

Title: Reflective dialogues of therapists in a couple's therapy session: A thematic analysis of a couple's experience about the reflecting team process.

Author: Georgios Polymerou

Contact details: giorgospolymerou@yahoo.gr

Acknowledgments

By ending this thesis, reflecting on which people to thank, it feels a bit difficult, since the voices of people who were taking positions in my inner dialogue while I was writing this essay were too many.

So, first of all I would like to thank Jaakko Seikkula who supported me in writing this essay as well as all the professors that I met during this two-years course who deeply enriched my knowledge. I also need to thank my classmates who emotionally supported me when I was stressed because of this thesis. I would like to thank the team of Mental Health Center in Volos, in Greece, that immediately responded to my request and helped me to run this small research project.

Reflecting on how I ended up in Finland doing this course and writing this thesis, it is important for me to thank all my professors from the Institute of Systemic Thought and Psychotherapy in Thessaloniki where I was trained as a systemic/family therapist, because there it was the beginning of this journey that drove me into Finland. Particularly I need to thank Kelli Patrikou because this was one of the professors who deeply inspired me and made me fall in love with dialogical practices and Open Dialogue.

Finally, I deeply thank my partner Dimitra for her ideas and corrections about my thesis and mainly for the burden she had to carry with all our family duties while I was writing this thesis. And finally, I need perhaps not to thank but to apologize to my nine months old daughter, for the moments I missed with her when I was traveling to Finland and writing this thesis. However, I want her to know that her voice was always the strongest and sweetest voice in my inner dialogue during this writing.

Abstract

Theory about reflecting team process and inner dialogues that take place during this process is examined in this thesis project. There is also a report about the existing research related to client's perceptions about the reflecting team process. Then it follows a thematic analysis of a couple's experience concerning the reflective dialogues of two therapists who were using this reflecting team process. The feeling of getting understood, the tendency of the couple to intervene or take a distance during the process and the openness of the process were the main themes that emerged during the analysis of the results.

Introduction

My interest and motivation to start writing this thesis is mainly inspired by the work of Tom Andersen who initiated the reflecting team and drew attention on the inner dialogues of clients (Andersen, 1991; Andersen, 1992; Shotter, 2007; Gehart, 2018) as well as by Peter Rober and Jaakko Seikkula who also deepened their research into the inner dialogue of therapists (Rober, 2005; Rober et al. 2008; Seikkula, 2008; Rober, 2010; Seikkula et al. 2012). My own experience regarding the reflecting team process intrigues me a lot so I thought how essential it would be to reflect on the elements of the reflecting team that can make it an effective therapeutic approach. Personally, I have felt several times some “magic” taking place during a reflecting team process. I do not know if this “magic” is related to the content of the shared reflections or to the dialogical process that is taking place but it feels to me that there is something that is happening during this process that as Bateson might claim causes differences that can make the difference (Bateson, 1970). However, since magic is not scientifically proved yet, it is essential to study what are the elements of the reflecting team process that can make it an effective, or a non-effective approach for the people we are working with and for the professionals who choose to use this approach.

Reflecting team was developed by Tom Andersen and his team. Particularly Andersen and his team used to apply the traditional Milan approach during which a member of the team is interviewing a family while the rest of the team is observing the discussion from behind a one-way mirror. During the interview the interviewer leaves the family and joins his/her team behind the one-way mirror in order to talk about possible interpretations and hypotheses of what has been discussed that can be new to the family. Then the interviewer joins again the family and is passing those new ideas, that are called “intervention” to the family (Andersen, 1992).

However, during 1985 Andersen decided to make a shift, so the therapeutic team that was following the conversation behind a one-way mirror suggested to the family and the interviewer to listen to them talking about their ideas and thoughts about the session. In this way they gave them access to the whole process by making their previously private discussions public (Andersen, 1992).

The reflecting team and the natural sharing of different ideas from the members of the group gave the chance to families to choose between different ideas they have never heard, that could offer to them new

understandings of their situation. This goes along with the idea that every event can be described differently, depending on the point of the observer's view (Andersen,1992). So, during the reflecting team process the interviewer is asking the family to share any ideas about the reflections that they listened to but in no way he/she puts pressure to them to talk if they do not want to. The purpose of sharing reflections is not to push the client to one direction or to another or to offer an explanation and a diagnosis (Andersen, 1992). Instead by sharing reflections the aim is to offer some new ideas that perhaps will facilitate the process of finding words for the not-yet-said (Rober, 2004).

Bakhtin (1986) also focuses on the importance of outsideness in order to achieve a creative understanding, as through outsideness are increased the possibilities to enrich the dialogue since the person who is talking from outside can adopt a distant position that can be different. This outsideness can be reflected in the questions that are created during the therapist's inner conversation and can be also reflected during the reflecting team. Hoffman (2002) highlights that the reflecting team that was initiated by Tom Andersen and his team revised the game of psychotherapy. This new practice resulted to start providing multiple possibilities to clients instead of providing one sole intervention. In addition, therapists stopped evaluating the interventions as successful or not. The focus was more on understanding and listening than on making changes. This new practice also decreased the hierarchies and created a more cooperative environment inside the team (Gehart, 2018).

Andersen mentions that there are at least three kind of dialogues. The dialogue between the client and the therapist, the dialogue within the person and the dialogue within the therapist. The dialogue between the client and the therapist is considered as the outer dialogue whereas the internal dialogue of the therapist, the reflecting team and the family as the inner dialogue. When a reflecting team is commenting, the therapist and the client deal with their own inner dialogues.

Rober referred a lot to the dialogical conversation that every therapist is having with him/herself that is described as therapist's inner conversation (Rober, 1999). During this inner conversation there is not only one voice or one truth. Instead there are different voices that speak from different perspectives (Rober, 2004). Rober first described the inner dialogue of therapist as a dialogue between two positions, the professional and the experiencing self. Then he moved from this “therapist-centered model” to a new one model in which the focus of the therapeutic process was on the dialogue between the therapist and the client. In this new model the therapist's inner conversation is considered as a complex process that is

focusing on two dialectics. Client vs therapist focus and process vs content focus. Those four domains, that represent different concerns that the therapist is dealing with during the session are the following: 1) to attend the client's process 2) processing the client's story 3) focusing on therapist's previous experience 4) managing the therapeutic process. Therefore, during his/her inner dialogue, the therapist needs to deal with the tension that is caused by those concerns, that are represented by the four I positions, and use them in an effective way in order to promote dialogical space and help the client (Rober et al. 2008). Seikkula (2011) also argues that the words that are spoken openly and in inner dialogues represent different things for the therapy session. Those inner voices represent more a part of the present moment and not so much of the stories told (Seikkula, 2008).

Although the inner dialogue of therapist has been studied a lot, there is not much research examining the inner dialogue of clients during the reflecting process. Andersen highlighted the importance of client's inner dialogue during the reflecting process as it can create a space that is essential for the emergence of new meanings (Gehart,2019). However, the research is mainly focusing on client's experiences about the reflecting process and there is not any special focus on their inner dialogues and how they might be connected to the previously heard reflections or to the whole dialogical process.

Clients experiences about the reflecting process

There is not too much research on client's perspectives concerning the reflecting team process since most of the research is focused on the theory of those processes. If the counselor increases his/her awareness about what clients find helpful about the reflecting team this could make those processes more effective and their therapeutic efficacy could be improved (Pender & Stinchfield 2012).

Griffith et al. (1992) examined the use of reflecting teams and they found out that during reflecting team processes, communication incorporated trusting, rethinking, comforting and nurturing instead of controlling, monitoring and blaming and this enabled an alliance in the clinical context.

Hoger et al. (1994) examined the effectiveness of reflecting team approach by conducting two research studies in Vienna and in Gottingen and reported that approximately two thirds of the participants experienced positive changes in the presenting problem. They also found that families with emotional problems had more positive changes compared to families with psychosomatic problems who appeared

to be less satisfied. However, clients who preferred more structured services and were seeking for advice were not satisfied with the reflecting team approach. Brownlee et al. (2009) also referred to some of the complaints concerning the reflecting team approach such as the lack of collaboration between the reflecting team, the client and the counsellor as well as the difficulty to decipher professional language. According to Smith et al. (1994) therapists believed that reflecting team was not effective when there was no crisis, no specific goals and not any specific problems to solve. However, most couples disagreed with this point of view as they considered the reflecting team as valuable and supportive at any time. In addition, there were couples who said that the reflecting team was not effective in the beginning of the therapy because trust had not been established.

Fishel et al. (2005) also examined the effectiveness among ten different reflections that were used during a couple's therapy. Those ten reflections were: the use of metaphor, sharing a story concerning another couple by one of the reflectors, sharing a story concerning reflector's oneself, offering a different perspective, offering an interaction cast in a more positive light, making a comment that was focusing on something positive, describing an individual's problem as a dyadic problem, suggesting experiments to try at home, normalizing a problem, suggesting ways that could be used in the past in order to differently handle a difficult situation. According to the results the four reflections that were listened the most and considered the most helpful by the couple were: 1) providing a different point of view, 2) focusing on something positive, 3) normalizing, 4) depicting the couple's difficulties in a positive light. Those four reflections can be characterized as empathetic and supportive and they usually aim to reframe in a positive way a negative pattern that a couple or a family is using.

Smith et al. (1994) also conducted an ethnographic research in order to examine couple's and therapist's perspectives about the use and process of reflecting team practice. Couples and therapists agreed that reflecting process was useful because it could offer deeper insight into a problem by providing different views and opinions. Couples also stated that it was important that the reflecting teams consisted of both male and female members because each gender could approach the same subject in a different way. There were also individual spouses who said that it would be scary for them if the reflecting team would consist solely of the different gender. However, the importance of having both genders in the reflecting team was not commented by any therapist. Some couples also supported the opinion that reflecting team is effective since it can operate as a buffer of the angry atmosphere. They also added that members of the

reflecting team could express ideas that one of the two spouses might be afraid to share.

It is worth mentioning that in this research clients commented on the spatial separateness that was created by the reflecting team during the session. Particularly they stated that by “looking elsewhere” and not “staring at us” the reflecting team made them feel more comfortable and less afraid. However, this spatial separateness that is supported by Tom Andersen's theory was not commented by any therapist of this research as a supportive element. Although many therapists perceived the reflecting team as an effective intervention or strategy, it makes sense that couples supported more Andersen's (1990) perspective that the purpose of the team is to create shared meanings with the client and the therapist instead of intervening and correcting client's behaviors.

Pender and Stinchfield (2014) also organized a qualitative case study in order to examine a couple's perspective about the reflecting team process. The themes that emerged by the couple's experience concerning the reflecting team process were its characteristics and their reactions to reflections. Regarding the characteristics of the reflecting team, professionalism, being nonjudgmental and the collaborative environment during reflecting team process were mentioned by the couple. In addition, the importance of using simple language and be respectful were highly recommended. It was also stated that giving the opportunity to clients to meet the reflecting team lessened their anxiety and helped them to talk more openly.

The couple's reaction to the reflections of the reflecting team included the following sub-themes: positive nature of the reflections and fostering hope. The couple said that it was very helpful listening to many positive comments. They also talked about the different comments they listened that helped them to see the problem from outside in a different way. Normalizing client's experiences was also one particular element that was fostering hope to clients.

Finally Fernandez et al. (2010) examined changes in (the constructs) couples in which one spouse was a gambler, when they were using the reflecting process. They said that reflecting team helped the participants to improve the image of themselves as well the perception about their relationship.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to examine how clients experienced the reflecting dialogues of therapists. Particularly I tried to study their inner thoughts, images, feelings, body reactions that were evoked by the content of the shared reflections and by the whole reflecting process and how those experiences can link to any elements of this process that can be helpful or not helpful.

I also tried to identify any of the elements of the reflective process that might have evoked those thoughts, images, feelings and body reactions. As Lidbom et al. (2014) state, the outer dialogue contributes to the client's inner dialogues through the words that are chosen to be uttered or the way by which they are uttered.

Design: participants, process, methods, and analysis

Participants

The participants of the study were one married couple of a woman and a man of middle age. This couple was visiting the Center of Mental Health in the city of Volos in Greece and agreed to participate in the research.

The professionals of the Center of Mental Health in Volos had been trained in 2009 by professionals from the Open Dialogue team in Tornio, and since then they keep trying to follow some of the principles of Open Dialogue and adopt them in their working context. Two of those principles that they follow, although it is not very common for a greek mental health center, is that therapists enter sessions in pairs and they also share reflecting dialogues between each other.

Process

After taking the verbal and written consent of participants I put a video-camera in order to videotape their session and in the end of their session I took the tape in order to study its content. Then, after a few hours during the same day, I met and I interviewed separately the two participants. Larsen et al. (2008) comment that if the video-recall takes place soon after the interview, then the interviewees will be able to remember their experiences more easily and vividly.

Method

The interview had two parts. One first part, in the beginning of each interview that I asked clients about their experience of the reflecting team process of therapists, in order to have access to any of its elements that could be helpful or not helpful for clients. And one second part that I showed to the clients the tapes of the reflecting dialogues of therapists in order to gain a deeper understanding concerning how clients experience the reflecting team process and what was happening in their inner dialogues.

For the first part my research question was “Would you like to tell me some things about how it was the experience of the reflective process of therapists for you” and based on their answers I developed a bit more my questions.

For the second part I had two research questions. So, my first research question was “Could you try to share your thoughts, emotions, images, bodily reactions that you experienced during the reflecting process and you can recall now by listening again the comments of the reflecting team”. Based on their answers I developed further my questions in order to gain a deeper understanding concerning how they experienced the process of reflecting dialogues and which were any elements of it that were considered helpful or not. My second research question was “What went through your mind there”. This question was used in the research of Lidbom et al (2014) in order to elicit the inner dialogues of the participants and I thought that it could fit in my research too.

The method that I applied for the second part of the interview was the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) that is a qualitative interview approach that is using video-assisted recall in order to access the client’s or caregiver’s conscious yet unspoken experiences as they remember them to have occurred during the session (Larsen et al. 2008). During Interpersonal Process Recall the videotape is replayed and the clients are invited to stop it when they recall something significant that they experienced during the session, such as a feeling or a thought that they had during the discourse. During the interviews, I showed to the participants the parts of the reflecting dialogues of therapists that I had previously collected and I asked them to interrupt me if something was coming into their minds otherwise, I was waiting the end of the reflecting dialogues.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA) was the method that I used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method that is used in order to identify, organize and offer insight into patterns of meaning that arise by the data

and are called themes. Those patterns of meaning need to be linked to the particular topic and research question being explored (Braun and Clarke, 2012). I tried my analysis to be more inductive and find the codes and themes by the data themselves however I think that in some extent it was also deductive since I was influenced by the theory I have studied about reflecting team processes. Braun and Clarke (2012) agree that analysis often uses a combination of both approaches and it is impossible to be only inductive or deductive.

So, I tried to follow the six steps method of Braun and Clarke. My first step was to transcribe the two interviews and then translate them from Greek to English. I also re-read the transcripts many times in order to get familiar with the data and start thinking about possible meanings of those data. Then my second step was to try to generate initial codes by the two interviews separately. Although codes can provide features of the data that are related to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2012), since I only had two interviews I tried to code almost all the lines of the transcripts that were addressing the process of the reflecting dialogues between therapists in order to be able to grasp then any latent meanings that could arise from the codes and would relate to my research questions.

During the third step I copied and paste all the codes from each interview separately in two-word processing files. Then I reviewed them and either I deleted or clustered some of them in order to generate any themes or subthemes. Afterwards I made two excel documents, one for each interview, with the name of the theme, the codes that belong to each theme, and the extracts that were corresponding to the code.

The fourth step was to review the themes I have generated from the two interviews in order to check if there were meaningful and enough data to support those themes and if I could find any common themes, or new themes that would link the data from the two interviews. However, my priority was to try to see in what extent the data of those themes could tell me a story or something meaningful related to my research questions. Particularly concerning the research question “What went through your mind there” I did not manage to collect any rich data about the content of the inner dialogues of the clients during the reflecting process.

Concerning the last two steps, after I collapsed a number of potential themes, I defined my new themes that I tried to represent more or less views of both participants. So I made a final excel with the

themes/subthemes, their extracts and their codes. In the case that a theme was representing solely one participant it was supported by strong enough data and was important for the overall story of the data produced. By analyzing extracts that were corresponding to those themes I tried to interpret them and create some meanings or perhaps a coherent story that those data could tell.

Results

1) Feeling understood by therapists during reflecting team process.

The feeling of being understood by therapists during their reflective dialogues was a theme that emerged mainly from the data of wife's interview although there is also one referral of husband concerning this theme. Particularly it seemed that this feeling of being understood by therapists during their reflective dialogues was helping the wife and was making her feel happy. This can be seen in the following extracts.

1) Wife: «Many times it helps me because they do understand what I am saying and they made this easier to me, and this is helping me to»

2) Wife: “And I feel, when you asked me how I feel..an internal pleasure that I feel understood when I am talking”

3) Wife: “They did not make me feel that it is difficult for them to understand me”

However, another important issue seems to be the expression of this understanding. In other words, it is not enough for the therapists to show understanding during their reflecting dialogues but it is also essential to make this understanding come out and pass it to patients.

Wife: «They understand me what I am talking about and they express it to me, they make it come out»

Although wife did not analyze and I did not ask her more about the meaning of this understanding there is an extract where she is saying that it is helpful when therapist can understand the meaning of some little words. Perhaps by saying this she means that therapists do understand the latent or covered meaning of those words that perhaps is difficult to be expressed.

Wife: their ability to catch the meaning of some little words, it was helping me

There are plenty of other extracts that wife mentions that she felt understood by therapists during the

reflective dialogues of therapists. However, it can be implied that wife considered that by understanding her during the reflecting team process, therapists were taking her side since they were saying things that were expressing and representing her side and that husband was unable to understand.

Wife: "This is what I previously told you that they understand me, what I am talking about and they express it to me, they make it come out. They say it. If you listened to what he (the husband) said, he said "is this 100 euros that would save your life"? Me, at this moment I wished G (her husband) would have said to me what the girls said, in order not to reach this point of disturbance that I try to convince him"

Wife: "G (husband's) reaction is the same he is having at his home. I was not expecting something special and girls again understood what I wanted to say although G (the husband) look back again and did not manage to understand it"

Wife: So I have the picture of girls who are saying what they said and me being in the house and talking with G and saying to him approximately the same things that girls were saying and G saying back to me "No you did not understand it correctly". This is the body language that I am talking about, the pencil that I am beating".

There is also one extract that wife is interrupting the reflective dialogues of therapists because she thinks that her husband might first intervene and tell her that she is not right.

Interviewer: "And you asked to interrupt"

Wife: «Yes in order to make them understand even more what I wanted to say"

Interviewer: But why at this point? Why when they are discussing if mr G agrees, it is when you are asking to interrupt?

Wife: Because I knew that G (husband) could just say something like "It is not like what you are talking about". Not to the girls but to me.

By interrupting, wife is aiming to make therapist to better understand her points of view and perhaps this is showing how important is for her to feel understood by therapists. However, there is also resulting the question how she would react if she was perceiving that during reflecting process therapists do also understand her husband's different point of views?

Concerning husband's side, he is referring only once to therapists understanding during their reflective dialogues. However it is interesting because he did not seem to feel less understood compared to his wife instead he stated that he liked that therapists can understand his and his wife's psychology and that this understanding can be enough even if there are no questions by therapists during the reflecting team process.

Husband: "I like it because, ok I am not saying 100% but for a 90% they do understand us. They understand our psychology and they are not seeking for answers"

So, husband argues that therapists manage to understand both of them and that this understanding that appears during their reflecting team process can be enough even in cases that therapists do not pose questions to them during this process.

2)Intervening or taking a distance during the reflecting team process

The way that the couple was taking a distance or not during the reflecting team process was a theme that came up again more by wife's but also from the husband's side. However, their stances differed a lot since from one hand wife seemed to struggle to take a distance and was often intervening during the process and from another hand husband seemed to enjoy taking a distance during the whole process and listening to therapists talking during their reflective dialogues.

2a) Interventions during the reflecting team process because of feeling or not feeling understood:

One sub-theme that was emerged by the data was that the feeling of getting or not getting understood seemed to play a role and was making the wife to intervene and comment during the reflecting team process. As she stated during our interview:

Wife: "I have done this (means interrupting the reflecting team process) many times. Either for positive reasons or for negative reasons. For instance, I might say to girls "You know what, you did not understand this correctly". Your answer does not suit me, take my response and I can say that to T1, T2, (therapist 1 or therapist 2) or G (the husband) if we are together in the therapy"

There are extracts that wife explains her interventions during the reflecting team process because of her sense that she was not understood by therapists or because something strange might have been told.

Wife: "Because I want to get free (when I am annoyed because I feel that I am absent)..I want to speak,

to say "No, it is not like this"

Wife: "If there was something strange (during the reflecting team process) I would talk. Hoop, you did not understand this correctly."

However, as it was already mentioned it makes sense that even in cases that wife was feeling understood by therapists, she was commenting in order to express her agreement or to help therapists understand more.

"Yes (I interrupted them) in order to make them understand even more what I wanted to say"

However, as it was mentioned above, in this specific extract wife says that she is interrupting in order to make therapists understand her more because she is concerned that perhaps her husband is going to comment and intervene into the process. So possibly the need to be more understood by therapists compared to her husband was a factor that influenced her to intervene during this reflective part.

Interviewer: "And you asked to interrupt"

Wife: "Yes in order to make them understand even more what I wanted to say"

Interviewer: But why at this point? Why when they are talking concerning if mr G agrees, it is when you are asking to interrupt?

Wife: Because I knew that G (husband) could just say something like "It is not like what you are talking about". Not to the girls but to me

2b) Interventions of wife during the reflecting team process because of the intensity of her feelings:

The intensity of wife's body feelings was another sub-theme that emerged and seemed also to play a role to wife's interventions during the reflective dialogues of therapists. In the first two reflective dialogues between therapists, wife is commenting and intervening in the reflecting team process

T1: I am trying to understand about what they disagree? "The one is saying, "I like this job, this job is very precious for me right now. Good. I am going to decide on my own way, when I want to" On the other hand miss R (wife) is saying "My husband, has skills, he is good at his job but he is not demanding things. And I am getting confused to understand what is the thing that he is not demanding.

R:His labor. His effort

T2: This is double, because as I understand miss R (wife) is saying that he (husband) will have more money

T1: And better self-esteem

T2: and better self-esteem but he (husband) is afraid that if he asks for more he might lose his job

R: Yes right

However, those interventions was something that I did not grasp it in order to discuss and comment it with her. However, it is interesting that during our interview for those two parts of reflective dialogues, wife mentions that she is dealing with feelings of nervousness and small disturbance because of the content of therapist's reflections. Particularly wife replies to me that she feels "a small disturbance, a small nervousness "in her body because of the content of those two reflective parts.

In another part of reflective dialogues between therapists wife is intervening again so in this case I am trying to gain some further information about her tendency to intervene and comment during the reflecting team process. Wife mentions that she is experiencing again tension during those reflecting dialogues of therapists because it is coming to her mind the image of her husband staying at home and she wants to remove this image. "*I wanted to remove it, to take it off me*". Then she adds that "*If there is something that is bringing tension to me, that makes me mad, when I want to pass them this info, I am going to interrupt them*"

She is also referring to her difficulty to contain her feelings and wait therapists to finish their reflections "*I do not know. The more possible is that I could not accept this (containing the feeling). I would intervene*". So, it seems that the intensity of the feelings developed during the reflective dialogues of therapists was one element that wife could not easily control and could make her to intervene during the process.

When I asked her if it is helpful for her that during the reflecting team process, she can take a distance from the process although she is present during the dialogue she interrupted me and she replied to me that she feels absent.

Interviewer: is it this helpful for you that "I sit down, I take a distance, I am present

Wife: But almost absent

Interviewer: Almost absent. Absent and present in the same time. And what I would like to ask you, is it helpful? Is it

Wife: It is annoying for me

Since wife intervened many times during the reflective dialogues of therapists, this feeling of absence that she is mentioning could be related to her need to be more actively included into the process and to be able to raise her voice if she wanted to. *"I want at least girls to talk about me but not without me. To be able when I want to pass something to them"* Particularly wife argues a lot about her need to comment and have an opinion during the reflections of therapists. *"I want me to be able, when I want to pass something to them"*. *"I want me to talk about myself"*. Somehow by those comments it is like the wife is asking to be more included into the reflecting team process and not to let others to talk about her while she is present. So perhaps in some cases wife is experiencing this feeling of exclusion that makes her to intervene and raise her voice.

2c) Taking a distance during the reflecting team process: Concerning the husband, as it was mentioned before, he takes a distance and is fine with listening to the dialogues of therapist, even for hours, and does not want to intervene during the process. Perhaps this spatial separateness and the "looking elsewhere" of therapists that Andersen has talked about, helped him to feel relaxed and take this distance.

Husband: "Personally I do not mind. I sit here and I am listening"

Husband: "I am not feeling when they talk to each other like asking my wife "What are they talking about"

Husband: "I can stay for hours listening to them"

It seems that during those reflecting dialogues there are cases that husband is actively trying to understand those dialogues *"When they talk to each other I am trying to understand"*, *"I am trying to understand how they mean this"* and other cases that he is taking a distance and does not listen *"I am in my own world"*. However, there were not any cases that husband tried to intervene during those reflective dialogues like his wife did apart from one extract that husband mentions that he would intervene during the process if he would listen something he would not like it. *"But if there was something that I would*

not like it, I would say it.

On the other hand, as it was mentioned before there were cases that this spatial separateness made the wife feel excluded and not taken into consideration.

Interviewer: is it this helpful for you that I sit down, I take a distance, I am present

Wife: But almost absent

3) Openness of the reflecting team process

The openness of the therapists during their reflections was another theme that emerged and seemed to be an element that both husband and wife appreciated. Both husband and wife agreed that they like that during those dialogues therapists are open and do not keep secrets.

“It is happening in front of me”

“I like that we talk like this (in an open way)

“Personally I feel this (that when girls they have to say something they say it).

The importance of the openness of the reflecting team process seems to be related to the concern of wife that therapists might comment her behind her back when she leaves the session. It is also related to a concern of wife about what therapists think of her and if she made a good or bad impression to them. The fact that therapists are open during their reflections and do not keep secrets seems to be relieving for the wife in order not to be occupied if she did a good or a bad impression since everything is expressed during the reflecting team process and therapists keep no secrets.

“It is not the secret that I am going to leave from here and discuss about this afterwards. It would affect me more when I leave the session if I had to think what was the impression I made to girls. The impression of a good or a bad person”

Wife also offers a metaphor of the reflecting team process as a company of friends where some of them decide to talk about another subject and talk between each other *“And this is like we are a company and we changed the subject of conversation and we talk to each other”*. However, the important thing is that although the subject of the conversation changes, this change is happening in front of the other friends.

Husband's side is also focusing to the openness of the reflecting team process as well as to the fact that

therapists are open and do not keep secrets into their minds.

“But the thing is that here, we talk about everything, this is a good thing”

“Personally, I feel this that when “girls” they have to say something they say it”

“We are open to everything we talk, and I like that we talk like this”

3a) Right to share different ideas during the reflecting process: One theme that was first generated was that therapists were sharing different ideas during the reflecting team process and was highlighted by husband. However, it seemed to me that this theme fit more as one sub-theme of the openness of the reflecting process since it is this openness that entitles diversity of ideas among therapists and clients. Particularly husband seems to accept and respect that therapists might have different ideas during reflecting team process. *“If girls think differently it is ok”* . He also feels free to disagree and express another opinion if he wants to *“If there is a case (that I need) to disagree of course I do not mind”*.

In addition, it makes sense how husbands describes the cooperation between therapists during their reflections:

“They are going to ask each other for example: How do you see what mr G (husband) said about this topic? What do you think? How do you feel”? And M (therapist2) is saying for instance I see this in this way.”.

“For instance, therapists say to each other. I see this in this way, can you tell me your opinion”

So the reflecting team process is described as a process that is open since therapists feel “legitimized” between each other to ask each-other’s opinion in a democratic and open way. Therapists have the right to see things in different ways and have different opinions. However, the husband used an interesting metaphor and claimed that therapists do not say “their long and short” during the reflecting team process.

“Yes because they turn to each other, but they do not say their long and their short, they sit down and communicate”

This metaphor “say my long and short” is referring to people when one person is saying one thing and the other person another thing that is totally different. It is argued then that therapists can share different opinions during their reflections under the condition that they sit down and communicate meaning

perhaps that they need to listen instead of ignoring each other's opinion even if they are different, because by listening to this diversity they can co-construct new realities during reflecting team process .

However, this sharing of different ideas during reflections that the two therapists were doing, maybe also entails some risks such as not feeling understood by therapist. In this small research wife tended to intervene when she was not feeling understood so perhaps therapists need to be cautious and reflect in what extent this diversity of opinions might make client feeling confused and less understood and in case that this is happening, how it can be negotiated during therapy.

Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how clients experienced the reflective dialogues of therapists. and how those experiences could link to any elements of this process that can be helpful or not helpful. The experience of this couple about the reflecting team process of therapists was a positive one. Both husband and wife agreed that this process was helpful and there was some agreement about some elements of the process that were helpful for both them. However, they also shared different ideas about the elements of the process that they might have found as helpful or not.

Feeling understood by the therapist during the reflecting team process was one element that was mainly highlighted by the wife but was also mentioned by the husband. This understanding during the reflections made the wife to feel enjoyment and that she is getting help. It also seemed important that therapists needed to express and make this understanding come out perhaps by understanding covered meanings that are hidden inside little words. However, it arises the question, if this understanding is one sided and is addressing solely the one of two spouses what affect this could have to the other spouse? Concerning this couple, the wife was feeling that therapists do understand that she is right concerning the arguments she was having with her husband however husband was not feeling like this and was also feeling understood although he did not highlight this factor too much. Therefore, understanding during reflecting team process seemed to be a supportive element however therapists need to be alerted how this understanding might be interpreted by clients and what impact might have into their relationship if it is not felt by both of them. Concerning this couple, it seemed that therapists managed to be neutral and show understanding to both of them although wife was perceiving that therapists could better understand her points of view.

Another interesting element that arose was the tendency of wife to intervene, and of husband to take a distance during the reflecting team process of therapists. Regarding the wife, the element of understanding continued to play an important role and was linked to her interventions, as there were many times that she intervened during the reflecting team process because of feeling not understood by therapists. However, there were also cases that she interrupted the process because she wanted to help therapists understand her more.

The intensity of wife's emotions seemed to be another element that could make her to intervene during the reflecting team process. This might imply that the reflecting team process can generate feelings that perhaps is difficult for clients to carry and maybe this is something that therapists who are following this kind of process should be aware of, as this could open space about difficult topics and emotions that is difficult to touch.

There were also cases that the spatial separateness that Andersen talked about made wife to intervene since she was feeling absent and excluded from the process. Perhaps this is also an element that therapists should think about, meaning that while adopting an external position during the reflecting team process, in the same they should reflect on the impact this might have to clients and how perhaps they can adopt an external position without excluding their clients from the whole process. Andersen has argued that the spatial separateness that comes from the reflecting team process offers the chance to clients to take a distance and have their inner dialogues however there might also be the possibility that clients might be feeling excluded from the process and this is a factor that therapists need to take into consideration. On the other hand in this small study husband experienced this spatial separateness with enjoyment as he could take a distance and reflect on therapist's discussion or get lost and thinking nothing.

Finally, the openness of the reflecting team process was an element that was highly appreciated by the couple and it was related with the genuineness of therapists who choose to share their thoughts in front of their clients without keeping secrets. Perhaps it is because of this openness of the reflecting team process that is created space where therapists can cooperate and listen to each other although they have different points of view. However, this diversity of ideas between therapists during their reflections does not mean that there should not be any link and connection between those different ideas. Therefore, it seems crucial that even though therapists might share different ideas it is important to be able to cooperate by listening and respecting each other's opinion.

There were several limitations of this study. First of all, it was a small research project, the sample was small and the data were not analyzed by a second researcher, except from me, in order to increase the credibility of the results. Therefore, results and conclusions cannot be generalized however they can open space for reflection and possible new research projects related to reflecting team process.

References

- Andersen, T. *The Reflecting Team: Dialogues and Dialogues About the Dialogues*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Andersen, T. "Reflections on Reflecting with Families." In S. McNamee and K. J. Gergen (eds.), *Therapy in Social Construction*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1992.
- Anderson, H. and Hoffman, L. (2007) Memories of Tom David Andersen: friend, colleague, scholar, inspirer, and rhizome. *Family Process*, 46:571–574
- Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Rober, P. (2005). Family therapy as a dialogue of living persons: A perspective inspired by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Shotter. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31(4), 385-397
- Bateson, 1970 in Dell, P. E (1985). Understanding Bateson and Maturana: Toward a bio-logical foundation for the social sciences. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, II, 1-20
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012) Thematic analysis. In Cooper, H. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Brownlee, K., Vis, J., & McKenna, A. (2009). Review of the reflecting team process: Strengths, challenges, and clinical implications. *The Family Journal*, 17, 139-145.
- Fishel, A. K., Ablon, S., McSheffrey, C., & Buchs, T. (2005). What do couples find most helpful about the reflecting team? *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 4, 23-37
- Garrido-Fernaandez, M., Jaen-Rincon, P., & Garcia-Martinez, J. (2011). Evaluating a reflecting team

couples approach to problem gambling. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 24, 1–29

Gehart, D. R. (2018). The legacy of Tom Andersen: The ethics of reflecting processes. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(3), 386-392

Griffith et al. (1992) in Pender, R. L., & Stinchfield, T. A. (2012). A reflective look at reflecting teams. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 20, 117–122.

Hoffman, L (2002) in Gehart, D. R. (2018). The legacy of Tom Andersen: The ethics of reflecting processes. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 44(3), 386-392

Höger, C., Temme, M., Reiter, L., & Steiner, E. (1994). The reflecting team approach: Convergent results of two exploratory studies. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 22, 219-238.

Larsen, D., Flesaker, K., & Stege, R. (2008). Qualitative interviewing using interpersonal process recall: Investigating internal experiences during professional-client conversations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1), 18–37

Lidbom, P.A., Bøe, T.D., Kristoffersen, K., Ulland, D., & Seikkula, J. (2014). A study of a network meeting: Exploring the interplay between inner and outer dialogues in significant and meaningful moments. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 35(2), 136–149.

Pender, R. L., & Stinchfield, T. A. (2012). A reflective look at reflecting teams. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 20, 117–122.

Pender, R. L., & Stinchfield, T. (2014). Making meaning a couple's perspective of the reflecting team process. *The Family Journal*, 22, 3, 273-281.

Rober, (1999). The therapist's inner conversation: Some ideas about the self of the therapist, therapeutic impasse and the process of reflection. *Family Process*, 38, 209-228. In Rober, P. (2008). The therapist's inner conversation in family therapy practice: Struggling with the complexities of therapeutic encounters with families. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, 7(4), 245-278

Rober, P. (2004). The client's nonverbal utterances, creative understanding and the therapist's inner conversation. In T. Strong & D. Pare (Eds.), *Furthering talk: Advances in the discursive therapies* (pp. 109–123). New York: Kluwer/Plenum Publishers.

- Rober, P. (2005). Family therapy as a dialogue of living persons: A perspective inspired by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Shotter. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31(4), 385-397
- Rober, P., Elliot, R., Buysse, A., Loots, G., & De Korte, K. (2008). Positioning in the therapist's inner conversation: A dialogical model based on a grounded theory analysis of therapist reflections. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 34, 406-421
- Rober, P. (2010). The therapist's experiencing in family therapy practice. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 33(3), 233-255
- Seikkula, J. (2008). Inner and outer voices in the present moment of family and network therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(4), 478-491
- Seikkula, J. (2011). Becoming Dialogical: Psychotherapy or a Way of Life. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 32(3), 179-193
- Seikkula, J., Laitila, A., & Rober, P. (2012). Making sense of multi-actor dialogues in family therapy and network meeting. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(4), 667-687.
- Smith, T. E., Sells, S. P. and Clevenger, T., (1994) Ethnographic content analysis of couple and therapist perceptions in a reflecting team setting, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 20, 267-286.
- Shotter, J. (2007). Not to forget Tom Andersen's way of being Tom Andersen: The importance of what 'just happens' to us. *Human Systems*, 18, 15-28

