapists' abilities to foster a strong emotional bond in therapy is impacted by the extent to which their own interpersonal relationships and skills are well established and cite a study by Dunkle (1996). Dunkle concluded that one key result was that the bond component of the alliance was predicted by the extent and quality of the therapists' social network. Cook and Doyle also summarise that highly motivated clients who enter counselling with the expectation that they will need to assume personal responsibility for doing the work of therapy, are more likely to form a strong working alliance and that research findings are mixed, but it appears that experienced therapists may be slightly more skilled at cultivating high levels of working alliance.

The above discusses only a few of the studies that have investigated the nature of the therapeutic alliance, how it manifests in therapy and the implications of this.

The volume of studies available is beyond the scope of this work to summarise. However, one might consider that the concept is still changing as the literature grows and we might also note as Green (2006) comments that 'the concept of alliance within emerging computer-aided treatments further challenges our concepts' (p. 426). This study aims to further understanding of the concept of the therapeutic relationship and as part of this, it will consider notions of the 'therapeutic alliance' and how this might also relate to online interactions between client and therapist.

2.3 Counselling and Young people

2.3.1 Overview

This section discusses some key issues around counselling services for young people. In particular, this includes some of the limitations of current services, why they are important, how effective they are, the therapeutic relationship and the development of online services.

2.3.2 Outlining the need: some key research findings and policy initiatives

To begin with it is important to consider some of the reasons why counselling services and why those services employing online methods are important for young people. Vossler and Hanley (2010) discuss a number of factors, which have impacted on why young people use new media and especially the internet. They emphasise for example, how growing up in western societies has changed perceptibly over the last decades. They cite influential sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck in the UK and Germany respectively and comment on how such authors have used terms such as 'individuation' to emphasise the increased importance of individual decision making and the emerging plurality of lifestyles in contemporary societies. This clearly also relates to young peoples' use of the internet and associated developments in online counselling. Interestingly, Vossler and Hanley comment that despite higher numbers of young people experiencing

psychological difficulties, statistics also show that only a minority of these people find their way to the established counselling services. They comment that 'the institutional conditions at these traditional counselling centres, with their often adult-oriented 'counselling culture', may deter young people from accessing therapeutic services' (p.3). The authors suggest that this might be a key reason why politicians in the UK are now calling for young people to have easy access to counselling something that is hoped to be provided by those who develop services online.

When considering why counselling services are so important for young people, one might also refer to statistics recorded by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC, 2009) who comment that NSPCC research shows that a significant minority of children suffer serious abuse or neglect. The NSPCC highlight how their year 2000 study of childhood experiences of 2,869 18-24 year olds found that:

'Six per cent of children experienced frequent and severe emotional maltreatment during childhood.'

'31 per cent of children experienced bullying by their peers during childhood, a further seven per cent were discriminated against and 14 per cent were made to feel different or 'like an outsider'. 43 per cent experienced at least one of these things during childhood.'

Although the above does not highlight how this translates to a need for mental health services, it does emphasise some of the difficulties young people face, which can lead to a need for such services. A survey was carried out by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department of Health and the Scottish Executive (Office for National Statistics, 2004, p. 8). They found that in 2004, 'one in ten children and young people (10 per cent) aged 5–16 had a clinically diagnosed mental disorder: 4 per cent had an emotional disorder (anxiety or depression), 6 per cent had a conduct disorder, 2 per cent had a hyperkinetic disorder, and 1 per

cent had a less common disorder (including autism, tics, eating disorders and selective mutism). Some children (2 per cent) had more than one type of disorder.'

Such statistics highlight the necessity for mental health services for young people and this has been acted on by the government which has responded through initiatives such as the UK Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (Department for children schools and families, 2003). The Children's Act 2004 also became law. This legislation is the legal underpinning for Every Child Matters, which sets out the Government's approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. Following this, The Every Child Matters agenda has been further developed through publication of the Children's Plan in December 2007. This is a ten-year strategy and is based around a series of ambitions, which cover all areas of children's lives including childrens' mental health needs.

Cooper (2006) conducted an extensive research project looking at counselling in schools and comments that his summary of counselling services in schools found that data from a range of sources indicated that counselling brought positive change in the client's wellbeing. He highlights for example that 'outcome data indicated that clients were significantly less distressed following counselling'. He highlights that approximately eight out of ten clients said that counselling helped them 'a lot' or 'quite a lot'. Pastoral care teachers from all of the schools researched said that, overall counselling had been helpful to their pupils and gave it a mean rating of eight on a one to ten scale from 'extremely helpful' to 'extremely unhelpful'.

In terms of the efficacy and effectiveness of counselling for young people, a number of authors highlight the specific nature of therapy between young person and counsellor. Kendall and Morris (1991) for example comment that there are 'specific issues that require attention' (p. 777) when working with young people. They highlight for example the role of the family when considering diagnosis, consideration of 'who is the client' and specific factors related to the therapeutic relationship, which are unique to working with this client group. A key series of

meta-analyses are summarised in the paper by Weisz, Sandler, Durlak, and Anton (2005, p. 629). They comment that several narrative and meta-analytic reviews have shown that prevention programs for children and adolescents produce significant benefit by reducing the rates of future social, behavioural, and academic problems. The key measurement is the 'effect size'. To help explain this, Cohen's (1969) general rule (as discussed above) is used. As a reminder, this states that .2 as a 'small effect', .5 a 'medium effect' and .8 for a 'large effect'. Weisz et al. cite that the full body of evidence on youth psychotherapy includes at least 1500 clinical trials and several hundred of these have met inclusion criteria for various meta-analyses. They cite Casey and Berman (1985) who found a mean effect size of 0.71 for a collection of 75 outcome studies of children aged 12 and below, and 0.79 for a collection of studies with 4–18-year-olds. They also cite Weisz, Weiss, Alicke, and Klotz (1987), who found a mean effect size of 0.79 for 106 studies with 4–18-year-olds and Kazdin, Bass, Ayers, and Rodgers (1990), using 223 studies of 4–18-year-olds, who found a mean effect size of 0.88 for treatment versus no-treatment comparisons, and 0.77 for comparisons of treatment groups and active control groups. Weisz et al. conclude that one way to summarise the findings of the four meta-analysis they comment upon is to note that in all four, averaging across the various outcome measures used, the average treated child was functioning better after treatment than more than 75% of control group children. They also comment that the effects found fall within the range of what has been found in findings of meta-analyses of predominantly adult psychotherapy citing Shapiro and Shapiro (1982) and Smith and Glass, (1977).

Because of the policy initiatives and research projects as discussed above, there has been a push for the development of new services for young people with mental health difficulties. This is also commented on by other authors such as Hanley (2006, p. 182), who states that there has been a steady development of counselling services for young people in the UK, which has been supported by 'high profile' research projects (highlighting for example the research by Cooper discussed above) suggesting that young people are both in need of these services and can benefit from them. Vossler and Hanley (2010, p. 4) also comment that increasingly

there are 'reports of the internet positively impacting upon youth centred professions'. They consider how this has been related, for example, to personalised opportunities for safe and entertaining identity expression and peer-focused relationship exploration. They also discuss how young people can find different forms of support and help online. They highlight free chat rooms, which can offer a space to meet and communicate with other people and self-help groups, which can also provide a source of support.

2.3.3 Young people and therapeutic approaches: Which method?

Downey (1996) considers that therapeutic approaches fall into four main categories. He highlights 'community approaches (eg. School, neighbourhood), family approaches, group approaches and individual approaches' (p. 310). It is outside the scope of this work to consider each of these in detail. The key approach of relevance to this work is individual approaches, as this is the main focus of online counsellors at the service Kooth who are participants in this project.

Psychodynamic work with young people often refers to the early work of Freud (1856-1939) and his work with 'Little Hans' through his consultations with the child's father. Following this, interventions from a wide range of perspectives were developed to include behavioural, cognitive, systemic and many other. Kazdin (2000) provides an extensive list of 551 different approaches for example and Weisz, Sandler, Surlak and Anton (2005, p. 629) also considers that a 'thriving' research enterprise including over 1500 outcome studies highlights the 'remarkable diversification' of psychotherapies available for young people.

Just as in adult psychotherapy, there have been a variety of approaches used with children since Freud's early work. As highlighted by Pattison and Harris,(2006), there is now a greater body of evidence for CBT suggesting that this form of counselling may be more effective. They also discuss how there is a lack of high quality research published in support of other counselling approaches. Pattison and Harris also investigated psychoanalytic, humanistic and creative therapies.

However, although they found a greater body of evidence in favour of CBT, they suggest that this finding needs to be interpreted with caution owing to the lack of high quality research evidence published in support of other approaches. It is possible that the absence of evidence in favour of other approaches may simply reflect a lack of published research. They conclude that further research into process would be useful, thus emphasising that the question of what might be 'the most' appropriate therapy for young people is far from answered (if indeed there even is one therapy which is 'better' than any other).

Downey (1996) points out that variation in practice or emphasis appears to revolve around at least three key dimensions: the degree to which treatment is directive or non-directive, interpretative or supportive, and conducted principally through verbal discourse or indirect communication. The last of these dimensions will be discussed further below but for now, it is important to note that this is a key consideration relevant to the development of online services for young people.

It is then apparent that deciding which therapeutic approach might be best suited for young people is not a simple task and there may well be more questions than answers. A number of studies highlight how this is partly the consequence of a lack of studies investigating which mechanisms of therapeutic change are important during therapy with young people. In Kazdin and Nock's (2003) study on mechanisms of change in child and adolescent therapy, they comment that despite progress in research examining therapy with young people, advances are 'sorely needed' in studying mechanisms of therapeutic change. They highlight that:

'..there is not likely to be a single mechanism for a technique, just as there is no simple and single path to many diseases, disorders, or social, emotional, and behavioural problems (e.g., lung cancer, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder') (p. 1127).

Similarly to research investigating the role of therapy for adults, research by authors such as Kazdin and Nock illustrates the importance of understanding more

about the therapeutic process between therapist and young people. The evidence heavily supports that therapy is useful for young people experiencing mental health difficulties. However, there is much room to explore the intricacies of the therapeutic process itself, which includes an investigation of the relationship itself.

2.3.4 Young people and the therapeutic relationship

The therapeutic relationship has been researched and discussed in many academic works and research topics and some key studies have been mentioned above. Authors such as Sharry (2007) highlight how the therapeutic relationship and alliance is also integral to working therapeutically with young people. Sharry quotes Carr (1999) who said when considering the initial assessment with young people:

‘All other features of the consultation process should be subordinate to the working alliance since without it clients drop out of the assessment and therapy or fail to make progress’ (Sharry, 2007, p.23)

However, work on the therapeutic alliance specifically with young people is a far less researched area. Hughes and Kendall (2007) for example, describe research in this area as ‘rare’ (p. 487). Green (2006) also discusses this, stating that this seems unlikely given that there is good reason for it to be a well researched area. He discusses how, for example, a young person’s motivation for therapy may be less due to their feelings of ownership over the treatment being with their parents. Younger children may have developmental limitations in understanding the concept of needing treatment and adolescents may disagree with their parents about the nature of the problem. Oetzel and Scherer (2003) also consider that far less is understood about the process of psychotherapy with children and adolescents. However, they found that the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and child is essential to effecting change. Similarly to Green, they argued that establishing a therapeutic alliance is often more difficult with younger clients than adults. They discuss this is partly because of the stigma associated with

psychotherapy and also add that children are often pressured into attending psychotherapy.

It is also evident that practitioners who work with young people therapeutically feel that the therapeutic relationship is a critical variable for therapeutic change. This is highlighted in the research by Kazdin, Bass, Ayers and Rogers (1990), who concluded in their investigation of 1162 psychologists and psychiatrists that one of the priorities for areas of child and adolescent research is understanding therapeutic processes. They highlighted this, because a key finding was that the therapeutic relationship was seen as a key factor influencing outcome. Interestingly, the same practitioners did not rate treatment characteristics as 'very much or extremely related to therapeutic change' (p.739).

For such reasons as highlighted above, it may then be considered that it is reasonable to think that these factors and more might make the therapeutic alliance with younger clients more variable and complex; and thus more critical to the outcome of any intervention. It is also reasonable to consider that this is an important and topical area for research studies.

2.3.5 Quantitative research. Young people and therapeutic relationship

As discussed above, there are some key meta analytic studies on alliance and outcome in research with adults, which do reveal consistent predictive relationships across types of treatment (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Martin et al., 2000). However, there are far fewer studies which investigate the same processes with young people. A meta-analysis by Shirk and Karver (2003) is considered by Hanley (2008, p. 51) as 'the most comprehensive review of quantitative studies' conducted in this area. Shirk and Karver's research analysed 23 studies examining associations between therapeutic relationship variables and treatment outcomes in child and adolescent therapy. They found that the therapeutic relationship with young people is related to outcome across diverse types and modes of child treatment. This was also true across behavioural and non-behavioural forms of treatment. Key

to their findings they concluded that the overall result of strength of relationship to outcome was 'modest' and 'quite similar' to results obtained with adults. They found this to be the case across divergent types of treatment and across levels of development i.e children, adolescents and adults. They conclude that despite inclusion criteria differing across the studies involved in the meta-analyses, 'this review suggests that the role of the therapeutic relationship is reasonably robust and consistent' (Shirk and Karver, 2003, p. 461). There are some points to note of particular importance when considering Shirk and Karver's findings however. They highlight that dissimilarly to adult studies, therapist and parent ratings of the alliance were more accurately associated with positive outcome. They consider that 'these results should be interpreted with caution' and also highlight that 'differences with the adult literature could be a function of differences in types of relationship measures and modes of treatments across respective meta-analytic reviews.' (p. 461).

There are a number of limitations of Shirk & Karver's (2003) study. The authors themselves cite a 'major limitation' (p. 462) as being the limited sample of studies, which this meta-analysis draws on. Further, only one study met the full inclusion criteria used in meta-analysis of alliance-outcome relations in adult therapy, meaning that generalising these findings in the same way as has been done with similar studies in adult populations is not possible. The authors acknowledge the various limitations of their study and conclude that more research is needed, stating that they hope their review 'triggers similar interest in relationship processes in child treatment' (p. 462) and as such hope that further research will help to address these limitations. However, they also highlight how their study informed the direction future research should take. They discuss, for example, that researchers looking at technical variables in outcomes should take account of relationship factors in future research. They also emphasise that the potential contribution of relationship to outcome in child treatment is ambiguous owing to measures not being temporally separated. This was due to many of the studies they cite measuring the therapy relationship near to or at the end of therapy, which could appear to inflate the relationship-outcome association. Alliance or other

relationship constructs should be measured prior to outcome and preferably at multiple points in time to help establish if there is a predictive relationship.

Further studies have been conducted investigating the therapeutic relationship with young people since but Shirk and Karver's (2003) work represents a key meta analytic study. More recently, Karver et al.'s (2008) study concluded their work did find some 'preliminary evidence' (p. 22) that although some associations may generalise, others may be moderated by the type of treatment. In particular, they found that the therapeutic alliance and client involvement was related to treatment outcome in only the cognitive behavioural treatment, suggesting that therapeutic relationship variables may be moderated by treatment type. It was also found in this study that client involvement was correlated positively with therapeutic relationship, a finding similar to a study by Taft, Murphy, King, Musser and DeDeyn (2003) in the adult treatment literature, which also found that early rating of therapeutic alliance predicted later homework compliance. Shirk and Karver concluded that this finding was however 'unique' (p. 22) in the literature on child therapy and supported the hypothesis that a good alliance promotes client involvement in therapeutic tasks irrespective of treatment approach.

2.3.6 Qualitative research. Young people and the therapeutic relationship

A number of studies investigating the processes involved in the development of a therapeutic relationship with young people are described in the face-to-face literature. Everall and Paulson (2002) present a qualitative study, which aimed to focus on the factors young people identified as important in the maintenance and development of relationships. They identified three major themes: therapeutic environment, uniqueness of the relationship and therapist characteristics.

The 'therapeutic environment' was described as the 'climate' within which the therapist and client functioned, which then set the tone for what was to follow. They discuss that young people viewed the therapy as an intense and formal process in which a 'really strange person' asked 'really weird questions'. (p. 81).

This highlights how the participants' responses may have been impacted by stereotypes and pre-determined judgements about what to expect from therapy. Interestingly, they discuss how participants reported beginning therapy expecting to be treated as 'insignificant and inferior'. They highlight how this meant that confidentiality and issues around their expectations needed to be addressed before the young person could engage in the therapeutic process.

The 'uniqueness of the therapeutic relationship' highlighted by participants that a positive therapeutic relationship includes a foundation based on a sense of trust and respect. The authors conclude that this helped them achieve a sense of freedom which other support systems had not been able to offer. The participants notably emphasised the importance of the egalitarian basis of the relationship and the young person's perception of equality between therapist and client was considered very important to their engagement in the process. Interestingly, the participants who had experienced a negative counselling service said that their experience had similarities with negative interactions they had experienced with adults who had been in an 'authoritarian' position. (p. 83).

'Therapist characteristics' emphasised how young people identified a number of characteristics of their therapists, which they felt helped the therapeutic relationship. The participants referred to a sense of 'constancy' which was facilitated by a 'sense that the therapist was authentic, open and sincerely cared. This was manifested through a genuine emotional response that was described as sensitive, sympathetic and kind'. (p. 83)

The above study provides some interesting themes which will be useful at a later point in this research when such findings can be contrasted with the findings from this research, which aims to explore if and how there may be differences in how the therapeutic relationship with young people is perceived in relationships conducted online.

French, Reardon and Smith (2003) conducted a study which investigated engagement of at risk youth through the use of qualitative methodology. They interviewed 16 clients of a mental health service finding four primary themes, which they identified as crucial to the engagement process. The authors discussed how the model helps to visualise the young person as the focal point in the process of engagement. They consider this is important because each young person is different in their reaction to therapy stating for example that whereas a 'degree of coercion to attend counselling might work for certain people, for others it may have the opposite effect and harden their resolve not to attend' (p. 544). As such, their model highlights how the three thematic categories of 'attractiveness, accessibility and follow up' help to provide a 'broad framework for clinicians' (p.545) as an aid to helping conceptualise the individual within this, they discuss how 'attractiveness' refers to 'feeling understood, confidentiality, individual counselling, recent information, choosing the level of disclosure and the physical environment'. The theme of 'accessibility' referred to the importance of a free service for young people, which had extended opening hours, was based in the local community and had outreach services available. The third theme of 'assertive follow up' emphasised the importance of a minimal waiting list, personal contact and the maintenance of this contact (p. 535). Although the individuals consulted in this study all varied greatly, the authors comment on a central desire common to all participants of wanting to 'feel understood'. These themes are of interest in the context of this study and similarities with the findings derived from the interviews with online counsellors are considered further in the discussion section.

This section focussed on two key studies of relevance. The study by French et al. (2003) and Everall and Paulson (2002) highlight that there are many different facets to the notion of the therapeutic alliance. This research aims to understand the therapeutic alliance in more detail from the perspective of online counsellors and these works highlight and justify the role of process research in helping achieve this. Outcome studies such as those commented on above do suggest that we can measure the therapeutic alliance but when a broader approach is taken incorporating studies of process, the importance of subjectivity and individuality is

highlighted, emphasising the need for a methodology, which aims to disentangle micro level processes and interpret how individuals make sense of their personal and social world.

2.3.7 Young people and the therapeutic relationship in online counselling

As commented by authors such as Orlinsky and Howard (1986) and Williams, Bambling, King and Abbott (2009) psychotherapy can only be adequately evaluated if behaviours transpiring during counselling sessions are also examined in addition to session and end of treatment outcomes. Williams et al. (2009) consider that 'there have been no published investigations of the micro-level processes that occur during online counselling sessions' (p. 94). They highlight that this is an important omission because improvement in effectiveness of online counselling depends on a better understanding of therapeutic process characteristics. It is clear that the research base for understanding of the therapeutic alliance in youth online counselling is thin and as Green (2006) comments, the idea of alliance in treatment has broadened beyond being solely the province of any one psychotherapy and interpersonal processes may be part of effective psychological treatments for all sorts of difficulties. Green also highlights that the 'concept of alliance within emerging computer-aided treatments further challenges our concepts' (p. 426).

There are few studies, which have investigated the online therapeutic alliance with young people, but this section aims to give an overview of some key studies and then continues to highlight how this research intends to build on these findings.

A recent paper investigating the online alliance in online counselling with young people was conducted by Williams, Bambling, King and Abbot (2009). Their research aimed to explore in-session processes and behaviours between therapists and young people in online counselling. This was done through the use of questionnaires and the analysis of transcripts of counselling sessions. The analysis of 85 online counselling transcripts revealed three types of 'rapport building' behaviours and five types of 'task accomplishment behaviours' that were usually

seen during therapy. Williams et al, concluded that their finding of these two domains were in line with unpublished research by King et al (2007) who found that clarifying problems and planning actions were commonly employed by online counsellors with young people. Similarly it was found that there was minimal exploration of young people's goals and suggest that some stages of the counselling process may be applied in a 'superficial' (p. 97) manner or omitted altogether. They consider that this may relate to the constraints on session time, a factor related to the slower rate of information exchange afforded by text typing. It is also considered that this may relate to the frequency of rapport building behaviours compared to the task-accomplishment behaviours found in this study.

The key findings of Williams et al.'s. study was that rapport building processes were used more consistently with both types of processes having a moderately strong positive effect on young people. They concluded that building rapport rather than accomplishing tasks were clearly the focus of online counsellors. However they also found that there were weaker positive effects for behaviours in session that rely more heavily on verbal and non verbal cues being accurately interpreted.

Williams et al. (2009) conclude that there are many challenges for online therapists when implementing traditional counselling processes in an online environment. They discuss that the time limitations may mean counselling techniques typically employed in verbal methods of providing counselling are not used online and that without the aid of verbal and non-verbal cues, therapists may find it difficult to build adequate relationships with young people in a 'timely manner' (p. 99). The authors consider that this may have the effect of either reducing the time available for exploring issues in the session or reducing the effectiveness of the work with the young person, which they consider could be due to 'poor interpersonal connection'.

Crucially and of particular relevance to this study, Williams et al. suggest that further research needs to investigate how interpersonal connections can be more efficiently facilitated between therapist and young person. Interestingly, they suggest this because they consider that disinhibition effects may facilitate relational

building processes more strongly when the nature of the young person's problems is less severe. They also suggest that communication difficulties between therapist and young person may be less problematic if the meaning of typed text can be accurately interpreted without verbal and non-verbal cues. They consider that it may be fruitful for online therapists to focus more on in-session behaviours that facilitate clear understanding of messages, but that further research need to be done to understand this.

It is important to note some limitations of Williams et al.'s work. The key limitations are that the sample was predominantly represented by young females limiting how much one can generalise the findings. A further limitation cited by the authors highlighted that the sample itself was perhaps too small to establish reliable inter-rater estimates for some of the variables.

There are also some less recent studies than Williams et al. (2009), which have investigated the online therapeutic relationship with young people. Papers by King et al. (2006a; 2006b) represent some key research in this area. King et al. (2006a) investigated the motives and experiences of young people who chose internet instead of face-to-face or telephone counselling. This was done through collaboration with an organisation called Kids Help Line, which is a national service providing free telephone and online counselling to young people in Australia. The study utilised a naturalistic design investigating 100 young people who had received a single counselling session of telephone counselling and 86 young people who had received a single session of online counselling. Pre and post measures of emotional distress were used to evaluate outcome and standardised measures of alliance and session impact were also used to evaluate the role of potential outcome mediators.

King et al. (2006a, p. 179) concluded that both the telephone and online conditions revealed an overall positive effect finding that 'young people were significantly and substantially less distressed' by the end of the counselling session.' Interestingly, they also found that the telephone counselling group showed a greater reduction in distress according to psychometric scores than did the online group and concluded

that telephone counselling was 'clearly superior' to online counselling. However, although self reported alliance scores were higher for the telephone counselling group, the alliance was not considered a major mediating variable in counselling outcome. The authors discuss that 'session impact,' measured using a 16 item scale (Session Impact Scale, Elliott & Walker, 1994) which measures the therapeutic impact based on specific session content was a stronger mediator than the therapeutic alliance measured by the Therapeutic alliance scale (TAS) (Bickman, Vides de Andrade, Lambert, & Doucette, 2004). They also comment that it was particularly notable that the bond component of the alliance (mutual liking and acceptance in the TAS) was absent in the outcome.

The findings of King et al.'s (2006a) study therefore provide a challenge to the idea that the alliance is important in therapy with young people (eg. Sharry, 2007). It also suggests that text based methods of providing therapy may not be as effective as verbal methods. King et al. highlight that there are limitations of their study. Notably, this includes the weak control of subject factors, which may have impacted outcome. Examples are personality or social factors, which were not measured in the study. They highlight that a randomised control design could have helped to manage factors such as this. The authors also highlight that demand characteristics of the study may have impacted the findings and suggest that this could vary due to the use of an online questionnaire for online participants and a telephone interview for participants in the telephone counselling group. A final limitation is that the effects of the counselling were measured immediately after the session. This seems to be a major limitation, as this does not account for longer term effects which could occur if the participants were followed up at a later stage and it also does not account for how participants may have responded if they were asked about their experiences after a longer period of therapy.

A second study by King et al. (2006b) explored the motives and experiences of young people who chose the internet instead of face-to-face or telephone counselling. The methodology involved the use of a qualitative research methodology, utilising semi-structured online group interviews (focus groups). 39

participants from the Australian charity 'Kids Help Line' were recruited. As illustrated in table 1 below, the study identified three domains on the basis of feedback from the participants.

The domain of 'privacy and emotionally safe environment' highlighted that the text environment was perceived as less intimidating or potentially confrontational to young people. The second domain highlights the benefits and challenges of text communication. A key challenge of this form of counselling was the concern that the counsellors may not be able to satisfactorily understand the young person's feelings. The authors also reported that a common theme was a difficulty in building a therapeutic alliance with the counsellor due to the lack of counsellor voice input or profile and difficulty in capturing counsellor moods through text. A number of advantages of the medium of communication were also found. These included that many online users felt comfortable with expressing their feelings through text and that the loss of some cues from the counsellor could even have beneficial effects, such as the client feeling that they were not 'bothering them' as they may feel when using the phone. The final domain identified was 'time'. This included references to a lack of time available for counselling when communicating online due to the waiting times to access the counselling and the issue of being 'forced' to end the session prematurely due to session time limits. However, it could also be said that a similar process occurs in face-to-face counselling sessions, which are generally time limited.

Table 1. Domains, domain categories and frequency of occurrence (adapted from King et al. 2006b, p. 171)

Domain	Domain categories and frequency* see note below	Illustrative quotes
Privacy and emotionally safe environment	Feeling of emotional exposure Environmental privacy when online- typical Feeling of control with text counselling- typical Suggestion of open chat group- typical	“if I felt embarrassed about talking in real life to a counsellor or something then I would use web counselling” “I have to wait until everyone leaves the house before using phone counselling” “just walk away for a bit and not feel as bad” “I always feel better if I talk to someone, especially someone who understands”
Communication through text	Issues with expression of emotion through text- general	“with web counselling you cannot communicate as easily as things like voices pitch/laughter/etc aren’t there”
Time	Insufficient time for counselling sessions- general Long waiting time while in the queue- general	“liked to talk to counsellor for longer” “wait is heaps worse online than it is on the phones”

**Note. Frequency; ‘general’ means the core ideas for each domain category appeared in all five focus groups, ‘typical’ means the core ideas for each domain category appeared in 2_4 focus groups, and ‘variant’ means the core ideas for each domain category appeared in only one focus group.*

A study by Bambling, King, Reid and Wegner (2008) investigated the experience of counsellors providing synchronous single-session counselling to young people. This qualitative study also utilised the Australian service Kid’s Help Line through the use of focus group methodology. The key themes identified supported the study by King et al. (2006b) commented on above. Counsellors identified pros and cons of utilising an online environment for providing counselling to young people. A key

theme identified was that of 'emotional safety due to reduced emotional proximity to the counsellor' (p. 112). Online counsellors reported that young peoples' anxiety about receiving counselling was less. This could make it easier for the young people to discuss problems and to be assertive. However, a negative side to this reduced emotional proximity was considered to be that it could be difficult for the online counsellor to assess severity of a presenting problem. Counsellors also reported that there were certain communication difficulties. It was highlighted, for example, that active listening skills were sometimes 'perceived as patronising' by young people and that the use of communication conventions developed in chat room environments resulted in some misunderstanding, which could indicate limitations because of the lack of face-to-face cues.

Other problems highlighted by Bambling et al. were that information gathering was time consuming. This was due to the sometimes inexplicable communication pauses in client text responses and as a result less was achieved in the time available. Counsellors also reported that there could be difficulties with maintaining empathy due to the speed of text exchange, suggesting that there was an important role for the speed that participants could type during online interactions.

A number of criticisms can be levied at the study by Bambling et al. (2008). Some of these are noted by the authors themselves. One might cite a limitation of the study that it is once again using the service 'Australian kid's helpline'. It would be interesting to compare how findings using the same or similar methods differed with alternate organisations and in alternate locations, cultures and ethnic backgrounds. A further criticism of the study relates to the issue of methodology. Bambling et al. used focus groups to investigate the experience of online counsellors. Despite Bambling et al.'s assertion that the 'high level of participation' of their focus groups members minimised the effect of dominant members, focus groups can be criticised for biasing the responses of participants. This is also something highlighted by other critics of focus group methodology. A number of limitations of focus groups are for example pointed out by Marks and Yardley (2004) who suggest that focus groups can be difficult to steer and control so that

time can be lost to irrelevant topics. They also consider how the skill of the moderator in phrasing questions along with the setting can impact responses and skew results. Bambling et al. also only base their findings on a single session. It could be argued that further research is needed to support their findings.

Further key studies that should be considered here are by Hanley (unpublished thesis, 2008 and preliminary findings published in Hanley, 2009). Hanley examined the quality of the working alliance in online counselling relationships with young people. Hanley's second research question outlined in his 2008 work is particularly relevant to this project. He asked 'what are the key features of the Therapeutic Alliance that young people report after experiencing online therapy?' (Hanley, 2008, p. 261). He employed a mixed method approach, which combined a self-report quantitative measure (the Therapeutic Alliance Quality Scale) and qualitative interviews with service users. Similarly to this project, Hanley employed the service Kooth to source the interviews with the young people. He concluded that the findings indicated that approximately three quarters of the service users experienced the alliance to be of a medium or high quality and interviews highlighted the importance of an appropriate 'match between client and service in the creation of a strong alliances' (Hanley, 2008, p. 8). Hanley's research is of particular interest to this study, partly because of the fact he investigated the therapeutic relationship between service users and therapists at Kooth. His work contributes to the understanding of the context and findings of this study because he highlights the perspective of the clients themselves who used Kooth. Hanley reported that key to the matching process included an initial engagement phase (related to gaining access to the service) and the development of rapport with the counsellor (related to consensus over key issues between the counsellor and the client). Grounded theory was used to analyse the qualitative interviews. Hanley (2008) identified a core category of 'Service-User Match' and three key Subcategories were defined. He considered that the concept of Service-User Match resonated through each of the subcategories and discussed how this highlighted the importance of creating an online counselling service which 'proved flexible enough to attract a wide variety of young people, whilst at the same time providing

support of a sufficient quality to maintain good relationships.’ (Hanley, 2008 p. 190) Each of the sub-categories identified explained these phenomena in more detail. The sub-category ‘Initial Engagement’ referred to service users’ first contact(s) with the service. Hanley considered that this related to the ‘specific needs and wants’ of the user, and access issues such as encountering technical problems, which needed to be considered when assessing if the service-user match might be appropriate.

The second sub-category he identified was ‘developing rapport’. He discussed how this related to the individual’s ‘competence at computer-mediated communication’ (p. 190) and considers how specific compensatory written techniques and non-textual events were identified within the interview transcripts. He suggested these have potential parallels to therapeutic meetings. Hanley discussed that understanding online conventions such as these could prove important for both the counsellor and client to develop a relationship online. In contrast, he highlights that negative experiences such as technical problems during counselling sessions could inhibit the development of the counselling relationship.

The final sub-category he defined was ‘establishing control’. This category focused upon the practical elements of the counselling relationship. Specifically, issues such as the intervention type, duration and regularity of meetings, and the way in which referrals to non-online services were handled proved significant within the interviews. Hanley considered that a breakdown in the relationship ‘may occur in instances where conflict occurred over the direction of these practical elements’ (p. 191).

In bringing together the interviewees’ evaluative comments about Kooth, Hanley considered that a number of key factors were apparent. He concluded that it was evident that although users reported successful relationships developed with their online counsellor, this did not always prove to be the case. Hanley also identified specific issues such as limits in service provision, technical problems and counsellor-client matching, which were important when considering the match between user and service.

In a follow up paper, Hanley (2009) discussed a number of key themes from the interviews with the young people to help identify what users found helpful or unhelpful in developing good quality online working alliances. He discussed five themes (Hanley, 2009, p. 264-265). The theme 'anonymity/public' emphasised how working online appeared to enable some individuals to 'talk about things that they would not ordinarily talk about'. This included subjects people may find embarrassing to discuss. However, this was contrasted with other individuals who emphasised how working online put their therapy in the public space and highlighted how one interviewee said they had to stop their online chat because they did not want others to know what they were doing. A second theme 'the right time and place' referred to the ease of access of online counselling which young people experienced as beneficial. 'Misinterpretation/empathic responses' referred to how communication skills proved an important factor in online therapy. This highlighted how young people at times felt their online counsellor did not understand the meanings the young people were trying to convey. However, others commented on how they felt their counsellor was 'deeply in tune' with their feelings emphasising the polarity of experiences related to this. The theme 'control trust' referred to how users felt a sense of control when communicating online which helped them judge whether or not they could trust their counsellor. This sense of control was discussed in the context of one user expressing their sense of satisfaction that they did not have to tell their counsellor if they were crying or not. The final theme of 'valuing service and counsellors' referred to explicit praise which some users expressed about Kooth.

Hanley's work has a number of limitations. He comments himself that in relation to the question of if there is a link between client reports of positive therapeutic outcomes and strong alliances, that 'the quality of the data collected during this study was not sufficient to draw any conclusions with regard to this question' (Hanley, 2008, p. 261). Other limitations of the research included a sex bias towards females so consulting specifically male users may reveal differences in the data. Hanley concluded that the qualitative data supported the developing body of

literature (quantitative and qualitative) reporting positive therapeutic outcomes. However, this could be investigated further. Another important area related to his findings is the phenomenological experience of therapists involved in online therapeutic relationships with young people which could be explored further.

In summary of the research on online therapy for young people it is clear that there are few studies which have investigated this in depth to date from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The research by King et al. (2006a) highlights interesting results, which contrast with the findings of work with young people in the face-to-face literature. They challenge the idea that the alliance is important in therapy with young people and suggested that text based methods of communicating are not as effective as verbal methods. However, there were a number of limitations to their work, which mean that further research is needed before any conclusions can be drawn. A further study by King et al. (2006b) utilised qualitative methodology to investigate the motives and experiences of young people choosing internet counselling over other forms of therapy. This study and the work by Bambling et al. (2008), which explored the experiences of counsellors providing single session synchronous counselling to young people found some overlapping themes but have a number of limitations, which emphasises the need for further work in this area. The studies discussed here represent key research in this area to date, but also highlight the sparse amount of literature available. The work by Hanley (2008, 2009) has close links with this research project. He investigated the therapeutic alliance through a mixed methods design employing interviews and statistical analysis of alliance measures with service users. The categories derived from his qualitative analysis are of particular interest to this research. However, although Hanley's research provides interesting results on the experiences of young people engaged with Kooth, it does not represent a phenomenological insight into experiences of online counsellors working for Kooth, which this study aims to investigate.

2.4 Summary of literature review

Online counselling is a topical area and there are both proponents and opponents to what appears to be a growing field. While online counselling appears to offer some interesting new and potentially important contributions to how therapy is delivered, there are also some areas of concern. Often quoted as a key advantage of this form of therapy are, for example, the convenience of being able to receive counselling via the internet, the ability to work with otherwise hard to reach individuals and the relative inexpensiveness of services. There are a number of other issues cited as potential disadvantages. These include issues such as maintenance of confidentiality in a digital environment, how risk is assessed and managed and how and if an adequate therapeutic relationship can be created and maintained online. In addition, there are areas which appear to offer both advantages and disadvantages. This includes the issue of anonymity where on the one hand this may be seen as an advantage, which helps people who are particularly shy or introverted to engage in therapy or avoid judgments or stereotypes to be formed on the basis of appearance; this may also be seen as a disadvantage due to the problems this may present for providing help for someone who is at risk. The anonymity that this form of therapy allows has also been invoked as a possible explanation for why some online therapists may not be following accepted practice when working online.

The above review also includes some key studies, which comment on the efficacy and effectiveness of online counselling. Outcome studies indicate that there is evidence that online counselling can be facilitative of positive therapeutic change. However, these studies have not been conducted on a comparable level to counterpart work in the face-to-face literature. What can be concluded from the research to date is that online counselling does appear to provide a means for therapeutic change, but that further research is needed.

Of critical importance to debates about online counselling has been the impact of verbal and non-verbal cues, which are typically not available in current popular

forms of providing online counselling such as asynchronous e-mail. This point has been key to consideration of how and if it is possible to form a therapeutic relationship online. The role of the therapeutic relationship in face-to-face contact has been proven to be integral to the process and outcome of therapy but again it is not possible to conclude with the same degree of certainty that this is also the case for those people who use online mediums. Research on processes in face-to-face therapy with young people highlights some interesting idiosyncratic elements that are of importance to the therapeutic relationship. There is less literature on the process of establishing a therapeutic relationship with young people online but studies suggest that there may be differences in some aspects which, deserve further attention and in particular there is a need to investigate this in different settings.

Young people today are a group that deserve special attention when considering online counselling because they are the first generation to develop alongside the internet from the beginning of their lives. They are therefore commonly more familiar with and more likely to use the internet in their everyday life. Although there are specific services, which have been set up to work with young people online both in the UK and abroad, there is little research investigating this. There are very few studies, which have examined the online therapeutic relationship between young people and therapist. A relevant piece of research investigating online therapists' perceptions of the therapeutic relationships with young people was conducted in Australia using focus group methodology, (Bambling et al., 2008) which identified a number of themes supporting a previous piece of research, (King et al., 2006b), which investigated young people's views on the therapeutic relationship. Hanley's work (2008, 2009) is also particularly important to this research project as this highlights some interesting findings in relation to both the potential to form good working alliances with young people and a number of themes which help understand the online therapeutic relationship from young peoples' perspective. However, although these works have aided understanding of this area, there is still a lack of studies investigating processes in this arena.

2.5 The research question

The research question for this project is derived from the literature review above. The details and further justification of the methodology is discussed further below. The above literature review highlights how, in some areas there are substantial quantities of research and in others very little. The research question has been constructed to reflect this gap. The discussion above under the heading of face-to-face psychotherapy research highlighted a debate between those proponents of 'common factors' and 'outcome' research. This project has aligned itself with those proponents of common factors research and aims to contribute to the research base on process. It is acknowledged above that the literature available on the therapeutic alliance does not provide for unanimous and conclusive verdict about how exactly this is defined. It has also been pointed out that the evidence heavily supports a need to explore the intricacies of the therapeutic process itself, particularly in relation to young people (e.g. Kazdin & Nock, 2003). Key to this project is the aim of exploring in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world in relation to the online therapeutic relationship and young people.

The question this project aims to investigate is:

How do online counsellors working with young people experience the therapeutic relationship in their online work?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction:

This section considers how and why the chosen methodology of IPA has been used. This includes considering the online interviews as the method of data collection. As such, ontological issues are discussed, which involves consideration of underlying conceptual systems of theories. It also raises the issue of epistemology or how

knowledge is obtained. In considering this, it is important to justify one's position with reference to a range of possible approaches, which could have been taken. Following this, the methodology will continue to describe how the study itself was carried out with the aim of providing a rationale and justification for the decisions of the researcher in determining the project's direction.

3.2 Qualitative research and counselling psychology

In the introduction to a series of articles published in the *Journal of counselling psychology* in 2005, Haverkamp et al. (2005) discuss that qualitative and mixed methods have been underutilised in counselling research, as most counselling psychologists have been trained in the positivist research paradigm and associated quantitative methods. However, qualitative methods have since gained more credibility and studies support that allied journals use these methods widely (eg. Hoyt & Bhati, 2007). Despite this, the debate about the use of qualitative research in counselling psychology and other allied disciplines continues. Franco, Friedman and Arons (2008), for example, highlight the divisiveness between humanistic and positive psychology in relation to the former's preference for qualitative methods in a human science paradigm and the latter's preference for quantitative methods in a positivistic paradigm. Their paper discusses how this debate still rages, reflecting a continuing epistemological divide. One can conclude from this that there is a broad spectrum representing a range of epistemological positions in counselling psychology and allied disciplines.

It is important to ask the question why a qualitative approach is relevant to the field of counselling psychology, as this project utilises a qualitative design. Three main reasons have been asserted for the compatibility of qualitative, including phenomenological methods in the field. Hoyt and Bhati (2007) discuss that some advocates of qualitative methods (e.g., Hoshmand, 1989) have asserted quantitative methods are static in a positivistic philosophy of science that is not suitable for studying some aspects of human experience. Key to this are the personal meanings associated with life events, which cannot be fully understood

through use of quantitative methodology alone. Second, phenomenological inquiry can be conducted with small samples and can provide rich idiographic descriptions of the participants' experiences. Using these methods is likely to be attractive to practitioners, who act as both researchers and the practical users of research. In turn, this advances the notion of the scientist–practitioner model (Heppner et al., 1992). Finally, phenomenological or ethnographic inquiry may be especially relevant to the study of rarely researched populations highlighting how this method is particularly relevant for this study when studies investigating the online counselling therapeutic relationship are still very much in their infancy. The appeal of a pluralistic approach utilising qualitative methods has increased as counselling psychologists have embraced the opportunity to study diverse populations and counselling individuals from varied cultural groups.

3.3 Phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and validity

3.3.1 Phenomenology

'Phenomenology' is a term, which encompasses both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches. It is beyond the scope of this work to give a detailed account of the intellectual origins of this approach (for further details on this the reader is referred to Halling & Nill, 1995; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The phenomenological movement was initiated by Edmond Husserl in 1936 and advanced further in 1970 as a radical new concept in philosophy. Husserl can be seen as broadening the concepts and methods of science at that time to include the study of consciousness. As commented by Finlay (2008), this was seen as profoundly influencing philosophy, other humanities, and the social sciences during the 20th century. Husserl developed scientific methods to assist psychological researchers in the investigation of human experience and behaviour. Finlay continues to discuss how, when phenomenology is applied to research it is the study of phenomena and the 'focus is on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness where the phenomenological researcher aims to provide a rich textured description of lived experience.' (p. 1)

Wertz (2005) highlights how there are many different versions of phenomenological analysis but that some common elements link all of these. He discusses how phenomenological methods are 'scientific by virtue of being methodical, systematic, critical, general, and potentially intersubjective' (p. 167). He continues that like all good science, they require critical thinking, creativity, and reflective decision making that gives rise to many procedural variations and innovations. Many different types of research participants, situations, forms of expression/description, analytic procedures, and ways of presenting findings have been used. Wertz cites Giorgi (1989) who has indicated several core phenomenological characteristics that hold across the variations of these psychological research methods: he describes these as 'descriptive, uses the phenomenological reductions, investigates the intentional relationship between persons and situations, and provides knowledge of psychological essences (that is, the structures of meaning imminent in human experience) through imaginative variation' (p. 168). Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) describe a similar process involved in the data analysis of a series of texts about participants' experiences of learning.

3.3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Edmond Husserl, (1859-1938) the founder of phenomenology proposed that concepts should be grounded in experience. Smith and Osborn (2003, p. 12) discuss how the core philosophical basis of Husserl's approach was a rejection of the presupposition that there is 'something behind or underlying or more fundamental than experience', which should be immediately sought. They highlight how phenomenology starts with the suspending or 'bracketing' of experience, which emphasises Husserl's emphasis on returning to 'the things themselves'.

The approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is phenomenological because it involves detailed exploration of what phenomenologists call the 'life world'. The life world comprises the world of objects around us as we perceive them and our experience of our self, body and

relationships. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) refer to this as 'the way a phenomenon appears in everyday life' (p. 28). Smith and Osbourne (2003) comment that this means an IPA approach attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event itself. However, the IPA approach also crucially emphasises that there is an active role for the researcher him/her self. The researcher's aims are, as Brocki and Wearden (2006) state to explore in detail the processes by which humans have 'interpreted and understood their world' (p. 88) by forming their own stories into a form, which makes sense for them. However, this process is complicated further by consideration of the researcher's own involvement in this process. Access to these interpretations depends on the researcher's own conceptions, which are in fact required in order to make sense of the other's personal world through a process of interpretation. Smith and Osbourne (2003, p.51) describe this as a 'double hermeneutic' or two stage process where the participants are trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world. IPA is also connected with theories of hermeneutics, which refers theories of interpretation. Smith and Osborn (2003) consider that IPA combines an 'empathic' hermeneutic with a 'questioning' hermeneutic so that IPA is concerned with understanding the participant's side but at the same time, asking critical questions of the texts from participants, such as 'is the participant saying something here that was not intended?'

While the researcher attempts to access the participant's 'life world' insofar as this is possible, IPA also acknowledges that access depends on and is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions as stated above. As pointed out by Brocki and Wearden (2006), the term 'interpretative phenomenological analysis' is therefore used to signal the dual aspects of the approach and the joint reflections of both participant and researcher form the analytic account produced.

3.3.3 Validity

The concept of validity in qualitative research is an issue, which has been discussed and debated for some time (see for example. Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Stiles 1993). The validity of an IPA study is based on the interpretations of the researcher him/herself and as such, it is important that these interpretations can be substantiated. Smith and Osborne (2003) highlight a paper by Yardley (2000), which they felt had led to a new 'maturity' in the discussion and believed they provide some useful guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative psychological research. Brocki and Wearden (2006, p. 98) discuss how Yardley (2000) argues that the notion of 'reliability' may be an inappropriate criteria against which to measure qualitative research if the purpose of the research is to offer just one of many possible interpretations. Brocki and Wearden comment that consideration of validity should be done in the context of IPA's recognition of the researcher's interactive and dynamic role. They consider that for those who question the objectivity of knowledge, the use of 'inter-rater reliability' measures merely produces an interpretation agreed by two people rather than functioning as a check of objectivity (Yardley, 2000). They also comment that the aim of validity checks in this context is to not prescribe to 'the singular true account', but to ensure the credibility of the final account and cite Osborn and Smith, (1998).

The first principle cited by Yardley is *sensitivity to context*. This principle includes a number of ways, in which the researcher can show sensitivity to the context of their research. Firstly, she highlights that this can be done through demonstrating an awareness of the existing literature and through this, providing a rationale for the study. This is done by discussing why the method of analysis is appropriate for the chosen research area and also through considering the data itself. Notably, she comments that this latter point may be evidenced through considering how well the transpiring arguments of the study are evidenced through the material from the participant's responses. In considering this point, this study has endeavoured to explain the reason for choosing the method of analysis in the preceding sections and also has evidenced each theme with quotations from participants. The themes

identified were considered again through re-reading of transcripts to ensure that identified themes had not been taken out of context. Within the principle of sensitivity to context, Yardley also highlighted the relationship between the participant and the researcher and the impact that this could have on the process of interview. She indicated that the author should reflect on how the expectations of participants may have affected the interview. This point is reflected on further in the following analysis and discussion.

The second principle cited by Yardley is *commitment, rigor, transparency and coherence*. The commitment of the researcher can be assessed through their prior engagement with research. The previous publication (Fletcher-Tomenius & Vossler, 2009) mentioned earlier is a sign that the researcher has been engaged in this field already. The rigor of the study refers to how appropriate the sample was to the question in hand. This research aimed to use a sample appropriate for the research questions and also ensured that the process of the research followed recommended IPA methodology. The transparency and coherence of the study has also been addressed through providing a full account of the methods and processes involved in conducting the research.

The third principle of Yardley's is *impact and importance*. This principle refers to a key test of the validity of the research, whether it actually tells us anything useful or important, or if it makes any difference. This research is aimed at enhancing understanding of an area which has previously received little attention, particularly in the field of counselling psychology and also addressing questions that are arising from a growing and expanding industry, which some have commented is not consistent with the evidence base underpinning it. This research aims to help address that imbalance.

Yin (1989) offers another important component of establishing the validity of IPA studies by suggesting that the researcher should ensure that the research is reported in such a way that others can follow the chain of evidence. He highlights how this includes making the interview schedule, audio recordings (if applicable)

and transcriptions available and other data involved in the project be made easily accessible. These aspects of this project are available for independent audit. A sample transcript is also included in appendix 3

3.4 Online research methodology

'The pond you fish in determines the fish you can catch' (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007, p. 295)

While the above section details the method of qualitative analysis, it does not discuss the issue of how the data is obtained. There are a number of diverse forms of data collection, which have their own advantages and disadvantages. There is not scope here to discuss each of these in turn, but the aim of this section is to identify some key advantages and disadvantages of using online methods in this study and to detail why this method was adopted. The quote above is an African proverb highlighted by the authors Suzuki et al. (2007). It emphasises how the context in which the work is conducted determines the outcomes, that are produced (at least to some extent) and thereby highlights the importance of understanding the method of data collection and how this could impact on the findings. In addition, some have commented on broader, cultural issues in research methodology. Travers (2009) discusses how it is important to view innovations in qualitative research with sceptical eyes highlighting how such research has marketed itself aggressively because of academic pressure and a competitive funding climate where there is a drive to demonstrate methodological innovation. Because of this drive the author suggests that there is a 'cultural problem' (p. 161) which means that there is a push for 'newness' in qualitative research methods. The same caution is emphasised here. It is important to consider that although using online methods may be a relatively new area for researchers in the field of counselling psychology, this does not mean that this should be considered superior to more conventional methods.

Researchers entering into the territory of online methods face a potential barrage of questions about the practical and ethical implications of doing this and about the quality of the data that can be collected. Kraut et al. (2004) for example report on how psychologists can observe 'new or rare phenomena online' and can do research on traditional psychological topics more efficiently, enabling them to 'expand the scale and scope' of their research. They also discuss however that these opportunities entail risk both to research quality and to human subjects (p. 105). This study, therefore had to consider the suitability of using online methods and whether there were other potentially more appropriate ways of collecting data (note that ethical issues are considered separately in the section below).

As discussed earlier, this research has been conducted with the help of the organisation Kooth, which provides online counselling for young people. This was a key consideration when deciding on the most appropriate method of data collection. It was early in the research design process that it became evident that analysis of the online therapeutic relationship could be facilitated through the use of an online environment. This was done for a number of key reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly the method of data collection is congruent with the subject matter that is being studied i.e the online relationship. Through conducting the interviews online it was considered that this would allow for personal reflections on the process of communicating and the process of developing a relationship, albeit a shorter term one than most online counsellors experience with their clients. In addition, this would involve the active role of the researcher, which is emphasised in IPA (Smith, 2003) during the process of the data collection. Secondly, it was considered that as the interviewees and the researcher were familiar with this method of communication, the method did not pose a technical challenge or the danger that it could not be used in the appropriate manner. Thirdly, the issue of practicality of carrying out the research was considered. Because of the nature of working online, Kooth counsellors are not all in one geographical location. As a result, interviews conducted face-to-face would raise practical difficulties in carrying out the research project in the allocated time frame. Finally, it was considered that conducting the research with an online methodology

would itself represent a potentially useful research finding. As commented by Suzuki et al. (2007, p. 295) counselling psychology researchers have 'underutilised' electronic means of collecting data. Therefore, it is arguably also a useful research endeavour to undertake the data collection using electronic means as this could provide useful information on how these approaches can be used in counselling psychology research.

There are numerous other advantages to conducting interviews online and as mentioned above also a number of potential disadvantages. James and Busher (2006) point to a number of these based on respondents views on taking part in e-mail based research.

They consider that advantages are that participants control when they can respond citing that it is at their 'own convenience and is less stressful to be able to answer at their own leisure' (although this could be argued to only be the case if using asynchronous methods). They also consider that more thoughtful/reflective answers are possible, which they consider is 'aided by being sent the questions one at a time, responses written not spoken and not responding straightaway.' (p. 407)

They cite disadvantages of the gap between sending questions, which led to 'discontinuous responses, participants forgot what had been said and difficulty getting clarifications of meaning of questions'. They also cite that administering email questions one a time led to 'loss of coherence and flow of thought, unpredictability and difficulty to resolve intended meanings'. Finally, they state that distractions and disturbances led to 'responses not being as focused as in face-to-face, losing threads of what the email interview was about and rapid responses'.

James and Busher's (2006) work highlights a number of advantages and disadvantages of online interviews, which indicate a range of issues to consider when interpreting and analysing the data. James and Busher for example comment that these aspects of the online interview may impact on the development of collaborative relationships with participants and they suggest that as a result,

researchers should 'think carefully about how they build relationships of trust' with participants they cannot see and may not even meet' (p. 417).

However, despite the potential limitations of the online interview, it could be concluded with Sturges and Hanrahan (2004, p. 116) who comment on a comparison of telephone interviews with face-to-face interviews that '...advances in technology shape the way we do research, and researchers need to consider how the technology fits in the lives of potential participants'. This emphasises the need to consider carefully if the method of data collection is one that is appropriate for the participants involved and the need to consider each research project individually with particular attention to the sample population which one is sampling from. It is considered here that benefits and relevance to the research project of the use of online methods for data collection outweigh potential disadvantages.

The brief section here on online research methodology introduces some key ideas and considerations to why this method has been chosen to gather the data. The discussion chapter considers this in more depth with reference to how the interviews were conducted, the conclusions the researcher arrived at and how this method impacted on the findings. Notably, and as discussed in more detail below, the interviews were conducted using synchronous techniques, which was also helpful for considering the process of how online counsellors at Kooth were communicating with their clients.

3.5 Epistemological position and methodological design

The epistemological position that has been taken in this research is determined by a number of factors. The literature review above highlights a gap in the research to date, leading to the research question. However, one could argue that the same question could be approached from a variety of perspectives and utilise a range of methodological tools. It is then clear that there are other factors at play in

determining the epistemological position. This is where the researcher's personal philosophy and professional training also impacted.

Consideration of issues of ontology and epistemology can be broad and wide. There is only scope here to discuss some of the central themes of relevance to this debate. Key to this is consideration of where this research sits in relation to realist and constructivist positions and other approaches, which might be considered as 'mid way' between these such as 'post-positivist' approaches.

Realism and constructivism are often depicted as conflicting doctrines in papers and texts discussing methodological approaches. Smith and Heshusius (1986), for example, comment that 'the claim of compatibility, let alone one of synthesis, cannot be sustained' (p. 6). Lincoln and Guba (2000) have also argued that the ontological basis of positivist and interpretivist approaches are fundamentally irreconcilable. However, other authors do not feel this is the case. Cupchik (2001) for example, considers that 'constructivist realism' is an alternative ontology that accommodates both positivism and constructivism and the methods they utilise.

A purely positivist approach would utilise quantifiable data in an attempt to obtain accurate information about an objective physical reality. This is based on the classic positivist 'hypothetico-deductive method', which states that through the use of objective methods such as statistics, observations can be empirically tested. However, postmodern critics suggest that eliminating subjectivity is impossible, (Gergen, 1985) which supports the constructivist argument. Winter (1996, p. 219) discusses how the psychological constructivist 'believes that people actively construct their worlds'. The aim of constructivist research is then to understand how the different meanings that people have in varying contexts impact on their understanding of their lives and the social processes surrounding this. As highlighted by Marks and Yardley (2004) rather than isolating variables and regarding human interpretations as 'bias', which obscures objective reality, constructivists seek to investigate how context and interpretation (including those of the researcher) influence our experience and understanding of the world. Thus,

the aim is not to identify universally applicable laws, but to develop insights, which are meaningful and useful.

This research utilises qualitative methodology. One may then argue that the research is most closely aligned with a constructivist approach and could suggest that on the basis of this there are certain epistemological assumptions underlying it. However, it is considered here that the project has also taken a pragmatist view which considers that:

‘All human enquiry involves the interpretation, intentions and values which constructivists regard as paramount, but must also necessarily be grounded in the empirical, embodied experience, which realists regard as fundamental.’ (Hickman & Alexander, 1998, p. 48)

This view is one that the researcher shares. The pragmatist utilises the approach which ‘works best’. (James, 1978). This is also an approach consistent with the philosophy of counselling psychology as discussed by Barkham (1996) who states within counselling psychology ‘the critical point for the research is to select the approach which is most appropriate to the question being asked’ (p. 23). He also states that this means engaging both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and, if necessary, utilising methodological pluralism. Although, the project utilises only a qualitative perspective, this does not signify a belief that there is only one ‘correct’ approach to research but simply that qualitative methods are the most appropriate for this research, which posits a phenomenological question requiring an inductive approach. Other research based on quantitative approaches has been discussed above and will also be discussed further below and is used to further inform the basis and findings of this project.

3.6 Ethics

The research study was run in accordance with British Psychological Society (BPS) guidelines on ethical research and consultation of other relevant works (BPS, 2001,

2004; Cheek, 2007; Hewson, 2003). The research was also scrutinised and passed by the London Metropolitan University ethics committee before data collection was commenced.

Key to conducting the research ethically was the issue of gaining informed consent from participants. This was done through the use of a participant information sheet (PIS, Appendix 2) and a consent form (Appendix 1). As emphasised by Garg (2008) the data in qualitative research can only be regarded as legitimate if the participants are aware of what the data will be used for and the purpose of the research. Therefore, it was important to ensure that participants were fully aware of the nature of the research, which was accomplished through the use of the PIS, the use of a consent form and giving the participants adequate time and opportunity to decide if they wished to participate and also to ask questions about the research. This was done through posting the PIS and consent form on Kooth's intranet site well before interviews took place to enable participants to have enough time to review details of the study. It was emphasised to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time should they so wish. The details of gaining consent are discussed in more detail under the 'procedure' section.

Confidentiality was maintained through highlighting to the participants that their names would be anonymised. It was also highlighted that no personally identifiable information of the clients they worked with would be asked for or should be disclosed.

The interviews were conducted through the service 'Skype' which utilises an encrypted line to ensure confidentiality. There are reviews of the security of Skype available (eg. Berson, 2005) which have concluded Skype is a 'secure system' for data transmission. The report by Berson highlights the measures which Skype has taken to protect users through attempting to attack the Skype key agreement protocol and not finding any weaknesses (see p. 8-10). It is of particular importance that many of the online counsellors working for Kooth also used Skype in their online communications with their clients. This meant that the participants were

both familiar with and confident in using Skype as the means to conduct the interviews. Further, it was highlighted in the PIS that although Skype had a good record for online privacy, it was not possible to say with 100% certainty that someone could not develop new technology to listen in to a conversation should they so wish. However, this was thought akin to the risk that one cannot also say with 100% certainty that no one may attempt to listen in to a face-to-face conversation (through for example surveillance devices or listening at doors).

3.7 Participants

IPA studies aim to examine in detail the perceptions and understandings of a small sample size through the detailed analysis of individual transcripts. This process is one that is described as an 'ideographic' mode of enquiry. Smith (2003, p. 54) highlights how this method of enquiry involves the examination of individual case studies, which means that it is possible to make specific statements about those individual participants involved. However, to do this it is necessary to find a fairly homogenous sample. This is described as 'purposive sampling'. Suzuki et al. (2007, p. 299) discuss how the literature points to how qualitative studies are usually purposive rather than random and that the selected sample is the one from which most can be learnt regarding the research questions(s) (they cite for example Miles & Huberman, 1994). They discuss how Miles and Huberman (1994) list 16 strategies for purposive sampling in qualitative inquiry, including homogenous sampling (a sample with similar or shared characteristics, which focuses, reduces, simplifies, and helps to facilitate group interviewing); convenience sampling (a sample that is readily available and saves time, money, and effort, but whose availability sometimes comes at the expense of diversity and credibility). This study utilised homogenous sampling, the two key homogenous characteristics being that the sample all worked for the same organisation and all worked with young people online. However, convenience sampling was also employed as the sample was also based on consideration of what could be achieved in the time frame. As stated earlier, another way of carrying out this study would have been to conduct the interviews face-to-face. This was not done for the key reasons that it was thought

the process of conducting the interviews online could yield useful reflections on this process. This was also not done because the practicalities of conducting the data collection in this way would have presented difficulties, due to online counsellors being dispersed over a wide geographical area.

In total, eight participants were recruited from Kooth. Smith and Osborn (2003) comment that IPA studies have been conducted with as few as one participant and as many as fifteen. All the interviewees were counsellors accredited with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), except for one who was near the end of training and all had worked therapeutically with young people online. The participants were not intended to be representative of all online counsellors. It was intended that they contribute their unique experiences of the therapeutic relationship with young people in an online environment. Participants were asked if they could give some brief background details about themselves, including details of their work with Kooth and if they had particular areas of interest in their therapeutic work. All counsellors working for Kooth had in-house training when they began their work, but they had different backgrounds and interests. Below is a table outlining some brief background details of each of the participants in response to a standard question, which was asked at the beginning of the interview.

Table 2 outlining brief background details of interviewees

Name	Brief background details about the interviewees.
Kim	Kim said she had been counselling young people online and face-to-face for an 'extensive' period . She was trained in a person-centred approach and had done additional training in other areas including transactional analysis.
John	John said he had been working for Kooth for about 3 years and that prior to this he was a face-to-face counsellor in a school, worked as counsellor for the NHS and privately. He had a generic counselling qualification.
Claire	Claire said she had worked for Kooth for 3 to 4 years. She said she drew on numerous models of therapy in her online work but that she qualified in person centred counselling. She also said that she had completed further training in CBT and was a neuro linguistic programming practitioner. She said that she also used solution focussed approaches.
Linda	Linda said that she also had a post graduate certificate in play therapy and was perhaps most oriented towards a humanistic model of working but that she used many concepts, which she learnt from play therapy in her work.
Debbie	Debbie said she was still a trainee counsellor who was coming to the end of her training. She said that she had worked with young people at a college in face-to-face counselling, worked for a telephone counselling service . She said that her training was in integrative counselling.
Jake	Jake said that he had been working with Kooth for just under a year. He said his diploma was in gestalt counselling with 'an integrative bent' and that he was currently doing a Masters in integrative counselling.
Jane	Jane said that she had been a qualified counsellor for about 17 years and worked with young people for about 9 years. She said that she was largely self employed before beginning working with Kooth about year ago. She said that she did not consider herself to have any particular specialism's but said that young people were a client group of particular interest.
Katie	Katie said she had been counselling for 10 years mostly in primary care with adults and working with young people in schools and other face-to-face agencies. She said that she had been working with Kooth for 5 years and worked about 20 hours a week with the young people online. She said that she had a diploma in integrative counselling and a particular interest in transactional analysis.

The names of the interviewees have been anonymised but, for the purpose of the write up of the research, they have been given the pseudonyms above and in the discussion which follows.

3.8. Materials and apparatus

The following materials and apparatus were used for conducting the study:

Two computers with internet connectivity (one backup computer, which was not used).

Participant information sheet

Consent form

Interview schedule

Software: Max QDA qualitative data analysis programme.

Endnote referencing software

Microsoft Word

Mozilla Firefox

3.9 Procedure and approach to analysis

Following ethics approval through London Metropolitan University, participants were recruited via initial e-mail contact to ask if they would be interested in finding out further details of the study. As part of this they were also given details of where they could find the participant information sheet on the Kooth intranet. If, after reading this, they expressed that they were keen to participate, a date was arranged when the interview could take place. Before the interview occurred, participants were asked to sign a consent form. The signed electronic consent form had to be returned to the researcher by email before the interview began. The details of confidentiality as set out in the participant information sheet were highlighted and it was also made clear that the interviews would be recorded, anonymised and transcribed. Kooth posted the participant information sheet and consent form on their intranet so that their counsellors could view this easily and well in advance. Participants were also told that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they so wished.

The interviews were conducted through Skype (details of ethical and confidentiality issues around this are described above). Skype is a freely available communication tool, which can be easily downloaded from the internet and installed (<http://www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/>). Skype enables video, text or telephone calls between users. For the purpose of this study, Skype was used for the exchange of 'instant' text because counsellors at Kooth mainly use 'instant messaging' for communication with their users.

Interviews lasted no less than an hour and no more than an hour and three quarters. As discussed above IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals make sense of their personal and social world. Research questions in IPA projects are therefore often framed broadly and openly (Willig, 2008). The interview schedule (Appendix 3) was used but, in keeping with the IPA approach, this was used flexibly in order to allow new avenues to be explored with the aim of letting the participants tell their own story and to allow them the opportunity to express their personal psychological experience of the relationship with young people online. Questions were adapted in response to participants' responses and the schedule was not followed in the same order or the questions asked in the same way. Since phenomenological research requires the researcher to enter the life world of the research participant, it is extremely important that the questions posed to the participant are open-ended and non-directive. Their sole purpose is to provide participants with an opportunity to share their personal experience of the phenomenon under investigation with the researcher. Smith (1995) describes the process in more detail. It is noted that focused and/or specific questions should be used to encourage participants to elaborate rather than to check whether they agree or disagree with particular claims or statements. It was also important for the researcher to document his own thoughts and feelings on the process of the interview. For this reason an additional window was open in the program Microsoft Word which allowed him to document this as the interview progressed.

At the end of the interview, participants were de-briefed, which included asking them if they had any queries or questions. They were also given the opportunity to leave any comments or thoughts they may have about the interview in a separate asynchronous chat area open only to all interviewees and the researcher, accessed through a secure connection on the Kooth website. However, although this was offered to the participants, they did not use this following their interviews. Analysis followed in a similar way to that described by Osborn and Smith (1998) and (Willig, 2008). The analysis was conducted through the use of the programme Max QDA qualitative data analysis software. The reason for using Max QDA is to help manage the large amount of data, which is produced through the interviews. Details of how this was used are discussed further below:

1. After the first interview, the transcriptions were read. Each turn of the researcher and participant was numbered. During the transcription, notes were added, referring to pauses that may have occurred and any initial observations about the data. Smith (2003) recommended initially that this was done through making notes in the left hand margin of the text. As the research was conducted online, this was done by having another window open in Word where the researcher could make his notes.
2. The transcript was read again. Notes were made of anything significant which was said by the participant. The notes were re-read and initial notes expanded to form emerging themes. Willig (2008) comments that theme titles are conceptual and they should capture something about the essential quality of what is represented by the text. This was done using the programme 'Max QDA', which allows for themes (decided by the researcher) to be marked in the text, memos assigned (which may detail anything of interest or unusual in the theme) and later allows for these themes to be isolated and brought up in one 'retrieval window' for ease of analysis.

3. Once the transcript had been thoroughly analysed, connections were made between emerging themes and similar ones were grouped together. This stage involved an attempt to introduce structure into the analysis. The researcher considers how the themes relate to one another. Some of these form natural clusters of concepts that share meanings or references, and others are characterized by hierarchical relationships with one another.
4. A thematic table was then constructed with excerpts from the participants' responses to illustrate and substantiate them. The summary table only included those themes that captured something about the quality of the participants' experience of the phenomenon. The main themes were selected, based on their relevance to the research question and the richness of the evidence from the transcripts. This meant that some of the themes generated during the second stage were not used. These may be themes that are not well-represented within the text or which were marginal to the issues being investigated. The researcher's decision about which themes should be retained and which should be abandoned was inevitably influenced by his interests, but this is discussed through the process of analysis and the later discussion section. It is also noted that after the themes had been selected and discussed, the researcher's two supervisors commented on the work and made suggestions about which of these themes were considered more or less helpful for answering the research question.

The researcher's own interpretive engagement with the text was central to the research process. His research interests led him to ask certain questions, which inevitably took the analytic process in a particular direction. Consequently, it is not claimed that this IPA study represents a definitive or 'true' representation of participants' accounts but a 'co-construction between the researcher and the participant, which emerges from the participants' and researcher's engagement with the data (Smith, 1998 cited by Willig, 2008). This is reflected on and discussed later in the project.

It is important to consider which approach within the field of qualitative research methodology would be best suited to the research question. Within qualitative analysis are a range of approaches and it is not possible here to discuss each of these. The selection of IPA as the method of analysis as opposed to other qualitative methods such as grounded theory or discourse analysis is best discussed in the context of ontological and epistemological considerations and it has been explained above in the section on epistemological position and description of methodological design why IPA is appropriate method. However, this does not mean that other methods could not have also been used but this would reflect the particular ontological leaning of the researcher. As discussed by Morrow (2007) 'designs based on an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm are particularly appropriate to counselling psychology because of the constructivist nature of psychotherapy' (213). Morrow also discusses that consensual qualitative research has components of an interpretivist constructivist paradigm, and 'grounded theory methods originated in a constructivist frame and are typically conducted within this paradigm'. In addition, Morrow also consider that phenomenology (which may be considered a subset of interpretivism-constructivism) is, in addition to being a sub paradigm, a research design frequently used by counselling psychology researchers (e.g., Creswell, 1998; Wertz, 2005).

3.10. Summary

This chapter has outlined the key elements of the research design for this project. It began by discussing the epistemological position of the researcher highlighting that while a pragmatic approach to research is taken, there are some key constructivist underpinnings relating to the researcher's professional background and personal ideology. The constructivist seeks to understand the different meanings that people have in varying contexts and emphasises that there can be 'multiple truths' depending on how the individual constructs their world. A pragmatic stance to the research was also taken, which meant that the researcher considered how best to answer the research question given the nature of the question and the practicalities

surrounding the research. This was also a factor, which led to an approach utilising qualitative methodology to analyse online interviews. It was considered that because the research methods were congruent with the research question and the methods allowed for the researcher to comment on his personal experience of a text based synchronous online interviews with the participants, online interviews utilising an interpretative phenomenological approach was the most appropriate way to investigate the research question.

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter details the main themes and their sub-themes in turn. Each theme is discussed with direct reference to quotations taken from the interviews with the eight participants. The themes often interrelate and should not be viewed as discrete and independent from each other. Where the interviewer and the participant are quoted, they can be discerned from each other by the preface 'I' for interviewer and 'P' for participant.

The thematic table (appendix 5) illustrates the themes and sub-themes, which were found from analysis of the interviews conducted, using the process outlined in the methodology. Willig (2008) comments that more recent qualitative researchers (eg. Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith 2004) have moved beyond stopping their analysis when the table of master themes is constructed. She discusses that whereas the initial stage to the analysis involves a more descriptive, empathic' stage, which aims to allow the researcher to enter the participant's world, the second critically interrogates the participant's account in order to gain further insight into its nature, meaning and origin. The second level of interpretation, therefore, takes the researcher beyond the participant's own words and understanding(s). Where this has been done below it is highlighted that this is more tentative and speculative. It is also emphasised that such interpretations cannot be held rigidly as they are partly dependent on the researcher's subjective understanding.

Below is a thematic overview which has been constructed to aid the reader to see how the sub-themes relate to each super-ordinate theme. The thematic overview provides details of all of the themes and sub-themes, which were found as a result of the interviews with the eight online counsellors. It is considered that some of are of more interest than others due to their relevance to the research question. However, where sub-themes have not been included, this has been justified in the text.

4.1 Thematic Overview

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF WORKING ONLINE

Flexibility

Able to re-read and re-type text and limited time

Familiarity for young people

Challenges and limitations

Can be interferences/distractions/easy to leave

Isolating for the counsellor/ need for supervision

Lack of typical cues and the need for reassurance

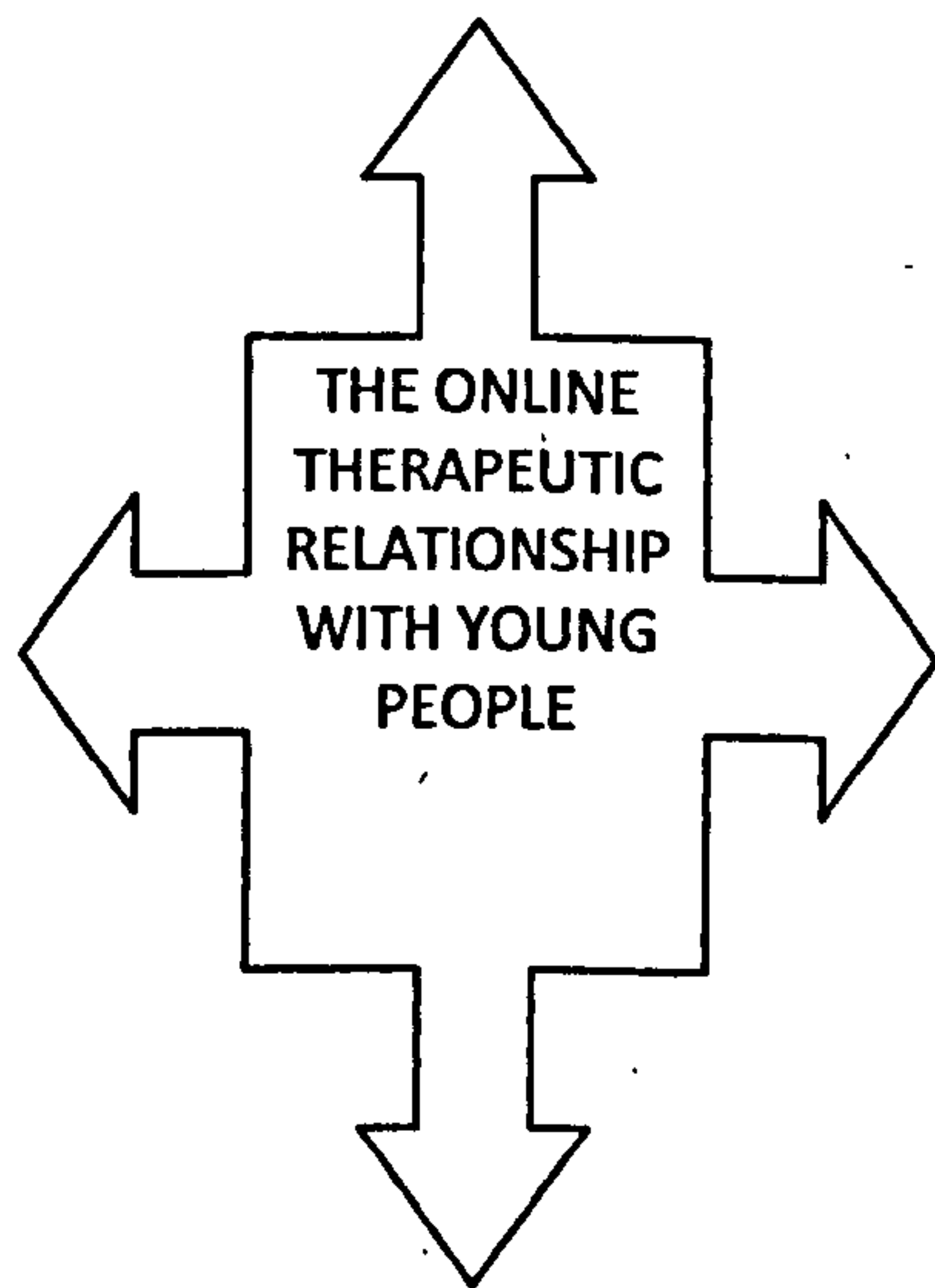
Can be more difficult and slower to form online relationships

Technical failure and the need for computer literacy

THE VALIDITY OF ONLINE COUNSELLING AND SIMILARITIES WITH FACE-TO-FACE COUNSELLING.

Perceived limitations
or differences not
detrimental

The same or better
than face-to-face



ANONYMITY AND EMPOWERMENT

Maintains boundaries
Importance of others not
finding out
Enables client's to engage
and not engage
No prejudice
Empowerment and control
Important for self
conscious/embarrassed
young people

ADAPTING METHODS TO THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Writing/typing skills important

More didactic and structured

Need to adapt to age and characteristics of young people

Precision of words/ sentence structure important

Emoticons/visual techniques important

4.2 Theme 1: Practical implications of working online

This theme highlights how online counsellors referred to a number of practical implications of working therapeutically online with young people, which impacted on the therapeutic relationship in numerous ways. Initially, there were many sub-themes identified under this super-ordinate theme. The most relevant themes were selected to give the reader an accurate overview of the topics, which arose in the process of the interviews. However, as some of these sub-themes were considered less relevant to the research question, they have not been discussed to the same extent as others or a decision was made not to include them in the write up. For example, it is noted that there was a sub-theme 'Potential to use as steppingstone/need to involve other service' which was excluded from the write up because it was not thought that there was adequate representation of this throughout the text. Although two interviewees discussed this, this sub-theme was considered more relevant to service related issues as opposed to the issues relevant to the therapeutic relationship and so has not been included. This illustrates how the final themes were selected for analysis and discussion.

Flexibility

The sub-theme 'flexibility' highlighted how the practical implications of using the internet as the medium to conduct counselling sessions impacted in numerous ways on the therapeutic relationship. Claire comments:

'hmmm it's just different, i love face2face with yp, but i love this too, because u still build up ur relationship, i think that in face2face i wouldn't have the flexibility i have on here as i have a few long term clients i have worked with, for a while now, where as there would be more pressure to end in face2face'. Claire (Turn 115)

Claire highlights how there is a flexibility, which she would not experience face-to-face and this meant that she felt able to work with clients for a longer period.

Interestingly, she also refers to there being more 'pressure' if working for a face-to-face counselling service. It is queried here if her feeling of there being less pressure is related to her relative anonymity online compared to face-to-face so this quotation has overlaps with the theme of anonymity discussed further below. Later, Claire explained that due to service pressures, working with clients over longer periods was not always possible and that procedures at Kooth were being 'tightened up'. Her comment that Kooth were tightening up on working over longer periods with clients suggests that the same service pressures are perhaps also coming to bear on online counsellors as face-to-face counsellors. Other counsellors highlighted how the flexibility of working online impacted on the speed the therapeutic relationships developed. Linda comments:

'I guess a lot depends on the frequency of contact - i.e some yp come on daily, others only very rarely - but maybe it's more to do with the use of text, some will tell you a lot, almost not waiting for responses - and others will say very little, so it takes longer to get a feel for them' Linda (Turn 30)

Linda discusses how the flexibility, which working online affords, means that young peoples' frequency of contact varies and this can result in it taking longer to 'get a feel' for them. It seems that she is referring to the ability to develop rapport with the young person, although she also commented that young people can be 'very open' and it can feel 'very quick' to engage them. This comment also related to the sub-theme 'can be more difficult/slower to form online relationships' and highlights that the speed of development of the therapeutic relationship may vary. This is commented on further below.

Able to re-read and re-type text and the sub them of limited time

The quote below from John highlights how the ability to re-read the text allows the counsellor to provide a concise response, which he regards as 'vital'. It also highlights how some people use more than just 'messaging' to communicate and may use for example telephone contact or video conferencing. It is suggested here

that if one only uses text for communication, the text itself takes on a new level of importance. Linda also discusses the importance of being able to re-read and re-type text:

'..for those who just use messaging its vital that the reply u send is as concise as poss. It may take a few re-writes before I send to make sure.' John (Turn 34)

'an example might be someone who deletes and rewrites their reply a few times, some will just send the 'correct' reply - whereas others will rewrite it and send each one - or others send the 'correct' one and then tell me they had trouble knowing how to say that - that they needed to rewrite it and rewrite it'.Linda (Turn 41)

The above quote describes how young people can use the medium of communication to interact in different ways with their counsellor, depending on their individual style. This is also related to the above theme of 'flexibility', indicating that the online medium does offer a different style of flexibility in communication that would not be available in the face-to-face environment.

Jake comments on how the online interview with him reflected elements of the online counselling relationship:

'Absolutely - Like u have been doing - we read back over what has been said, and that encourages fact verifying. BUT at same time - we do spend a lot of time building rapportI think the pressure u may have felt is perhaps more pronounced cos u KNOW this is last one. But yes, it makes u v careful with interventions, which is no bad thing. I have become better f2f counsellor since working online, no doubt.' Jake (Turn 67-68)

This quote highlights how it was important for me to have conducted the interviews online. It allowed me to reflect on the process of communicating with the

participants and this can be seen as mirroring aspects of the relationship that is formed between online counsellor and client. The quote from Jake highlights how there was a pressure to make each written word 'count'. This was felt by the interviewer who (as Jake highlighted) 'knew' this was the only chance he would get to speak to Jake and so was sensitive to ensure that he had worded his questions appropriately. Interestingly, Jake felt that he had become a better face-to-face counsellor because of the skills he developed as a result of having to be very careful with each intervention when online. This suggests that a deep level of processing is occurring through the critical analysis of one's own text during online communication. This is something supported by other authors. Cook and Doyle (2002, p. 102) for example commented on how 'Participants appreciated the ability to re-read messages from therapists and noted that this allowed for greater cognitive processing than verbal communication'.

Related to the theme discussing the importance of being able to re-read or re-write text, Jake comments that there is a 'pressure' because of the limited time highlighting that this was evident during his interview. However, this probably also relates to why he felt it was 'no bad thing' that he was careful with each intervention and that this may have contributed to his sense that he had as a result become a better face-to-face counsellor.

'In what i have experienced, when working f2f with Uni students, i certainly feel less pressure of time. And as has been demonstrated in this interview, u dont get many chances do u? How few back and forth interactions compared to f2f, so there is a pressure there.' (Jake, turn 63-64).

Familiar for young people

Participants highlighted how it was significant that the medium of communication was something that young people were familiar with. Importantly, because young people are experienced in the use of the internet and chat rooms, this meant that seeing an online counsellor was perceived as 'familiar'. This sub-theme also relates

to the sub-themes of 'enable client to engage' and 'empowerment' under the theme of 'anonymity'. These comments also relate to the work by Vossler and Hanley (2010, p. 4) who consider that the attractiveness of counselling via the Internet can be partly explained by the fact that young people are embracing and taking advantage of technological developments.

'For YP it may have similarities if they use msn to talk to friends' (Jake, Turn 32)

'..the medium of therapy is a 'familiar' one to them - in that its using a computer'. (John, Turn 53)

Although young people are familiar with the internet, they were not so familiar with online counselling. Interestingly, Claire comments how it can be 'confusing' for young people because Kooth is also advertised as an 'advice' site. This suggests that young people may be beginning their online therapy with certain assumptions and an element of uncertainty. Kim discusses this and suggests this is why the early stage of the relationship involves a degree of education about what online counselling is. She also describes how a key aim of Kooth is to help remove barriers to getting support and that this also emphasises the educative role.

'they don't always quite understand what counselling is, and we are advertised as an advice site too, so it gets a little confusing for them sometimes' (Claire, turn 215-216)

'well the point of Kooth is to make getting support easy and to remove barriers. It's really a process of education as it is face-to-face. You can't expect that young people will know what counselling is and how it works....so you have to 'show' them as well as 'tell' them...' (Kim, turn 34).

Vossler and Hanley (2010, p. 5) comment that a major aim of Kooth is to 'increase access to individuals who would not ordinarily access therapeutic services'. They

discuss that young people are able to use the service without providing any identifiable material meaning that they can self-refer. This may partly explain why there is uncertainty about the online service. If they had been referred to Kooth, one would expect that they may have a better understanding of the services Kooth provides.

Challenges and limitations

This sub-theme of practical implications of working online has a number of its own sub-ordinate themes, which highlight numerous specifically challenging aspects online counsellors commented on, which could impact on the therapeutic relationship with the young person.

Technical Failure and the need for computer literacy and skills

Linda and the interviewer made the following exchange (turn 70-73):

P: 'I guess internet connection can be a pain in the arse if its bad, it can lead to a lot of frustration on the part of both therapist and client and get in the way - also I imagine if the therapist or the client were not particularly at home with computers it would have an impact'.

I: 'is it quite common to experience internet connection problems?'

P: 'it can be - not so much lately - but we did have a spate where a lot of people from one area - had bad connections due to all using the same school computers which only had dial up'

P: 'but as technology advances it becomes less'

The above quotations highlight how technical failure can lead to a sense of frustration, which as Linda comments, can 'get in the way'. I also noticed in myself a sense of frustration and a degree of anxiety due to technical failure during the interview with Debbie (Turn 23):

I: 'I should just add that for some reason I can't see the pen on the top right of the screen so if I type before you finish I don't mean to be rude. Not sure why I can't see it though.'

The above quote highlights how I could not see a graphic image of a pen, which Skype presents on the screen when the other person is typing. It was found that without this image, it was impossible to know if the interviewee was composing their next message and therefore it was possible to interrupt with another question before they had finished answering or to wait too long before asking the next question. I comment that I don't 'mean to be rude', highlighting that I feel a degree of concern that my online behaviour could be interpreted in an unintentional way. This is interesting, because it is likely to be representative of how online clients or counsellors may also feel during online communications, particularly if they similarly lack appropriate visual cues, which the software would normally provide.

'you need to have good, quick keyboard skills and understand simple things like what to do if you lose connection etc'. (Jane, turn 99)

Participants highlighted how there was a need for computer literacy in addition to good typing/writing skills (a further sub-theme discussed below). Without such skills, it is likely that counsellor and client may experience a sense of frustration or experience practical difficulties, as Jane comments there is a need for therapists to:

'understand simple things like what to do if you lose connection etc' Jane (turn 99)

It is interesting that Jane uses the term 'simple' when she is discussing that it is important to understand how to manage technical difficulties. This suggests that she considers there is a minimum level of computer literacy, which is expected and required of online counsellors. Similarly, Haberstroh et al. (2007, p. 279) also comment on how technical skills are important and suggest that 'perhaps, as part of standard intake procedures, online counsellors could provide an assessment of

technical skills and offer self-paced online tutorials to educate potential clients about the process of Internet counselling.'

Can be interferences/distractions/easy to leave

In the quotation below, Katie explains how she feels it is more difficult for the young person to walk out face-to-face but when online, the young person can easily leave the chat room. This has clear associations with the theme on anonymity and empowerment and the sub-theme 'enables clients to not engage'. This is likely to be related to the issues Debbie raises in the quote underneath Katie's where she highlights how it is easy for the young person to 'disappear' and do 'other things'. Other counsellors also discussed how they had some concerns that young people may be having several conversations at once when working with them online. This suggests that young people may be more easily distracted when working therapeutically online than they would be face-to-face and that could be particularly important for the development of the therapeutic relationship. Davis et al. (2004, p. 950) comment that online interaction is not easily 'repaired' if ambiguity or other distractions arise.' Haberstoh et al. (2007, p. 278) also comment that in their study 'although communicating from a personal space was seen as safe, and potentially offered unique clinical opportunities, distractions could occur, reducing the client's full attention to the session.' It is likely however, that how distracted a young person may be will depend on a variety of factors, not least the therapeutic relationship they have established with their online counsellor, but this does highlight an important potential limitation of therapy conducted through the online medium.

'somehow, in the same room it seems easier to communicate I think...and the fact that the young person has 'arrived' and attended their appointment and is in the room with you, gives you more chance to build relationship...its harder for a young person to walk out of f2f than it is to just leave the chat room' (Katie, turn 60).

'P: they can disappear and myt be doing a lot of things at the same time as talking to us, like talking on msn. if there are big gaps i tend to ask if it's difficult to talk for any reason.

P: basically sometimes that they myt not engage cos they're doing other things

I: How might that impact on your relationship - if they are doing other things?

P: harder to work with them. can be frustrating for me.' (Debbie, turn 81-85)

Lack of typical cues and need for reassurance

In the first quotation below, Katie discusses how she feels developing the online therapeutic relationship is more difficult online than it is face-to-face. She says that as a result, it can take longer. This is contrary to other quotes, which have referred to the relationship developing more quickly, partly due to the role of anonymity. This suggests that the issue of the speed of the development of the relationship is more complex and may depend on a variety of interpersonal factors relating to both client and therapist.

'It's more difficult to build a relationship on line than face-to-face...it takes longer I think and requires more patience! There are less clues...we are deprived of body language, facial expression and need to check stuff out more' (Katie, turn 52)

I: that's an interesting point about being seen, being important. Why do you think that would be important for the YP?

P: to be validated as normal, as OK.

P: But as you know, recovery from traumas such as sexual abuse takes time

I: Does that mean that without this, the YP might not feel these things?

P: no...not necessarily...because the counsellor will work with the young person, set tasks on how to start changing their perceptions of themselves

and this is around doing real things in their physical environment. (Kim, turn 93-97)

The series of exchanges above with Kim focuses on the interviewee's experience of how being seen face-to-face can be important to help the young person's sense of validation. Kim suggests that although this could be a difficulty when working online, the young person can still be helped to feel validated through aiding them with building 'real' (face-to-face) activities in addition to working therapeutically online. While she suggests that this presents challenges, she also suggests these challenges can be met through building activities outside of therapeutic contact. Thus, this sub-theme overlaps with the theme 'the need to adapt methods to the online environment'.

'when they cannot see me, I wonder sometimes if they think I'm just sat there twiddling my thumbs and not really wanting them to engage'. (Jane, turn 54-55)

Jane highlights how she is uncertain if her clients always know she is engaged in the process of their therapy. She refers to the lack of visual cues, which she feels can result in her client not feeling re-assured they are being listened to. The quote also highlights her sense of anxiety during the online interaction. This could suggest further training needs, but Jane did report that she had 9 years experience of working with young people and had been qualified for 17 years, suggesting that she was an experienced therapist. Her comment may also be representative of a process of reflective practice, which she is continuing during the process of the interview.

'in f2f if a client has trouble saying something you maybe will have a clue why - or at least that they did, a pause will also have visual clues with it, and you can ask if it seems appropriate - whereas online its sometimes more difficult to tell - at least at first - it could be their connection is slow, or they

type slow, or they are doing something else - so you are not as able to reflect on it sometimes'. (Linda, turn 57)

Similarly, Linda also discusses how it can be easier to judge the appropriateness of making a comment when face-to-face with a client but when online, this is more difficult because of the lack of typical cues. She also highlights how a gap in the conversation could be due to numerous factors, which creates a sense of uncertainty about the other. She gives the example of how technical failure could impact on this or how the other person could be doing something else without her knowing, which relates to sub-theme one under this super-ordinate theme.

Through the process of conducting the interviews, I also noticed that I asked interviewees for re-assurance, particularly if there was technical difficulty such as when I could not see the graphical indication of a pen, which indicates the other person is typing as discussed above in the conversation with Debbie (turn 23).

Can be more difficult and slower to form online relationships

Katie highlights how she feels it is more difficult to build relationships online than face-to-face, saying that it is more time consuming and requires patience. This suggests that it can potentially be frustrating for Katie, which could also impact on the therapeutic relationship.

'It's more difficult to build a relationship on line than face-to-face...it takes longer I think and requires more patience! There are less clues...we are deprived of body language, facial expression and need to check stuff out more' (Katie, turn 29)

'i do get sense that in f2f, it may be easier to secure attachment. Whereas online, there is freedom to NOT meet. Like i said at beginning - to coexist in this cyberspace, without personality almost. But i think that has potential dangers. And is ultimately less satisfying - i don't enjoy being automated in that way, but inevitably it is a large part of our work cos that's what YP

come on for - to avoid the complicity of f2f contact. We have to struggle with that problem all the time - it is not ok for YP to use online as avoidance of f2f contact - so our job must be in some way to facilitate that. But inevitably sometimes we don't.'(John, turn 33)

John comments that he feels 'secure attachment' to the counsellor may be more easily obtained in face-to-face contact. He discusses how this is related to young people wanting to avoid the 'complicity' of face-to-face contact. This is related to the theme of 'enables client not to engage' under 'anonymity and empowerment'. He highlights how young people are empowered through their 'freedom not to meet' but expresses a dissatisfaction at how he sometimes feels he can 'coexist... without personality almost.' John emphasises that his job is to try and overcome this through facilitating young people's engagement in face-to-face contact, but acknowledges that this is not always possible.

John comments on how there can be problems with interpretation from the counsellor's and the young person's perspective. In the following quote, John discusses how young people may see the responses of the online counsellor as 'written in stone', which relates also to the sub-theme regarding the precision of words as important. However, his quote here emphasises how using only text as the means to communicate results in the possibility that a comment may be misinterpreted or meaning could be lost.

'I: You said that YP may see the response as 'written in stone'. Do you know why that is?

P: cuz if they 'interpret' something in the msg that was not my intention - they may feel that I haven't grasped what they ave said in their initial msg or they mis-interpret my reply.' (John, turn 35- 36)

'..some will present in each chat seeming very similar types of use of language, text etc - and others will present very differently from one chat to another' (Linda, turn 31)

Linda highlights how young people can present differently from one chat to another suggesting that she does not always perceive continuity in her therapy sessions. This may relate to a similar issue raised by Jane that sometimes intended meaning can be lost in the interpretation. She suggests in the quote below that subtleties in meaning can get lost due to the lack of body language:

'subtleties can be lost in online work, because i suppose we are stripped down to the bare minimum, words without facial expression etc, so i find sometimes i may need to explain what i am saying a bit more so that they can get the intended interpretation. It feels like some things need to be spelt out more to possibly 'soften' the way they may be received when no body language is available.' (Jane, turn 25)

Jane's comment also relates to some extent to the concept of 'flaming'. Oravec (2005, p. 130) describes how this refers to 'the sending of messages of an emotionally charged nature (usually hostile ones)'.... which are 'intense emotional expressions that are directly linked to the issues being discussed'. Jane highlights that due to the possibility of mis-interpretation, she needs to be very careful about how she conveys herself online. We may then conclude similarly to Oravec that 'the vigilance of counsellors is required' and it may be prudent for counsellors 'to advise their online counselling clients of the flaming phenomenon before commencing with counselling sessions'. In the context of this, counsellors may find it useful to discuss how mis- communication can occur online and if a client is unsure or upset by their counsellor's response they should seek clarification.

Summary of theme 1

'Practical implications of working online' was the theme with the most sub-themes. The sub-theme 'challenges and limitations' and its own further sub-themes emphasised how working online presented difficulties for an online counsellor. However, when viewed in the context of the other three super-ordinate themes it is

clear that these practical implications of working online also create a number of opportunities and differences, which do not exist in face-to-face forms of counselling with young people. These opportunities and differences mean there is a need for online counsellors to adapt their methods. Issues of empowerment and anonymity can also be seen as directly related to the practical implications of utilising an online environment for counselling young people, which is discussed below.

4.3 Theme 2: Anonymity and Empowerment

The theme of anonymity and empowerment arose in the context of numerous aspects of the therapeutic relationship with young people. Online counsellors emphasised how anonymity is very important to the young people who use Kooth as John does below.

'The anonymity is a big plus for most yp - its THE 1 thing that they say they love Kooth for above everything else tbh' (to be honest) (John, turn 51)

There were a number of sub-themes, which arose in relation to the super-ordinate theme of anonymity and empowerment.

Maintains boundaries

Jake discussed that working with a client online maintained a boundary that would not be present if he was then to work with the client face-to-face:

'keeping the relationship online maintains that purity in some way. In a way it is like if a f2f counsellor and client become friends after process - that process can be tarnished.'(Jake, turn 51)

Jake alludes to a sense of there being a unique quality to the online relationship, which cannot be replicated face-to-face and that this quality is important for

maintenance of the therapeutic relationship. Jake appears to be referring to how the online environment is unique in the 'boundaries' that exist between counsellor and client. This may be related to the lack of face-to-face contact and the relative anonymity of client and counsellor. In a similar way that face-to-face counsellors will not become friends after their therapy contract is complete, he suggests that online counsellors will not see each other face-to-face after their online therapy is complete, suggesting that the lack of face-to-face contact is in itself a therapeutic boundary that should not be breached.

A further quotation which illustrates the role of the maintenance of boundaries includes the following from Kim. She said this when talking about how Kooth has the effect of 'removing barriers' between online counsellor and client:

'well they dont have to be referred so its completely private....no one need know'.

This quotation is also deemed relevant to the sub theme 'importance of others not finding out'. However, it is felt that it is relevant to this sub theme also as it emphasises how online counsellors felt that not only the format of counselling but the process of the client engaging with their service affected the development of the therapeutic relationship. The fact that clients can 'self refer' means that there is a different dynamic (than in face to face therapy) between counsellor and client as it is possible that no one else knows about their contact. This suggests that a key factor impacting on the dynamic between online counsellor and client is the maintenance of therapeutic boundaries which are related directly to the method of communication itself.

Importance of others not finding out

Interviewees discussed how it was important to young people that they felt others did not know about their involvement with Kooth. Debbie comments on this saying that there were advantages and disadvantages to this.

'... sometimes is that they can come on here to work things out which they wouldn't be able to do otherwise. disadvantage could be they stay in danger if we can't help if at risk of harm but then i wonder if those yp would come on anyway then and ask for any help if they thought we would break confidentiality' (Debbie turn 72)

Notably, Debbie was the only Trainee counsellor who was interviewed (although she was coming to the end of her training). We may then also try and consider her comment in the light of her relative inexperience. She comments that she 'wonders if', suggesting that she is unsure. It is important to consider this when interpreting the comment because it highlights how her lack of experience might impact on her responses. Debbie suggests that there are pros and cons to the anonymity, which young people have during online counselling. While she acknowledges the potential that it may not be possible to fully address issues of risk, she also comments that the same young person may not have accessed the service without the sense that their online contact was confidential. This presents an interesting dichotomy between on the one hand the accessibility of the service and the issue of the young person's trust in their online counsellor but on the other, the lack of a means to pursue issues of risk.

Linda comments on how a young person who had been raped was able to discuss her experience, perhaps due to her feelings of anonymity:

'she was raped and feels a great sense of shame and judgement, she has told me she feels more hidden online, less exposed, more in control - so therefore can afford to be more open' (Linda, turn 43)

Linda highlights the role of the online medium in helping her client with feelings of shame and judgement. This is also commented on by other authors. Anthony (2000) for example comments: 'The openness that the Internet affords contributes to the relationship being honest, and bypasses some of the defences that the client and Counsellor have as

well as issues of the client's shame' (p. 1). In addition, we might consider that Linda is talking about how her client has developed an online identity that may or may not be congruent with the way that she presents in a face-to-face context. It appears that the way her client presents online is different to how she presents face-to-face because she has a sense of feeling more 'in control' and 'less exposed'.

Enables client's to engage and not engage.

The anonymity associated with online interactions seemed to have a polarised impact on the therapeutic relationships. On the one hand, online counsellors discussed how it was associated with a sense of empowerment which facilitated clients' engagement in the process. Contrastingly, interviewees also discussed how the anonymity could cause problems for the therapeutic relationship and led to a certain distance between counsellor and client.

Debbie's two comments below highlight how she feels the online setting provides a forum for young people that enables them to work on a problem relatively quickly, (compared to face-to-face) which they may not have been able to do without this service. However, other online counsellors also said that the therapeutic relationship could take longer to develop (see theme 'can be more difficult/slower to form online relationships').

'i think some yp seem willing to engage with the work quite quick maybe cos they are anonymous' (Debbie, turn 27)

'advantage sometimes is that they can come on here to work things out which they wouldn't be able to do otherwise.' (Debbie, turn 71)

Kim also highlights that young people find it 'easier' to talk to counsellors at Kooth because it is not face-to-face contact and discusses that because of confidentiality, young people may not wish to engage face-to-face at their schools. This again suggests that the relative anonymity of the young people through using the internet

provides an attractive alternative means of discussing their difficulties. Young people are encouraged to provide details when communicating with counsellors working for Kooth, but they do not have to do this as they would do face-to-face before seeing a counsellor.

'yes...we get so many people say they find it easier to talk to us than their psychologist or face-to-face worker. Also in school settings they hold a lot back because of the confidentiality rules' (Kim, turn 69)

Although online counsellors discussed how the anonymity afforded by the use of the internet could help young people engage and lead to a more open encounter, interviewees also discussed how their anonymity could lead to a number of difficulties. Linda comments on how the client may be able to 'hide things'. Jake (below) discusses how some young people use the online medium to enable them to avoid complicity of face-to-face contact suggesting that the use of online therapy may in some circumstances be complicit in maintaining avoidance of confronting a psychological difficulty.

'I guess feeling hidden can lead to a more open encounter but also it can lead to a more erm false (in a way) encounter, the client is able to put on a character - hide things etc - sometimes I imagine this can be useful and other times not at all.' (Linda, turn 44)

'Yp can 'avoid' issues easier than in f2f in my opinion' (John, turn 54)

'it is not ok for YP to use online as avoidance of f2f contact - so our job must be in some way to facilitate that. But inevitably sometimes we don't' (Jake, turn 63)

Interestingly, on two separate occasions during the interviews, the interviewees interrupted the process of the interview to attend to another phone call:

'P: just 5 min pls i need to answer a call

I: Ok.

P: sorry

P: it will take 5 mins' (Claire, turn 158-163)

The interviewer noted that this had not happened during any other interview he had conducted face-to-face for previous research projects. It is suggested that interviewees may also experience a sense of anonymity, which was interpreted by the interviewer as having a detrimental impact on their engagement with the process of the interview with him. Further research would be needed to explore how the relative anonymity of therapists may impact their online behaviour.

No prejudice

Jake comments that the primary importance of words themselves in online interactions means that personal prejudices do not impact on the relationship. While this might be seen as an advantage, (as Jake comments being empathic can be 'simpler' and 'perhaps quicker') he also says that there is 'less transference' in the relationship. Psychodynamic (and other) therapists utilise transference to gain greater understanding of their clients and themselves as part of the therapeutic relationship, so one could argue that if there is less transference this may be detrimental to the process of therapy. However, one may also suggest that this does not mean there is a less productive relationship but that the style of therapy is simply different. This may also be related to the theme 'more didactic and structured'.

'i know if i met some of the YP I work with f2f, my prejudices would come in, where as a pure online relationship is that: pure - no other factors other than the words people use. When i work f2f i have to work through those prejudices, perhaps online there is less need....But there seems to be more freedom to accept YP as they are (for me anyway) online... I think what i am trying to say is the prejudices and the challenge to be empathic is still there,

but working through that is simpler and perhaps quicker online - there is less transference and complicity in the relationship cos its limited to words' (Jake, turn 37-41)

The following exchanges between the interviewer and Linda below also illustrate how online counsellors considered that personal prejudices were impacted by the relative anonymity afforded by online communication. Linda's comments highlight how attention is directed to the actual text used as opposed to visual features of the person communicating.

I: Is that lack of visual clues a disadvantage then?

P: I am not sure i would call it a disadvantage - more a challenge - but saying that sometimes I imagine it could be an advantage too - we all make judgements based on appearance - as much as we try not to - so sometimes I guess having no visual clues can mean more attention is payed to the words used'

(Linda, turns 46-48)

Similarly, Jane below comments that she 'forgets' about the fact that she cannot see the other person and considers that this in some way contributes to her understanding of them. Although it is not entirely clear what her exact meaning is from this, it is possible that the lack of visual cues means she gains a different and possibly (as she seems to suggest) deeper understanding of her online clients .

'I have worked with some people and its as if i forget that i have no idea what they look like, at the risk of sounding corny, it can be like i know their soul, but the stuff that doesnt matter!'

Empowerment and control

Katie discusses how young people feel less intimidated and more empowered online. She discusses that face-to-face contact could lead to young people feeling

'intimidated' by adults and that because the therapy is conducted through the online medium, young people can end the contact far more easily than if they were face-to-face. It was detailed in the 'participants' section that Katie had extensive experience of working both online and face-to-face. She conveys a sense of passion for her work through the use of the word 'love', suggesting that this is a particularly powerful aspect of working in the online environment compared to the face-to-face environment for her.

'i think the main thing is that actually, and this is what i love, it gives them far greater empowerment than f2f work... i don't think it's as dominant in f2f as online, i think online really does help that sense of empowerment...they don't have to go in to a strange building and feel intimidated by adults...they don't have to give their name and address...they can 'walk out' far easier than they could if they were in f2f work..'. (Katie, 65-68).

John also uses the term 'empowerment' and highlights an overlap with the themes 'enables clients to engage', 'no prejudice' and 'Important for self-conscious/embarrassed YP'.

'I think that there is an 'empowerment' issue to it. Society kinda depicts 'professional's' (esp therapists) in a formal and 'stuffy' manner. I get a hell of a lot more DNA's in f2f (1st session) - than I do online. Ppl are obviously anxious about the process of therapy and online - u can kind of 'hide' or runaway if its deemed too much for them. In f2f - the yp (or even older one) - can be 'seen' - and its maybe the being 'seen' (and possibly worrying about being judged on their physical reactions etc) that is key.' (John, turn 59)

Linda also emphasises the issue of empowerment and how important it can be for young people to feel a sense of control when discussing emotional problems. For the young person discussed here, Linda highlights that the online environment facilitated the client's ability to express herself because she felt less 'exposed' and

had a greater sense of control in the therapeutic relationship, which was related to this.

'I think presenting problem defo has an effect on this yp - she was raped and feels a great sense of shame and judgement, she has told me she feels more hidden online, less exposed, more in control - so therefore can afford to be more open - online she is likely to reflect on why she had trouble saying a certain thing, or writing a certain thing - and is more likely to have a go at communicating something difficult, whereas in f2f she will think very carefully before responding - only maybe telling me much later what was going on for her when she responded. and if things feel emotional she may even hold back, for fear of feeling too exposed - she has a fear of crying in front of people...' (Linda, Turn 43)

Helpful for self-conscious/embarrassed young people

This sub-theme has similarities with the other sub-themes under anonymity, particularly 'empowerment'. However, issues relating to self-conscious or embarrassed young people are distinguished as separate because participants referred to this specifically on a number of occasions suggesting this was a particularly important aspect to both participant and counsellor related to the anonymity experienced during online communication. This is illustrated in the quotes below:

'it can help take away any self-consciousness...it by-passes issues about image and attractiveness etc' (Jane, turn 58-59)

'the fact it's not face-to-face yp often open up about things they feel they couldn't if they had to sit in front of someone and say... so it lessens embarrassment, however that's not to say that they don't feel embarrassed and they will tell u they do... and again use moticons' (Claire, turn 101-103)

Claire emphasises how the use of emoticons (discussed further as a separate sub-theme) also help young people who may be embarrassed. It is possible that the use of emoticons helps a young person who is experiencing embarrassment to express themselves. It was noticed in Claire's interview that she expressed enthusiasm about how these were used to aid online work. While emoticons can assist expression, (see for example Antony, 2000) other authors also comment on the potential for them to cause confusion and the need for practitioners to guard against this. Barnett (2005, p. 874) for example comments: 'Perhaps online counselling psychologists should review with clients the emoticons to be used at the outset of the professional relationship, provide each client with a list of emoticons for ongoing use, and be sure to check regularly with clients to reduce confusion and minimize misunderstandings.'

We might also consider how this theme links to the idea of identity presentation. Claire talks about the importance of the lack of physical presence. This allows the young person to interact using an online identity, which is perhaps why they do not experience the same feelings of embarrassment.

Kim, below also comments on how the anonymity afforded through online communication is particularly important for young people and in a similar way Jane considers how she feels online communication can 'by pass' issues about attractiveness.

'if they feel embarrassed about anything it is easier to discuss this through the meduim of the Internet' (Kim, turn 65)

'it can help take away any self-consciousness...it by-passess issues about image and attractiveness etc' (Jane, turn 58-59)

Jane's comment is particularly interesting because it highlights possible strengths and limitations of counselling conducted without visual feedback. This point is discussed further in the discussion section in relation to the idea of behavioural

inhibition and avoidance. For now it is a consideration that although, she suggests the lack of visual feedback means that clients may feel less self-conscious, it also highlights how if there is a problem regarding for example, body image, the issue could be 'by passed' and therefore not discussed. Arguably, the online environment may help the client to avoid talking about their experience of such difficulties which could help maintain such problems.

Summary of Theme 2

The theme of anonymity and empowerment reflected how the lack of a physical presence impacted on the therapeutic relationship. A common theme related to the issue of anonymity was that of empowerment. Interviewees referred to how this also impacted on other psychological processes such as the formation of prejudices, which this aspect of the online relationship appeared to surmount. Online communication was also associated with both facilitating and impeding the engagement of clients, which in turn was also linked with the sense of control young people experienced and the young person's sense of embarrassment or self consciousness. The themes of anonymity and empowerment also seem related to the idea of a separate online identity, which young people experience in their online interactions. It is perhaps this online identity, which can both facilitate and at other times hinder the development of an online therapeutic relationship from the perspective of the interviewees.

4.4 Theme 3: Adapting methods to the online environment

Interviewees referred to how their methods of providing therapy needed to be adapted to the online environment in numerous ways.

Writing/typing skills important

Interviewees commented on how writing and typing skills varied and this could impact on the therapeutic relationship depending, on the skills of the client and counsellor. John comments on this:

'Some yp have a great grasp of language and diction - whereas others may need 'simple speak' to convey a msg.' John (Turn 417)

John highlights how there is need for the therapist to be able to respond appropriately to the young person, depending on their individual grasp of language and diction. Interestingly, Linda below comments on how it can be difficult for some young people to convey their feelings using typing. This may be related to the writing skills of the individual.

'some will just send the 'correct' reply - whereas others will rewrite it and send each one - or others send the 'correct' one and then tell me they had trouble knowing how to say that - that they needed to rewrite it and rewrite it' Linda (turn 41)

John conveys that if someone has quick writing skills, they may want a quick response, emphasising the need for the therapist to be able to accommodate this:

'the speed of replies are also a player too. Some ppl can type really fast and may get impatient if the replies aren't 'up to their speed'!!' John (turn 44)

John also suggests that this may be related to the 'instant culture' of the internet:

'Its only a small amount of yp that may get frustrated by having to 'wait' for a reply - but I suppose thats part of the 'instant' culture which exists today.' John (turn 48)

John's comment above refers to a cultural shift, which he feels has impacted on the therapeutic relationship between young person and online counsellor. His comment 'I suppose' seems as though he is resigned to young peoples' sense of frustration that he encounters, which he suggests is a symptom of an 'instant culture' of today.

The quote below from the interview with Claire highlights how the use of 'text speak' was important for online counsellors to use in their communication with young people. Claire describes how without knowing this, communication could be very difficult. She states that it is important to 'learn the lingo'. This casual use of phrase also seems representative of the need for online counsellors to adapt to the online environment, which includes adapting to cultural and linguistic differences.

P: ...u have to learn the lingo very quickly or it's like another language.....

I: Can you give an example?

P: c u etc

I: Ok. A bit like text language? (Claire, turn 195-199)

Interestingly, it was noticed that the online counsellors used 'text speak' themselves in their communication with the interviewer:

'I: I noticed that you use 'text speak' quite a lot eg. 'cos'. I wondered if you do this in your online counselling with YP and also if so, do you think that this impacts on the therapeutic relationship in any way?

P: yeah i use it online. seems to mirror how yp speak. makes it seem less formal i think' (Debbie, turn 73-75)

Debbie's comment that the use of text speak makes the process less formal may also be related to the sub-theme of empowerment under the theme 'anonymity'. If young people are using a form of language, which they feel comfortable with and which reminds them less of 'formal' communication with adults, this may impact their feelings of control and empowerment in the online therapeutic relationship,

which may in turn also aid their engagement with the online counsellor. It is also possible (although not established) that Debbie was a closer age to the young people she counselled online. Debbie was still a trainee counsellor (as described in the table detailing online counsellors background details) and she may have been more familiar with text speak as a way of communicating. Nicol et al. (2003, p. 276) comment on how the reliance on the written word in online communication was considered by participants who were students using internet chat with tutors to be 'more informal both in form and function'. Similarly, one of their respondents also commented they felt sentences should be 'shorter, the whole mode of communication should be 'zappier' if one is expected to read on screen'.

More didactic and structured

Online counsellors commented on how the therapeutic relationship could involve a more didactic approach. Jake below discusses the transference he experiences in the online relationship. His use of the term 'I guess' when discussing transference in an online relationship may suggest that he is unsure if it is possible to use the concept to understand the relationship with the young person when working online. He suggests that this is because the 'style' of the work is more 'task oriented'. Jake conveys the idea that although he experiences transference when working online, the way he works with this is different due to the more didactic structure of the work.

'As i experience relationships at the moment, they tend to be more didactic and mentor like - which would have its own transference given time i guess - but perhaps less opportunity to work with that tranference - cos the style of online work seems so much more task-oriented - solution -focussed in lots of ways' (Jake, turn 52-53)

Similarly, Jane comments how her work can seem 'too' directive. This is partly related to her wanting to ensure that there are not any misunderstandings when working online. This is further supported by the sub theme 'precision of

words/sentence structure important' which also highlights how misunderstandings can occur. Interestingly, she highlights a possible tension between her practice as a person centred counsellor and an online practitioner.

'yes, it can interfere sometimes with trying to be a person centred counsellor, i'm not sure how much is about the precision and how much is again about the invisibility of the work... sometimes it can feel a little too directive because i feel i need to be precise to prevent misunderstandings that are more vulnerable to happening because of the online element.....sometimes it can feel a little too directive because i feel i need to be precise to prevent misunderstandings that are more vulnerable to happening because of the online element...' (Jane, turn 42-43)

Need to adapt to age and characteristics of the young person

Kim mentions that it is important to use the correct therapeutic 'tools' for the young person. She also highlights how maturation levels are important in determining this suggesting that she uses different approaches depending partly on the young person's age.

'it depends on the preferred 'door' to contact for the young person. Sometimes accessing someone's feelings shuts them down. They may want a more cognitive response from you ...it's about finding the 'therapy' or 'therapeutic tools' that fit the clients need... remember we work with young people/adolescent... and they are at different maturation levels' (Kim, turn 56-58)

John below also comments on how the age of the young person is important for the use of diction. He emphasises how awareness and appropriate use of diction is a key part of the empathic process with the young person and discusses how he adapts his style accordingly. This can be related to studies on the therapeutic

relationship in face-to-face environments and suggests that online clinicians are adapting their style in a similar way through the online medium. Lambert and Bergin (2002, p. 359) for example, comment on how 'successful training in the communication of empathy mandates that clinicians adapt their response style in accordance with how each particular client defines or experiences helpfulness.'

'it probably applies to all age groups and also to intellectual capability too to a degree. Some yp have a great grasp of language and diction - whereas others may need 'simple speak' to convey a msg. The fact that we cover the ages from 11yrs to 25yrs is also a big player in being 'appropriate with language etc so it helps if u know what age the yp is and also - I need to gauge my reply and its appropriate diction etc by using 'their' intial msg as a kind of 'template' to work with....I suppose it's part of the empathic process and ensures that I am pitching my reply in the same way that the yp pitches theirs really.' (John, turn 40)

Precision of words and sentence structure important

Interviewees commented on how the precision of the words they used were important due to working in the online medium. Jane discussed how the lack of body language means that she tries to articulate herself carefully. She implies that she gives even more attention to this than she would otherwise, due to the lack of face-to-face cues.

'It feels like some things need to be spelt out more to possibly 'soften' the way they may be received when no body language is available.' (Jane, line 25).

'but i guess instead of visual changes, I would look for changes in words used, sentence structure, timing of responses etc - to indicate changes in the client' (Linda, turn 64)

Linda also comments on how it is important to pay careful attention to sentence structure and timing of responses to understand changes in her client, which emphasises how online counsellors attend to these other factors in the absence of typical face-to-face cues. She uses the term 'I guess', suggesting that she is unsure or she has not considered this before, which gives the impression that she has perhaps adopted a style of working online, which she has learnt through a process of interacting with her clients online rather than following a procedure or training structure.

'...for those who just use messaging its vital that the reply u send is as concise as poss. It may take a few re-writes before I send to make sure. (John, turn 34).

John, above comments on the importance of being concise. This emphasises how adapting to the method of communication is essential for online counsellors in particular but it also suggests that meaning could become lost for both participants. This highlights that there is a certain level of technical competence and familiarity with the method of communication that is required.

'im more aware that i need to convey empathy and it seems more important in a way maybe cos i feel i lose wot i myt convey online through body language or tone of voice which myt be to try and make it not seem so cold sometimes which i guess it can seem that way online sometimes' (Debbie, turn 46).

In a similar way, Debbie, above comments that she feels the lack of visual cues means that she is more aware of trying to communicate empathy and expresses concern that without awareness of this, her communications could appear 'cold'. This is supported by other participants such as Linda, below, who highlights how instead of visual cues she will look carefully at the way the client uses text.

'but i guess in stead of visual changes, I would look for changes in words used, sentence structure, timing of responses etc - to indicate changes in the client' (Linda, turn 52)

Emoticons/visual techniques important

Jane's quote below highlights how she uses emoticons to help young people develop a sense of her personality, characteristics, warmth and compassion. She suggests that this is important for a young person to feel comfortable with her. Interestingly, she refers to her invisibility when online and as a consequence the lack of typical cues means that she cannot always convey her sense of humour and compassion. She describes that emoticons are an important visual tool which aids her expression.

'I think because they represent me, they can enact the warmth that i may want a young vulnerable client to know I feel for them. I've always felt a very down to earth counsellor, I want young people to feel comfortable with me and relate to me and when I worked face-to-face they could pick that up in so many ways, it may be the clothes I wear, the informality etc, but that's invisible online...so I want young clients to realise things like, that i have a sense of humour, that I do genuinely care about them, that I'm not like a teacher etc, and I think the emoticons can contribute to that' (Jane, turn 28).

Emoticons were also described as aiding the young person with expressing their emotions:

'anger and frustration is easily expressed....yp storm in and out of the chatrooms....sometimes you can almost hear the 'door' slam' (Kim, turn 120)

Kim also comments that Kooth is currently in process of developing their use of emoticons, which emphasises how the use of this mode of communication is still developing:

'new symbols we may develop in consultation with young people to express emotions.' (Kim, turn 121)

Summary of Theme 3

Theme 3 reflected how interviewees experienced a need to adapt their methods to the online environment. This was reflected in their discussion of how they adapt their use of language through, for example, 'text speak' and how they adapt to the age and characteristics of the young people. In addition, other methods such as the use of emoticons and visual techniques specific to the online medium were used to adapt their methods. The adaptation of methods that online counsellors have used is at least partly based on their experiences of interacting through the online medium and not merely about following protocol based treatment procedures or guidelines.

4.5 Theme 4: The validity of online counselling and similarities with face-to-face counselling.

This theme incorporates two sub-themes, which relate to interviewees' comments about the similarities between online and face-to-face counselling. Interviewees also commented on how they felt online counselling was equally or more valid than face-to-face forms of providing counselling as a therapeutic method.

Perceived limitations or differences not detrimental

Interviewees commented on how the differences in communication style were not detrimental to the online relationship. Claire (below), for example, comments on how emoticons, whether the client returns for further therapy and the language the client uses, provide cues she would normally experience from body language:

'ok well i find it works very well , in that u can pick up clues from yp re there txt, the language they use, the moticons, what they say, what they don't say, whether or not they come back, how they end, so many things would give me a clue of where they are coming from clues i would have normally picked up from body language' (Claire, turn 76).

The perceived limitations or differences in communication were also highlighted in other areas. Jane, for example, acknowledged that poor typing skills could be a problem but considered that this did not necessarily impact negatively on the relationship:

'ok, well, i guess it's mainly that it could slow things down because of the limitation of how much could be covered in a session, but that doesn't mean that it wouldn't still be a therapeutic relationship... what is going on internally for the yp would still be present, mmm, not sure how to express what i'm meaning...yes, it may slow the physical implementation down, but the nature of the relationship is the most important aspect.. and i think that would still come across, but the counsellors skills may just have to adapt a little'. (Jane, turn 114-117)

Kim highlights below how there are similarities in the way that the relationship is built with the young person. Here she emphasises a need to convey to the young person a sense of empathy. Her use of the term 'just because' seems to acknowledge a perceived limitation of online counselling and it is interpreted by me as though she is trying to validate the mode of counselling. She highlights that communicating through the medium of the internet does not mean she does not feel emotionally affected by the other person.

'so explaining who you are and what the service is about is important....you have to establish with the young person that you are a real person on the end of this computer and start to build a relationship with them....to show the young person that what they say does have an impact on you....that just

because it is through the medium of a PC it is just as real as sitting with someone face-to-face' (Kim, turn 36)

The same or better than face-to-face

Throughout the interviews there was a recurring theme of the similarities of online counselling to face-to-face forms. Interviewees often commented on how online counselling could be superior. This latter point was interpreted as being related to an assertion of the 'validity' of online counselling as a form of providing therapeutic help for young people. To some extent one might expect this. As was discussed in the literature review, online counselling is a relatively new way of providing therapy and there are both ardent advocates and opponents. While interviewees acknowledged limitations of online counselling, they also asserted their belief in their profession. It is possible that their assertions of the validity of online counselling could have been an attempt to convince me as their interviewer of the meaningfulness and utility of their profession. They were aware of my role as a Trainee counselling psychologist and as discussed previously, counselling psychologists have had very little involvement to date with online counselling services. This may have resulted in interviewees being cautiously defensive about their role. However, their assertions may also represent their honest and well meaning thoughts that online counselling is an effective form of providing therapy and they were simply expressing their enthusiasm about this.

The three quotes below highlight how interviewees referred to commonalities between online and face-to-face counselling. During the series of exchanges with me, I noticed that my comment could have been leading. It could also be argued that my comment did not facilitate the interviewee to discuss different aspects of the relationship and may have resulted in Kim's rather brief and unelaborated response, which could have been investigated further.

'As with all relationships - the more u work with someone online - the more u can recognise the cues'. (John, turn 50)

'I actually see little difference in the therapeutic value of the work, online can be as therapeutic for young people as face-to-face can, but sometimes the method of delivery has to be adapted slightly' (Jane, turn 23)

P: 'the same way you do face-to-face...reflecting..showing impact via congruent responses, and being empathic'

P: 'using humour as well'

I: 'So, the same as f2f as regards building the relationship?'

P: 'yep'

P: 'just the same' (Kim, turn 47-51)

Katie (below) commented on how she had experienced good online therapeutic relationships, which were attainable although she felt this was over a longer period of time. She also highlighted that she was unsure what measurements had been taken to compare this with face-to-face relationships, suggesting a potential research gap:

'I think that it is obtainable through longer contact...I have felt that I have known young people very well and had a great therapeutic relationship with them....whether it can be measured with a face-to-face, I don't know. I have had those moments of feeling very close...and moments that have been emotionally 'charged' ...very warm, empathic moments for me...but maybe you would need to ask the young person what their experience was of that'. (Katie, turn 93)

Katie's comments emphasise how she clearly feels a strong personal connection with her clients, although she highlights that she does not know if this sense of connectedness is shared by the young people she works with. Her use of the term 'emotionally charged' emphasises the depth of feeling, which she experiences in her online work but her comment that I 'would need to ask the young person' about their experience does suggest that she is uncertain about the mutuality of

this. Hanley's (2009, p. 265) research does however suggest that the feeling that strong therapeutic relationships can be formed is supported by the experiences of some of the young people he interviewed who use Kooth. His themes 'misinterpretation/empathic responses' and 'valuing the service and counsellors' are particularly relevant to this which highlight how online therapeutic relationships are valued by young people who also feel that a sense of empathy is developed.

Summary of Theme 4

This theme reflected how online counsellors asserted the validity of online forms of providing counselling for young people. While interviewees acknowledged common perceived limitations, such as how a lack of body language could present a challenge to a therapeutic relationship, they also asserted how they felt that online counselling could be equally or more effective than face-to-face methods. This theme probably reflects not only the similarities between how online counsellors experience the online relationship compared to face-to-face therapeutic relationships, but also how they wanted to assert their belief in and perhaps passion for their profession. In turn, their assertion of this could be related to the relative infancy of online counselling as a discipline, the controversy which still surrounds this and the participants' interaction with their interviewer, whom they may have also wanted to convince of the 'validity' of this form of counselling.

4.6 Summary of Analysis

Four main themes were found from the analysis. Each of these themes had a number of sub-themes. Although it was thought that all of the sub-themes had relevance for understanding of the experiences of online counsellors of the therapeutic relationship, it was considered that their interest value varied. This finding is understandable when one reflects on the relative advantages and disadvantages of using semi-structured interviewing as discussed further in the discussion section below. The lack of control, which the interviewer had over the process meant that the interviews at times strayed into unplanned areas. However,

this also highlights how online counsellors were able to discuss issues, which the researcher did not necessarily expect to arise emphasising the exploration of the interviewees' 'life world' (their subjective understanding) in keeping with the IPA approach. With this in mind, the discussion section below takes some selective sub-themes of the four super-ordinate themes and discusses these further in the context of the literature.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the discussion is firstly to outline the intended focus and aims of this section. It is then to consider how the literature applies to the findings of this research project. This will include a discussion of key points found in the literature review, considering the limitations of the research, how the findings contribute to knowledge in this area and finally the implications of the research for practitioners and researchers in this field.

The question this study addresses is:

How do online counsellors working with young people experience the therapeutic relationship in their online work?

The literature review provided the background to this question and discussed some key studies, which will be referred to again in the context of the findings discussed here. Firstly, this illustrated how there was a degree of controversy related to areas such as ensuring confidentiality, privacy and regulation of online practitioners. It also highlighted how online counselling appeared to be growing in use and that while there are people opposed to this, there are also people who are staunch advocates. It was discussed that online counselling is an area of growth, worthy of research and development and that the ambiguity and controversy surrounding this area provides further justification for the project.

The literature review also discussed key studies on the therapeutic relationship in both face-to-face and online therapeutic relationships. This involved discussion of the term 'therapeutic alliance'. A review of the literature found that the terms 'therapeutic alliance' and 'therapeutic relationship' were sometimes used interchangeably and there were differing definitions and interpretations of these. There is however a recurring definition in the literature about the therapeutic alliance of 'collaboration between therapeutic participants to facilitate healing' (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999). It was discussed that the volume of studies investigating the therapeutic relationship was outside the scope of this project to report on but that this concept is still changing as the literature grows. As such it was decided that this provided further support for research, which attempts to help understand this concept.

The literature review continued to discuss the qualitative and quantitative research available, which has investigated the therapeutic relationship with young people. It found there was evidence a good therapeutic alliance was central to treatment success. It also found that there was still much room to explore and understand the intricacies of the therapeutic relationship with young people, owing to an underdeveloped evidence base. It then continued to discuss two key studies of relevance (Everall & Paulson, 2002; French et al., 2003), which highlighted the multitude of factors involved in the therapeutic relationship and can be compared and contrasted to this project's findings. It was concluded that the importance of subjectivity and individuality was paramount, emphasising the need for a methodology, which aims to understand micro level processes. Consideration was then given to the small body of research, which had investigated young peoples' involvement with online counselling services. Included in this was a discussion of two key studies by King et al. (2006a, 2006b) and studies by Hanley (2008, 2009) and Bambling (2008). It was found that there were some overlapping themes in the qualitative studies but a number of limitations to the work and the sparse amount of literature in this area emphasised how further research was needed.

The methodology section discussed how the author originates from a pragmatist perspective, but there are constructivist underpinnings to his approach. As Barkham (1996, p. 23) states within counselling psychology 'the critical point for the research is to select the approach, which is most appropriate to the question being asked.' For this reason this study has used IPA to investigate the therapeutic online relationship between young people and online counsellors through the analysis of online interviews conducted with online counsellors working for the organisation Kooth.

The aim of IPA studies are to explore in detail how individuals understand and make sense of their own experiences. This is done through looking at the participants' responses and focusing on their experience, understandings, perceptions and views. (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

IPA is 'phenomenological' because it investigates participants' subjective reports. Smith (1996) emphasises how IPA is a dynamic process and that it attempts to access the personal world of the participant. He highlights that this process is however complicated by the researcher's own subjective reality, which is connected to hermeneutic approaches emphasising the central role of the researcher's interpretations. Thus, the terms 'interpretative' and 'phenomenological' represent the dual aspects of the approach, which involves the subjective conceptions of both participant and researcher. The aim then of an IPA study is not to provide a definitive answer, but to engage with the participant's account, which makes it an inductive approach that aims to capture and explore the meanings participants assign to their experiences. Reid et al. (2005, p. 20) comment that:

'A successful analysis is: interpretative (and thus subjective) so the results are not given the status of facts; transparent (grounded in example from the data) and plausible (to participants, co-analysts, supervisors, and general readers)'.

Reid et al. (2005, p.20) also comment that:

‘Researchers should reflect upon their role in the interpretative and collaborative nature of the IPA interview, data analysis and subsequent publication.’

Therefore, the discussion will now continue to examine the research questions in the light of the results obtained and the methods used. It will also include an interpretation of the findings in the context of the research questions and the wider theoretical context in which the work was carried out, including a consideration of alternative explanations and methodological limitations. Discussion of the scientific and professional implications of the findings will also be included in the context of the researcher’s own personal reflections.

5.2 Anonymity and empowerment

The theme of anonymity is one that has been recurring in the literature investigating online counselling. Young (2005) for example, concluded that anonymity along with convenience and counsellor credentials were the most cited reasons users sought online counselling over face-to-face therapy. There are numerous other studies, which have also concluded that the role of anonymity in online counselling is one of the main reasons young people seek online counselling (eg. Gray et al, 2005; Nicholas et al, 2004). Related to the theme of anonymity and specifically in relation to young people, Hanley (2009, p. 264) highlighted key themes of ‘anonymity/public’ where he discussed how the anonymity which young people experienced online helped them to discuss ‘sensitive issues’. Similarly, King et al. (2006a, p172) emphasise how it was in the ‘privacy and emotionally safe environment’ domain where ‘the main benefits of online counselling were reported’ by young people. These terms have similarities to those used by the online counsellors of ‘anonymity’ and ‘empowerment’. The sub-themes in the super-ordinate theme of anonymity and empowerment in this research project support the findings of both Hanley and King et al. For example, King et al. comment on how participants reported their concern that talking on the telephone to a counsellor could be ‘intimidating’ or ‘scary’, whereas they perceived that

talking online was easier. This is supported by the sub-theme 'enables clients to engage' and 'empowerment and control'. Similarly, Dunaway (2000) commented on the role of disinhibition as a function of their relatively anonymous state: 'People's communications are more disinhibited than they are in real life...Clients get to the point in e-therapy in the first correspondence' (p.34). King et al. also discussed how participants' reported privacy as a key strength of online counselling, as they did not experience a fear of being heard and as a result experience feelings of 'embarrassment', which corresponds to the sub-theme 'important for self conscious/embarrassed young people'.

However, although the role of anonymity was considered by online counsellors to be an aspect of online counselling, which could facilitate the relationship, anonymity was also discussed as a factor, which could present difficulties for the development of this. This was represented by the two contradictory sub-themes of 'enables client to engage' and 'enables client not to engage'. Similarly, Hanley (2009) did find that the anonymity associated with communicating online could be contrasted with the difficulty of being in a 'public space' (p. 264) and cited how one young person he interviewed had to terminate the interview because he did not want anyone to see that he was online. There are other papers which discuss possible negative effects of anonymity such as Gedge (2002) who cites Pelling and Renard (2001), stating that it can be very difficult for clients to assess the legitimacy of on line counsellors. She discusses how there is some evidence that para-professionals, often considered unqualified for other counselling positions, are looking to online counselling for business opportunities. Here she discusses how the 'invisibility' and disinhibition characteristic of online communications can affect the therapist also. This finding is supported by sub-theme 'need for reassurance and uncertainty about the other' and the interviewers own interpretation of some of the online behaviour of the online counsellors discussed in the analysis under the theme of anonymity.

Interestingly, the finding that anonymity can cause problems for engagement with the counsellor contrasts to many of the studies on the online therapeutic

relationship. It also contrasts with the work of Fletcher-Tomenius and Vossler (2009) who did not report on any negative aspects related to the anonymity of the client impacting on online counsellors (working with adults) experience of trust. The fact that only some online counsellors reported a difficulty with engaging young people online suggests that this is not a universal problem for all those interviewed in this study and may be dependent on a complex interplay of factors. One aspect mentioned by participants in this study was that young people may 'put on a character' to 'hide' behind and that they may use online contact to 'avoid' face-to-face contact. This could be at least partly related to the presenting problem of the client. For example Dina, Jamie, Aude, Alison, Joseph and Jerrold, (2008, p. 358) highlight that behavioural inhibition or BI (the persistent tendency to show extreme reticence fearfulness, or avoidance in novel situations or with unfamiliar people) is estimated to occur in approximately 10–15% of children, and has been shown in multiple studies to have moderate stability from the toddler or preschool years to early or middle childhood. (Dina cite for example, Asendorpf, 1990). It is possible then that young people showing symptoms of BI may favour online counselling because it means they do not have to see someone face-to-face. Related to this point, Oravec (2005) discusses how counsellors should be aware of their clients' tendencies toward computer dependence or even computer addiction. She suggests that if clients are spending a substantial share of their time with computers, counsellors should consider moving sessions to face-to-face settings. She considers this because 'clients may not be able to gain the perspective on their problems that the physical presence of a counsellor and other clients might bring' (p. 129).

If it is the case that young people demonstrating symptoms of BI are using online counselling as an alternative to face-to-face forms of counselling, there are implications for this. Current guidelines by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICEb, 2009) for anxiety disorders refer to the use of protocol based CBT, which would include exposure and response prevention (see for example Clark, 2002). This presents a number of difficulties for online counsellors to tackle. For example, it can sometimes be appropriate for the use of in-vivo exposure with a

client and this would not be possible to partake in this (although it could be possible to discuss a program that the client could engage in by themselves) when working online and anonymously. A further difficulty is how online counsellors approach such difficulties in an informed evidenced based way when a robust evidence base underlying online counselling to aid protocol based treatments is not available. This strongly suggests that further research is urgently needed to investigate treatment strategies and implications in this area.

The role of anonymity is a theme, which appears to have both potential advantages and disadvantages to the therapeutic relationship and seems closely linked with the idea of 'empowerment'. When reflecting on this in the context of the literature it is clear that this concept has some overlaps with models of the alliance. For example, the proposed model by Bordin (1979) who other authors (eg. Green, 2006) have based similar models on emphasises the components of 'bond', 'goal' and 'task'. Anonymity is a factor which could be seen in the context of the 'bond' component of the therapeutic alliance. Referring to the bond component of the alliance, Bordin describes how the goals that are set and the tasks, which are specified, are 'intimately linked to the nature of the human relationship between therapist and client' (p. 254). He discusses how a working relationship, which could be several years in duration could be very different to a relationship, which is expected to terminate in three months or less. Although there are not specific statistics available on the length of time that online clients access Kooth, online counsellors did report working with a wide range of difficulties and over varying amounts of time in this study, suggesting that there is a need to develop bonds, which would sustain both long and short term work. Bordin emphasised that a 'basic level of trust' was central to all varieties of therapeutic relationships, but that this was particularly important when one is directed toward 'the more protected resources of inner experience.' However, he does not state that one therapeutic approach requires a stronger bond than any other, but highlights that the bond 'differs' depending on the approach. (p. 254). Interestingly, Bordin considers how different approaches have a varying amount of a 'take charge' element to them. The super-ordinate theme of anonymity and empowerment suggests that the 'take charge'

element, which Bordin referred to may be more dominant for the role of the client in online therapy, (as opposed to face-to-face) which can be seen (at least partly) as a function of their relative anonymity and sense of empowerment.

When reflecting back on the literature review, which cited Weisz (2005, p 629) who discussed the 'remarkable diversification' of child psychotherapies available, it was also considered that there was a lack of 'high quality' (Pattison & Harris, 2006, p 235) research investigating models of therapy apart from CBT. The literature review highlighted that further research into processes occurring in the relationship could be a useful direction for additional research because as Pattison & Harris conclude, it is far from clear what if any is the most appropriate therapy to use with young people. Downey (1996) was also discussed, who mentioned three key dimensions of the degree to which treatment is directive or non directive, interpretative or supportive and conducted principally through verbal discourse or indirect communication. He discussed that variation in practice of therapy with young people often revolved around these dimensions. The role of anonymity has particular relevance to the last dimension and the findings around this theme can be seen in the context of this. Downey (p 318) comments that:

'the counselling psychologist is left with a mass of research evidence, which does not provide clear evidence of treatment superiority (only of the broad effectiveness of most approaches)... nevertheless, the responsible counselling psychologist must in his or her therapeutic practice, attempt to maximise the value of what is known.'

In the context of Downey's comment, this research has attempted to help describe the intricacies of the therapeutic relationship with young people online through analysis of how online counsellors understand that relationship, which is one of many 'indirect' methods of therapeutic intervention. The role of anonymity and empowerment appears to be one key aspect of this, which could also be considered as particularly relevant to the 'bond' between therapist and client in Bordin's (1979) model.

5.3 Adapting methods to the online environment

This theme highlighted a number of factors, which were related to how online counsellors adapted their work when using the online medium. Hanley (2006, p. 182) cites Griffiths (2003) who commented that for counselling services to be 'youth friendly', they should be accessible, friendly and relevant. Hanley also comments that counsellors who work in these settings are encouraged to 'be more pro active and flexible in their style'. The theme and sub-themes represented here suggest that online counsellors working for Kooth are trying to adapt their style to working with young people online and that they are being both pro active and flexible. Online counsellors appeared to regard this as an important aspect of developing a working therapeutic relationship with their online clients.

Interviewees commented that the precision of their words when working online and the structure of their sentences were important. In addition, they also discussed how the use of 'text speak,' emoticons and visual techniques could be important for their online therapeutic relationships with young people. This is supported by other research. Colon (1996) and Murphy and Mitchell (1998) for example, discuss how participants who do not have sufficient typing and computing skills can be disadvantaged when participating in online counselling. A similar finding was reported in the study by King et al. (2006a, p. 172) who commented that young people reported that being able to delete what they had typed and check the text before it was sent was linked to a 'greater feeling of control and comfort' with the process. This also supports the findings under the super-ordinate theme 'anonymity and empowerment'. Online counsellors also referred to how they used emoticons to convey a sense of their personality and as an adjunct to the use of words. Interestingly, Mallen, Vogel, & Rochlen, (2005a, p. 789) discuss how 'there is potential for emoticons to become overused' and counselling psychologists should be encouraged to discuss these nuances of online communication with their clients, because each client will or will not use them in their own unique way. They highlight how for example, the :-) emoticon could indicate happiness, but it may not truly mean that the client is smiling while he or she is typing the message. They

discuss that the :-) emoticon may be similar to certain rote phrases or gestures in face-to-face communication. Mallen et al. consider how there are many times throughout the day, an individual may ask 'How are you doing?' However, it is not a true question but really another way to say 'Hello.'

Bordin (1979) discusses how collaboration between the client and therapist involves an agreed upon contract that takes into account what he refers to as 'some very concrete exchanges' (p 254). Here he also refers to how this aspect of the therapeutic relationship is crucial to the different therapeutic methods. A person-centred approach may not for example, involve an explicit set of tasks with the client but in a behavioural piece of work, there may be an explicit task agreed of a change in behaviour. However, as Watson (2007, p. 272) comments in his review of Roger's necessary and sufficient conditions of change, 'other clients may benefit from more direction and guidance'. This relates to the different tasks and different degrees of emphasis on tasks for the therapist. Activity and passivity for example, would vary depending on therapeutic approach as would the emphasis on interpreting and self-disclosing. Interestingly, the sub-theme 'more didactic and structured' highlighted how some online counsellors found that a more structured approach was helpful when working with young people online. However, it is suggested here that this was not a universal approach of online counsellors, as this was not something they all reported. Indeed, others also discussed the importance of adapting to the age and personality of the young person emphasising that they were hesitant to recommend one style of therapeutic approach over any other. This sub-theme probably highlights how the individual counsellors responded to the individual clients they worked with reflecting a complex interplay of factors, which are not possible to generalise. Research investigating therapist approaches supports this suggesting the approach, that individual therapists may assume is dependent on a number of factors. Steiner (1978), for example, found numerous factors which impacted the therapist's selection of therapeutic orientation, including the therapist's supervisor and the age of the therapist. While a more didactic and structured approach may then be related to working with young people online, it may also be a factor related to a number of other variables.

5.4 Practical implications and the validity of online counselling.

The theme 'practical implications' emphasised how there were a number of implications associated with the practicalities of working therapeutically online. One aspect of this was the flexibility, which communicating online allowed. This has been commented on by other authors such as Nicol et al. (2003, p. 279), who consider how the flexibility of the online environment allows for 'anytime, anyplace learning' when discussing the social dimensions of online learning. They comment that working online does mean the tutor has less control over the social contexts of the student's learning. This is an interesting parallel to both the online interview and the online counselling session, where it could be argued that similarly the online interviewer and online counsellor have less 'control' over the interviewee and client respectively and as a consequence, this may be a factor aiding the feelings of 'control,' which the online client experiences (as represented by the sub-theme 'empowerment and control'). Indeed, this may also be a factor contributing to the way that online services are delivered. It was commented by one interviewee that she felt that due to the 'flexibility' of working online, she was able to work for longer periods with her clients than when working face-to-face. The interviewer interpreted this through reference to the theme of anonymity and suggested that one possible interpretation is that the counsellor's relative anonymity may be impacting on their practice. This is also related to broader issues such as licensing and accountability. Casper and Berger (2005, p. 906) for example, comment that the greater flexibility in access means there is a need for defining 'who offers what'. They consider this includes the issue of licensing and that there should be specific training for practitioners working online.

There were numerous other sub-themes related to how practical implications impacted on the online therapeutic relationship. For example, it was discussed by online counsellors that the ability to re-read text was a 'vital' aspect of online communication between therapist and client. This is supported by other authors such as Hunt and McHale (2007) who consider that the e-mail interview allows time

for reflection, which 'enables deeper processing of information and more complete review of the issues being discussed' (p. 1416). Other researchers utilising online methodologies have also commented on how the ability to re-read text is key to their online interactions, even modifying research techniques to enable this (eg. Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007, p. 542). Being able to re-read text was also considered relevant to the process of conducting the interviews with the participants for this research, as well as a factor which online counsellors reported as important for their online interactions with clients. Personal reflections on this process emphasised to the researcher that a deeper engagement with the text was possible through re-reading and considering meanings and interpretations.

The sub-ordinate theme of 'challenges and limitations' was devised to represent the numerous difficulties experienced when working therapeutically online, which online counsellors discussed during the interviews. However, they also discussed how they felt their approach provided a valid form of counselling for working with young people therapeutically and how there were many similarities with face-to-face counselling when considering the therapeutic relationship, which is represented by a separate super-ordinate theme. It was also considered that the research methodology itself may have impacted on this aspect of the research findings, which is discussed further in this section below.

Online counsellors often discussed how they thought the method of online counselling was as relevant and applicable to working therapeutically with young people as face-to-face forms of counselling. Some interviewees highlighted how they felt that perceived limitations or differences between online and face-to-face forms of counselling were not in fact detrimental to the online therapeutic relationship. For example, they commented on how poor typing skills could present challenges for communication but that this did not necessarily negatively impact the therapeutic relationship. It was discussed in the analysis how online empathy and trust were considered key aspects of the online therapeutic relationship and how participants did not feel that this was limited by working online. Feng, Lazar and Preece (2004) studied empathy and the effects on online interpersonal trust.

Their results suggested that empathy has a significant influence. The results implied a relationship between 'daily trust attitude' and online interpersonal trust. They considered, for example, that people who are more trusting in their daily life may experience more difficulty in developing trust online. They discussed that one key result is that their research suggests empathic accuracy itself does not guarantee trust and conclude that in order to gain other people's trust online, a person not only needs to correctly infer the other's feeling, but also provide a supportive response. This study is useful to consider in the light of the work of Everall and Paulson, (2002) which was discussed in the literature review as an example of relevant face-to-face research. Their work found a number of factors, which were key to the maintenance and development of therapeutic relationships with young people. They found, for example, that therapist characteristics that enabled young people to gain a sense of the therapist being authentic, open and caring was key to their experience of 'constancy' in the relationship. The findings from this research project support the findings of Feng et al. (2004) that providing a supportive response is important, in addition to being empathic for enabling a productive therapeutic relationship. This is evidenced by a number of the sub-themes from various super-ordinate themes, which refer to the importance of therapist style or characteristics such as the 'need to adapt to age and characteristics of the young person,' 'need for computer literacy and skills' and 'emoticons/visual techniques important', all of which highlight how therapists could create an empathic environment for their clients in different ways through the use of relevant skills and techniques particular to the online environment.

It is of interest that interviewees reported both limitations and at other times, emphasised how online counselling was as or more effective than face-to-face counselling when discussing how they experienced the therapeutic relationship. This suggests that interviewees were attempting to discuss both advantages and disadvantages of this method of therapeutic intervention and give a rounded view of how working online impacted the therapeutic relationship. This is also important from the point of view of validity of the research project (discussed further below). The finding is a reflection on the questions that were asked in the interview, which

encouraged interviewees to comment on the differences between online counselling and face-to-face counselling and to consider how and if there were any disadvantages or advantages to using different therapeutic mediums. Interestingly, under the theme of 'challenges and limitations' was the sub-theme of 'interferences and distractions'. The process of carrying out the interviews online also supported this sub-theme and it was queried if the online counsellors themselves were distracted during the process of the interview, leading to the interview being interrupted on a number of occasions. In a paper by Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr and Elford (2004, p. 950), they reflected on the process of interviewing online participants about their experiences of using the internet for sex seeking behaviour. They reflected that the online dialogue can 'get out of order' owing to a number of reasons. They highlight the time lapse between questions and answers as a factor and because participants often scan 'up the page' to review the dialogue, which can cause further delays. They also discuss the possibility for miscommunication, citing how 'wordplay' such as metaphor or jokes may need clarification. They discuss that consequently, probing and clarifying meanings can be more difficult online. One may argue that difficulties in communication such as this may have contributed to the experience of the interviewer that participants were easily distracted. However, on reviewing the transcripts, this was not considered to be the case. Interestingly, the suggestion by Davis et al. is not supported by other authors. Turney and Pocknee (2008) for example, discuss their experience of using online focus groups. They discuss that in the virtual setting, participants had a choice of responding to questions or deciding to withhold response, thus providing a 'non-coercive and truly democratic discursive environment', (p. 7) which they consider is conducive to the process of communication in an online environment. This is also reflected in other themes highlighted in this project, particularly the sub-themes of 'empowerment and control' and 'no prejudice' under the theme 'anonymity and empowerment' for example. However, the suggestion that online counsellors may have been distracted does have other support. Haberstroh et al. (2007) comment on how although communicating from a personal space was seen as 'safe, and potentially offered unique clinical opportunities, distractions could occur' (p. 278), which

reduced the client's full attention to the session suggesting that the environment, which the person working online communicates from can influence the progress and content of therapy. The findings from this research project highlight how this may be a two way process applicable to therapist as well as client. This paragraph has included discussion about how people using online methodologies have reached different conclusions about the use of this method for data collection. It is likely that additional research is needed to explore these differences. The next section continues to review methodological considerations further.

5.5 Methodological review: Validity, limitations and implications

The introduction highlighted how the research project had developed with reference to the researcher's personal and professional background. This led to discussion of epistemology and ontology. The positions of realist, constructivist and pragmatist approaches were considered and this research project located itself within a pragmatist perspective with a constructivist underpinning. IPA was described as the most appropriate method for answering the research question. A novel online approach was also utilised and consideration was given to the relative advantages and disadvantages of using it. A number of issues arose through the process of conducting the research, which are discussed further in this section. Firstly, it is important to reflect on the process of using online interviews as the method of data collection. This also means it is important to consider what other approaches (if any) could have been used and how this could have yielded different results. It is also necessary to consider the issues of validity, which were mentioned in the methodology section and the coherence of this approach with the philosophy of the researcher and that of counselling psychology, where this research locates itself.

We might firstly consider the importance of reflection on the process of conducting the research by reference to other studies using a similar methodology. Rapley (2001, p. 306) discusses how awareness of the local context of the data production is central to analysing interviews 'whatever analytic stance is taken' when analysing

the data. He cites a study, (Shiner & Newburn, 1997) which aimed to find out if recreational drug use is seen as 'normal' by young people. The authors highlighted that as the study was conducted in a school setting, this may have encouraged respondents to give 'socially desirable' answers, thus reducing the validity of the interview data. Rapley points out that their concept of validity is concerned with bias, establishing trust and the truthfulness of the data. Shiner and Newburn commented that they tried to gain access to 'the subject beyond the respondent' through using semi structured interviews, which '...minimised the extent to which respondents had to express themselves in terms defined by the interviewers and encouraged them to raise issues that were important to them.' They discussed that their approach was particularly well suited to attempt to discover respondents' 'own meanings and interpretations'. (Shiner and Newburn, 1997, p. 520). This is also the approach of IPA which (as discussed above) was used to gain access to the 'lifeworld' of the participants and as suggested in the rationale for this research, is particularly suitable for the research question. Rapley however highlights that although Shiner and Newburn attempted to gain access to 'the subject beyond the respondent,' 'purely constructionist' approaches such as theirs may undermine the role of the interviewee's subjectivity. Rapley (p. 307) comments that Shiner and Newburn (1997) were interested in establishing the 'meaning' of drug use, the way it is 'understood by the young' (p. 519) *beyond* the space of the interview. Rapley considers that the constructionist critique denies that interview data can be used to report on a reality beyond the interview and treats the interview itself as the central *topic* of analysis; interviews merely report upon, or express, their own structures (Silverman, 1993). A similar line of criticism could be argued in the case of this research project if one did not discuss the *interpretative* impact on the process of analysis or if the research did not highlight the limitations of the research and issues of validity. However, a key part of this study has been the reflection, analysis and discussion of the process of how the research was carried out. This was given particular importance due to the novel method of data collection. The comments by Rapley discussed above are interesting in the context of this work. This project also allies itself with a constructivist approach but considerable attention has also been focussed on the context of the data. The discussion of the

online synchronous method and the role of the interviewer as central in the production of the discourse has allowed the project to contextualise these key aspects. The interviews can be seen as inherently social encounters in which those involved co construct their dialogue and as such, awareness of the context of the data is integral.

As discussed in the methodology section, research questions in IPA studies are usually framed broadly and openly and the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail a particular area of concern. Examples of psychological research questions addressed through IPA are provided by Smith and Osborn (2003, p.53). They highlight Flowers, Smith, Sheeran and Beail (1997) whose question was: 'How do gay men think about sex and sexuality?' and Turner and Coyle (2000) who asked: 'what does it mean to be a donor offspring?' Similarly, the question of this project was also framed broadly and asked about how online counsellors working with young people 'experience' the therapeutic relationship.

Because IPA sets out to analyse how participants perceive a situation and make sense of this, it is necessary to have a flexible approach to data collection. For this reason semi structured interviews are used. Smith and Osborn (2003, p.53) highlight how this approach is distinguished by there being an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent, the ordering of questions being less important; the interviewer being freer to probe interesting areas which arise and the interview being allowed to follow the respondent's interests or concerns. Because of this approach, it is possible for the respondent to share his/her own story. Smith and Osborn (2003) summarise the advantages of this as being that it facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interviewer to go into novel areas. However, the key disadvantages of this are that it reduces the control the researcher has over the process, can take longer to carry out and is harder to analyse. The relevance of these comments to this research project are discussed further in the paragraphs below.

The broad range of issues, which the interview schedule (appendix 3) contains was considered before conducting the interviews as a way of thinking explicitly about the questions to be asked. It was established from the literature review that there are many aspects to the therapeutic relationship. Although there is some consensus about the idea of the therapeutic alliance, there is also ambiguity in the literature about the definition of this. Therefore, it was thought to be most appropriate to use the term therapeutic 'relationship' rather than 'alliance' with the participants. This is because the word 'relationship' was considered to be more generic whereas the word 'alliance' refers to particular aspects of the relationship, which not all participants may be familiar with and may not share the same definition. It is also for this reason that IPA is an appropriate methodology to use for this research question. It was not deemed appropriate to use a structured approach such as questionnaires or a structured interview for example, which would not have allowed the flexibility to explore an area where it would be difficult to succinctly define, categorise or label variables for analysis. The interview schedule tackled key areas that could help develop how online counsellors experience and understand the therapeutic relationship with young people such as how online relationships with young people, compared to face-to-face relationships and how the medium of communication could impact on the relationship. As suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003) minimal probes were used, such as 'could you tell me more about that' and the interviews always began with the same question, which asked how online counsellors experienced the therapeutic relationship. This very open ended question was designed to allow participants to discuss their thoughts and understanding of the therapeutic relationship without attempting to direct participants towards a particular theoretical construction of the relationship or a specific approach. The interview questions could generally be described as open ended and the interview style as non-directive. This was central to allowing participants to tell their own story in their own words (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This allowed for an inductive analysis, where participants could offer their experiences rather than being led by the researcher to talk about a particular issue. Reid et al. (2005, p22) comment how the insider's perspective is only one part of the analysis and distinguishes this 'emic' stage (phenomenological insider) from the

'etic' (interpretative outsider) where in the latter, the researcher attempts to make sense of the participants experiences and illuminate them in a way that helps to answer the research question. This emic stage initially resulted in the thematic table, which involved the organisation and coding of the themes followed by the illustration of these themes through the selective analysis of quotations. This discussion section continues the etic process to discuss how the findings can be understood in relation to the literature in this area and the implications of the findings.

5.5.1 Online interviews

A number of issues arose when using online interviews for the method of data collection. Some of these issues were considered in the analysis and discussion above, such as how the anonymity of the online counsellors may have impacted their online behaviour. When conducting the interviews, the interviewer took notes on personal reflections during this process, which concerned how he was interacting with the interviewees. Some key reflections from this are discussed further here.

One reflection was how each interviewee seemed to have an individual 'style' of communicating online. For example some interviewees were very comfortable with using a rather informal style, making use of 'text speak' as commented on in the analysis whereas others were more formal, taking longer to compose messages and correcting them if they noticed mistakes. It was noted that developing awareness of the interviewee's style of communication was important for developing rapport and understanding with the interviewee. In keeping with the IPA approach a non-directive and open ended approach was taken to the interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, it was clear that some participants needed more or less prompting, depending on their own individual styles. This is a significant observation when considering how online practitioners might engage in effective therapeutic contact. The success of this contact depends, at least in part, on how well one participant can know the other in order to adapt to the individual's needs.

This may be something which has implication for both time (as discussed in this separate sub theme) and training needs.

Some difficulties with the chat software were noticed by the interviewer the main one being that the visual depiction of a pen which showed when the other person was typing did not always function. This presented difficulties for the interview, because the participants did not know when the other person had finished typing or if they were in the process of composing a message. This emphasised to the researcher how the lack of a shared physical space impacted on the process. Technical errors have been reported in numerous other studies, which have used online methodologies for data collection. Fox et al. (2007), for example, commented on how the most common technical issue they experienced when conducting online focus groups were connection issues, which on one occasion led to the need to re-run a focus group. Hanley (2006, p. 184) commented on how he experienced other technical issues when researching online. He discussed how a number of postings to forums (which were later analysed) disappeared due to a 'technical glitch'. It is clear that technical glitches are a potential problem of online research. Since the research has been conducted, it has been noted that the new upgraded version of Skype, which was available after the data collection was complete does not seem to suffer from the same technical problems encountered during this research. This emphasises the dynamic nature of online research and the need to continually evaluate online technologies and methodologies.

The interruptions to the research on two separate occasions because of interviewees needing to take a break to answer a phone also emphasised the difficulties of online interviews. The same phenomenon was also commented on by Ayling and Mewse (2009), who discussed how numerous explanations were offered to explain delays by participant's even referring to some rather unexpected comments: 'sorry about the delay, pizza arrived' (p. 571). It is note-worthy that in Ayling and Mewse's study, the interviewees were homosexual men discussing their experience of bare backing. The fact that they were not counsellors familiar with the interview processes might at least partly explain why such interruptions were

more common in their research. However, interruptions did still occur in this research project, suggesting that familiarity with research methods is not the only factor impacting on this and other factors such as anonymity (as discussed above) may also be implicated. However, one might also argue that these difficulties were a result of individual characteristics of the interviewees and it could be argued they may have behaved similarly in a face-to-face scenario by for example answering their mobile phone. Interestingly, Sedgwick and Spiers (2009, p. 3) refer to how a number of authors (O'Conaill, Whittaker & Wilbur, 1993; Sellen, 1995) highlight how the use of videoconferencing for online data collection can create a 'more formal' interaction. Although the authors comment on how this can reduce the spontaneity in the conversation and result in a degree of 'depersonalisation', they also comment that this can result in 'fewer interruptions'. It would be interesting to investigate how this more 'formal' conversational style, which some authors contend is a factor of the online interview using videoconferencing, may impact on how interviewees respond during online interviews.

5.5.2 The role of the researcher

It is noteworthy that there are similarities with the super-ordinate themes of this research and my previous project (Fletcher-Tomenius & Vossler, 2009). This research found the main themes of: the role of anonymity in trust online; the impact of the medium of communication and similar issues to forming trust in face-to-face contexts. While new themes and sub-themes did emerge from this research, there were numerous overlaps. This was considered to have occurred for a number of reasons. While my previous study investigated trust and this project investigated the therapeutic relationship as a whole, the idea of 'trust' is as Marshall and Serran (2004) comment a multi-faceted aspect of the therapeutic relationship. Thus, when the issue of how online counsellors establish trust with their clients was being discussed during interviews, it was to an extent expected that similar issues would arise when discussing the notion of the relationship more generally.

It is also possible that I was affected by my own biases related to my experience of the previous research, which resulted in an interpretation of similar themes. One might argue this because there are some similarities between the themes from this project and the previous. However, it is considered that this does not necessarily represent just bias but a similarity between the findings which is a result of the similarity of subject area. We might also consider the role of bias in qualitative research and if this is necessarily something that should be and/or could be removed. When discussing the role of research bias in qualitative research Koch (1994) comments that:

‘Prejudices are not necessarily erroneous or necessarily distortions of truth. Our situatedness as interpreters, our own historicity, do not constitute an obstacle. Prejudices are the conditions by which we encounter the world as we experience something. We take value positions with us into the research process. These values rather than getting in the way of research, make research meaningful’ (p. 77).

Koch highlights how researcher ‘bias’ is an inevitable aspect within qualitative research. Walker, Cook and McAllister (2008, p. 83) discuss in relation to Koch that this subjective understanding of reality ‘risks being a personal and possibly private’ process and it is important that measures are taken to avoid research findings that are ‘narcissistic and insignificant’. This is the reason for the consideration of issues of validity in qualitative analysis as discussed in the methodology section (Elliott & Wexler, 1994; Yardley, 2000) and an attempt to be transparent as detailed here. In addition, and as elaborated further by Walker et al., researchers must make decisions ‘based on their experience, knowledge, and strategy of inquiry from within the philosophical and theoretical framework they have chosen’. They discuss that in presenting the results of a study, they must also demonstrate the veracity and relevance of their interpretations and of the meaning of their work. This has attempted to have been done through the processes described in the procedure section of the methodology based on Smith and Osborn (2003). Further, the analysis and discussion sections seek to interpret, discuss, justify and outline the limitations and context of the findings to aid this process.

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is then something which can have a significant potential bearing on the results. As discussed above, there are numerous ways which the researcher might impact on the findings through for example personal bias. In this project one particularly important role for me as the researcher in shaping the outcome was in the way I chose to carry out the interviews and my personal interactions during the process of the interviews with each of the interviewees. My interaction varied according to the person that I was interviewing. This meant that I might for example probe more or less depending on how responsive the interviewee was and that I drew on my own experience of interviewing people on previous occasions. This highlights how this can be a subjective and individual process, which emphasises how generalisations on the basis of such research need to be made cautiously and how triangulation of findings or further research studies can aid the interpretation of findings.

5.6 Personal reflections: development of the project

Three key elements are central to the research project: an investigation of the therapeutic relationship, an investigation of online counselling and an investigation of working therapeutically with young people. These core elements relate to my personal interests and motivations, which in turn can be seen as central to the genesis of the project. Below is an overview of how personal interests and motivations relate to these key areas.

Key to the motivation to explore the therapeutic relationship is my professional background and training experiences. As a trainee counselling psychologist working for the National Health Service (NHS) in secondary care services with people with mental health difficulties, I am involved in direct therapeutic contact with individuals and groups. My therapeutic orientation, training and philosophy, which informs this work is directly linked to the research project. Key to this is the importance placed on the therapeutic relationship, understanding the subjective view of the client and the emphasis on phenomenology, which is characteristic of

the epistemological basis of humanistic psychology (Aanstoos, Serlin, & Greening, 1996). A humanistic approach is a key underpinning strand of counselling psychology, (Woolfe & Dryden, 1996), which highlights for example, the importance of non-pathologising a person, the emphasis on formulation as opposed to diagnosis and the fundamental importance of the therapeutic relationship and humanistic value base through the work of key authors such as Rogers, (1951) and Maslow (1943). All of this is directly related to the research project, which utilises a qualitative methodology to explore the subjective understanding of online counselling with young people from the perspective of the counsellors themselves.

The interest in online counselling as a form of providing therapy relates to a personal historical interest in the development of information technology (IT) and my experience of seeing this medium grow exponentially. The 'Spectrum 48k', one of the first mainstream home computers in the UK was also my first computer. Following this, my use of computers developed along with the growth of the market and expansion of IT in public and private spheres and along with my peers, I upgraded to other higher specification computers over time. The advent of the World Wide Web in 1989, which emerged from research at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research was a key event in the history of the development of communications. This had the effect of popularising and making the use of the internet mainstream (Naughton, 2000) it was shortly after this that I began using the internet myself for email communication. An early memory of being told that a message composed of text or graphics could be transferred almost instantly from England to Australia was particularly memorable. Following this, I witnessed the exponential growth of IT and in particular the use of the internet. It was seeing the growth of this and expansion into diverse and varied areas, which eventually led me to consider how this could also be relevant for counselling psychology.

As there was little literature to discussing developments in IT and psychology it was not until researching a topic for my thesis that I came across articles making a clear link between counselling psychology and internet applications. A key set of articles

explicitly linking counselling psychology with online communication were published in *The counselling psychologist* in 2005 (Mallen & Vogel, 2005). Mallen and Vogel highlighted some key themes of counselling psychology referring to how their work provided a framework for specific questions related to the theory, research and practice of online counselling. They also highlighted the availability of online counselling citing numerous web sites, which were already offering this and presented literature suggesting such sites would grow (Norcross, Hedges, & Prochaska, 2002). My personal experiences of discussing this with colleagues tended to rouse a common query: 'How can an effective therapeutic relationship occur between therapist and client without face-to-face cues, which are so pertinent to effective communication?' This question is clearly valid, given the large quantity of research and authors suggesting that communication encompasses more than just the communication of language itself and that communication over the internet does not provide an adequate alternative for face-to-face contact (eg Altman & Taylor, 1973; Robson & Robson, 1998). However, I was surprised that a number of my colleagues' reaction was to dismiss the notion of therapy being conducted online for this reason alone and suggest that any investigation of this was in some way defunct. This highlighted to me how research in this area was urgently needed so that people could make informed decisions about the relative validity (or not) of using online methods for therapeutic contact.

Also relevant to the background of this project is the previous piece of research, mentioned above, which investigated trust between online counsellor and client conducted by myself and supervised by Andreas Vossler. (Fletcher-Tomenius & Vossler, 2009). The current project can be seen as building on the findings of this, which concluded that there were many research gaps in the literature and that further research was needed to fill these. Central to the findings was discussion of concepts such as anonymity, disinhibition and other processes idiosyncratic to the method of communication. It was commented that further work was needed to investigate how these elements impacted on the therapeutic relationship. The details of the findings of this study are discussed in more detail in the work that follows. However, of key relevance to this project is the notion of 'immersion'

(Smith & Osbourne, 2003, p. 54) of the researcher in the field of enquiry, which this previous work highlights.

Through my own therapeutic practice as a trainee counselling psychologist I have worked with both adults and young people. I have also worked with a range of other client groups including adults, families and children with mental health difficulties, older adults and people with dual diagnosis of learning disability and concurrent mental health difficulties. This range of experience has highlighted to me that key to appropriate and inclusive psychological practice (particularly when considering minority groups) is the importance of having knowledge of and being able to draw on a range of approaches and potential interventions. The field of online counselling represents a new intervention in the history of therapeutic approaches for people with mental health difficulties. This approach appears to be both growing in use and expanding in practice (Anthony, 2003). Therefore it was clear that there is an increasing need for researchers to investigate online approaches to aid knowledge of how this field might be adapted to minority groups, investigate strengths and limitations and help to develop the evidence base underpinning online work.

Related to the above point, a subsequent consideration following the research project investigating trust in online relationships was that a major client group, which the literature pointed to, were 'young' people. Hanley (2006) highlights that despite young people being a key group utilising online counselling services, 'presently there is very little research examining the specifics of youth friendly online work' (p. 183). King et al. (2006b) also comment that 'as the use of internet is becoming a norm for young people in the developed world, web-based mental health services will play a greater role in improving the mental health and well-being of young people' (p. 173). They highlight that consequently, further research in this area is imperative to further the use of this growing medium of communication which has specific relevance for young people.

5.6.1 Personal reflections: contextual issues and broader implications

The introduction to this research highlighted how there were three main aspects to this research project: an investigation of the therapeutic relationship, an investigation of online counselling and an investigation of working therapeutically with young people. This research project has discussed how each of these interrelates and has investigated through the means of a qualitative analysis how online counsellors experience the therapeutic relationship with young people. The aim of doing this was to help answer the question of how online counsellors 'experience' the online therapeutic relationship. Such a broad question required a suitably broad approach. The use of IPA reflected constructivist underpinnings to the research project. As discussed in the methodology, the aim of this was not to identify universally applicable laws but to develop insights, which are meaningful and useful. However, there are numerous limitations to the research, which have been discussed above as a result of this approach.

A key reflection, which occurred early on in the research process, was how the choice of topic and epistemology was influenced by my own beliefs, ontological orientation, professional background and personal and inter-personal experiences. I also considered how I might have been impacted in my choice of research topic by current political debates and the nature of counselling psychology. As discussed above, my choice of topic was related to my own personal work and training experiences. The later point is discussed further below.

As a student of both qualitative and quantitative methods, I can see advantages and disadvantages of the design chosen for this research. There is an argument to say that a mixed methods approach, which utilised a range of data collection and analysis methods, would provide the most comprehensive answer through the possibility afforded to 'triangulate' data. Triangulation is an approach which Jick (1979) suggests could 'uncover some unique variance, which otherwise may have been neglected by a single method' (p. 603). It is also arguable that if one asserts that they come from a pragmatic paradigm, a mixed methods approach is one

which is most appropriate. This is discussed by Hanson, Creswell, Piano Clark, Petska and Creswell (2005) who consider how a number of prominent mixed methods researchers believe pragmatism is the 'best philosophical basis' (p. 226) of mixed methods research. It was discussed in the methodology section that pragmatism also informed the design of this research and it is necessary to reflect on how other approaches could have been used. However, although it is acknowledged that the use of different methods could yield different results, I consider that this is dependent on the questions being asked. If I had chosen not to specifically focus only on the individual experiences and instead had chosen to, for example, measure online counsellors' perceptions of the working alliance using standardised measures, I may have chosen a quantitative design. There is clearly much scope for further research in online counselling and I have considered this in more detail below in the section on recommendations for future research. Some of these further studies would usefully draw on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

As the role of subjectivity and my own interpretations in the process of the analysis were particularly important in the research, it is important to consider how I may have been impacted by broader social and cultural factors. Related to this is also the changing nature and constructions of how we define science and counselling psychology. To consider this fully, one must consult up to date literature, as these are issues and debates which have changed in emphasis over time. Although my own interpretations were unique to me, one could argue that the way I interpreted and the conclusions made on the basis of these interpretations were also affected by my own academic background and the current status quo. Strawbridge and Woolfe (2010, p. 6) comment on the 'scientist practitioner' identity of counselling psychologists, which emphasises how psychological theory and research is central to the identity and practice of counselling psychologists. This is also a major element of the profession, which attracted me, so from a personal perspective this is also particularly important. However, Strawbridge and Woolfe also consider the limitations of research and quote Schön (1987, p. 3) who refers to:

'a high hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution... but... in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern.'

Strawbridge and Woolfe consider how this quotation emphasises the role of 'reflection on action' but it is also considered here that this is an apt quotation for the role of qualitative research methods and in particular the role of IPA. I can also identify with this through my own personal experiences of working in the field of mental health. One's engagement with a client cannot be solely dictated by the literature because it may not be the case that a relevant piece of literature is to hand. The 'swampy lowland' (referred to above) in this case is where a therapist may find him or herself, particularly when working (as I do) in secondary care with complex and enduring mental health difficulties. It is often the case that there are few or no protocols that one can refer to where an array of complex personal, interpersonal, social, cultural and other factors interplay. Further, if, as counselling psychology highlights, effective practice must emphasise the role of the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist, there is a necessary reflexive element to therapeutic practice. This means that to be a successful practitioner there is a need to learn from experience.

It is also necessary to consider the current political context of this research. Psychologists are increasingly called upon to justify their practice on the basis of evidence and to demonstrate technical expertise in treatment definable conditions and disorders. This is in the context of the new Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, which is oriented towards cognitive behavioural science but is also considered by some authors to be 'often inappropriate to complex life situations' (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010, p. 7). Related to this is a movement within counselling psychology, which emphasises the role of 'practice based evidence' within psychological services. Corrie (2010, p. 48) discusses how the link between research and practice has been called into question and discusses

a number of authors (eg. Marsillier, 2004) who comment they are unable to find evidence of studies, which have directly impacted on their therapeutic work. Corrie also cites evidence that many psychologists are unlikely to engage in research once qualified and may not even feel compelled to read research or keep up to date with empirical literature (Nathan, 2000). It is considered here that there is then a need for 'evidence' which appeals to a broader audience. I am mindful that some might argue this research project does not meet the traditional expectations of a study, which might inform the current push for a certain 'type' of research and inform services such as IAPT. This project may then reflect a deviation from the current political climate of research in the NHS. However, while this is acknowledged, it is also highlighted as Corrie (2010) states there is a new outlook on the research protocol, which argues for the importance of including idiographic assessment and treatment within a case formulation approach, emphasising a move away from purely quantitative designs and the emphasis of controlled laboratory based research. This research project also utilised an idiographic approach and in this way can be related to the research agenda Corrie highlights. This study can also be seen partly as a reaction to a political climate of research, which may be becoming too reliant on a narrow definition of what constitutes 'evidence'.

5.7 Relevance of the Research to Counselling Psychology

The research project has direct relevance to counselling psychology for a number of reasons, some of which have already been cited as part of the broader discussion above. A key reason to emphasise, is that the scientist-practitioner model is an approach advocated by many counselling psychologists (eg. Lane & Corrie, 2006) and as Hanley and Richards (2009) comment, 'counselling psychologists can therefore play centre stage in the development of this burgeoning field'. Mallen and Vogel (2005) also suggest that as a result of this, the field of counselling psychology is well suited to provide and evaluate online counselling.

Central to my own beliefs and practice is the scientific practitioner model. Meara et al. (1988, p. 366) comment specifically on this model in relation to counselling

psychology: 'the scientist-practitioner model is an integrated approach to knowledge that recognises the interdependence of theory, research and practice.' It is this scientific basis of the discipline separating it from other approaches (while also allying it with similar disciplines such as Clinical Psychology), which is one significant aspect of my own personal enthusiasm for counselling psychology. The scientist practitioner model emphasises that research and practice should go hand in hand, which also suggests that potential new ways of working and therapeutic endeavours should not be discarded but explored and investigated using scientific methodology. In addition, it seems prudent to consider the historical change and development of the concept of the scientist practitioner model itself. Shapiro (2002) comments that although the origin of the model called for psychologists to be trained as both scientists and practitioners, trainees and practising clinicians often expressed 'reservations' about this model. They cite a divide between research and practice: 'much research is seen as inapplicable to clinical practice'. Shapiro considers that the model should now be 'renewed' and highlights how science should be integrated with practice both conceptually and operationally. This point seems particularly relevant for online counselling where it is possible that practice of this may have advanced at a pace beyond the evidence supporting it. This would entail research that is as Shapiro comments 'based in clinically realistic settings' (p. 234). However, it is interesting that Shapiro's article comments only on clinical psychologists in the NHS. Although he does himself note that 'clinical psychology cannot claim a monopoly over scientific competence,' (p. 233) it is interesting that he does not refer to allied disciplines such as counselling psychology and how their research and practice could also assist in helping to define the scientist practitioner model. This seems to be a particularly relevant point for this research. While this project is exploring a new area of relevance to counselling psychology, it does sit firmly in the foundations of counselling psychology and as part of this highlights the importance of the scientist practitioner model. It is notable that academics such as Shapiro do not specifically mention counselling psychology when discussing the importance of 'renewing' the model although he does refer to effective 'teamwork' to support the delivery of scientist practitioner contributions and research in 'clinically realistic settings' (p.234). It is

considered that this research project being routed in the core competencies of counselling psychology and through utilising the experiences of clinicians in practice does aid the promotion of evidenced based practice within online counselling. Unfortunately, Shapiro fails to identify which allied disciplines could assist with this. This may partly reflect a lack of awareness of counselling psychology as a relatively new discipline in the NHS but it may also reflect a degree of professional rivalry and defensiveness (issues which are explored further by Walsh & Frankland, 2009). One could argue that for 'effective teamwork' to take place it is important to directly acknowledge the potential of other allied disciplines.

One may argue if the discipline of counselling psychology is suited exclusively to any one research area and thus if it is possible to align this research specifically with counselling psychology. This is a question raised by James (2009, p. 67), who considers that counselling psychology research is applicable to a 'wide umbrella' of research topics. James comments that when considering a review of past articles in 'the counselling psychology review,' many appear 'discursive', fewer involve data collection and many comment on the practice and use of different approaches. James also highlights how the research agenda is related to the philosophy of counselling psychology itself, discussing for example how authors such as Rowan (2001) would argue that 'superficial approaches' like CBT, which for symptom reduction can be evaluated using superficial symptom-based evaluations (referring to, for example, randomised controlled trials or RCT's). However, it could also be argued that deep rooted explanations of experience and personal change cannot be accessed by such methods. One may then refer to the history of research traditions to identify if and how a qualitative project investigating phenomenological aspects of online counselling is, or is not relevant to counselling psychology. If one takes the view of Rowan described above, a possible conclusion is that the study has relevance specifically when considering traditional research areas in counselling psychology. This research project's emphasis on understanding subjective experience is a particularly relevant point regarding this.

As noted above, counselling psychology research is considered applicable to a wide range of research topics and includes the use of RCT's and specifically quantitative studies. Therefore, one may also argue that there is not one specific approach or area, which is in itself uniquely related to counselling psychology because of this wide range of research endeavours, but that the study does ally itself with historical research agendas consistent with traditional themes related to the philosophy of counselling psychology.

In considering some predictions for counselling psychology over the next ten years, Walsh and Frankland (2009, p. 39) discuss the importance of qualitative studies highlighting that they feel these are of increasing importance as 'the impact of technology will continue to grow' and suggest that 'counselling psychologists will bring an appreciation of the value of evidence, which the health service and other employers will require and the on-going redefinition of 'legitimate' research to embrace more qualitative analyses and methodologies. They also point out that supporting this, qualitative methods in psychology section has now been developed.

Mallen and Vogel (2005) cite the web site 'Caremark', (<http://www.caremark.com>) which is a company staffed by registered nurses. They note that such businesses often have many similarities to services offered by counselling psychologists, yet there are very few counselling or other types of psychologists involved in the provision of these. Mallen and Vogel (2005) comment on the lack of qualified counselling psychologists who are involved in such work and state that it is important counselling psychologists increase their presence in this area. One reason they cite is that it is important counselling psychologists can help monitor the provision of services that already exist. Other authors also comment that few counselling psychologists have investigated whether online services offer a viable means of client treatment and have not developed a strong presence in the research field in this area as yet. (Mallen & Vogel, 2005; VandenBos & Williams, 2000)

There is also a need for counselling psychologists to be involved in the field of online counselling to help uphold ethical, research and clinical practice standards. This may include the removal of inaccurate information and the development of the evidence base. A study by Shaw and Shaw (2006) emphasises the need for the monitoring and development of ethical standards by professionals with relevant training and competence, which they suggest is a role counselling psychologists are well placed to fulfil. Further, it is important for counselling psychologists to become involved in this growing area to ensure they remain up to date with developments in this field so that they maintain their professional presence as the field of online counselling develops.

From the service user's point of view, counselling psychologists may have a role in minimising negative effects of the 'digital divide' and work so that clients are not disenfranchised by the development of new services provided through computer mediated communication (CMC). A key factor related to this is highlighted by Mallen et al. (2005) who comment that: 'future research efforts should investigate elements of process and outcome that have already been explored in face-to-face modes of treatment.' Related to this point, a recent study by Williams et al. (2009, p. 93) highlights that there have been no published investigations of the micro-level processes that occur during online counselling sessions and consider that this is an important omission, as improvements in the effectiveness of online counselling will depend on a better understanding of therapeutic processes characteristic of this form of delivery.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

To date, the majority of research into online counselling has focused on investigating session-level and end-of-treatment outcomes (e.g. Cook & Doyle, 2002). There have been few published investigations of the micro-level processes that occur during online counselling sessions. This is an important omission, as it could be argued that improvements in the effectiveness of online counselling (and counselling generally) depends on a better understanding of therapeutic processes

at the heart of this method of delivery (Williams et al., 2009). The approach taken in this work allowed for the exploration of the personal experience of 8 online counsellors. The active role of the researcher, analysis and discussion of the online counsellors' responses and the researcher's interpretations were central. While the four themes and their numerous sub-themes cannot be said to exclusively represent how online counsellors' 'experience' the therapeutic relationship, they do represent the findings of a phenomenological analysis of 8 online counsellors and the interpretation of the researcher in the context of an evaluation of relevant literature to date. This study supports the view of a building evidence base that positive therapeutic relationships with young people can be formed online but adds to the understanding of what the online therapeutic relationship actually consists of and how it is experienced. It also lends support to numerous other findings which have been discussed above. The findings also support studies which suggest that the action of typing itself aids self expression (Wright, 2002) and in the context of the therapeutic relationship can be an important component of therapeutic contact. This research also highlights the role of techniques and skills in the context of the relationship such as the ability to re-read and re-type text and the 'precision' of words being important. Thus, it can be concluded with Goldfried and Davila (2005) that 'therapist techniques, client involvement, and the therapeutic relationship' is 'inextricably intertwined' (p. 438).

It is notable that studies such as those by Altman and Taylor (1971) suggested that nonverbal cues are critical to the development of a therapeutic relationship. However, this research taken with the findings of other work discussed above suggests this is not a straight forward issue and there is a complex interplay of factors combining in the formation of effective therapeutic relationships. Further research is needed to explore if themes discussed here can be replicated. Hanley's (2008, 2009) research found that a therapeutic alliance could be established online between young people and counsellors working at Kooth. He considered that the concept of 'service user match' resonated through the subcategories and discussed how this was important when creating an online counselling service which 'proved flexible enough to attract a wide variety of young people whilst at the same time

providing support of a sufficient quality to maintain good relationships.’ (Hanley, 2008, p. 190). This study supports this finding and highlights how online counsellors provided this through for example the use of ‘text speak’ and adapting their methods in other ways to the online environment. It also emphasises how therapists may be assisted in this engagement through processes such as anonymity. This study also supports Hanley’s finding of ‘difficulties in service and user match’ highlighting limits in service provision, technical problems and counsellor-client matching, which were important when considering the match between user and service. This finding was supported by a number of sub-themes under the super-ordinate theme ‘challenges and limitations’.

The research highlighted numerous opportunities for future research projects. Firstly, a range of issues were raised by the research method itself of online synchronous interviews. It would be of interest, for example, to see if similar themes would be found if the same study was conducted using face-to-face interviews and if the study was repeated using online methods, if online counsellors’ behaviour during interviews differed according to the method of synchronous counselling used. Video conferencing, for example, could be used instead of synchronous text. In addition, it was considered how the individual experiences and personal background of the interviewees may have impacted on the research findings and for this reason it is important to repeat this study or make comparisons using similar studies drawn from different populations. This emphasises how generalisations made on the basis of this research should be drawn cautiously and findings should be the subject of further research. The role of the individual characteristics of the interviewer himself was also considered in relation to the findings suggesting that conclusions should be viewed in the context of the personal experiences and interpretations of the author.

It is arguable that there is a need for regulatory bodies to develop universal guidelines (as commented on by Skinner and Latchford, 2006) for online counselling services. At present there are numerous bodies which provide guidelines but given that online counselling cuts across geographical borders it seems sensible for these

bodies to develop a shared approach. This is also related to the research findings of this project. It could, for example, be useful to ensure that all online counsellors receive accredited training to a specified level before practising online. This study suggests that there are discrepancies in the way therapists practice online although it is not possible to comment if this is in any way problematic for the therapy and further research is needed to explore this. One could argue that the variety of typing abilities and discrepancies in how emoticons and short hand ('text speak') are used could present difficulties for online relationships. Other studies support the need for universal guidelines. Shaw and Shaw (2006) for example highlighted that many online counsellors are not following accepted practice.

There are numerous other possible quantitative and qualitative studies which could be utilised to explore the online therapeutic relationship further on the basis of the findings from this study. For example, it was found that online counsellors perceived there were many similarities between online and face-to-face forms of providing counselling when establishing a therapeutic relationship. However, this finding could be queried, because it is possible that online counsellors were biased towards their particular mode of working. The evidence base comparing online with face-to-face forms of counselling was discussed in the literature review, but concluded that further work was needed to understand if and how therapeutic relationships of the same quality as face-to-face studies are formed. The findings of this research could be complimented by quantifiable research, which could investigate this further.

An older but seminal piece of work on the therapeutic relationship can be quoted when concluding on the findings of this project. Bordin (1979) proposed that the working alliance between the person who seeks change and the one who offers to be a change agent is one of the keys, 'if not *the* key, to the change process.' (p. 252) He also comments that the working alliance can be defined and elaborated in terms, which make it universally applicable and can be shown to be valuable for integrating knowledge, particularly for pointing to new research directions. It was discussed above that there are aspects of the notion of the therapeutic alliance

which can be usefully considered in relation to the findings of this research. It was found for example that the 'bond' component of the alliance could be understood in relation to the themes and sub-themes of anonymity. It was discussed that the increased sense of empowerment and control which young people seem to experience when online aids their sense of trust and ability to develop this bond with a therapist. However, it was also discussed that while the therapeutic relationship may be aided in some ways by the relative anonymity afforded by online communication, there were also numerous difficulties with this. The concept of behavioural inhibition was related to comments by online counsellors that anonymity could cause difficulties for online relationships and this was discussed in the context of current clinical (NICE) guidelines. The notion of the therapeutic alliance can then be usefully applied to some degree to online therapeutic relationships. Perhaps more importantly than this and in the context of epistemological and ontological considerations underlying this research, it is necessary to consider how the individual experiences of online counsellors can be understood in their own unique context. The four themes and sub-themes identified provide a framework for understanding how online counsellors experience the therapeutic relationship with young people online. However, they need to be considered in the context of the research project itself and how this was carried out. Key considerations are how the methodology, including the novel method of data collection and the researcher's own interpretations impacted on the findings.

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APENDIX 1

Consent Form

Title of project:

Online Counsellors Experience of the Therapeutic Relationship with Young People.

Name of Researcher:

Leon Fletcher-Tomenius

Please type

your

name in the boxes

below if you agree

to the statements.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet I have also had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason and without my legal rights being affected.
3. I understand that what I say during the interview will be used in the write up of the research project and may be published at a future date.
4. I understand that in the event of me disclosing any personally identifiable information, this will be anonymised or removed in the write up of the research.
5. I agree to take part in the study

APPENDIX 2

Participant Information Sheet

Title

Online counsellors experience of the therapeutic relationship with young people.

Why have I been asked to partake in the study?

You have been asked to partake in this study because you work as a qualified counsellor with young people online.

What is the background to this study?

Online therapy is increasingly being sought as a method of receiving counselling, but previous studies have focussed largely on the analysis of the therapeutic relationship in face-to-face contexts. There is little research on how online therapists themselves perceive the therapeutic relationship and in particular there is little, which investigates how they perceive this relationship when working with young people.

How will the research be conducted and the data generated and analysed?

This study takes a qualitative approach employing the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to study the online therapeutic relationships from the perspective of the therapist working with young people. This means that a series of online interviews will be conducted with online therapists. During the interview, the online therapist will be asked about their experience of the therapeutic relationship with young people. The transcripts of the online interviews will be analysed by looking for themes in the text and commenting on this.

The interviews will be analysed by Leon Fletcher-Tomenius but will be logged with the thesis supervisor whose contact details are below.

Is what I say confidential?

What you tell the interviewer will be confidential and no other third party will be informed about the content of this unless you say something that suggests there is risk to either yourself or others. It is possible however that the supervisor of the project (contact details below) may see the data before it is made anonymous. The anonymised interviews between the participant and researcher will be commented upon in the write up of the project and the text from these interviews will appear in the analysis.

It is noted that although it is deemed unlikely that any other party would be able to see the data transferred over the internet, this cannot be completely ruled out. This is because it is thought that if someone has the relevant technical abilities; it is theoretically possible for any form of communication to be intercepted. This risk is minimised through the use of up to date software and virus and spyware protection and is considered highly unlikely.

What will happen to the transcripts of what I say?

All interviews will be made anonymous so that the interviewees name does not appear on any written documents associated with the research. A pseudonym will appear in the text where the interviewees name occurs. After the project has been written up, the transcripts will be kept in a secure locked location with London Metropolitan University. It is possible that the project will be published at a future date so anonymous comments may form part of a future publication.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There are no known disadvantages of your participation in the study.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

This work will help us to explore and understand the therapist-client relationship in online counselling, with a particular emphasis on how this relationship is developed with young people. Helping aid understanding of this could also lead to enhancing the efficacy of such services, although this would require further work in addition to this study.

What if I don't want to participate?

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by London Metropolitan University's ethics panel.

Who can I contact for more information about this study?

If you have any other questions about the study, please ask the researcher for more details. His contact details are:

Leon Fletcher-Tomenius

tomenius@yahoo.co.uk

Tel. 077 864 08 901

If you feel that you still would like to know more about the study please contact Dr Andreas Vossler who is the main research supervisor. His contact details are:

a.vossler@londonmet.ac.uk,

Tel: 0207 320 1059

APPENDIX 3

Interview Schedule

How do online counsellors working with young people experience the therapeutic relationship in their online work?

What is your experience of how the therapeutic relationship develops with young people online?

What are the key features of the online therapeutic relationship reported by online counsellors working with young people?

Further prompts: Are empathy, unconditional positive regard, congruence factors of this?

How might the therapeutic orientation of the online counsellor impact upon the online therapeutic relationship with a young person?

Further prompts: How might the use of CBT, person centred, systemic, psychodynamic therapies be used online?

Are there any technological issues associated with the medium of conducting therapy in this way which might affect the development of the therapeutic relationship with young people?

Further prompts: speed of typing, literacy, familiarity with the internet, programmes, spyware, virus', use of avatars.

Do you think the young person who is an online client has any expectations when they begin online therapy?

Further prompts: How might the gender, age, qualifications, experience impact upon the relationship?

Does working with young people online have any differences to working with young people face-to-face?

Do you feel that there are any advantages or disadvantages to working therapeutically with young people online as opposed to face-to-face?

Further prompts: How might the lack of facial cues and body language impact?

How might the medium of communication itself (i.e. typing or face-to-face contact) affect the therapeutic relationship?

Do you feel the stages of therapy with a client are different when using an online approach instead of a face-to-face approach?

Further prompts – how might the initial stages be affected, maintenance of the therapy and endings be affected?

APPENDIX 4

Sample Transcript

Interview with 'Jane'

22 I: This question is rather general: How do online counsellors working with young people experience the therapeutic relationship in their online work?

23 P: that's an interesting one and obviously I can only speak for myself. I actually see little difference in the therapeutic value of the work, online can be as therapeutic for young people as face-to-face can, but sometimes the method of delivery has to be adapted slightly. I still get the sense of satisfaction as a counsellor as I did in face-to-face work.

24 I: Can you say a bit more about how the method of delivery needs to be adapted?

25 P: yes, subtleties can be lost in online work, because I suppose we are stripped down to the bare minimum, words without facial expression etc, so I find sometimes I may need to explain what I am saying a bit more so that they can get the intended interpretation. It feels like some things need to be spelt out more to possibly 'soften' the way they may be received when no body language is available.

26 P: In face-to-face work, I used my face a lot...

27 P: clients could SEE the warmth or concern...

28 P: or I could gesture some feelings that I obviously can't do without the client present, that is where emoticons can also be invaluable, they at least help to demonstrate the respect I am saying something with

29 I: Are you saying then that it is possible to make up for the 'subtleties' that are lost in online work? If so is this done through the use of emoticons only?

30 P: yes, I think it is possible. No, it's not purely through emoticons, but they are certainly very useful, particularly when working with young clients. I think that it requires a precision in words and context, I often find myself thinking 'am I saying exactly what I want them to know I mean here' because they only have my written word and any emoticons to 'meet' me through, so that adds to how crucial they are.

31 I: That is very interesting.

32 I: Do you know why emoticons are so important for young clients?

33 P: mmm, I'm finding it very interesting myself and I hadn't necessarily thought about it like that before, but it does become natural.

34 P: I think because they represent me, they can enact the warmth that I may want a young vulnerable client to know I feel for them. I've always felt a very down to earth counsellor, I want young people to feel comfortable with me and relate to me and when I worked face-to-face they could pick that up in so many ways, it may be the clothes I wear, the informality etc, but that's invisible online...

35 P: so I want young clients to realise things like, that I have a sense of humour, that I do genuinely care about them, that I'm not like a teacher etc, and I think the emoticons can contribute to that

36 I: Do you think that the way you use emoticons with young people would be different to how you would use them with an older person?

37 P: yes, i think there tend to be less use of them with an older person, maybe because there is always the possibility with younger clients that they may not understand some of the words i have used (we can often be working without knowing how old a client is)

38 P: and i think they break the ice with younger clients too

39 I: You said that the emoticons and written word can be 'crucial' when working online as there is a need for 'precision'. Do you think that need for precision impacts the therapeutic relationship?

40 P: maybe, i'm just trying to think in what way...

41 I: take your time.

42 P: yes, it can interfere sometimes with trying to be a person centred counsellor, i'm not sure how much is about the precision and how much is again about the invisibility of the work...

43 P: sometimes it can feel a little too directive because i feel i need to be precise to prevent misunderstandings that are more vulnerable to happening because of the online element...

44 P: and also because young clients can find it very hard to sit with 'silence', i think sometimes i step in before i would in a face-to-face situation

45 I: So it sounds like that because of the nature of 'needing to be precise' it is not always possible to be person centered when working online?

46 P: mmm, no, i think it is but i think it can make the challenges different

47 P: i have to find other ways of being present in a person centred sense, i guess its back to trying to adapt to the situation

48 P: and i think it can be equally powerful, maybe more so, for clients

49 I: Do you mean you feel that online counselling is as powerful as f2f with YP?

50 P: yes, i certainly think it can be. I have worked with some people and its as if i forget that i have no idea what they look like, at the risk of sounding corny, it can be like i know their soul, but the stuff that doesnt matter! and for yp's the fact that they have chosen to use an online service gives them a freedom and anonymity that they wouldnt have f2f

51 P: sorry, that was meant to be, but NOT the stuff that doesnt matter

52 P: eg, the superficial stuff, how they dress, etc

53 I: You said you are not sure 'how much is about the precision and how much is again about the invisibility of the work'. Can you just tell me a bit more about what you meant by invisibility?

54 P: yes, i think this is more of an issue with yp's who are struggling to engage, there could be something in how i present myself physically, as i say, the non-verbals, that could demonstrate how present i am, and sometimes i feel that helps them to be present...

55 P: but when they cannot see me, i wonder sometimes if they think i'm just sat there twiddling my thumbs and not really wanting them to engage

56 I: Are there any advantages and disadvantages to this 'invisibility'? for the clients or the counsellor?

57 P: oh yes, i think the main ones are for the client...

58 P: it can help take away any self-consciousness...

59 P: it by-passes issues about image and attractiveness etc

60 P: kooth of course is anonymous, which i think is wonderful for yp's...

61 P: that offers so much freedom for them they do not receive if they are in f2f work

62 P: for the counsellor there are advantages but they tend to be more practical rather than process focused

63 I: Can you name a some?

64 P: ha, yeah, lack of travel time etc, being in own home, those kind of things. I have a health problem and know that if i worked the amount of hours () f2f that i do online, it would take far more out of me physically, i'm not sure if i can explain why, but i know it would

65 P: i also really like the hours, you know, working evenings etc

66 I: How does the young person's 'freedom' impact on your work with them and in particular the therapeutic relationship?

67 P: mmm, another one to think on Leon!...

68 I: take your time and if you need a quick break, please just say!

69 P: will do...

70 P: i think the main thing is that actually, and this is what i love, it gives them far greater empowerment than f2f work

71 P: i work with a lot of people whose issues are sexual abuse, usually historical...

72 P: if they told me some of the things they do in a setting where i already knew their name and details...

73 P: then automatically they would get lost in the system, child protection would kick in (which it does on kooth but because yps do not have to have given their details they are anonymous) and suddenly the yp would not feel in charge of what then happens

74 P: and i do feel it is very important that yp's can talk openly to a counsellor about these issues without losing a sense of empowerment

75 P: so i think the impact on the therapeutic relationship is a very positive one

76 I: Do you think that the young person's sense of empowerment not as dominant in F2F or it is the same?

77 P: it ensures the yp feels in charge, not me

78 I: *is not as dominant

79 P: i don't think its as dominant in f2f as online, i think online really does help that sense of empowerment...

80 P: they don't have to go in to a strange building and feel intimidated by adults...

81 P: they don't have to give their name and address...

82 P: they can 'walk out' far easier than they could if they were in f2f work...

83 I: You said that child protection does become involved in some cases on Kooth. I just wondered how that is possible if the YP are anonymous?

84 I: *in Kooth

85 P: what happens is that we may then try to encourage them to share their details, but if they don't then we can do nothing

86 I: I see. Thanks.

87 P: and we make it very clear to them when we start working with them, that they do NOT have to give us their personal details, so those who do, choose to do so

88 I: I noticed you said earlier you're not very 'techi'. Do you feel this a problem at all when working as an online counsellor?

89 P: lol! in the sense of the actual work, no...

90 P: but in some other aspects, yes, like the way the laptop is set up, i don't understand some of these aspects but that only creates problems with admin sides of things, but the work with yp's...

91 P: is fine as its a very simple chat room that i'm told works a bit like msn (no idea what thats like though!)

92 I: Do you think there are certain skills that are needed to be an online counsellor?

93 P: i expected it to be far harder techi wise than it is!

94 I: sorry... technologically speaking.

95 P: mmm, another one for me to think on there leon!

96 P: ok, so you mean what technological skills do you need?

97 I: Yes. :)

98 P: mmm,not really, you need to have good, quick keyboard skills

99 P: and understand simple things like what to do if you lose connection etc

100 P: but in regards to the actual work with yp's thats it

101 I: How might the medium of communication itself (i.e. typing or face-to-face contact) affect the therapeutic relationship with YP?

102 P: ooh, ...

103 P: well, i think some of the things we've already said apply to that but i certainly don't feel it can obscure the therapeutic relationship, i guess the occassional loss of connection can be a problem and you can guarantee that will happen when it matters most in the process

104 P: my feeling is that the same general cores apply to both f2f and online...

105 P: if the counsellor provides the theraputic and safe environment, and the client is willing to engage, then progress is inevitable

106 P: of course, for yp's there are sometimes interferences at their sides that can make online a problem, family interrupting, no privacy etc

107 I: Ok. Well. I think we have finished there.. You have given some really interesting answers that will make for some rich analysis and discussion. Have you got any questions you would like to ask me?

108 P: no leon, i hope its been helpful and its been useful for me to also have that time to look at how the process works online. Will we ever be able to see the results of your study?

109 I: Sure. I can put together a summary of the thesis for you to have a look at.

110 P: yes, that would be great. It will be interesting to see. Are you speaking to any other online services as well?

111 I: I am not... only Kooth. Although it would be interesting to talk to other services.. I dont think I would have the time! Sorry I just thought of one other questions: If someone has poor typing skills, how might this impact the therapeutic relationship?

112 P: do you mean if a yp or a counsellor?

113 I: hmmm. both.

114 P: ok, well, i guess its mainly that it could slow things down because of the limitation of how much could be covered in a session, but that doesnt mean that it wouldnt still be a therapeutic relationship...

115 P: what is going on internally for the yp would still be present, mmm, not sure how to express what i'm meaning...

116 P: yes, it may slow the physical implementation down, but the nature of the relationship is the most important aspect

117 P: and i think that would still come across, but the counsellors skills may just have to adapt a little

118 I: Ok. Thanks again for your help with this.

119 P: you are welcome Leon, i hope its useful for you. I'm sorry you've had to chase me a little, take care.

120 P: (wave)

121 I: All the best. (wave)

122 P: had to send you one after the discussion of emoticons!

123 P: you too :)

124 P: bye

125 I: Bye :)

APPENDIX 5

Thematic Table

Theme 1: Practical implications of working online	
Sub-Theme 1: Flexibility	
Operationalised: Interviewees referred to how working online allowed for flexibility in contact which could impact on the therapeutic relationship and the working environment.	
Linda Turn 30	P: I guess a lot depends on the frequency of contact - i.e some yp come on daily, others only very rarely - but maybe its more to do with the use of text, some will tell you a lot, almost not waiting for responses - and others will say very little, so it takes longer to get a feel for them
Jane Turn 64-65	P: ha, yeah, lack of travel time etc, being in own home, those kind of things. I have a health problem and know that if i worked the amount of hours (30) f2f that i do online, it would take far more out of me physically, i'm not sure if i can explain why, but i know it would P: i also really like the hours, you know, working evenings etc
John Turn 53	P: advantages = the yp's 'instant access' to a trained professional without all the formalities that accompany having to 'go' to see a therapist.
Claire Turn 51	P: hmmm its just different, i love face2face with yp, but i love this too, because u still build up ur relationship, i think that in face2face i wouldn't have the flexibility i have on here as i have a few long term clients i have worked with, for a while now, where as there would be more pressure to end in face2face
Kim Turn 104	P: For some online suits them best because it is more adaptable...they don't have to travel...they can see someone at unsocial hours...
Sub-Theme 2: Able to re-read and re-type text and limited time	
Operationalised: Interviewees reported that the use of the typed word impacted on their experience of the therapeutic relationship with young people and the time of therapeutic contact.	
John Turn 33-34	I: So, it sounds like writing the responses down has to be done very carefully with young people because what you write might be interpreted in a different way to how it would be interpreted in a face-to-face situation? P: Thats right - and for those who just use messaging its vital that the reply u send is as concise as poss. It may take a few re-writes before i send to make sure.
Linda Turn 41	P: .. some people are more guarded than others - I work with one yp both online and f2f - and in some ways she is more open online than in our f2f sessions. I suppose an example might be someone who deletes and rewrites their reply a few times, some will just send the 'correct' reply - whereas others will rewrite it and send each one - or

	others send the 'correct' one and then tell me they had trouble knowing how to say that - that they needed to rewrite it and rewrite it
Jake Turn 67	P: Absolutely - Like u have been doing - we read back over what has been said, and that encourages fact verifying. BUT at same time - we do spend a lot of time building rapport (did u see that research in OZ in CPR mag about online counsellors spending more time developing rapport? in latest issue). I think the pressure u may have felt is perhaps more pronounced cos u KNOW this is last one. But yes, it makes u v careful with interventions, which is no bad thing. I have become better f2f counsellor since working online, no doubt.
Jake Turn 63-64	In what i have experienced, when working f2f with Uni students, i certainly feel less pressure of time. P: And as has been demonstrated in this interview, u dont get many chances do u? How few back and forth interactions compared to f2f, so there is a pressure there
Jane Turn 114-118	P: ok, well, i guess its mainly that it could slow things down because of the limitation of how much could be covered in a session, but that doesnt mean that it wouldnt still be a therapeutic relationship... P: what is going on internally for the yp would still be present, mmm, not sure how to express what i'm meaning... P: yes, it may slow the physical implementation down, but the nature of the relationship is the most important aspect P: and i think that would still come across, but the counsellors skills may just have to adapt a little
Sub-theme 3: Familiarity for young people	
Operationalised: Online counsellors discussed how young peoples' familiarity with the internet as a means of communicating impacted upon the therapeutic relationship.	
Jake Turn 32	For YP it may have similarities if they use msn to talk to friends
John Turn 53	The fact that the medium of therapy is a 'familiar' one to them - in that its using a computer.
Sub-theme 4: Challenges and limitations	
Sub-theme 1 of 5: Can be interferences/distractions/easy to leave	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how the nature of communicating online could allow for distractions that would not be present in a face-to-face environment and make it easier for young people to leave the session as a result of this.	
Katie Turn 60	somehow, in the same room it seems easier to communicate I think...and the fact that the young person has 'arrived' and attended their appointment and is in the room with you, gives you more chance to build relationship...its harder for a young person to walk out of f2f than it is to just leave the chat room
Debbie	P: they can disappear and myt be doing a lot of things at the same

Turn 81-85	<p>time as talking to us, like talking on msn. if there are big gaps i tend to ask if its difficult to talk for any reason.</p> <p>P: basically sometimes that they myt not engage cos they're doing other thingsq</p> <p>I: How might that impact on your relationship - if they are doing other things?</p> <p>P: harder to work with them. can be frustrating for me</p>
Katie Turn 79-81	<p>I: You also said that the relationship is fragile at first. Do you feel that stages of therapy with a client are any different to F2F?</p> <p>P: Well, I guess that all relationships are at the beginning of therapy with yp or adults, are somewhat fragile, but I think that its more so with on line work...so slower to build working aliance maybe....Working face-to-face with young people does have problems to...and just wondering now if they are any more extreme on line. The stuff that gets in the way of therapy is not attending, being late, gamey behaviour, inconsistency..all that stuff still happens on line! so maybe for me the building of relationship is the thing that I do find different</p>
Katie Turn 83-85	<p>I: Could you just say a bit more about why it is slower to build the TA online?</p> <p>P: msn gets in the way on line! and yet young people can ahve several convos at once!</p>
Sub-theme 2 of 5: Isolating for the counsellor/need for supervision	
Operationalised: Interviewees commented on how working online could be isolating for them and how this related to a need for supervision.	
John Turn 54	<p>The BIG one to working online for me personally is the lack of 'social contact' (either with the yp or colleagues). The work can be quite isolating and there can be a 'craving' to be able to have a break and a 'moan' or pleasant chat with a colleague over a coffee. This is sp so when its ben a tough session etc - where there is a need to 'off-load' professionally really.</p>
John Turn 61	<p>P: hopefully this is negated by the issue of 'being present' for the yp. F2f work is also isolating to a degree - we work alone and chats with other counsellors tend to be only fleeting at the best of times. The use of internal / peer / and external supervision is vital. The availability of SKYPE has also helped to establish better forms of communication with colleagues and ultimately....no matter what the external pressures / distractions are - I see myself as a professional and try to evaluate 'my needs' on a daily basis to ensure that I can work to my best abilities with the yp - either online of f2f.</p>
Sub-theme 3 of 5: Lack of typical cues and the need for reassurance	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how the lack of cues which would be typical in a face to face environment impacted on their experience of the relationship. In addition, they also discussed how they experienced a need to be reassured and to reassure the other.	
Linda Turn 33	<p>P: yes, but I guess in f2f there are other ways of communicating, body language etc, online if there are no words, no text - there is</p>

	little to go on
Debbie Turn 46	not really, i think im jus more aware sometimes when im working a certain way, like im more aware that i need to convey empathy and it seems more important in a way maybe cos i feel i lose wot i myt convey online through body language or tone of voice which myt be to try and make it not seem so cold sometimes which i guess it can seem that way online sometimes- if that makes sense
Katie Turn 52	P: It's more difficult to build a relationship on line than face-to-face...it takes longer I think and requires more patience! there are less clues...we are deprived of body language, facial expression and need to check stuff out more
John Turn 48	they obviously don't truly appreciate the need for me to 'reflect' on what they have said in order for an appropriate response. In f2f - there will be non-verbal indicators to say I'm reflecting' really.
Kim Turn 93-97	I: thats an interesting point about being seen, being important. why do you think that would be important for the YP? P: to be validated as normal, as OK. P: But as you know, recovery from traumas such as sexual abuse takes time I: Does that mean that without this, the YP might not feel these things? P: no...not neccessarily...becasue the counsellor will work witht he young perosn, set tasks on how to start changing thier perceptions of themselves and this is around doing real things in thier physical environment
Linda Turn 57	in f2f if client has trouble saying something you maybe will have a clue why - or at least tht they did, a pause will also have visual clues with it, and you can ask if it seems appropriate - whereas online its sometimes more difficult to tell
Jane Turn 55	when they cannot see me, i wonder sometimes if they think i'm just sat there twiddling my thumbs and not really wanting them to engage
John Turn 54	ppl can 'mess' and pretend etc which can lead to 'abuse' of the counsellor (esp if there has been a great deal of therapeutic investment that has occurred.
Debbie Turn 84-97	P: harder to work with them. can be frustrating for me I: Do you know why they might do that online? It sounds like that behaviour is different to how they would behave face-to-face? P: maybe jus you can online. that you can have lots of convs at once I: why do you think someone would choose to have more than one conversation at a time? P: i kno for me personally i do it on msn or fb cos ppl type slow and i get bored so im usu in a few diff convs to keep my attention P: not even that ppl type slow, they myt jus be thinking or be in alot of convs I: do you feel that being in lots of conversations can impact on the relationship you have therapeutically with that person though? Does

	<p>the other person always know you may be in another conversation?</p> <p>P: i dont do it wen working onnlin</p> <p>P: online</p> <p>P: i mean thats wot i myt do socially</p> <p>P: and thats wot i think some yp are doin wen online to me</p> <p>P: i meant wen* im on fb or msn</p> <p>P: not wen working online</p>
Linda Turn 57	<p>in f2f if client has trouble saying something you maybe will have a clue why - or at least tht they did, a pause will also have visual clues with it, and you can ask if it seems appropriate - whereas online its sometimes more difficult to tell - at least at first - it could be their connection is slow, or they type slow, or they are doing something else - so you are not as able to reflect on it sometimes</p>
Debbie Turn 52-56	<p>P: if they arent talking much then i jus tell them to take their time and reassure them its their space to talk and they tk as much time they want</p> <p>P: dont seem to have to do that as much f--f</p> <p>I: Sorry.... don't have to do what as much - reassure?</p> <p>P: yeah but i think thats more wen there are big gaps and i cant always be sure wots going on, whether they're thinking of have disappeared</p>
Katie Turn 56-58	<p>P: I am aware that for young people, coming on line can be very scary....and they may have not told anyone about what they are going through coping with. It feels like a fragile link which depends on how inviting, encouraging, empathic I am in that initial few minutes on line.</p>
Debbie Turn 57-59	<p>I: Do you think that you might need some re-assurance in that situation - if you don't know if they are there?</p> <p>P: thats wot i was jus thinking- i was thinking back on wot i wrote before and am aware that i do more in a way cos they cant see im here and listening and thats why im more aware of having to convey it online more</p>
Sub-theme 4 of 5: Can be more difficult and slower to form online relationships	
Operationalised: This sub-theme represents how it can more difficult for online counsellors to form therapeutic relationships. Issues which they discussed in relation to this were the limited time and the difficulties which young people had in understanding the notion of what online counselling actually is.	
Linda Turn 28	<p>P: well I guess its unique to online, its in some ways quite different from f2f and its built up through text, words, emoticons, - in some ways I guess it can be slower to build - or slower to be sure of</p>
Kim Turn 29	<p>P: there are two kinds of 'camps' in the online world. You get some young people who are very hesitant and take a while to let you in....in some ways these are easier to work with. OK so the 'assessment' bit takes a whlie...understanding who they are and what the issues are, but at least you get the opportunity to work out the contract with them.</p>
Katie	<p>It's more difficult to build a relationship on line than face-to-</p>

Turn 52	face...it takes longer I think and requires more patience! there are less clues...we are deprived of body language, facial expression and need to check stuff out more
Jake Turn 63	But i do get sense that in f2f, it may be easier to secure attachment. Whereas online, there is freedom to NOT meet. Like i said at beginning - to coexist in this cyberspace, without personality almost. But i think that has potential dangers. And is ultimately less satisfying - i dont enjoy being automated in that way, but inevitably it is a large part of our work cos thats what YP come on for - to avoid the complicity of f2f contact. We have to struggle with that problem all the time - it is not ok for YP to use online as avoidance of f2f contact - so our job must be in some way to facilitate that. But inevitably sometimes we don't.
Jane Turn 25	subtleties can be lost in online work, because i suppose we are stripped down to the bare minimum, words without facial expression etc, so i find sometimes i may need to explain what i am saying a bit more so that they can get the intended interpretation. It feels like some things need to be spelt out more to possibly 'soften' the way they may be received when no body language is available.
Linda Turn 31	..some will present in each chat seeming very similar types of use of language, text etc - and others will present very differently from one chat to another
John Turn 35-36	I: You said that YP may see the response as 'written in stone'. Do you know why that is? P: cuz if they 'interpret' something in the msg that was not my intention - they may feel that I haven't grasped what they ave said in their initial msg or they mis-interpret my reply.
Claire Turn 16	I: Do you mean that the use of such things as emoticons are used instead of body language? P: not necessarily, but some young people will come on and just put every moticon there is and not be really engaged therapeutically, its a bit like a game.....
Kim Turn 24	P: ok firstly for us the biggest question is WHY has this particular young person come online....not every young person comes to our service looking specifically for counselling or therapy....some come to unload, ask questions to a particular problem and some, even if they think they want counselling CAN'T use it.
Kim Turn 123	P: I think the key difference with young people is the extra mile you have to go in educating them about counselling.....not all young people want counselling, not really, and so the online counsellor has to be prepared to offer support and advice sometimes or to refer on to more appropriate services
Kim Turn 34	P: well the point of kooth is to make getting support easy and to remove barriers. Its really a process of education as it is face-to-face. You can't expect that young people will know what counselling is and how it works....so you have to 'show' them as

	well as 'tell' them...
Claire Turn 24	P: not a game as in the games people play, more a game where young people don't really understand what counselling is and they come on for a chat
Claire Turn 151	they don't always quite understand what counselling is, and we are advertised as an advice site too, so it gets a little confusing for them sometimes
Sub-theme 5 of 5: Technical failure and the need for computer literacy and skills	
Operationalised: Participants and the interviewer commented on how technical difficulties could impact on the therapeutic relationship with their clients. Participants also referred to how computer skills on the part of both client and therapist could impact the therapeutic relationship.	
Debbie Turn 23	I: I should just add that for some reason I can't see the pen on the top right of the screen so if I type before you finish I don't mean to be rude. Not sure why I can't see it though.
Jane Turn 103	I guess the occasional loss of connection can be a problem and you can guarantee that will happen when it matters most in the process
Linda Turn 70-73	I guess internet connection can be a pain in the arse if it's bad, it can lead to a lot of frustration on the part of both therapist and client and get in the way - also I imagine if the therapist or the client were not particularly at home with computers it would have an impact I: is it quite common to experience internet connection problems? P: it can be - not so much lately - but we did have a spate where a lot of people from one area - had bad connections due to all using the same school computers which only had dial up P: but as technology advances it becomes less
Linda Turn 93-95	P: I quite enjoyed it actually - but then I quite like talking a lot too ! I guess the only thing I would mention is that sometimes I almost added a bit more - but did not want to cut across your writing - but I think that's more because I am so used to not wanting to cut across if a client is writing something - if that makes sense? I: That does make sense. Do you think it could be helpful if I gave a little more time before responding in the future? P: I think maybe just keep an eye on the pen thing - and if someone's pen starts to go again - give them a little more time, or let them know it's ok to add something if your writing.
Jane Turn 99	you need to have good, quick keyboard skills and understand simple things like what to do if you lose connection etc
Theme 2: Anonymity and empowerment	
Sub-theme 1: Maintains boundaries	
Operationalised: Participant referred to how the anonymity of the client and therapist could help to maintain the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship.	
Jake Turn 51	keeping the relationship online maintains that purity in some way. In a way it is like if a friend and client become friends after process - that process can be tarnished.
Sub-theme 2: Importance of others not finding out	

Operationalised: Participants referred to how it was important to the young people that they felt other people would not find out and that this could also impact on the therapeutic relationship and their sense of empowerment.	
Katie Turn 57	P: I am aware that for young people, coming on line can be very scary....and they may have not told anyone about what they are going through coping with. It feels like a fragile link which depends on how inviting/encouraging/empathic I am in that initial few minutes on line.
Linda Turn 43	she was raped and feels a great sense of shame and judgement, she has told me she feels more hidden online, less exposed, more in control - so therefore can afford to be more open
Debbie Turn 70-72	I: You said earlier that the sometimes YP don't want parents finding out anything and I think you were saying that seeing a counsellor online instead of face-to-face helps with this? Are there any advantages or disadvantages to enabling the YP to talk about their problems in this way? P: advantage sometimes is that they can come on here to work things out which they wouldn't be able to do otherwise. disadvantage could be they stay in danger if we can't help if at risk of harm but then i wonder if those yp would come on anyway then and ask for any help if they thought we would break confidentiality
Kim Turn 62	P: well they don't have to be referred so it's completely private....no one need know
Sub-theme 3: Enables clients to engage and not engage	
Operationalised: Participants commented on how the anonymity afforded by the online environment helped clients to engage with their online therapist. Conversely, they also commented on how the anonymity could hinder the client's engagement and this was also observed in the interviewers interactions with participants.	
Debbie Turn 27	i think some yp seem willing to angage with the work quite quick maybe cos they are anonymous
Linda Turn 28	but sometimes yp are very open very quickly and it can feel very quick
Debbie Turn 71	P: advantage sometimes is that they can come on here to work things out which they wouldnt be able to do otherwise.
Kim Turn 69	P: yes...we get so many people say they find it easier to talk to us than thier psychologist or face-to-face worker. Also in school settings they hold a lot back becasue of the confidentiality rules
John Turn 59	I get a hell of a lot more DNA's in f2f (1st session) - than I do online.
Debbie Turn 108	P: i def think its more accessible- cos its online and cos of the anonymity
Debbie Turn 112	P: can be quicker and more intense as yp sometimes come in and say more right from the start cos of the anonymity
Kim Turn 37-41	P: Leon...I have just got to take a call...can you give me ten minutes? I: Sure.. no problem. Just let me know when your ready. P: sorry leon

	<p>P: almost there</p> <p>I: OK.</p> <p>P: ok back</p> <p>P: no more phone calls</p>
Linda Turn 44-45	<p>P: I imagine there are many, I guess feeling hidden can lead to a more open encounter but also it can lead to a more erm false (i n a way) encounter, the client is able to put on a character - hide things etc - sometimes I imagine this can be useful and other times not at all</p>
Linda Turn 53-55	<p>P: I guess its something to do with the difficulty of having this yp come on and present as a different person, different log on - denies having spoken to you, but same presenting problems, same use of language, same words, etc and logging on from the same pc as the other user names - but only stays to chat to a certain point before logging off and coming back as someone else</p> <p>I: Do you find that this is a common concern for you when working online?</p> <p>P: no - I imagine its a very small minority tht do this - I guess sometimes it can feel like a larger proportion because this yp can take up a lot of time</p>
John Turn 54	<p>Yp can 'avoid' issues easier than in f2f in my opinion but saying all that.....they are the only disadvantages I can think of.</p>
Debbie Turn 82	<p>P: they can disappear and myt be doing a lot of things at the same time as talking to us, like talking on msn. if there are big gaps i tend to ask if its difficult to talk for any reason.</p>
John Turn 57	<p>P: as all ppl do when they don't 'want' to address an issue. It happens in f2f but the cues are more obvious and can be 'seen' and subsequently acted on. When online - the yp can 'pretend' or even jst press the 'escape' button.</p>
Jake Turn 63	<p>Whereas online, there is freedom to NOT meet. Like i said at beginning - to coexist in this cyberspace, without personality almost. But i think that has potential dangers. And is ultimately less satisfying - i dont enjoy being automated in that way, but inevitably it is a large part of our work cos thats what YP come on for - to avoid the complicity of f2f contact. We have to struggle with that problem all the time - it is not ok for YP to use online as avoidance of f2f contact - so our job must be in some way to facilitate that. But inevitably sometimes we don't</p>
Claire Turn 97	<p>P: just 5 min pls i need to answer a call</p> <p>I: Ok.</p> <p>P: sorry</p> <p>P: it will take 5 mins</p> <p>I: ok. no problem. I wondered if you know why you are the only person using CBT?</p> <p>I: Oh. Ok. talk in 5</p>
Sub-theme 4: No prejudice	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how the anonymity afforded through online meant that prejudices were not as prevalent as they would be face-to-face.	

<p>Jake Turn 37-41</p>	<p>i know if i met some of the YP i work with f2f, my prejudices would come in, where as a pure online relationship is that: pure - no other factors other than the words people use.</p> <p>P: When i work f2f i have to work through those prejudices, perhaps online there is less need</p> <p>I: That's interesting. So it sounds like online you experience less prejudices?</p> <p>P: Yes, i mean there are still some - quality of thought comes through the words, u get a sense of where people are at, just like f2f. And i have still had plenty to work through in supervision. But there seems to be more freedom to accept YP as they are (for me anyway) online... I think what i am trying to say is the prejudices and the challenge to be empathic is still there, but working through that is simpler and perhaps quicker online - there is less transference and complicity in the relationship cos its limited to words</p>
<p>Linda Turn 58</p>	<p>I: Is that lack of visual clues a disadvantage then?</p> <p>P: I am not sure i would call it a disadvantage - more a challenge - but saying that sometimes i imagine it could be an advantage too - we all make judgements based on appearance - as much as we try not to - so sometimes i guess having no visual clues can mean more attention is paid to the words used</p> <p>I: So there is something about the lack of visual cues which impacts on people making judgements. Do you think that is applicable to the client, the counsellor or both?</p> <p>P: to both</p>
<p>Sub-theme 5: Empowerment and control</p>	
<p>Operationalised: Participants referred to how the anonymity afforded by the online environment helped young people to feel empowered through aiding their choice, their ability to express themselves and their feelings of control.</p>	
<p>Debbie Turn 35-40</p>	<p>I: Do you not then ask for the same details online? Does that mean that an online assessment or screening is different to a face-to-face one?</p> <p>P: they know il ask for them if i sense that they or anyone they know is at a risk of harm</p> <p>P: and il encourage them to give me details</p> <p>P: but they still have that choice</p> <p>P: i check out with them that they've understood the confidentiality policy on site</p> <p>P: before going into anything</p>
<p>Jake Turn 41-44</p>	<p>I think what i am trying to say is the prejudices and the challenge to be empathic is still there, but working through that is simpler and perhaps quicker online - there is less transference and complicity in the relationship cos its limited to words</p> <p>P: *limited</p> <p>P: more thing:</p> <p>P: I think that is reflected back from YP too: I have worked with a young lady who experienced hugely traumatic abuse from men in her</p>

	<p>childhood. But she was able to work with me as a man (even tho at times she couldn't believe I was one). I had the sense of a deeply damaged young lady, but we were able to work really well together - through our words. I think it would have been impossible for us to get so far - for both of us f2f. She learned to trust a man through the computer screen</p>
<p>Katie Turn 65-68</p>	<p>P: because I 'think' that being a young person...can be very disempowering..people make decisions for you, you can't be autonomous...often your thoughts/wishes/opinions aren't taken into account or listened to....making decisions for yourself, to suit yourself, isn't encouraged for lots of young people?</p> <p>I: So, being able to communicate online helps with this?</p> <p>P: on line, yp are anonymous, and can decide when they want to leave. They can be angry and don't have to see what they may feel would be disapproval, they can be honest about sex and stuff ...they don't have to look someone in the eye!!! So yes...I think being on line is very empowering for young people</p> <p>P: maybe they feel less vulnerable</p>
<p>John Turn 53</p>	<p>The anonymity is a big plus for most yp - it's THE 1 thing that they say they love Kooth for above everything else tbh.</p>
<p>Jane Turn 70-83</p>	<p>P: I think the main thing is that actually, and this is what I love, it gives them far greater empowerment than f2f work</p> <p>P: I work with a lot of people whose issues are sexual abuse, usually historical...</p> <p>P: if they told me some of the things they do in a setting where I already knew their name and details...</p> <p>P: then automatically they would get lost in the system, child protection would kick in (which it does on Kooth but because yps do not have to have given their details they are anonymous) and suddenly the yp would not feel in charge of what then happens</p> <p>P: and I do feel it is very important that yp's can talk openly to a counsellor about these issues without losing a sense of empowerment</p> <p>P: so I think the impact on the therapeutic relationship is a very positive one</p> <p>I: Do you think that the young person's sense of empowerment is not as dominant in F2F or is it the same?</p> <p>P: it ensures the yp feels in charge, not me</p> <p>I: *is not as dominant</p> <p>P: I don't think it's as dominant in f2f as online, I think online really does help that sense of empowerment...</p> <p>P: they don't have to go in to a strange building and feel intimidated by adults...</p> <p>P: they don't have to give their name and address...</p> <p>P: they can 'walk out' far easier than they could if they were in f2f work...</p>
<p>John</p>	<p>P: I think that there is an 'empowerment' issue to it. Society kinda</p>

Turn 59	depicts 'professional's' (esp therapists) in a formal and 'stuffy' manner. I get a hell of a lot more DNA's in f2f (1st session) - than I do online. Ppl are obviously anxious about the process of therapy and online - u can kind of 'hide' or runaway if its deemed too much for them. In f2f - the yp (or even older one) - can be 'seen' - and its maybe the being 'seen' (and possibly worrying about being judged on their physical reactions etc) that is key.
Kim Turn 76-84	<p>P: I dont know...some of it is guesswork....maybe the 'shame' factor is not so high</p> <p>I: do you know why they might not feel such a sense of 'shame'?</p> <p>P: maybe the fact that it is to someone who cant recognise you in the street allows the young person/client to retain a sense of control ...being anonymous allows a person to feel more 'safe' somehow but still to have that sense of belonging too....Kooth is a community and people so feel they 'belong' to it as well as having a sense of belonging with their worker. So it fulfils the four basic emotional needs</p> <p>P: to belong</p> <p>P: to feel safe</p> <p>P: to be valued</p> <p>P: to have self control</p> <p>P: well they can't be 'seen'</p> <p>P: shaming is about being seen partly</p>
Linda Turn 43	P: I think presenting problem defo has an effect on this yp - she was raped and feels a great sense of shame and judgement, she has told me she feels more hidden online, less exposed, more in control - so therefore can afford to be more open - online she is likely to reflect on why she had trouble saying a certain thing, or writing a certain thing - and is more likely to have a go at communicating something difficult, whereas in f2f she will think very carefully before respoining - only maybe telling me much later what was going on for her when she responded. and if things feel emotional she may even hold back, for fear of feeling to exposed - she has a fear of crying in front of people, due to a suicide by her dad and associations of emotional expression = madness
Katie Turn 61-667	<p>I: sorry - does being able to leave the chat room m,ake it easier than walking out of F2F counselling</p> <p>P: :)probably easier to make the first contact....yes of course it is because thats why we are so busy! more young people will use on line I think, because they have control...so easier in some ways for them and harder for us?</p> <p>I: very interesting. why do you think it is easier for YP to feel a sense of control?</p> <p>P: because I 'think' that being a young person...can be very disempowering..people make decisions for you, you cant be autonomous...oftne your thoughtswishesopinions aren't taken into account or listened to....making decisons for yourself , to suit</p>

	<p>yourself, isn't encouraged for lots of young people?</p> <p>I: So, being able to communicate online helps with this?</p> <p>P: on line, yp are anonymous, and can decide when they want to leave. They can be angry and dont have to see what they may feel would be disapproval, they can be honest about sex and stuff ...they dont have to look someone in the eye!!! So yes...I think being on line is very empowering for young people</p>
Sub-theme 6: Important for self-conscious/embarrassed young people	
Operationalised: Participants referred to how the anonymity afforded by the online environment was of particular importance for client's who felt self-conscious or embarrassed.	
Katie Turn 66	P: on line, yp are anonymous, and can decide when they want to leave. They can be angry and dont have to see what they may feel would be disapproval, they can be honest about sex and stuff ...they dont have to look someone in the eye!!! So yes...I think being on line is very empowering for young people
Katie Turn 71	ooh I don't know, I haven't thought about that before...perhaps rather than minority groups it would be more about personality types I guess, like (if you're talking about adults here) someone who is sensitive shy introvert maybe, would feel more empowered and more in control on line, I would imagine. I can see that working actually for older people?
Jane Turn 58-59	<p>P: it can help take away any self-consciousness...</p> <p>P: it by-passess issues about image and attractiveness etc</p>
Kim Turn 64	<p>I: so there is something important for the YP about no one knowing?</p> <p>P: if they feel embarrassed about anything it is easier to discuss this through the medium of the Internet</p>
Claire Turn 37	<p>P: the fact its not face face yp often open up about things they feel they couldnt if they ahd to sit in front of someone and say</p> <p>P: so it lessens embarrassment, however thats not to say that they dont feel embarrassed and they wil tell u they do</p> <p>P: and agin use moticons</p>
Theme 3: The validity of online counselling and similarities with face-to-face counselling.	
Sub-theme 1: Perceived limitations or differences not detrimental	
Operationalised: Participants referred to how perceived limitations or differences of the online method (particularly when compared to face-to-face) did not have a negative impact on the development of the therapeutic relationship.	
Claire Turn 12	P: ok well i find it works very well , in that u can pick up clues from yp re there txt, the language they use, the moticons, what they say, what they dont say, whether or not they come back, how they end, so many things would give me a clue of where they are coming from clues i would have normally picked up frm body language.
Linda	P: it can be - not so much lately - but we did have a spate were a lot

Turn 72-73	<p>of people from one area - had bad connections due to all using the same school computers which only had dial up</p> <p>P: but as technology advances it becomes less</p>
Jane Turn 114-117	<p>P: ok, well, i guess its mainly that it could slow things down because of the limitation of how much could be covered in a session, but that doesn't mean that it wouldn't still be a therapeutic relationship...</p> <p>P: what is going on internally for the yp would still be present, mmm, not sure how to express what i'm meaning...</p> <p>P: yes, it may slow the physical implementation down, but the nature of the relationship is the most important aspect</p> <p>P: and i think that would still come across, but the counsellors skills may just have to adapt a little</p>
Kim Turn 36	<p>so explaining who you are and what the service is about is important....you have to establish with the young person that you are areal person on the end of this computer and start to build a relationship witht hem....to show the young person that what they say does have an impact on you....that just because it is through the medium of a PC it is just as real as sitting with someone face-to-face</p>
Claire Turn 138	<p>I: How might not knowing 'the lingo' impact on development of the therapeutic relationship?</p> <p>P: if yp feel comfortable with me they will tell me, if they dont they tell u too</p> <p>P: i dont think it does, if i need something clarifying i would jsu ask them to explain a little more or simply say im sorry im not sure what u mean, could u say a little more about that</p> <p>P: or just say what does that mean, it depends on the situation and content at the time</p> <p>P: i haven't found it a problem</p>
Sub-theme 2: The same or better than face-to-face	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how online counselling was equally as good or better than face-to-face methods of counselling	
Jane Turn 23	<p>I actually see little difference in the therapeutic value of the work, online can be as therapeutic for young people as face-to-face can, but sometimes the method of delivery has to be adapted slightly</p>
Linda Turn 37	<p>P: hmm - i think its something to do with length of time maybe, some of the more sparodic yp have been using the site or working with me - for over a year - so I guess maybe the relationship built slower but over time became just as strong,</p>
Jake Turn 36-38	<p>I: Do you think that situation could have been different at all if you had seen the same person F2F? Or would it have been the same?</p> <p>P: No i think it would be drastically different - cos u would always have that visual and 'felt' sense to refer back to. In some ways i think it would be harder - i know if i met some of the YP i work with f2f, my prejudices would come in, where as a pure online relationship is that: pure - no other factors other than the words people use.</p>
Kim Turn 47-51	<p>P: the same way you do face-to-face...refelecting..showing impact via congruent responses, and being empathic</p>

	<p>P: using humour as well</p> <p>I: So, the same as Ff as regards building the relationship?</p> <p>P: yep</p> <p>P: just the same</p>
Claire Turn 54	<p>P: well, we have been told to tighten up, but i have found it difficult as some of my clients have mental health issues which are not going to go away in wks, so for instance i have worked with a young woman who have BPD, and she has worked extremely well,</p> <p>P: keeps every app, and has now gone to uni</p>
Katie Turn 93	<p>P: i think that it is obtainable through longer contact...I have felt that I have known young people very well and had a great therapeutic relationship with them....whether it can be measured with a face-to-face, I dont know. I have had those moments of feeling very close...and moments that have been emotionally 'charged' ...very warm, empathic moments for me...but maybe you would need to ask the young person what their experience was of that</p>
Linda Turn 66	<p>P: I guess its neither harder or easier - just different, in f2f I would till pay attention to these things, but sometimes I guess visual clues, body language may be bigger - but not always - so I guess its not so different, its just making use of what is available - as if its the only thing there nothing else distracts you</p>
Jane Turn 104-106	<p>P: my feeling is that the same general cores apply to both f2f and online...</p> <p>P: if the counsellor provides the theraputic and safe environment, and the client is willing to engage, then progress is inevitable</p>
Jake Turn 67-68	<p>P: Absolutely - Like u have been doing - we read back over what has been said, and that encourages fact verifying. BUT at same time - we do spend a lot of time building rapport (did u see that research in OZ in CPR mag about online counsellors spending more time developing rapport? in latest issue). I think the pressure u may have felt is perhaps more pronounced cos u KNOW this is last one. But yes, it makes u v careful with interventions, which is no bad thing. I have become better f2f counsellor since working online, no doubt.</p>
Kim Turn 25	<p>P: so the first experience of working online is unravelling witht the young person what they want and what they need. You have to do an assesement in exactly the same way you would do in a face-to-face setting</p>
John Turn 50	<p>As with all relationships - the more u work with someone online - the more u can recognise the 'cues'.</p>
Kim Turn 59	<p>P: so yes, its about finding the best way to engage them. But I think this is no different to face-to-face</p>
Theme 4: Adapting methods to the online environment	
Sub-theme 1: Writing/typing skills important	
<p>Operationalised: Participants referred to how writing and typing skills were important for the therapeutic relationship. This included the use of 'text speak' when conversing with clients.</p>	

John Turn 415-17	P: it probably applies to all age groups and also to intellectual capability too to a degree. Some yp have a great grasp of language and diction - whereas others may need 'simple speak' to convey a msg.
Linda Turn 41	P: No I guess it does also happen in f2f, some people are more guarded than others - I work with one yp both online and f2f - and in some ways she is more open online than in our f2f sessions. I suppose an example might be someone who deletes and rewrites their reply a few times, some will just send the 'correct' reply - whereas others will rewrite it and send each one - or others send the 'correct' one and then tell me they had trouble knowing how to say that - that they needed to rewrite it and rewrite it
John Turn 44	P: the speed of replies are also a player too. Some ppl can type really fast and may get impatient if the replies aren't 'up to thier speed'!!
John Turn 47-48	I: You mentioned about needing to be 'up to their speed'. I just wondered do you feel that it is important to be quick typist? P: its certainly a help - but the main thing is to be able to be concise with the words that I choose. Its only a small amount of yp that may get frustrated by having to 'wait' for a reply - but I suppose thats part of the 'instant' culture which exists today. Most yp will wait responses no problem. The other thin of course is that altho they have sent u msg etc - they obviously don't truly apprecuate the need for me to 'reflect' on what they have said in order for an appropriate response. In f2f - there will be non-verbal indicators to say 'Im reflecting' realy.
John Turn 50	P: there are probably lots of them really which is why its important to keep things 'tight'. The use of emoticons are 'quick ways' to get thru this but the main one is to be honest and uses appropriate questions if I feel communication is blurred or the yp is avoiding / deviating / upset / etc etc
Jane Turn 98	you need to have good, quick keyboard skills
John Turn 46	in lots of cases yes. Some yp use 'text speak' ad it can be difficult to understand what it is they are actually saying. Its a case of being open and honest with them if I feel I'm not getting what they are trying to say.
Debbie Turn 73-75	I: I noticed that you use 'text speak' quite a lot eg. 'cos' . I wondered if you do this in your online counselling with YP and also if so, do you think that this impacts on the therapeutic relationship in any way? P: yeah i use it online. seems to mirror how yp speak. makes it seem less formal i think
Claire Turn 132	I: Do you feel that working online with YP is a skill that develops over time? P: yes as u have to learn the lingo very quickly or its like another language..... I: Can you give an example? P: c u etc

	I: Ok. A bit like text language?
Sub-theme 2: More didactic and structured	
Operationalised: Participants referred to how the work with young people could be more didactic and structured which could impact on the experience of the therapeutic relationship. The interviewer also reflected on his experience of interviewing online.	
Jane Turn 42-43	yes, it can interfere sometimes with trying to be a person centred counsellor, i'm not sure how much is about the precision and how much is again about the invisibility of the work... sometimes it can feel a little too directive because i feel i need to be precise to prevent misunderstandings that are more vulnerable to happening because of the online element...
Kim Turn 52-53	hmmm sometimes...sometimes a more solution focused approach is useful and does the job well
Jake Turn 52-53	As i experience relationships at the moment, they tend to be more didactic and mentor like - which would have its own transference given time i guess - but perhaps less opportunity to work with that tranference - cos the style of online work seems so much more task-oriented - solution -focussed in lots of ways
Katie Turn 97-100	P: yes I will....I find myself wondering...that we havent met before, and how you find talking to me on line, I guess there could be a parallel, is there a feeling of being deprived some experience? I: I find that the process of doing the research is interesting in itself. I find that I try and make every word count to (try) and ensure that I don't miss anything or am deprived of anything - I guess that has something to do with only being able to communicate a limited number of words over a longer time period. P: yes,its very structured for you....nice to have talked to you Leon, good luck with your research
Claire Turn 88	I: When is using online preferable for you? P: it means that maybe we need to get work sheets and diaries online I: Could you explain a bit more what you mean by that? P: if im working using CBT then it involves the use of thought diaries, it is difficult trying to explain to yp how to draw one if there was one that i could mail through to them that would solve a problem for me I: So it sounds like there is a resource implication there and that it would be helpful if such resources were available to online pratitioners? P: well im the only person who uses CBT I: Do you know why that might be?
Sub-theme 3: Need to adapt to age and characteristics of the young person	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how there was need to adapt their style for the age and personality of the young person.	
Kim Turn 29	P: there are two kinds of 'camps' in the online world. You get some young people who are very hesitant and take a while to let you in....in some ways these are easier to work with. OK so the 'assessment' bit

	<p>takes a while...understanding who they are and what the issues are, but at least you get the opportunity to work out the contract with them. Then there are the younger young people and those that may be more chaotic....who embrace the instantaneous culture of the net and just blurt stuff out and want instant quick solutions. Getting across to these young people that this is something that is going to take some time and building a relationship with them will take some time is part of the work. They are trickier in a way because all the social barriers are removed online...they can't see you and some will use Kooth to 'dump' all their worst thoughts and feelings and expect you to come up with answers quickly. You have to explain to them that counselling and therapy and getting support is something you need to work out with them.</p>
John Turn 40	<p>P: it probably applies to all age groups and also to intellectual capability too to a degree. Some yp have a great grasp of language and diction - whereas others may need 'simple speak' to convey a msg. The fact that we cover the ages from 11yrs to 25yrs is also a big player in being 'appropriate with language etc so it helps if u know what age the yp is and also - I need to gauge my reply and its appropriate diction etc by using 'their' initial msg as a kind of 'template' to work with....I suppose its part of the empathic process and ensures that I am pitching my reply in the same way that the yp pitches theirs really.</p>
Kim Turn 56-58	<p>P: it depends on the preferred 'door' to contact for the young person. Sometimes accessing someones feelings shuts them down. They may want a more cognitive response from you ...its about finding the 'therapy' or 'therapeutic tools' that fit the clients needs P: remember we work with young people/adolescents P: and they are at different maturation levels</p>
Kim Turn 86-92	<p>P: I don't know...I think some young people might like webcam. Some young people do want to know who you, what you look like, what music you like etc P: so for some young people having a sense of who you are as a 'normal' human being (not a counsellor!!) is important to them P: so web cams for some clients have their place I think I: is that left as an open option for the YP - to use a cam? P: and I do think that at some point in their recovery being seen is important P: no not on kooth at the moment P: we might introduce it as an option</p>
Sub-theme 4: Precision of words and sentence structure important	
Operationalised: Participants discussed how the precision of words and also shorter sentences they and their clients used in the online communication impacted upon the therapeutic relationship.	
Jane Line 25	<p>It feels like some things need to be spelt out more to possibly 'soften' the way they may be received when no body language is available.</p>
John	<p>P: for me it took a while (probably still learning really)- almost like the</p>

Line 23-25	<p>beginning of the 1st course I ever took to do with counselling - a bit like being a 'novice' again. Online work means working in a very 'tight' way with what I'm given by a yp. If 93% of communication is non-verbal (old study but still relevant) - that means that I only have 7% to work with. What must also be born in mind is that the original study came up with the figure of 7% as being 'speech' - so I would imagine that what is left is just maybe 4%???</p> <p>I: Could you say a bit about how you work in a 'tight' way online?</p> <p>P: example would be when yp prefer to use messaging only and if a complex issue arises that needs a lengthy response. If I were to 'verbalise' my answer as f2f work normal be - I can quickly ascertain if the yp has understood my reply / been confused by it / found it upsetting etc etc. When 'writing' a response - its important that every word (and poss punctuation) - is clear - concise - relevant - informative and appropriate etc . Sometimes - the long ms replies are the hardest to do cuz they can be seen by a yp as being a 'written in stone' kinda thing .</p>
Jane Turn 30-31	<p>I think that it requires a precision in words and context, i often find myself thinking 'am i saying exactly what i want them to know i mean here' because they only have my written word and any emoticons to 'meet' me through, so that adds to how crucial they are.</p>
John Turn 35-36	<p>I: You said that YP may see the response as 'written in stone'. Do you know why that is?</p> <p>P: cuz if they 'interpret' something in the msg that was not my intention - they may feel that I haven't grasped what they've said in their initial msg or they mis-interpret my reply.</p>
Linda Turn 64	<p>P: but i guess instead of visual changes, I would look for changes in words used, sentence structure, timing of responses etc - to indicate changes in the client</p>
Linda Turn 82	<p>P: I guess sometimes it can feel like I need to draw a client out more - if they use short closed sentences - so maybe it can feel like it takes a little longer to build the TR - but not always</p>
Jake Turn 33-35	<p>P: So therapeutically, it is almost intangible, but still very present - quite a paradox really</p> <p>I: could you explain a bit more about what you mean by it is almost intangible but still very present?</p> <p>P: Yes ok, here is an example: I had a situation: After a particularly intense chat, I said to a YP: 'i really feel like we are beginning to understand each other. That YP replied 'but u dont really know me do u?'. And i said 'i guess i dont know u in the way others may do. I dont know what u look like etc, but i know you through your words, and they tell me a lot about u. I have an image of u' And i went on to describe that image which the YP really felt was tuned in to who they were. So the relationship can be profound in that way. Maybe it just needs to be made more explicit to become tangible.</p>
Sub-theme 5: Emoticons/visual techniques important	
Operationalised: Interviewees discussed how the use of emoticons and other	

visual methods were used in online therapy and this could impact on the therapeutic relationship.	
Jane Turn 28-29	that is where emoticons can also be invaluable, they at least help to demonstrate the respect i am saying something with
Jane Turn 34-35	<p>i think because they represent me, they can enact the warmth that i may want a young vulnerable client to know i feel for them. I've always felt a very down to earth counsellor, i want young people to feel comfortable with me and relate to me and when i worked face-to-face they could pick that up in so many ways, it may be the clothes i wear, the informality etc, but thats invisible online...</p> <p>P: so i want young clients to realise things like, that i have a sense of humour, that i do genuinely care about them, that i'm not like a teacher etc, and i think the emoticons can contribute to that</p>
Claire Turn 18	<p>P: while others will use them sparingly but at points where something has been touched upon and its hteir way of letting me know that they are sad, or happy or angry etc</p>
John Turn 50	<p>P: there are probably lots of them really which is why its important to keep things 'tight'. The use of emoticons are 'quick ways' to get thru this</p>
Linda Turn 62	<p>I: and you said that this impacts on the attention paid to the words - how does that impact on the development/maintenance of the TR?</p> <p>P: hmmm I guess it means that the relationship is built up around the words used, or in some cases the emoticons, colours etc, but I am not sure tht would make it any different to f2f</p>
Linda Turn 76-77	<p>I: So it sounds like there are not really any differences working online with younger or older people?</p> <p>P: hmm thinking about it - I guess the younger people, tend to use more emoticons, more expressive or inventive with changes colour of text - I suspect that if they had the use of a white board they would be more able and comfortable to use sounds and drawing</p>
Kim Turn 117	<p>P: and for some young people online doesnt work becassue they cant verbalise what is happening...they are too overwhelmed....some show this by emoticons and then the counsellor has to sit wit this and wait</p> <p>P: emoticons....we have some new ideas on how to do this which we are developing currently</p>
Kim Turn 120-121	<p>P: anger and frustration is easily expressed....yp storm in and out of the chatrooms....sometimes you can almost hear the 'door' slam</p> <p>P: new symbols we may develop in consultation with young people to express emotions</p>