Author's response to reviews

Title: A Lacanian view on Balint group meetings: a qualitative analysis of two case presentations

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Version: 2 Date: 15 February 2014

Author's response to reviews: see over
Cover letter revisions

In the following part, we address the questions and suggestions provided by the reviewers. We thank the reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions.

Referee 1: Elizabeth Cottrell

MINOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS
1. Although the purpose of this article becomes clear upon reading it, when the aim of the work is given in the paper, only what was done is described but not why. To me it seems that the work was done in order to illustrate the value of Balint groups and explain how the benefit is achieved. I think a few words expressing this intent (or whatever the intent of the authors was) would enhance the background section in the abstract and the final sentence of the main paper background immediately before the subsection "Lacan's theory on imaginary and symbolic relating to the other"
We now made this more explicit by adding that this study aimed at examining the potential benefit of Balint group work.

2. There is an apostrophe missing from the data analysis section after "challenging presenter's expression"
It was added.

3. Case 1 verbatim quote should be anonymised in the same way as the case 2 one is - I do not think that "Algerian" needs to be stated to assist the case
This was already anonymized (it was not the patient’s real origin), but it is now left out. It is true that this information is not important for what follows.

4. Case 1 6th paragraph I think there is a typo "Other group interventions addressed another mode of one-dimensional thinking in the presenter's discourse..." should be "Other group interventions addressed another mode of one-dimensional thinking..."
This was rephrased.

5. There is a typo 2nd paragraph of discussion "Focusing on this dynamics..." should be "Focusing on these dynamics..."
It was corrected.

6. Final paragraph in discussion "Although both cases follow in a longitudinal design (one year), they were analysed as isolated sessions." I am not quite sure how this fits with the described methods or even description of the case itself – it seemed from the case that the observer saw the primary description of the case and follow up "updates" of the case in future observations. This could be made clearer in the description of the observation in the methods. I don’t really see how, in the analysis, the cases were analysed as isolated sessions - this is not the impression given in the discussion of the cases. So please have a look at the wording of this limitation and the methods and descriptions of the cases to make sure this is all consistent.
We meant that we only analyzed the presenter’s discourse used during the presentation, discussion and indeed the follow up the next month. Since we have much more data at our disposal (reaching over 1 year and not just 2 subsequent months), it could be interesting to analyze the presenter’s discourse over a year (over several case presentations and interactions during other participants’ presentations). We now adapted the phrasing.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS
1. In the method section of the abstract it states "(originating from the observation of four Balint groups)" - I had interpreted this as the researcher had only observed 4 meetings and was shocked that this had included 68 cases- I think it would be clearer to re-word as "(originating from the observation of meetings among four Balint groups)" or similar
   This was rephrased in the abstract.

2. I think that the description of the "procedure" under methods of the main paper is slightly confusing because of the description of the main and secondary study being split up. I would suggest putting "All meetings that took place between September 2011 and June 2012 were audiotaped (33 meetings (68 case discussions))." after the sentence ending "...15 month period (April 2011 – June 2012)." and then removing the first sentence of the second paragraph under "procedure" so that this paragraph starts with "Following each meeting...". Then later through that paragraph, I suggest changing "...two case presentations were selected from the larger dataset and transcribed verbatim" to "...two case presentations were selected from those that had been audiotaped and were transcribed verbatim".
   This was adapted.

3. I wonder if in the second paragraph under "procedure" the addition of "identification of" before "a marked change" would be better. At the end of this paragraph I think "A closer analysis of this change was indicated" is not necessary.
   We esteemed that the addition of "identification of" makes this sentence unnecessary heavy, so we decided to rephrase this sentence completely.
   We removed "A closer analysis of this change was indicated".

4. I would suggest that under "participants and sample" the sentence "As outlined before, two Balint case presentations..." is superfluous and can be removed.
   It was removed.

5. For clarity it would be useful to put "(case 1)" and "(case 2)" after the descriptions of the GP presenters’ ages in the "Participants and sample" section.
   It was adapted.

6. Under "data analysis" when describing the first part it states that "transcripts were subdivided into fragments, each covering a different idea" were these ideas predefined or iterative? May be worth clarifying.
   It is now clarified that this part of the data analysis consisted of inductive coding.
7. I think the data analysis section can be strengthened by giving more explanation about how the first phase links with the second e.g. it describes "Recurring themes and patterns that appeared in the discussions..." are these the same themes that arose during phase one or new themes? I wonder whether a flow diagram or other type of diagram may assist readers to understand how the first and second phases are related.

We rephrased this part of the data-analysis in order to make the procedure followed more clear.

8. I think that the use of the terms related to Lacan's theory need to be explicitly related to the context being described e.g. under "Data analysis" the term "other" at the end of the sentence "On the one hand, it was guided by continual reflection on the position each presenter is speaking from and the position that is attributed to the other" - and in paragraph 6 under case 1 - what/whom is being described as "the other"? Would be useful to give this information in brackets after the term.

In our research team we discussed the suggestion to repeat Lacanian concepts in the data-analysis part, but we decided that this is not really necessary (since the concepts are discussed in the theoretical part) and that this would add duplications to the text (which was one of the comments of the other reviewer). We now made more clear what is meant with 'the other' by adding information between brackets.

9. First paragraph of Case 1 - the meaning of "I am dismissed" becomes clear at the end of the discussion of the case but here it makes little sense to the reader...I think the contents of the brackets found in the final paragraph of case 1 "(the patient had 'dismissed' the GP)" should be moved to the first paragraph and even a couple more words about what this means should be added as it is an unusual term and concept for a GP to be 'dismissed'. This would clear up a later confusion I had which was what is meant by a "therapeutic rupture" but this is clear once the outcome of the case is known.

We now added that it was only later in the discussion that the meaning of this statement became clear to the other group members, while at the same time adding the meaning between brackets (i.e., the patient had dismissed her).

10. After the verbatim quote in Case 1 I think that just 1-2 sentences outlining how the case panned out over time would be really helpful to set the rest of the discussion about the case in context. For example, the comment "I could have avoided being taken in by that inextricable situation" makes more sense by the end of the case than it does at the point it is given.

We discussed this in our research team and think that it is difficult to summarize the case discussion in just 1 or 2 sentences. Expounding one by one the crucial elements of the following discussion is what the results part is about.

11. In case 1, 4th paragraph starting "After a while..." I think that putting an example of a working question towards the group "(e.g. ....)" would be really helpful.

We rephrased this part of the text in order to make it more clear.

12. Final paragraph of case 1 it states "I thought I was vaccinated" - this is a very strange term to use - I am not sure if this is what is intended or if it is more a comment on feeling "immune" to emotion about it - perhaps worth looking at again if it has been translated from one language into English.
Indeed, this may be a translation difficulty.
We now changed “vaccinated” into “immune”.

13. 5th paragraph of Case 2 and second paragraph of the discussion - I am not convinced that "irritation to compassion" is the same thing as "hate to love" - although I understand this is what fits with the theoretical model. I am 'happy' to accept that the change from "irritation to compassion" can be likened to a conversion from hate to love but I do not think it can be described as the same - perhaps this could be reworded.
We removed the comparison and focused on the idea that we wanted to put central (the shift from irritation to compassion).

14. End of 5th paragraph of case 2 - it states "ambivalent" subject position - I am feel that what is being described is a contradictory position rather than an ambivalent one...perhaps consider rewording.
We now reworded this into “this subject position, that acknowledges the ambivalence she is confronted with”.

15. The final sentence of the penultimate paragraph of the discussion "...to set fixed or blocked perspectives on certain situations into motion." requires quite a bit of re-reading to be clear about what is being said - perhaps this can be reworded for clarity.
It is rephrased now into “to open up the range of perspectives from which the situation can be viewed”.

Referee 1: Avril Danczak
1)The title reflects the content accurately and is clearly defined.
Ok

2)The method is appropriate and is partly defined; the sampling method for the "random" case could be defined more clearly, I think there could be more clarity about the nature of the analytic method used in analyzing the transcribed discussions. How were the texts analyzed exactly? This needs to be stated..
We added more information on the selection of the cases (see also under remark 3)) and about the way the data were analyzed (especially about the first phase of the analysis, since this was not clear to the other reviewer either). See under ‘data-analysis’.

3)The data appear sound, although could be triangulated with a participant or animator from the group and with the presenters whose cases were discussed.
The data were triangulated in one way by means of discussions with the members of the research team. We agree that another way of triangulating the data consists of approaching the participants of the study in order to gain feedback on the data analysis. However, it was not the intention of this study to present and discuss our results with the participants (nor was this ever mentioned to the participants). Therefore, after reflection among the research team, this was felt inappropriate. We then reflected on presenting our results to external Balint group experts, but given time restrictions
(in addition to the length of the article and the extensive transcripts) it was not possible to find experts in such a short time delay. However, in future research, we will consider including this type of triangulation as well.

The limitation of only verbal information used is clear; the limitation that only two out of a potential 87 case discussions are analysed is an important limitation on the results which could be more explicity acknowledged. Are these cases in any way to be considered "typical"? The report could have been strengthened by analysing more than two cases. Reasons for limiting this need to be identified

We now made clear in the methods section that “Both cases were considered typical and thus representative for the majority of the observed meetings. Moreover, the second case was considered highly instructive due to the marked change in the presenter’s discourse during the case discussion as well as the remarkably positive case follow-up.

In the discussion of the limitations we stated that “Because of our intention to analyze sessions on a detailed level, we were restricted to discussing only two cases. Nevertheless, examining more case presentations or studying group members’ change in discourse across several consecutive sessions (or even over several years of participation) could facilitate further understanding of the type of change members go through.”

The content of the paper is interesting to anyone who has attended a Balint Group.

4) The writing is at times somewhat repetitive and verbose and could be made much more concise. This would aid intelligibility greatly, especially for a GP audience. The writing needs a general editorial tidy up to reduce duplication and make the language clearer

We examined the text carefully in order to reduce duplication and to make the language clearer. Several sentences were rephrased; duplications were identified and removed. We believe the text is now more fluent now.

5) Most GPs will be familiar with Balint; few will have heard of Lacan or be in anyway familiar with how his work fits into modern psychotherapeutic understanding. This paper could be more useful to GPs if there was a small section explaining how Lacanian ideas work. Alternatively, the principal idea, that the Balint discussion offers new perspectives and changes participants ways of looking at things, could be demonstrated without specific reference to a Lacanian framework.

We now added a introductory phrase that situates Jacques Lacan’s work.