Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 5 January 2014

Reviewer: Elizabeth Cottrell

Reviewer’s report:

I read this paper with great interest as it has really highlighted the value of Balint groups for GPs. It is well written and generally easy to understand. It is of broad interest, potentially to any GP, as it clearly describes how individuals can be assisted to manage situations they find difficult.

Major compulsory revisions
None

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"

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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".

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.

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

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

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.

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.
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.

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.

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

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

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.

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

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.

Level of interest:An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English:Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review:No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests