

Containment and beneficence in psychoanalytically informed social work research

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Abstract: This article adds to literature addressing research beneficence from a psychoanalytic perspective, providing reflections focussing on notions of containment and container-contained dynamics as derived from the Kleinian/post-Kleinian tradition of psychoanalysis. It does so by reference to the accounts of participants in a study which explored how professionals working in local authority children's services in England experience the suffering of parents. In this research, a psychoanalytically informed interview approach was used, and space was provided for participants to reflect on the experience of participation. The variable representation of this experience is considered along with the experience of the researcher carrying out the interviews. Questions are raised about using the language of containment in the context of this research approach and whether this may say more about a researcher's desire to be helpful to participants and less about participants' actual experiences (and a genuinely psychoanalytically based understanding of them).

Keywords: container-contained dynamics; containment; free association narrative interviewing; practice-near research; psychoanalytically informed interviewing; research beneficence

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Introduction

Ideas about how research interviewing can be informed by the practice of psychoanalytic therapy have been subject to growing attention in recent years across a range of disciplines, including social work (see, for example, Archard, 2020a, 2021c; Boyle et al, 2009; Garfield et al, 2010; Gregor et al, 2015; Guest, 2012; McAndrew and Warne, 2010; Nicholls, 2009; Nicholson et al, 2012; Storey et al, 2012; Sutton and Gates, 2019). Within this work, it has been acknowledged that research participation can be experienced as cathartic and therapeutic, which can be connected to contemporaneous non-psychoanalytic contributions addressing the topic of research beneficence, as well as earlier writing on the relationships between psychoanalysis and social research, and psychotherapeutic practice and research interviewing (see, for example, Birch and Miller, 2000; Hendin, 1964; Hendin et al, 1965; Herdt and Stoller, 1990; Hutchinson and Wilson, 1994). There, nonetheless, remains a need to conceptualise the therapeutic action of interviews in the context of social work research in a way that is directly related to the 'doing' of interviews by researchers interested in psychoanalysis.

Addressing this gap in the literature, this article provides reflections focussing on links between research beneficence in social work research and notions of containment and container-contained dynamics, as derived from the Kleinian/post-Kleinian tradition of psychoanalysis. There are two starting points for this endeavour. The first is a contribution from Ruch (2013) in which links are made between research beneficence and containment based on her experience completing research into the conditions influencing reflective practice with two English local authority child and family support teams. The second starting point is comments made by Hollway and Jefferson in *Doing Qualitative Research Differently (DQRD)* (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, 2013) – a highly influential text on the use of psychoanalysis as a resource for enriching the theory and practice of qualitative research interviewing. In *DQRD*, Hollway and Jefferson set out their interviewing approach known as the 'free association narrative interview method' (FANIM)¹ and discuss how the empathic research interviewer may be a containing presence for the participant (and this discussion is referenced by Ruch (2013)).

We chart an engagement with Ruch's arguments and reflect further on the idea of the research interviewer as containing presence. We do so by drawing on the experience of the first author (PJA) undertaking and analysing interviews for a research study based on the principles of FANIM. This study examined how children's services professionals working in local authority children's services in England experience and position themselves in relation to the suffering of parents. Consistent with Hollway and Jefferson's method, multiple interviews were completed across the sample. Moreover, at the end of the final interview for each participant, time was set aside for conversations about the experience of taking part. Different ways this experience was represented are considered, as is the extent

to which PJA's experience as interviewer corresponded to what was viewed as therapeutic and beneficial by participants. Particular attention is dedicated to two participants who expressed very favourable views.

Our account is not designed as a challenge to Hollway and Jefferson's or Ruch's accounts. It does, nonetheless, pose important reflective questions about the use of the language of containment in this research context, querying whether this may say more about a researcher's desire to be helpful to participants and less about participants' actual experiences and a genuinely psychoanalytically based understanding of them.

Direction of our argument

The article is divided into six sections. First, we provide a brief overview of notions of containment and container-contained dynamics and their application in social work and psychotherapy. In the second and third sections, we attend to Ruch's (2013) linking of containment and research beneficence and Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2013) comments on the researcher interviewer as containing presence. We also detail the particular approach taken to interviewing and engaging participants in PJA's study. In the fourth and fifth sections, we deal specifically with the study participants' accounts, moving from more general themes across the sample to individual accounts, and attending, in-depth, to two participants who gave very favourable accounts of the experience of taking part (covered in two separate subsections). Finally, we conclude the article with some comments about what might be taken forward from our exploration by social work researchers.

Containment

As Bott Spillius et al (2011) point out, 'the notion of 'containing' has become a decisive concept for most British forms of psychoanalytic psychotherapy inside and outside the Kleinian Group of psychoanalysts, although this now often means it is used imprecisely' (pp. 279-280). A similar sentiment might be expressed regarding writing about social work from a psychodynamic perspective. In this writing, comments about practicing in a 'containing' way or providing 'containment' in helping relationships regularly figure as generalised expressions for practices that can be construed as, in some way, therapeutic. This dilution of the terminology may be considered in terms of the ways in which the meanings of psychoanalytic concepts are reformulated according to the clinical and extra-clinical contexts in which they are applied. There is, though, also a need to recognise how, in a Kleinian

sense and way it figures in the influential work of Bion (1959, 1962a, 1962b), the concept carries an essential ambiguity; that is, it is, in itself, a form of container that may be imbued with multiple meanings (see Parry, 2010).

Succinctly described, the idea of container-contained dynamics builds on the earlier idea of projective identification and conceptualises how parts of the psyche and states of anxiety and affect pass between minds in human interaction. In the psychoanalytic and psychotherapy literature, it is usually referenced in respect to dyadic relations, those of the infant and caregiver, patient and psychoanalyst, and patient and therapist. It denotes how the caregiver or clinician's ability to receive and take in what the infant or patient projects – what Bion (1962a, 1962b) referred to as their capacity for reverie - mediates how affectivity is tolerated and imbued with meaning. Bion (1962b) describes this in terms of the transformation of the sensory-somatic, or 'beta', quality of the infant's affect and projections and its transformation into a known, 'alpha' quality.

Explaining this process, Waddell (1998, pp. 28-29) gives the simple but instructive example of an infant attempting a simple jigsaw puzzle in the presence of his or her mother. Struggling to figure out where to place a particular piece the infant becomes frustrated. Waddell describes various ways the mother may respond which, in turn, lead to different eventualities in the infant's mind. One response is the mother becoming irritated by the child's inability to resolve a seemingly simple puzzle. Picking up on this irritation, the child becomes more anxious and consequentially less capable, even prompted to abandon the activity entirely. An alternative response entails the mother simply inserting the piece in the correct place. Yet another involves the mother seeking to engage with and gain a sense of the infant's frustration and distress, perhaps encouraging him or her to persevere a while longer, hinting, or if need be, turning a piece the correct way round, aiding the infant to achieve a measure of autonomy. As Waddell explains it, the first of the three responses involves a failure to contain the child's anxiety about their ability to complete the puzzle. This conceivably has as much to do with the mother's anxiety as the infant projecting an 'un-thought' sense of uselessness. All the same, these feelings are left unmodified by the absence of attention to them. In the case of the second response, there is some indication of the mother tolerating or engaging with the child's anxiety, but this is only minimally attended to or modified, and the mother's response is based on an incomplete understanding of the infant's distress. The mother conducts herself in a way she may perceive to be helpful, but she does not stay with what is being communicated - this is not a desire for the puzzle to be solved but an expression of the distress the infant experiences when faced by the prospect of doing something without her. With the third response, the mother both withstands and accepts the anxiety generated, taking time to process the uncertainty around what is being communicated and then, when acting, does so as a 'thinking partner' (Wolf, 2004, p. 17) with a receptivity to the infant's response so as to not impinge on an emergent capacity for, to use Bionian language, 'thinking thoughts'.

Waddell's example illustrates well how the process of containment is not a case of caregiver simply mirroring the infant's mood or impulses but is rather a process of meaning-making (and the development of symbolic thought) that arises internally and intersubjectively (see Parry, 2010; Pederson et al, 2014). In a similar vein, in the context of psychotherapy and professional helping, one can think of the terminology of containment as denoting receptive listening. Hinshelwood (2014, pp. 282-283) for example, characterises it as 'probably the basis of the everyday saying, 'a problem shared is a problem halved''. Still, on another level, as in the case of the mother who returns projected affect in manageable quanta to her infant, such a description does not quite capture the dynamic quality of container-contained dynamics: how the helper receives and struggles to internally mediate what is projected by the person they are trying to help and the awareness in the relationship of the struggle to do this. In psychoanalytic therapy, this process can be construed in terms of faith in the therapist's internal experience to indicate something about what is happening in the patient's mind, as well as the use of verbal interpretation to communicate this to the patient, albeit to differing degrees. For some therapists, this means being realistic about what is projected and activeness in making relatively frequent observations about this as a means of communicating that the patient's projections may not be representative of reality and can be tolerated and thought about. Conversely, for other therapists, the emphasis resides more with sifting through subjective feelings to be clear on what is being projected. The nature of this process is then only elucidated with the patient over time, with the attendant meanings being elaborated by reference to the intersubjective relationship co-produced between the patient and therapist.

Containment and beneficence in qualitative social work research

Ruch's (2013) linking of containment and research beneficence is grounded in an appreciation that the emphasis in more recently developed psychoanalytically informed 'psycho-social' methodologies on emotionality, unconscious and intersubjective processes in research encounters opens up avenues for more 'containing' research relationships. Ruch's account emphasises how these methodologies allow social work researchers to consider in greater depth the relational and intangible benefits of participation, for example a participant feeling they have developed an increased sense of self-awareness (personally and/or in regard to topics or issues investigated and interview foci).

Referencing both Bion (1962b) and Holloway and Jefferson's (2000) discussion in *DQRD* regarding the containing presence provided by the sensitive and empathic research interviewer, Ruch defines containment as an interplay between thoughts and feelings in which anxiety is significant, and through which a person becomes

able to tolerate and think about an experience for themselves through another. She also describes a lack of containment as something that can 'engender irrational behaviours' (Ruch, 2013, p. 526). In her estimation, to facilitate containing research relationships, researchers need to be process orientated in their understanding of encounters with participants and receptive to be moved by what they observe and hear. This means maintaining a capacity for reverie, tolerating 'not knowing' and the avoidance of premature certainty, staying with feelings of discomfort in themselves even when what they are observing or hearing feels confusing or uncomfortable.

To evidence this argument, Ruch draws specifically on her ethnographic involvement with two local authority child and family support teams for research exploring conditions influencing reflective practice. This research involved the observation of office-based practice and, later, semi-structured interviews with workers from each team. The study was undertaken from, what she describes as, an emancipatory standpoint informed by feminist perspectives and collaborative approaches and became more psycho-social and orientated to psychoanalytic principles during the course of the fieldwork. Newer psycho-social methodologies were, Ruch notes, in their infancy at the time the project began. However, her commitment to relationship-based practice and parallels between her research and professional work meant the project was always, to some degree, psycho-socially inspired.

In both settings in which the research was carried out, Ruch found that various 'unintentional relational benefits' arose that she attributed to 'participants' experiences of a containing research process that had enabled them to confront anxiety provoking aspects of their work context and practice' (Ruch, 2013, p. 529). One team was described as lacking containment at an organisational level, in terms of space to reflect on the work and durable procedures and processes. In this team, after the study, arrangements were put in place to institute case discussion meetings. Additionally, comments from participants suggested supervision had become more focussed, shifts in practice were observed, and conversations occurred between team members about the experience of being involved in the research. While participants from both teams spoke in later interviews of initial, mostly unexpressed reservations about her involvement, they also commented how these lessened during her time alongside them. This was accounted for by Ruch by reference to the space her observations and interviews afforded 'to both think about their practice and also experience having their practice thought about by someone else' (Ruch, 2013, p. 531).

Containment and the free association narrative interview method

While methodologically similar, PJA's research diverged in certain significant ways from Ruch's enquiry, not least because it was interview- rather than observation-

based. Moreover, although initiated as an empirical enquiry concerned with how children's services professionals positioned themselves in regard to the suffering of parents, it iteratively developed to a primary methodological focus on the application of concepts and practices associated with psychoanalysis in qualitative research. The juxtaposition of the empirical and methodological aspects interlinked with the methodological learning journey informing the empirical concern with professionals' experiences and the use of an adapted version of FANIM as a psychoanalytically informed, psycho-social methodology. Experience gained in doing and analysing the interviews afforded a supplementary source of insight for work completed on the transformations brought about in resituating psychoanalytic concepts away from their traditional clinical context.²

In total, over a period of just under 18 months, 33 interviews were completed with a sample of 10 child protection social workers and five workers from an intensive family intervention programme. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013), the interviews were used to generate participant narratives that went beyond 'well-worn' responses. The guiding principle was to foster a non-judgmental atmosphere of safety and trust and make space for 'interviewee centred' conversations (Frosh et al, 2003, p. 43). Participants were encouraged to speak about how they experienced working with parents and parents' problems and talk about whatever came to mind in relation to the topic. Follow-up interviews were then completed in the case of 13 of the 15 participants and used to ask questions not covered in earlier interviews, explore emergent themes and return to practice scenarios and cases described in the previous interview/s. Each interview concluded with an opportunity for the participant to ask questions they might have about the study or PJA (with the recorder turned off) and say anything else they wanted to, including commenting on anything that was particularly resonant for them in the interview/s. At the end of the final interview, time was also set aside for each participant to reflect on the experience of taking part.³

Owing to this approach, while the study entailed a much more limited involvement (and less of a 'sustained presence') with participants and their work teams than Ruch's research, in a similar way to - or even more so than - Ruch's study, its completion was informed by a psychoanalytically based psycho-social approach. It also involved a concerted attempt to collect data to examine the more intangible benefits of participation, notably in the practitioner participants having a space to speak openly about feelings that they experienced regarding parents they worked with.

In *DQRD*, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) do not dwell on the sustained presence of the researcher regarding containment, but rather focus on interactions. Following parallels they see between narrative research interviewing and the practice of psychoanalytic therapy, they describe the interviewer who stays with anxiety provoking topics and uses phrases that reflect the 'reality' of the participant's emotional experience as creating a context of recognition and containment

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, pp. 45-47).⁴ They also reference containment in terms of unconscious and intersubjective processes, and emotions being ‘constantly passed between people’ - what is too painful to bear being passed onto - or put into - someone else who ‘experiences it through empathy’. As they describe it, if that person can bear what is communicated and not deny its painful nature, then it can be returned in a ‘detoxified’ form and ‘faced as an aspect of reality’ (ibid, p. 46). Ruch’s invoking of the concept involves her citing specifically an observation Hollway and Jefferson make about the containment they were able to offer in the interviews they completed into fear of crime through which they developed their method: ‘the tendency of participants to see us as very knowledgeable meant that when we do understand, sympathise and recognise their dilemmas, it could have an emotional effect. It could begin to feel less disconcerting or upsetting to them (that is, we would, ‘contain’ it)’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, cited in Ruch 2013, p. 525). This sentiment also finds form in the passing comments of other social work, psychotherapy, and health and social care researchers whose interviews are informed by FANIM or aspects of it. These researchers often state that interviews served some form of containing function or at least the beginnings of this (see, for example, Gibbs, 2011, p. 241; Gregor 2013, p. 61; Evans, 2009, p. 78; Lillrank, 2002, p. 123).

The research interview as a setting for reflecting on social work practice ‘in less obvious ways’

From relatively early in the study, PJA had reservations about laying claim to this sort of ‘containing’ research stance. Additional points Ruch (2013, p. 526, p. 536) herself makes about not confusing rapport, containment and beneficence and the need for caution and realism regarding them seemed significant. Specifically, Ruch observes that while it may be possible to intentionally maximise the possibility for beneficence by designing research with containment in mind, there is no guarantee this will follow, or for that matter, that containing research will produce research beneficence (Ruch, 2013, p. 536). This is not to argue that any comments participants make about a researcher being knowledgeable or helpful should be viewed circumspectly as an indication of potential idealisation.⁵ It is, all the same, to recognise that, viewed psychoanalytically, there are a range of unconscious and conscious motivations to consider in thinking about why a participant is led to comment on a researcher’s knowledgeable – the extent to which participant and researcher are ‘defended subjects’ should not be overlooked in the process of doing (and concluding) psychoanalytically informed research (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, 2013).

In the interviews PJA completed, there were no overt statements from participants

that taking part had been a negative experience. On the contrary, many participants made comments that conveyed their appreciation for the opportunity interviews provided to think about and reflect on their work and, to some extent, the increased level of insight they felt they had gained into working relationships with parents. Emily for example, was one of five child protection social workers from a county-based local authority.⁶ During the two interviews completed with her, she spoke, at times very candidly, about quite personal issues: the experience of being a young mother and a social worker and the sometimes tense and conflictual relationship she experienced with her own mother growing up. She talked about how she felt this had influenced the way she perceived relationships in families with whom she worked in terms of a heightened sensitivity for situations in which adolescent children were scapegoated. When asked about the experience of participating, she eloquently described it as an opportunity for reflecting on her practice and professional identity in 'less obvious ways', 'where I suppose our ... personal selves meet our professional selves and professional duties and how that kind of works out in the end when it's put together' (Interview 2). This was, she said, something that 'definitely... impacts on your way of working, your way of delivery' and that she would reflect on 'from time to time' but rarely 'actually really delving into it deeply'.

On first impression, one might say that this suggests the interviews, and PJA's interviewing, provided a beneficial, if not containing experience for Emily. At the same time, there were also various reasons to argue against construing the interviews and interviewing via such terms. Notably, in the case of the five social workers in Emily's team, PJA only met participants at short notice. Following institutional ethical approval for the study, as well as email correspondence and managerial approval from the local authority, interviews were arranged by an administrator and times booked in with whoever had volunteered to take part based on written information sent out in advance (the offer of a preliminary meeting to talk about the study with prospective participants having been passed up). This meant a lack of clarity (and some discomfort) regarding the research when participants first met with PJA. When first meeting with Lisa for instance, another worker from the team, it appeared as though she thought PJA should be viewed with suspicion - as evidenced in his notes from the time:

Lisa remarked that she had been talking about this [the interview] before coming down and I half joked [anxious myself] that I hoped it was nothing bad to which I thought I heard her say she wouldn't tell me if it was anything bad (and she wasn't telling me anything) making me feel quite the outsider. I thought then perhaps she said 'nothing bad' but then after the general tone of the interview [as I remembered it at the time, one which felt generally quite strained and which I was relieved to terminate when I did] I realised I must have been mistaken. (Interview 1 field notes)

These anxieties appeared to lessen as participants from the team became more

familiar with the interview structure. At the beginning, such anxieties were also, as the example of Lisa illustrates, partly a product of PJA's anxiety about being a 'good', i.e. respectful and receptive, interviewer. In follow-up interviews, participants from this team expressed their appreciation of how material from initial interviews was recalled (with these interviews having been listened to and transcribed by this stage). In the case of Lisa's second interview, PJA was able to note that she seemed 'less irritated by the interview process' and 'impressed by how much was relayed from the first interview and that I could relay back and comment on what she was saying'. He was also led to wonder whether he had overestimated the awkwardness of the initial encounter, noting how, when the interview concluded, Lisa had said 'they had been talking about the interview experience with each other and she 'wanted' to tell me 'what was good about the interview experience anyway'' (Interview 2 field notes).

This appraisal notwithstanding, PJA found it hard to be entirely convinced that the interviews had been all that helpful to the members of the team, even within the confines of what might be expected from two interviews. The idea that talking with a university-based researcher should help in thinking about their work felt like a predictable description. Indeed, when reflecting on Emily's comments about thinking about the meeting of professional and personal selves in research supervision discussions, it was acknowledged that this made for a nice quote yet contrasted other ways she had distanced herself from the idea that the interview had provided her with any personal insight. For example, when asked whether what it has been like to speak about personal issues from her childhood, she emphasised how she had 'dealt' with this before by talking with friends.

There are, of course, different ways in which such a statement might be interpreted. It may be said that in emphasising how she had 'dealt' with this childhood adversity, Emily was, in actual fact, minimising the pain she still felt and the extent to which the interviews had been personally meaningful conversations. Nevertheless, PJA's understanding regarding his involvement with the team was less that his presence represented anything significant. More so, it seemed to offer at a more or less unconscious level, something of an avenue of escape from the daily grind of their work and the heaviness of the concern for children and families they worked with.⁷

Research interviews as 'free therapy'

The case of the participants from the intensive family intervention team was different, in terms of how the experience of participation was represented by this group overall and the relationship that developed with the team. PJA completed more interviews with these participants (three each) and often completed interviews

on separate days, which meant additional contact and informal conversation with other team members present at the office at the times he visited. The participants from the team were all encouraging in their comments about the interviews and connected this experience to the need to take time to reflect on their practice. With three of the participants, being interviewed was not viewed as out of the ordinary and comparable to conversations they might have with colleagues or friends about challenging aspects of their work. However, the remaining two team members, Kate (who was the supervisor of the team) and Ben, went much further, in representing participation as, to differing degrees, a personally significant experience.

Kate

For Kate, the interviews being 'just kind of exploratory stuff and just talking about stuff going wherever' made for a welcome contrast to, what she referred to as, the 'action orientated' and 'specific' nature of case-based supervision they undertook as a team in accordance with the programme framework.

I quite like the idea that things can take a direction and kind of go off on a tangent to some extent, whilst at the same time, whilst you've got a hold on knowing where it needs to go if it's going in a place you don't want it to go or I don't know, if that's the right way to describe it. I think you've got an idea where you want it to go and you've got to guide it in that direction, but this is more unstructured whereas supervision it tends to be more structured and we've got goals we have to work towards and it's how we're gonna get there. It's more like that. It's very action orientated. It's very different, it's very specific. (Interview 3)

Kate welcomed prompts outlining what might be covered in follow-up interviews, finding that 'the reflection stays with you for a few days in that it plants a seed in some ways'. Although in the first interview, she said, she felt apprehensive not knowing 'what to expect', her apprehension was alleviated once she was acquainted with the format. She drew parallels between the experience of the interviews and her habit of going for walks after getting home in the evenings which helped her make sense of her experience at work and 'de-stress': 'I'll often walk ... thinking 'God I was really angry' or 'God I was hurt by that' in my head to myself'.

Kate joked, half seriously, about being 'booked in' and having 'more sessions'. 'I'd do it again in a flash, if you ever need me again, it's like free therapy'. This was particularly welcome because, as a supervisor, the daily focus of her work resided with families and staff and 'less so on myself', and this could leave her 'in quite an insular position'. Many issues would arise with staff, cases, and other agencies, and it could be difficult to know who to turn to for support. The management team she belonged to in the local authority only had a relatively superficial understanding of the workings of the programme model, her contact with other programme

supervisors elsewhere was infrequent, and it would be inappropriate to share team or personal issues with the practitioners she supervised: ‘...there are times when you just sit there. I think ‘Oh God, who do I talk to?’ and very often there is nobody’.

Consistent with Kate’s account, PJA’s impression was that the interviews had been helpful to her, and that he had helped her give voice to concerns she had about her work. The time together completing the interviews did, sometimes, seem to border on a psychotherapeutic type of support. Prompted by her suggestion that she would ‘do it again in a flash’, PJA found himself imagining a long-term research project which would more closely resemble therapy or a clinical type of supervision by, for example, completing interviews at fortnightly or monthly junctures with Kate for a year to explore the lived experience of the supervisor in their work on the programme. This was, though, just a fleeting thought and, in the interviews that were completed, he did not seek to go beyond his brief as a researcher. Correspondingly, Kate appeared to have been able to use the interview space herself to articulate concerns she had about different issues she was encountering in her work. This included issues related to work with parents but also the place of the programme in the local authority and how she worked as a supervisor, albeit perhaps the most significant insight she came to in participating was the extent to which she had much to gain from a comparable relationship to the one that developed with PJA during the interviews.

Ben

Ben’s account had parallels with Kate’s, but also contrasted it in other ways. He was less restrained in speaking about how beneficial he experienced the three interviews to be. He had been keen to make use of the outlines sent between interviews as a prompt for personal reflection.⁸ He also referred to the experience of being interviewed as ‘therapeutic’ and, like Kate, emphasised how the interview format provided a welcome change to other forums with which he was involved as part of the model to which the team worked. Alongside this, he commented on PJA’s ‘skills’ and attentiveness as an interviewer, expressly, for ‘reflecting things back, being clear you’re listening’, as well as being ‘respectful’ and picking up ‘non-verbal cues’: ‘You’ve been engaged throughout, and I feel you’ve really listened, and you’ve retained and recalled conversations and bits of information which means this isn’t just a formality and you’re interested in the process’ (Interview 3).

More notably still, Ben spoke about how the interviews had provided an opportunity to reflect on his professional development: ‘to think about where I am now in relation to where I was before and where I want to go’ (Interview 3). He even went so far as to link the experience of participation with his gaining, toward the end of PJA’s involvement with the team, a post as a supervisor in another service.

... it’s interesting that within this process I have gone from talking about [name of

children's residential home he worked in prior to his appointment in the programme] to talking about working here, and now I've got a new job and something's kind of evolved which I don't know, in the same way as the interview process has evolved, my career had kind of evolved as well at the same time. (Interview 3)

Gratifying as this type of comment was, PJA felt uncomfortable with the role he seemed to be placed in by it. From the earlier interview, he was aware that the transition Ben referenced in the quote, wherein he had established a working identity in this context after several years working in residential care, had been far from easy for him and complicated by difficulties in his personal life.

Ben had spoken candidly during the first two interviews about how difficult this period had been for him in getting, what seemed to be, an 'ideal' job then never feeling entirely competent. Yet, in the third interview, he had distanced himself from, even rejected, a sense of vulnerability around this, and emphasised his resilience, which came across, in particular, in distinctions he made between himself and others. Social workers in the authority were, for example, characterised as having 'a really tough job' in the second interview: 'They're criticised a lot, but the odds are stacked against them'. In contrast, in the third interview, they were depicted more as agents of their own difficulties. Despite acknowledging that the social workers in the authority were 'spread really thin', Ben described them in terms of their 'negativity', wondering aloud why they continued to do jobs they disliked while speaking of his 'love' for his job and how he was 'really happy' working in the programme.

A significant exchange in the same interview was Ben imparting the news of his new post and PJA unwittingly expressing 'alarm' about this following a fire alarm test in an adjacent building. The interpretation of this after the interviews was that it seemed to be something of an effort on PJA's part to put Ben in touch with how a sense of personal vulnerability was being evaded. PJA recalled his conscious motivation at the time as being to gather more data on the emotional impact of working with the programme model which placed considerable emphasis on practitioners ensuring change is achieved and evidenced with the families they support. Ben had, by this time in the interview, already commented briefly on the experience of participating in the research, having jumped at the chance to when it was brought it up as a point to cover, amongst other things, at the start.

Ben: ...I think in the beginning I was certainly guilty of taking things personally erm and that's down to my own inexperience and knowledge ... but I think over time erm because I've had successes with quite a few cases, I've had quite good outcomes erm I think I've got more confidence in my ability to do the job and if things are going wrong I look at how we can address them to improve them and probably don't need anywhere near as much guidance or management as I did because erm I'm more competent in my job and I'm doing it. Incidentally, I've just got a new job.

PJA: Oh wow [surprised] (B: yeah). Congratulations.

B: Thanks (laughs). So, I'm going to be a supervisor in [name of city] (PJA: Okay), same job as [name of supervisor in another authority he had spoken of in a previous interview].

(Fire alarm rings in background)

PJA: Yeah, okay wow, congratulations. Because you said – is this alarm bells ringing? (laughs)

B: Yeah, I think it's the other building. We'll be okay (not seeming to pick up on or hear PJA's joke)

PJA: Because you said before that you wanted, in some ways, to progress, so that's brilliant.

B: And it's interesting that while I've been doing the interviews that's actually happened.

PJA: Right yeah, and so you'll be out there doing the same thing, supervising?

B: Yeah, I'll be a supervisor and manager in [name of city] so

PJA: Crikey, do they have one [programme of the same model] at [city name] already?

B: They've got one in [city] and [county name] (PJA: okay). The one in [city], the supervisor's going on maternity leave, so I've got a one- year contract there so I'm going to be taking on that position.

PJA: So, if you don't like it, you can come back

Ben: Well yeah, I did ask for a secondment but because of the needs of the service they've said no but I'm leaving effectively a permanent contract for a one year contract but this is what I want to do, where I want to go, and I feel like I'm ready to be in a management position erm and I think as I said because of the structure and the way that it is, it's quite appealing to me. You get good support as well... I think that helps so I think the model works really well. Its very thorough, very well thought out.

Several points can be made about this exchange in terms of how it further reflects Ben's 'flight to resilience' in the interview and the significance of different aspects of the dialogue and what it reveals about how PJA and Ben viewed their time in each other's company during the study. The fact Ben's disclosure about his new post coincided with the alarm sounding provided the opportunity for PJA to express his unease but only indirectly (and ineffectively),⁹ as in the later comment that 'if you don't like it, you can come back', as well as PJA's surprise ('crikey') and questioning, implicitly, this was what Ben desired ('because you said... in some ways, you wanted to progress'). In fact, in other respects, it can be said that PJA was complicit with the revised account Ben gave of himself and reverted to being, as Ben had described himself, 'a positive person' and responses that accorded with everyday social convention (being congratulatory about an individual success) but did not express the unease felt being put into the role of confidante and supporter. This role Ben again alluded to in his observation that it was 'interesting' this opportunity had 'happened' while the study was ongoing. PJA acknowledged the fact of this but did not endorse the underlying sentiment and instead changed the subject.

While it would be a stretch to suggest Ben 'heard' the alarm bells joke on some level based on his response that 'We'll be okay' when referring to the alarm being in another building, there is some suggestion he may have picked up PJA's unease. At the beginning of the excerpt, he comments on 'taking things personally' although this was explained away in terms of a lack of experience. Moreover, in the final comments he makes, Ben speaks about getting 'good support' in his new post. After the interview, PJA reflected whether he might have observed to Ben something about what seemed to be hived off from conscious awareness via some form of quasi-analytic interpretation about his idealisation of the process of being interviewed, if not him as interviewer. His view was, however, that to do so would be to step outside his role as researcher, even that it could have functioned more as a means of ridding himself of anxiety about having provided a collusive sort of support.

Conclusion: Containment and the researcher's sustained presence

Our aim in this article was, specifically, to reflect on links between beneficence in social work research, psychoanalytically informed interviewing and notions of containment and container-contained dynamics as derived from the Kleinian/post-Kleinian tradition of psychoanalysis. We critically engaged with this issue via PJA's experience undertaking a study which made extensive use of a psychoanalytically based methodology and the accounts of professionals who took part in it. We sought to extend Ruch's (2013) account addressing research beneficence and containment in the context of researching reflective practice, as well as comments Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013) make about the sensitive and receptive researcher providing a containing presence in interviews.

As we noted at the beginning, Hollway and Jefferson's (2000, 2013) work has been highly influential in considering how insights from psychoanalysis can be used to enrich thinking about the theory and practice of qualitative research interviewing, and deserves critical attention from social work researchers, as well as considered application.¹⁰ The way in which our account may be viewed as an alternative perspective to what Hollway and Jefferson and Ruch suggest is in emphasising how accepting participant comments about what was helpful (or unhelpful) about interviews at face-value should be avoided. This can mean the loss of a psycho-social sensibility, and, in turn, lead to the generation of accounts of research beneficence that relate, as much as anything, to a projection of the researcher's desire to be of help. This being acknowledged, for us, there is a clear continuity between our accounts and those of Hollway and Jefferson and Ruch, not least in foregrounding the research need to understand and conceptualise how psychoanalytically informed, psycho-social methodologies and qualitative social work research can benefit participants

in terms of the development of self-awareness and the quasi-therapeutic elements of participation. We hope that other researchers (particularly practitioner-researchers) using a similar approach will be encouraged to report on their own experience and reflections, and actively incorporate avenues for feedback in their study to enable meaningful analysis of beneficial aspects of participation.

An obvious rebuttal to what we have suggested is that our more circumspect position has a lot to do with the more limited involvement PJA had with the participants and his positioning, at the time, as a researcher without additional clinical psychotherapeutic training. A more sustained researcher presence would enable participants to better appreciate that they are being thought about and held in mind by the researcher, as might some form of formal feedback regarding the emergent analysis. While this may be so, this counterargument does not properly address the implications of using the terminology of containment in this context, and the differing interpretive involvements of research interviews and psychoanalytic therapy. Indeed, when starting to undertake the interviews for the study, PJA assumed that other researchers' inclination to use this language likely had something to do with their bringing a greater level of therapeutic skill to interviews. It was only as he continued with his interviews that he reflected more on the possible role of professional socialisation and the way the term containment can be used as shorthand for relating that personal and potentially sensitive conversations were conducted in a safe manner. Our intention is not to suggest that research interviews should not be conducted in this way (or to diminish the importance/value of this) but rather to highlight the need to question what this may indicate about what researchers want or desire participants to think or experience by way of their involvement with each other.

Notes

1. FANIM is used as an acronym rather than the customary, but potentially colloquially misused FANI or FANI method.
2. For further detail on the methodological enquiry and empirical study and linked work, see Archard (2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) and Archard and O'Reilly (2022).
3. Ethical approval for the study was obtained via the University of Nottingham School of Sociology and Social Policy ethical review process (where PJA was based as a postgraduate student). The research was also approved by senior managers in the two local authorities involved in the research and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before interviews. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, the active nature of consent to participate was taken seriously (see Hingley-Jones, 2016, p. 122) and participants were

reminded at different stages (for example, at the start of follow-up interviews) of their absolute right to withdraw if they so wished (see also Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, pp. 82-83).

4. References to page numbers for *DQRD* in this article are, for the most part, for the second edition (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). In this edition, the core text remains the same as the first edition (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). However, the inclusion of additional material before and after this (as well as different formatting) means the page numbers differ from the first edition.
5. See, in particular, the case of 'Jane' in Hollway and Jefferson (2013, pp. 43-47).
6. Pseudonyms have been used for individual participants. Some identifying characteristics have also been altered. In making these changes, care has been taken to think through the implications of this for the integrity of the data and how this may alter the meaning of what was said or how it is interpreted.
7. In the case of the five social workers who were interviewed from a city-based local authority, there were similarly positive comments about taking part and how it had helped them in getting a different perspective on a specific incident or aspects of their work, as well as insight into ways they had developed professionally, including understanding the impact that changes in the structure and organisation of services had had on them. However, as with the social workers from the county authority team, the time spent with PJA was limited. Consequently, it was difficult to ascertain the extent to which the interviews had been helpful to participants. Also, in the case of three participants from a duty team there, the chaotic nature of the work and the incursion of working demands meant it could be difficult to stick with the interview approach and be receptive to much of what they were communicating.
8. A separate contribution focusses specifically on the way in which emails sent between interviews may be thought of as an interpretive intervention in the context of psychoanalytically informed interviewing (Archard and O'Reilly, 2022). This includes reflections dedicated to Ben's interviews specifically, how he responded to interview agendas being sent to him via email and how this seemed to contribute to a more personal dialogue being possible.
9. The issue of the 'alarm' was also noteworthy as it recalled a phrase Ben himself had used during the second interview when speaking about the events that had led to him leaving an earlier post in residential care. Specifically, it had been very challenging to take time off because of his commitment to caring for the children. The workplace supervision (of a broadly psychodynamic orientation) did not tend to help as, Ben said, it generally focussed on seeking insight around why this situation had arisen rather than offering practical help to avoid overwork. He recounted the exhaustion he suffered and how, on one occasion, he had fallen asleep at the wheel of his car on his way home. This incident had, he said, been a wake-up call and, soon after, he had resolved that it was time to move on from his post; 'It was like alarm bells ringing' he said.

10. Less substantially, but still importantly, the article also adds to critical commentary addressing Hollway and Jefferson's work regarding FANIM and its development (for example, Frosh and Baraitser, 2008, pp. 361-363; Parker, 2003, pp. 17-18; Wetherell, 2003, 2005), as well as reflective accounts of the method's use (Elliott et al, 2012; Gadd, 2004; Garfield et al, 2010; Sutton and Gates, 2019). The analysis and data reported on provides evidence of how social work professionals working in children's services experience being the subject of research when a FANIM informed approach is used.

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