



DProf thesis

**The bridge between technique and presence: an inquiry into the lived experience of group leader presence**

**McLean, A.**

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Full bibliographic citation: McLean, A. 2023. The bridge between technique and presence: an inquiry into the lived experience of group leader presence. DProf thesis Middlesex University

Year: 2023

Publisher: Middlesex University Research Repository

Available online: <https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/10yzvv>

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# **Doctorate in Professional Studies**

## **The Bridge Between Technique and Presence:**

*An inquiry into the lived experience of group leader presence*

**Adam McLean**

**M0052977**

School: Health and Education

March 2023

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies

## Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to those who have passed during the lifetime of the research project: Martha, my mother, whose quiet and continual presence is felt today at the oddest of times; Marg Garvan, my mentor and friend, whose presence taught me to be me and whose laugh lit up a room; and WT, whose presence was love, fun and joy in abundance, whom I miss.

I am grateful to have friends, family and colleagues who had sensed when I needed support and unknowingly, freely offered encouragement to keep going. My sincere thanks and gratitude to my earlier supervisor Margaret Volante who offered insight and interest in the project before retirement. To Dave Adams, whose interest, guidance, and dry wit has kept me sane on this journey. His insight and ongoing encouragement, gentle challenge for more has sustained me. Also, to Mike Dawney who brought a freshness and vitality just when mine was edging away.

Also, a huge thank you to my peers who took part in the study. They freely gave their time, energy, interest, and excitement to be part of the research group. I am in your debt.

### Disclaimer

The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners, or Middlesex University.

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## Glossary

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Attunement	Group leaders' sensing of the mood and emotional needs of the group.
Group Climate	The overall atmosphere and emotional tone of group members' interactions and communication.
Group Cohesion	A condition of the group describing how group members come together in their communicative interactions and indicating their working alliance and level of safety.
Group Dynamics	The interactions, forces, and processes occurring between group members as they organise their personal responses, reactions, and engagement, influenced by past life experiences as experienced in the present.
Implicit Intricacy	Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit refers to what is sensed first as a felt experience and is yet to be fully realised. The experience is intricate in complexity and can be difficult to fully explain or tie down as one thing. Implicit Intricacy helps to describe the 'what' and 'how' between our experience and logic.
Readiness to Hand – Present at Hand	<p>According to Heidegger, <i>Dasein</i> is in a world of others, objects, and phenomena. As humans, we are always caught up in a world of objects, things, phenomena. The things in the world are ready-to-hand and come to our attention when we look to them for their significance and usefulness.</p> <p>Present-at-hand refers to adopting an attitude of studying objects or phenomena which are ready-to-hand from a logical and scientific perspective, to help understand their usefulness.</p>
Relational Depth	Refers to specific moments or experiences of encounters with others, and to the quality of the relational contact and level of connection.
Relational Realms of Encounter	Spinelli's descriptive approach to the therapeutic encounter in four distinct inter-relational realms, the I-focused, You-focused, We-focused, and They-focused. Each realm helps to guide the therapist to embrace the uncertainty of the therapeutic encounter.
Sedimentation	Spinelli's term for self-beliefs as structural statements of inflexibility within a person's worldview. Sedimentation overrides

any perceived challenge or threat to destabilise someone's certainty or security of being-in-the-world.

**Worldview**

A person's structural view of their ongoing experiences of being-in-the-world, of others, and of the wider world that is unique to the individual.

## Abstract

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This research set out to inquire into the lived experience of group leaders' and group psychotherapists understanding of the meaning of presence. Presence was chosen as a medium to understand the gap between the technique-driven group leader and one whose leadership is relationally focused. With fewer training programmes providing in-depth training in group leadership, the current trend of reliance on learning techniques and skills-based training of group leaders has grown exponentially. Training programmes have provided a formulaic and relationally avoidant approach to leading groups, rendering outdated the artistry and complexity of training group leaders.

The research methodology frame was based on a Heideggerian interpretative hermeneutic phenomenological approach. A group of nine professionals from different areas of expertise in group leadership came together over six consecutive sessions to explore their lived experience and understanding of group leader presence. Principles from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) were initially used as a springboard for the analysis of the research narratives, along with other steps which were creatively added. Criteria for analysis of participants' body language in the video recordings, with the sound muted, were developed to meet the needs of the research project.

From the findings, three key themes emerged. The first theme provides compelling evidence of group leader presence as sensory, experienced as an embodied sense of something to be noticed and attuned to before engaging in articulation. The second theme acknowledges group leader presence as relationally focused on multiple levels of awareness to include the self, the other, and the group as a complex connective network. The third theme distinguishes presence, not as a fixed entity, but simply as continually changing in meaning construction, flow, and movement.

The research findings have implications for the future direction of group leader training. A bridge connecting group leadership technique with presence has been identified in a

merging of Eugene Gendlin's 'philosophy of the implicit' and Aristotle's virtuous practical wisdom, charting the growth of the group leader from technique towards sensory presence.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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*I had drunk the water of the Land of Metaphor only a few days earlier, and had crossed the river that divided presence and absence.*

Haruki Murakami (*Killing Commendatore*, 2017)

### 1.1 Introduction

This research project investigates group leader and group psychotherapists meaning and understanding of presence. I have used 'presence' in the research to describe those indefinable moments when a group leader senses something happening in the group space yet lacks the full awareness of the situation or what is informing the feeling or sense before acting or intervening. Some group members have named this sensing quality 'intuition'. The group leader instinctively senses something unknown and emerging without consciously understanding a connection to the feeling or sense. The group leader leans into the unknown, listening to what might be unspoken or hidden, staying with the uncertainty of the unknown. Presence, I believe, takes intuition a little further, in that where intuition seems an innate quality that is mysterious, or a gift of insight without necessarily having any proof or evidence, presence can be acknowledged as being grounded within the context of time, place, and situation.

The motivation for undertaking the research was in response to my understanding of the limitations of the current trend in training group leaders with an approach biased towards skills and techniques. This is explained further in this chapter and extended throughout the thesis. I will propose the phenomenon of presence as the focus of the research to discover a bridge between the current trend of training technically focused group leaders and the relational depth of the work. The thesis includes the use of the personal pronoun 'I'. I aim to reflexively highlight and bring awareness to the intersection between myself and the

research topic, including those being researched and the purpose and rationale of the research.

It is important to declare my professional practice as an existentially informed group psychotherapist. I have integrated existential and phenomenological themes into the report. As an existentially informed practitioner, the existential themes from an encounter arrive with inquiry. The existential themes are more to inform me of clients' interactional dilemmas than to define or diagnose their problems. I consciously choose to be open to other possibilities while intentionally moving those existential themes to the background to open the space to what will arrive within the therapeutic encounter.

As the existential aspect moves into the background, phenomenological inquiry becomes a process of examining the encounter. Critical constructs like bracketing, descriptive questioning, verification, equalisation, and attunement form the basis of the investigation. They are not techniques to be solely relied upon in the encounter, but they become a process of aliveness and a "shared meaning voyage" of discovery (Spinelli, 2015; Stern, 2004). Spinelli (2015) reminds the practitioner to reflectively appreciate the encounter from a phenomenological stance of curiosity and unknowing. The phenomenological process of inquiry works alongside the therapeutic process. The research is indicative of 'presence moments', when the group leader works in the unknown and more emerges in an "inter-relatedness rather than an isolationist subjectivity" (Spinelli, 2015, p. 196). The research draws distinctions between those group leaders who lead with an isolationist approach and presence – structured, formulated, and technical – and those who work at inter-relational depth. The introductory chapter concludes with a brief overview of each chapter of the thesis.

## 1.2 Research Question

The research question – *What is understood to be the essence and meaning of group leader presence?* – emerged in a way that lacked any clarity or clear understanding. I wanted to capture and understand the essence of what the presence of the group leader could mean and how the group leader’s presence influenced the working and relationships of the group.

Presence has an elusive, nebulous quality and is hard to pin down. For example, presence could express or describe someone's physical appearance or stature, or a feeling or sense within a room, such as an aura or ghost-like quality. The qualities of presence include different descriptions and ephemeral, shapeshifting attributes and its meaning depends on the context and circumstances. Presence can also signify calmness, watchfulness, silence, listening, and being in the moment. The multifarious concept of presence thus challenged me to research what presence in the context of group leadership was.

The inquiry explores the phenomenon of group leader presence by drawing upon existential themes. I wanted to bring together group leaders from various professional backgrounds to explore how they experience presence as group leaders. Nine leaders in the research inquiry group explored their lived experience and understanding of the phenomenon over six sessions. The expected outcome hoped for is to determine how the research project results can contribute to a better training paradigm for group leaders. The emphasis of the training is to determine if a bridge can be built between the current trend of technique-laden training and the lack of in-depth group leadership training.

On a personal note, leading groups has been a source of passion and personal commitment cultivated throughout my professional life. I first encountered working in groups when training to become a psychiatric nurse in the early 1980s. On completion of the training, I worked in the acute admission area. Once the patient was stable, group therapy became

part of the treatment programme. I found working in groups fascinating. Although I didn't fully understand the complexity of group dynamics in those early years, I found the interactions between the members and their behaviour patterns intriguing and wanted to understand more. I realised that groups could be a powerful conduit for change, and similarly potentially dangerous, when clients and the group leader encounter personal challenges and dilemmas. As a novice, I felt exhilarated by the challenge of working with the unpredictable.

During my training in a career-change to become a psychotherapist, I first encountered being a group member. Over three years, the group processes were exciting, unpredictable, terrifying, anxiety-provoking, fearful, and a rush of adrenaline all at the same time. From those early moments of being a group member, I knew I wanted to learn to be a group therapist. This part of my training stood out and spoke to me the most. I was attracted to the complexity of the multiple relational dynamics, and I was impressed by the group therapists and how they led the group.

I say this to put into context my belief in the power of the group as transformational. Group provides a meeting between people, coming together to engage in life-changing work. It is a place of difficult conversations. Participating in a group is an intense, intimate, and emotionally charged experience with the potential for psychological healing. The group leader holds a significant key position of responsibility for the care of both the individual and the group-as-a-whole.

Briefly, the context of my work includes long-term therapy groups, between three and five years in length. Depending on the cohort of clients, shorter groups of one to two years are also available. To lead a group is demanding, challenging, rewarding, and intensely satisfying. Participation in an ongoing therapy group was a crucial aspect of my development as a group leader, including the supervision of my group leadership approach. Critical to my growth was learning how to respond when personally challenged by the group membership. I have found this to be vital in learning how to sit in the messiness of group



members' lived experiences, while reflexively assessing myself in the process. Leading groups requires personal commitment, stamina, learning, and being prepared to confront one's own inner world. Groups are fascinating and, as Yalom (2005) comments, they are a "social laboratory" for experimentation, in preparation for engaging with life and its complexities outside of the group environment.

Within the psychotherapy profession, I am most known as a group therapist. Throughout the thesis, I have chosen to use 'group leader' to encompass those professionals who lead groups without narrowing the focus of the inquiry to group psychotherapists only.

### **1.3 Motivation for the Research**

The motivation for undertaking this research was in response to the current development and training of group leaders in training institutions. Over the last two decades, the university and higher education sector has responded with a neoliberal approach to changed government policies and funding regimes for education and training (Keast, 2020; Gibbs, 2011; Davies and Bansel, 2007). Free market conditions have brought both challenges and successes. For example, attracting international students has allowed funding for research to continue (Ovens, 2018), but Reid (2019) argues that the new fee structure has allowed a gap between the privileged and underprivileged to emerge.

The current trend globally in training group leaders sits at the intersection between neoliberal ideology and mainstream training provision, developing the dominant political ideology of standardisation and, in effect, control based on market forces (Keast, 2020). The values inherent in this approach to education and training have brought about significant changes to the training and development of future group leaders.

The accessibility and availability of courses driven by government grants and government-funded student loan services (Keast, 2020), in effect, support the current trend in training group leaders, making it hard to avoid the tendencies associated with this ideology.

These neoliberal values have brought fundamental transformations of course structure and training. For example, at one time the training included learning by immersion through real-time participation in ongoing personal group therapy over a two- or three-year period. The central ideology of training group leaders previously emphasised self-investigation, exploration, and examination. This has been replaced today with deductive learning, where the student conceptually, theoretically, and hypothetically learns about leading or facilitating a group without the element of participation as a group member.

In the current approach to training, I have observed the difficulties felt by aspiring group leaders in knowing how to handle the transition to leading groups from the theoretical and technical-focused interventionist approach and how to work with the emerging relational dynamics.

Sugarman (2015) implies that the current training trends encourage students to conceive of themselves as self-directed and responsible in providing and meeting their needs and aspirations for future success. As Dudley (2017) contends, this ideology and training approach is at risk of dehumanising the group's potential participants by applying a prescribed and formulaic approach to group leadership.

The change in training provision today drives accessibility globally because market forces attract national and international students (Sugarman, 2015), relegating the student to commodity status. Fundamentally the approach may be in response to the bigger question of the global approach to learning. The advance in the social sciences and psychology arenas towards preference for an evidence-based approach, derived from the behavioural research arena, reinforces the importance of having a focus on expected outcomes.

I believe the current trend in group leader training misses the very essence of addressing the complex needs of what it is to be human in a group context and requires an alternative or additional approach to address this shortfall.

That larger global debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the significant changes in training, education, and accreditation have brought noticeable changes affecting group leadership training. For example, from a local and personal perspective the impact relates to:

1. University courses in counselling and psychotherapy in Sydney have relegated group leadership training to learning about short-term groupwork structure and function
2. Within the more intensive private counselling and psychotherapy training institutions, participation in a group and the in-depth training of group leadership has been phased out and is no longer part of the curriculum, replaced by a modular approach of learning about groupwork.
3. Smaller, expert-driven specialised training programmes in psychotherapy and counselling have been priced out of the market in Australia by the financial burden of the accreditation process, meaning a loss of valuable practitioner expertise and experience.

On a personal note, since commencing this doctorate, the psychotherapy training institution where I trained, once a magnet for group leadership and group therapy training, has removed it from the curriculum and, in effect, me from the faculty after fourteen years. I am attributing this change and the departure of quality teachers to the new direction the institution is taking with a new course which meets current industry standards and not, as Reid (2019) asserts, to neoliberalism.

I recognise a need for learning to facilitate time-limited psychoeducational, supportive style, or short-term counselling groups. However, the change to a positivist formulaic facilitation of groups, I believe, would mean future group leaders being untrained in working at relational depth. There needs to be a balance, particularly in an ever-changing world. Irvin Yalom's preface to the updated sixth edition of his seminal text on group psychotherapy with Modyn Leszcz (2020, p. 2) supports this view: "Fewer and fewer training programmes – whether in psychology, social work, counselling or psychiatry – provide in-depth training and supervision that future practitioners require."

The progression towards technical learning of group leadership, I believe, is concerned more with theoretical principles and cognitive reasoning (Massingham, 2019), without being tailored to the individual group members' lived experience. The explosion of technically focused courses minimises the development of the relationship between the members in favour of evaluation of the product and its outcomes (Massingham, 2019).

I am bewildered by the current trend in the training of group leaders, who in my opinion are set up by a system that no longer has the client at its centre and thus ultimately fails the client whom it should serve. The artistry of those leaders who work at a relational depth explores, engages, and examines the unknown, thus creating the anxiety and fear which drives the technocratic group leader to the safety of a formulaic approach. Being a group leader calls for insight and pursuit of in-depth change for clients, which the current trend in training fails to offer. What has emerged in Sydney is a limited choice of training programmes providing technically driven training without addressing the need for in-depth group leadership training.

Thirteen years ago, with a colleague, I helped establish the Centre for Existential Practice, a small boutique organisation for ongoing professional development and training of counselling and psychotherapy professionals, with training in group leadership included.

The Centre attracts experts locally and internationally with an existential focus and expertise. Participants in the courses and seminars come from varied professional fields of expertise to deepen their work in group leadership. It is clear from the course feedback on group leadership that there is a demand for training that personally extends and deepens the group leader beyond the current training courses. My hope for the outcome of this research is to build upon and add to the existing group leader training offered at the Centre and make a modest contribution to addressing the training of group leaders.

#### **1.4 Presence and Leadership**

Presence as a quality of leadership has surfaced from feedback and comments from participants who have attended group training and participated in group therapy sessions. I was curious to understand what was meant by group leader presence and why it was difficult for group participants to define or describe.

On reflection, people who have presence could be described as charismatic or as having a magnetism that attracts others, making them feel uplifted, energised, and expectant of something about to happen. Presence as a mood has the power to uplift or help someone feel safe and loved. Influential people like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, or Barack Obama command others to listen and follow with their presence. Actors have 'stage presence', ranging from impressive and commanding to quiet closeness and intimacy, depending on the role. Then there's also a general desire to have a personal presence. No one wants to be ignored or overlooked and people want their presence to be acknowledged and validated.

When considering presence and leadership in the corporate arena, leadership presence or executive presence is an attribute to be developed. For example, by following a set of principles of engagement, executive presence leans towards inspiring and leading teams towards a desired outcome such as increased productivity (Luber and Halpern, 2004).

Contemporary writing on leadership focuses specifically on the assessment of organisational leadership skills and the associated approaches, models, and processes (Wherry, 2020; HBR, 2018; Silsbee, 2018; Brown, 2016; Cuddy, 2016; Su, and Wilkins, 2013; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2012; Scouller, 2011; Scharmer, 2009; Luber and Halpern, 2004). 'Executive presence' and 'authentic leadership' are regarded as intellectually and emotionally encompassing. The premise is that the genuine leader inspires others with credibility, decisiveness, and *gravitas* to forge deeper connections (George, 2003; Luthans and Avoilio, 2003; Scouller, 2011).

Within contemporary psychotherapy, writers like Mearns and Cooper (2011) define presence as a relational depth that arrives between the client and therapist. Their view is that such presence aspires to deep connectedness with the other, which they attribute to several conditions operating at high levels within the therapeutic relationship. The existential philosopher Martin Buber (1945) considers moments of genuine dialogue as an *I-Thou* relationship. Where one party has in mind the presence of the other and they mutually establish a living relationship, a mutual resonance of deep and intimate relationality emerges in the encounter (Mearns and Cooper, 2011).

Presence in the one-on-one therapeutic relationship between therapist and client becomes an essential relationally bound condition to cultivate. For Schneider and May (1995), presence inspires clients to become more 'presence aware'. Geller and Greenberg (2012) expose therapeutic presence as a goal of the therapeutic encounter which can be offered as a principle of engagement and exchange when the therapist is therapeutically present. Other authors describe therapeutic presence as a silent mirror that helps illuminate the therapeutic exchange's subtle intricacy as fully conscious of those moments of presence (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2005; Stern, 2004).

The literature on presence and group leadership is scanty. Contemporary psychotherapy writing speaks of presence emerging or defining the quality of the therapeutic encounter between two people. In the corporate arena, presence becomes an attribute to be learned

and achieved. This inquiry will explore group leader presence not from a set of principles or attributes or between two people, but as a living phenomenon within a group setting, where multiple points of contact and engagement contribute to the emergence of presence.

At the heart of this research, the investigation of group leader presence brings into focus the inner world of the group leader. It retracts reliance on those techniques, models, and systems that dominate and overshadow the group leader's individuality (Wright, 2012). Existentialism emphasises the group leader's freedom and responsibility to reveal their humanness as directly related to their lived experience, which is not possible for the technically focused group leader. The unscripted group leader has a willingness to attend to emerging affairs within a changing and evolving dynamic, bringing the freedom of thought and action to an evolving living phenomenon rather than relying on isolated techniques with strictly prescribed aims (Schneider, 2015, p. 4).

I began the chapter, hopefully, by setting the scene and describing the presence of a group leader as unformulated and hard to define. The leader intuitively senses their way into the group space without conscious awareness of their feelings, thus constituting the vague, nebulous quality of presence. The challenge of this research project is to reach into the uncertainty of the elusive and vague sense of presence. The inquiry will engage with the phenomenon of presence as something hard to grasp and fully know, aspiring to understand its meaning and application to the group leader as a personal and integrated aspect of being a group leader.

### **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

The following provides an overview of the thesis structure. Each chapter offers a progression of the work, with a reflexive voice throughout to help ground the research report.

Chapter 2 describes the process of choosing a methodology to meet the study requirements of researching an ongoing group membership and then considers what to analyse and the principles of the analytical method. The challenges inherent in being a novice researcher and one's positionality, including those ethical dilemmas associated with the study, are considered.

Chapter 3 provides the planning and structure of the Presence Inquiry Group, its workings, processes, and engagement over the six sessions, becoming the narrative gathering part of the thesis. The chapter also provides insight into the flow of group discussion and the development and identification of individual and group presence. In contrast, I also explore my assumptive stances before the commencement of the group sessions.

Chapter 4 primarily focuses on the method of analysis, the steps and process considered in an approach determined by the project needs. The multiple areas for analysis have brought challenges in how to approach each one separately. The chapter brings together the complexity of creating and crafting a unique way forward.

Chapter 5 brings together the results of the Presence inquiry Group. The results of the study are in two parts. Part A examines the Presence Inquiry Group transcripts and the observations from the video recordings with muted sound. Part B analyses my vocal contributions during the group sessions and my self-observations from the video recordings, followed by the results. The results in both parts rely heavily on data extracts under two main headings, Presence and Group Leader Presence.

Chapter 6 builds on the results of the previous chapter to provide an in-depth discussion and exploration of the results under the two key headings and their associated themes, followed by their implications for the results. Existential, philosophical, and other contemporary writings help guide the conversation.



Chapter 7 concludes the research results and discussion, conceptualising the proposed bridge between technique and presence. A future direction for training on group leader presence is offered, followed by the verisimilitude results of the study.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the reflexivity of being an insider researcher. The results from Part B of my contributions and observations from the video recordings during the six sessions, along with journal entries, were synthesised. I reflexively review my learning and presence during the research study.

### **Reflective Chapter Summaries**

Each chapter includes a reflective appraisal from my journal entries. The primary purpose is to access my internal conversations, deliberations, strategies, experiences and thinking during the process of the thesis. I use the reflective summaries as a reflexive loop process of turning back in on myself and reflexively attempt to examine my inner world. The reflective summaries come together as a separate narrative thread providing an additional narrative to the thesis.

## 1.6 Reflective Summary

### *Thread 1. Front or Core Leadership and Presence*

*I am tentative and curious and wonder how I should research presence and group leadership. Instinctively I sense there is a relationship and struggle to define or describe this fully in a way that would satisfy the project direction. It seems such an indefinable word. The hermeneutic process of going back and forth between the language, expression, tone, and meaning of presence helps to clarify what I am seeking to research. As the research question emerges, I wonder what is the relationship between presence and group leadership?*

*Turning to exploring neoliberalism to explain the development of the current trend in training intrudes into my thoughts. The ideology's influence is substantial yet narrow and familiar. I ground my thinking in the changes I have experienced as I grasp the fundamental questions of how the ideology has directly influenced the direction and erosion of in-depth training of group leaders.*

*The changes in the current training trends seem critical as I take a meta-view of the impact on the training of group leaders. I recognise the fear of the consequence of the current training trend in potentially losing the art of group leadership within the existing training pedagogy. I want to convey this without blame, to acknowledge the importance of the technique and evidence-based group leadership. However, I recognise my bias and preference for immersion and participation in the group as a fertile ground for learning and change.*

*Yalom (2020) writes about acknowledging the "front and the core" of group leadership. The front consists of those techniques and strategies used up front when leading a group. The core refers to those intrinsic aspects of the therapeutic process towards change, requiring the group leader to step into the unknown and work with what emerges within the relational group space. The latter is where I place myself today and I find the work more interesting at this level of engagement. This seems to*

*be the crux of the dilemma. I am attempting to find the words to explain the motivation for the project. Does the current training develop leaders who lead from the front or the core? And what about the opportunity for an emerging integrated approach?*

*Within my journal entries there are questions regarding the relationship between presence and group leadership. My thinking so far considers presence as the thread that connects the elements of past and current training, and perhaps considers a place for a new or different integrated paradigm to emerge. The power of the group provides an opportunity for change to happen. I extend my experience to the group leader's responsibility to know themselves reasonably well. The current trend in training seems to lose sight of the development of the group leader and of the client's unique expression of being-in-the-world, which seems radical when considering leading from the core. The possibility of integrating the front and core leadership approaches becomes a thread for my project inquiry into presence and group leadership.*

## CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY AND METHOD CHOICE

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*A researcher using organic inquiry never fully relinquishes leadership to the rest of the participants. Instead, the researcher relinquishes control of the ego to contact the liminal or spirit and leads the process in partnership with it, which provides guidance through direct intuition, confirming signals, and synchronicities.*

Braud and Clements (2004)

### 2.1 Introduction

Leading groups is always a step into the unknown. Group leaders work with relational dynamics which challenge even the most seasoned leaders' fundamental skills and experience. Groups, like all relationships, have complexities arising from a range of variables with multiple possibilities. Like life, the group system is unpredictable. In the bringing together of a group of individuals, the unknowability of what to expect is paramount. Spinelli (2015) describes the uncertainty that comes and goes at the heart of all our certainties. Every system will have its own inseparable, often paradoxical, interwoven polarities that gather in its space and create relational and interconnected patterns.

When considering the research methodology, I wanted to bring together a group of professionals with expertise in group leadership. To help formulate the rationale for the study and the methodology required consideration of several areas. Firstly, having a group of professionals coming together was exciting to contemplate. These group leaders would be a rich source of professional and unique lived experiences and bring an aliveness to the inquiry. I wanted to have a group of professionals over six sessions as the research cohort, as opposed to interviewing individual group leaders or holding focus groups. My rationale for this was to allow the development of relational dynamics to emerge and become part of the study of presence.

My study diverges from focus group principles in that the research group had a continuous membership. I understand focus groups to be time-limited, one-off engagements with participants using a set of questions, which wouldn't allow the development of relational dynamics. Having ongoing consecutive group sessions with organically-driven discussions on the research topic would help those relational features to arrive. (Randazzo, Farmer and Lamb, 2015; Githaiga, 2014; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). Also, having the same group over several sessions would help capture an ongoing dialogue and maintain the continuity of the inquiry, to allow the deeper discussions between members which are impossible in focus groups.

Having a group as a research cohort made sense to me, and I believed I could play to my inherent strengths as a group therapist. My primary approach to leading and working with a group is anchored in Irvin Yalom's (2005, 2020) Interpersonal Model of Group Psychotherapy. I am comfortable and at ease with the theoretical and practical aspects of leading ongoing long-term therapy groups and other shorter versions. Bringing together a group of peers as the research inquiry group would, I believed, allow their experience to contribute to meaningful discussions and the examination of the research topic during their shared time together.

Also considered in my choice of methodology was my approach as an existentially and phenomenologically informed group psychotherapist. Spinelli (2007, p. 51) sums up the "assumption of the existential phenomenological approach as relatedness, or inter-relation, which underpins" all the considerations in the lived world. Relatedness describes an ongoing, ever-shifting, process-like, linguistically elusive living of being (Spinelli, 2007, p. 180). Relatedness challenges the dominant tendency to divide, isolate, and separate via reliance on technique-driven group leadership. Within the group, each individual and the group leader must be considered from the stance of relatedness. As a group leader, each member of the group cannot be considered as being separate from the other members since "no inter-relational gap exists" within a group (Spinelli, 2007, p. 202).

The existential-phenomenological principle of relatedness becomes the basis of examining the encounter while the existential givens of existence in the encounter move to the background for later consideration. Little has been written on existential group leaders. Cohn, (2007, p. 55) offers insights which include that they explore the disturbances of relatedness rather than individually addressing internal disturbances as in other group psychotherapies, so that in effect the group becomes the therapist. The move from the group leader being separate and isolated from the ontology of relatedness to being a conduit for the descriptive investigation of the group in all its relational complexity (Spinelli, 2007, p. 202) has an influence on the methodology chosen.

Wanting to create a group experience rather than holding focus groups or interviews brought challenges when determining the choice of methodology for the project. I hoped to capture the aliveness and relatedness of the inquiry between the members and the leader. I was interested in having the discussions as a natural and organically evolving process. I wanted to mimic the group process where the members take the lead in their deliberations on the research topic and to include the group's evolving relational processes and dynamics. In effect, I was aiming for the group to become the investigator.

I named the group the Presence Inquiry Group to reflect the project's focus. The group is a diverse operating system, driven by each of the parts interacting relationally in a flow encompassing connection, separation, and reconnection. As the members navigate the complex and diverse system of the group together, emotional tension-filled moments of interpersonal processes emerge. I was interested in including those moments of relatedness as part of the investigation. My hope for the members in their encounters would be to co-create meaningful engagement and understandings through their contact with a group of diverse professional and personal life experiences.

What follows is not a conventional methodology chapter defining and describing the methodology and associated analysis, but one that has emerged as the project evolved,

which is not to suggest that there is a lack of rigour or attention to the research methodology design. The chapter will focus on these considerations and deliberations in arriving at the rationale for the methodology and analytical method of the study project.

The chapter will also highlight areas of challenge and confusion, including arriving at the chosen methodology and creatively adapting the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to become a practical analytical method. Chapter Four details more fully the processes of the analytical method.

## **2.2 Phenomenology**

I have been down several rabbit-holes where I have found myself tightly clasp the research language and methodology in the hope it would explain all that I am doing. I was striving to understand the intrinsic nature and meaning of group leader presence and, as a group represents the lived world of the participants, a with-world-of-others (Spinelli, 2005; Moran, 2000). Caeli (2000) reminds researchers to consider the philosophical implications inherent in their research questions when considering methodology.

In acknowledging the subjective nature of knowledge and lived experience as a valid source, phenomenology's concern is with the specific characteristics and structures of inquiry. It is concerned with the individual group members' understanding of phenomena and is interrelationally derived (Spinelli, 2007). It also understands that the phenomenon appears and manifests (Moran and Mooney, 2002) in the everydayness of the lived experiences of the research participants.

Initially, I naively put forward a proposal of a mixed approach which used both Husserlian (1997) and Heideggerian (1962) phenomenological approaches. I realised I had to choose one or other approach as having a mixed phenomenological methodology was confusing. Reviewing Husserl's (1977) phenomenology of "getting back to the things themselves"

(Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2012; Ladkin, 2005; Moran, 2000) through the rigour of descriptive questioning, I concluded it would detract from capturing the aliveness and immediacy of group interactions. I knew implicitly that description alone would not achieve what I wanted because, as Spinelli (2005, p. 15) says, “we are active interpreters in the everydayness of our lives.” A descriptive methodological approach would require a discipline that, in my opinion, would not suit the intricate interpersonal dynamics which a group leader employs in their craft.

I also considered Merleau-Ponty's ‘phenomenology of perception’ (2014), but its emphasis on the importance and centrality of the embodied perception of self through the other’s perception seemed to complicate what the project was seeking to explore. Following Merleau-Ponty’s (2014) approach would have moved the research towards the interface of the perceptual interaction (Ladkin, 2010) between the group leader and group members, and away from the research inquiry into group leader presence.

I understand phenomenology as offering access to the lived experiences of group participants as they come together to explore group leader presence. Heidegger's phenomenology aims to

*“... show itself as something that is concealed or hidden, something that lies hidden but belongs to what it shows itself, so essentially as to constitute its meaning and ground”* (Smith Flowers and Larkin, 2012, p. 24).

This captures my experience of presence, something that lies hidden but belongs and shows itself, deriving meaning when grounded in the context of its appearance. It is a reminder of the uncertainty of the lifeworld. I came back to how I wanted to approach the research inquiry and how Heidegger's phenomenology would match with the research investigation.

Heidegger's philosophy of being-in-the-world, *Da-sein*, reminds me of the *Mitwelt*, the social world or world-shared-with-others (van Deurzen, 2010). The *Mitwelt* represents our relationship with-the-world as we disclose ourselves in everyday encounters. At the same



time, we also retain the individual concerns and tensions of our lived world, expressed through our interpretations as a way of making meaning from our lived experiences (Lavery, 2003). Existential-phenomenological therapy rejects the split between subject and object, arguing for ongoing relatedness and holding non-relatedness to be an act of exclusion (Spinelli 2007, p. 20). The group is a *Mitwelt* and the group leader is part of this *Mitwelt* of the social encounter, and I didn't see this research study as any different.

I concluded and agreed with Spinelli (2005, p. 131) that phenomenology attempts to understand more fully the human condition as it manifests itself in the concreteness of lived experience. It doesn't seek to answer or discover a determinate conclusion, but to illuminate and disclose the structure and meaning of human existence and its inter-relational engagement with the world. The underpinning knowledge of the lifeworld is unique, yet also a shared experience.

Consequently, differently from Spinelli's position of staying with description, interpretation of being-in-the-world becomes evident and can be understood (Finlay 2011, p. 52) from the premise of pre-understandings, interpretations, and embeddedness in the world, including the history of engagement with the lifeworld. Acknowledging the inclusion of the interpreted experience, a Heideggerian phenomenological approach to the inquiry would allow the formulation of new meanings derived from past, current, and future life experiences or, as Spinelli (2005, p. 189) says, "we are currently living our past presently, with a future focus." The with-world of the *Mitwelt* activates those past experiences in the present encounter with the other, with the focus on a changed or different future. Taking Heidegger's phenomenology as the interpretative stance means including hermeneutics in the methodological approach.

## 2.3 Hermeneutics

Phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when interpretation rather than description is the focus. The differences between philosophers depend on where each apply interpretation. For example, Heidegger (1962) argues that all description is always already interpreted and that every form of human awareness is interpretative. Gadamer's (2006) hermeneutic explores the role of language and questioning in conversations, including historical and traditional understandings of lived experiences, while Ricoeur (2013) examines hermeneutic interpretation and meaning-creation by focusing on myth, religion, art, and language (Todres and Wheeler, 2001; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2012; Dowling, 2007).

Heidegger's hermeneutic will be the preferred focus of the research methodology, stressing the interpretative nature of understanding dynamic group relationships operating between the back-and-forth movements of the members' awareness, understanding, and interpretations of what is already known and what is new and emerging. For Heidegger, language is essential to the concept of *Lichtung* or 'clearing' where language opens access to meaning as a condition shared with others (Moran, 2000; Holroyd, 2007). Adopting a stance of openness to new interpretations and possibilities, language is thus integral to hermeneutics, revealed through the worldviews of group members, and it functions as a medium disclosing their relationships with the research question and their lifeworld's (Holroyd, 2007).

Gadamer's hermeneutics (2006), building on Heidegger's (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology, would focus on acknowledging the pre-understandings of group members as a baseline of interpretation when considering the research question (Todres and Wheeler, 2001). The task of temporarily relinquishing what is currently known and understood about group leader presence to derive new understandings from the encounter poses significant challenges to pre-existing interpretations.

Including the hermeneutics, the engagement between the members helps to clarify the group process conditions, including interpretation, group dynamics, and the potential development of complex interpersonal relationships. Hermeneutics also helps to address the complexity of individual members' lived experiences when encountering the other (Holroyd, 2007; Lavery, 2003; Todres and Wheeler, 2001). Hermeneutics brings the interpersonal process of potential new understandings to emergence, mimicking the real-time aliveness of the group process. As the inquiry group explores group leader presence, I believe reciprocity is active in the group's interactions. As they move between existing interpretations, they engage in the emergence of new, collectively inspired understandings, providing a context for revision and ongoing reciprocal dialogue.

The hermeneutics of the research methodology inquiry forces the revision and reflection of existing pre-understandings and presuppositions (Moran, 2000, Holroyd, 2007, Todres and Wheeler, 2001), as a movement between those implicitly held pre-understandings, expressed in the language of the embodied understandings of the interpreters, and the phenomenon of presence (Finlay, 2011).

My experience as a group leader leads me to understand the complexity and divergence of multiple realities existing and cohabiting in a space. The hermeneutic is open for reinterpretation and new meaning-creation (Lavery, 2003) which emanates from the group members' socially constructed paradigms of personal beliefs and values (Burr, 2015) in continuous reimagining and reinterpretation.

## **2.4 Where I have arrived**

Todres and Wheeler's (2001) paper on the complementary nature of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and existentialism in research helped ground my thinking and position on the methodology for the study. In my deliberations, I came back to what I wanted to investigate. Phenomenology positions the research inquiry in the living experiences of the group

leaders. I wanted to learn and understand more about group leader presence through the group leaders' encounters over the six group sessions. The quality of the interpersonal relationships, the dynamics and experiences of presence, absence, and active and passive member engagement in the encounter can be captured as fundamental structures of the lifeworld and as a reflection of the everydayness of the participant's relatedness in coming together (Todres and Wheeler, 2001, p. 5).

A hermeneutic focus adds reflexivity to the research inquiry through meaningful questions and concerns with no clear beginning or endpoint to the new understandings which emerge, open to interpretation and meaning-creation. The application of hermeneutics allows multiple realities to co-exist. The primary concern of hermeneutics is understanding and, as Holroyd (2007, p. 2) emphasises, there are no such things as measurable behaviours, stimuli, and responses. An assumed link between the researcher and the participants exists, a commonality of professional expertise for feasible meaning-making and for consideration of the fore-structures of influence (Holroyd, 2007).

Existentialism reflects what is universally experienced in the lifeworld and humanises research, allowing expressions and ideas to be examined in their complexity by participants (Todres and Wheeler, 2001). In drawing on the philosophical aspects of human existence, the research methodology grounds the inquiry in the humanness of the participants' lived experiences.

In arriving at interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology as methodology, I agree with Holroyd (2007) that all human experiences are rich, complex, and unique. These deliberations and considerations about the research's preferred methodology have helped address my limitations in understanding phenomenology as applied to the research world.

## 2.5 Positioning myself in the research methodology

Spinelli (2005, pp. 132-133) comments that, as an investigator, "We can never really know the real world, only the interpreted world – the world that emerges through reflections upon it." This quote calls into question the focus of my lived world through my fore-understandings and pre-judgements, including my assumptions and interpretations, and the impossibility of avoiding them throughout the study. What is clear, is that the inter-relationship between the investigation and investigator reveals my relatedness as co-constituted. Phenomenological research relies upon the phenomenological method of reduction to suspend or set aside any of my preconceptions and assumptions. 'Bracketing' is a process employed to address the phenomenon.

Both Husserl's (1977) and Heidegger's (1962) influence on research methodology includes bracketing, as a way of being able to reduce (Husserl) or illuminate (Heidegger) the interpretation of the phenomenon and thus reach out beyond subjectivity (Morrow, 2005; Ladkin, 2005). In acknowledging pre-understandings, these subsequently become the foreground of the interpretation, as a starting point from which the inquiry begins. Le Vasser (2003) writes of the impossibility of eliminating or bracketing completely, previous learning and understanding while striving for reduction through bracketing, also described by Chan, Fung and Chien (2013) as near impossible in its purest form.

A Heideggerian approach to bracketing then becomes a process of managing the intrusions of pre-understandings. I agree with Finlay, who advocates for reflexive self-awareness as a way forward to identify any pre-understandings, to explore and engage with them "as a source of insight rather than suspend all pre-knowledge altogether." The process becomes "a dance between reduction and reflexivity" (Finlay 2011, p. 74).

My intention during the study is to bring to the attention of reflection and review any pre-understandings, including assumptions, experiences, and knowledge, and to consider how I

could work with them, as opposed to eliminate them (Moran, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2005, 1989; Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013).

Heidegger's phenomenology of interpretation regards hermeneutic questioning as being derived from and permeated with presumptions and pre-understandings, which then provide the springboard for questioning to take place and are crucial for the inquiry. Limitations in research can be caused by researchers' pre-understandings distorting and concealing what is potentially discoverable (Moran, 2000, p. 237).

A reflective journal will be used during the research project to address the intrusion of my biases and pre-understandings (Finlay, 2011; Tufford and Newman, 2010; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). The journal has several uses. Firstly, to engage with an ongoing process of self-examination, helping to constitute the continuing process of bracketing. Also, to acknowledge my pre-understandings by reflectively examining those intrusions, responses, and reactions further in the journal writing to help shed light on the interface between my position as insider researcher, my closeness to group leadership, and the research topic.

Reflexivity as part of the methodology of the study becomes embedded within the investigation as a process of continual reflection throughout the study because the process of bracketing is never final, but always an ongoing process of self-assessment and evaluation (Finlay 2011; Tufford and Newman, 2010; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

## **2.6 Method Choice - Considerations and Challenges**

Colaizzi's analytical method was proposed in my original submission (Shosha, 2012; Edward and Welch, 2011), but it is no longer relevant because its process did not match the project methodology and it was more closely aligned with Husserl's, (1977) Giorgi's, (1994) and Merleau-Ponty's (2014) descriptive phenomenological research methodology (Shosha, 2012; Edward and Welch, 2011).

Interpretative phenomenology considers the generation of the study content to be a process of co-creation between the group members and the researcher. The production of meaning occurs through a search to understand the experience and to examine past pre-understandings as new learnings emerge (Holroyd, 2007). The process of co-creation echoes that of the group and its interactions. The discovery process becomes bound by the members' unique qualities and contributions, interpretations, and understandings, continually refined to reach a meaningful level. I wanted to find a way of transposing the fundamental processes and interactions of the inquiry group into the analytical process.

The study's basic structure around group-generated conversations, instead of responses to a set of predetermined questions, posed the question of which method would suit the project design. The narratives were generated within a group context and were determined by the members, although the research question would be guiding the members in their deliberations. I returned to thinking of multiple voices in conversation to envisage free-flowing communication between the members. I mulled over how best to bring together the content for analysis, interpretation, understanding, and meaning making in a consistent and logical way.

I also considered how to include and capture the complexity of the spoken and unspoken group-generated content in the analysis. In general, I define the principle of the group as a process of aliveness in an ever-changing landscape of interaction, where the apparent anomaly of no two sessions being the same provides a space for the emergence of interpersonal dynamics and processes, ultimately one building upon the other. There are elements of group process and dynamics that are familiar and fundamental. I wanted to capture those elements and the narratives developed between members to understand the inquiry group's ponderings and interactions as the foundation of the analysis.

On reviewing several analytic methods, interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2012; 'IPA') seemed obvious and appeared the most appropriate. The

IPA method offers flexibility and is open to various applications. It is aligned with hermeneutics and phenomenology and acknowledges the difficulty of fully immersing oneself in *epoché* (Larkins, Watts and Clifton, 2006). The approach, however, is idiographic and traditionally suited to the in-depth analysis of small numbers of one-on-one interviews driven by the hermeneutic interpretation of text grounded in the experience of the participating members (Smith, 2011, 2004).

In my deliberations, the main concern with IPA lay with its application to group-generated data and the question of whether this was possible. In my review of the literature, the application of IPA to group-generated content is heavily reported in its application to focus groups, which was different to my intention of having an ongoing research group with the same membership (Randazzo, Farmer and Lamb, 2015; Githaiga, 2014; Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; Palmer, Larkin, de Visser and Fadden, 2010; de Visser and Smith, 2007; Vandrevalla, Hampson, Daly and Thomas, 2006; Duane and Quayle, 2002; O'Toole, Ohlsen, Taylor, Purvis, Walters and Pilowsky, 2004; Roose and John, 2003; Dunne and Quayle, 2001).

My journal entries noted the tension I was experiencing between relying on an established staged process like IPA and wondering if its steps would fully engage with the project design. A dilemma emerged – was I attempting to fit the project analysis into an existing staged process and thus limiting the scope of analysis, or should I be creative and develop an approach, which partly includes the IPA approach adding my own steps to the analysis process? I wanted to capture information from the multiple voices within the group, which seemed fundamentally important in determining the rationale for choosing an appropriate method. I felt stuck in my naivety and self-doubt was asking if I was allowed such a bold step, so I set out on a course of trying to find other alternatives.

The study sought to understand the Presence Inquiry Group members' experience of presence as a group leader at multiple relational engagement levels and I had the insider-researcher's role and function. I recognised that the process would generate different



sources of information for analysis, including the transcripts of the Presence Inquiry Group narratives and the video recordings of the group's interactions. I also wanted to have my vocal and bodily contributions during the sessions and the reflexive entries from my journal included in the analysis.

In my search for an analytical method, I came across the concepts of *bricolage* and the *bricoleur*. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) urge the *bricoleur* researcher to embrace the complexity of data and encourage them to be active in the research narratives and processes, including negotiating the process as an active participant rather than a passive bystander. Like the group leader, the *bricoleur* engages with the unknown and in between the relational edges, actively exploring the relationships between parts, accessing pre-existing therapeutic knowledge and learning. This posture is captured by Kincheloe and Berry's (2004) concept of the *bricoleur*, which honours the relationship between the researcher's worldview, the social location, personal history, and the research investigation that shapes the inquiry. In this manner, at this point I positioned myself as a *bricoleur* and I took the bold step of being creative with IPA by adding to it and developing the analytical method for the study.

Using a broader lens to engage with the question of how an analytical method can be creative, I noted Rogers (2012) urging the *bricoleur* to move from the formalised structured, rational analytical method to embrace an eclectic, blended, innovative, and flexible approach. Wibberley (2012) also argues that the *bricoleur* should articulate both the mechanisms used and the philosophical underpinning of their process.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and later Rogers (2012), the interpretative *bricoleur* is influenced by personal values and beliefs from their historical, sociopolitical, and cultural experiences, which is aligned with this research project's methodology. I would add that the approach also aligns with an existential-phenomenological approach of 'relatedness' when working with clients.

Chapter Four of this thesis outlines the details of the analytical process for each of the components of the study. I have tried to be inventive by adding, from my previous experience, creative ways to analyse the group's interactions and my own personal interactions in the video recordings. The following section explores group-created knowledge, followed by defining 'what to analyse' and then concluding with the ethical deliberations needed for the study.

## **2.7 Gathering of Shared Knowledge and Understandings**

Heidegger's phenomenology of interpretation of the lifeworld proposes that all human beings are actively engaged with the lifeworld, including the environment and its objects, and how the initial contact is made becomes the interface of learning and meaning-creation in two ways – 'readiness-to-hand' (*Zuhandensein*) and 'present-at-hand' (*Vorhandenheit*) (Moran, 2000, p. 233).

For group leaders, engagement with a group is a *readiness-to-hand* stance which does not involve explicit awareness of the leadership skills, technique, or approach being used; instead, the group leader 'sees through' them to the task of leading a group. It is when difficulties are encountered that what was previously ready-to-hand now fails to serve its function. Often enough the group leader then attempts to use the same ready-to-hand skills and techniques, without success. *Present-at-hand* allows the group leader to step back from their current use of the *readiness-to-hand* approach and to examine those practices and see them as standing alone as learned skills, techniques, or processes that become available for scrutiny (Moran, 2000). *Present-at-hand* engages in the exploration and investigation of those learned approaches.

In the research, *present-at-hand* was the mode of action of the Presence Inquiry Group, because of members' active participation in examining and exploring the phenomenon of

group leader presence from their lived experiences and because the group went beyond their existing ready-to-hand experiences and knowledge.

To fully understand group leader presence implicitly requires a commitment by the group leader to move beyond a cognitive understanding alone and actively engage with and experience the phenomenon of presence as a lived phenomenon (Ladkin, 2005, pp. 115-116). There is a connection between the two forms of interpretation. They both move from an interest in the phenomenon, its usefulness as something of interest (*readiness-to-hand*), to immersing oneself and being fully open to experiencing the phenomenon, to gain insight and understanding, as well as understand its limitations (*present-at-hand*) (Ladkin, 2005; Moran, 2000).

The exploration into the lived experiences of group leader presence had several intentions, including the participants self-determining the inquiry process after the initial meeting and setting the agenda by exploring the research topic organically. I regarded the participants as co-researchers, using their expertise to help develop the group as a space of learning and knowledge-sharing. The group then becomes a process of ongoing reciprocal reflections, one session building upon the last. This process imbues the reflective investigation with a sense of commitment and engagement (Bray, Lee, Smith, and Yorks, 2000). The flexible setting allows creative engagement with the research question, paying attention to the participants' pre-understandings, influences, and limitations.

Within the inquiry, the group members are peers who are attracted to and interested in the inquiry question. This offers the opportunity for members to investigate, explore, and appraise the research topic as a living phenomenon from their lived experience, while also committing to the principle that all members hold equal value for the inquiry.

I anticipated that participants would find themselves in the tension between their pre-understandings (*readiness-to-hand*) and the evolution of newly acquired intentional ideas, opinions, and beliefs as they engaged in new meaning-creation and interpretation with one

another (present-at-hand). In any group, there are many levels of inter-relational and personal experiences operating at any given time – for example, considerations like personal safety, belonging, acceptance, and status of contribution. The group becomes a socially constructed entity where participants with a personal interest in the research topic come together from various backgrounds and professional paths, tied together by the common thread of group leadership.

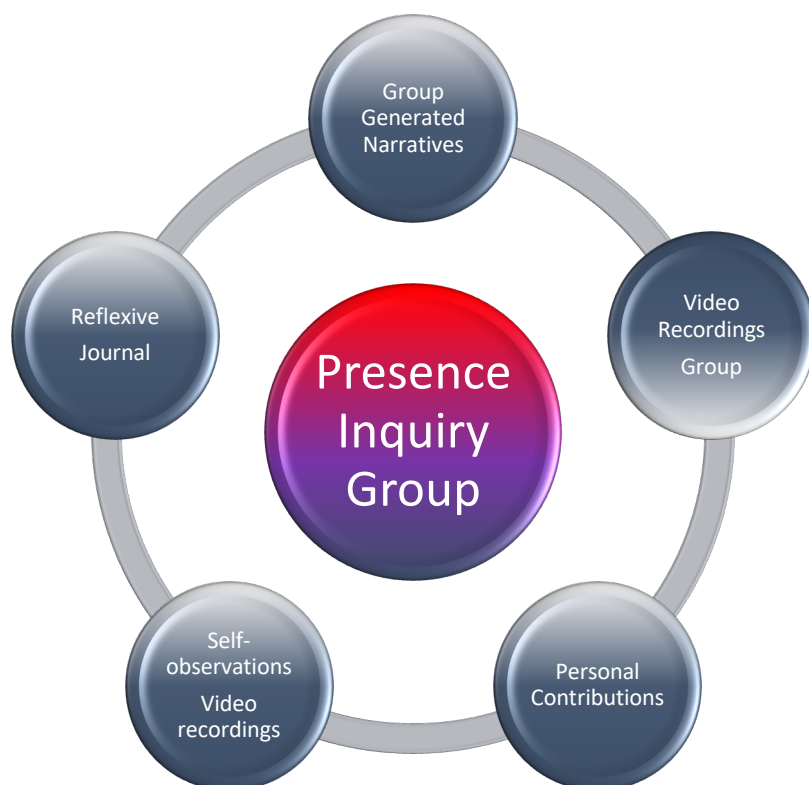
Burr (2015) and Danziger (1997) characterised social constructionism as a play between light and dark. Light refers to the interaction with others and the multiple versions of the world available through dialogue and within the relational embeddedness of the individual's thoughts and actions (Burr, 2015, p. 25). In contrast, dark represents 'macro-social constructionism', which is influenced by Foucault's concept of power as a constructive discourse of dominance and submission within social relations and institutionalised practices (Burr, 2015, p. 25).

The two are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the micro-level is concerned with exploring the development of the four forms of knowledge creation – experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical (Reason and Bradbury 2008, p. 366) – and allows for learning to be experienced in a natural setting. With repetition, Reason and Bradbury's differing levels of knowing become pronounced as the inquiry unfurls (Charaniya and West Walsh, 2015; Kasl and Yorks, 2010; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). On the other hand, evidence of the macro-level would be found in the development of relationships emphasising the implicit power relationships between the Presence Inquiry Group members and myself as the facilitator. Both levels are integral to the group's working. Chapter Five will examine the power dynamic more closely and how it unfolded in the Presence Inquiry Group's interpersonal dynamics.

## **2.8 What to Analyse**

I found myself trying many times to fit a method of analysis onto the study. Taking the step of trusting myself to creatively adapt and deviate from the defined IPA process was a step into the unknown, with my anxiety as a novice researcher expressed in a fear of ‘getting it wrong’. Given these considerations, I decided on the following components for the analytical process.

The Presence Inquiry used audio and video recordings, providing both transcripts of group discussions and a visual representation of the group's interactions for analysis. As the insider-researcher, my contributions, and my embodied responses during the six sessions have been recorded. A further consideration was to include observation of the development of participants’ group presence and associated dynamics, adding an aliveness and immediacy to the interplay between the *present-at-hand* and the *readiness-to-hand* of experiencing the presence phenomenon. Diagram 1 depicts the elements of the study for analysis and reporting.



**Diagram No 1. Elements for Analysis**

### *Group-Generated Narratives*

The aim is to explore over the six sessions the group leaders' understandings and awareness of their presence as a group leader and its implications for their leadership. The group members' diversity – coming from a range of different professions, expertise, and experiences – contributes to the inquiry because multiple voices in the encounters can go on to co-create an identifiable group presence.

### *Video Recordings – Group*

Phillips, Montague, and Archer (2016) suggest strategies for analysis with focus groups, but I required a different analytical approach due to the ongoing collective membership. With the video recordings, the aim is to analyse group interactions between members and with me as the research facilitator to determine if a group identity emerged. Muting the sound allows for close observation of interpersonal exchanges between members, including their embodied expressions and the flow of cohesion, to identify if a group-generated presence and dynamics emerged.

### *Personal Contributions*

My contribution as an insider-researcher and facilitator of the six sessions is considered for several reasons, including monitoring any impactful diversions like past professional relationships with members or influences from my professional expertise as a group therapist and educator, and identifying my researcher bias and its impact on the study's discussion focus. Lastly, my contribution was considered to determine if a presence could be identified.

### *Self-Observation – Video Recordings*

Like the group, I intend to observe myself and my embodied expressions and reactions, by muting the sound on the video recordings. The observations will include, for example, eye contact, reactivity to group dynamics and individual members, and contributions to a personal presence.

## **2.9 Reflective Journal**

The members of the Presence Inquiry Group are peers who bring their skills and experience to the group. Their willingness to participate opens them to the risk of multiple potential relationship boundary violations or conflicting alliances (Herr and Anderson, 2015). In the reflective journal, I have chosen to record any tensions I experience within my relationship with the participants as they occur, including my subjective experience and presence during the study. Acknowledging the multiple relationships and how easy as a peer it would be to merge with the group, the journal will provide a reminder and reflective process which stands between the group relationships and my position as insider-researcher.

The analytical process's components are set out in detail in Chapter Four. I have taken the initial four steps of the IPA method and creatively added others when considering the transcripts of the spoken narratives. For consistency in the observations of the group interactions from the muted video recordings, I created an observational chart for the synthesis of the embodied communications between the members and myself. The last section of this chapter below outlines the ethical considerations of the study.

## **2.10 Ethical Considerations**

The ethics application to Middlesex University Ethics Committee was granted full approval. The research is associated with the Centre of Existential Practice, Sydney, Australia, with the Centre's moral support (Appendix 1). The participants in the study are professionals who identify as group leaders and are experts in psychotherapy, counselling, coaching, and leadership training. I also researched the ethical codes of conduct and principles of the following Registering Boards – the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PAFCA), Australian Counselling Association (ACA), and International Coaching Federation of Australia (ICF).

The risk of harm was minimal. The participants are psychologically minded people who have avenues for discussion and exploration of personal experiences with their respective clinical supervisors, therapists, and peers. However, a process approach to ethics was required to view it as an ongoing negotiated process which ensures participants have an opportunity to voice any concerns or issues throughout the research process. The participants who expressed interest were sent the initial contact information sheet (Appendix 2) outlining the purpose, structure, and format of the study, its benefits, and the level of commitment required to participate. Those who remained interested were sent a link to an electronic consent form to read, complete, and return before the study's commencement. The consent form included the option of withdrawing during the process. The agreement also included the researcher's right to use the information already collected in the project. Discussions at the time of recruitment included the possible benefits to participants' professional practice and, ultimately, to the wider group leadership community.

### **2.10.1 Concerning Confidentiality, Privacy, and Storage**

Strategies to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of personal information included coding and de-identifying any personal information to ensure extracts from group members in the report are not attributable to participants and to ensure confidentiality. The raw data was stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic information storage was on a secure online domain accessible only by me and encrypted with two-level password protection. I developed a coding system to help protect identities and the possible future sharing of information was also made transparent in the consent process, which specified possible dissemination in conference presentations, articles, and thesis submission. Information was provided and explicit permission with informed consent was obtained for any parts of the recorded videos to be shared.

### **2.10.2 Insider-Researcher**



A consideration when seeking consent was to acknowledge my positionality as an insider-researcher. Darra (2008) advocates that researchers should reveal their expertise, interest, and knowledge of the research area for transparency reasons to achieve in-depth qualitative data. Considerations for potential ethical challenges include managing the power dynamics associated with changing roles and identities between group leader, colleague, and researcher (Greene, 2014). Also, notably essential when working with peers, the question of alliances and personal biases when gathering data (Greene, 2014) and their potential to contaminate the results must be considered, given my insider knowledge and expertise in the research topic. Challenges such as remaining objective, confidentiality, negotiating power and shifting identities (Greene, 2014), or failing to critically engage with the research content (Sikes and Potts, 2008; Greene, 2014) are all relevant concerns and possibilities requiring ongoing vigilance and monitoring.

### **2.10.3 Dual Relationships**

Part of the ethical consideration is dual relationships (Mercer, 2007). As an insider, I have multiple past professional dual relationships with some members. In the recruitment phase, those past relationships were openly discussed and negotiated and opened to examination regarding how and when they might influence group members' participation in the study. Taylor (2011, pp. 6 -13) cautions diligence in monitoring the interchange between personal and ethical conduct, managing role boundaries, accountability, and the potential for data distortion and lack of objectivity caused by possible insider blindness.

Further, it seems essential to ethically consider my connectedness to the culture of group leadership and to guard against personal participant bias, experienced as the "airing of dirty laundry" (Taylor 2011, p. 14). Bennett (2003, p. 190) proposes a stance of "unlearning" as an insider-researcher, where he suggests will play a role in effecting distance between the researched and the researcher. Spinelli (2015) echoes this, saying that a stance of

unknowingness helps in the process of bracketing prior knowledge, which also links with the earlier discussion of interpretative bracketing as part of the research methodology and managing those potential relationship boundary challenges.

Throughout the project, as stated earlier, I intend to keep a reflective journal as a research method to enhance my ability to sustain a reflective stance and maintain vigilance against personal bias and assumptions throughout the process. In Chapter Seven, I use the reflective journal as a source of inspiration in exploring my positionality in the group, using this as a source of reflexivity regarding potential dual relationship boundary challenges and reactivity to individual members or the group entity. This approach will further develop and examine my spoken and embodied responses and reactivity to any given individual in the content analysis process and the video recordings. The reflexive journal goes toward addressing the question of the objectivity of the insider-researcher (Laverty, 2003). I assumed that, during the study, it would be challenging to have a neutral position of reactivity given my closeness to the research topic and the group process of discussions and interactions, including dual relationships with some members and my personal bias and influence on the research approach. Chapter Three will explore the structure and workings of the Presence Inquiry Group as it comes together during the six sessions.

## 2.11 Reflective Summary

### *Thread 2. Avoiding Formulation and the Freedom to Choose*

*I came back to what is important, what is fundamental for the project. The relationship as the primary source within a group context is critical to consider and meeting existential and phenomenological principles is also crucial. Then there are the multiple points of narratives and lived experiences expressed in an ongoing group with consistent membership. I return to the research question, foremost in my thinking, of how the methodology and the method of analysis can avoid becoming a formulated and technically driven process. I'm reminded of the complexity of groups and that, in the process of gathering the narratives, I have set myself a complicated task. I find myself creating diagrams of possibilities to appeal to my visual brain, hoping it will make sense, knowing that it's not perfect.*

*I am struggling in my inexperience, seeking a clear way forward. The desperation and frustration of seeking clarity and certainty is overwhelming at times. The paradox is staring me in the face, between certainty and uncertainty, the very attitude I am seeking to examine. I am confronted with my need for certainty because I am out of my depth, finding myself in the tension of not knowing. Reverting to an old habit of reading and rereading the literature, until the chosen methodology is clear, helps to anchor the project.*

*Drawing upon my experience as an existential psychotherapist and, importantly, as a group therapist, I am aware of choosing a methodology to capture the multiple voices and realities of the Presence Inquiry Group participants as they emerge. The process of choosing and sifting has illuminated my dread of getting it wrong and being trapped in the choice I've made. This says more about me than the methodology as I try to understand the application of the methodology and epistemology of constructivism to the research project.*

*The meaning of presence draws excitement, along with uncertainty, in that I am seeking to explore something that is nebulous and difficult to define. As I decide on the methodology, freedom emerges as I conceptualise a way forward to explore the lived experiences embodied in the conversations of the participants. In the settling of the methodology, I breath more easily. For now, there is a melding of the philosophical with the procedural.*

## CHAPTER 3: PRESENCE INQUIRY GROUP

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*Presence is far more intricate and rewarding an art than productivity.*

Maria Popova

### 3.1 Introduction

At its best, phenomenology seeks to understand individuals' lived experience, their understandings, meanings, and accounts, in their lifeworld context. This chapter presents the process of bringing together group leaders from various professional backgrounds and experiences to explore presence in relationship to group leadership. I intended to create a group experience and inquiry method in keeping with the relational and intersubjective meaning-creation of a group environment. Each of the group's unique parts individually and collectively navigate together the variety of emotionally tension-filled moments. A process emerges as individually the members in their encounters contribute to the meaning-creation collectively as the group elements coalesce towards illuminating the phenomenon in its context (Patterson and Higgs, 2005).

Shank's (1998) comment about the human need to reconcile opposing meanings towards a meaningful conclusion was helpful when considering the complexity of bringing together such diverse realities. The 'juxtaposition law' (Shank, 1998) of opposing meanings and attributed values required creatively developing processes to provide meaningful conversations and dialogue for the analytical process.

This chapter will focus on the setting up of the framework for the Presence Inquiry Group as the members came together, how the group was formed, and the process associated with members' contributions. Included are the details of the group members' recruitment and the planning and implementation of the six sessions, as well as considerations in the

planning stage as an insider-researcher. The development of a framework was essential to establish a structure to help develop a level of safety and purpose for meaningful engagement between the members.

As an insider-researcher, I offer an exploration of the duality of my position as both researcher and insider as a group leader detailing the approach undertaken to review personal bias, including the dynamic of holding several identified roles with associated responsibilities – practitioner, researcher, group leader and facilitator, and peer. Emerging group processes and dynamics are also framed and explored in this chapter.

### **3.2 Recruitment**

A purposive sampling (Polkinghorne, 2005) process offered an approach for recruiting interested participants to the research. I was seeking a heterogeneous mix of group leaders from various leadership backgrounds and professions. This approach recruits' people who are information-rich, have an interest in the research topic, meet the inclusion criteria of a minimum of five years of leading groups, are currently conducting a group, and can commit to the six sessions. The last condition was a concern as I wasn't certain whether potential members would be able to fulfil this condition or how absences would impact the study.

Participants self-selected via response to an email invitation sent to my professional network, to organisations that provide groupwork, and to the Centre for Existential Practice database in Sydney, Australia. Twenty people responded and had further information and written details forwarded to them. Fifteen people expressed interest, of whom ten were selected for their diversity of experience and their agreement to attend the six sessions. I contacted each participant to discuss the project and their involvement in more detail and answer any questions. An electronic link to the consent form on the Survey Monkey platform was forwarded to the participants for completion before commencement. A paper consent form and information sheet were also sent for their records (Appendix 2). One participant withdrew immediately before the first session due to a health issue that would

require ongoing treatment and extended absence. The cohort of nine group leaders is described below.

1. An addictions therapist with 15 years of experience in leading process groups in drug and alcohol recovery in a private hospital.
2. A Bishop of the Agnostic Church and CEO of an internet analysis organisation who has led circling, meditation, and spiritual growth groups for over 20 years.
3. A director of a leadership training consultancy who has designed and conducted leadership training groups for business corporations for 22 years.
4. A director and trainer of corporate leadership groups for 12 years who is trained in Gestalt psychotherapy.
5. A group leader and psychotherapist, working predominantly in leadership with young people globally with 12 years' experience in group leadership, who is currently leading groups for Correctional Services and with young people internationally.
6. A process group leader in private practice who has worked for 15 years in a private addictions centre running family groups and who is currently running several ongoing long-term process therapy groups.
7. An executive coach, psychotherapist, accredited supervisor of other coaches, groups, and clinicians, and a team/group facilitator with over 30 years' international corporate experience leading systemic focus groups.
8. A director of the Gestalt Psychotherapy Training Institute and co-founder and facilitator of healing retreats. The Director is an experienced Educator, Gestalt group therapist, and Spiritual Director while currently running several Gestalt and spiritual groups.
9. A leading groupwork specialist in community services, counselling, and health. A respected author of multiple textbooks and training programmes who has spent 25 years working with groups, specialising in working with men and violence.

The decision to include professionals with different experiences and perspectives allowed for divergence development, noting differences and similarities, and convergence of multiple realities in the co-construction of meaning about group leader presence.

### **3.3 Stance in the Presence Inquiry Group Process**

Hermeneutics is embedded in the world of language, ideas, and social interactions and reflects the "inescapable historicity of all understanding" (Findlay, 2003, p. 107). The dilemma of keeping the focus on the purpose of the Presence Inquiry Group and managing historical storytelling can be couched in the rationale of activating the "here and now" process within a therapy group (Yalom, 2005). A stance of genuine and active interest in the process of engaging in the immediacy of the "here and now" experience (Yalom, 2005) is required, while reminding myself as the facilitator to "consciously avoid being distracted by externalities" (Findlay, 2003, p. 110). My expertise lies in moving historical storytelling, a 'there and then' construct, to the immediacy of present engagement where leadership in the Presence Inquiry Group becomes shared. Keeping the group's interactions within a framework of reciprocity and collaboration, the facilitation focus would include stimulating the exploration of members' lived experiences and understanding of the research topic. Burr (2015) reminds us that the researcher's task is to acknowledge the participants' intrinsic involvement in the research process, just as I relied on my group therapist experience when facilitating the six sessions.

My facilitation would be at a high level of involvement initially to help establish purpose and engagement between members and then would move to the process facilitation stance of an insider-researcher. The research, embedded in the principle of co-production, seeks to develop a collaborative dialogue with mutual benefit to everyone where members directly engage with one another and trust that all members can express themselves and operate freely in group discussions (Burr, 2015). My role would be to help all the members to engage as freely as they are able. As stated earlier, throughout the six sessions I kept a



reflective journal to note, immediately after each session, my participation and style of facilitation and to monitor my intrinsic involvement in the process. I wrote reflections on the quality of my responses, embodied expressions, and relationships with members individually and as a group.

### **3.4 Assumptions Prior to the First Meeting**

Before the first meeting, I acknowledged my pre-understandings of professional experience and expertise in group leadership and the training of group leaders. I searched for any bias about the research topic as a practitioner-researcher and the potential influence of past relationships with some members, including my assumptions and personal knowledge. As stated in Chapter Two, these pre-understandings became the foreground of my interpretation and are integrated throughout the thesis.

To manage my anxiety and be upfront about my dilemma, I chose to discuss previous relationships with those identified members. The purpose was to reach an agreement on how we would prefer to address any possible difficulty or crossing of a personal boundary by myself or another group member.

Secondly, I recorded a list of my assumptions about group leadership. The purpose was to empty myself of many beliefs I currently held about what constitutes an effective group leader. I wanted to uncover any preconceptions and biases I had and bring them to conscious awareness and examination. In doing so, I was also attempting to alleviate potential intrusion during the content generation process and the analysis (Chan, Fung and Chien, 2013). My attempts to clarify my assumptions before the group commenced helped illuminate my closeness to the research topic.

Tulford and Newman (2010) advocate taking time to write about all that is in conscious awareness as a process of illuminating, monitoring, and mitigating potential preconceptions,

and they stress minimising personal bias and influence by deepening the reflective process across all the research stages. The writing down of my personal preferences and assumptions allowed a clearing towards a place of openness for the research process (Finlay, 2011), while noting where my biases could influence the dialogue and facilitation process during the six sessions. Further, those areas would be crucial to vigilantly monitor.

The pre-understanding process included writing a list of all the components needed to be an effective leader, such as physical appearance, emotional intelligence, values, and beliefs. Also included as initial thoughts and assumptions of what I assumed the group leaders' presence might represent were the associated qualities, attributes, and capacity for critical thinking. The process began by completing the statement, *Group leaders are...* When I had exhausted adding to the list, I put it aside and returned a few days later and continued the process before the first meeting, adding to the list.

In committing to writing in my reflective journal within twenty-four hours after group, I provided time for reflection and immersion of the review of myself in relationship to the group. Included is the process of inquiry and my reactivity to individuals, while considering any other biases and assumptions that came to my awareness. The discipline of writing the journal was particularly helpful in monitoring the relationships in the research group, of which I give more detail in Chapter Seven.

On reviewing the list, I categorised my reflections into the following attributes of leaders:

- Perceived skills and qualities
- Tasks
- Demands and expectations from others
- Characteristics
- Emotional intelligence
- Relational aspects
- Training and theories
- Influence on group workings

I acknowledged that tensions would emerge in the research group and, if not carefully monitored, my position as practitioner-researcher could be compromised, especially considering past membership relationships. Given my closeness to the inquiry subject and to my peers, it was essential to consider the potential for compromise. I thought about where I could be challenged and seduced into falling out of the researcher position and find myself engaging in the ensuing discussions and explorations.

I deliberated on how to establish my position within the dual role of practitioner and researcher. I concluded that being part of the discussion without direct influence would require careful monitoring. I made time to reflect and journal about my qualities as a practitioner-researcher and the facilitation of the inquiry group, the qualities I wanted to aim for in the research group, and to explicitly respond to the dual role aspect, including:

- Be flexible, open to ideas, don't be a therapist, be a researcher.
- Facilitate the research process, don't lead a therapy group.
- Be involved but take a bird's eye view.
- Be curious and ask questions for clarity and to avoid taking the conversation towards my interests.
- Be present to everyone and recognise the tensions between group members, but don't do therapy.
- It's OK to take notes during group sessions.
- Bracket and hold personal opinions and ideas but make suggestions or statements when required.
- Maintain personal boundaries.

The list was a helpful and a practical reminder before each session.

### **3.5 Planning the Inquiry Group**

For Session One, in the planning strategy I wrote down what I wanted to communicate clearly to the Presence Inquiry Group Inquiry members. These included how the content from each session was being recorded and clarifying the meeting process, introductions, and personal expectations of being part of the research group. Also, I wanted everyone to be clear on my responsibility in the research project, on the project aims, and on how we could work together collaboratively to help set a clear purpose and process by developing interactive boundaries for the six sessions.

I was mindful that most members would be able to move with ease towards the interpersonal process dynamics (Yalom, 2005) and perhaps forget they were part of a research group. In being upfront with the group members, I wanted to seek an agreement from them that, if the interpersonal processes deviated from the group's primary task, I would assign myself to facilitate a return to inside the research boundary. I hired a professional room in a central location that provided the ability to record the six sessions via video and audio. The choice of location proved to be ideal for everyone, free from technical issues and without interruptions.

#### **3.5.1 The Structure of the First Meeting**

Like the beginning phase of any group I lead, I set the intention of making the Presence Inquiry Group participants aware of the principles of engagement. As a structured introduction, I intended to help develop clarity of function and ultimately set up a safe enough space for the participants to be comfortable finding their voice and contributing to the discussions freely.

I intended to offer a place where group leaders would explore presence in a democratic space, addressing the power balances within the group by building cohesion. The framework of the inquiry is essential to establish at the beginning of any group to alleviate anxiety and feelings of vulnerability and to assist in creating a structure of safety, a sense of purpose and motivation, a working frame for the inquiry process, and promoting trust between members and the leader (French and Simpson, 2010; Yalom, 2005).

My journal reflects the level of pre-planning I undertook, driven by anxiety and a wish for the six sessions to be successful. As the group consisted of experienced group leaders from diverse professions, theoretical orientations, and backgrounds, I decided not to assume that everyone would be 'on the same page'. Reciprocity is at the heart of relationship building in any group. I considered how the research group would operate differently to my familiar psychotherapy or training groups. The interplay between holding to the principles of engagement while acknowledging the potential of a group whose primary task is to explore the group leader's presence required a different approach.

### **3.5.2 The Sessions, Structure, Themes, and Processes**

The structure of each session followed on from the first meeting.

- Five days before each session, participants received an email outlining where to meet and asking them to bring their reflections on presence in line with their group leadership experience.
- The subsequent session emails included themes determined by the group for exploration in the following session. Two questions were included and repeated in each subsequent session to help participants focus on engaging in personal and professional 'reflection on action':
  1. *What have you noticed in your leadership of groups/training since we last spoke?*

2. *What, if any, actions have you considered implementing in your leadership since we last spoke?*

- During each session, I would write down themes or questions emerging from the discussion. I would relay the themes back to the group towards the end of the session using the participants' own words where possible, asking them to consider which theme/s they would like to explore in the following session. I aimed for the sessions not to be stand-alone discussions but to have a thread running through them, building one upon the other.
- In the last ten minutes, I also included time for members' reflection on the session and how the group was forming and working. Overall, the process proved helpful for everyone as a measure to create a sense of trust, safety, and intimacy during the research process.

The rationales for choosing themes from the inquiry in each session included considerations on a few levels. Firstly, as a reminder, I wanted to provide the key elements from the discussion when the material was fresh in the participants' awareness. Secondly, a review and summary of the participants' themes in each session helped twofold. I primarily wanted to capture the immediacy of the discussion as I sensed that I could become caught up in my thoughts, excitement, and reactions, potentially becoming lost in the debate and forgetting that I was the facilitator. Also, I wanted to provide a reminder for participants to connect with the content and their embodied lived experience. I borrowed the summarising of sessions from a narrative perspective from when I ran groups previously. The group therapist would send a letter to the members with reflections on the session. Given the sessions were held monthly, participants found this helpful as a review of the discussion content. The summary became the group norm, with members asking in each session for a recap as something beneficial to capture the moment. Simultaneously, their reflection on the process also added to the group's engagement and motivation, sparking further examples and questions which prompted reciprocal learning from one another. The discussions took on various areas of interest, moving between personal and professional accounts of the impact of group leader presence, adding to the experience's richness. I

found this satisfying and took it to be an indicator of participants' healthy engagement with the process. A summary of each session's themes is in Table 1 below, including the number of participants in each session.

Session Number	Number of participants	Discussion Themes
1	6	Leadership presence from your perspective – what is presence, your definitions?
2	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The embodiment of the leader.</li> <li>• “I can only understand myself in the presence of others.”</li> </ul>
3	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence – is this our desire for mastery?</li> <li>• Is presence a tool to mobilise others – is it meaningless?</li> <li>• Spirituality and presence – is there a relationship?</li> <li>• Presence – trusting oneself – using the collective wisdom in the room.</li> </ul>
4	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The question of the difference between being present and presence?</li> <li>• Is there a universal presence as a dynamic?</li> <li>• Sacrament of the present moment – intimacy and presence.</li> <li>• How are we here (our presence) in this group and are we different in our outside groups – what do we notice?</li> </ul>
5	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When is a group leader not present; how might this be described?</li> <li>• How much honesty is required to be present?</li> <li>• Is there any shadow to presence?</li> </ul>
6	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have we formed, as a group, our presence?</li> <li>• What have we co-created as a presence group?</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Sessional Discussion Themes**

### 3.5.3 Members' Attendance

I was disappointed in never quite achieving all nine members of the research group being present together, despite all the participants agreeing to be available for the six sessions. For Sessions Two, Four, and Five, the participant numbers were seven and eight, and in the remaining three sessions they were six and five. Six was the average number across all group sessions. For Session Six, one member just forgot to diarise the event, apologising afterwards. Reasons offered for non-attendance included time constraints, interstate travel, illness, and a medical procedure.

SESSION NO	ATTENDANCE AND GENDER DIFFERENCE EACH SESSION
1	6 Members – 4 Males and 2 Females
2	7 Members – 2 Females and 5 Males, 1 new male member joins
3	6 Members – 3 Males and 3 Females, 2 new female members
4	7 Members – 3 Females and 4 Males
5	8 Members – 4 Males and 4 Females
6	5 Members – 2 Females and 3 Males

**Table 2: Attendance and Gender Profile for Each Session**

I chose to have ten people for the group sessions because, based on my experience of groups, not everyone would attend every session. If I were to pick the ideal size, at least in my area of expertise of group therapy, it would be between eight and ten members (Yalom, 2005). Aiming to recruit ten members, I wanted to avoid a lower membership for several reasons:



- Low attendance numbers would challenge engagement and commitment to the process and limit each participant's enjoyment of being part of a peer group.
- The generation of data would be from a diverse range of participants rather than just a few.
- Members who attend consistently may feel more pressure in discussions, limiting their involvement and participation and impacting the group's diversity.
- Low numbers could send a message of a lack of interest in the research topic and a "Why bother?" attitude.

Having nine people in the group, I considered whether I would be saturated with content and information. I had discussions with my Advisor on reducing the number to six, because of possible content saturation, but having more participants would allow for absences and add to the diversity of the inquiry process. Having a minimum of six and a maximum of nine participants would accommodate change and flexibility in the inquiry.

### **3.6 The Flow of Discussion Over the Six Sessions**

The flow of interactions between the members, the leader, and the research process over the six sessions was considered. As per all group theory, participants will choose to engage at a level of disclosure based on their assessment of inclusion and safety. Participants' relationship to authority and power are crucial to note, along with any underlying personal disturbance associated with a sense of belonging, acceptance, or rejection. The level of motivation to engage in the encounter, the willingness to participate, and people putting themselves forward in the discussions add to the dynamics of any group and require close monitoring.

Accordingly, assessment of differences emerges quickly in groups, with participants making conscious choices about engagement. My assumption regarding the level of engagement was, given that the participants are professional group leaders, there would be relative

safety for all involved. All the group members are familiar with group processes and dynamics, and I assumed there would be a level of self-monitoring and commitment to the purpose and aim of the research group coming together. I imagined that the focus of the inquiry would establish a sufficiently safe process for the discussions. However, participants' vulnerability in groups potentially produces regressive behaviours, as evidenced on several occasions in the Inquiry group when the group acknowledged several important personal disclosures and responses. I now offer an overview of the six sessions in three parts – beginning, middle, and end. My reason for doing so is to reflect the group being time-limited, task-focused, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

### **3.6.1 Beginning Phase – Sessions 1 and 2**

From the outset, the Presence Inquiry Group process centred around addressing and exploring the inquiry question regarding the presence of the group leader which I initially put forward. The participants responded to the question in a uniform manner, addressing me as the Chair in the first meeting and helping to set up the inquiry process and establish safety. In addressing the research group's task, the interpersonal assessment of one another begins while avoiding early interpersonal challenging of other participants. Also, the process allows for settling into the room, getting a sense of who is in the group and their connections with one another, while holding the leader accountable for establishing interactive engagement and safety rules.

Participants enter the process of inquiry as individuals without an established collective identity. Finding one's way in a group is critical – how one enters and finds a place and a level of safety and voice can be daunting. My orientation evolved quickly in the first session, from asking the questions towards developing cross-talk between the participants. Setting a structure from the start helped develop the dialogue between members and away from speaking through the Chair. By Session Two, the level of cross-talk between members showed their motivation and interest in engaging with the research group. At the same

time, I moved from a directive stance towards a facilitative one. The dynamic refocused from the individual reporting of ideas towards a joint inquiry and curiosity about what other group members could offer.

The pacing of the process was necessary to monitor. My journal entry notes how some members of the group processed differently and how my facilitating required flexibility. For example, some members were still sitting in reflection when others were ready to move on with the discussion (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt, 2002), requiring small interventions from me via observations to the group.

Each session began with the participants' reflections including reporting of any actions they may have implemented or considered from Session Two onwards. The process helped develop a dialogue of curiosity, questioning, and seeking of clarification as the sessions progressed. The group turned its attention to the themes identified in the previous session for discussion and exploration, focusing on the task at hand or moving from a *readiness-to-hand* attitude towards a *present-at-hand* attitude in the inquiry process on presence. Similarly, evolving relational aspects emerged in group processes. In the final ten minutes, I summarised the key points from the discussion, using the participants' words where possible. The group then formulated the themes for consideration in the next session.

### **3.6.2 Middle Phase – Sessions 3 to 5**

Between Sessions Three and Five, a relational process (*Mitsein*: being-with-others) was emerging between the participants. The common purpose and goal of coming together became apparent and group participation developed to become reciprocal and collaborative. In principle, the inquiry moved beyond individuals offering their contributions towards a more unified or collective force of individuals reciprocally engaging in a critical investigative process of interest.

Members gave an account of their reflections between the sessions. They offered discussion questions and reported back on what they had noticed in their work as group leaders. Interest from others dovetailed with reviews and sparked off new thoughts and inquiries. The group's work turned in on itself as a deliberative, reflective process of reciprocal knowledge creation. Collective wisdom was forming as the group focused on the practical *readiness-to-hand* aspect of the inquiry process.

According to Yalom (2005), the group relationships are "germane to positive outcomes" (p. 53) and a "successful [group] requires the presence of a positive attachment to a benevolent, supportive, and reassuring authority figure" (p. 54). I was encouraged by the fact that the structure and process I had set up from the start successfully brought the group together. Cohesion and engagement are essential to establish early in the process. Group cohesion is about "group-ness, we-ness" or simply the "attractiveness of the group for its members" (p. 55). Cohesiveness is not fixed and fluctuates considerably during the lifetime of the group. The sense of belonging and the appraisal of how well the group is working contributes to cohesion, depending on the members' levels of investment, personal motivation, and satisfaction. The fluctuation of cohesion means it can wane and lose potency during the lifetime of the group. With group members not attending all six of the group sessions, I wondered how this fluctuation influenced the level of cohesion of the group? I journaled a niggling concern:

*The revolving sessional membership of the group is an interesting dynamic to process. How does this phenomenon contribute to the cohesion of the inquiry group? Is cohesion in the group defined differently here, beyond the usual conditions of safety, trust, and relationship?*

During this phase, several processes emerged to address the cohesion question. The examples below show the group's potential to move into therapeutic mode, adding to the development of group cohesion. A quiet member, for instance, was encouraged by others to contribute to the inquiry. The participant reported a lack of safety in the group and a feeling of invisibility which impacted speaking openly. The feedback to the group provided

great discussions where members offered personal insights into what safety meant for them.

Other examples included the partner of a participant being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness as she prepared to run a group immediately after the diagnosis. The personal and detailed reflections on this process were powerful, moving, and an enriching experience for the inquiry group, bringing a closeness between members. Another participant described the pain of a business partner's decision to remove her furniture and, in effect, herself from her practice when she was on holiday overseas and how this flowed on to a group which she was leading immediately upon realising the situation. Unknown to her and only revealed later, someone in the group she was leading knew about the situation. She spoke of the shame and impact on her ability to lead the group and the emotional pain reminiscent of her family-of-origin transference.

One member provided a detailed account of the illumination and confrontation of a behaviour pattern he had noticed in his leadership style and approach since beginning the research. He felt shame when reflecting on his attitude and behaviour towards some of his group therapy clients. He explained that he had set about exploring this specifically with those members of his group. Another member spoke of working with male inmates for mandated counselling about their violence and other crimes, noting how his embodied presence changed during the inquiry to be less rigid and lacking in emotional engagement. The group members noticed and commented on the change in his presence. Another member spoke of questioning his physical and mental capacity and losing his anchor in the world through personal doubt, impacting his sense of self and presence as a group leader.

Group cohesion prevailed, as evidenced by such self-disclosures, despite the rotating sessional membership in the above examples. The group offered support and assistance in those instances, but therapy was ultimately resisted by the group because members acknowledged the group's purpose and boundaries. Yalom (2005) describes therapy groups generating a positive reinforcing loop of *trust – self-disclosure – empathy – acceptance –*

*trust* (p. 56). Despite the group being task-oriented for research purposes, the reinforcing loop of trust was active in the group at specific times.

Although the foundational conditions are similar for most groups, the framework of engagement always needs to be made explicit and enforced by the leader. There is little evidence that ongoing personal disclosure helps to deepen the focus of inquiry in task-oriented groups, however in this case I believe the calibre of the membership caused this anomalous development.

As the group came to an end in Session Five, one participant put forward a proposal to write up his reflections as he would miss Session Six due to a scheduled medical procedure. Others took up the idea and a discussion began about what would be meaningful to explore. The group agreed on a list of questions (Appendix 4) to reflect upon their participation. The questions, it was suggested, could be sent to each participant. Individually they could decide if they wanted to write responses to all or some of the questions. I had not included this aspect as part of the research for analysis; however, I was intrigued as to whether the members would follow through.

### **3.6.3 Ending Phase – Session 6**

My journal noted the various reactions in Session Six by the group of being taken aback by the questions proposed in the earlier session as being “big” and “not quickly or easily answered”. Some had considered what they wanted to offer, while others sought more time to review and assess their responses.

At the end of the last session, my journal entry noted the group's overall sense of unity. The differences in disciplines and approaches required the group to find its way through a maze of language, terminology, and meaning-making. For example, how the language of the corporate world differs from leading a drug and alcohol process therapy group brought

many questions and admiring comments. The by-product I noted was the gleaning of 'presence differences' in leadership. There was discussion of the navigation of the language and meaning differences during the six sessions that required patience in finding a common language and expressions to explain and communicate ideas that others could comprehend. Paying close attention to other participants' words, language, and embodied expressions brought meaning-creation, intention, and a mutual admiration for the complexity of one another's leadership approaches. Hermeneutics as a shared understanding using language and dialogue was, I believe, demonstrated in the Presence Inquiry Group process as meaning surfaced in group members' relationships during the six sessions and then again later as I engaged with the text narratives (Koch, 1999).

### **3.7 Knowledge Creation**

When considering the process and intensity of the Presence Inquiry Group interaction during the six sessions, I wanted to overlay this with how the group generated knowledge. Having a free-flowing group provided an ideal format for the inquiry process to review the integration of knowledge creation. The two questions, posed in five of the sessions, were adapted from the principles of Cooperative Inquiry (Kasl and Yorks, 2010; McArdle, 2004; Bray, Lee, Smith, and Yorks, 2000) with the aim of turning the focus onto how the group generated knowledge and understandings from their lived experience. Knowing-in-action is implicit in the group's deliberations. Like the *bricoleur*, I have borrowed principles for exploring how the Presence Inquiry Group generated knowledge creation via the four ways of knowing – experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical (Kasl and Yorks, 2010).

In effect, the primary principle I held to was that the group members would return to their respective groups and, in between each session, actively review and note what action they may have taken or considered taking which was influenced by the group discussion. The two questions set the group norm for members to bring those reflections for further discussion

and exploration. The concept also allowed members to learn from one another while contributing to the research inquiry.

Two forms of knowledge-creation, experiential and propositional, stood out the most in the inquiry group. The group as a field of inquiry lent itself to the direct experience of self and others within the group space. From the first session together, experiential knowing, a felt and embodied knowing, unfolded as the group members came together. With the varying attendance of the six sessions, the constant movement of bodily responses and actions depended on who was attending. Through the shifting dynamics of the group's changing interpersonal relationships, experiential knowing, and the participants' direct face-to-face encounters, they entered a process of openness (*readiness-to-hand*) to the present moment of the inquiry.

Although elusive to define, the participants' multiple worldviews fundamentally grounded the group in its time together. The participants' accounts reported earlier in the chapter were unexpected and profoundly moving. I wondered if experiential knowing was a conduit to the empathic connection and openness between the members which deepened the group's intimacy and cohesion, at least in some of the sessions.

It seemed that in coming together, the encounter of being in a group set the groundwork for propositional knowing to emerge. Through sharing personal theories, ideas, and knowledge from the participants' professional fields of expertise, (*present-at-hand*) knowledge creation as a defining principle of engagement arose as the two kinds of knowing fused and separated in both embodied and spoken experiences. The challenge lay in professional and technical language differences as the participants sought to clarify and integrate their learning. Professional terminology played a crucial role in the group's learning (the mutual interaction between *present-at-hand* and *readiness-to-hand*) as participants searched to understand the professionally laden language of others while having their personally held and embedded 'knowing' challenged from various viewpoints in the discussions.



Practical knowing revealed in 'knowing how to do something' was initially not evident in the group. As the research facilitator, I didn't offer any applied suggestions or interventions about exploring presence. In hindsight, perhaps I could have considered an applied exercise as a different group discovery process, as the group leader's presence was a new concept for the group to explore. On reflection, using practical ways of accessing a group leader's presence was put forward in one session as a five-step process by one member who put forward his perspective on how to attend to presence. Although not practically demonstrated in the group, participants found this realistic view and process to be of interest. My sense-making of the formulated approach was organic and part of the member engagement and pragmatic learning style operating since the inquiry process began. Tacit knowledge allowed other members to reflect upon whether the steps put forward resonated with them and were of value when considering their own actions.

The fourth type, presentational knowing, was expressed via storytelling. The process of bringing to life concepts through storytelling and anecdotes provided rich illustrations for conceptualising and understanding the various applications and differences of presence as a group leader (*readiness-to-hand*). Group members continually brought stories to the sessions to illustrate leadership difficulties that they experienced in their respective groups. The stories seemed to help participants investigate their practices and think through the many views offered. Others' stories helped conceptually to connect with different ideas and thinking. With the participants coming together, they emerged as a group collaboratively developing and reciprocally sharing their ideas to address the presence question (Angelides and Gibbs, 2007). I journaled about my anxiety during what I would term 'excessive storytelling'. I understood that this realisation came from my self-pressure on managing the balance between a potentially helpful illustrative storytelling used for participants' understanding and the fear of the group losing the inquiry's focus and ultimately becoming a reflection on me as the anxious novice researcher getting it wrong.

### **3.8 Group Members' Learnings on Presence**

The inclusion of the two questions in the email between sessions served as a reminder to the participants (Appendix 3). The intention was for participants to bring along their reflections and to consider presence awareness in their leadership activities. At the start of each session, the participants took time to report their considerations and any actions they had taken between sessions. Participants found having the two questions structurally helpful, providing a reminder of preparation for the following session and allowing for an expansion and discussion of their lived experiences and the meaning-creation of presence. I noted a sense of connection and interest growing from one session to the next as the reflections deepened.

Members reported a heightening of their learning about and awareness of presence during the study period. Appendix 4 provides sample quotes from the participants incorporated into the report results on their individual grappling with presence and their comments on the study group presence.

#### **3.8.1 Individual Presence**

- Somatic, felt sensing as a 'feeling into' the group
- It becomes more natural and harmonious over time
- Relational and complex
- Not a task; we must be in presence to experience
- Transformational aspect of knowing where I've gone and of my robustness to return
- Mental preparation of setting my intention, then presence is more likely to become captured
- Presence as a group leader being more fluid than fixed
- It's about how I respond to the people around me relationally
- Being conscious of presence and feeling more able just to be me and less worried about excellence, and less attached
- Presence is a work in progress for me; it's just how grounded I am at the moment, and how I'm showing up to others

### 3.8.2 Group Presence

- The shared presence of authority, insight, and compassion, allowing other ideas to have equal grace
- Tapestry with threads that contribute to it, weaving and joining together
- Exposure as a collective conscious state. It's radically different to anything I've been exposed to before and is profound
- It went from a kind of orientation towards self and the facilitator to an orientation towards multiple individuals, a collective self – disabling the technical jargon
- A collective presence is always composed of the authentic presence of the individuals

### 3.9 Reflective Summary

#### ***Thread 3. Balancing between Therapist and Insider Researcher Roles***

*My journal entries reflect my excitement and how much I enjoyed facilitating the six sessions. I found myself engrossed in the discussions and emerging dynamics, not wanting the groups to end.*

*The decision at the outset was to avoid following group psychotherapy group dynamics and past theories such as Bion's (1961) basic assumptions, Yalom's (2005, 2020) scapegoating, or Billow's (2003) reliance on rigorous interpersonal processing. The purpose was to render my existing expertise in group process and group dynamics as secondary to the purpose of the project and adopt the insider-researcher position.*

*Managing the pre-existing relationships and prior knowledge of some members of the research cohort required careful consideration. Bracketing my own theories, assumptions, and past relational connections over the duration of the six sessions was crucial. I developed a process based on my teaching of students about group process and I used three headings to help – How do I experience myself?; How do I experience the Other?; and How do I experience the group? These three headings have been instrumental in my journal writing and bracketing process. I write extensively of my experiences and reactions under them.*

*As the sessions continued, the stance of insider-researcher developed. By introducing myself as an insider-researcher in the first session and when new members arrived, I helped formulate a positional stance, some role clarity, and the responsibilities of both myself and the group members. I wanted to be clear and avoid any confusion about the purpose and reason for our engagement in group. I had a sense that some members would be willing to move into an interpersonal process group focus between one another and lose sight of the reason for coming together. There were challenges*

*in some of the sessions and I was aware of times where, if not for vigilance to maintain the group's focus, I could have facilitated a therapy group given the content of the discussions.*

*Yalom's (2005, 2015) observer-participant position of observing and participating through observations of process reminded me of the insider-researcher and the social-constructionist position (Gergen 2001), with the stance of 'looking in' where multiple truths coexist within the group space.*

*Yalom's (2005, 2020) group theory includes the reflective loop. Proposing two stages, the first stage engages the conversation towards the emotional connection between the members where storytelling of past events occurs. With the therapist's expertise, the conversations become focused towards the immediacy of the here-and-now relations between the members. The establishment of connections and relationships emerges as both connections and disruptions eventuate. However, the process can be tension-filled and hard to tolerate, and the group members get a break by moving to Stage 2 of cognitively exploring what has just happened between each other to make sense or meaning, creating a reflexive loop back to Stage 1. The process is repeated until a moment of realisation occurs, the lightbulb moment.*

*I was acutely aware of how any group can avoid the work of the group by bringing into dialogue extraneous thoughts and machinations about something unrelated as a strategy for avoiding the immediacy of the purpose of the group. Yalom (2005, 2020) defines this type of conversation as 'there and then' excessive storytelling or cocktail party talk where, e.g. topics like the weather or everyday tasks are talked about at great length, avoiding the interpersonal and relational process of group. Perhaps my vigilance in trying to prevent the reflexive loop entering the research group was unsuccessful because I know from experience that there is a time for storytelling to relieve tension and allow the group to turn back on itself and reconnect, especially when the tension between the members is high.*

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS THREADS AND PROCEDURES

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*The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor:  
he took my measure anew every time he saw me,  
whilst all the rest went on with their old measurements  
and expected them to fit me.*

George Bernard Shaw

### 4.1 Introduction

Following on from Chapter Two, the methods of analysis for each of the components identified are set out in this chapter. The chapter will provide in detail the approach of the analytical strategy. First, I considered the generation of the content narratives and how I would be positioning them for analysis.

I held to the viewpoint of there being no single voice, but multiple voices co-generating multiple realities drawn from their respective professional, lived, historical, socio-political, and cultural experiences within dynamic group-generated principles. Anderson (1987) and later Senge (1990) offer guidance on group-generated discussion with multiple voices generating a large pool of collective meanings, understandings, and experiences. Preskill and Torres (1999) define the group space as a place of holding each person's unique qualities, tacit knowledge, and learning to allow for the development and emergence of shared meanings in a co-created space of collaboration. For Camargo-Borges and Rasera (2013) and Gergen, McNamee and Barrett (2001), the dynamic process of cooperation between the group members allows for alternatives to be explored and imagined and the potential creation of new realities to be examined.

I reflected further on the genesis of the information collection process, beginning with a single voice responding to the research topic. I concluded that, as the individual's voice is heard, a collaborative dialogue emerges that is meaning-oriented and dynamic. There is a shared experience, a sifting through of multiple experiences in the immediacy of the sharing, imbued with emotional resonance, construction of ideas, concepts, values, informed and expert knowledge, and lived experience. Differences and similarities in realities appear, providing new perspectives and challenging, enriching, and engaging members as they connect in meaningful inquiry. The shared space allows for contact between individuals, offering their lived experience within the Presence Inquiry Group setting. The individuals and the group-as-a-whole respond to the data put forward; other responses, reflections, knowledge, and interactions are informed by a personal connection to the developing dialogical exchange. As a group, the members engage in the process of adding to the dialogue with individual and personally informed ideas, challenges, knowledge, and insights, seeking clarification, a deepening and widening of their lens of insight, moving from and between individual offerings, towards a collective offering that is diverse, emerging, and dynamic. The dominant discourse in this environment is not that of one voice but of a collective of voices shaped by language, meaning construction, and identity, as a group whose time together is limited and purposeful, with an end in sight.

To help address the process of engagement and generation of narratives, as described, the initial steps of the IPA analysis process helped to engage with the content narratives before I added other steps to meet the project objectives. The phenomenological method encourages the principle of equalisation (Spinelli, 2005, pp. 21-22), which advocates avoiding developing a hierarchy of significance or importance of one theme above the other and treating all the study content as having equal value or significance. I decided early in the process not to develop a traditional hierarchy of themes, as suggested in the IPA process, divided into the standard superordinate and subordinate categories. I wasn't seeking to separate one from the other and wanted to honour the principle of equalisation. I considered how equalisation gives equal weighting to all aspects of the Presence Inquiry

Group Inquiry. I took the stance of not assuming that one theme would be more important than another and seeing the themes as inter-related and overlaid on each other.

This chapter will provide in detail the rationale and steps for each of the elements for analysis. Section Two of the chapter will bring together the results of the analysis. Given the large volume of content and information, I have designed an analytical pathway in two parts.

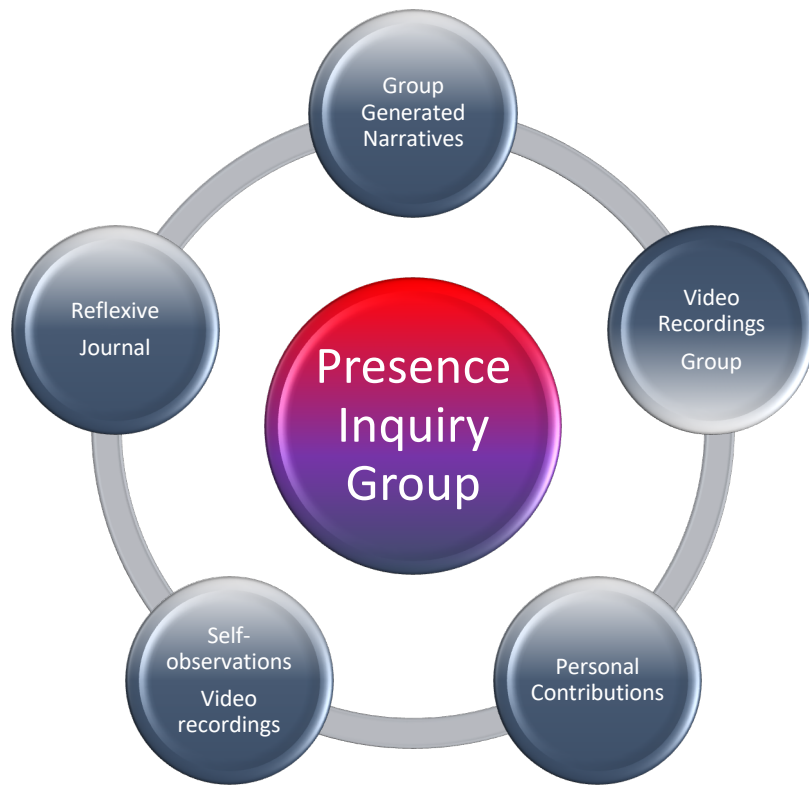
**Part A** provides the process and analytical steps for the group transcripts and the observations of group interactions from the video. See Appendices 6 A, B & C

**Part B** similarly provides the analytical process for my personal spoken contributions in the six sessions and observations of myself during the facilitation of the research study group. See Appendices 12 and 13.

## **4.2 Analysis Elements**

The audio recording of each session was sent digitally to a transcription service and returned within forty-eight hours. Following on from Chapter Two, the reporting areas are further described below to provide the rationale for the analytical method of choice. I have also included questions to help ground the elements in context for analysis. The themes identified from the analysis are then assigned to the two main headings of Presence and Group Leader Presence.





**Diagram No 1. Elements for Analysis**

#### *4.2.1 Group-Generated Narratives*

The group-generated content from the six sessions was analysed from the transcripts using the following approach. I adopted steps one to four from the IPA method (Smith et al., 2012) and added further directed steps. The analysis aimed to explore, over the six sessions, the group leaders' personal grasp and understanding of presence, including the broader lens of its meaning and application to the purpose and role of the group leader, while considering the potential impact on the group leaders' presence within their respective professional groups. The potential for a group identity to emerge over the six sessions was also explored.

#### *Questions considered when working with the group-generated narratives*

Embarking on the complexity of working with and ultimately arranging the information into emergent themes required maintaining a focus without becoming overwhelmed or lost in

the process of discovery. The following set of questions helped as a reminder during the analysis of the information.

#### Presence

1. Is presence a thing in and of itself or part of more extensive processes?
2. What am I looking for that is called 'presence'? Is this an individual or collective experience, or can it be both?
3. What does presence mean and what is its impact on the group leader and the wider community? Is it of value or worth, and how will this knowledge assist the stakeholders?

#### Group Leader Presence

1. What does group leader presence mean, its impact and meaning for the role/position and the wider community? Is it of value or worth, and how will this knowledge assist the group leader and stakeholders?
2. What is missing/absent in the material on presence?
3. What is my alternative, imagined way of experiencing, knowing, and understanding presence as a group leader?

#### *4.2.2 Video Recordings – Group*

The review of the research group's recorded videos across the six sessions showed the group participants' interactions. The overall aim was to develop an analysis of 'groupness' and group cohesion from the videos. In any group, cohesion is a primary phenomenon for assessment by the group leader. Cohesion is a multifaceted dynamic based on interactions between members, providing the group leader with an evaluation of the group's engagement and commitment to one another and of the group as a helpful entity. Tomkins and Eatough (2010) describe the danger of ignoring information from the group perspective, which could be viewed as a disregard of the context in which the discussions were generated.

Phillips, Montague, and Archer (2016) suggest strategies for analysis with focus groups, which were helpful to consider. However, as the study group has an ongoing collective membership rather than an individual one-off focus group approach, my study was seeking to understand the development of 'groupness' and thus required a different analytical approach. Pivotal for my thinking was a past training programme I had developed for intern group leaders, where video recordings were used to help students learn to observe and read group process and dynamics. I wondered if I could use the group sessions' video recordings with the sound muted. Observing the group would allow close observation of the participants' interpersonal exchanges, non-verbal communication and body language, and embodied interactions between one another and with me. Initially, I planned to observe the videos without a structure for a descriptive interpretation of group members' interactions. However, I decided while watching the first video to develop a flowchart of bodily communication and dynamics to be used across each of the six sessions for consistency, to help ground the observations of the group. I held in principle the following questions as a reminder when working with the video observations:

- How do participants respond to one another in the group setting – does it change over time? (e.g., non-verbal, eye contact, listening, responsiveness, body expression)
- How would I describe the presence of the group in each session?
- The overall sense of the group's behaviour in each session – dominant figures/quieter members etc.? Any specifically observed disruptions to group cohesion? (e.g., specific times of agreement/disagreement; support/differences)

#### *4.2.3 Personal Contributions and Self-Observation in Video Recordings*

There are two parts to the analysis of my personal contributions – spoken contributions and the embodied participation shown in the video recordings. A review of my spoken contributions was included for analysis. In the literature on the insider-researcher's positionality (Greene, 2014; Drake, 2010; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Breen, 2007), several

arguments are offered for and against the insider-researcher sitting within the methodological and ethical areas of discussion. For me, my positionality in the Presence Inquiry Group was essential to consider because from the outset I was aware of the possible impact of past professional relationships with some members, my prior experience as a group therapist, and my researcher bias influencing the study's focus. The challenge was to monitor any over-involvement or suggestibility in my questions and statements to be used for analysis during group time. I chose to follow the same process for observing myself that I used for observing the group's interactions, focusing primarily on my embodied communication and engagement with the group.

The questions below were helpful to consider when working with both the transcripts and video recordings.

- Is any clear development, understanding, or interruption of the group's role and my facilitation as an insider-researcher evident over the six sessions?
- When is 'bracketing' evident in the group's facilitation, and does it change over the six sessions?
- How and when does group therapist expertise become activated or influence the group, and does it change over the six sessions?
- Is there an insider-researcher presence which is evident or developed over the six sessions?

#### *4.2.4 Literature*

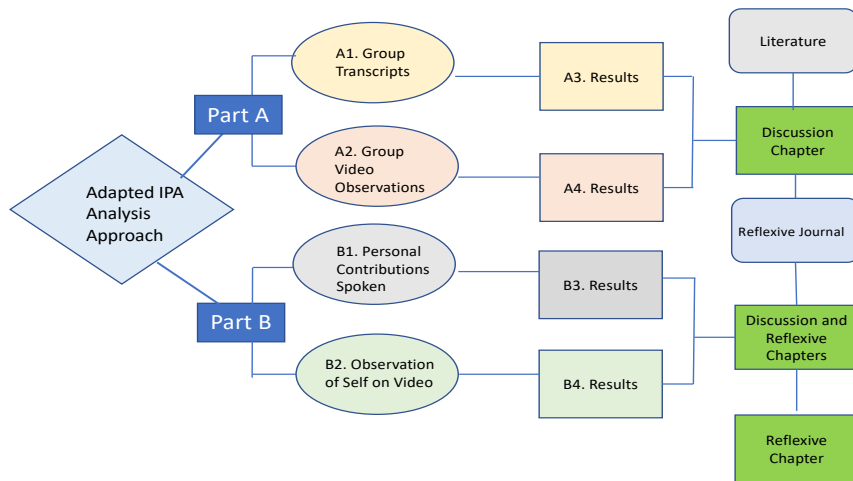
The themes identified from the material were reviewed, along with further primary and secondary information from the literature to help develop the results narrative. I have deployed the literature as a supportive background element for the discussion and meaning construction (Wibberley, 2017). Apart from my initial research project submission, I have deliberately stayed away from the literature on presence. I wasn't fully aware of why I did this at first. Chen, Fung and Chien (2013) suggest that a delay in the literature review will provide the researcher the freedom to explore in-depth the research question without bias

or influence. I had begun to collect articles and books on the research topic; however, my felt sense was that it wasn't the right time to delve into other people's ideas and concepts prior to the research.

At this point, there were several factors for consideration. During the group meetings, I wanted to be as open as I could be to the emergence of ideas and concepts in the dialogue. Bracketing my insights and biases, where possible, without influencing the process was a position I wanted to hold throughout the six sessions, and I committed to bringing my assumptions for reflection in my journal. I wanted to immerse myself without prejudice in the content generated from the literature. Then, at the discussion stage, my thinking could move between the identified themes and the theory, in keeping with a flexible and creative approach to meaning-creation.

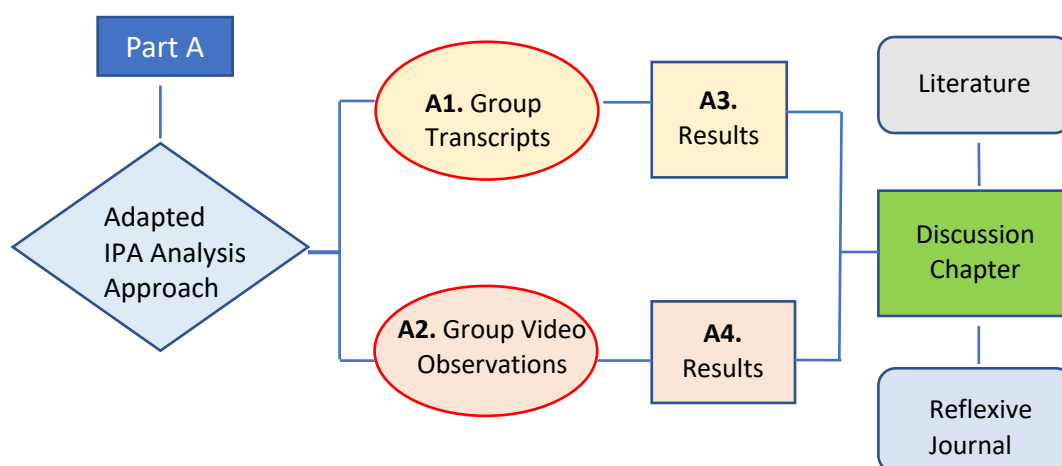
#### **4.3 Section One - Analytical Pathway**

Diagram 2 below shows the overall relationship of the information-gathering elements for analysis, and their relationship to the results and respective chapters. I begin with the analytical processes of Parts A and B, separated to help manage the large volume of information. The steps of the analytical process were initially influenced by the IPA process stages and then others were creatively added to suit the analytical method.



**Diagram 2 Analytical Pathway Approach**

### 4.3.1 Part A – Analytical Steps for Group Transcripts (A1) and Group Video Observations (A2)



**Diagram 2.1 Part A – Analysis Pathway**

Part A provides the steps involved in the analysis of group members' interactions during the six sessions of the Presence Inquiry Group, detailed in Table 2. The steps cover the analytical method of managing the large volume of content information from the group transcripts (A1), followed by my observations of group members' interactions (A2) from the muted video recordings.

Coding of the participants' engagement in the group discussions is shown in Table 3 and includes the non-verbal communication observed in the video recordings.

The results of the analysis will help to provide a focus for the discussion chapter and, where appropriate, inclusion in the reflexivity chapter.

Steps in Analysis of Transcripts (Group)	Aim
<i>Reading and rereading, immersion in the transcripts of the narratives</i>	The purpose of the first step is to actively engage with the transcript data, to allow myself to be fully immersed in the complexity and embedded 'life stories' of the participants.
<i>Initial note-taking and descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments on the text</i>	The process aims to identify and highlight specific nuances that the participants offered in dialogue from their lived experiences over the six sessions. Their personal meanings, language, and understandings of the research topic are also noted for consistency.
<i>Preliminary emerging themes are identified in each session and cross-referenced</i>	The volume of information will be reduced and reviewed across the six sessions, seeking patterns, connections, and relationships to the research topic of group leader presence and the themes to be identified and extracted.
<i>Developing themes across each of the six sessions</i>	The mapping of the themes is organised into lists based on the relational interconnections and scope of the data. The lists of themes under each heading are further refined and placed within the associated themes of each heading. The themes are divided into the two main headings, Presence and Group Leader Presence.
<i>Developing meaning-creation from the themes for discussion</i>	The aim is to present a coherent and meaningful understanding and summary of the dialogue on group leader presence for discussion and write-up.

**Table 3: Analytical Steps - Group Transcripts (A1)**

#### **4.3.2 Analytical Steps - Group's Interactions on Muted Video Recordings (A2)**

Observing the group would allow close observation of the participants' interpersonal exchanges, non-verbal communication and body language, and their embodied interactions



between each other and with me. Initially, I planned to observe the videos without a structure to allow for a descriptive interpretation of the group members' interactions. However, for consistency, I decided when watching the first video to develop a flowchart of bodily communication and dynamics to be used across each of the six sessions to ground the observations of the group. For example, eye contact and body movements such as restlessness, irritation, gesticulations, and facial expressions were observed and noted, and were added to in consecutive sessions. See Appendix 10 for a summary of group observations in Session 5.

Steps in the analytical process for the video recordings of group interactions with the sound muted are set out in Table 5. They had the overall aim of developing and understanding the level of groupness, group cohesion, and group climate. 'Group climate' refers to the overall level of group cohesion, including bonding, communication, alliance, and empathy, based on the interactions between group members and the insider-researcher (Johnson, Burlingame, Olsen, Davies and Gleave, 2005).

I also acknowledge, having first worked with the transcripts, that it was essential to find a way to work with the video recordings without bias. I chose to review the video recordings with the sound muted. Specific moments and incidents were readily available in my recollections and awareness, and my first task was to attempt, where possible, to bracket any recall from the live meetings and from my immersion in and reading of the transcripts. Journal entries were made during the process to manage and consider those intrusions later in the investigation.

Steps in Analysis of Six Sessions of Muted Video Recordings (Group)	Aim
<i>Observations of group interactions</i>	To record group members' interactions, highlighting individual and group responses, including bodily communication like eye contact, emerging dynamics, level of group cohesion, and observations of personal reactions.
<i>Mapping of observations</i>	Observations to be transposed into a spreadsheet for uniformity and consistency of collation.
<i>Summarising of observations</i>	Collated observations over the six sessions will be summarised to allow for interpretation and analysis.
<i>Writing-up of results per session</i>	A summary of each session will be written up to provide an overview of each sessional group interactions.
<i>Synthesis of the six sessions for meaning-creation discussions</i>	To determine the group cohesion, process, and dynamics of the Presence Inquiry Group and their development of presence as a group for discussion in a write-up.

**Table 4 – Analytical Steps - Group Interactions on Video (A2)**

#### **4.3.3 Coding of Participants**

The nine participants' coding was devised in association with each member's contribution level and to ensure anonymity. For ease of reporting, male and female gender-specificity helps identify the participants in the reporting: Male = M and Female = F. Following the gender is a participant number, e.g., Male number 1 to 5 or Female number 1 to 4.

Therefore, male participant number one would be MP 1 and a female participant would be FP 1, as illustrated in the table below. The identified session number uses the code S for

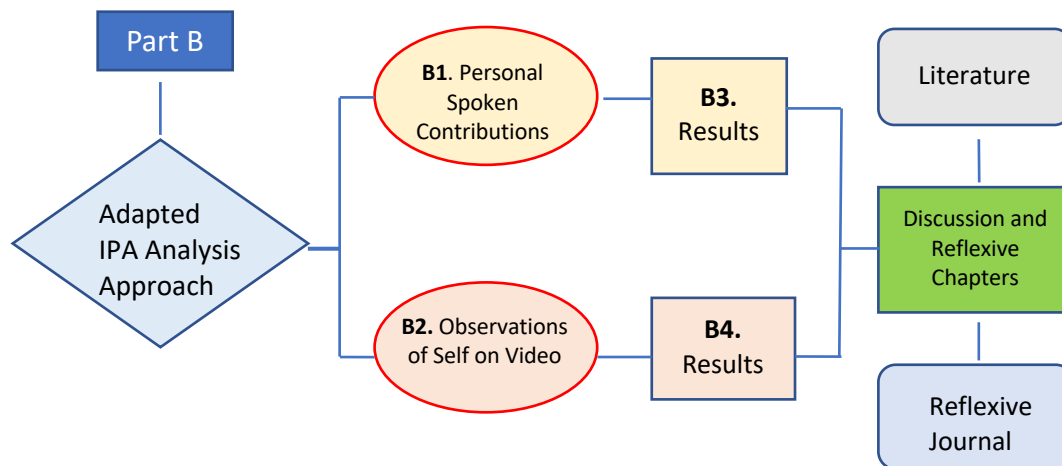
Session followed by the session number from the transcripts. Session One thus becomes S1 and Session Two S2, and so on.

Participants were similarly coded for the video recordings but omitting participants or adding them according to whether they were dominant or quiet in their contributions. For example, male participant 1 (MP 1) now becomes ‘dominant male number 1’ (DM 1). The categories of dominant or quiet reflected each person's level of interaction, their energy of engagement and participation. ‘Dominant’ reflects a high level of interaction, while ‘quiet’ recognises a more thoughtful and reflective stance.

**Table 5: Coding of Participants**

Transcripts Gender (M/F) Participant(P) Number (1)	Video Recordings Gender (M/F) Dominant (D) Quiet (F) Number (1)
MP 1	DM 1
FP 1	DF 1
MP 2	DM 2
FP 2	DF 2
MP 3	DM 3
FP 3	DF 3
MP 4	DM 4
FP 4	QF 4
MP 5	QM 5

#### 4.3.4 Part B – Analytical Steps for Personal Spoken Contributions (B1)



**Diagram 2.2 Part B Analytical Pathway**

Part B provides the steps involved in analysing my personal contributions during the six sessions with the Presence Inquiry Group. The steps cover the analytical method for my spoken contributions (B1) and the process of self-observation (B2) in the video recordings. The results of the analysis will help to provide a focus for the reflexivity chapter and integrate into the discussion chapter.

The overall aim was to indicate where a breach in the bracketing of my assumptions and biases was evident. To do this, I chose to highlight in the transcript all my own spoken contributions and to separate them from the group interactions.

##### *B1. Personal Contributions Analysis Process*

###### *1. Reading and rereading by immersion of the transcripts of the personal data*

My contributions were highlighted and separated from the participants and then transferred to a Word document with created columns. The first column held personal

contributions with the heading 'What I said'. The purpose was to actively engage with the data during the Presence Inquiry Group.

2. *Initial note-taking and descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments on the text*

Notes and commentary were made in relation to the contributions and were placed in the next column alongside the personal contributions. The process provided a collation of the comments and notes over the six sessions as a process towards the next step.

3. *Coding of personal contributions notes and commentary as interventions used over the six sessions*

The collated contributions, notes, and comments were reread and coded in the next column, identifying my interventions during the six sessions. The rationale for making the interventions was also added to the last column. These interventions included standard micro-counselling skills such as the use of directive, clarifying, and open-style questions, as well as facilitative linking and influencing statements. Also, it was important to identify where bracketing failure was evident in the transcripts.

4. *Synthesis and organisation of the interventions*

The interventions and rationales for use of each intervention were put in an Excel spreadsheet to be coded. They were categorised as high-, medium-, or low-level of readiness for reporting.

#### **4.3.5 Analytical Steps of Self-Observations from Muted Video Recordings (B2)**

The analytical steps shown below emerged from observing the video recordings of myself and developed as a pragmatic response. The aim was to record personal interactions by highlighting embodied communication like eye contact, emerging reactivity to individuals, and group dynamics.

### 1. *Mapping of Self-Observations*

Observations were transposed to a spreadsheet for uniformity and consistency of collation.

### 2. *Summarising of Self-Observations*

Collated observations over the six sessions were summarised to allow for interpretation and analysis.

### 3. *Writing-up of Results Each Session*

A summary of each session was written up to provide an overview of my personal contributions and responses.

### 4. *Synthesis of Self-Observations and Interactions*

Personal contributions were synthesised, including failures to bracket, influence on group discussion, and facilitation between working with the group as a whole and the focus on individual members. The three levels were reviewed and were further reduced and synthesised for reporting of patterns, connections, and relationships.

### 5. *Coding of the Interventions*

The categorised interventions were coded by their incidence of use:

- *High* – where more than four of the same intervention were used in a single session.
- *Medium* – where up to three interventions were used in a single session.
- *Low* – where only one intervention was used in a session.

Failure to bracket was also noted in each session. Personal comments from the data were reviewed and assessed for non-suspension of the assumptive stance, emotional reactivity, theory, information, or knowledge. The results are reported with data extracts for discussion. Data extracts are included with the results to validate findings. See Appendix 13 for a summary of Session 3 on self-observations in muted video recordings.

#### 4.4 Reflective Summary.

##### **Thread 4. Bricolage: Creatively Identifying Threads of Presence**

*Philosophically, I am torn between wanting to stay with a phenomenological approach that honours the organic nature of the discussions of the Presence Inquiry Group participants, and finding a method of analysis. My initially proposed method required a deeper dive into the literature to find a way forward and to address the project philosophically and practically, to meet the project outcome.*

*Although Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2012) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) seemed the most logical method to apply to the project, there are logistical and philosophical reasons that the method's steps don't meet the project requirements. The emergent approach requires me to set out a plan and then mould this as I go along.*

*I stumbled across Bricolage, and I'm grateful. The tapestry metaphor of pulling together threads from the different parts of the project to create a unique story resonates with me. As a visual representation, the metaphor invokes and provides a space where I can dream into the process, becoming creative in how I bring together the multiple parts of the project for analysis and reporting. I adopt the stance of the 'Bricoleur' rather than adopting the Bricolage method that grounds me in the artistry of creativity.*

*The idea of the Bricoleur appeals to me and seems in keeping with who I am as a group leader. The bricoleur works with the narrative threads running between the group members, the multiple relationships, complex in nature, connecting and separating as they weave a rich tapestry from the lived lives of the participants.*

*Giving myself permission to be creative, not to box myself into a given set of rules or steps, allows personal freedom and creativity to emerge as a process. I took the bold step of challenging my self-limiting beliefs as a novice researcher, to be creative and*

*like the Bricoleur to adapt and develop an analytical method for the project rather than trying to fit the project's narrative data into a method.*



## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

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*Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside or outside. One has to push one's work as far as one can go: the borderlines, where one never stops walking on the edges.*

Minj-ha

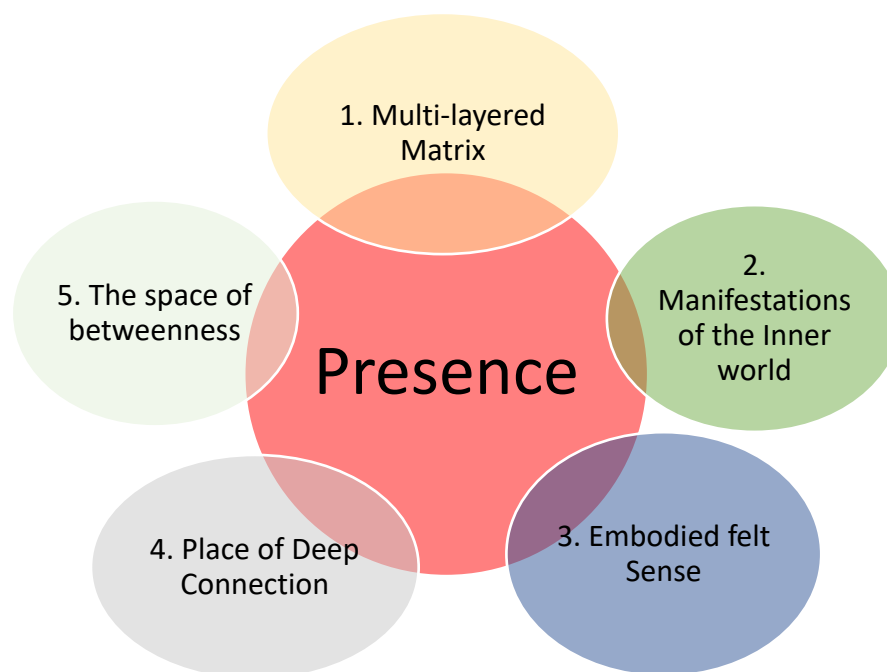
### 5.1 Introduction

The results from the transcripts of the six sessions are provided under the two main headings of Presence and Group Leader Presence. Two diagrams are provided to illustrate the associated themes from the analysis, assigned to each heading (see Appendix 8). Under the two headings, the analysis is reported with data extracts as supporting evidence.

There are five identified themes reported under *Presence*: multi-layered matrix, manifestations of the inner world, embodied felt sense, place of deep connection, and space-of-betweenness. Four themes have been identified under the heading of *Group Leader Presence*: self-mastery, flow and threats to presence flow, pseudo-presence, and container of presence (see Appendices 8 and 9).

The learnings from the first heading, Presence, allowed considerations for application to the second heading, as outlined in the discussion on the findings in Chapter Six.

## 5.2 RESULTS PART A – GROUP TRANSCRIPTS (A3) – PRESENCE HEADING



**Diagram 3 –Themes Within Presence Heading**

### 5.2.1 Presence as a Multi-Layered Matrix of Meanings

The study group participants tried to define presence as something tangible, but it remained elusive and difficult to define. 'Multi-layered' and 'matrix' were often used in the discussions, with presence as a multifocal point of unpredictable emergence explaining group leader presence. The theme itself adds to the difficulty of presence being not just one 'thing', but many. Qualities and attributes were offered as a starting point and abandoned, only to be returned to several times throughout the six sessions as the group grappled with co-constructing the meaning of presence.

Presence, as suggested by the group, can be understood to be a matrix of multiple meanings. Each meaning fell short of clearly defining presence as a 'something', revealing it as elusive and difficult to define as one thing while also inviting multiple possibilities. As humans, we are complex beings and to fix a single meaning to presence was challenged and rebuffed by the group as impossible. Humans are complex beings with multiple meanings and multiple layers of self and are not just one type of 'self'.

The group's attempt to define presence was based on qualities such as trust and vulnerability. A powerful presence was described as a quality of robustness. The group came to a decision at the outset that it seemed like an impossible task to clearly define presence:

*Your way of saying that, is it's a multi-dimensional space that you're moving into and out of, different dimensions, and it makes more sense to me. (S3: FP 3)*

On reflection, the group came to hold a view of presence in Sessions Three, Four, and Five as having so many dimensions that it was easy for them to get lost in trying to put words to its meaning and description.

*You're present in some ways and not present in other ways and that's shifting... Presence is multi-dimensional, it's multi-layering, I think that multi-dimensionality makes more sense. (S3; MP 5)*

The consensus of the group saw presence as a movement, something that is not static but dynamic, a movement flowing between different planes and qualities of presence. This was not surprising as the description mimicked how they went back and forth in their attempts to describe presence.

*And that statement that you brought up about presence being a dynamic state. It is a question, isn't it? Which actually... my very rapid answer would be yes, it has to be... so, I'll take that away and go, what would that mean if that was true? (S3: FP 3)*

An interesting aspect of presence emerged like an alignment and contact between the self and the other, as an experience of the flow of outward connection and separation. For example, in the flow, there is movement between all the parts, and it is never quite fixed,

being described as a flowing movement of leaving and returning. The description likened it to riding a wave:

*It's that focus on the expanding sense of self, rather... or the sense of others, you know, of trying to fully understand that saturation of everyone, which is impossible. I think if you think you've got it, then it's probably past ... so, I think of it as something of riding a wave, in some ways, that you're... you know, it's important to not stay with the wave right to the shore, because it's then a lot of hard work to get back out to do it again. So you're really trying to have a series of waves that you're really connecting to, you could say, in that relational way, and then you're finished. And you know, you probably disconnect yourself and then you really try to join it again. (S3: MP3)*

The wave metaphor seemed an apt focus of attention for the group to explore presence and was picked up and developed in later sessions.

*You know, what's coming up here, like the wave, you know. What's this wave looking like?*

(S5: MP 3)

*It's almost like that emerging wave that you talked about, where I kind of know how it feels to be like that, but I'm not sure I can deliberately bring it forward. (S5: FP 4)*

Further commentary on the wave allowed the metaphor to expand and develop throughout the six sessions. Rather than one wave, a series of waves was put forward as a way of being in connection and in relationship with one another. For example, the waves come together and then separate and then come together again, returning not to the same but to a different flow of contact, quality, and being.

One member felt they were in contact with something personal and intimate and described the contact, movement, and flow as the "Sacrament of the Present Moment", a state of intimacy.

*I'm sitting in that title, The Sacrament of the Present Moment. Oh my God. I just want to staple that on my forehead or tattoo it down my arm. Because that was so*

*intimate. Such an intimacy around it and so, there's a part of me going... I'm sitting here facing intimacy again. And I related a lot to, a lot of what was said. Meaning, what's there in the moment... and just the meaning of it and letting it be and going with it and not avoiding anything. (S3: MP 3)*

Within the multidimensionality of presence, it was suggested there are states of presence, such as intimacy, calmness, ego, purpose, intention, influence, fragility, or vulnerability. One member in Session Three asked if there was such a thing as a 'universal presence.'

*These states of presence and I've just kept this running list here of ways to just understand it. At least for me in language, distinguishes between the types of presence. So, that's a question for me like, is there a universal presence in all? Or is there just completely a dynamic? (S3: MP5)*

Also, the multidimensionality of presence was suggested as being co-created in the dialogue and possibly linked to the position and role of the group leader. The co-creation of presence emerges from the relational aspect between the membership and the leader. As one member commented:

*... because a lot of my experience in groups is in co-emergent dialogue stuff and this question of presence and leadership... Leadership's still present when you've got eight people all participating because it just emerges dynamically in the moment, rather than being structured at the beginning. (S3: FP3)*

Presence was understood as emerging, primarily from the relationship between the parts of the group, including members and leader, contributing consciously and unconsciously towards the emergent presence. There was a suggestion, typified by the quote below, of group leader presence being compromised or distracted and challenging to understand:

*So, I'm just curious around that, around... I don't want to break down the frame of the inquiry of presence, but there's a sense in which there's an inquiry of group presence, about how we are here and also how we are in things that are not our work with our groups. What does that actually mean, when you're this... you know, multiple focal points? (S3: FP3)*

Further, the multifocal point on where presence could emerge from was missed in the group by an interesting comment made by FP 3 in Session Four which didn't seem to go anywhere in the discussion. The group member referred to presence as being "a quality of existence", not a noun but a verb. "For me, presence is about... we're always 'presencing' if you like. It's not a state to be actualised. It's a way of being." This was an interesting aspect of being-a-group-leader to consider.

Presence in the six sessions was dominated by the exploration of multiple meanings and elusive states, qualities, and actions, which could be described as a matrix-like quality, not just one 'thing' but many complex and intricate relationships that take form from its origins, which develop, flow, and change in the relational space of the group engagement.

### **5.2.2 Manifestations of the Inner World**

The summarised qualities of presence amounted to a list of potentialities which an individual could maintain and project as presence. Despite the list of qualities and traits put forward, the discussion focused on exploring presence as a manifestation of the group leader's inner world.

The vulnerability of the group leader was central to the exploration and was a recurring theme and quality. Several of the members spoke candidly of their experiences of exposure. One participant described it in physical terms:

*I'm also thinking about yes, I get to that door, and I know I'm going to walk into a shit storm, so what am I leaving at the door? What am I still carrying in with me? So that when all that transference comes at me, whether the shame, the anger is flying around in the room that it's not totally destroying me internally even though I might have left something that's deeply meaningful. So, what's in my body physically? How do I kind of comfort or... I don't know... What I'd do with my body muscularly, if that's the word, to kind of tackle that storm? (S2: MP 5)*

As the group grappled with the construct of vulnerability, they agreed that it was an internal process at play between self-stability and instability, attributable to past childhood experiences influencing their current awareness of their presence.

*So when I think about when I was younger, I reckon I was incredibly unhappy and I think a lot of it was due to the feedback loops were all playing themselves out. But I had no idea how to deal with them, so it becomes like rumination, so all the same things, in those days if I call it rumination, worrying, overwhelmed by stuff that's, kind of, like hitting me all the time. I'd say now over many years, and this happened very gradually, there's much more stability in me because actually all the things that, sort of, are still flying around like flies and mosquitoes. I immediately know what they are, and I know how to make sense of them, and I don't buy it and I don't worry about it and actually, it actually helps me because the dynamic, it's dynamic in the sense that things are moving and shifting moment to moment but I think the differences are more stable. I can see, I feel myself, so this word stability I think is important. (S1: MP1)*

The manifestation of past events, their impact, and how the individual had addressed them seemed essential to the quality of presence. The relationship to self is a mode of understanding the quality of presence.

*... this is how I relate to this in myself, I've just noticed I'm more stable, I don't get knocked over so much. When I do get knocked over, I get back up pretty quickly even if you don't notice what's going on for me, I, kind of, notice that in myself. And I think stability might come from being able to take perspective. So being able to step out of where you are and what's happening and actually take perspective, so being aware and being mindful and being slightly away from being immediately impacted. (S1: MP1)*

The group discussion centred around the internal structures of attending to presence when feeling vulnerable, especially when the inner world feels unsteady. MP2 described it as an inner world of flow between internal calmness and internal implosion.

*... the group tests everything to a 100% level because really you have to be authentic. Your presence is just you and hence the more you have integrated with the professional mind-set, the personal experience of who you are, you just have to be yourself because anything else is seen through at that moment [by other group members]. (S2: MP2)*

Another group member described the internal implosion as:

*The internal impact of the presence of others in the group – real or perceived or both, based on past experiences can be internally destroying. The question I ask of myself is how do I stay in my presence? (S2: MP 5)*

The group returned to the metaphor of 'riding the wave' as a beacon of hope indicating calmness could emerge long enough before the next wave of instability arrived. The qualities of a wave's movements were used as representations of the inner world of turmoil. The force of a wave's qualities indicated the wave's power and calmness, representing the dynamism required to access presence. The group spent considerable time exploring how a group leader could potentially access presence through a process of self-observation of their internal reactions and responses, and as a way to stabilise the vulnerability of their inner turmoil for calmness to return. One member explained in Session Two that "the inner world of presence requires a wisdom of contact with the inner workings of the self, a felt level of knowing" (S2: FP1).

In Session Two, FP1 went on to state that the quality of presence was a "narrative quality that reveals itself in a relationship by making itself known to others." The exploration of the relational aspect was a vital key to accessing presence. The use of a horse-racing betting metaphor captured the discussion's essence:

*It's like having the trifecta of any relationship between welcoming self, attuned to self, attend to self – e.g., the heart (using your gut feelings) and intuitively along with the cognitive ability to interpret and make meaning. (S3: FP2)*

The group put forward qualities of the group leader's inner world as requiring an "inner connection to self-permission, relatedness, joining, empathy and attending, it's like finding the resonance of self," as FP 2 put it in Session Five.

The quote below illustrates the difficulties the group had in understanding the inner world of presence as a personal choice:



*In my anxiety the qualities I perceive in others can be a hindrance to my presence, my feelings can be compromised, and I'm challenged, as I am out of my place of comfort, I lose purpose and lack clarity. (S5: MP 3)*

The inner world's manifestation and the disjunction between the internalised presence and the outwardly projected presence was explored as critical to understanding presence. The group agreed that the inner world belonged to the individual and was uniquely experienced rather than having common descriptors, although language becomes the vehicle of description and definition, and not all the study group members agreed on the terminology to describe the inner manifestation of a presence process. A group member summarised his awareness of this complexity:

*... so there is no one presence experienced, but multiple, and as a group therapist I can embody one way of a projected presence yet it is experienced by others differently, on multiple levels – that's really complex to get my head around. (S5: MP2)*

Another member spoke of the experience of mentors and trainers who had "high presence" as people who drew others in:

*I think that, that it's that ability to be able to not just get the task done but to actually create a focus that's much deeper, I suppose, is really, you know, what presence makes. And I'd say everyone has a presence, it's just, are you aware of it or not? (S1: MP1)*

The manifestations of the group leader's inner world were explored as including turmoil and conflict, with moments of inner strength and vulnerability. The capacity of presence to be multi-layered was carried forward in exploring the theme of the inner world and the manifestation and impact of past experiences and projections.

### 5.2.3 Embodied Felt Sense

The interchange and interconnectivity between 'felt sense' and the embodiment of presence was explored as a desire to bring consistency and definition to the term 'embodied presence'. To expand on the understanding of embodied presence, the group explored qualities and conditions associated with the term (see Appendix 6). While some members were acutely aware of and worked with their bodily communication, other members understood the term to mean communication of their personal past experiences through the process of countertransference.

For example, one member spoke of the felt sense as "my body is picking up information, not just my intellect and I don't use the word intuition but felt-sense" (S3: FP 2), while another described felt sense as "totally an embodied experience" (S3: FP 3).

A key issue raised in association with embodied presence is connectivity, meaning the connection between all the parts pertaining to the whole. Connectivity is a starting point for understanding the complexity of embodied presence by bringing to awareness the interconnectivity and communication between all the elements of self.

*So the thing about presence is I think when you are... cohered between what your gut is telling you is right, and you need your executive functioning to go, is this my gut being scared of an old story or is this my gut actually telling me this is right, and your heart tells you it's right and your head tells you it's right, you are cohered and you have amazing presence. Or if your heart is going, you know, I don't think this is right, again, you won't bring that full embodied presence. (S2: FP1)*

In bringing to awareness the interconnectivity of the parts of self, a union occurs that potentially heightens personal awareness. Challenging this idea, a member spoke of embodied presence as requiring some, if not optimal, conditions for this to happen in context:

*And it's that sense of connectivity for me, that sense of, what are the conditions that are actually okay for me? Was I always that way? Or did I come to be more okay in this different situation? I think all of us can relate to that with time. Doing what we are doing, we feel more okay. So, there is something I reckon. Probably in all of us, there is a sense of presence that's come from familiarity. So, I think that this thing about conditions is sort of interesting. So, is there such a thing as a present person in all conditions or is it contextual? (S2: MP1)*

Further, the idea of a felt sense challenged some members to reflect on connectivity beyond a simple feeling or emotional state of being. To help understand this in simpler terms, the group tackled the concept of a felt sense as a 'knowing'. To explain this and give it an agreed meaning was difficult. Some members relied on their bodily communication instinctively and defined knowing as 'intuition', while others disagreed and said it was less defined for them. Finding a language to conceptualise the phenomenon was challenging for the group. Multiple meanings emerged in the exploration, with a loose agreement on the felt sense as embodied presence. For others, a felt sense implied a movement between connection and disconnection, being nourished and refreshed, a place of embodied "attunement to self", suggesting embodied presence was about being 'in tune' or 'in harmony' with oneself.

A participant challenged the concept of attunement as a 'thing' that required assessment and said it could change over time. He considered attunement as an ongoing process and not a fixed one:

*How are you attuned to what's going on in your heart? How are you attuned to what's going on in your belly? Is there a you, which can connect to these guys [group members]. And, so, the reason I'm asking you that is, the sense in which those two things kind of feel like they are in a resonance somehow. And it changes over time too, you know, in the sense I think you have to be present as that leader. (S2: MP3)*

Qualities of embodied presence included "relatedness, empathy, attending, and vulnerability." As another member (S2: MP 3) spoke of the challenges and the successes of his work, MP 2 also verbalised concern in Session Two of being aware of his groups personal experience of being vulnerable. Another member aligned vulnerability with a concrete

understanding of the challenge of a group member's presence described as imposing and dangerous:

*He creates fear in the group because it's like he'll come strong and sit there. So that's interesting for me in terms of presence just to watch myself in relation to that, the way I kind of deal with this because there is an aspect I noticed where I'm, you know, it's almost like paying attention to it and kind of like picking things up and drawing him in. (S2: MP5)*

The group sensitively explored concepts of vulnerability, safety, and how to feel safe when dealing with difficult group members. One member described it as going "head-to-head" or "headbutting" the group member: "there is a vulnerability in putting oneself in presence, especially someone else's imposing presence."

*So, it draws out in me a real sense of... I think when I was younger; it would have drawn out an enormous amount of vulnerability. It kind of draws out the headbutter... I want to headbutt this bloke. This is how I learn about myself; this is what, you know this is what my relationship with you is. Now I'm starting to see more about myself. You know, I do want to headbutt you and, you know, I want to do this or I want to go there or you're bringing out my, you know, vulnerability about maybe I'm not good enough, how do I get this guy in?  
(S1: MP1, also a similar reference to headbutting in S2: MP2)*

Another member relayed the impact that vulnerability had on their presence:

*... vulnerability again, there are times when I'm not available and I'm not present and I don't want to be. But there's something that happens when I pretend to try and be present, when I'm actually not. (S2: MP2)*

The group also explored personal vulnerability, which would seem to be a key component of presence as anxiety and tension, of the flow between the relational and contextual quality of attuning and attending to self as complex:

*I'm noticing when that first click happens of my heart closing or my vulnerability closing and that's really been my journey, I think. It's really getting that really fine, embodied sense of when I'm open and when I'm starting to close. (S3: FP2)*

Further, embodied presence was about being mindful. In Session Two, MP 5 made a statement about what it means to be human as a group leader and its challenges:

*... the greatest permission we have is that we are human, and we need to respond as humans, it is compelling and profound. So, I wonder how much we need that permission to bring who we are fully, to drop away all the other thoughts that come in about. Do I have permission to be here? And if that permission doesn't feel like it's there, you get caught up in, do I have any rights to talk to these people, can I bring myself in here?*

A descriptor for presence, "the embodied instrument of the group leader's trade," provided in Session 3 by FP 3, brought further discussion. The descriptor was an attempt to bring together the felt sense beyond the intellectual knowledge, the relational and attuned self, by considering the wider context of individual members' connections with the group-as-a-whole.

One member put it as:

*... in your body, you know what was going on for you. The emotion was there, you could contact that emotion... And so, that just to me, reminds me that maybe presence isn't static. It's completely dynamic and we're moving from these different planes of presence. (S3: MP 5)*

Embodiment as a felt sense would suggest its central focus to be that of connectivity between all the group leader's inner and outer lived experiences. The manifestation of embedded presence brings about the harmony of all the elements 'singing' with one another.

The tension identified as the vulnerability and potential fragility of the group leader's lived world experience challenges the embodied felt sense of and attunement to presence.

#### 5.2.4 Place of Deep Connection

Following the interconnectivity of embodied, felt-sense presence, the group explored the inner world manifestation of a quasi-spiritual quality of presence. One member explained it as "going to the depths of my deeper self" (S3: FP 1).

A "divining rod" was picked up in S3 by MP 4, using the analogy of "a rod to help divine what's underneath." As the group delved into the discussion, another member explained this felt sense as a place of deep connection:

*For me, that feels to me like I'm connected. That awareness is that link to that really deep part of me, which is what I call my spiritual connection. So, it's... For me, I'm just thinking now, it's linked to awareness in the moment. That immediate moment of knowing I've got something rising in me. Okay, I know what it's connected to. I'm looking at the group, I know what will happen if I choose this or that. So, it's a really conscious, really aware sense of what's going on in the deepest parts of me and it feels... I feel that connection too. It's almost like I'm getting information from that deeper part. So, that's what I would... That's how I would speak about it in spiritual terms. (S3: FP2)*

The group explored several terms to help develop an understanding of presence as a place deep within, as where they would experience a connection to self and what lays beyond the self, though not necessarily a religious experience. The group proposed that the inner self space would have an internal quality, accessible for information and guidance. For some members, presence from a spiritual perspective had a more profound sense of connection to something difficult to explain. One member posed a series of reflective questions to help understand the quality of spiritual presence:

*... does this have a lot to do with some deeper sense of alignment? Am I in contact with my 'self'? Is my 'self' in contact with people around me? Is my work in contact with my values? I just think there's layers to it. (S2: FP2)*

The group conceptualised presence as having a quasi-spiritual quality, and the fear would be of disconnecting from this deep space of alignment. Fear for some members included the

arduous task of bearing the responsibility of group members' expectations. Also, some members discussed the burden of leadership, especially when an organisation imposes its expectations and procedures, adding to performance anxiety and fear of delivery when under pressure. For most, fear was put forward as caused by the disconnect from the deeper part of 'self' and conceptually limiting access to a personal connection to the deeper spiritual space within themselves.

Also suggested was the mystery of finding the language and meaning to explain this "deep space within." FP 1 spoke of the "divine other that cannot be clearly defined, fully experienced, acknowledging it as a deeper part of the 'self' that is within and without."

Another member in Session Four offered a description of the quality of presence between individuals as an "attraction of yearning for the other to know and the other yearns to know you, that can occur in the immediate moment" (S4: FP2).

In group process and dynamics, the "attraction and yearning" could be likened to a mass attraction happening at various levels of yearning and disinterest as the parts and the whole contract and re-engage over multiple iterations. Possibly this could be understood as the connection-and-disconnection duality of everyday living. The group called this quality of attraction and re-engagement "a yearning process of presencing" in Session Five.

Furthermore, the group looped back to the quasi-spiritual quality of presence in Session Three. DM 4 described the process as the "Sacredness of the Moment". The phrase suggests the interchangeable worlds of the conscious and unconscious as they meet in awareness and connection with one another. "The sacrament of the present moment" was a phrase coined by Jean Pierre de Caussade, a Jesuit mystic of the eighteenth century. The moment also linked to the metaphor of the 'divining rod', a unique and sacred moment where the deeper part of self is expansive energy.

*So, I don't feel like I'm in the room working alone and I'm actively drawing on that wisdom. Now, I might use the term God, because that suits me and, it fits for my*

*spiritual framework... my conceptualisation is probably quite small when I'm actually in there, but I know that I'm getting wisdom, and intuition, and information, and direction if you like, from a much deeper place. (S3: FP3)*

The group sensitively and creatively explored the theme of deep connection as non-binary or relating to traditional religious beliefs and faith-specific practices. I was curious how different descriptors were used to activate and explain the deep place within and the respective personal belief systems. It is a reminder of the importance of recognising differences in meaning-creation, not to fall into a place of limitation in recognising only one reality. In Session Three, FP 3 concluded that to have a deep personal connection within "self" and the experiences of being a group leader seemed to be almost spiritual and required identifying a space within, "a place of inner knowing."

### **5.2.5 The Space of Betweenness**

The group explored how the physical and psychological space between the members and the group leader could help with understanding presence. Defining the space of betweenness was difficult. It seemed to the group to be ephemeral and yet have a quality. One member referred to the betweenness space as "a dynamic process of flow, complex and requiring attention." Another member referred to the space as being like quantum entanglement:

*It's like quantum entanglement, even when you're not there, it's still there... so one of the things that I sort of like to think about is an eruption. I feel like there is kind of like an eruption going on of some kind, and I work really hard to not look for the external reason for that eruption... I notice I relate to it differently if I do that. If I go to an external reason, I am into my head, I am into, he said, she said, I said, you said, how do I change that view? But if I stay with it just as an internal process, then it's more just being conscious of you know, I know this territory, I know exactly what I have got to do now, watching how I react to that, watching how I am in the space. (S4: MP 1)*

Bringing the idea of quantum entanglement to the discussion generated an awareness of the parts interacting and impacting one another both passively and actively in the space



while they remained individual and indistinguishable. The impact of the eruption of one part was understood to influence the others, as the contact with each other was uniquely individually experienced. In Session Two, MP 1 explained how presence moves and flows and can be an important part of information for the group leader to pay attention to. "When an eruption within a group occurs, it is crucial to stay with it and remain internally focused."

This exciting concept would suggest the space-of-betweenness as a place of reflexivity, a balance between 'being and doing'. In Session Four, MP 1 called the space a "phenomenological moment", meaning that which appears and requires attention, a correlation between the phenomena, including the parts that create the whole. One member summed this up: "... what gets my attention and how I will respond, I need to get out of the way and to allow presence to happen" (MP 3).

Another description included a meeting point, a junction of tension:

*It's like for like, for example anger with anger. There's something that happens in that space. There's a meeting, even though it's anger to anger, it's like a point has been met or something... even in the meeting point, it is hard to stay with the intensity and requires a presence to be there in the intensity. (S3: FP1)*

FP 1 took the concept of a meeting point a little further. In Session Three, she suggested that the meeting point was "a platform for a different kind of meeting, an acknowledgement of the personal response and care," including the tension between wanting to connect and to be defensive; "it's not all warm and fuzzy".

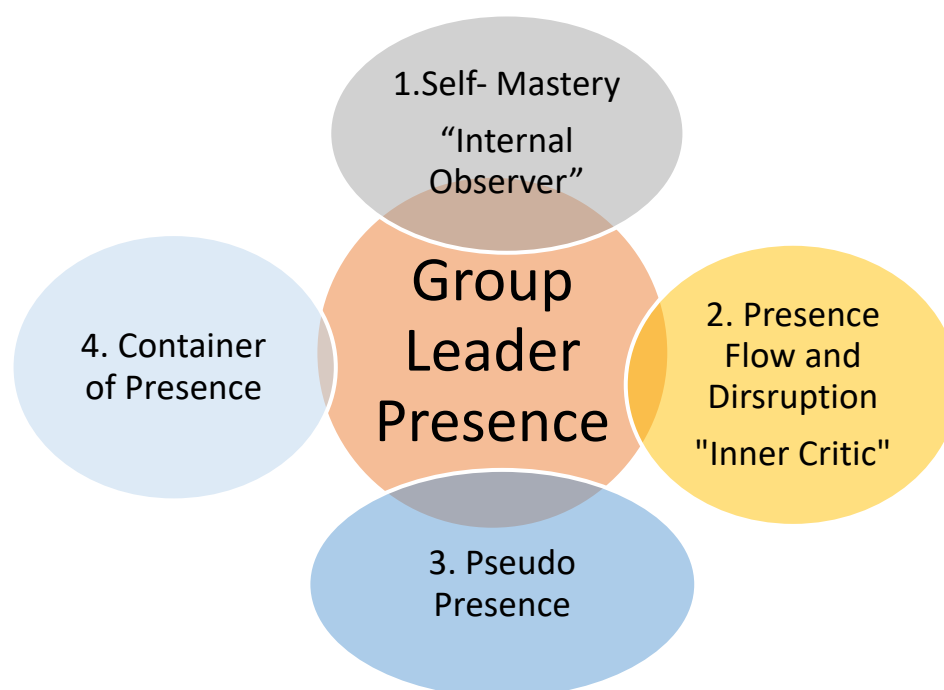
According to one member, the group space had a quality of the "unknown, experienced internally" (S5 MP 5). The co-created group space includes an agreement for the group members to find a way collectively to be in a relationship with one another, rather than being directed by a group leader. In Session Five, MP 2 explained, "It's like an integrity gap I am facing, a question to myself here is, how am I showing up moment by moment with

people in the group space?" For others, it was about "getting out of the way to allow the process to evolve."

The construct of getting out of the way proposes a certain quality within the space. A balance between human attributes and the creation of engagement is about being real within the 'betweenness space', instead of being task-focused without integrity, simply performing a role without personal integrity. In Session Five, MP 5 described the space as "a place full of conventions, organisational procedures, theories, ideas, and values possibly having levels of influence in the space." There was an agreement from the other members that "whatever they are, whether it's group therapy, process or psych-ed groups, even corporate leadership programmes, conventions are in the space... they are spoken and also unspoken." The challenge, therefore, is not to get so caught up in those influential conventions and to co-create a space of betweenness where there is "an openness, not a shutting down to the intensity, not doing or fixing, or rescuing etc. and to stay with the energy, focus and emotion of what is in the space" (S5: MP 4).

This theme provides a place for reflection on how to navigate the betweenness where the unknown is the focus, the meeting point where connection, eruption, and engagement emerge. Simultaneously, it reflects the intersubjectivity which engages the group leader to be present. Accordingly, presence seems crucial to the engagement with the parts of the relationally focused space-of-betweenness.

### 5.3. RESULTS: PART A– GROUP TRANSCRIPTS (A3) - GROUP LEADER PRESENCE



**Diagram 4: Themes Within the Group Leader Presence Heading**

#### 5.3.1 Self-Mastery

Over the six sessions, the group members moved interchangeably between the question of exploring presence as a construct in and of itself and engaging about their understanding and personal awareness of presence as a group leader:

*I've been thinking a lot about presence. And I guess part of my understanding about presence is this; there is some level of core within the leader, within the group facilitator that is constant. And, yes, there is dynamism around that but kind of who we are in the world, there is something core about that. But I guess my point is to what degree is presence core? Is it dynamic, is it static? (S3: MP5)*

The discussion of self-mastery brought up vibrancy as a requirement for group leader presence and alluded to the internal tension experienced by a group leader between being

in or out of presence. Mastery would mean paying attention to when a group leader's inner world is disrupted and finding a balance between their emotional stability and instability, including personal self-awareness and responsiveness to those 'eruptions' of the self.

Further, the group discussed self-mastery as a way of endeavouring to bring a "higher level of presence" (S1: MP1). In Session Four, bravery was defined in terms of risk-taking in action and "stepping forward into unknown territory" (S4: FP2). The group devised the term "internal observer" to encapsulate the above. One member explained their understanding of this phenomenon:

*There is a powerful internal observer that's watching the eruptions and accepting eruptions, that sounds very strong and powerful and really present, with whatever emerges in this other part of you. So, I call that 'internal observer'. It's about that dynamic. If I am being present for the present moment, the present moment has already gone and I am being present for it, so by default it's a dynamic existence, it's a dynamic process. But if I don't have some way of observing that, then I can get lost in that process. So, I am a great believer in developing that internal observer. (S4: FP1)*

As a requirement, the group leader would commit to personal examination as a prerequisite for leading a group, hence the term 'internal observer'. Prerequisites suggested included commitment to participating in a group as a member and having personal individual therapy, coaching or, personal inner work to examine oneself. In undertaking a commitment to personal work as a group leader, presence, as the group came to illustrate, is experienced, and developed through a rigorous process of self-awareness by identifying personal triggers for exploration and understanding.

One member offered the counterargument that too much self-awareness can impinge on the effectiveness of leading a group:

*So, I really like your point around the level of self-reflection, the self-awareness or self-criticism... I was remembering, I saw this thing many years ago, where they looked at different sorts of leaders, and they found that the worst leaders were those who were too self-aware, they were the worst, and the reason was because they*

*thought too much about what was going on. There's got to be an element where you basically just go... I believe in myself; I can do this. (S4: MP4)*

Caution was also recommended, with a balanced process of self-awareness. If the group leader was too engrossed in their own process of reflection, they could be absent in presence, leaving the group feeling unsafe. A balance was preferred, taking on multiple expressions that are active in the group space operating simultaneously, for example, being present to self, present to group members, and present to the entity of the group-as-a-whole.

*So the issue about being present is being present long enough, getting to know what, you know, like attending to what's going on in the next moment, next moment, next moment, so it's the effort required. It can't be just at one with the universe, effort is required to stay with it, stay with it, stay with it. Particularly when there's an eruption, because there's something then about, which is what you're getting to, you get to a different state. (S4: MP1)*

In the discussion of presence and self-mastery, the group moved towards seeking to identify a sense of self as they negotiated the challenge of not stepping into a prescribed identity or role and arriving at an awareness, trust, and attentiveness to self, one that is honest and trustworthy. The members extended their discussion towards thinking about the responsiveness to presence as a force of resonance and attunement when attending to the inner workings and dynamics of being a group leader:

*... so there's a sense of I'm, kind of, really conscious of this other being without being conscious of it, sort of there and, you know, the sense of my attentiveness, I reckon I've got to a point over time where I'm much more okay about just going I'm here, I kind of, know what I'm doing. But I'm not planning everything and so it's like I trust that it will come out. I know enough and I've got enough of a sense of things that the right stuff will come out. I know how to get the thing going, I know how to, you know, and I don't over-engineer things. So it feels like the presence then is much more about it's me, I'm trusting me rather than what I know, what I should be doing etc. And I notice that when that happens the group is very different. It's quite different. (S1: MP1)*

The process elicited a response from MP 2, in Session One, who likened a "journey of self-mastery" to the commitment to a "long-term process" of "self-discovery, self-awareness, attunement, and attending."

*Presence for me is about how we choose to be in the moment, this context, this group, this person at the moment. And sometimes that might be that we could've done it differently because we're triggered. Sometimes we might say we're triggered and does that feel that we're more present if we say that? But I'm struggling with how... There's a sense for me that we're reaching something that is not what we're maybe doing. Because we can only be as present as we can be. (S1: MP2)*

The equilibrium of the group seemed fragile at times. The tension between being fully aware of self and being in presence required the group to explore this further. There was concern that being present required the group leader to be committed to the process, with the danger of being consumed by the process to the detriment of the group. Self-mastery could be associated with embodied presence, as discussed in previous sessions, as a way of "welcoming to self and connecting to heart" (S2: FP1). Aspects such as intuition, feelings, the cognitive ability to interpret, meaning-creation and acquisition as a force of resonance between all the parts and being in relationship to the group-as-a-whole were included for consideration. Those aspects of self-mastery were likened to being a "mantle of embodied presence" (S4: MP5) and an "embodied and lived experience" (S2: FP4). Self-mastery in the discussions suggested the correlation of internalised presence as being embodied, projected as self-presence through the activation of the group leader's understanding of their inner world as a process towards being in presence.

### **5.3.2 Presence Flow and Disruption**

The flow of group leader presence was explored from the position of being in and out of presence. This betweenness flow can be understood as the tension-filled experiences between the polarities of the internal observer and the inner critic. The polarity is critical to understanding the flow of presence for the group leader and the relational anxiety within the polarity tension, defined as the 'disruptor' of presence, seemed key.

Building on the 'internal observer' towards understanding the group leader's self-mastery and being in presence, the opposing polarity was captured as the 'inner critic', representing being out of presence. The inner critic is a standard psychological term, meaning a person's internal world of self, mostly from a critical, self-effacing, negative viewpoint. This extended the understanding of the process of self-mastery to that of holding the tension between being 'in presence' in the internal observer archetype and being 'out of presence' in the inner critic archetype.

*Until every ounce of the very being-ness that makes up my world is threatened... I didn't realise how much that [the critic] contributes to my ability to be present. (S5: FP3)*

The polarities of the internal observer and the inner critic were understood by some members to be a constant background noise that potentially threatened the flow of presence:

*Like being with all of my own presence, the tiredness is a factor, which is sort of like a background noise that sort of blocks you from that interface of experiencing the world, I suppose. So probably, really, to have and use your presence you really need to be able to do something with that background noise. (S2: MP5)*

Members spoke candidly of their experiences of activation of personal triggers like self-doubt, ongoing painful events, personal fears, frustration, tuning out mentally, and feeling shame.

One member compared this to the analogy of the "closing of the heart space of compassion and empathy, it feels like I'm no longer in contact, available or in connection" (S4: MP3). The closing of the heart space, the experience of being out of presence, is also in response to managing physiological changes such as menopause, anxiety, or mentally "tuning out of responsiveness." A member captured this as:

*... this kind of social anxiety, which I haven't really consciously had to do before. And realising that when I do group work, that's not there. And so, I'm really... I really enjoy and really love that sense of myself in group work and having to face the anxiety where that's not going to happen. I'm really noticing that my anxiety's higher and there's some grief there, some grief there. Because I've got a lot of grief in my*

*life at the moment, for lots of reasons. So, I don't know whether it's something that's always been there, or whether this is something that I'm having to deal with because I'm noticing my anxiety. I've got social anxiety, and I don't remember myself having that when I was younger. It literally has emerged in that last probably five or six years since I've been going through menopause. (S4: FP2)*

A member (FP3) spoke emotionally about a partner's diagnosis with a serious life-threatening health issue, while another spoke of the breakdown of a business relationship (FP5) and the cruel method used to remove her from the business, which shook the foundations of her sense of self and professional identity.

Other dilemmas centred around the activation of personal triggering events.

*I know when I'm not present, but I'm often not aware when I am present. I'm often not aware that... I've made a choice, I've made a decision, or however I've come across, which I interpret is going to be judged differently, is often more present than the presence I think that I'm deliberately bringing, if that makes sense. So, I know when I'm not in presence. I get it. I get it. I'm not here, I'm not able to be present, or... but I'm often not aware when I am present, or in mid-presence, if that makes sense. (S5: MP3)*

The everyday dilemmas and more serious life events faced by a group leader were captured in the ordinariness of everyday living, fraught with challenges, insecurities, and difficulty in “bringing oneself forward into presence when there is personal ‘stuff’ happening” (S1: FP5). This seemed to activate in some members a recall of difficult times as a group leader when personal ‘stuff’ got in the way.

Also of interest to me was the description of what I would call the ‘bidirectional flow of presence’ in those personal expectations of both the group leader and the group members when they could be misinterpreted as not being present. This suggests that group members may experience the group leader as absent of presence in how they are being perceived by the other.

*Because we talked about being present, having presence, and being present to and being present for self and being present for other. What's coming up a lot for me*



*today is what you're present as, and hence, what are you present as not? So, there's always a presence and absence... presence that's getting tortured anyway. Sometimes in this type of work, people expect us to be present in a particular way, and I would have an expectation of people to be a particular way of being and behaving and interacting in the world. (S5: MP3)*

The dilemma of needing to be present when experiencing personal life events and triggers, referred to as “eruptions to presence”, was put forward for consideration. One member (S5: FP3) commented, “... am I overthinking it?”, meaning that the effort to be present can take the person out of presence. Another member (S5: FP2) also went on to speak about a “yearning for deep connection” and that when “it doesn’t exist”, the impact on presence was one of deep heartfelt loss. The idea was picked up in the conversation, turning back to the wave metaphor:

*It's almost like that emerging wave that you talked about, where I kind of know how it feels to be like that, but I'm not sure I can deliberately bring it forward. It's... I don't know. It's a really funny thing. So, I really wonder if we're striving for something around presence and being present, that we only learn from our experiences of understanding when we're not present and being present and in presence. (S5: FP3)*

The group explored how personal disclosure by the group leader impacted the level of presence and could be understood to be a way of being out of presence. The accepted ethical boundaries of disclosure brought a heated debate on the appropriateness of disclosure and to what extent it is acceptable. The generally accepted therapeutic rule and the question of appropriateness lay in the question, “For the benefit of whom?” This was discussed at length, with various arguments for and against.

*Presence requires hard effort to transcend personal triggers. So, I use a lot of self-disclosure. So, I think that provides a sense of being... bringing my whole self into the space. (S5: FP3)*

While the discussion evoked various points of difference, as the focus moved from the group to the group leader there was fundamental disagreement on whether the group leader would be fully present or essentially be out of presence when self-disclosing. For some members, there was a hard and fast rule on whether to disclose or not, and for others

it was less so. I wondered why there was such a difference. Perhaps some professional governing bodies hold to this more strongly than others, or was it more aligned with individual preferences?

It would seem from the discussion that self-disclosure is linked to the activation of personal triggers and memories that contribute to being out of presence and can be viewed as serving to ease personal distress, tension, or intensity. Bracketing was a challenge for some members who used self-disclosure as part of their work to establish honesty with their group members. For example, disclosure is used effectively in the addictions area, while corporate disclosure is more measured and used as a tool of engagement. Others use disclosure as an expression of authenticity. However, some members viewed over-disclosure as being out of presence to the other and fully present to the activated part of self. This was an interesting discussion of opposing positions and differences about the disclosure dilemma and presence.

*So I think of it as something of riding a wave, in some ways... and, it's important to not stay with the wave right to the shore, because it's then a lot of hard work to get back out to do it again. So, you're really trying to... you know, have a series of waves that you're really connecting to, you could say, in that relational way, and you know, you probably disconnect yourself and then you really try to join it again. (S5: MP3)*

The threat to the flow of presence of the group leader is closely linked to the polarities of the internal observer and the inner critic. This bidirectional flow requires vigilance, especially when personal triggers, dilemmas, and eruptions challenge the flow of presence in areas like self-disclosure and loss of contact. Group leadership was likened to a transcendent quality of authenticity which is flawed when personal responses and experiences disrupt the flow.

### 5.3.3 Pseudo-Presence

The discussion of being in and out of presence also brought to light the idea of a “pseudo-presence” (S2, S4, and S5) of the group leader. The discussion explored, over several sessions, personal traits such as self-serving manipulation, narcissism, inflated ego, role-playing and not being real, performing a prescribed role, limited leadership without personal involvement, and the potential use of positional power for reward and punishment. The animated discussion brought awareness of the ‘darker side of the group leader’.

The term “mantle of professional presence” was created by the group to understand pseudo-presence. Interestingly, according to the group, a pseudo-presence adopts qualities and traits associated with a grandiose identity and a somewhat inflated ego, described as a “mantle of positional power and authority” (S2: MP1) with a hidden agenda of reward and punishment. Control is central to this position; in straightforward terms, the person takes on the mantle of a professional role with an absence of genuineness and trustworthiness.

*That great desire for excellence and desire for outcome and desire to show up well actually consumed me. I just took it on as a mantle [of professional excellence and authority] because that was what it was like growing up. You just took it on as a mantle and you just did the best you could and... So, having taken that off and going back in, I'm really noticing how easy it would be to slip into taking that on as a mantle again and what I'll lose. (S2: MP5)*

Another term used to describe this pseudo-presence was “the shadow”. In psychodynamic terms, the shadow is understood to mean the hidden or unconscious and repressed aspects of the ego. In existential terms, this concept can be viewed differently, understood less as a pathology or condition to be overcome and more as an expression of a lived world that is out of awareness or is unreflective.

*Like, is there some denial in the shadow? Like, am I denying my authenticity or my true self or my need or whatever it is? And maybe we put that before the other... so yes, there's a shadow side. So, knowing your shadow side is critical, because I think being an all-rounder is best, be it as a facilitator or living life. (S4: MP4)*

For a few members, despite the shadow being understood as a negative and something to be hidden, the shadow presence was also described as being positive:

*That's where, for me, I want to bring my response in dialogue in a way that I'm authentic with what's happening for me. So even though it feels like a negative shadow, it's more authentic, and so for me that's presence. Not just trying to be, you know, aligned with somebody if I'm not feeling that. (S2: MP4)*

The shadow presence was linked to inauthentic living. In acknowledging the shadow, the group explored the responsibility of the group leader to step out of the shadow towards a presence of authenticity or genuineness. The loss of identity and personal integrity was explored when donning a mask or persona of disingenuousness, especially by those who work with groups in organisations, where a professional mask is more likely to be in response to organisational protocols:

*Not talking about feelings and, you know, spending time on the business side of things. So, there is a mask, there is a... if we're very present to other people's expectations [organisation], do we get sucked into that, away from where we really think we should be? (S5: FP2)*

The expectation from organisations is for the level of interaction to be higher up the scale on the information and knowledge-creation level of safe communication, ensuring a lower risk of complaints from the group discussion. The focus is likely to be that of providing service delivery and being of far greater importance than working with the individual and the ensuing interpersonal interactions and group dynamics. The group reported that the approach of some organisations was that of the elephant in the room, “professional avoidance”, defined as having a stage presence, a mask or role, and adopting a personality to fit the brief. The ‘canary in the cage’ analogy was used to illustrate this point:

*My analogy is, man, these guys, these people are all at the coalface, there's a canary in the cage and it's about to pass out and no-one's even looking at the canary. So, the canary will be dead at the bottom of the cage and they'll all be chipping away at the*

*coalface and I'm standing at the back going guys, run and, I'm trying not to do that because I'm not paid to do that. (S3: FP3)*

Another member responded:

*I'm contracted by the organisation to come in and make it work and I'm going, you guys are mad, this is never going to work. And so, yes, I'm out of my presence and integrity in a way because I'm false in a way. (S5: FP1)*

In pseudo-presence, the group leader's positional power was described as a potential for being out of presence. Positional power was argued to have authority and influence, used as a form of control:

*I was going to say that power and influence is what stood out for me. Just the amount of power we seem to have and the influence we can bring. I picked that up from everybody as well just in the role, this leadership role, you know, authoritarian type role you have as soon as you walk into a group or sit down. You have authority. (S2: MP2)*

Taking up the 'mantle of authority' position was discussed as having a downside for group leaders. Mainly in organisations, it was reported that there is a fear of risk-taking behaviour, so the group leader is expected to stay within certain parameters of engagement and to essentially take control and limit any potential risks to the organisation. Tension exists, according to group members, between care and authority. Both are interchangeable, mutually coexistent, and opposing. Authority and positional power, as discussed, were associated with leaders who display charisma, manipulation, dominance, and control. For example, one member described their Chief Executive Officer's leadership style:

*And it's been getting increasingly obvious to me... how his style of presence actively sabotages people's motivation and autonomy. He carried a lot of the brilliant charismatic CEO energy, and that has a shadow side of being quite distrustful of other people's ideas. Like he's verbally very in favour of people contributing but that often didn't come through in the way he showed up. (S2: MP4)*

Another member shared his internal struggle of not being comfortable in his authority in his group work for corrective services because he wanted to offer a human perspective beyond the authoritarian and custodial culture of the institution:

*I leave everything at the door when I walk into the room, who do I need to be for this group and for them to get something out of this group when I'm in the group? And then I also feel like I'm abandoning my core to some degree and then I have this internal struggle, you know, who am I in this group and am I just cowering to something or am I in service, in disservice? (S2: MP5)*

Further, another member spoke of the challenge of the tension between taking up and putting on the mantle of authority:

*So part of my struggle is... I know that the caretaker doesn't always serve me to the best end but there is a part of it that I want to stay attached to me because it does serve me in some way on the ego level. But I also think maybe I have to and then if I'm not that, who am I? To me, that's like a beautiful case in point about leadership versus authority. And I think that often as a leader as a facilitator or whatever we want to call ourselves, we are in conflict between the two. (S2: FP5)*

The tension of finding a balance between leadership authority and being present was suggested to be associated with care. Whether in therapeutic, corporate, or other groups, the motivation and the level of competence and autonomy were identified as the key aspects of finding the balance.

*Well, the poorest outcomes for group members or the team is where you have a high level of charisma and low levels of caring structure and meaning attribution and how dangerous that is in therapeutic groups, and I'd say even organisations. And really the best outcome is where you have medium charisma and medium structure and a high level of caring and a high level of meaning attribution. So, you know, there is caring and meaning attribution, which is really about the other, it's much more dominant. (S2: MP4)*

Experiences of personal shame were also expressed as a counterbalance to authority by some members in their personal ethics and response to authority, charisma, and influence of control.

*... with the idea that really internal shame speaks to your own ethics, then that's actually good shame, you know. That you feel it yourself and you can own it yourself. It's the external shame, which is what gets the kickback and, you know, where it's projected... it can be abused. (S2: MP3)*

The 'mantle of professional presence' seems to indicate a hidden part of the group leader. A mask of a pseudo-self, one wielding positional power, control, and dominance over the membership, so perhaps is useful to consider it in the realm of existence of authenticity and inauthenticity. The balance and antidote to this was offered as care, taking into consideration the expectations of others in a genuine and authentic relational position of regard. The challenge proposed was to be vigilant and recognise when the mask of the pseudo-self was activated and then seek to counterbalance it with 'care' of the other.

### **5.3.4 Responsibility as the Container of Presence Flow**

Closely associated with the 'space-of-betweenness' theme reported earlier, the group provided a lengthy list of personal qualities for the group leader to embrace as a signpost for presence development and called it "finding your way through the maze of presences." This steered back to earlier comments on the responsibility associated with being a group leader to create a safe enough group space. Creating a safe enough container to help initiate and grow a sense of safe contact between the members was agreed to be the responsibility of the group leader.

The intricacies of the dynamics and relational qualities of the group space are unpredictable. One member described the unpredictability as working on the edge and said that, as a group leader, it often felt like "masochistic edginess, so containment felt really important to establish" (S1: MP1).

*The difference is around containment, I think. Sometimes in situations I have to have containment, my boundaries are there around containment, which then makes me curiouser. Okay, so is containment about putting it off, and if I am fighting that, are we still really not present, because I am not really contained, but I'm trying to contain the group, I just try to keep that there, so I can be here. (S4: FP3)*

It seemed that the group struggled to find a meaningful way to connect with the idea of containing unpredictability. Responsibility for containment also seemed counterproductive to presence freely emerging.

*So, this level of dishonesty comes in, and the critic that is so strict and cruel inside my head, like I want to really share that with many people, and so this sort of like, it's the defence mechanism that comes up in the way, which I experience as being dishonest, as I want to contain what is happening in my groups. (S4: FP5)*

Unpredictability within the group space is a given and a product of the inter-relational dynamics of the workings of any group. The study participants put forward that, for presence to emerge, there is a responsibility of the group leader to create a safe enough container or boundary for presence flow.

The container analogy is a common expression in the group work literature, usually related to a set of boundaries including rules of engagement, processes reflecting the category of the group, along with the leader's overall tasks and responsibilities. It also refers to the complexity of the engagement through learning to read the multiple interchanges and workings of the group as complex dynamics emerge. For Wilfred Bion, the container is not a thing, but a process to include how the group manages and works through their lived experiences in intersubjective relationships and denotes the full spectrum of ways of processing those experiences, from the most destructive to the most creative and growth-promoting (Ogden, 2004, p. 1355).

The metaphor of the container represents a group space where the intersubjective experiences between members become the meeting point of contact.

*For me that's that contact thing maybe, I don't know, but there's that sense of really coming into contact with each other briefly in that moment. And that these magical things emerge. (S1: MP3)*

*Yes, it's like magic, all else is suspended momentarily only to be superseded by another interaction as contact is made. (S1: FP1)*



As the group explored the container theme and the responsibility of the group leader, they moved back and forth, reviewing the container of the Presence Inquiry Group over the six sessions. Their awareness was drawn to the boundary of the Presence Inquiry Group as a container defined by the room in which the sessions were conducted, adding to the freedom for individual personal expressions while also recognising where personal triggers, biases, and disagreements weren't always voiced. One member bravely said they chose what to reveal – when, how, and under what circumstances – based on the assessment of the level of safety experienced. She summed this up as awareness of when she was in contact or lost contact with others when feeling triggered or unsafe (S5: FP 5).

These comments suggest that the container, a metaphorical boundary, is influenced by the group leader and/or by the group members and point towards a focus on relational co-creation where presence emerges in the relational field. The relationship is offered as the link to presence flow, and the responsibility for the container sits with the group leader. The challenge for the group leader within the container is to also monitor and take up the mantle of responsibility for the flow of multiple presences and to work personally and intimately with the tension of being in and out of personal presence.

*If I am being present for the present moment, the present moment has already gone and I am being present for it, so by default, it's a dynamic existence, it's a dynamic process. (S4: FP3)*

And another member summed up the responsibility of the container for presence flow:

*It sounds like there's that authentic, the professional, and then now there's the spiritual dimension to presence and I think that has a lot to do as well with some deeper sense of alignment. Am I in contact with my 'self'? Is my 'self' in contact with the people around me? Is my work in contact with my values? I just think there are layers to it [the container]. (S3: MP5)*

The theme of the responsibility of the group leader as the container suggests that a balance is required in the task and responsibility of providing a safe enough space for the group members to connect in. The danger could lie in being overly concerned with establishing and managing the container, so that the immersion in and navigation of the intersubjective

experiences of the group members are overshadowed by the functional and operational tasks of leading a group. The group concluded by discussing how group leader presence requires attention to the group space and all that is within it, and to developing personal awareness of the tension of being in or out of presence.

#### **5.4 Reflective Summary.**

##### **Thread 5. Weaving the Emerging Analytical Threads**

*The volume of dialogue and the challenge of how to make meaning out of the conversations poses the challenge of finding a way to creatively work with the threads of the themes. My insecure self seeks an application that will help formulate a process to give direction. However, I return to the stance of the Bricoleur and set aside prescribed formulations.*

*I write down three headings on paper. The middle column is titled “What was said” to capture participants’ direct quotes from the transcripts. The left-hand column is titled “Connections” to note any similarities and differences between the members, and the right-hand column is to record my contributions and is titled “When I spoke”. I added colours by using marker-pens and later collated summaries of the connections for further processing and shaping of the themes across the six sessions. The process was labour intensive and time consuming.*

*I remind myself to be disciplined as I want to rush ahead and get to the end. The creative process requires me to be present, to pause, and to consider. In my awareness of being more present to myself and of the process of moving between my eagerness and slowing down, I reflect on the conversations from the transcripts. They become alive with possibilities.*

*The hermeneutic process goes back and forth like the shuttle of the weaver at their loom, as threads of conversations come together, weave, and settle on a meaningful theme. The quest in front of me is how to bring together the connections between the two sets of themes. I am aware of the duality of both sets of themes. They can be separate and connected. There is a hint of a correlation between the multiple presences in the group space, including the group leader and how I am lost in the possibility of attempting to explain presence from the multiple generated presences within the group space as they fuse and separate in a dynamic flow. It's like atoms of energy bouncing off one another, some staying connected while others move on. I am excited to discover how to connect the movement and flow between the collective presences and the group leaders' presence as the themes emerge.*

## **5.5 RESULTS – PART A - GROUP VIDEO RECORDINGS (A4)**

Following the structure set out for the Presence Inquiry Group in Chapter 3, I have synthesised the observations under the three headings of beginning, middle, and end. The video recordings move beyond the initial experiences and are specifically related to members' interactions observed in video recordings with the sound muted. Although I paid detailed attention to the bodily communication, language, and gestures of each member, this synthesis captures the essence of the group's mood during their deliberations (see Appendix 11).

### **5.5.1 Beginning Phase – Sessions 1 - 2**

There was a high level of engagement, with animated expressions, in Sessions One and Two, with some interjecting between members observed. One female (QF4) and one male member (DM 4) were quieter and responded only when asked for commentary.

The different communication styles of the three males indicated the beginning of a power dynamic. Tension is evident between the members, particularly between the three dominant males (DM 1 to 3). Their body postures and eye contact were engaged with one another as each responded relationally towards the other. For example, DM 2 looks suspiciously around the group as if seeking validation when he speaks, in some way attempting to control the conversation. DM 3 is commanding in height and stature with animated facial and hand gestures, pointing at times for emphasis. He tends to slouch in his chair and slightly leaning over the table. DM 1 can be described as an 'orator' as he held the group members' attention for long periods when speaking and used direct, focused eye contact, particularly with the other two males.

There is a natural flow in the group of interjecting and speaking directly with one another, with some open disagreements observed. The Orator (DM 1) holds the group's attention when speaking; his conversation seems to invoke ideas and thoughts from the others. DM 1 looks directly at each member commandingly, seeking their full attention to connect. The group members lean in intentionally to listen while making notes and, as one person responds, he encourages the person to continue in a discussion using hand gestures.

The group's range of body postures includes open facial expressions of interest and curiosity. Others include closed postures with arms folded across the chest, leaning back in the chair, and swinging gently from side to side, especially in response when DM 1 and DM 2 were speaking. For example, DM 3's body postures included leaning heavily on the table, sitting, and holding his knee off the ground at times during the session while looking down in thought. There is an element of distraction in DM 3 noticeable when DM 2 speaks, as he fidgets with his hands and pen and is restless in his chair, swinging from side to side and moving around.

Facially, the members offer a range of expressions from tension, thinking, staring, rubbing of the face, to looks of distraction. However, there is a high level of direct eye contact, with smiles, laughter, vigorous head nodding, and most of the group members physically turning

to face the speaker. The new male member QM 5 seemed to be assessing the group thoughtfully.

The dominance being played out by the three males is evident in their display of competitiveness in differing ways. The outward show of mild conflict is being held within a checked and appropriate manner by DM 2 towards DM 1, while DM 3 is outwardly irritated in his body posture by DM 2 when he speaks. Another male (DM 4) is inclusive and gentle in his approach, especially when he turns towards and notices the two quieter women, encouraging them to speak.

### **5.5.2 Middle Phase – Sessions 3 - 5**

For the first time, there is an equal gender balance between the membership in Session Three. The two dominant male members, DM 1 and DM 3, and one dominant female member, DF 1, were absent. In Session Four, the dominant members returned.

There was a high level of direct eye contact, smiles, and laughter. The group looked more cheerful and relaxed in Session Three than in Session Four, when the tension in the room was intense. In Session Three, body postures observed included members directly turning to face the person speaking in a relaxed open posture, sitting back in the chair while listening intently, and pensive facial expressions. There were tears from one member, DF 3, as the group looked on, visibly concerned with emphatic head nodding, concerned facial expressions, and bodily leaning towards DF 3. Although the tears were short and controlled given the circumstances, DF 3 continued to speak; the group looked concerned during this time. The chair movement was limited as a stillness settled in the room.

When the new female member, DF 2, addressed the group, there was a natural movement in her chair as she turned towards the quiet female (QF 4) of the group, while QM 5 overall is more subdued in this session. He responded and engaged when members asked him a

question or directed comments to him. For most of the session, he took notes and looked deep in thought.

The group members specifically turned to pay attention to DM 2 when speaking, who was more relaxed in this session, making only a few comments to the group and ending with a comment that invokes light laughter from the others. However, DM 2 continues to scan the group as if he is seeking acceptance or approval from the two new female members when they speak. DM 2 quickly checks how others are listening to him.

The interchange between the members was at a high level as they listened intently to one another. At times the group was animated, with hand gestures, smiles, and laughter between one another. In the video observations, there was a bonding between the membership that was different from previous meetings.

In comparison, Session Four was the opposite of Session Three. DM 1 arrived late, just as the group was beginning. He confidently walked into the room, stopping the conversation with his entrance and greets each member individually, shaking their hand with steady eye contact, except for DM 2, to whom he nods and then takes his time to settle into his seat.

As DM 2 speaks, notetaking abounds, while DM 1 has his arms folded across his chest at first, distracted and looking out of the window and covering his mouth with his hands. The quieter members look tense, looking around the room. QF 5 hugged herself tightly with both her arms wrapped around herself and when DF 3 began speaking animatedly with large hand gestures, DM 2 was looking anxiously around at everyone in the room.

The body posture of DM 1 ranged from intense staring, disinterest, and distraction to irritation. He looked annoyed, with fierce staring at some members and intimidation towards others observed. There were few smiles or laughter in the group as if the room was heavy with tension. The high level of notetaking seemed to be in response to the tension; I observed members retreating into themselves as a form of disconnection towards safety.

The chair movement was more evident as most people moved from side to side regularly, moving away from the large conference style table they were sitting around. DM 1 swivels in his chair as he bodily blocks out the two closest to him, QF 4 and DF 1. They turn away from him when he speaks. The high level of tension in the group looks intense. When there was a break in the pressure, the group members swivelled in their chairs less and sat back. Observation indicates that the tension is arising from DM 1's physical presentation.

Deep listening is evident as the group turn to look directly at the speaker. When DM 1 spoke, there was a look of intensity from him, commanding everyone's attention and using direct, almost threatening eye contact as he held the group's attention with his rhetoric. The members responded with supportive glances, however there were unspoken glances between members observed. The level of engagement was at a high level of readiness as the tension continued. The safety in the group seemed fragile, as if members were preparing to defend themselves. Half of the group members relegated themselves to sitting on the side line and were quiet during the interchange between the key players, DM 1 and DF 2. The three more quiet members – QF 4, QM 5, and DM 4 – looked as if they had blended into the background.

The power play emerged from an unknown exchange between DM 1 and DF 2. DF 2, sitting on DM 1's left, moves her chair significantly away from DM 1, as does QF 4 on his right. On observation, the two women have separated themselves from DM 1, leaving him with an open extended space on either side and looking separate from the group.

Alliances emerged in response. DF 2 was being supported by DM 2 and DF 3. Both members were attempting to intervene to break the tension and to connect and support DF 2 directly. Through this intervention, both DM 1 and DF 2 visibly relaxed in their body posture. They smiled at one another as a result. DM 1 turned directly and moved closer to DF 2, softening his facial features, smiled and dropped the tension in his body as he relaxed his shoulders, almost physically shrinking in size as if to submit or not impose himself on DF 2. The three

quieter members looked visibly relieved at this point and smiled, looking around the group in relief.

A few times, DM 2 attempted to break the tension with what looked like a light-hearted comment or joke, minimally received by the group. DM 4 broke the tension successfully within the group with his inclusive style of relating, speaking fluently and bringing smiles to everyone's face. DF 2 is visibly holding her reactions and tension in, as her facial expressions were tense as she turned to speak directly to DM 1. On observation of their body posture, the tension seems to be physically reduced in intensity. Both looked more relaxed than before, and the group responded by relaxing their bodily tension *en masse*.

In Session Five, the tension of the previous meeting was missing. The participants were relaxed in their body posture, smiling, and greeting one another warmly. For example, when DM 2 spoke, DM 3, who tends to lean on the table, changed his body posture to being upright and facing DM 2 face on. My assumption about the change of posture was that of readiness to defend or correct, given his previous responses to him in other meetings. The group listened to each other's contributions with interest. The natural flow in the conversation between members was evident in their interactions with one another.

DF 3 shared with the group. There were tears as she spoke with hand gestures, looking very distressed while telling her story. The group leaned in with concerned facial expressions; they were focused, interested, listening quietly with concerned head-nodding, including me as I leaned in to listen and connect with DF 3's distress. I observed, when I spoke to DF 3, how everyone's attention suddenly snapped away from her towards me. It was as if I was witnessing a spell being broken. Group members' heads turned away at this point while someone searched for a box of tissues. DF 3 continued to speak through the tears while the group held the space for her to continue.

When the tears stopped, and there was a quietening of her distress, another member, DF 1, offered supportive gestures and spoke directly to her as she continued with animated hand



gestures. From my observations, there was a natural point in the storytelling when DF 3 made a funny face and laughed, completely breaking the spell. The group's facial expressions relaxed as the whole group simultaneously took a deep breath together and sat back in their chairs. There was a quietness, almost a stillness, in the group members' posture at the end of DF 3's contribution.

The group looked stunned once again as QF 4 spoke with tears and animated hand gestures. A couple of members covered their faces partially; others leant in to listen intently with the scratching of their head and head shaking. It looked as if they were in shock or disbelief. QF 4 looked sheepishly embarrassed while DF 3 spoke up, with hand gestures flailing about, almost jumping out of her chair. The other members responded with laughter, breaking the intensity of the group response to QF 4's sharing once again.

When DM 4 speaks, his facial expression looked stunned by the conversation and sharing of DF 3. The group leaned in to listen to him. It seemed there was a gentleness of communication between the group members, a sense of immediacy, engagement, and quality to the quietness in the group members' body postures, mainly observed when DM 4 and DF 1 dialogued together. Laughter emerged, breaking the intensity. DF 2 was animated and laughing more than in the last session.

### **5.5.3 Ending Phase – Session 6**

The communication in the group was light-hearted, easy-going, and collegial. The facial expressions were open, smiling with laughter and good eye contact between the participants. The body language was relaxed, and all the members were sitting back in their chairs as they engaged with one another. The engagement level between the members seemed to be intentionally high, with frequent head nods, leaning forward with interest and ease of conversation, with smiles and note-taking.

DM 2 sat back a little in the ease of other members' conversation, with intense facial expressions and looking distracted in his thoughts while others enjoyed the flow of the conversation. He made notes as if in preparation for his contribution. When DM 2 spoke, he referred to his notes and had the group's full attention as they responded with notetaking, head nods, smiles, and good eye contact.

There were concerned faces as the group leaned in to listen to DM 4 when he spoke. They seemed to be intently listening. He included other group members, characterised by eye contact, softening of facial expressions, and hand gestures that invited others into conversation with gentle engagement.

In the Presence Inquiry Group's last meeting, observations included direct eye contact with each of the members as they spoke. Some were more animated and involved in the conversation in this meeting than at other times. Also, I observed a change in the increased spoken contributions and body postures and chairs turning directly to face each speaker. Overall, everyone's body posture was relaxed, sitting back in their chairs more than in any other meeting, and note-taking diminished significantly in the session.

## **5.6 Overall Flow of Observed 'Groupness'**

Each of the three phases was now synthesised to determine the overall flow of group cohesion, as demonstrated by the 'groupness and group climate' of the Presence Inquiry Group interactions. See Appendix 11.

### *5.6.1 Beginning Phase*

In Session One, the group's climate was relaxed and open dialogue, collaborative and collegial, with occasional intensity between the three male members. A power dynamic was potentially emerging between the male members. The change in Session Two was pronounced. Tension and possible conflict between the males was observed at the start,

and what began as members engaging freely with one another turned into what could be described as covert competitiveness.

### 5.6.2 Middle Phase

In the middle phase of the group, Session Two's tension has relaxed to a collegial and less competitive communication. The group is observed to be safe for sensitive emotional expressions by some members. The change in group members' mood was quite stark in Session Four. The group climate was observed at a high level of tension, with rupture between members a threat to safety caused by the overt power dynamics between members. In Session Five, the interactions between the members overall can be observed as intimate and collaborative. There was respectful free-flowing communication between the relaxed members, reflected in their bodily communication. A little flutter of combative tension came and went without any traction because, in previous sessions, the power dynamic was missing.

### 5.6.3 Ending Phase

The last session was collegial and respectful in engagement as the group moved away from cross-talk and enquiry with one another towards separation. They were making comments through the Chair, as opposed to directly.

## 5.7 Reflective Summary

*My excitement and trepidation and wondering how to approach the videotapes with the sound muted comes from my early days of training. I am transported back to my learning via watching Yalom's (2005) seminal videotapes on group psychotherapy with the sound off. I remember how challenging it was to learn the art of tracking the relational dynamics of a group session through the participants' body language. Settling on the possibility of this approach could be a way to explore the*

*interpersonal processes and body language that could add an 'aliveness' to the Presence Inquiry Group interactions.*

*When viewing the videos, I am reminded of the impossibility, when leading a group in real time, of being fully aware of everything and of missing golden opportunities for exploration in the subtleties of the participants' bodily communication, especially when my attention is elsewhere. I apply this method of observation to both the group interactions and to myself as I reflect on those embodied lived experiences.*

*In the observations I am deeply touched by the level of intimacy in some of the sessions and surprised at other times by the dynamics between some members. There are multiple mirrors operating simultaneously within a group context as I dwell on the observations between the members and how to correlate them into a form of coherence for analysis.*

*One of the key aspects to being a group leader is the ability to read the group from an observational stance. I am familiar with observing others because I learned this art early in life. On observing the group, the difference between what I recall from the live sessions and what I am observing now after the time lapse has expanded the process. I find myself drawn to the relational dynamics. The forensic nature of analysis has highlighted my awareness of those dynamics challenging my narrative and recall of the group interactions. Is this the same group on tape or have I been fantasising them as a different group from the one I am observing? The recall requires me to bracket my previous knowledge as I try to resist interrogating the observations and interpreting them from my presumptive, preunderstanding stance. A base line of observations from the first session is developed, with additional observations added as the sessional analysis progresses. As a group therapist, I feel the familiar pull to examine the group from the perspective of interpersonal relationship dynamics as they emerge on tape, however, I remind myself to remain focused on the research question and topic of presence. The challenging interplay continues between the therapist and the insider-researcher positionality.*

## **5.8 RESULTS –PART B - PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS (B3)**

As the investigator of the study, it was important to acknowledge that the Presence Inquiry Group required an element of facilitation. My intention was to use my existing group skill and experience as investigator, without a therapeutic focus. Yalom (2020) describes how, even though the emphasis in training groups may be on teaching, a degree of therapy emerges in the process. I believe this therapeutic element was impossible to ignore in the group exchanges. The challenge for myself lay in maintaining the focus of the group while using my existing skills and experience with a research focus, requiring vigilance on my part. The results from my spoken contributions and unspoken communication from the self-observations are provided below.

### **5.8.1 Part B – Results of Personal Spoken Contributions (B3)**

The data was synthesised into three areas for reporting:

1. Overview of the interventions used in the facilitation approach
2. Influence of group discussion
3. Identifying failure of bracketing

### **5.8.2 Overview of Facilitation Interventions**

The results allowed me to examine the use and application of my existing skills and techniques throughout the six sessions. In summary, there was a high level of facilitation skills used to expand and develop the discussions.

Examples include a directive question in Session One – *"So, the question is are you able to define your own presence?"* – while attempting to expand a previous comment made by DF

1 – "Can you explain what you mean by the outliers in your terms, would this mean the quiet ones, or something else?"

During the six sessions, linking statements are used, including an example in Session Four where I sought to connect the current discussion to a previous one:

*The other thing that is emerging for me, between what you were saying earlier and what you were just saying now, is it sounds to me as though, and it's quite mind-expanding for me because I think what I am picking up or learning for myself is that actually, being present starts long before we walk into the group, let me check out with you, your thoughts on this aspect of presence? (To DM1)*

In Session Four, I wanted to engage the quieter members of the group and move away from the key players' dominance, especially the tension existing between two members, and I directed a comment to QF 4:

*Something you said earlier around projection, whatever group or groups you have been running, and you hinted that it was having an effect on you because there was something about you that questioned if you were a good and effective leader, and you have talked about it before and what your presence is. I think you said, you don't want to step forward, and you are not big and loud as a leader, and so, I was curious around whether there's the internal and reflective part within you or else the internal critic is more present at times for you?*

The clarifying questions in the examples below were used to expand and elaborate on the content, ideas, thinking, and exchanges between the members in Session Five:

*Are you saying this is happening because of this other group, the online group? You're being influenced... Or something within you is shifting or changing in response? (To DM4)*

*Can I ask you, what were you tuning out to? What was within yourself that you noted when you were tuning out? (To DF3)*

*That's what I was going to ask you, actually, because that's what I was wondering, is how... because you're in charge of the permissions in some way, shape or form, and so you're aware of what was happening for you in the previous session? (To DF1)*

In Session Six, my sense was that the group was losing traction. I chose to offer a facilitative statement to help the group refocus:

*But it does pose a question around, you are stepping into the space of being present to yourself, then you are making choices around the maturity of the group... If it's a new group of say, one year, compared to the one that's say, ten years, what allows you to be more in this space with them compared to the other? So, you are beginning to compare or think about or decide or choose what allows you to step into this space with the 10-year group compared to the one-year? Has that freed you up or is it an experiment to see what happens? (To QF4)*

At times, I also posed questions to be a little controversial or challenging:

*"What does that mean, you don't exist, or you are just there to do a job?" (To DM 4)*

*"You are invisible?" (To QM5)*

*"Why ask for it?" (To QM5)*

*"So, you don't count really, that's what it sounds like?" (To DM2)*

*"So, you can't really process it?" (To DF3)*

*"What would you imagine would happen if you were more open and vulnerable?" (To QF4)*

Although the use of the micro skills was helpful in the facilitation process, there were areas where I recognised that I was perhaps seeking to influence the group.

#### *5.8.2.1 Influence on Group Discussion*

In retrospect, in Session Three I was subtly influencing the language of vulnerability, which didn't gel with the group.

*There's something around the closing down and the opening up and closing down into your role from what you're saying. But, by opening up to something, you're opening up to yourself, and you're opening up to others. That tension somehow moved, or changed, or dissipated, or disappeared. So, there's a quality, a quality of*

*the vulnerability, you said, is that right, so, I'm just posing the question. What is vulnerability for you which may be different for everyone else?*

Also, in Session Four, I was aware of interrupting the conversational flow to influence the discussion by clumsily attempting to bring together some of the ideas around stability and flexibility and presence. I wanted to expand and deepen the debate by making the statement below to QM 5

and DM 4:

*Does that feed into how you're leading your team now, because it sounds like there's a lot of movement there, flexibility, at least for people taking self-care, and so I wonder what they are thinking of you as a leader and how you're containing that collective of people together, whether you recognise the presence that you are possibly creating around the flexibility of the collective, or not at all?*

Influencing the group's conversations could also be related to my failure to bracket my personal biases and assumptions, along with my emotional reactivity.

#### 5.8.2.2 Examples of Failure to Bracket

The results give a clear indication of my failure to bracket while facilitating each of the six Presence Inquiry Group Inquiry sessions as an insider-researcher. Although the level of non-bracketing can be said to be minimal, a non-bracketing example from each session is provided below to illustrate.

*In Session One* – I failed to bracket my response to DM 2 because I believed he had missed a central point in the discussion. The commentary was clumsy and bordering on criticism and a putdown of DM 2:

*I guess I'm interested in what you're saying because I think if I reflects on myself, I think it was like, you know, the rabid dog approach I had in the beginning stages of group leadership, that I didn't let anything go. I was on top of everyone in the group, and I was in the members' face a lot. But now I sit back a lot, and I'm curious about*



*what you were saying, whether you have shifted and changed yourself or are similar in being in other people's faces?*

The example below from Session Two was a provocative attempt to influence the group discussion's direction towards my personal biases by introducing the idea of subpersonalities, authenticity, and the group leader's response to difficult group members.

*Is it something that is conscious or unconscious within us or is it something we just respond to within the environment we find ourselves or the conditions we find ourselves in? And if we do adapt, then what does that actually mean for us in our adaptation? Who do we become? How authentic are we as group leaders? And then, therefore, who do we leave behind when we leave? Like using you as an example, when you leave that group, what or who do you step back into? If you are aware of that... I'm just throwing out an assortment of ideas. There is like an embodied failsafe? How does all that come together? Does it create one presence or many presences? There are lots of different aspects to what you are saying. So, it's subpersonalities that we have that might come into play in different parts or conditions that we find ourselves or are we authentic?*

A further personal bias in the breach of bracketing with DF 3 was that the summary of the conversation I gave of my assumptive intentions in Session Three could potentially have influenced the meaning of DF 3's experience:

*So, it's bidirectional, it's moving in both directions. It's not just you are moving toward someone else to filter something down. It's actually you're in a relationship. It's not fixed. It's something that's constantly emerging and moving and changing, is that what you are saying?*

In contrast, in Session Four a closed-style question was asked of DM 3, QF 4, and DF 3: "Is that different from what you were saying about the internal observer, would you call that a critic?" I named the concept of the critic without waiting for the participant to arrive at it for themselves. The introduction of this term could be understood as 'leaping ahead' of the client in phenomenological terms and is associated with failure to bracket.

On reflection, in Session Five the commentary I made below was driven by my personal emotionally fuelled reaction and response to the black-and-white thinking of DM 2, which I interpreted as limiting and restrictive, thus activating an emotional response in me. I

thought I was bracketing my reactions, but a more influential element was in force here as I potentially criticised the participants' contribution. I wanted to deepen the discussion rather than simply accept a *fait accompli* from DM 2. However, my projected irritation and annoyance and transference towards DM 2 was evident in the excerpt below:

*In some ways, you're almost describing that you have to go beyond, you know, your annoyance by tuning out and your frustration and, whatever else you're experiencing, to move and stay within that compassion or that heartfelt space, because your ultimate concerns, the care, really, is around ensuring that person comes back, because this is really something so important for them to continue in their recovery. So, there's something like a bigger, sort of, idea around what you're doing and why you're doing it. And you have to draw into something that is, you know, beyond your irritation and annoyance. You've got to go beyond that in order to stay connected with them, in some way. But you have used compassion and empathy, which is much softer, you know, in relationship than saying, stop projecting all your crap onto me. What you're suggesting, it seems, is you have to transcend that part of you that is disturbed in order to stay connected and then resent too later. Can't you do both, have care and compassion and be upfront with the group member?*

The discussions in Session Six were light-on and I was annoyed and judgemental in how I reacted to what I interpreted as the session's hijacking. I said something to the group, but it was clearly aimed at DM 2 once again, with echoes of my transference towards DM 2 which resulted in my reactivity:

*It feels Machiavellian to me in what you are saying, they [participants in his group] may not be aware of the impact, at least with you, but once they're in that zone, it's hard to get out of it, even for them, but it's hard for you to address because there's nothing really you can hang your hook on. It might be her relationship with her dad anyway that you represent. You offered her something at that moment, she feels something definitely towards you, so there is transference between you to be worked through, were you aware of this and did you work this through with her?*

## **5.9 Part B – Results - Self-Observations from the Video Recordings (B4)**

For consistency between the results from the Presence Inquiry Group Inquiry and the results from the muted video recording of the group's interaction, I have synthesised the observations under the three headings of beginning, middle, and end phase. In the middle phase of reporting, I have reported the results in three categories after synthesising the large volume of data:

- Facial and hand gestures
- Body postures and movement
- Monitoring the movements and interactions of the group-as-a-whole and of specific members

### **5.9.1 Beginning Phase – Sessions 1-2**

There is a high level of listening, facial expressions, and engagement by the group participants in Sessions One and Two. I saw myself during the two sessions as offering contributions to the discussion; however, from the recordings, I look to have a specific role and responsibility more than being a group member fully immersed in the discussions.

I tended to look around the group, monitoring who was speaking and who was finding it difficult to join the conversation. DM 4, QF 4, and QM 5 especially were quieter than others in their contribution as I looked directly at them. I observed myself watching DM 2 closely, primarily when DM 1 had spoken. I wondered as I watched the video recording if I had noted something within myself that was happening between them in their interchange. At one point, I interjected in their discussion to encourage other members of the group to participate. I looked on curiously, watching DM 3 when he spoke, using large hand gestures for emphasis while he looked sideways at me. I hadn't noticed this during the session. There were a few moments of laughter in the group, which I joined, and I moved from note-taking to listening intently throughout both sessions.

I addressed DM 4 directly, observing myself as fully engaged in what he was saying, and stopped taking notes. I watched myself monitoring the group by looking around the room, making eye contact with the members, as if to gauge their level of engagement and interest. My gaze lingered between DM 2 and DM 1. I wondered if I was observing and measuring the tension building between them and noted that I had stopped taking notes when DM 1 had spoken for some time. I watched myself listening intently. I looked as if I was drinking in his every word. I noted at the end of the diatribe from DM 1 that I turned directly to QF 4 and spoke to her and she smiled in return. At the end of both sessions, I talked for some time while the group members listened intently, making notes.

## **5.9.2 Middle Phase, Sessions 3-5**

### *5.9.2.1 Facial and Hand Gestures*

I observe myself animated and excited in Session Three, looking on with facial smiles and hand gestures, gesticulating, head nodding, and actively participating in the meeting. Conversely, in Session Four, the level of concentration on my face was intense as I observed the interactions and movements of the group in response to the exchange between DM 1 and DF 2. I also noted I had stopped taking notes to listen intently to what DM 2 said as DF 2 responded to his enquiry. I invited other members to speak and chose the two quieter members to say something. DM 4 and QF 4 looked directly at me towards the end of the session. I noticed I smiled at them as if to seek reassurance that all was OK. In Session Five, I looked more relaxed, shaking my head, becoming animated and raised my hands in the air with hand gestures in reaction to something said.

### *5.9.2.2 Body Postures and Movement*

In Session Three, I observed myself as looking relaxed, sitting back in my chair, listening to the conversation with interest, and making small spoken contributions. My body posture changed to concerned, leaning forward to listen specifically when DM 4 spoke. It looked as if he was saying something meaningful or supportive to DM 3. I noted the change in my body

posture as I leaned forward to look directly at each member in the group and relayed comments from my notes to the group and wrote down their response. In Session Four, my body posture had changed to alert, watchful, and monitoring the conversation, particularly the key players. The posture in Session Five was more relaxed, the group responding to the discussion and tears. When I offered a spoken word or two to DF 3, I broke the group's spell. I looked visibly relaxed, sitting back in my chair. There was a look of relief as DF 3 responded to my comment with lightness and laughter.

#### *5.9.2.3 Monitoring of the Group as a Whole and Individual Members' Interactions*

In each session, I was engaged, moving my gaze from the group-as-a-whole to specific members depending on their engagement level. I looked to be listening intently, observing, and monitoring closely the group's engagement during the sessions. However, in Session Five I stopped taking notes to listen intently to what DM 2 said as DF 2 responded to his inquiry. I invited other members to speak and chose the two quieter members to say something.

There were crucial moments and incidents during the middle phase that required closer scrutiny of specific members. For example, in Session Three I was watchful of DF 3 as she was speaking, and I expressed concern in my facial expression. As DF 3 spoke with distress for some time, I invited other group members to contribute. As the group continued with a free-flowing conversation, the few statements I made to the group during the emotionally charged moment suggested my monitoring and facilitation of the group. In contrast, I looked surprised at DM 1's late entrance in Session Four as he disturbed the conversation and flow by walking around the table and shaking each member's hand. There was tension in my body posture, sitting upright and watchfully as the group began with DM 1 sitting directly opposite me. I gazed around the room as I monitored group members' responses to DM 1's entry.

My attention and focus was clear from the video recording on DM 1. His facial expression looked troubled and distracted. I noticed that everyone turned to look at him when he

spoke, and I looked around the room, observing the group intently listening as he spoke. My posture of sitting back in my chair watching him and the group's response during his commentary was almost a mirror image of how the group was seated. At one point in the conversation, I asked something of him, broke his rhetorical spell, and others took the opportunity to comment. I looked a little more relaxed as laughter entered the room as DM 4 spoke about something, with others smiling and laughing lightly.

Whenever DM 1 spoke, I noticed that I also sat back without taking notes and looked directly at him. My facial expression was of confusion. In response to the tension between DM 1 and DF 2 as they sparred with one another, the alertness in my body posture looked as if I was ready or prepared metaphorically to jump in between them if required. I sat back in the chair in readiness, watching how the disturbance between them would play out while noting how the other group members were responding similarly. As I sat upright monitoring the group, the tension was evident in all participants' facial expressions and body posture.

Once again, I was watchful when DM 1 took up the conversation. I looked to DF 2 to gauge how this conversation was landing with her and with the group. I intervened when DF 2 looked troubled, redirecting the conversation by inviting others to speak. It seemed that I had monitored and picked up the tension in the group and taken on a more substantial facilitative role by moving the group interaction beyond the two key players to include others. I leaned in towards DF 2 to offer support because she looked vulnerable when explaining something to the group. My shoulders relaxed visibly when DM 1 softened his posture and smiled at DF 2, and I then sat back in my chair, observing the exchange. I looked relieved, and yet bodily remained on alert, looking around the group members and monitoring for adverse reactions or responses.

In Session Five, I observed myself leaning in when DF 3 told an emotionally charged story. I monitored the group members' response to DF 3's distress and listened intently, gazing around at the other group members. My attention was focused on DF 3's pain while also monitoring the group-as-a-whole.

When DF 2 responds to something I have said, she begins by turning to face me to answer. I encouraged her to talk to the group with an inclusive hand gesture towards all group members. I listened with a concerned facial expression and eventually relief was observed on my face as she continued.

### **5.9.3 Ending Phase – Session 6**

In the Presence Inquiry Group's last meeting, I noted my eye contact was directed towards each of the members as they spoke. I observed myself contributing to the conversation more in this session than others. My body posture and chair turned directly to face DM 4 when he spoke.

In the recording, my gaze fell on DM 2 as he was taking notes while listening to DM 4. My facial expression was one of interest and curiosity when DM 2 was speaking. However, I noticed I sat back in my chair when he talked and monitored the group members as he spoke. My facial expression suggests I was annoyed or frustrated with him; it's hard to say from the video recording.

DF 3 asked me a question and, as I responded, the group leant in closer to listen. Also, I was relaxed, and I sat back in my chair more than at any other meeting. I keenly looked when others were speaking and interjected at times. My notetaking diminished significantly in the session.

Chapter Five synthesises the large volume of information from the results to develop an in-depth exploration and discussion of the findings of how presence can be understood within the group space and the interface, and application to the group leader presence.

## 5.1 Reflective Summary

*As I dwell on the transcripts of my contributions and observe myself with the sound muted, I become a blur. I lose awareness of myself. I look the same, I am familiar and alien, and find myself cringing in self-critique.*

*Questions arise as I observe myself: I could have probed more, challenged some members of the group; Why am I sitting back at this point when I should be more discerning and moving forward to engage? I am reminded of my positionality and the purpose of the group. I recognise that I am thinking and being critical of myself with a group therapist lens. I witness others' care in those difficult interchanges between members and how I look present. Watching myself, I also sense my absence.*

*Merleau-Ponty's (2014) phenomenology of perception engages in a radical way with thinking about how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. For when I review my spoken contributions and how I am observing myself, I find it difficult to correlate all my contributions to being me. Am I adopting a role here? There is a simultaneous process of attempting to understand my motives and actions; what am I experiencing that shapes my responsiveness? Observing myself is challenging the unreflective experience I hold of myself while discovering and confronting how I perceive myself through observation of the videos. I have a genuine interest in myself and how I am perceived by the group. In my subjectivity, I question my objectivity, my perceived self that confronts and fascinates.*



## Chapter 6: DISCUSSION

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*Presence is our capacity to be whole in the moment, in alignment with our deepest wisdom  
(Living Presence: A Sufi Way to Mindfulness)*

### 6.1 Introduction

Harper (2006) writes of how presence makes itself felt; it reveals itself immediately. It is not surprising that the concept of presence was elusive in the study group discussions. This chapter aims to critically discuss in detail the results from the lived experiences of the Presence Inquiry Group. The premise for undertaking the research was a response to today's sociopolitically and economically driven graduate programmes in Sydney, Australia. In my opinion, the learning offered in graduate programmes is merely training to inhabit a role which lacks vibrancy, engagement, and presence, a sentiment echoed by Schneider (2015).

I began the study to understand the manifestation of group leader presence. Was presence something to be aimed for and attained? Was presence superior to those techniques currently being taught in group leader programmes? My experience tells me we need those techniques and, more importantly, skill development as a group leader, because without them group leaders are adrift. They help to anchor the group leader's development in understanding group structure, procedures, and dynamics, providing a framework for the work. My assumption is that, as the group leader gains confidence and maturity in leading groups, they become less dependent and focused on those acquired resources. However, to rely on those alone, I believe, minimises the group leader's development and growth and the advancement of the work.

The discussion has two key areas. The first examines how presence within the group space, which I have called the space-of-betweenness, unfolds and reveals the sensing elusive quality of presence. The second explores the group leader's presence through the construct of the self and self-awareness.

I begin in Part One by exploring how presence within the group space arrives through the multiple intersubjective layers and levels of activity, illustrated with an overview of each of the study group's six sessions. Each session's key points are summarised briefly, focusing on how presence arrives and highlighting the members' specific interactions. I aim to provide a backdrop for the discussion and propose the arrival of differing presences in each session.

In analysing the spoken and observed data, the dynamic of the marginalisation of women in the group becomes apparent. Through gendered power relations, the 'microaggression' lens examines the marginalisation of women in the group. Michel Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power (1990) can be applied to exploring the enactment of hidden gendered power relations in the six sessions.

As a frame for anchoring the elusiveness of presence, Eugene Gendlin's (1999) "philosophy of the implicit" and the concept of "implicit intricacy" conveys the movement and flow of presence. The term "implicit intricacy" describes the difference between what we implicitly experience and how theories and words used to explain the experience into our everyday felt experiences meet and yet fail to capture the essence of the experience. The implicitness of presence is always in the process of becoming, never quite complete. Life is intricate and, if presence is defined as one thing, the intricacy of the lived experience is lost.

In Part Two, the discussion moves on to examine group leader presence from different aspects of self. Adopting Spinelli's (2015) concept of sedimentation, the term 'self-mastery', meaning a process of awakening to self-awareness is used to understand the process of group leader presence. Lastly, the discussion moves to consider the group leader's presence as having a spiritual element of self, where access to a wisdom outside the boundaries of

the constructed self is suggested. Existential and contemporary writing on presence under therapeutic conditions is integrated into the discussion and provides a backdrop to the discussion chapter.

## **6. 2 Part 1 Presence**

### **6.2.1 Emerging Presence in the Space-of-Betweenness, Togetherness, and Oneness**

Traditionally, the group boundary is defined by its relational dynamics and how group leaders work through and process those dynamics. In psychodynamic theory, the boundary is understood as an imaginary fixed entity (Ogden, 2004; Billow, 2003). My group experience is more aligned with a living boundary of ongoing change where movement and flow are progressive, temporal, relationally driven, creating a place of experimentation similar to a social laboratory, a place of alchemy. I agree with Yalom and Lezscz (2005), who describe the group space as a social microcosm, filled with the participants' emerging interpersonal interactions, of being confronted with a willingness to potentially know themselves differently and a willingness to be recognised by others (Bugental, 1979; Cooper, 2015).

In the psychodynamic group leader literature, the group leader's responsibility is to take the role of analyst while psychologically holding the group boundary for the work to continue and the group leader becomes the container of the group's dynamics (Ogden, 2004; Billow, 2003; Foulkes and Anthony, 2003; Foulkes, 1986).

In doing so, they set themselves apart from the membership by adopting a stance of separateness. Through close observation and listening intently, the analyst offers the group participants their analytical interpretations. The results confirmed that the group leader's role is to take responsibility for maintaining such a boundary, with the ultimate responsibility of providing and monitoring a safe enough space for the process of presence to emerge. However, the responsibility of a group leader is far greater than just

psychologically maintaining a boundary for the work to continue and referring to the group participants as merely the 'contained' assumes that they are a deficit.

The responsibility of being the container of the contained seems to me to involve a sense of separateness, an elitist, superior, and uninvolved position. My research challenges the setting apart of the group leader. As we will discuss later, if merely inhabiting a role, it is redundant to bring oneself to the leadership space and be fully present.

Multiple relationships exist in any group and most group leaders think in terms of working with the ensuing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intrapsychic dynamics in the group space. In the results, the term 'eruption' explained interpersonal disruptions between the members as dynamics of complex social engagement emerged. The space-of-betweenness becomes a fusion of the spoken and unspoken, including perceived threats and potential danger added to a myriad of responses and reactions.

I am proposing that the space-of-betweenness symbolises the interactions of the individual members as a network of connectivity and flow where group presence emerges. The space of betweenness is active and dynamic and is referred to in the results as analogous to quantum entanglement, filled with multiple particles interacting and exchanging with one another. Much of what we as group leaders observe and interact with within the microscopic group space is composed of those unknown aspects of individual lifeworld experiences. When working with those fundamental and hidden aspects of the individual's experiences, culminating, and coming together in the group space, there is a possibility of understanding the rules and behaviours that underlie each person's reality, experienced in the larger world.

Yalom's (2005) curative factor, universality, is activated in the group space when togetherness emerges, experienced as individual presences merging into a single presence. Oneness emerges, a presence shared by everyone, reflecting the universality of the human condition and our lived experiences resonating with others. I believe that Yalom's (2005)

curative factors, although separate in theory and understood differently, overlap in the space-of-betweenness. Those universal givens of existence faced by all human beings are found in the everyday issues that everyone faces at different times in their lives. Despite the unpredictability of those issues, such as in Session Three when the group discussed presence and spirituality or in Session Five when members shared personal challenges, universality emerged in the space-of-betweenness as the group experienced a closeness as togetherness.

In the space-of-betweenness, it is difficult to say just what constitutes presence *per se*, what laws or rules govern it, and what interactions are required or associated to calculate or define the elusive quality of presence?

Yasuo Yuasa (1987, p. 37) explains that the "space-of-betweenness consists of various human relationships of the lifeworld" engaging and networking with one another. The entanglement in the results refers to those times of disagreements, conflict, or eruptions between the members, arising from the relationally driven engagements, internally experienced. The group is a microcosm of the lived world. The group's interactions are rich and powerful agents for potential change as each "maladaptive cycle is repeated many times and members have multiple opportunities for reflection and understanding" (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005, p. 42).

The dynamism of the space-of-betweenness is what holds the everchanging connectivity where a togetherness, a state of closeness to others in the group, emerges, transforming the space to that of oneness. The movement and flow in the space-of-betweenness is a dynamic and relationally driven force that brings together an individual's presence, in close contact, unifying and whole and yet mobile, to relocate towards other presences such as via separation and disconnection, for example.

The study group provided examples of the multidimensional intersubjective experiences over the six sessions culminating in a surprising and unexpected group presence. I begin

here to offer as a starting point the importance of acknowledging presence as both individually and collectively experienced. The section that follows discusses the emergence of presence in each of the six sessions, offering brief examples of commentary and my facilitation as we identify common themes connecting those individual sessions to arrive at an overall theme of group presence through the group dynamic of gendered power. The movement from a space-of-betweenness towards togetherness and potential oneness is a frame in which presence is difficult to fully encompass as a single entity.

### 6.2.2 Presence Flow in the Research Group Space

The conditions of each of the six sessions were different in that the agreed research cohort was stable, but attendance changed from session to session, mimicking the lifeworld of ongoing change and uncertainty. A summary of the flow of presences is presented in the table below. See also Appendix 5.3.

***Table 6 - Summary of Presence Flow Over the Six Sessions***

*The flow of presence is summarised for each of the six sessions below.*

Session 1 – 'What is possible' – the potential of the group

Session 2 – 'High tension' – power dynamic emerging

Session 3 – 'Equalising' – coming together in safety and harmony

Session 4 – 'Alertness' – the threat of imminent danger

Session 5 – 'Intimacy' – settling into one another

Session 6 – 'Separation' – disengagement

#### *Session One*

As the members engaged with one another in Session One, the gender composition and imbalance were crucial to note. Given that there were four males to two females, a pattern of competitiveness emerged in the space between the males. One of the males dominated the group by taking the role of the group orator. He directly sought eye contact with every

member of the group as he spoke at length. At first this seemed inviting if commanding, but a territorial positioning of male competition for dominance in the group space eventually became evident. Another male dominated differently, displaying exaggerated body movements and body postures along with direct eye contact and looking visibly annoyed when the third male was speaking. The third male dominated by counteracting the other males' contributions and playing devil's advocate, challenging the other two men by making comments or by staring directly at them. The fourth male was more inclusive in his presentation and protective of the two female members. It was interesting to observe how one of the female participants, used to working in a male-dominated corporate sector, was unfazed by the developing power dynamic. In contrast, the remaining female member became quieter and more withdrawn as the group progressed.

For any group leader, the dominant positional stance is of working with the emerging group dynamics. I noticed within myself my internal challenge of not being seduced into analysing and defining the emerging interpersonal dynamics. To stay with the purpose of the study was not to become locked into the dynamics, but to determine what presence was possibly emerging from those specific dynamics in Session One. The group can be understood as a living organism with its system of cells interacting and undergoing change and adaptation as they respond to the stimuli. The group space seemed to hold an anticipation of what could happen, as the members worked collaboratively to establish a structure where interpersonal relationships could form and provide meaning. On reviewing the video recording, the group presence can be summed up as 'What is possible', an expectancy of future engagement that is potentially both exhilarating and stimulating. However, the beginnings of competitiveness between three of the males were noticeable if contained at this time.

### *Session Two*

In Session Two, presence was experienced as the 'high tension' associated with the potential threat of conflict. Along with excitement, anxiety, and possible suspense, strained relationships can emerge and add to the overall presence of tension. The three dominant

male members were a competitive force between one another, each displaying dominance in different and effective ways and adding to the universally felt tension in the group. Even when a new male member joined the group for the first time, the anxiety felt in the group continued as he sat back to observe the dynamics between the main protagonists. In contrast, the two female members were less vocal in this session, requiring support from the fourth male member and me.

In a group, tension is a natural force operating between the membership, fuelled by the unknown. The assumption here was that the group was not a process group, where such tensions between members might be worked through; in this forum, they would remain unexamined and unresolved. Unresolved personal material can be reignited in later sessions because the point of contact remains the same, adding to the group tension. On the plus side, the tension in groups can enhance creativity, and Session Two did produce substantial contributions from the group members.



### Box 1. Presence as High Tension – power dynamic emerging

As each of the three dominant men find their place in the hierarchy of the group the rest of the members struggle to find a voice at times during the long diatribes and imparting of knowledge as the three vie for dominance.

- DM3 “Like at Yalom’s research probably around the best outcomes come when the... Well, the poorest outcomes for group members or the team is where you have high level of charisma and low levels of caring structure and meaning attribution and how dangerous that is in therapeutic groups, and I’d say even organisations. And really the best outcome is where you have medium charisma and medium structure and a high level of caring and a high level of meaning attribution. So, you know, there is caring and meaning attribution, which is really about the other, is much more dominant. And probably the charisma and the structure which you provide is, you know, is still present but it’s secondary.”
- DM2 “It’s the oil. It’s a bit like the oil, isn’t it? Lubricated.”
- DM3 “Yes. And it has to be there, but it needs to be moderated. It’s not about you.”
- DM2 “And it is.”
- DM1 “... in my mind it’s like the conditions. What conditions allow me to turn up in a particular way? And, you know, we can pick it apart and talk about the embodiments. That’s the anthropologist in me. Thinking, okay, it’s like we had a good session then but it’s a new day. And it’s that sense of connectivity about it all. But for me, that sense of, what are the conditions that are actually okay for me? So, there is something I reckon. Probably in all of us, there is a sense of presence that’s come from familiarity.”

#### My facilitation

To help bring together the ideas expressed and to open the discussion up, I offer the following as a facilitative comment to expand the discussion out towards the others.

“I am wondering if what you are saying is unconscious or conscious with us or is it something we just respond to within us, the environment we find ourselves in, or the conditions we find ourselves in? And, if we do adapt, then what does that actually mean for us in our adaptation? Who then do we become and who or what do we leave behind in the adaptation – what do others think about this?”

### *Session Three*

A significant change in the membership brought a balance of genders for the first time, with two of the main protagonists missing from the group and the introduction of two new female members. The previous tension was significantly reduced as the members settled into a process of engagement that allowed a balance of group members voices to be heard, including the quieter members from the previous two sessions. The flow of conversation had a relaxed, natural flow, while the competitive tension from before was mildly noticeable in the one remaining protagonist.

The observation of the flow of the dialogue from the video recording was of harmony and consideration among the group members and, in group terms, it was a cohesive group. The mirroring back of content was less apparent in the conversation because those dynamic structures (Bohm, Factor and Garrett, 1991) from the previous two sessions were no longer in play in the space. By relaxing the earlier tensions, a presence of 'equalising' emerged in the group coherence through the interpersonal exchanges, bringing a sense of group togetherness and harmony.

## Box 2: Presence as Togetherness and Harmony

As DF2 attempts to explain the dilemma of presence as a task or as something to be reached for rather than arrived at, the group listens intently, assisting with questions of support, suggestions and ideas, when a pause happens in the group where all of the members stop talking momentarily.

### **My Facilitation**

Most members were contributing to the conversation, but I realised DM 4 was quiet as spirituality was his specialty and I wanted to bring him into the conversation. I asked DM 4 if he would like to comment on the discussion.

“What are your thoughts around all of this, as I’m aware you sent me a lovely quote last week?”

He asks permission to share something he was reading (the quote he sent earlier).

*They do not reject the first eye, sense, nor do they reject the second eye, knowledge and information. But go further, whenever by some wondrous coincidence, our heart space, our mind space and our body awareness are all simultaneously open and non-resistant, I like to call this presence. (Rohr, 2009)*

The participants responded as if the quote touched something within them as they spoke of how the quote allows for a pause, a breath to experience the felt sense of presence, leading them to consider presence as multidimensional. The equalising nature of presence in this session brought the group closer together than it was in the previous tension-filled session.

### *Session Four*

The dominant male returned in Session Four, as did the tension experienced in Session Two. His bodily communication and facial expressions were severe and stress-filled. A defensiveness emanated from him which was unknown and intensely felt by group members. The session was the first meeting between the two new female members and the dominant male member. The group-as-a-whole responded in various ways as tension arose at one point between the dominant male and the dominant female members. An anticipation of potential conflict was observed as the communication from the dominant male was directly challenging and intense, and a power dynamic emerged in the dialogue which threatened the integrity of the group. Sub-grouping was observed in support of the

female member and some members offered supportive comments and leaned in bodily towards her. The male member's physical space became bigger as people tentatively moved away from him and opened significant space on either side of him.

The power of one person's presence can influence the overall felt experience of safety in a group. Safety is critical in any group and so defensive behaviours are switched on in alertness and readiness to respond to personal threat or danger. Safe states of engagement are prerequisites for social action and for accessing higher brain structures that enable group members to be creative and generative (Porges, 2011, 2007). Without a safe enough environment, the body responds instinctively by readying itself for a fight/flight response (Rothschild, 2000). The group members showed both fight and flight responses to the potential danger and conflict between the two members. The presence here can thus be described as one of 'alertness', a state of readiness for the threat of danger.

### **Box 3. Presence as Alertness – state of readiness to defend**

The tension in the group can be examined through the exchanges of trust and safety in the group because the female members felt compelled to name this in an indirect way without engaging in direct confrontation with the main protagonists.

“I think all these little moments, for me it feels to me that, you know, I am happy to kind of like be free associating here, which is what I am doing, because of the high levels of trust, but then it’s like, what does that mean? What does trust actually mean? For me, there is something about these little moments of interaction, of observing each other and feeling like, actually they are all good with each other” (DM 1).

DF 2 challenges DM 1’s trust in the group and its psychological safety, with DF 1 also responding,

“I wouldn’t say I feel safe here, in this group... and I feel we are kind of sitting on the edge of a group process here which I kind of like, part of me is thinking, I could get into it... I don’t think that’s what we are here for” (DF 1).

DF 1 then follows up further in naming what is in the room.

“I just thought of it (lack of safety), with all this gendered talk in the wider field at the moment I am just, its heightened for me and I’m feeling vulnerable.”

#### **My Facilitation**

I attempted to link the discussion between DM 1 and DF 1 with a previous conversation earlier in the session with QF 1 about safety, projection, and transference without going into the details of the transference, but also acknowledging the tension as I moved the focus along.

“Is that what you were doing to let this person know that you really were on the ball because you were feeling shitty and were putting yourself out and you weren’t going to be a dickhead [DM 1’s word]. Is that what you are doing here as well, as I hear QF 1 earlier was questioning the risk involved in stepping forward and not to be so big and loud. So, I am curious around whether there is room for reflection here on the internal critic being more active and present in this discussion and how we can explore this together as part of being in and out of presence and feeling safe?”

### *Session Five*

Session Five brought a change in the relational dynamics. The main protagonist was missing and the tension from the previous session was significantly reduced. The presentation from two of the group members transported the group-as-a-whole towards a universal closeness

and care for the two female members who spoke of the impact of personal situations and linked them to the application of presence. Unlike the previous session, the tension was that of care as opposed to defensive behaviours in response to threats to personal safety. Tears and emotional vulnerability were present in the group, along with warm smiles and a 'leaning into' the space-of-betweenness towards one another.

#### **Box No 4. Presence as Intimacy – settling into one another**

The tension of previous sessions was missing. There was a gentleness and softness in the group as I observe them leaning into one another, listening and smiling in free-flowing conversations as they shared intimate vulnerable personal and professional moments with one another.

“I’ve had the most turbulent time I think I’ve probably ever had... I’m grateful for my training. I’ve had to use so much of my own understanding and learning just to walk each day.”

“A kind of slightly enforced invitation to reflect on my presence, I think has also had me just continuing to pay more attention to how I’m showing up at work.”

“I noticed how... my presence of attention was failing at the work. And what I realised, or what I kind of tracked in the process, was that, in this specific work, it was around my gender.”

“And so, I have this much more fragmented and shallower sense of my own presence, and my anxiety is really high.”

#### **My Facilitation**

QF 1 was distressed about a decision made without her knowledge, but one member of her group knew before she did. I was seeking to help facilitate a link to her presence.

“In some ways, you’re almost describing that you have to go beyond your annoyance, tuning out the frustration and what you’re experiencing in order to move and stay within that compassion or that heartfelt space, as you are leading the group, because your ultimate concerns, the care, really, is around ensuring that the person comes back, because this is really something so important for them.

So, there’s something bigger, the idea around what you’re doing and why you are doing it. And you have to draw into something that is beyond your irritation and annoyance. You’ve got to go beyond that to stay connected with them, in some ways. You have used compassion and empathy, which is much softer and is in relationship rather than saying stop projecting all your crap onto me. What can be said about your presence?”

The vulnerability was vital to bringing change to the group presence in the space. Perhaps the absence of a protagonist opened space where others could breathe without being defensive. In response to the fragility of the group members' experiences, the space allowed diminished defensive systems, which enabled strong social bonds to support the restoration of safety in the group space (Porges, 2007). The presence of this group can best be described as 'intimate'. The defining factor of the members' sensitivity to the vulnerability and inner world of emotional pain provided a gateway to the presence of 'intimacy' without defensive systems operating.

### *Session Six*

The group in Session Six moved from a space of collaborative engagement to disengagement. The established interpersonal relationships from the previous sessions offered a margin of collegiality and safety as the members withdrew from group interactions to being individuals within a group setting. This dynamic is common in group endings where the work and function of the group have come to an end and the members mourn the loss of ongoing connection and regress to earlier relationship behaviours (Benson, 2001).

The last session mirrored this process of group endings. The interpersonal process of previous sessions of working together as a group moved to a more static communication style of reporting and individual turn-taking. The spontaneity of the communication, personal engagement, and productive dialogue was replaced with light-hearted and respectful collegial surface communication. The unfolding presence emerged as a felt experience of disengagement and separation.

Malpas (2005) uses the term "communion" as an expression of what happens when people come together in dialogue, where disclosing and revealing occurs as presence emerges in the communion with others. Language brings and joins people together as well as alienates and isolates them. Concepts offer a disclosing of one's inner world where limited and fixed

meanings can be held at least momentarily for consideration. Concepts allow the revealing and disclosing of the relational quality of communing together, of how members of a group hear, think, and experience words and concepts and ultimately relate to one another. Presence in the individual sessions reported above provided a window into the emergence of presence in each of the sessions, understood retrospectively. The encounters also included those social interactions comprising complex sociopolitical and cultural factors that each member brought to the interactive group space. What stood out in the review of the six sessions was the competitive dynamic between three of the male participants which culminated in the marginalisation of the women in the group.

### **6.2.3 Power and Marginalisation**

The behaviours between the men established the group's social conditions, moving from subtle to overtly gendered power states. Although not specifically exposed or examined in the group, the gendering and subtle marginalising of women were evident in non-verbal microaggressions (Johnson, Leighton and Caldwell, 2018; Nair, Good, Murrell, 2019; Johnson, 2015). The men's behaviours at first were confined to each other. In the early development of the interpersonal engagement between the men, their behaviours leaked beyond themselves towards all group members, most noticeably towards the women in the group. On reviewing the group videos, behaviours ranged from subtle forms of biased language to more overt bodily held tension, perceived on observation as threatening, especially to the women. I observed some of the women physically distancing themselves from the men.

Microaggressions are usually associated with verbal content. Johnson, Leighton and Caldwell's (2018) research into embodied microaggression helps to throw light on the dynamic of non-verbal marginalisation of the women in the group. Johnson et al. (2018) classified embodied microaggressions into gestures, posture, facial expressions, the use of



space, touch, and eye movement, all of which could describe the behaviour of the three protagonists in the research group.

In the first two sessions, the women tended to sit back and observe the competition between the men. As the sessions continued, the physical space between a few women and the men increased as they distanced themselves by physically moving their chairs out of the group circle boundary away from close physical contact with the men. At times, as the facilitator, it seemed to me from the group's bodily responses that the men had become the gatekeepers of what was acceptable dialogue. Examples of this are the dominant male responding with long diatribes, especially in response to some of the women's comments, while expanding on other members' ideas and controlling the flow of conversation and using direct eye contact as if to hold the members under a spell. Another male would use humour to communicate and move difficult conversations along when he looked physically uncomfortable, ending the conversation with a *fait accompli* statement. The third male would use his size and physical body movement to dominate the space by slouching, sitting with his hands behind his head, using his height and body bulk and hand gestures to designate dominance and authority.

On the other hand, changes in the level of connection and intimacy were noticeable in Sessions Three and Five when one or two of the main protagonists were missing. The language, ideology of care, collegiality, and cohesion made for a pleasant, almost tension-free group, immersed in participatory discourse. Compared to Session Four, the gendered power enactment was most visible between the dominant male and the dominant female. It seemed the marginalisation of women was taken up on their behalf by the dominant female to test the male-defined (Lennie, 1999) ideological approach to group leadership and the gendered microaggressions of the women.

Power, in theory, is something anyone can exercise through discourse (Burr, 2015). As I observed the group, I wondered what value-laden assumptions and biases contributed to the three protagonists' behaviours. What was activated for them to behave in such a

stereotypically gendered way? My curiosity about what beliefs they might hold about the women in the group and their group leadership was unanswered.

The examples of gendered power relations from Foucault's (1990) perspective are historically contingent on the era in which the power relation is exercised. The 'episteme' (Foucault, 1990) or worldview of the persons involved impose those norms of structure and form, gender included. Foucault understood discourse via language and symbols to produce a phenomenon at both the social and personal levels that constructs our experiences. When examined by deconstructing these experiences and, in this case, the text and observations of the six sessions, it shows how those hidden biases, assumptions, and behaviours were at work. It seemed that everyone in the group was on a level playing field at first but, as relations between participants were formed and constructed, power relations emerged.

Foucault's challenge for any group or society is awareness of the everyday normal or disciplinary power exercised by institutions from a macro-level of constructionism, while acknowledging the power of language to influence social structures, relations, and institutionalised practices (Burr 2015). On the other hand, repressive power is a reminder of the saying 'Do as I say,' compared to disciplinary or normal power influences of 'What we ought to do,' shaped by sociopolitical and cultural conventions. For example, as I write this chapter the world is in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic where disciplinary power is being exercised globally. Yet, there are differences in each country's cultural, societal, and political norms and differences within the boundaries of each country. The disciplinary power influences how any given person thinks about how they are represented in society. The women in the group have centuries of historically recorded oppression and repression by a dominant patriarchal gendered power system of control, including State, Church, and science. For Foucault (1990), sexuality and gender are major power relations where an interest in dominance over women, although shifting in epistemes over the centuries, continues to exert power today. The group's gendered power presence was unexamined or deconstructed (Burr, 2015) and left unchallenged due to the structure of the group, despite being felt and experienced.

Reviewing the gender balance of the group participants, I was aware in the first two sessions of the gender imbalance, with the male members outnumbering females two to one. Did the numerical dominance ratio of the number of men to women in the first group establish the conditions for competitiveness between three of the men, or were other personal unknown gendered ideologies of group leadership at play? Perhaps both, leaving me with the strong felt sense and possibility of this being the main cause and effect for the setting-up of the dynamic of marginalisation of the women in the group.

When considering the intersectionality of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1989) within the dominant research group identity, multiple discourses are constantly at work, constructing and producing identity, which originates from the social realm of language and other signs instead of having a fixed identity (Burr, 2015, p. 126). The marginalisation of any sub-identities like gender overlaps with the complexities of the group's sociopolitical and cultural hierarchies and structures (Sue, 2010). The dominant social structure of the group was of collegial group leaders of a time-limited research group. However, some aspects of the group membership were more visibly supportive of the dominant group identity's social structure than others. In contrast, other aspects detracted. Gender, in this case, became an unexpected sub-identity.

To illustrate, a direct challenge to gendered microaggressions became overt when a direct gendered power challenge occurred in Session Four. A tension-filled dialogue between the dominant male and dominant female elicited a display of subtly gendered microaggressions in a controlled aggressive tone by the male towards the female member. During the discussion, the dominant male member physically moved closer to the female participant, sitting directly in front of her. Simultaneously, in response, the female member on the other side of the male member moved her chair away. The movement toward the dominant female member can be understood as a threatening, aggressive act, a statement of authority indicative of women's oppression and of dominance over the female sub-identity of the group. This display was met with challenges from other group members and I had to

intervene to defuse the situation. I was thankful that the dominant female member returned in the next session and explained what had happened for her. The male member wasn't present in Session Five, so no response from his position was available.

It is also important to say a little about the other two men concerning the gendered power relations and marginalisation of women. In contrast, their gendered position was inclusive of the women participants. One was observant, respectful, and curious, and the other supportive, able to hold the tension while observing the dynamics. The impact was that of withdrawal of one female member on several occasions in response to one or all the three protagonists, potentially for personal safety reasons. Both men offered supportive comments and engaged at a level of curiosity and respect, inviting them to be in the group as a form of care. What was evident in the power of inclusiveness was that, despite the competitiveness, the women participants were in contact with one another in unspoken solidarity, demonstrated in their ability to maintain eye contact and encourage and support one another's statements.

Understanding and attunement to the significance of non-verbal microaggressive behaviours demonstrate how "the body can be the locus of social and personal change" (Johnson, Leighton, and Caldwell, 2018, p. 166). Also, for Foucault (1990), sexuality, gender, and the body historically became areas of intense interest for the exertion of power and authority by those seeking to control at a macro-level, filtering down to the micro-level. The group was the perfect social laboratory for the unconscious re-enactment of underlying micro-level differences in gender, roles, and contradictory qualities expressed in this case as hidden microaggressions. The possibility of addressing the microaggressions was beyond the scope of the study. However, for any group leader, understanding the nuances of non-verbal microaggressions and learning to work with them to redress, examine, and potentially repair them is vital. For the group leader specifically, working with awareness of their own microaggressions in gendered power relations requires tracking their bodily sensations, thinking, and language towards making the implicit, explicit (Johnson, Leighton, and Caldwell, 2018, p. 168). To help anchor the process of presence emerging in the group

space, I now turn to Eugene Gendlin's (1999, 1982) "philosophy of the implicit" to help extend understanding and track back to the emergence of a dominant, non-verbal gendered power presence.

#### **6.2.4 Presence as Implicit Intricacy**

In psychotherapeutic work with clients, Gendlin (1999) proposed that much more was happening than mere spoken words and emotions as clients grappled for the right words to express what wanted to be said (Preston, 2008). Gendlin's philosophy is similar to that of investigating what lies between the larger implicit knowing we all have and how we seek to find meanings symbolised in the words and images we use to describe them. The study group's presence encountered a similar predicament in attempting to understand the implicit meaning of group leader presence from an 'implicit knowing' stance. To arrive at a concrete understanding was superseded by further implicit meanings from the words and symbols used to describe presence. For example, terms such as multi-layered, multidimensional, relational, dynamic, or matrix were explored in the group, each with its implicit meaning and yet never quite fully satisfactory as a definition. The hallmark of Gendlin's work, according to Preston (2008), is the reciprocal zigzagging between implicit bodily senses and the explicit articulation of those felt bodily senses. This descriptor fits with the group attempting to zigzag in their understanding of presence and its application to the group leader. It seems there was always more to reveal as the discussion continued intricately weaving over the six sessions, adding to the complexity of presence's meaning.

The premise of Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit is the body as a sensing organism, with actions responding to the implicitly felt sense. The felt sense for Gendlin is about the instinctive, visceral, and primal mode of implicit knowing (Preston 2008). I stumbled across the term "implicit intricacy" in Gendlin's (2004) writings, explaining the why and how of the difference between what we experience and the theories, concepts, and language that we use to describe or explain our experience.

'Implicit' for Gendlin (1982, 2004) means that the implicitly felt has yet to arrive or is not yet fully there. The action associated with implicit experiencing is a forward movement that we feel, but the felt sense hasn't yet come to completion. There is an ongoing sense of sensing something, rather than knowing what the felt sense is, until we place words around the sensory input. On the other hand, intricacy (Gendlin, 2004) is whatever is felt and is experienced and is yet to be completed. It is complex and cannot always be described or explained using ordinary words or language. These terms suggest that we cannot say what presence is until it has been completed, and then only to be superseded by other words or symbols explaining the experience. However, Gendlin's 'intricacy' conceptually reflects that the implied felt experience is already there in essence. In this regard, whatever presence is, it is already there. Presence goes out into the open space of the group's relational dynamics, demanding, subtle, and urging. It forms structures or concepts, continues to emerge, and reveal its essence, and yet is never quite complete. The language used to describe presence will imply further meanings as the process continues.

I am suggesting that presence was never complete in the six sessions. However, each session had its spatiotemporal conditions. With each session's completion, hidden possibilities were left unexamined and yet implicitly felt in the following sessions, adding to the overall group sensory presence.

Applying logic to the gendered power theme, for example, presence may seem clearer and more specifically identified. However, even this defined presence state will go on to reveal more hidden possibilities of meaning when engaged. The elusiveness of presence persists; presence is implicit and intricate, difficult to fully grasp or agree upon, but remains one of many possibilities.

By examining and experiencing the phenomenon of presence using words and language, new meanings and phrases are created that potentially open the experience to something different. In combining both the implicit experience of presence with the intricacy of presence as a process of becoming, words and metaphors help grasp the elusive quality of presence that bypasses conceptual logic.

One of the ways the participants in the study attempted to grasp presence was with the wave metaphor they returned to several times during the sessions to help explain presence. The group added other meanings and descriptor words and symbols to expand and deepen the implicitly held meaning. The wave metaphor was an analogy to describe the flow and movement of presence as the waves arriving and leaving on the seashore, a continual movement and living phenomenon. Metaphors offer ways of attempting to grasp words, language, and concepts to explain a phenomenon by overlaying meanings, only for new meanings to arrive.

The metaphor suggests movement, flow, and dynamism. For example, the group explored the wave ending at the shoreline, only to return to the sea and then re-emerge at the shore again, yet different from before in quality, energy, force, and tension. The metaphor as a symbol of meaning described presence as a dynamic flow, interacting, connecting, and moving with various degrees of force, from gently lapping at the shoreline to crashing onto the shore with strength and energy.

Gendlin's (2004) theory, as applied to presence, rests with presence as an implicit felt sense. Harper (2006) suggests the experience of presence can also be dangerous and potentially evil. Waves carry living entities, particles, and sedimentations towards the shore to end their journeys or return once again with a renewed energy force. Perhaps the complex relational dynamics and gendered microaggressions, for example, are best represented as those implicit living entities in the study group that were potential moments of threat contributing to the group space's emerging presence.

Overlaying the group's gendered power presence with the wave metaphor holds sociopolitical and cultural intricacies as embodied responses, both visible and invisible, as they met one another, taking on form and movement. As the wave metaphor implies, the waves' flow represents the living phenomenon of presence as a movement of coming and going. My observations of the group over the six sessions concluded that the group members felt, sensed, and experienced the dynamics of presence individually. Collectively,

those individual experiences brought together a force and vitality of felt senses and directed experience, culminating in the unexamined gendered power presence.

Concepts and techniques are formulaic and, as Kyrcka (2006) points out, logic interacts with the experiential knowing but does not precede it. By positioning implicit experiencing at the centre of the group leader's awareness, presence has the potential and function of ensuring that the human lived experience is first and foremost at the centre of the group leader's response.

In the group leader training arena, this is a radical way of thinking. I believe this is a quality of many group leaders gained from their experience in leading groups and working with the complex relational dynamics that occupy the group space. This is an under-acknowledged area that is barely given any attention in the group leadership literature.

In this first part of this chapter, I attempted to examine how presence as a process emerges implicitly, linking this with the Presence Inquiry Group's individual emerging presences and its group presence. The next section will discuss group leader presence from the self-mastery perspective because the dominant discourse from the results included the concept of 'self-mastery' over those aspects of self that inhibit presence emergence.

### **6.3 Part 2 Group Leader Presence**

The results described group leader presence as a process of personal commitment to inner work.

'Self-mastery' was used as an umbrella term to capture the process of developing self-awareness or, as the group called it, a higher level of 'presence awareness'. Self-awareness as introspection and self-examination of the inner world by the group leader was dominant in the results, the ability to capture those hidden aspects of self that interrupt the flow of



presence and require mastery while acknowledging and confronting personal past and painful experiences. Self-mastery is discussed from an existential self-awareness perspective as a sedimentation, as opposed to merely inhabiting a role, before enlarging the discussion to include the inner world of the group leader, the development of wisdom, and its application to presence.

### 6.3.1 Existential Self-Awareness

The phenomenological process of inquiry engages the person in uncovering aspects of self through descriptive analysis. A delicate balance between working with the unknown and the known parts of the self emerges as a process of revealing and uncovering which is continuous and emergent.

Existentially, the self is fluid and in a state of ongoing change. The socially constructed self is embedded in experiencing and not merely in cognitive or mental processes. As individuals, we are responsible for bringing to conscious awareness our commitment to being the architect of our constructed self. The fluid self's premise is of one continuous and endless process of construction and reconstruction rather than a fixed or stable construct (Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, and Meek, 2008; Polkinghorne, 2001). For Spinelli (2001, 2009, 2015), the self is many imagined and different aspects of the ever-changing self in a continuous relationship with self, others, and the world. The interdependence between the related parts, for example between the insecure and the secure, coalesce in personal transformation because integration is necessary but not without its challenges.

The relational encounter according to Spinelli (2009), captures those personally held sedimented beliefs of oneself as a group leader. Spinelli advocates examining those sedimentations that support and limit the self as being *a priori* in the therapeutic encounter. For Langridge (2013), sedimentations over time and through habit, and the consequent actions, develop into 'quasi-truths' that limit and potentially define the person. An extract from my journal entry reflects the influence of personal sedimentations.

*My lived world when younger was one of unpredictability and a feeling of a lack of personal safety. However, this was not true all of the time. I sensed that it did feel this way predominantly in my formative years. I felt alone and unsupported in the world, and yet I knew this not to be strictly true. I hid as much as I could from my family. It is challenging to think of myself later in life, how those feelings and specific memories remain potent still today. They are sediments that float within me that become stirred in times of anxiety. The established and intuitive way of being in the world of observing and listening for the potential threat to personal safety was found long ago. The sedimentations, despite a great deal of personal work, self-reflection and therapy, those self-beliefs remain today. However, they are now flexibly held.*

Sedimentations as structural beliefs and components of the group leader's worldview can be flexible or fixed, depending on the strength of the self-belief and associated circumstances. The exchanges within the group environment can challenge those sedimentations of “self, the other and the world” (Spinelli, 2015). Self-awareness brings conscious awareness of those responses and behaviours, when activated by the group leader, as flexible and less dominant in presentation than a defined, closed, or fixed life position (Spinelli, 2015). For example, my sedimentation above can be understood as “the world is not a safe place, also to include, that others cannot be trusted, and that safety can only be found in my independence of others and the world. The sedimentation can be both flexible or fixed dependant on time, place, and situation.

### **6.3.2 Self-Awareness and Inhabiting a Role**

in the results, two fundamental archetypes, 'the mantle of professionalism', and 'pseudo-presence' or 'pseudo-self' were explored by the study group as reference points for assessing whether a group leader is in or out of presence. Building on sedimentation, the results described the mantle of professionalism as when a group leader adopts a professional persona but lacks genuine and personal engagement. Surprisingly, in the members' discussion, they also put a positive spin on assuming such a role or position. By inhabiting a professional role, the group leader could function in response to differing group

presentations. For example, all participants stated there were times when they had consciously adopted a professional role. They provided examples when lacking experience in leading groups, when personally challenged by a group, or when challenged to put aside demanding personal life events. Adopting a professional role was positive for ensuring certainty as a leader with a set of prescribed tasks and functions, alluding to a sense of confidence. A member in Session Two spoke about adopting a teaching role to manage a personal health issue, believing at the time that she had done some of her best work.

The participants also recognised the pseudo-self as a role where the group leader adopts a position of power, potentially misused, with an associated lack of care and need for control over others. For instance, in Session Five, DM 3 spoke of personal health issues and was aware of his mind wandering and finding it difficult to focus during the session. He chose to adopt a directive leadership style to get through the session by controlling the membership with directive questioning to reduce the likelihood of interpersonal processes between the members. His external pseudo-persona was of confidence and control, masking his inner vulnerability and lack of self-confidence.

Szakolczai (2009) extends the concept of the 'pseudo-self' role to include a leader lacking trustworthiness, potentially cunning, controlling, manipulative, shaming, self-absorbed, and dangerous. An archetype like the charismatic leader emerges from this positional power role, represented as calm, charming, and persuasive. Although the group did not go so far as to name such qualities, the pseudo-self suggests someone who takes on a professional false self, lacking genuine warmth and emotional engagement with the group.

Dreyfus (1975) discusses how a person, without being consciously aware, every day inhabits a role that changes depending on the environment or situation in which they find themselves engaged. Philosophically, Heidegger (1962) proposes that a person is always in a role and argues that, by adopting a role, the person becomes the role. However, Dreyfus (1975) comments that when someone inhabits a role, "it's as though the person inside of the role is missing?"

The concept of inhabiting a role has positive and negative elements. The positive aspects include self-discovery as a group leader, knowing what is required, how to follow through, and how to progress in the world in the broader sense. Ultimately, the role allows the person to be in the world, offering an element of safety.

The participants also explored their perspective on being in a role as being out of presence. Spinelli (2015, p. 74) explains that sedimentation is linked to adopting a role that allows the group leader to dissociate, deny, or disown the anxiety they experience when under pressure or being challenged. Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (1962), tells us we are always in a role and inhabiting a role allows us to be in the world (Moran, 2000). It would seem it is a normal function of everyday living to be in a role, it is the awareness of being in a role that is key.

Sartre (1984) writes about the roles we take in life, such as the waiter who becomes his role of unreflective consciousness. It's as if the waiter is playing at being a waiter by taking on the characteristics associated with being a waiter, in the way he walks, smiles, talks, and so on and then at the end of his shift, he takes on another role which allows him to be in the world. Sartre's philosophy of freedom challenges the notion of playing a role like waiter or group leader and limiting our freedom through the conscious choices we make. The waiter unreflectively inhabits the role and unreflectively moves to another when one is completed. By taking a conscious and deliberate stance of settling into a role, presence emerges despite the associated choices and actions, like Sartre's vignette of the waiter. The tension of being in or out of presence brings to conscious awareness our choice to be in or out of a role as either genuine or merely the donning of a mantle of protection.

Perhaps there is a fine line between being in and out of presence when the difference is that between reflectively choosing to *inhabit* a role or unreflectively *being* a role. I would also add that it is in the unreflective stance that awareness of self emerges and can move from unreflective to reflective conscious awareness. One participant commented that being

consciously aware of being in a role is similar to choosing to put on a mask to hide their vulnerability. Perhaps the role of the mask represents the masking of the sedimented, insecure aspect of self.

The attraction to adopting a role as a form of protection is understandable, offering insight into the group leader's unique and complex inner world. Whether consciously adopting a role or not, the implicit emergence of presence within the group's relational dynamics is yet to unfold and fully emerge. Its form and structure are in direct response to the inherent situational dynamics. A vital question arose for the participants. Was being in a role aligned with being out of presence?

Inhabiting a role unreflectively would suggest denying or not engaging with those aspects of the self that bring conscious awareness of personal insecurities. In my journal, I considered self-awareness of myself and its possible meaning and application:

*When I consider myself as a group leader, presence arrives with a mix of several influential components from personal experiences as a young person. Observing and listening are the two critical parts of myself that I contribute to my presence awareness. I learned to watch others for signs of threat and possible danger as a young person. From observing others, I learned to read other people's body movements. I operated in life in my formative years from the assumption that people were unpredictable and potentially dangerous. In listening, I would attune to the other's tone, language, and whether they spoke in rapid, slow or elongated expressions to assess potential verbal attacks. To support this part of myself, I adopted silence as a form of making myself invisible. In silence, there was safety, and in this adapted behaviour, I believed I would not be visible to others.*

I include my journal entry to introduce the importance of any group leader's background and back story. Adopting a conscious role of silence allowed my insecure self to go unnoticed, my hope being that people would forget I was around. To step out of a role requires courage to examine those inner hidden aspects of the insecure self. I suggest that the associated past experiences and felt sense informs the currently lived experiences (Spinelli, 2015) of a group leader and how those experiences contribute to a sense of personal presence. The study group's proposed key concept of self-mastery implied the process and means of bringing to awareness, at any given moment, the activation and

enactment of such past experiences, contributing to the construct of being in or out of presence.

The aim would be to defend and protect the insecure self and give space for presence to emerge and be valued, so that fundamental hopes and fears that imprison the secure part of self, dissolve into the background (Mearns and Cooper, 2005). The exchange between the insecure and secure aspects of self appears simple and straightforward to regulate, but I am suggesting that sedimentations are a powerful and rich source of disruption. When unexamined, these recurring behaviour patterns, emotional responses, and associated fears and self-doubt impede the flow of presence.

Spinelli (2016) offers hope in the form of working with the tension between disruption and continuity. Self-awareness is our conscious and reflexive ability to understand those fixed and sometimes rigid, sedimented beliefs, which include self-limiting behaviours, assumptions, and biases. The group's microaggressions are an example of those sedimentations. Although unexamined in the study group, their existence limited the potential for safety for the women in the group. I am suggesting that it is essential for the group leader to know their preferred way of responding and to work with the emerging manifestations of individual psychological, sociopolitical, and cultural factors as an interplay of forces between the group members and the presence of the group leader.

### **6.3.3 Awakening Consciousness to Self**

The results regarding the group leader also revealed the archetypes of the 'inner critic' and the 'internal observer'. Both were assigned roles and characteristics associated with the group leader being in or out of presence. The inner critic's role is to disrupt presence flow, while at the more ideal end of the spectrum is the internal observer, where self-awareness is accessed to counteract the disruptive element of the opposite polarity, creating tension.

The inner observer's process and being observed within a group context constitutes an awakening of consciousness to self. In the others' gaze, a group leader becomes consciously self-aware, potentially determining how to choose to reveal their 'self'. The body becomes a visual representation as the members individually assess, experience, and respond. As the group leader becomes conscious of their "bodily seen self", they choose which aspect to present to the group, becoming reflexively self-aware of how they appear to others (Dolezal, 2012). Reversible and reciprocal actions also emerge simultaneously as multiple projections of the members' selves enter the group space. As a group leader, observing myself as both object and subject became a process of self-awareness. It is a continuous process of engaging with those known contributing sedimentations and past experiences of disruptive influence which inhabit the inner critic.

To illustrate, in the research group the dominant male arrived late for Session Four. His physical appearance embodied a purposeful stride, and he systematically went around the room, shaking everyone's hand with direct eye contact. His physical presence and behaviour disrupted the group, was possibly interpreted as threatening, and emanated tension. In response, the quiet female member's presence became physically smaller as she withdrew and moved her chair away, distancing herself from the dominant member when he sat down on the empty chair next to her. In contrast, a few members responded by moving closer to the quiet female, exchanging eye contact with her as if supporting their physical bodily felt presence, experienced as care. What was surprising was the intensity of interplay between the members of the research group, demonstrating a fundamental attitude towards the interplay between self and others.

Karen Horney's (1992) theory of neurotic conflicts understands people's embodied responses and engagement within a conflictual space as tending to fall into three categories – moving towards others, moving away from others, or moving against others. The basic premise is one of self-protection or engagement with conflict as supporting another or observing the other. All three responses were evident in the group, each member choosing their preferred response position.

The group responded to the dominant male's physical presence and behaviour as an embodied and implicit threat, felt and sensed without direct verbal communication of the threat; his physical presence was sufficient to negate a sense of safety in the other members. In the group space, the experience between two members becomes no longer restricted to them. It becomes a network of multiple incidents of self-consciousness and awareness of being both object and subject. Participants' safety and self-protection were determined by choosing distance and/or closeness, both individually experienced and interpreted.

Sartre's (1984) concept of intentionality includes of all our consciousness, thoughts, emotions, and perceptions directed towards an object or something other than itself (*being-for-itself*). Consciousness for Sartre is relational, concerning how we connect with others, how we are in the world, our perceptions, and how we perceive the world (Jackson, 2013). The study group became conscious of the male member's presence upon his entering the room. Their gaze upon him engaged real and imagined dangers, inviting possibilities, and choosing differing individual responses to his presence. Some members created safety through physical distancing while other members moved towards him, consciously aware of the tension.

An essential aspect of learning from examples is the group leader's interpretation of the group space and the multiple levels of meaning-creation. I suggest that multiple presences of the members and leader coexist in the group, inviting multiple pre-reflective conscious projections, interpretations, and imaginings of what others might be imagining about how they are perceived. Spinelli's (2015, p. 187) "we-focused realm of encounter" describes the embodied existential insecurities that arise from each participant's experience of an "us" when in relation with one another. The individual's focus in a "we-relational realm" calls the membership and group leader to consider and examine experientially the immediacy of what emerges of the self in the presence of another. In times of unexpected inner tension,



the group leader's physical embodied world can at times be surprising and alarming as well as embarrassing and disappointing.

Sartre's (1984) ontology of freedom encourages the group leader to be reflectively conscious of the focus of the other's presence and the internal reflective choices, actions, and interventions adopted in response to the other. The dominant male's physical embodied presence observed on arrival and entering the group became a collective experience, yet individually assessed, evaluated, and responded to. Simultaneously, he also considered, assessed, and responded to those who observed him (Yngvesson, 2015; Jackson, 2013; Cox, 2007).

Perhaps for the male member, his physical embodied world presented itself as a reflection of the felt sense of what he might have been experiencing and yet was unknown to the others. He would have been conscious of himself and observed himself as an object of focus for the others. The implicit felt sense of his presentation had yet to arrive fully. The others' implicit felt sense via their observations defined him at that moment (Jackson, 2013). The group and its membership also become an object and subject for the dominant male. The dominant male's assumption may be of feeling under pressure, stressed, or angry, but this may not be what was truly there for him. This may have been an embodied expression of personal vulnerability, confusion, or embarrassment. On reflection, how the group members individually responded to the dominant male's physical presence indicated their pre-reflective responses to their internal assessments of potential threat or danger by assigning a role to the male participant, the aggressor.

Did the dominant male adopt the role of the aggressor to mask what was genuinely happening for him? The question remains unanswered and an assumption. Sartre's (1984) concept of bad faith requires awareness of personal responsibility for the group leader's choices. Potentially group members' choices are driven by an expectation of the type of leader they seek. They can assign a role or position to the person to control the unknown in the quest for safety through predictability until they can tolerate the uncertainty. For the

group leader, the work is in awareness of being observed through the process of various mutual and intersubjective experiences (Jordan, 1991) coalescing as multiple presences, coexisting, interacting, and exchanging, potentially to connect, clash, merge, or disrupt.

### **6.3.4 Spiritual Self-Awareness**

Although the results proposed the archetype of the internal observer as the ideal self, the study group extended the proposed aspect of self as having access to information beyond that of the known and as one way of counter-challenging the inner critic. The study group allowed the possibility of presence and self-awareness having a spiritual element.

Psychotherapies such as transpersonal or Jungian analysis integrate the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the human experience. As the results show, this may be an attractive way to consider group leader presence. The group emerged with the term a "place deep within," suggesting a space within the self or even beyond the constructed boundaries of self to access wisdom and personal insight.

The consideration of a spiritual self as presence suggests that awareness becomes a conscious activity and process. Self-awareness can be viewed as closely connected to personally held beliefs in those essential and valued parts of the constructed self. A belief system that transcends in some way the constructed boundaries of self must also include those moments when self-consciousness interrupts the activity of self-awareness at a primitive level, challenging an automated manner of being-in-the-world.

Applying Gendlin's "implicit intricacy" (2004) to the spiritual aspect of self throws light on a complex and contentious part of the self. Implicit within the term 'deep place within' is the group leader's awareness of a personally felt sense of a relationship with something beyond their logical self. The participants' discussion of the spiritual element of presence provided a rich reservoir of different constructed meanings. For example, members of the group used

language and meaning derived from their belief systems, practices, and rituals – from Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, agnostic, and atheist viewpoints. Intricacy arrived through the group's search for agreement and understanding without individuals losing the ground of their embedded fundamental philosophical and theological principles. The language and words used to describe the felt experience of those differences became the participants' defining collective experience that went beyond words and lacked definitiveness (Hoffman et al., 2008). The spiritual self as a concept potentially provides a platform for the group leader to develop an awareness of a personally constructed repository of felt experiences and logic as a response to the group's relational dynamics.

The suggestion of a spiritual self implies an aspect beyond the boundary of the constructed self that is transcendent or outside of the self. For some of the study group, rituals and practices were part of the blueprint of the constructed spiritual self, such as contemplation, prayer, rituals, symbols, meditation, or mindfulness. Existentially the self is boundaryless, always in a state of flux and becoming. To conceptualise the deep place within discussed in the results seemed to suggest accessing a location outside of the self. I agree with Hoffman et al. (2008) that the spiritual self is neither individual nor contained within the material self; it is part of the self and, as boundaries go, its boundaries are not so absolute.

The 'sacredness of the moment' captured the moments of connection to the spiritual self. The term summarised the meaning of those moments of insight which emerge from consciously going within oneself, beyond logic, to access information and wisdom outside the boundaries of self, calling into question the distinct edges of what constitutes the self.

I pondered the term 'deep place within' and self-awareness in my journal.

*A deep place implies a practice of going within oneself to access wisdom. As a group leader, in observing and listening, I seek to hear the hidden parts of the individual. Perhaps by turning within myself, I am listening for those hidden parts that are not easily accessible and help to bring them to conscious awareness.*

It is easy to concentrate on the dynamics of the individual's cognitive and emotional expressions during group time. Within myself, I can listen, work with, and go beyond the dynamics, listening and observing for the micro-subtleties when words are not always readily available.

Presence requires patience with self which extends towards others. Presence requires close observation and awareness of the relationship between the self and the other. Presence requires going beyond self to access something deep within that allows fine-tuning and listening for the hidden parts in both the participants and me.

Contemporary writing on presence within psychotherapy points towards a spiritual element of the self. Daniel Stern's (2004) seminal writing argues that “present moments” between therapist and client are synonymous with spiritual practice and time. Present moments are temporary, lasting mere seconds. They are experienced subjectively as uninterrupted moments of reflectively lived consciousness (p. 245). Similarly, Geller and Porges (2014), Geller (2013), and Geller and Greenberg (2012) understand therapeutic presence to be ultimately a moment-to-moment state of receptivity and deep relational contact which, if not spiritual, is the meeting moment or point in the therapeutic encounter.

Authors and researchers propose the practice of mindfulness as an avenue to develop conscious awareness, helpful for when the mind unintentionally wanders (Stern, 2004; Geller and Greenberg, 2012). Kabat-Zinn (2016) describes mindfulness in western culture and psychology as the field of awareness. Mindfulness, a neural activity, became a conscious experience and sustained attentiveness, typically with a metacognitive awareness of being aware. Mindfulness as an individual and sometimes solitary activity of going inward and being attentive suggests the spiritual self, an intimacy between the self and the self beyond the constructed self's constraints and boundaries.

For Australia's Indigenous population, the concept of spirit is much more straightforward yet profound. *Dadirri* refers to a place of “inner, deep listening, quiet, and still awareness.”

*Dadirri* recognises the deep spring of life and energy within us (Korff, 2019) as we journey through the sacredness of the land. In coming back to self, whether a spiritual self or known by another name, the group leader requires a conscious awareness of the self and its intricacies.

Whether a personal belief system beyond that of the self – be it deity, religion, spiritual practice, or personal philosophy – is necessary for a group leader is a question adding to the complexity of defining and naming what is meant by a deep place. Not all the study group members agreed with the association of presence with spirituality. Some were sceptical, while others were more enthusiastic in constructing a spiritual element of group leader presence.

Corbett's (2011) writing on psychotherapy and spirituality considers presence as simply a quality of awareness rather than a belief in a particular deity or religion. Because psychotherapists have in some ways become the new priests, the therapy room, the confessional, the intimacy of the relationship, and the work require psychological engagement with the client to assist in finding their meaning, significance, and purpose in life (Corbett, 2011).

I have come to appreciate that the study group's differences on the meaning and intent of presence as a spiritual dimension are based on the individuals' subjective, personal relationships with those sacred moments of deep connection, which are momentary and outside of oneself. Wuthnow (2001, p. 307) defines spirituality as "a state of being related to a divine, supernatural, or transcendent order of reality or a sense of supra-reality that goes beyond life as ordinarily experienced."

Wuthnow (2001) suggests that awareness in this instance is a state of relating and meaning-making about what might be beyond the constructed self that may be culturally understood as sacred (Steffan and Coyle, 2008). Bennett and Bennett (2000) also argue that awareness is grounded in a transcendent relationship beyond ordinary experience. Spirituality

comprises multiple personal meanings, as the study group's differences attested to, depending on the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the group leaders' lifeworlds.

The challenge, therefore, for the group was not to systematise a dimension of the group leader as having a spiritual belief system, as this would be beyond the focus of the study. However, I have come to understand the connection between the group leader's presence and having a spiritually transcendent (Corbett, 2011) dimension to self, as a personal and individual acknowledgement of those moments beyond the everydayness of the constructed boundary of self. Alternatively, spirituality and presence pertain simply to how a person deals with life's ultimate questions or concerns or what might be of the highest value to them and may not involve any conscious connection with the spiritual (Corbett, 2011).

To define spirituality as rigorous and restrictive in terms of function and meaning diminishes the transcendent quality of presence, similar to reducing presence to a 'some-thing' which is concrete and defined and loses the essence of the elusive and implicit quality of presence. Adopting a spiritual stance of presence as a group leader implies access to wisdom beyond the boundary of the constructed self, transcendent in nature, as a gateway of connection to aspects of self.

Scharmer (2009) urges leaders to connect to the highest possible source to access a profound personal shift towards an authentic self. Authenticity, like presence, is elusive in that there are moments of authentic experiencing which are experienced as passing through, momentarily captured. Those moments bring authentic presence into sharp relief as profound moments of coming back to self (Moran, 2000; Chidiac and Denham- Vaughan, 2006). Conversely, the pseudo-presence or inauthentic self is expressed at times of forgetfulness, lapsed into, and becoming a role or taking a stance of professional presence with a mask, hiding the human connection from the group participants. Drifting into inauthenticity as a group leader is unavoidable and inevitable and requires mastery of self-

awareness and agency to address the lapse. The anxiety associated with a lapse into inauthentic presence is a reminder of the absence of authentic presence.

Ladkin and Taylor (2010) write about how the “true self” and “authenticity” of the leader are crucial for their followers’ (participants) experience of leadership, including embodied expressions and how the leader can use them to express themselves as a mechanism for authenticity to be conveyed to the membership.

Authenticity is both positive and negatively experienced, which involves balancing the group leader's inner world with how they might express themselves. Tensions in Sessions Two and Four were the result of the participants’ engagement. However, the research group consisted of experienced group leaders who may have responded differently or perhaps expressed themselves authentically without the responsibility or limitations of a leader checking their reactions. According to Ladkin and Taylor (2010), the true self therefore places the leader in a vulnerable arena with a corresponding tension between authentic and inauthentic leadership and associated insecurities. Existentially, the term 'true self' is not in keeping with a construct of the self in a state of flux and change. However, the point being made here is that the authentic embodiment of the inner world of the leader carries its own tensions of inauthenticity.

### **6.3.5 *Phronesis* – Practical Wisdom**

To hold the stance of an authentic leader calls into question the complexity and demands of the tension between the authentic and inauthentic poles. In my view, the group leader must be who they are. As Smythe and Norton (2011, p. 6) write, "when values are already firmly established, they become the compass that directs the voice that speaks with authenticity, the passion that convinces." In coming to the end of this discussion, I have been considering what might be the bridge that connects group leaders' techniques with their presence.

Smythe and Norton's (2011, pp. 1-2) writing on practical wisdom is helpful to consider as a possible bridge. The three areas of *techne*, *episteme*, and *phronesis* refer to Aristotle's types of knowledge, of which practical knowledge, *phronesis*, has the highest intellectual virtue. *Techne* refers to those types of knowing or 'know-how', such as techniques, that guide the group leader in what they do. The second, *episteme*, considers the kind of knowledge learned and captured in the sciences, providing explanations and reasoning, perhaps universally recognised, for how the group leader leads. *Episteme* helps explain what techniques to use and how the group leader can use them in a particular way. In the training of counsellors and some psychotherapists today, we look towards evidence-based behavioural research that anchors the work in a results-based approach which provides rationales and measurements of competencies for effective group leadership.

For Aristotle, *logos or reason* is added to knowledge to bring a circumspection that underpins the action taken by the group leader informed by their learned techniques and knowledge. I agree with Smythe and Norton (2011, p. 4) that the first two types of knowledge are necessary but not sufficient, whereas the third, *phronesis*, captures the essence of what I have attempted to examine in this study. *Phronesis* refers to practical wisdom, which is the knowledge that helps with practical matters, such as the actions and decisions of a group leader. *Phronesis* emerges from the practical experience of leading groups and learning, critical reflection, dialogue, theory-making, and creating and testing hypotheses (Massingham, 2019, p. 3). The wisdom that emerges is applicable to varied and changing situations and environments. It is receptive to improvisation, unlike the first two areas.

I have been struggling to find a way to connect the technique-driven training informed by both theory and presence. In the larger picture, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) encompasses the ethical virtue of acting morally in response to reasoning about what is good or bad for humanity (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010; Massingham, 2019). The practical wisdom, in this case, is best captured when a group leader is unsure of what to do or finds themselves in a situation where they call upon their experience to respond. *Phronesis* is therefore a part of



the group leader's engagement with the group and all its intricacies, becoming seamless in the leader's actions. It is revealed only in the practice of leading a group.

Considering the group leader's *phronesis*, I reflected on my own experience of over twenty-five years of leading groups. 'Practical wisdom' seems an apt way to describe what I have honed and developed over this period, where the techniques developed are of less importance and sit in the background until required. Like me, the research group participants' experience is based on their practical wisdom developed from leading groups. The common denominator standing out is practical and ongoing experience and engagement with leading groups. This goes beyond a technique-driven approach and leads to the development of *phronesis*. Practical wisdom depends on the group leader's ability to make choices to act when observing situational group dynamics and to deliberate about what might be appropriate in response to interpersonal exchanges (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010).

Aristotle's word for the purpose and aim of any given practical wisdom is *telos*. The *telos* of group leadership is associated with the motivation of a leader who combines skill with the will to achieve the best for the group they lead. Not having this *telos* "can lead to ruthless manipulation of others, to serve one's own interest, not theirs" (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010, p. 8).

The group leaders' *phronesis*, located in their experience and ability to read and work with any emerging group, is never about delivery. Leadership requires commitment, integrity with the workings of the members' inner worlds of vulnerability, carefulness, and openness to change. *Phronesis* is about connecting with the tensions and unpredictability (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010) in the group space without relying solely on known and tried techniques. The difference between the two is that between action and production – "*techne* produces a product and the object produced is the end in itself while *phronesis* is action and production" (Massingham, 2019, p. 3). The leader's practical wisdom should be tolerant of those complex relational dynamics that the group leader with reasonable consideration acts

upon while holding the frame of communion (Malpas, 2005), attuning to self, to the other, and to those group-as-a-whole tensions within the mutually shared space. As Smythe and Norton (2011, p. 7) note, "It takes courage to leap, and it takes wisdom to reside" in the practical wisdom that comes from experience without relying on those predetermined rules and guidelines. They may be useful rules, good guides to managing multiple aims, but taking a 'one size fits all' approach defuses and diminishes a subtly nuanced approach to the aliveness of the group's interactions (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this is not to say that *techne* is not necessary, but only that in itself, it is not sufficient (Smythe and Norton, 2011, p. 4).

*Phronesis* stimulates the leader and the group members towards a felt sense of oneness. They come together in the space-of-betweenness with differences to develop their individual and collective *phronesis* as presence. Leaders who embrace *phronesis* and the embodied felt sense embrace unpredictability, whereas a competency-based training course or university degree doesn't teach the intricacies and nuanced responses of being a leader. Only from the leader testing their felt sense and their leadership abilities is *phronesis* born. I believe that the ability to make decisions in the moment and skills combined with practical wisdom hold the key to the bridge between technique and group leader presence.

## 6.4 Reflective Summary

### Thread 6. The Threads of Group Leader Presence

*How to bring together a coherent understanding of the material is foremost in my thinking. My thoughts at times are overshadowed by how I will be judged in the analysis findings.*

*I look at the material on my screen. As the Bricoleur, I decide to print the themes on paper and so I begin by cutting sections from the pages I have circled with a pair of scissors and then sticking them to where I think they link with others. It is in the doing that I find I can move, the action of cutting and sticking seems to unstick me. I transfer the process to my computer. The literature I have read comes to mind as I reengage in the meaning-making process. The discussion points emerge and I am occupied in the separating-out of the themes and the organising and placement within the two key themes.*

*I wrestle with myself to bring my thinking back to describing presence as flow and movement; it's easy to become reliant on the existing group dynamic theories to explain what is happening. I am engaged in testing myself and how this translates to those who read the thesis. As I review the six sessions, I want to convey how presence changes, how presence seems more like a process of becoming and is always in flow, never quite fixed. The 'quantum entanglement' comment from one of the participants comes to mind as I dream into atoms bouncing between each other in the group space. This seems a way forward to not get bogged down in group theories and to be creative. I want to convey how presence emerges in each of the sessions and I decide to use verbatim examples to help illustrate. I wonder if I have chosen the best examples, and how they connect the relationship between the group interchange with presence and my facilitation process.*

*Turning to consider how the two themes will come together, I recognise on the one hand the collective group presences and the individual group leader presence. My thinking began by only considering the group leader presence, however, the realisation of multiple presences within the group creates a dynamic of fusion and separation to which the group leader contributes. The merging and flow of multiple presences is dynamic and offers movement and exchange. The wave metaphor helps to ground me in thinking about the dynamism of multiple presences coalescing and separating in a constant state of activity. I realise this movement is vibrant on multiple levels of interactivity.*

*Bringing awareness and learning of the vibrancy of the flow of presence to the application of the group leader presence feels tentative. It has a nebulous quality, groundless and forever in movement. I sense my want to anchor presence as a something as I resist the urge. The themes on group leader presence exemplify a desire for the self of the group leader to be a portal of awakening to presence. The spiritual-like quality seems embedded in the awareness of now.*

*I am tentative in my approach, wanting to avoid becoming prescriptive on what is, and how one should go about understanding, group leader presence. I internalise for myself the results of awakening to the conscious self and having a spiritual element. Once again, I want to avoid being prescriptive.*

*With leadership charisma, I recognise my bias of treading carefully around this characteristic. Finding a balance between the positive and negative associations of charismatic leaders I confess is difficult for me to reconcile. When charisma is intense, the group members fall under a spell as followers and prevent the interpersonal dynamics from emerging and suppress spontaneity and emotional expression. In my view, the group members seek validation and recognition from the leader at the cost of self-awareness, change, and growth. Similarly, when there is charisma and it is conveyed in a way that is encouraging, the group members' individuation can be a positive aspect.*

*I have encountered both the good and destructive qualities under the charismatic leadership banner. The inflated ego can dominate and, after the early stages of a group coming together and they have moved on, the members can experience overwhelming feelings of abandonment with the potential for the narcissistic elements of power and control to surface. The charismatic leader requires wisdom, self-awareness, and a suite of other leadership qualities without relying solely on charisma to get them through their leadership.*

## Chapter 7: SENSORY PRESENCE

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*Learning skills is central to all human learning because meaningful human life is skills based and not technique based because techniques treat us as machines and distance us from our humanity. An activity can only be truly learnt when it is owned, and its significance understood and embodied. The process of learning skills is not simply about remembering an intellectual body of knowledge, it is existential because it involves understanding our place in the world, our relationship with the rest of the human world as well as the non-human world and form as well as our relationship with ourselves, our embodied temporality and spatiality.*

Martin Adams

### 7.1 Introduction

The research question set out to inquire, *what is understood to be the essence and meaning of group leader presence?* The project has taken many surprising turns, requiring changes and flexibility to address the inquiry. The results of the investigation have brought significant learning on presence in the context of groups and group leadership.

I discovered from this inquiry that the primordial phenomenon of presence is a living phenomenon of movement, flow, and change, with features primarily felt and sensed and relationally focused in response to the active relational group dynamics. I have arrived at calling group leader presence 'sensory' and will refer to group leader presence as 'sensory presence' from this point onwards. I have appreciated understanding the group leader's presence from the research inquiry as primarily sensed. The inquiry findings persuade me to conclude that the sensory nature of presence, when applied to the group leader, becomes an inner act of self-attunement in response to the active relational dynamics within the group space.

This chapter will explore sensory presence and relationally focused concepts in more detail. Also, a bridge to connect from the current focus on leadership technique training and a proposed in-depth group leader sensory presence training is explored. The merging of Gendlin's (1982) "felt sense" and Aristotle's *phronesis* as self-mastery becomes the bridge of connection calling into action the in-depth inner work of the group leader. The chapter concludes with a commentary on the inquiry from the research stakeholders' perspective, the verisimilitude of the results and the limitations of the research. I begin by applying Gendlin's (2018) concepts of felt sense and presence.

## **7.2. Presence as Sensory**

Gendlin's (2018) implicit philosophy has anchored group leader presence in an act of embracing the body, primarily as a sensing organism of experience. By activating sensory presence, the group leader moves from dependence on theoretical and technically acquired skills to a focused attunement with group members. It is in the immediate experiencing and attunement with the group interactions that a group leader learns and responds through 'sensory presence'. Sensory presence is about attuning to the felt and unspoken subjective experiences, hiding, or sitting underneath the spoken and behaviourally communicated experiences.

Sensory presence allows space for an embodied felt sense of 'something' to be noticed in the exchanges between the members that may be significant. It becomes, if not explored, a missed opportunity for members learning and growth. To my way of thinking, it's like fine-tuning the sensory input, including sensing the group's mood, within the group space. The experiencing is through explicit and implicit interactions before a group leader engages in the cognitive articulation of the felt sense (Preston, 2008).

Gendlin's (2018) "implicit intricacy" helps anchor the experiencing as something sensed and felt within behaviours and actions responding to tensions without fully understanding what was at play. For example, although implicitly felt, the relational gendered differences experienced in the group were not fully understood or addressed as gendered microaggressions until later. It was unclear what was happening in the group; it seemed confusing and threatening. Overall, the mood and changes in the relational presence of the group were felt and observed.

Observing as the researcher-facilitator, I sensed relational changes collectively within the group where the focus between two members impacted all the members. I observed the collective change from a relaxed pose to alertness, which amplified the mood as the conversation continued.

Sensory presence includes listening to the felt sense of the group's mood (Heidegger, 1962; Segal, 2011). For example, as the group leader engages and attunes with the changes in the group's mood from relaxed to alert, they consider how to respond. Beyond the words used, I felt the difference in the group's mood, heightened by the group members' bodily communication as they responded, which I interpreted as readiness for action. There was a lack of clarity about the hidden aspects of the two protagonists. As the researcher-facilitator, I didn't have permission to delve into the underbelly of what was happening between them. The group members responded to the change in mood individually and collectively. Although this incident was a missed opportunity to illuminate the implicitly felt sense, moments such as this become the work of the group leader in real groups.

The example shows how a group leader could attune their sensory presence to help facilitate and deepen the exploration of the hidden phenomenon. The focus moves to making explicit and working with the emerging change to include contributions from all the group members. The implicit meaning of the felt sense takes time and requires attunement and engagement with the experiencing, as opposed to the detached stance of the technical group leader.



The process of sensory presence first, before conceptualisation, is different from the established forms of learning about group leadership and the associated tasks. Group leader presence as sensory initiates the process of unpacking and tracking back from the felt sense experience to the implied meaning and resonance (Steffan and Coyle, 2011) of the group's interpersonal exchanges.

In applying Gendlin's (1999, 2004) concept of implicit intricacy, a counter-challenge emerges to the reliance solely on techniques and knowledge acquisition. Presence as sensory is informative of the lived experience of the group leader's inherent expressions, gestures, behaviours, and actions (Ratcliffe, 2020). Sensory presence emerges from the engagement, learning, and inhabiting of the experience of being a group leader (Style, 2018) and in response to the group's mood.

### **7.2.1 Presence as Relationally Focused**

I have found that the key to understanding the intricacy of sensory presence is in being grounded by the multiple relationally focused interactions within the group. I say this because sensory presence emerges in response to the involvedness of numerous complex relationships, including between the self, the other, and within the group space as they come together to merge and find their place within the boundaries of the group space.

The group space becomes an imaginary relational boundary determined by the characteristics and underpinning experiences of the membership. In coming together, the membership co-creates the imaginary boundary defined by the individual elements each member brings to the space to form and contribute to a network of interpersonal relationships, with psychological safety as one of the critical needs of members.

According to Spinelli (2015), within the relational boundary, the inter-relational realms of encounter are captured in the immediacy of the group encounter. Spinelli (2015) focuses on four distinct relational realms of the encounter (I, You, We, and They), each interdependent and activated in the immediacy of the interpersonal interactions within the group boundary. For example, the 'we-focused realm', "relies on the immediacy of the relational encounter within the group space. The embodied existential insecurities arise through each participant's experience of being in an 'us' relationship" (pp. 187-8). The we-focused realm of encounter seeks to expose and clarify the relational encounter's immediacy and its re-enactments of relationally focused particulars, especially from past experiences. The inquiry group called those moments eruptions; I call them disruptions. When they occur, a breakdown emerges in several layers of relationship interaction, including the objective and subjective layers of experiencing, or as Spinelli (2015) says, in the four realms of encounter, fundamentally posing a threat to personal safety (the I-focused realm of encounter) for example.

From personal experience, a group leader will always be affected by the interactions between the members, including being responsive to any individual member's presence or to collective disruptions in the group space. Existential thinkers have built upon Heidegger's philosophy that we are not separate from one another in the world in the way Cartesian philosophy suggests (Heidegger, 1962). Instead, we are always in a relationship to where we find ourselves (Segal, 2011, p. 473).

In amplifying the relational focus between members, the group leader participates in the immediate experience and exchange and is not separate, but part of the encounter. Like Spinelli (2015), in the psychotherapeutic encounter of therapist and client, I would propose that the group leader is called upon in the group encounter to be willing to examine and consider what there are personally experiencing and reflexively bring awareness to the four realms of encounter (I, You, We, They) as a valuable source of personal inquiry to counter potential sensory presence disruption.

The interplay between the secure and insecure parts of the group leader within a relationally focused sensory presence, accepts the quality of the group leader's presence as crucial in helping the group members bring their alert, active, receptive presence (Rofls, 2015) to the fore. Sensory presence as relationally focused means examining those aspects of the group leader's hidden world first, where insecurities from past experiences emerge in the present in response to complex group dynamics.

As the study group began their inquiry into understanding presence and what it might be or mean, I too started with Stenstad's (2006) work on Heidegger's (1962) "thinging" to help conceptualise the process of presence emergence in the group space. Thinging, as Stenstad (2006) points out, is a gathering of all that is available in the group space so that presence can unfold as a process, revealing qualities as a living phenomenon. Quantum entanglement, a phrase offered in one of the sessions, was an apt metaphor to describe presence activity. Quantum entanglement is conceptualised as being as many particles as possible of energy coming together and, in this process of connection, actively arranging themselves at given meeting points only to disperse, reconfigure, and re-emerge in a continuum of active flow, movement, and change. The quality of presence in the metaphor points to presence within the group space as a living phenomenon of aliveness and flow where interpersonal entanglements and moments of interaction create a network of connectivity. In the process, presence unfolds and reveals its qualities, giving concreteness to the moment before moving on.

The artistry of group leader sensory presence is the balance between engaging with the dynamics of the group and active attunement to the felt sense. Without retreating to the safety of inhabiting a role, the group leader must consider the purpose and meaning of taking on and living the role. The role and the person are not separate but come together in sensory presence awareness.

Sensory presence as relationally focused requires the group leader to attune and respond to their sensing world while bringing their experience of being a group leader to conscious

awareness. Also included is their responsiveness to the relational dynamics and conditions of the other and the group, revealed in personally held values and sedimentations (Spinelli, 2015).

This research was strengthened by formulating what I have instinctively felt but not fully articulated. In undertaking this study, I have challenged the current trend in group leader training of learning about and relying on techniques. The focus on technique doesn't enable a group leader to work with groups or teach them how to respond to mutual intersubjective experiences and group dynamics. In my opinion, the technical group leader takes a detached and disengaged stance, insensitive to the nuances of the group members' emotional and vulnerable worlds (Segal, 2011).

Mintzberg (2004) refers to the art and craft of management, describing it as an experience that is honed and developed over time (p. 52). The sensory presence of the group leader is similar, in that their craft is acquired through experience as they sense hidden aspects of the individual members and the group-as-a-whole. A feel for the situation arrives as they 'sense into' the mood of the group in the dilemma presented. The art of group leadership (Mintzberg, 2004, pp. 52-53) involves various dimensions of insight and vision to hold a bigger-picture view of the group space. When applied to the group leader, the lens of inquiry becomes the artistry of sensing into the group's culture, embracing the uncertainty and anxiety of not fully knowing the intricacies of the disruption. A problem rarely presents itself in the same theoretical way, which challenges formulaic group leader training.

Reliance on technique is not sufficient for developing the artistry of group leadership. Group leaders' development would stop if left at this level. How to sense and feel their way and respond to complex relational dynamics remains essential and would be missing with any depth of understanding. The fatal tendency to pursue formulae over living phenomena is to the detriment of the growth, not only of group leaders, but also the members they serve.

Gendlin's implicitly felt sense of what has yet to arrive makes itself known in the relationally focused dynamics between the members and the group leader. The inner act of the group leader's attunement to the relational dynamics sets in train a process of responding appropriately. The bidirectional flow is both felt and sensed in the mutually intersubjective space of the group. The felt sense of the group leader becomes a process of attuning to those hidden elements of the unspoken group interactions which are behaviourally experienced. Therefore, the group leader is commissioned to apply wisdom and discernment to their felt sense.

### **7.2.2 *Phronesis* - Practical Wisdom**

Combining the embodied felt sense with practical wisdom assists the group leader in choosing how to respond and what action to take in response, which is not merely a cognitive activity (Preston, 2008), but a blend of attunement to the immediacy of group tensions and having the courage to act. Practical wisdom aims to adapt what one should do and how one should respond (Ladkin, 2010) to the given circumstances within the group space, while also acknowledging personal responses to the emerging dynamics.

For Aristotle, practical wisdom was discernment at the heart of emerging dilemmas and about what constitutes ethical behaviour. The ability to act is about discerning between the felt tensions experienced in the group space and those contradictory statements, opposing arguments, and experiences, without collapsing them into one another (Ladkin, 2010, p. 173). In engaging with the ensuing relational dynamics, practical wisdom encourages the group leader to go beyond a technical approach, possibly elevating the tension as relational dynamics arise. Existentially, there is no linear causality. There is always an 'and' because the lived world is ambiguous. Sensory presence attunes the group leader to relational dynamics and simultaneously turns them back in on themselves to evaluate personal responses. Here the group leader finds themselves at a moment of discernment, confronted with possibilities and personal dilemmas about how to respond, for example with care,

directness, empathy, or challenge. Polkinghorne (2004, p. 15) notes that "phronesis is receptive to particulars and has a quality of improvisation" and, when merged with the felt sense, *phronesis* and wisdom of action are relationally focused and directed.

The group leader's practical wisdom is called into action when something is felt and unknown and absorbed into readiness to act. It considers what the group leader knows, their discernment and thoughtfulness, as wisdom (Traüffer, Bekker, Bocârnea and Winston, 2009). As Schwartz and Sharpe (2010, p. 24) conclude:

*Practical wisdom demands more than the skill to be perceptive about others. It also demands the capacity to perceive oneself – to assess what our motives are, to admit our failures, to figure out what has worked or not and why.*

Informed by the results, I have set out below some considerations towards developing sensory presence training programme principles. Further research is required to create a programme to meet the research findings.

### **7.3 Future Direction**

*I have identified key points of contact with organisations and professional bodies showing an interest in the project. These include acceptance of a paper and workshop on group leader presence to the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of Existential Therapy in Athens in 2023. Also, I am in contact with several professional organisations to promote the work through presentations for example, at the Society for Existential Analysis professional development program, and to seek publication for inclusion in their peer reviewed journal. My intention is to also attend, and offer to secure a workshop at the 2024, American Group Psychotherapy Association's annual conference and to seek publication on aspects of the project in their peer reviewed journal. I have inquired and with interest in writing a paper for the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia's quarterly journal and to market the*

*training below to professionals engaged in group leadership. Other areas have emerged of similar interest in the coaching and social work realms for presentations and training which I intend to follow up.*

### **7.3.1 Developing Sensory Presence Training**

What is clear from the research findings is that a bridge is required between the current trend of technique-laden training of group leaders and group leader sensory presence. A formulation of inquiry into the group leader's sensory presence will be developed for inclusion in the Centre for Existential Practice training programme.

I am proposing the merging of Gendlin's (2018) embodied felt sense with Aristotle's *phronesis* (practical wisdom) (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010) to become the bridge that connects group leader technique with group leader presence.

Focusing on group leader sensory presence represents a liberation from the structured technical approach towards accessibility, aliveness, and relational engagement. Although I have concentrated on the group leader's presence, I acknowledge the influence of a network of multiple presences within the group space, interrelating with one another and with the group leader. The diverse and layered communication matrices are active in discerning personal responses and connections within the multiplicity of complex relationships that help define the group space's boundary.

The active act of attuning to the unpredictability and uncertain interpersonal interplay between the membership is captured in the findings as self-mastery. The term denotes the act of developing self-awareness and engaging in self-examination within the archetype of the inner observer. The activation of the group leader's presence requires them to turn back in on themselves in response to the multiplicity of inputs from the complex relationships and presences actively engaging with one another in the group.

The response to the dominant male's lateness and physical presence on entering the group, for example, reminds us of the interplay between the response to a unique physical presence (the seen body) and the perceived imaginings and associated responses invoked by the sensory felt presence of the Other. The archetype anchors the process as ongoing, requiring the group leader to engage in personal inner work, including examining sedimentations within their worldview as expressed bodily in the "seen body" paradigm (Dolezal, 2012). Similarly, Spinelli's (2015) four realms of encounter add to the demands for turning in on oneself as a group leader to reflectively assess where one's biases, assumptions, and sedimentations intrude.

Sartre (1984) points us towards the gaze of the Other and being self-conscious and affected by the presence of the Other. The training would seek to develop a programme where critical self-reflective inquiry would be a central focus, to help the group leader attune to the self, the other, and the group as an entity. The group becomes a representative of a matrix of complex relationships continually merging and separating in a continuous flow of movement and change. The group leader's presence becomes a holistic stance of self-examination and self-evaluation, emerging from a programme where the group leader participates as a group member and learns from other group leaders within the group. The training would seek to develop a programme that encapsulates both experiential and theoretical learning.

Discernment, as a composite of wisdom and understanding (Traüffer, Bekker, Bocârnea, and Winston, 2010, p. 181), encapsulates deeply held and embedded values and beliefs, prejudices, and sedimentations in a continuum of self-learning. Engaging with the group leader's inner world will help bring those hidden aspects of self into focus for the group leader to reveal the phenomenon of sensory presence to others.

From the research, I understand that training to cultivate the group leader's inner world requires a blend of both embodied experiencing and examination and the unveiling of personally held practical wisdom. The findings signpost the process of self-mastery via the



cultivation of sensory self-awareness as pivotally important for engaging consciously with webs of complex relationships.

The ability to track one's experience through the felt sense towards implicit meaning and resonance seems to me to be key to developing group leader awareness as sensory presence. Further research will be required to validate and establish the accuracy of the inquiry process. However, the group leader's self-mastery using the archetypal qualities of the inner observer will help cultivate self-awareness, bringing a point of difference to the training of group leaders.

The training would modestly address the gap between those essentially learned skills and techniques focused on developing an in-depth understanding of group leader presence. The necessary skills, procedures, and practices become the foundational level of training, while sensory presence becomes an additional layer of learning and development. For those group leaders who depend on technique, it is important to acknowledge the importance of developing a frame of engagement for the group leader working within the group space. The development of psychological safety is essential and recognising how to identify and work with the group interactions arising is crucial.

There is a growing gap in providing in-depth training for group leaders. I understand that the type of in-depth training I mean is beyond the parameters of systematised and competency-driven educational institutions. It is radical in that the group leader training in sensory presence would attract group leaders who are ready and willing to delve into training where aliveness and a call to 'know thyself' is discovered. The hope from this research is the development of sensory presence as a new paradigm of training, not in opposition to the current approach but as an advance beyond it.

## 7.4 Impact for Stakeholders

Based on the research findings, the Centre for Existential Practice (CEP) would develop training as a vital stakeholder. The idea would be to contribute to the organisation without competing with the more rigorously accredited university programmes for postgraduate professionals.

CEP would disseminate the training to secondary stakeholders interested in leadership presence. It would also apply for the training to become a recommended course meeting the criteria of Australia's professional registration body, the Psychotherapy and Counsellors Federation of Australia (PACFA). Given that the cohort of the Presence Inquiry Group comprised of professionals with a variety of training, theoretical backgrounds, and experiences, the research had potential for its findings to reach a wider audience than just my profession of psychotherapy. Other disciplines potentially interested include coaching, social work, leadership, management, counselling, and other group work.

## 7.5 Verisimilitude of the Research

I have considered the research's validity in addressing the research question in two ways. By taking the research data and results to an external audience for verification, I have used a feedback loop, a term from Yalom's group theory (2005, 2020). The feedback loop in group therapy is based on what is presented and experienced by any given individual member of the group. It can be reflected upon and cognitively considered. I have borrowed from *bricolage* the concept of a feedback loop to be functionally similar yet different to group feedback. The function is that of a disruptor, challenging the ongoing tracking process and connection with the data and the results. The primary function is to examine the invisible layers of meanings and practices (Kincheloe and Berry 2004, p. 130). This seems to me to be a mirror of the feedback loop in group terms. The giving and receiving of feedback to the

individual relates to considering the value and strength of how trustworthy the feedback is concerning the event. Invisible layers of meanings and behaviour become visible.

Adopting a stance of verisimilitude allows the input of other group leaders' lived experiences to be considered. Also, taking the results to a broader audience brings different challenges and disruptions to the project's conclusions. Those not directly involved grapple with the structures and sense of meaning, likeness, and recognition. Verisimilitude is contextual, restricted to the judgement and critique of the study of group leader presence rather than a general theory of truth. By using the feedback loop, I was seeking to know if there was a likeness or resemblance amongst group leaders' lived experiences. Also, I wanted to understand whether the results were so far-fetched as to be unrecognisable. The verisimilitude approach ensures the research results are recognisable in the experiences of a group leader and that the study participants and wider audience would be able to relate the results to their experiences.

The feedback loop involved three areas of interest. Firstly, throughout the study, I engaged with my Advisor and Consultant as we explored the structure, functions, and methods of continually examining and developing the project. In our conversations, I experienced a steep learning curve on the nuances of research, going down many rabbit-holes along the way.

The preliminary results were presented to the research participants face to face, pre-COVID 19 pandemic, to ask them if they recognised the data, their voices, and how accurate their discussions were with the themes under the two headings of Presence and Group Leader Presence. The group answered with resoundingly positive feedback, recognising their voices in the initial analysis. At a conference in Buenos Aires, I presented those same results and the audience provided initial commentary with interest, stating interest in further development of the research results.

The presentations highlighted some critical areas of interest, including the concept of disruption to presence, later understood not to be as problematic as previously believed but something that allows presence to emerge. The participants offered an understanding of presence as something that serves the moment, like an achievement that has sought other forms, such as mindfulness. Some members reported having an awareness of a more substantial leader presence than before, feeling less conflicted and having a better understanding of their inner past experiences of interrupted presence. Some members concluded that presence was like filling a void that helped them recognise when they were separating from the group. Also reported was recognising a sense of being safe and belonging without losing presence when activated.

The third avenue for feedback included presentations to group leaders who were not involved in the study but were keen to hear the results. The online presentation consisted of a PowerPoint slide of the relevant project content and discussion over two hours. Immediately afterwards, I sent an online survey with an access link to the four questions below.

1. How did you find the overall presentation of the project?
2. What stood out the most for you?
3. Do you recognise the information and how the results would benefit the training of future group leaders?
4. Any comments you would like to give Adam about the work and where it could fit with group work?

The feedback was constructive and illuminating. As time had elapsed since presenting the initial information, my thinking and understanding had changed. Overall, those who attended offered comments during the presentation seeking clarification and expansion of the study structure and rationale. The feedback was positive. The participants identified with the presented information and results of the study with commentary on the embodied experience during the session on "illustrating the multidimensionality" of group leader presence. In particular, the participants recognised the information and how the study results would benefit future group leaders' training.

*... I saw it as a completed body of training already out there in the world, and so now I'm eagerly awaiting, for the present time to catch up to that moment where I see and feel it.*

*As modern life becomes more unpredictable, we increasingly seek certainty, hence the tendency to cling to techniques to bring us what we believe is safety. The process of growth & change (dare I say, human evolution) relies first on direct experience, supported by fact & technique.*

*I found myself nodding a lot and the articulation of my experience of being group leader... and, differently, as a participant, crystallising and coming into view. This work is very much about the implicit becoming explicit for a moment, crystallised as I said, and then becoming part of the implicit experience but with a deeper relationship with the implicit. It seems so important that group work be experienced in this way to deepen the work, to explore the dynamics and to allow what is in the group.*

In conclusion, I end with a quote given by one of the participants:

*They do not reject the first eye, senses, nor do they reject the second eye, knowledge and information. But go further, whenever by some wondrous coincidence, our heart space, our mind space and our body awareness are all simultaneously open and non-resistant. I like to call it presence. (Richard Rohr)*

The quote captures the essence of what I was seeking to convey in the study. In the elusiveness of presence, there is a merging of our senses, knowledge, heart, and mind that is embodied and requires our attention as group leaders. To expand the self in response to the other and to respond to the lived experience of the clients we work with requires a commitment to the inner work of being a group leader. Presence has no other choice but to be lived out.

## **7.6 Limitations of Research**

The lack of ethnic or Indigenous participants in the study stands out as a limitation of the research. Australia is a multicultural country with over three hundred languages spoken and just under three percent are of Indigenous descent (ABS Census of Population, 2016).

Expanding the research to other populations with English as a second language may bring a different perspective and meaning of presence to the conversation. 'Yarning' or storytelling is culturally a norm in community gatherings for Indigenous Australians, more than, say, a group. Expanding investigations of presence from different cultural perspectives requires sensitive approaches.

## 7.7 Reflective Summary

### Thread 7. The Tapestry of Group Leader Presence

*I sense into the group for the unspoken, the metacommunication, the hidden parts of the individual and the collective. What has been activated in the exchange? My embodied felt sense emerges as a process of fine-tuning my senses; what am I experiencing, how am I experiencing the group, what is the mood of the group, what is implied? Gendlin's (1999) felt sense anchors me in the experience as something that is there without being fully aware of what that something is. There is a freedom to explore and examine the felt sense, a tentativeness, a directness, as the inquiry of the Other and of the group emerges.*

*Attunement comes to mind – what am I attuning to? How is this different from calling upon technical skills or addressing difficult situations? It seems that in the inquiry the opportunity of moving the implicit to the explicit is possible. I am reminded of how I visualise and work with the infinity symbol, becoming a process of meeting at points of contact to then move outwards. It's pulse-like, a process of inner awareness, awareness of the group as a whole and of the individuals in their own processing. Sensing brings together the felt sense as a pulse of presence becoming a dynamic force of connectivity. How am I able to communicate this process to the reader in its abstract formulation of describing presence as a sensory matter?*

*The relational element of sensory presence in how to convey what I am meaning emerges. The group for me becomes a network of connectivity driven by the multiple relationally-driven complex interactions that I ascribe as the bedrock of understanding any group. I am attempting to go beyond the established and traditional understandings of group dynamics.*

*I am seeking to extend the inquiry by inserting presence as being relationally focused first and foremost determined by the ongoing and simultaneous, complex relationship interactions. The sensory element of the group leader's presence requires in-depth*

*attunement to being-in-the-world, beginning with the self, the experience of the Other, and the sociopolitical and cultural elements of influence. I am struck how stating this brings into focus the layers which every individual is required to confront in life, including group leaders.*

*Over the lifetime of the thesis, especially in the application of Gendlin's (1999) implicit intricacy, I have this running need to be fully immersed in the term to understand its intent and meaning. I talk with colleagues and my Advisor because the phrase captures the essence of what I am arriving at with presence, while also being vague. I am tempted to abandon this in the search for something more structured but I resist.*

*In my reflections I am drawn into the self-scrutiny of applying the term to group leader presence. The wave metaphor is a way to understand the flow and incompleteness of presence and never quite fully comprehending the phenomenon. The title of the thesis points me towards seeking a bridge of connection that can ground the proposed conclusions of sensory presence. As I search and wonder what the bridge between technique and presence could be, phronesis appears in my reading. I want to look beyond the constructs of the existing traditional view of the group leader and point towards the innate sense of knowing or having wisdom. The spiritual element reminds me of what is already known and experienced as a group leader and is not always accessed. Dadirri draws me to the quietness within, accessing what is already there. Phronesis in combination with Gendlin's (1999) felt sense reveals the possibility of the bridge.*



## Chapter 8: REFLECTION – A JOURNEY IN PRESENCE

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*Dadirri*

*To know me is to breathe with me.  
To breathe with me, is to listen deeply.  
To listen deeply, is to connect.  
It's the sound of deep calling to deep.*

*Dadirri, a deep inner spring within us, we  
call on it, and it calls on us.*

Dr Mirriam Rose

### 8.1 Introduction

The art of writing this thesis has proven to be a monumental test in learning how to navigate texts, articles, websites, videos, and conversations, and then to discover how to synthesise and to coherently convey everything on paper. At the heart of writing was the challenge of stepping away from self-limiting, sedimented beliefs about my inadequacy in academic writing and engaging with and finding a way to embrace the process. Another challenge was finding my voice in the thesis. Adding my voice to the many voices of the study had legitimacy. My absence from the writing, considering the gender and power differentials and marginalisation's, might have been assumed to be separateness or complacency. We are relational beings; identities are socially constructed and defined by the relationships we encounter. We are thinking, feeling, and experiencing beings. The objective stance of separateness and not acknowledging my embodied experiences would have undermined the study's ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Doane, 2003).

Finlay (2003, 2002) offers the reflexive approach of hermeneutic reflection, closely aligned with the existential-phenomenological approach to psychotherapy, which describes a

process of returning to the interpretations of the text and of personal closeness to the study topic. The reflexive approach considers the assumptive stance that we are active interpreters by nature and that it is impossible not to bring our involvement to the research. In essence, my understanding of being-in-the-world is based on my fore-understandings and pre-judgements (Heidegger, 1962). Acknowledging them helps determine my 'openness and closedness' to experiencing the world. I agree with Heidegger, who argued (1962) that the same phenomenon will be perceived and interpreted differently according to an individual's historical background, specific understanding, and experience of their lived world. As an insider-researcher, I must acknowledge the principles of my interpreted worldview and how closed or open I am to the research topic and its context. The process of untangling any enmeshment with the research subject requires a process of intimate and ongoing reflection which includes personal interpretations and experiences of group leadership to assist in moving beyond those preconceived understandings (Finlay, 2003, p. 108).

This chapter will offer a reflexive account of my time as the insider-researcher and the interface of being a group leader with the Presence Inquiry Group members and the research subject. The reflective process has provided an opportunity to bring to conscious awareness the entanglement of my lived experience and that of the members of the Presence Inquiry Group, including my intimate relationship with group leadership.

Walsh (2003) proposes that reflexivity is about turning back on oneself or taking account of the research process and one's relationship with oneself. It is rare to find oneself as a group leader under the gaze of oneself. The video recordings of the six sessions provided that opportunity. With the phenomenon of presence at the centre of the study, I considered how my presence revealed itself. By diving into the participants' lived experiences, I now found myself at the point of wondering what presence emerged for me from the study.

## **8.2 The Interface between Group Leader and Insider-Researcher**

Humphrey (2012) comments that one of the most challenging aspects for the insider-researcher is being mindful of their primary role as a researcher, a reminder of the importance of reflective practice in psychotherapy and clinical supervision. Turning the gaze upon myself, I became the subject and the object when observing myself in the video recordings, requiring significant bracketing of my intimate experience and adopting a self-curiosity position.

In my submission, I set out to explore the positionality of the insider-researcher. I struggled with the ongoing dilemma of maintaining the researcher's position without abandoning my group leader experience. I realised the force of group leader was more potent in me than that of the researcher as I journaled about my preference to join the group dialogue and explore the inquiry with the membership. I was intrigued by the 'self-imposed muzzle', as I came to call the process for myself, of finding how to engage without abandoning the role of researcher.

The insider-researcher position required a conscious effort and shift in perspective, moving out of the familiar area of being a group leader into the unfamiliar. The tension of working with but not blurring the boundaries between the two was a constant course of contention. At times, dilemmas emerged when potential boundary-crossing was imminent (Kanuha, 2000).

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) propose the relational link between insider and researcher, advocating the space as not an either/or space, a space of binary alternatives, or a narrow range of understanding. The two parts directly connect the two distinct yet interconnected parts of the researcher's positionality (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). To represent the relationship between insider and researcher, they hyphenate insider and researcher, *insider-researcher*. The hyphen indicates a unitary phenomenon, emphasising two distinct entities brought together in direct relationship to one another.

Taylor (2011) extends consideration to the intimate relationship between insider and researcher, translated to *intimate-insider*, to represent the pre-existing personal relationships and ongoing contact between researcher and participants (Taylor, 2011). The intimate insider describes how I felt towards the research process, especially my relationship with the group members. I considered how I would navigate those prior professional relationships with group members in the study. Intimacy was evident in how I felt warm and connected to all the members and, even though there were differences between us, I liked and respected everyone in the group. I was excited by the research group and its processes, expertise, commitment, and engagement from the outset. I wanted to balance facilitation, keeping the group on track, and contributing, without influencing the discussion or falling into the therapeutic group leader position.

My position, I believe, was established collaboratively. The group members clearly held me accountable as the facilitator and my contributions were listened to but not necessarily taken up. Roles and positionality are intrinsically correlated with my worldview (Binswanger, 1963), highlighting the inter-relationship with the study's sociopolitical and cultural context. My worldview, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) eloquently state, is closely associated with "an appreciation for the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of the human experience." It would be impossible not to bring my subjectivity and biography to the research study (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson, 1992).

Despite the use of monitoring and bracketing, personal subjective experiences seeped out. It was not surprising that I found myself positioned in various roles and responsibilities, given my pre-existing relationships with some of the participants. If staying within a pure insider-researcher role, if that exists, I wondered similarly to Giampapa (2011) how this would automatically lead to a closer understanding of the participants' lived experiences in my research. For example, in Sessions Three and Five, intimacy was more pronounced. In Session Three, the safety level in the group brought a heartfelt discussion of personal belief systems and philosophies. In Session Five, the intimacy level shared between the members left me personally affected by the group's honesty and care. I felt particularly connected and

part-of-the-group during the somewhat fragile and painfully personal experiences spoken of by some members.

I was acutely aware of the multiple roles I inhabited as the *intimate-researcher*. I was susceptible to my interests and experiences as a group leader, sensitive to the participants' emotional pain, and engaged in and attending to the research project's aims and objectives. Undeniably, I felt conflicted when it seemed as if I were abandoning my colleagues by focusing on the study (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). I was also left wondering what the participants would make of my analysis and interpretation of their contributions.

Before the sessions began, I was excited but terror-struck when considering facilitating a group of experienced group leaders. My anxiety was around functional processes of leadership approaches, personal responses, and professional differences. I wondered how I would be effective with them, who I would become, what role above that of the researcher would be assigned to me, and what expectations they would have of me. I stepped into the first session with some trepidation. I was acutely aware that I would need to monitor the dynamics between the members, the impact of emerging power and gender differentials, and the development of interpersonal relationships. My journal entry from the first session reflected this:

*It is quite a buzz having experienced members in the room together. I notice my anxiety and terror at the thought of how I will manage the interpersonal dynamics as some of the personalities, they are pretty big!*

The complex interwoven sociopolitical, historical and cultural variables and experiences in relationships provide a ground for confusion. A dilemma of finding my voice among solid personalities, a remnant from my past, was prominent in my thinking. To combat my anxiety, I took control early on by setting the structure and, hopefully, establishing a principle of safety and inclusion for the groups ahead. I hold that, in principle, all voices are of value, including my own.

Even though I have similar insights, familiarity in language, and experience to other group leaders, there were differences in the group on what constitutes group leadership, including with me. The mix of the membership and their respective professions provided a space for sameness and difference to coexist. In coming together, the combination of group leaders' differences allowed for exploration and examination of the group leader's presence. The facts of these differences alone determined, at least for me, that there was both sameness and contrast operating and coexisting in a continuum.

As I dream into the hyphenated space, the hyphen represents the space of emerging presence in a continuum, within which the multiple voices and parts come together to coexist. The polarities and duality, representing the lived world, emerge with both potential and limitations. The space between, represented by the hyphen, acknowledges the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of the insider-researcher position as an intimate space that holds both sameness and difference.

### **8.2.1. *Boundaries***

According to Finlay (2003), reflexivity is about critical awareness via examining our understandings of the interface between the self and the other by analysing how we influence and impact the research process. I realise I am offering one version of my interpretation, situated within the moment, and I am confident it will be reinterpreted at another time with a different meaning construction.

Before the study began, we discussed the boundaries regarding any dual relationship with members. My attempt to bracket my assumptions was to understand the participants' experience and their impact on our relationship and to minimise preconceptions.

We reached an agreement at the outset on how to manage any difficulties arising. I wrote down a list of my assumptions about the group members before the sessions' commencement, including their group leadership approach and what I knew personally and

professionally about them. I wanted to temporarily suspend those assumptions as much as possible during the six sessions and monitor my relationship with them.

Bracketing is standard practice in existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. It is understood to mean, in its basic form, to attempt to suspend pre-existing theories, formulations, and assumptions in a process of being as fully available and present to the other (Lavery, 2003). From the research stance, bracketing acknowledges pre-existing knowing and understanding. As Finlay (2003) asserts, in the research context the aim is to reflexively review, interpret, and disentangle the researcher's assumptions from their experiencing to allow new insights to emerge, thus requiring vigilance.

Two examples stand out where my use of bracketing was questionable. With DM 2, I recognised my irritation during several of the sessions. My journal entries recorded my annoyance with his black-and-white thinking, use of humour, critical comments, and taking on the devil's advocate role. I wondered if this was a deliberate presentation he wanted to create and personally benefit from as an approach? The oppositional stance from group members was a familiar stance to me. I work with behaviour in a process way to help the person find understanding and insight into the underlying anxiety and attachment while monitoring my reactivity. However, I experienced an increasing tension from not having the opportunity to address the behaviour, which was challenging to keep in check.

In one journal entry, I passionately wrote of how I wanted to correct the views he put forward, almost as if to punish him. Awareness of my critical self and monitoring the associated personal reactivity remained vigilant in my journal. On reflection, I was aware of the participant's emotional need for approval and relationship with dominant men. I understood that one way the insecure self becomes activated is by using humour to defuse tension. I recognised my internal annoyance with someone attempting to derail a process as a form of control. The response was directly related to the ensuing male competitiveness within the group. I tried to bracket my critical reaction associated with my family-of-origin

experience of authority. I later recognised internally that I became a 'critical parent' towards the member in my self-talk.

Examining my internal response, I wondered if this was noticeable in my interactions with him. Had I managed to bracket the irritation and annoyance I was feeling towards him? At the beginning of each session, I posed a personal challenge to myself to be open to what he brought to the group. To defuse my irritation, I took time to write down those irritations in the hope of disentangling my reactions and assumptions, at least momentarily, during the session and being open to what he contributed. I found this to be an effort in almost all the sessions. On observing myself on the video recording, I was surprised to see myself mainly offering an open stance of curiosity, looking interested in his contributions, without overtly displaying my inner world of irritation and annoyance.

Another example was DM 1. I wrote of my insecurity when attempting to understand his intellect and use of language. At first, it was exciting and thrilling to hear. Captivated by his expansive thinking, I immersed myself within the dialogue and discussion. Later I noted this same presentation moved within myself towards feeling controlled. I questioned myself if this was the case. Was I picking up something else in the room as unspoken or my projection? I know I have an internal response to what I perceive as control over others and how I seek to disturb and examine presentations as such at length. Later, in Session Four, his late entrance and disruption, which I speculated as being orchestrated by him, validated my felt sense of his control within the group.

My journal reflects the personal tension I experienced in holding multiple relationships in the group and bracketing personal connections with those relationships. As a group, we discussed and acknowledged in the first session and consequent sessions when new members attended. On one occasion, DF 2 made a personal statement regarding me in Session Three, which was a little alarming at the time. Although affirming, I was concerned about the boundary break and chose not to respond, hoping that it was said to connect with



the group and not align herself in some way with me. My journal entry for the session reflected this:

*I was aware of how DF 2 introduced her relationship to me, saying I was "instrumental in her development as a group leader and as a mentor." I was taken aback by the praise but chose to sit with being uncomfortable, slightly embarrassed, and I wondered in bringing this to the group, how others would experience and make assumptions about me.*

Another example of a potential boundary challenge included DM 4 expressing his connection with me outside the research group. Although this connection was more than seven years previously, I was cautious and fearful of how this could become the focus of the conversation, but the group moved on without comment. I chose once again not to respond.

In choosing not to respond to both comments in the examples, I reflected in my journal, was I hiding by not engaging, hoping the acknowledgement of the connection would go away? I was curious about not responding for, as a group leader, I would inquire what was foremost in the individual's awareness of the connection with me and why they would make a comment such as this at this time. The inquiry would then examine therapeutically whether this was an attempt to align with the leader. Was I embarrassed or simply flicking praise away? Also, I was curious what difference it would have made. Again, a lost opportunity, perhaps, or was I too rigid in the insider-researcher position? Reflexivity has allowed for multiple responses to be reflected upon at the boundary between the self and the other, challenging the bracketing as an imprecise way of relating in attempting to untangle me from my preconceived and reactionary relational dynamics.

### 8.3 Observing Myself

When watching myself on the muted video recordings, it was challenging to avoid or escape objectification (Käll, 2010). Observing myself required going beyond self-critique of the negative aspects, generally not available to others. The ‘cringe factor’ was active and required an effort to suspend my existing self-criticism, judgement, and evaluation. I perceived myself differently when actively examining those moments of facilitation. I viewed myself moving into different states of engagement in the six video-recorded sessions, from being excited and anxious to affirming members’ contributions and monitoring their interpersonal responses.

Overall, I observed my presence on the video recordings as calm, interested, and occupied with the group and their discussions. On review, my journal reflections offer a different account. I wrote about my anxiety, being irritable, frustrated, and feeling annoyed and curious at the same time with varying group members. There was an energy in my inner world as I questioned my authenticity.

Was I inhabiting a role, as the results indicated, offering a pseudo-presence? How genuine and connected was I with all that was happening in the group? I wondered if I had succumbed to the technique of the role and abandoned my integrity and honesty. Examples from my journal notes offer a different perspective on this calm presence.

**Table 7 Journal Entries and Reactions**

Session 1	<i>Wow! This is great and very exciting. I am fully engaged with the group, it's mind blowing, full of adrenaline and I'm grateful of the members contributions and the power of the group.</i>
Session 2	<i>Even though I don't feel like an expert, I do have knowledge and I was very excited and engaged in today's conversation, but I'm irritated by one or two members.</i>
Session 3	<i>I felt there was something important being offered in the inquiry that at times was potentially lost in the dialogue and I wanted to bring the discussion back, I'm feeling frustrated, and I didn't want to lose the essence of what was being said.</i>
Session 4	<i>I noticed the tension within me of holding the multiple dual relationships in the group while attempting to maintain confidentiality and not reveal prior knowledge, and also the burden of holding the unspoken-ness of the dynamic simmering between two of the members as it filters and fills the whole of the group.</i>
Session 5	<i>There's more than a niggle of irritation and fear of how the discussion was proceeding, I wanted to avoid the process becoming a personal group therapy session and yet I was surprised by the level of care for one another in the session.</i>
Session 6	<i>I found myself having to really push down my annoyance and irritation with some of the members. I feel this has been steamrolled by one of the members in a superficial level and I wanted to bring it back, but I had to concede. I realised the session was more about separation and endings. I am feeling disappointed as I wanted this session to be similar in richness as the others.</i>

I realised I could not separate my lived world from being a group leader. They are both intricately entwined. Who and what I am in the lifeworld is not separate from who I am as a group leader? There are subtleties that indicate that not all my lifeworld is in the group leader world. Despite the external presentation of calmness, as I draw attention to my embodied felt sense, I feel energised within. I consider listening, observing, and attuning to the group space and those who occupy it as fundamental to sensory presence. My past life experiences influence my approach. I am aware of the multiple interactions and relationships within the relational group dynamic. Everyone brings their backdrop of life

experience to the group space, finding a way to relate with one another as I find a way to respond.

As the group leader, I seek to hear the individual's hidden parts. My personal belief is that each of us has an untapped vacuum of unmapped experiences. When given a safe enough space to explore, it offers an opportunity for the individual to examine their lifeworld with openness and freedom. As the researcher, I was also listening and observing others. In watching myself, I listen to my internal narratives of self-evaluated inadequacies, such as speaking clearly, and my level of less than containable excitement, or that I could have intervened more here or there.

There is something to be said about the difference between my outer and inner self-expression. Like the study group members, I also went through many emotional and relational dynamics. Equally, during the sessions, I observed my stillness, direct eye contact, facial expressions, and physical stature as calm, despite my innermost feelings and reactivity.

Perhaps my journal entries don't fully capture all that was happening for me. Turning specifically to observing myself in the videos offers further information about my awareness and blind spots. There was a change in my demeanour and bodily communication in Session Four. I observed myself as tense, watchful, monitoring the group interactions intensively. I have a fixed stare towards some members, watching their posture and body communication. There is alertness in my body, a readiness to interject while measuring the whole group response as I consistently look around the group. My body posture is sitting upright, observing, and tracking the interactions and bodily communication while listening and speaking with the group. In Session Five, I see myself differently. I am responsive to the distress, leaning in to listen and connect with the people speaking while observing and monitoring the group response. My observation is listening attentively, sitting back in my seat, looking relaxed, tracking the members' contributions, looking around the group, and making eye contact. In Session Six, the comparison is vastly different. I observed myself

having a higher level of spoken communication and direct eye contact as I addressed individual members while monitoring the group with irritated glances and relaxed at other times.

It has been a confronting and illuminating experience to observe myself as both subject and object. In my journal, I wrote about presence as a group leader.

*Presence requires patience with self and with others. Presence requires close observation and awareness of self and the other. Presence requires going beyond self to access something within that allows for fine-tuning of listening and observing.*

Perhaps presence can be considered an alignment between the outer and inner dimensions of self in this instance. The analogy of a duck serenely gliding through the water comes to mind. Above the water, the duck seems to flow effortlessly while its webbed feet power on underneath, paddling madly. My inner world of insecurities and vulnerability required attention, like the duck's feet; active, engaged and working hard, while the observed external dimension paints a scene of seamless calmness.

The exercise of observing myself brings into sharp focus the changes and shifts within myself. There are recognisable features which mark my uniqueness. The video recordings suspend my ability to be fully perceived (Käll, 2010), subjective according to time, place, and situation. I experience myself as someone known to me, reachable. I feel objectified and there is a disparity between what is visible on the screen and the known self. The potential to impose an identity becomes strikingly clear, a descriptive presence based on those frozen moments. Was my calm presence authentically accurate given the descriptions of mood changes and body communication? There was a lost opportunity in not asking the participants how they would assess my presence in the study, to help understand how others perceive my presence.

Sartre's (1984) concept of self-reflective consciousness reminds us that we are not only consciously aware of the world around us because when consciousness is turned inwards on ourselves, we also become aware of the self in relation to the other. What is observed of

the group leader by others is not necessarily the group leader's experience of self. Watching myself provided an opportunity to examine the nuances of my bodily communication while reflectively turning in on my experiences that others don't have direct access to unless I reveal them.

Sensory presence speaks directly to the group leader's self-reflective consciousness of the elements within the group space. When turned inwards towards self, the group leaders' experience of the other directly relates to an 'us-relationship interface'. Hermeneutically, meanings and understandings are never complete; some will remain undiscovered (Holroyd, 2007) and others will be open to different interpretations.

#### **8.4 Presence as a Unitary Experience**

Gendlin's (2004) intricate weaving between bodily felt sense and instinctual knowing, even for the more advanced group leader, the tension exposes their vulnerability and uncertainty (Preston 2008), which I was acutely aware of feeling. Tracking back in on myself in those felt moments of vulnerability over the six sessions and reflecting how easy it would have been to retreat towards learned and trusted techniques when feeling exposed and vulnerable, I have come to relate to the embodied felt sense in an evolving and revealing way. For example, I was aware of my responsibility on multiple levels in Session Four. I was concerned for the two members specifically in the interaction, the impact on the other group members, and the implications for the remaining sessions and study overall; would the study group members return? I didn't have permission to investigate those underlying personal responses, nor was permission given to explore the more significant implicit unknown of tension in the interaction.

Taylor (2011) extends intimate-insider moments of connection to unitary moments experienced when there is no separateness between self and the other, "as all life is relational and focused on the energy that wells up and flows freely in any given moment"

(May 1982, p. 42). According to May (1982, p. 54), unitary experiences are usually transient, spontaneous, and associated with specific life situations such as moments of intimacy, being lost in a musical recital, or a life event like the birth of a child. These, rather than being a thing or unitary experience, are felt, like presence, as a sensing of oneness with others so that all other activities fall away, suspended temporarily.

I experienced transient unitary moments during the six sessions. I felt connected in the space between myself and the group members. An invisible thread of unifying force joined us. I was aware I was in and out of the tension in Sessions Two and Four, while in Sessions Three and Five, I felt less separate and more consciously united with the group's focus of attention.

The group leader, who works with the unknown qualities of interactions, exemplifies the embodied sensory presence response to the group's mood and interactions, becoming a momentary unity of felt experience, more than those who would manage a situation with a technique approach. Turning the gaze upon myself as insider-researcher and facilitator reflexively has revealed multiple levels of vulnerabilities, anxiety and self-imposed criticism, judgement, and acknowledgement of the intricacy of the implicit within the researcher's managed subjectivity. Doane (2003, pp. 101-102) urges researchers to step away from "managed subjectivity into the fearful sea of self-abandonment, non-action and non-interpreting" and to surrender to presence. Spinelli (2007) describes Doane's description as uncertainty, a principle that runs through the existential-phenomenological approach:

*"... that one's reflective experience, knowledge and awareness of self, others and the world, in general, arises through and within relatedness, then what is revealed is an inevitable and inescapable uncertainty or lack of completeness in any and all of our reflections'.* (p. 21)

I have become aware of the importance of the group leader's technique and the danger of reliance on technique alone that helps to focus the group leader on having certainty. I have tried to avoid having a formulaic approach to the study and have failed. I have wrestled with

attempting to write my instinctive understanding of what I mean, learning that it is not always transferable.

Practical wisdom from the findings demands more than the technique of the group leader; it requires self-awareness and self-reflection on an ongoing basis (Schwartz and Sharpe, 2010). The ability to contemplate the available choices and to discern the best course of action, and the importance of learning from them, is crucial. Just as the group leader leads the group, the group leads the group leader towards mastering the artistry of sensory presence.



## 8.5 Reflective Summary

### Thread 8. Balancing the Tension Threads of Insider-Researcher and Therapist

*My aim is to provide a reflexive account of myself during the project. I am part of the research project and, in the writing of the chapter, I find I am attempting to extrapolate myself temporarily for self-subjectivity and objectivity to emerge. The critical experience of reading the transcripts of my spoken words and then observing myself in the videos has been confronting as I attempt to write a reflexive account of the experience the process has provoked within me, a critical view of myself as a group leader, how to evaluate my presence, and how I am perceived by others.*

*I am seeking to offer in the reflexivity a window into the experience of holding the multiplicity of relationships. I want the reader to experience and understand sensory presence, and I am fearful that I have stayed within a structured reflexive stance. The reflexive process of inquiry of myself as an insider-researcher is perplexing as I embody myself in the role. Where I situate myself in the research process and the multiplicity of potential roles and responsibilities was an ongoing conversation as I pursued clarity.*

*Yalom's therapeutic factor of universality in group terms is recognised when group members find a deep connection and similarity in their emotional pain with one another. It's as if the group members are all on the same 'experiencing page'. Contemplating universality and the emergence of presence has helped me to appreciate my experience of belonging and not belonging in the Presence Inquiry Group. The polarity of experiencing separateness from the group and a longing for togetherness engages the group leader to contemplate the tension of the betweenness. It is the technical leader that I would place firmly on the separateness side of the polarity.*

*The project outcome on group leader presence requires consideration of how to attract diversity and the inclusion of participants from marginalised gender, sociopolitical, and culturally diverse populations. At the close of the project, I am confronted by my “white privilege where those from marginalised communities become invisible, and those microaggressions become inconsequential or insignificant, a part of a cancel culture instead of understanding their impact on others” (Hoffman, 2021, p.3). The psychotherapy world is embedded in assumptions and a stance that was evident in the Presence Inquiry Group, without an awareness of their impact. Privilege is often invisible, says Hoffman (2021, p.4), to white individuals and to the systems in which they operate. Going forward for the work to be of value, further research is required with a diverse gender, socio-political, and cultural cohort (Braidotti, 2022; Butler, 2006)*

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## Appendices

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### APPENDIX 1: Letter of Support



14 December 2016

Research Board, Institute of Work Based Learning  
Hendon Campus  
Middlesex University  
Town Hall  
The Burroughs, Hendon  
London. NW4 4BT.

*To whom it may concern.*

#### **Support for Adam McLean's ethics submission as part of his Professional Doctoral Research Project - Group leadership/therapist presence, its essence and meaning.**

As the Founder and Director of the Centre for Existential Practice, Sydney I am pleased to write in support of Adam conducting his research on group leadership/therapist presence subject to ethical approval from the IWBL research ethics board of Middlesex University where Adam is registered as a doctoral candidate.

With 10 years' experience in providing professional development for a range of professionals from the counselling and psychotherapy profession, Adam's research project corresponds to the overall ethos of CEP for a number of reasons:

- The research will give a legitimacy and greater standing to the existing programme and future developments that may emerge from Adam's research
- It will provide an existential basis for the group leadership programme specifically around what is necessary and growth enhancing for a leader to aspire to
- It will provide consistency and gravitas to the existing group leadership programme
- It will advance the overall training of group leaders of therapy groups in Australia.

I am delighted to support Adam in his research that will be included within the suite of training programmes offered by Centre for Existential Practice. As an organisation we will endeavour to provide assistance to Adam such as access to the database, marketing support and facilities for the training to take place.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. Strasser'.

Dr Alison Strasser  
Founder and Director, Centre for Existential Practice

## APPENDIX 2: Research Study Information Package or Participants

*Email to potential Presence Inquiry Group participants*

Doctoral Research Project  
An invitation to Group Leaders to participate

I am contacting you to gauge your level of interest in participating in a group to explore the presence of group leaders who lead therapy groups.

I am a psychotherapist specialising in group therapy and existential therapy working in Sydney NSW Australia. I am undertaking a Doctoral research project through The Institute of Work-Based Learning at the University of Middlesex in London, UK. My research question is:

*“What is understood to be the essence and meaning of presence as a group leader and how then does this presence impact the working of the group?”*

The project is a phenomenological enquiry in which I will be exploring group leaders experience and understanding of their presence as a group leader. I am seeking to recruit six to eight group leaders with a minimum of five years’ experience and who currently lead a group.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research. By participating, you will be contributing to an important piece of research while having the opportunity to explore and reflect on your personal group leadership presence. You may also take the opportunity of implementing any of the ideas from the presence group into your practice. I anticipate the members of the Presence group to come from various mix of experience, professions and application of group leadership.

At this stage, I am interested in hearing from you as a possible participant in the project. We can discuss in more detail what your participation will involve and how I can assist you in making an informed choice about whether to engage in the project.

I have included an Information Sheet and the Consent Form for you to review. Please contact me on either my mobile 0407 915 076 or via email at [adam.mclean56@me.com](mailto:adam.mclean56@me.com) so, we can discuss this together.

For further information about me and my work, I refer you to my personal website [www.changehappens.com.au](http://www.changehappens.com.au) and [www.cep.net.au](http://www.cep.net.au)

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards

Adam K McLean

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET (Presence Inquiry Group)

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I wish to invite you to participate in my research project, described below. My name is Adam McLean, and I am conducting research as part of my Professional Doctorate at the Institute of Work Based Learning, Middlesex University, London.

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

Research Project Title	Group Leaders Presence, its Essence and Meaning
Purpose of the research	The research project will investigate what is understood to be the essence and meaning of presence as a group leader. More specifically, the project will explore and examine the development of the personal presence of the group leader as a force of influence. Broadly the training of groups leaders encompasses skill acquisition above developing presence. My aim is to understand participants experience of presence, its meaning as well as, its impact personally and professionally while seeking to develop a training programme based on the results.
What do I have to do?	The project is a phenomenological enquiry where you will agree to participate in a group whose purpose is to explore presence, its meaning and influence in your role and experience as a group leader.
The Process	There will be up to six, two-hour cycles of inquiry sessions using a collaborative inquiry process, spaced over a six to ten-month period. You will be asked to record your reflections between each cycle of inquiry and to bring them along to the session as part of group exploration.  The focus of the first session will be to develop the process of working together including group principles of engagement and confidentiality and begin the process of exploring group

	<p>leaders' presence. The following sessions will engage in the exploration of the research topic.</p> <p>Each session will be audio recorded for transcription purposes, any written information produced during the session will be used as data for research analysis. A de-identified transcript summary is sent to participants for validation after each session.</p>
Benefits	<p>By engaging in the project, you will have an opportunity to explore and reflect on your experience of presence as a group leader and through this process review and develop your practice. At the same time, you will be contributing to an important piece of research work which will make a serious contribution to the development of the training of group leaders and group therapists.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Any information or personal details gathered during the study will remain confidential. No individual is identified by name in any publication of the results. Pseudonyms will replace all names; this will ensure that you are not identifiable. If you agree, I would like to quote some of your responses that will also, be done in a way to ensure you are not identifiable.</p>
Participation is Voluntary	<p>Please understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary and I respect your right to withdraw from the study at any time. You may discontinue the interview at any time without consequence, and you do not need to provide any explanation if you decide not to participate or withdraw. It is important to be aware that you will agree as part of the consent procedure, for any data you have contributed to remain within the study for analysis.</p>
Use of Information	<p>I will use information from the Presence Group as part of my doctoral thesis, which I expect to complete in 2020. Information from the Presence Group may also be put forward as an article for publication in journals, conference presentations before and after this date, safeguarding your identity.</p>
Storage of information	<p>I will keep hardcopy notes and recordings in a locked cabinet at my office in Woolloomooloo, NSW 2021. Any electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer in the same place and at the researchers' home. Only myself will have access to the data.</p>

Disposal of information	All collected data is safely held for a minimum of five years after successful submission of my thesis after, which it's disposed of by deleting relevant computer files and destroying or shredding hardcopy materials.
Approval	The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Middlesex University, London and is supported by the Centre for Existential Practice.
Complaints or concerns	Should you have any concerns or complaints about the research process, please feel free to contact myself and or my Supervisor, details below.
Contact details	Email – (insert ) or phone on .... Supervisor, Dr Margaret Volante at Middlesex University - email M.Volante@mdx.ac.uk

**Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.**



CONSENT FORM (Presence Group)

Research Project Title:
Group leader's presence, its essence and meaning

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

I, (Insert name) have read the information contained in the Information Sheet for Participants and any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction. YES/NO

I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time and understand the data will be used within the research for analysis. YES/NO

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be quoted and published using a pseudonym. YES/NO

I agree to the group being audio recorded and transcribed. YES/NO

I would like to receive a copy of the transcription of the inquiry groups. YES/NO

I am older than 18 years of age. YES/NO

Participant Date

Researcher Date

### APPENDIX 3: Example of Email Sent to Participants Between Sessions

Thank you for participating in session 2 of the Presence Inquiry Group. It was a great discussion with some interesting reflections - food for thought!

A reminder of the venue and details for Session 3.

We meet on Friday 10 November for a 10 am start for approximately 2 hours with morning tea available as before.

City Group Rooms

Level 11, 60 York Street Sydney NSW 2000

Location Map - <https://goo.gl/maps/aP7DUkoVq1z> (Just past Lindcraft and sits opposite Eckersley's Art and Craft Store and the Holmes Building).

We also agreed to pick up for discussion the following areas

- 4 Presence – is this our desire for Mastery?
- 5 Is presence a tool to mobilise others – or is it meaningless?
- 6 Spirituality and presence – is there a relationship?
- 7 Presence - trusting oneself – using the collective wisdom in the room.

We may not be able to cover all of the discussion points in one session however, it would be helpful if you could consider any of the above that you are drawn to for discussion when we meet on Friday.

Also, can you consider bringing along your reflections to offer to the group and any action you may have taken or are considering?

As a reminder:

1. *What have you noticed in your leadership of groups/ training since we last spoke?*
2. *What if any actions have you considered implementing in your leadership role since, we last met and why?*

I look forward to meeting with everyone once again and to welcoming (FP1) and (FP2) who will be joining us for the remaining two sessions. (FP3) is unable to attend this session and MP3 is on annual leave but, will join us after the holiday break for the last two sessions.

Any questions please let me know and I look forward to meeting everyone on Friday.

## APPENDIX 4: Group Members Learning - Direct Quotes

### Individual Account of Presence.

"I feel my presence very somatically, sometimes to a feeling of needing to shout when a client is frustrating me, or the group is not challenging. I can somatically feel most of the core feelings, energy flow of love, connection, anger, frustration. I use my somatic awareness to bring about interventions".

"Over time with more confidence, my presence has become more natural, and I imagine more congruent. Through our sessions I wanted to become more present, and this has supported me to work a little harder".

"For me the relational aspect of presence is extraordinarily complex, and I think that the word is often bandied around as a task, and I don't believe it's a task. It is something that we need to be in".

"The discussions around presence as a group facilitator I thought was useful for me. In fact, probably quite transformational for me in recognizing how I notice where I've gone and enough awareness of presence and robustness in myself".

"I have begun to reflect on what it takes to be present to others in a group setting as a facilitator and have noticed that some mental preparation is needed to achieve this. I will call this setting my "intention" and have noticed that without considered preparation my attention/presence is more likely to become captured".

"In hindsight I'm not sure that I was so acutely aware of my presence in the group itself as much as I had been thinking about my presence externally. Maybe it was a missed opportunity - I tend to think my presence as being more fluid rather than fixed".

"I had primarily been thinking of presence as a, how do I show up in terms of professional excellence, and I was really trained in that model and I have been for years: what do I wear and how do I talk and how do I use my hands, and all these very important technical skills, I guess. But it was all about me, it was just about how I walk into a room. This was a big aha! for me, it's far greater, far deeper for me than just me, myself, and it's about how do I relate to the people around me in that relational sense.

I've just noticed this big shift in my attention, and it's helped me to let go of some of the anxiety, too, the anxiety of performance. Being conscious of my presence, now I feel more able to just be myself. I did find that I was far less worried about excellence, I was less attached to the script of the programme, I could just be me. I felt energised, I feel that I nourished myself".

I put a lot of attention on the way that I'm showing up is having on other people and that's a developmental journey for me, I guess. It's just how grounded am I in the moment? Am I fixated on what I'm thinking? Am I tense? Am I bracing myself against what this person's saying or am I relaxed? What am I doing and how am I showing up and how is that working? Presence is a work in progress for me".



## Study Groups Presence

“In our group, everyone I believe has shared an equally strong presence regardless of how much they spoke. When anyone spoke, it was with a sense of authority, insight and compassion in allowing other ideas to have equal grace”.

“I often think of experience is like a presence tapestry, like a big thread in that tapestry, and I never know after the fact what was it that contributed to it, but there’s a memory of the group that is very present in my awareness”.

“It was really radical to any kind of presence exposure that I’ve ever done, and all the presence training that I’ve done is in the US, and the collective conscious state is all about the plight of the individual. It was really quite radical to anything I’ve been exposed to and profound”.

“So, I kind of felt like it went from kind of orientation towards self and Adam, to an orientation towards multiple individuals and then the beginning, not quite too far into it, but the beginning of an orientation towards a collective self – disabling the technical jargon. Just admitting that, that there are other embodied knowledges in the room that need to be kind of accounted for. You are actually saying something I need to pay attention to. I can’t just incorporate what you’re saying into what I already know easily”.

“That’s then a kind of relaxing into there being a collective presence as well because a collective presence is always, in my model, I guess what can be said in my head a collective presence is always composed of the authentic presence of the individuals”.

“Some of the feedback that I got at the end of the retreat, both verbally and in the written feedback, was pretty profound. People were impressed, and all these beautiful complimentary words and whatever, and it was very moving to hear that, and it did make me wonder, was there a correlation, did they experience me in a way that I felt myself? I felt good going into it, to say the least; not in an arrogant way, but I just felt prepared and ready for the experience”.

“A very reflective space. A feature of the group was the participant’s depth of orientations and experiences. People brought a variety of orientations and applications while also representing a sense of excellence in those contexts. This made the discussion about presence very vibrant as a collective space of ideas and experiences”.

## APPENDIX 5: Participants Questions for Reflection.

For reflection

- How have we formed as a group, our presence? What have we co-created as a presence group?
- The relational aspect of presence?
- How to teach presence to group leaders? What might be useful to teach others and when to recognise when someone is not present
- Mask, role and incongruity from the sequence of meetings. How does it work being on and off in presence, how does it differ to where we find ourselves?
- Presence and personal development – about how our presence has changed over time
- How is our felt sense really experienced – the somatic, embodied sense of presence (challenging the mind/body split).
- Have we had feedback on our presence and are we aware of this from an embodied sense?
- Are we aware of our impact on others – what presence we create – be present to self and think we have/have not presence – it's others who say you have presence, are we aware of this?

## APPENDIX 6 (A) – Analysis Steps -Transcripts for the Emerging Themes

### Step 1

A template was created with 3 headings. *See Appendix 6 (B)*

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
From the transcripts words and phrases were identified in direct relationship to presence and group leader presence	Full copies of the transcripts were central to determining the themes with verbatim examples highlighted.	Understanding and meaning creation along with questions and application to group leadership and group process were highlighted for later consideration.

### Step 2

Reading and rereading of the sessional transcripts and highlighting words and phrases in response to the research question. The step was repeated several times for each of the six sessions. As the themes emerged, they were highlighted in different colours and also the supporting initial exploratory comments were highlighted for further examination within the next step.

### Step 3

The themes identified from the process and along with the exploratory comments from each of the six sessions were transferred to a summary section for each of the group sessions. The large volume of narratives was examined for repeat phrases and themes and were then collated under thematic headings. The purpose was to synthesise and collate meaningful headings for further examination.

Supporting verbatim examples were highlighted and collated at the end of the process and coloured. The verbatim examples were reviewed and a decision for inclusion in the thesis results and discussion chapters was considered.

### Step 4

The summary sessional themes and supporting explanatory comments were reviewed and placed within the two key headings of Presence and Group Leader Presence. Further exploration of the themes, initial clusters of themes under each heading emerged. The step was reviewed for accuracy and any changes and were considered to where the themes belonged.

### Step 5

From the clusters of themes under each of the two headings were further reviewed. The themes were considered from a meaning creation process associated with the research question and topic. Through a hermeneutic process of going back and forth over the themes and supporting commentary and the verbatim examples, assisted in the development of the key themes from the Presence Inquiry Group discussions over the six sessions. See Appendix 8 for a graphic representation of the theme development.

### Step 6

The themes verbatim examples would form the analysis results and then help to move to fuller exploration for meaning-creation in the discussion chapter.

**APPENDIC 6 (B) - Session 4 -Extract of Transcript with Comments and Identified Themes**

Emergent Themes	Original Transcripts	Explanatory Comments
<p><b>Eruption</b> – as a key to self exploration on what is happening in the lived experience of the GL -</p> <p><b>The observer of self.</b> Suggests there is a personal requirement to be a watcher of self and eruption offers a <b>SPACE OF NOTICING SELF AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ERUPTION – THE INSTABILITY ANYONE FEELS.</b></p> <p><b>Embracing eruption</b></p>	<p>So there’s always things that are a battle. Can you know, just kind of watch your mind or you know, what is the framework to attend? So that’s just some background, but it’s relevant to this.</p> <p>I was struck by what you were saying about, I was struck by just talking about what’s happening for you, so I am thinking about myself in that regard. <b>So the last week or so, I have felt really out of sorts, like really out of sorts. I am always fascinated at this point about who notices that and who doesn’t notice that. Some people notice is, because of their sensitivity and others don’t. But the way I relate to this being out of sorts now, compared to when I was younger is, it’s to do with my own journey of what I attend to, is I deal with it very phenomenologically, as opposed to narratively.</b></p> <p>So if you think about that aspect of it. I am not that interested in what I think about it, and I am not interested in what other people think about it, but I <b>am interested in what I experience.</b> So one of the things that I sort of like to think about is an <b>eruption.</b> I feel like there is kind of like <b>an eruption going on of some kind going on,</b> and I work really hard to not look for the external reason for that <b>eruption.</b> just, I don’t know, <b>it’s an eruption.</b> I notice I relate to it differently if I do that. If I go to an <b>external reason, I am into my head.</b> I am into he said, she said, I said, you said, how do I change that view?</p> <p>But if I stay with it just an <b>internal process,</b> then it’s more just <b>being conscious of</b> you know, I know this territory, I know exactly what I have got to do now, <b>watching how I react to that, watching my levels of instability in myself, my emotional...</b> because I have seen myself become a really stable person over a long period of time, I was very unstable as a kid. So just watching all that, it was quite interesting, but not, you know, you can say here it sounds like detached but it’s not detached in reality, it feels really pretty heavy.</p> <p>But okay, but really okay. It’s a real sense of <b>incredible confidence</b> that you can throw the kitchen sink at me and I will be fine. So that’s relevant, relevant to me, absolutely relevant to <u>being here in terms of my presence today.</u></p> <p><b>Is that past (name?)</b></p>	<p>Background leading the current way of being in the world – being out of sorts.</p> <p>Who notices?</p> <p>Eruption – us this the same as disruption – is there meaning within eruption towards personal change, growth etc...</p> <p>Being in the present moment - eruption is offered as a state of being – not to look for the external reason for the eruption but internally – self-reflexivity. External reason is intellectualising rationalising etc..</p> <p>Staying with the personal experience of being out of sorts – Internal process of the experience of an eruption, being conscious, observing the instability within oneself – build a knowing of oneself and a confidence in oneself when there is an internal process of observation of oneself when eruption arrives.</p> <p>– there can be a divide – such as language and meaning construction</p>

<p>Bridge to being both present and presence</p> <p><i>Presence is calmness – what informs the calmness?</i>  <i>Quality in the calmness of Trusting the person.</i>  <i>Calmness is this part of presence – or being present in order to be calm that then offers a presence? There is a quality in the calmness that offers trust ( safety?)</i></p> <p>Calmness  Fluidity  Trust</p> <p><i>In corporate driven outcome focused groups there is an arrival point and often this is stated or determined at the end as there is a task to achieve – despite the fluidity of the process of the group there is a suggestion that the group always ends up there – is this the presence of the group Leader and his abilities to allow the fluidity – is it due to the stated need for an outcome or the focus of the task brings the group naturally to the point at the beginning – In Gp therapy this often happen from the immediate issues etc offered is often the themes for the group and fluidity emerges yet the group moves back in on itself from where it begins ( Yalom)</i></p>	<p>No, it's still there, it feels like it's still there. Just kind of <b>like watching it</b>, I notice it at night, I notice when I wake up, kind of, you know, I have a lot of dread, a lot of kind of panic, I am not normally like that, but just being with it and experimenting with things like, rather than just accepting what's going on, <b>actually embracing it</b>. That kind of nuance is really quite significant, <b>because the embracing is almost like seeing it as something incredibly interesting, as opposed to actually, I have just got to bear this</b>. That will often changes things quite dramatically, and then I will often fall falsely. So just <b>watching</b> what allows me to sort of <b>like calm down</b> enough, it's almost like the anxiety is sort of gone. But <u>yes, no, it's still happening.</u></p> <p>When I read this, it was very interesting, and I <b>thought the one about the presence and being present, I really like that</b></p> <p>It made me sort of think about, you know, people that I have observed about, who are, some [inaudible] <b>they don't have a lot of presence, but they're present</b>. You know, rather than going, oh you know, everyone <b>who is present has got presence, because in my sense they don't necessarily</b>. But there's something about people <b>and</b> related to my comment, oh gee, now that I am thinking about it, you were there <b>but</b> they weren't <b>present in a big way at the time</b>. You have got people that have got <b>a lot of presence</b>, and they are <b>not particularly present</b>. Donald Trump has got presence, he's not particularly present.</p> <p>So anyway, I was thinking about that, and then thinking about my, thinking about what's been happening. So they have got me to reflect. It took me to a place where I was reflecting on the work I do and I do a lot of work where, there's something in me that feels quite capable of holding a lot of stuff live.</p> <p>So I kind of work with quite senior levels of business, where, I work with organisations under enormous amounts of stress, and it's really interesting the way, the comments that I get about how important it is that I am around. So one guy gave me this card, this CFO of this organisation, it's a top twenty company saying you know, it's like... I should have brought it. It's the <b>calmness</b>, the, you know, it's so</p>	<p><i>By embracing the eruption and moving into the space of eruption also allows space to notice, watch and calm the anxiety of the eruption.</i></p> <p>What is the distinction between being present to and not having presence?</p> <p>Examples of Trump and Obama</p> <p>The observer of self. Suggests there is a personal requirement to be a watcher of self and eruption offers a SPACE OF NOTICING SELF AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ERUPTION – THE INSTABILITY ANYONE FEELS.</p> <p><i>Question here if the person is present but they don't have a presence – what is this divide – It suggests there is a bridge to link both being present and presence.</i></p> <p><i>Seeking clarification – is this in the room this eruption in the group?</i></p> <p><i>Example of Trump being present and not having presence – what is the missing part?</i></p> <p><i>Suggestion here presence is different to being present for this participant - what are we present to and how can we be present to but not have presence – what is the distinction?</i></p> <p><i>Presence is calmness – what informs the calmness?</i>  <i>Quality in the calmness of Trusting the person.</i></p>
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Analogy of group as a complex jazz music piece

rare, I have very rarely seen this in a person, and it makes such a difference to me. it makes a huge difference to me, the fact that I can trust you, the fact that you're calm, that you can see what I can see.

Having been a business person myself, I can almost just kind of like double, double [inaudible]. But I was thinking about how often in group situations, because it's generally a day at a time, when I think about it, I am working with a group... this thing about, it's kind of like, it's often about getting them to do, start talking to each other and to start kind of doing the one, you know, one plus one equals three, that means there's something else etc.

But also the sense that if I know that I just do that, then this could go in a place that, from their point of view, because you think about it from a business, they're not okay necessarily about just going anywhere and then necessarily what happens. So there's this really interesting thing about, how does that happen, how do you allow the fluidity to occur, because that's really important to their learning.

In a way it feels like, we have actually [inaudible] the place we thought we were going to end, and it's one of the comments that I thought yes, I can't believe where we end up, but we always sort of end on time in the place where we thought we were going to end. That takes a lot of me being present to do that.

I see... if I use the analogy of classical music or rock music or jazz, it's like jazz. It's complicated, there's lots of changes going on, but you have got to let, you know, improvise my way, but I have got a sense of like, you know, there's 24 bars and you have got to end at that point.

*Calmness is this part of presence – or being present in order to be calm that then offers a presence? There is a quality in the calmness that offers trust ( safety?)*

*In corporate driven outcome focused groups there is an arrival point and often this is stated or determined at the end as there is a task to achieve – despite the fluidity of the process of the group there is a suggestion that the group always ends up there – is this the presence of the group Leader and his abilities to allow the fluidity – is it due to the stated need for an outcome or the focus of the task brings the group naturally to the point at the beginning – In Gp therapy this often happen from the immediate issues etc offered is often the themes for the group and fluidity emerges yet the group moves back in on itself from where it begins ( Yalom)*

## **APPENDIX 6 (C) – Example of the Results from Embodied Presence - Summary**

The dominant phenomena put forward as a felt sense with qualifiers on how to be embodied in presence.

### **Description/Definition**

- Connectivity - All the parts
- Coherence between heart and head,
- Resonance – Buber?
- relational contact
- felt sense as a whole – no just intellectual knowing
- whole, felt sense, feeling nourished, refreshed
- Dropping from head to heart to an embodied felt sense.
- met in a connection and disconnection
- Felt sense – embodied felt sense – being in connection or out of connection – being present and not present to self.
- 

### **Physical presence**

- To another physical presence and response – The organisational presence and response how to go beyond that may be linked to the embodied awareness of self
- Anxiety of experiences influence presence an embodied response
- how a GL stands, sitting looking, presentation to the group – first impressions etc. dress

### **Qualities**

- The qualities of embodied presence - permission, relatedness, joining, empathy and attending
- Embodied authenticity in relationship to the human being in the group and the human to human response
- Embodied presence is not a mask
- Vulnerability is key
- Knowledge, felt level of knowing/experiencing – personal knowing
- The observer within of self
- open to and closed to self and others?
- Softening – feeling changes in the allowing

### **NOTES**

- The internalised presence embodied and the projected embodied presence – can be experienced as vastly different and unique to the individual – so there is no one presence experienced but multiple within the group environment. The GL may only embody one way of projected presence, yet it is experienced multiple levels of complexity – depending on what is the others experienced of the GL.

## APPENDIX 7 Summary of the Qualities of Group Leader Presence

<p><b>Session 1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness, stable in oneself, self-focus within, BEING CURIOUS, gentleness, Relational, curious, containment, non-compliance, impact safety, being human, contact with others, mutuality,</li> <li>• Relational, intervening in the process, being attentive, personal attending (self) relating,</li> <li>• The quality of trusting oneself and being real not a role, involves a lifetime of personal learning and development</li> <li>• Personal worldviews influence presence – challenging the sedimentation</li> <li>• having an equilibrium – wisdom and the restraining forces such as anxiety fears and resistance. an equilibrium of self</li> <li>• Contact, In the process of trust there is a dynamic between closeness and disruption offered as a rhythm of presence.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 2</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quiet GL – silence, negative presence concealment of self</li> <li>• Pseudo presence – absence of self and being authentic is offered as presence makes good presence</li> <li>• Holes in the GL presence that is noticed – fallibility of the person can be experience and judged and critiques as non-presence. Or evil presence dominating presence for the wrong good?</li> <li>• Is sedimentation – personal beliefs (pseudo truths) part of shadow side of presence</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 3</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy, Coherence = balance and level of presence awareness</li> <li>• Being human despite internal struggle</li> <li>• Knowledge, observing self, - paradox of both self-awareness and awareness of the other?</li> <li>• Influencers - tension between being fully present to self and to the other and not be fully consumed that you lose presence to both self and the other.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 4</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus, Aliveness present to self, Breath, influence of language, openness</li> <li>• Embodied self – open to and closed to.</li> <li>• Curious – Over used word. The magic of curiosity, more of the other is revealed though curiosity of the other (therapeutic stance), Genuine curiosity a opposed a skill or technique (NOTE- Curiosity applicable to the therapeutic language – groupness language)</li> <li>• complex emotions choices, past experiences triggers</li> <li>• decision making (choice) reflective an unreflective?</li> <li>• Vulnerability - helps to develop presence</li> <li>• Openness and closedness</li> <li>• Honesty in self can activate presence -</li> <li>• Being present to what is –bypassing the intellect.</li> <li>• Accumulation of being present to oneself generates presence.</li> <li>• Relationship between vulnerability and openness</li> <li>• Trust in self - there is a spiritual quality to this</li> <li>• attentiveness in the moment to the flow</li> <li>• Yearning for the other to know</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 5</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calmness - <i>Quality in the calmness of Trusting the person.</i></li> </ul>



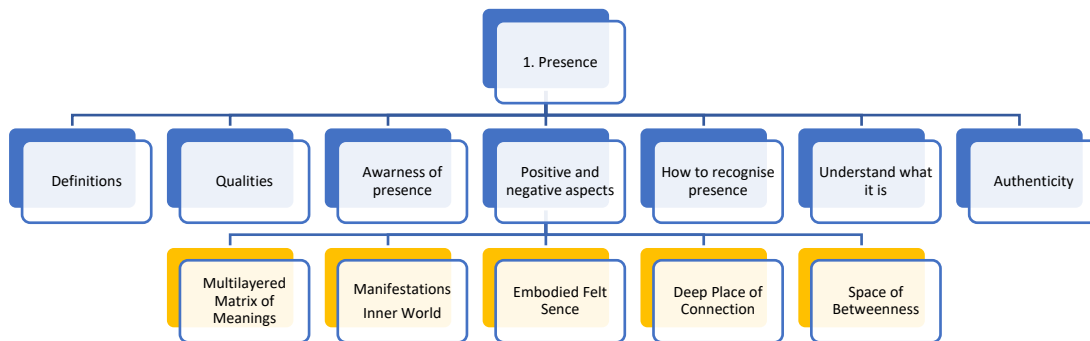
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Calmness is this part of presence – or being present in order to be calm that then offers a presence? There is a quality in the calmness that offers trust (safety?)</i></li> <li>• Fluidity</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Fluidity of presence is it not possible to be present all of the time.</li> <li>• Quality of presence and how much the GL engages and speaks</li> <li>• Honesty with self - Honest allows for disclosure of self and dovetails into sense of safety and trust development</li> <li>• Curious, honesty confronting to be honest</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 6</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability vs instability of self, Somatic response</li> <li>• Presence as heartfelt ness</li> <li>• Care and compassion</li> <li>• Empathy -sort of...</li> <li>• Awareness has a spaciousness to it – reading into the space with a quality of empathy.</li> <li>• Awareness is more spacious in quality rather than empathy. Define empathy and why is this brought in is it therapeutic jargon/</li> <li>• Fine attunement required of self – circling between annoyance, boredom etc to compassion – presence is in flow with all of the qualities the GL experiences.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 8 - Summary - Identified Themes Combined Across the Six Sessions

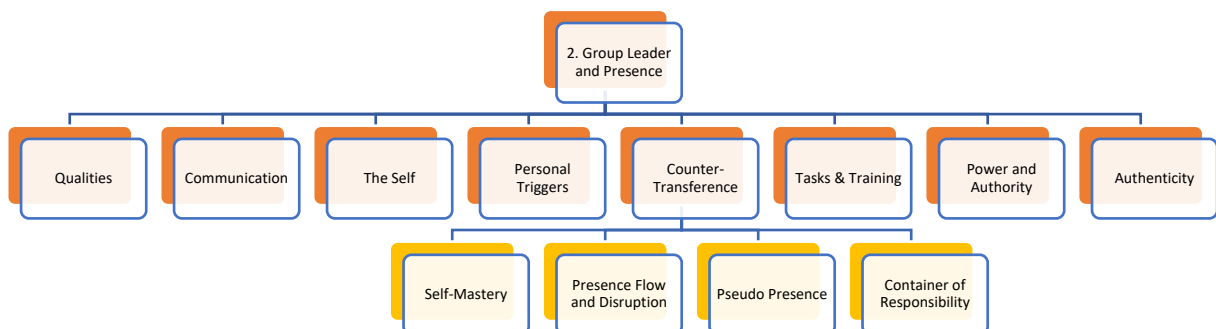
Session No	Initial Themes	Session No	Initial Themes
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness of the Group leader</li> <li>• Qualities of the Group Leader role</li> <li>• Presence definitions</li> <li>• Presence Qualities – Positive</li> <li>• Presence Qualities – negative</li> <li>• Co-Created presence of the research group</li> </ul>	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embodied presence</li> <li>• Power and authority of the Group Leader</li> <li>• The Self of the Group Leader</li> <li>• Knowledge as Presence</li> <li>• Presence – what is it?</li> <li>• Conditions and Qualities of presence</li> <li>• Influence of Triggers, past experiences &amp; Counter-transference of the Group Leader</li> <li>• Presence as the Space Between</li> <li>• Pseudo/Shadow of Presence (of the Group leader)</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence definitions</li> <li>• Qualities of Presence</li> <li>• Group Leaders presence</li> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Bracketing</li> <li>• Meeting Pint (space)</li> <li>• Relational Presence</li> <li>• Spirituality as Presence – its qualities</li> <li>• Being Present as a Group Leader</li> <li>• Task of Presence</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Out of Presence as Group Leader</li> </ul>	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Present to self as a Group Leader</li> <li>• Presence definitions</li> <li>• Space between-ness</li> <li>• Intimacy</li> <li>• Connection between being present and presence as a Group leader</li> <li>• Quality of presence</li> <li>• Disturbance to Presence</li> <li>• Embodied presence</li> <li>• Interchange between group Leader and group Process/Dynamics</li> <li>• The Divide of the Group Leader presence</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dilemma of Group Leader presence</li> <li>• Presence definitions</li> <li>• Quality of presence</li> <li>• Shadow presence as negative presence</li> <li>• Group Leader not present</li> <li>• Group Leaders presence</li> <li>• External Distractions to presence/being present</li> </ul>	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence definitions</li> <li>• Group Leader- not present to Self</li> <li>• Space of Between-ness</li> <li>• Group Variables and presence</li> <li>• Qualities of Presence</li> <li>• Group presence</li> <li>• Group leader Disclosure</li> <li>• Variables of presence</li> <li>• Dilemmas of group Leader presence</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 9 – Emergence of Themes

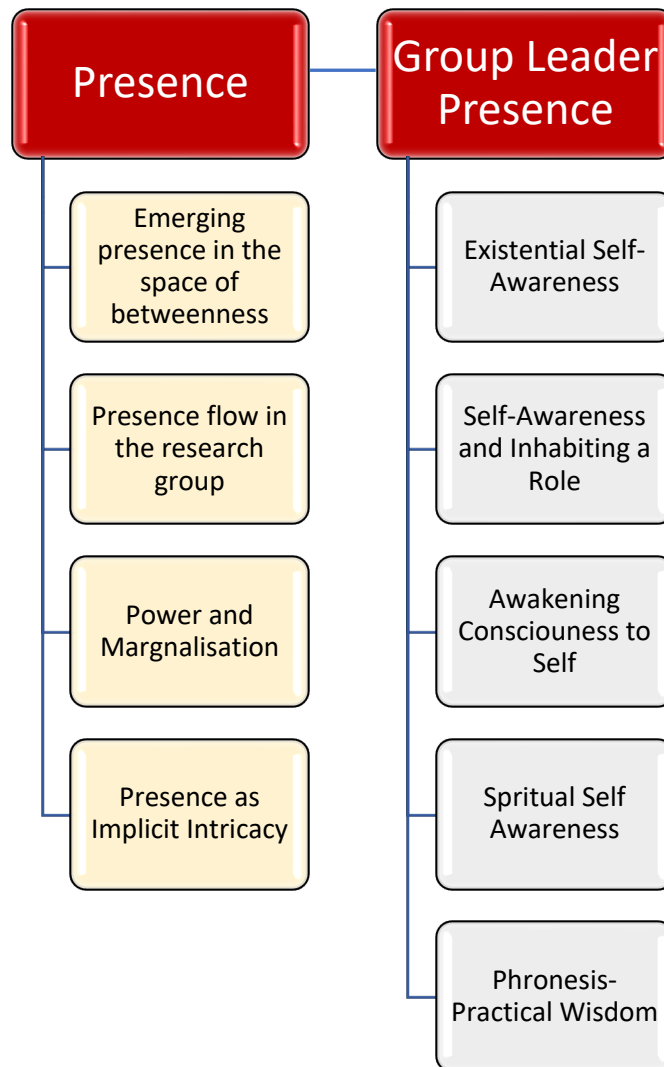
### 1. Presence



### 2. Group Leader Presence



## Summary of Findings



**APPENDIX 10: Example of Observations of Group Interactions on Muted Video Recordings – Session 5**

<b>Non-Verbal Communication</b>	<b>Level of Activity and Comments</b>
<b>Hand gestures</b>	High level
<b>Body Posture</b>	Mostly upright and paying close attention
<b>Strong hand movements for Emphasis Animated</b>	evident
<b>Specific Facial Expressions</b>	Range including sadness, concern, emotionally affected, tears, uncomfortable, hard to keep eye contact sheepish, supportive funny facial expression
<b>Eye Contact</b>	high level of direct eye contact
<b>Smiles &amp; Laughter</b>	smiles of relief and anxiety and laughter evident to break the spell
<b>Head Nods</b>	evident
<b>Pointing for emphasis</b>	minimum
<b>Note Taking</b>	evident
<b>Moves Chair in/out from table</b>	some restlessness but mostly seat turned inwards and directly facing the speaker
<b>leaning bodily</b>	mostly still, some stretching and leaning out of group
<b>Turn to group or specifically to look at speaker</b>	Group focused on speaker and vice versa, as the speaker moves through a range of emotions and is connected with the group
<b>Listening</b>	High level
<b>Distracted</b>	High level
<b>Engaged</b>	High level
<b>Animated</b>	High Level
<b>Power dynamic</b>	High level at a subtle, covert way by one member, other two key players not activating a response - slight irritation noted
<b>Quiet</b>	QM quieter member this time responded when asked, took lots of notes.
<b>Tension</b>	mild evident
<b>Relaxed</b>	Strongly evident by flow of conversation and body posture
<b>Interjection wanting to contribute</b>	High level
<b>Speaking directly to someone</b>	High level
<b>Dominance (Control)</b>	Covert awareness but not strongly evident
<b>Joking</b>	High level
<b>Responsive</b>	evident
<b>Agree/Disagree Openly</b>	Agree - evident / Disagree some but not significant
<b>Collaborative</b>	High level

<b>Free open Dialogue</b>	high level
<b>Collegial</b>	evident
<b>Sensitive</b>	evident
<b>Cohesion</b>	possibly safe enough for cohesion to be there
<b>Overall Comments</b>	M Dom seems to look for acceptance or approval from others when he speaks. He checks quickly how others are listening to him as he speaks and will often end in a light comment or joke. The group looks relaxed in their body posture, sitting in their chairs looking interested and attuned to one another with good eye contact and facial expressions hard for the group to stop when the end comes. Collegial presence with less competitive or combative presence - perhaps an openness. The loss of two strong Males and one Female has changed the overall working and feel of the group.

## APPENDIX 11 – Muted Video Recordings Summary of Group Interactions Across Six Sessions

Session	Summary of Group Interactions	Emerging Presence
Session 1	There is a power dynamic between 3 males All have different style of communication, one needs to be heard and validated and controlling in the conversation. Another is commanding in height, strong facial and hand gestures. The Orator can hold the group on ideas and thoughts - it would seem he needs a high level of engagement from the other members. Perhaps offers ideas a bigger picture compared to others.	'What is possible' - the potential of the group
Session 2	The group is fully engaged in the process. The three of the males are displaying competitiveness for dominance in differing ways - need to hear, need for expansive ideas, direct irritation of one towards another - possible conflict. Another male is more inclusive and gently in his approach two women are quieter in the session with one member responding when prompted. An exciting group, full of tension	'High tension" - power dynamic emerging
Session 3	M Dom seems to look for acceptance or approval from others when he speaks. He checks quickly how others are listening to him as he speaks and will often end in a light comment or joke the group looks relaxed in their body posture, sitting in their chairs looking interested and attuned to one another with good eye contact and facial expressions - hard for the group to stop when the end comes. Collegial presence with less competitive or combative presence - perhaps an openness. The loss of two strong Males and one F has changed the overall working and feel of the group.	'Equalising' – coming together in safety and harmony
Session 4	There is significant tension in the group emanating from one DM1 member. The group responds to this as a possible threat to the safety of the group space. Half of the group members are visibly quieter during the power dynamic between DM1 and DF 1 while the supporting members of DF 1 plays out. There is evidence of tension and a holding of the space for further exploration between the members. DM4 role in the group is evidenced by his inclusiveness and bringing a break in the tension. While 2 members especially are quieter. The two F members on either side of the DM 1 move slightly away, inching further as the group progresses leaving DM1 alone and possibly isolated. DM 3 seems more of an agitator and uses covert tactics of tagging on to DF 2 to deviate the conversation. Also using jokes or comments that elicit laughter - previously this was unanimously received, now, is less so as the tension builds and remains. DM4 is more successful in breaking the tension with his inclusive style of relating. DF 1 is visibly holding her reactions and tension together and speaks directly to Dom M1. The group is one of underlying tension and yet remain on task.	Alertness - the threat of imminent danger
Session 5	A different feel to the group this time. The main protagonist is not present, yet the other DM 3 has returned with specific body language which has not interrupted the flow and ease of the dialogue. What emerges is a sensitive engaged and concerned group for each of the main speakers. There are smiles an acknowledgement along with facial expressions and a closeness between the members. No significant level of tension is evident, and power dynamics are pretty flatted as all members seem to be in connection. This group is meeting post break so there may be a coming together of collegial spirit and the main protagonist is missing.	'Intimacy' –settling into one another
Session 6	The last group. Seemed the group has come to a natural end. It is light and easy going, no one dominates and there is a spirit of collegiality.	'Separation' – disengagement

## APPENDIX 12 Example of Personal Spoken Contributions – Session 5

What I said	My Comments on what I said	Skill Identified	Reflection – Non Bracketing
That's what I was going to ask you, actually, because that's what I was wondering, is how... because you're in charge of the permissions in some way, shape or form, and so you're aware of something?	Seeking more clarity in the members thinking	Clarification Statement	Seeking more information
Does that bring us to that sense around what is the shadow side to presence? You know, it was something that you were saying that you've been [overtalking]. Everyone's been saying it in some different ways of what presence is not or whether if you have presence, then what is the other part to presence that might challenge your presence. You know, if you're feeling fully expansive in the group, but in social settings, for whatever reasons, you're not. And there's something around, you know, the shadow. It's pervasive. Or even... it's like something sitting on the edge there.	I introduce the theme of negative presence the idea of Jung's shadow side – polarity, dualism of the lived experience. Shadow side to presence (negative aspects?)	Linking Statement, clarification influence	Alternative ideas offered to elicit expansion on the theme being explored
Because that's true [unclear] and you know, wonder what... I'm thinking about what you said earlier, QM, is around that sense of is presence really an ideal, it's something that you might aim towards. But the reality is we'll never really achieve whatever the presence is. And so becoming more present to yourself, what I'm hearing from you is I make different choices accordingly. For wherever I find myself.	Linking current discussion to previous comments that have stood out for me. Being self-aware of self and your needs and choices?	Linking, Summarising, clarifying statement and facilitative question	I offer alternative thinking but linking to previous sessions and discussions
But is that presence or is that a mask For a Role? Is that the shadow. So, is that a bit like presence is always there and it's about removing the blocks to presence?	Seeking clarification - is a mask – a role, rather than being present	Clarification with open questions supportive and enquiring	I am attempting to be a little provocative in my statements in the hope the conversation will be expanded
Which actually possibly brings the other people to be more present?	What am I missing?	Comment and question	Seeking to help to understand a process of relationship to presence in the field and the betweenness



<p>I think that's quite interesting. If you are not in the manner of connecting with someone else, if you're not being present to the other, it may heighten the other's presence of awareness of that disconnect or that lack of connection from you as a leader. So, their presence may become, let's say bigger and more expansive. They might become needier or demanding as well. So, there's something I think that's quite interesting. If you are not in the manner of connecting with someone else, if you're not being present to the other, it may heighten the other's presence of awareness of that disconnect or that lack of connection from you as a leader. So, their presence may become, let's say bigger and more expansive. They might become needier or demanding as well. So, there's something happens in that process that should [overtalking].</p>	<p>My attempt here is to not be locked into DM2 description but to add a different perspective and a wider lens to explore the situation</p>	<p>Commentary Influence statements</p>	<p>I sense I am responding to DM2 response as it seems I am finding the narrowness of some of the comments annoying. Am I trying assist in the expansion of his thinking by offering a different perspective which he may not have considered or am I really annoyed and correcting him?</p>
<p>Oh, genuinely not, [unclear] you're boring me, so let's put you to the side and I'll just deal with everyone else. That person then responds to that you know, that disconnect from the leader, and then becomes [overtalking]. Not necessarily. It may be unspoken.</p>	<p>I continue to add more context to my thinking here to help expand then idea.</p>	<p>Commentary Influence statements</p>	<p>I am pushing my own sense of annoyance here and not bracketing</p>

### APPENDIX 13 - Example - Summary of Observations of Self on Muted Video Recordings – Session 3

Skill/Technique	Times used	Comments
Introduction	1	Setting the focus for the session
Directive	1	Wanting to expand on what was said and what was discussed from the previous week
Clarifying	2	Keeping track on who has and hasn't spoken
Linking	7	Attempt to illicit more of what is behind the statements – seems there is?
Influence	2	Attempting to develop further reflection by the group - Am I influencing the language of the group?
Facilitative	10	Bring new members to the discussion, Monitoring the conversation by Helping a quieter member contribute
Open	4	I extend the discussion beyond self to noticing what is happening in their worlds
Reflective	1	Setting the scene for the main topic of discussion as a Segway - facilitating and engaged with the discussion
Closed	2	I introduce my phrase of being open and closed to new possibilities
Summarising	1	Wishing to expand on the current conversation
Empathic	1	Attempt to expand the response to the space between and its location?
Use of Self (Experiences)	0	I am offering information from the literature to help deepen the discussion – was this helpful?
Commentary	5	Seeking to add to the discussion, to expand ideas and to acknowledge the complexity of the content offered - I add my own musings into the pot.
Observation	2	Is this supportive, my excitement and possibly a rescuing of the person?
Offer Alternatives	3	Offer the quote to the whole group, also I am offering information from the literature to help deepen the discussion – was this helpful?
Non Bracketing	2	Dialogue fed back to the group to help support and encourage them to continue in their dilemma

#### Summary of skills used

<b>High</b>	Linking, facilitative, open questions ad commentary
<b>Medium</b>	Clarifying, Influence
<b>Low</b>	Empathic resp, summarising, reflective directive

