'Let's check-in with our tummies': Orienting to feelings talk in group supervision for psychotherapy counsellors

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ABSTRACT

This article examines a particular kind of business-opening activity found in a specific, and little analysed, type of institutional group meeting: group supervision for psychotherapeutic counsellors. The data consist of a particular set of activities that occur in the initial stages of these meetings, that are neither the kind of pre-meeting talk identified by previous research on interaction in meetings, nor specifically the business of group supervision itself. This phase, referred to as the 'check-in', functions as an interim stage between small talk and getting down to business. The analysis shows how the check-in comprises a highly structured set of linguistic sequences whose production is bound up with one of the key interactional features of group supervision: the collaborative orientation to the production and relevance of 'feelings-talk'.

KEYWORDS

Conversation analysis, counselling, psychotherapy, meeting talk, group supervision

Introduction

As a range of research has shown, group meetings in institutional or organisational contexts are interactional events with a number of specific features (Goffman, 1963; Turner, 1972; Atkinson et al., 1978; Boden, 1994; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Neilson, 2013). In particular, such events are characterised by an oriented-to episodic structure throughout. Within that structure, much attention has been given to the processes involved in beginning

the activity the group has undertaken to meet for; colloquially phrased as 'getting down to business'. For example Goffman (1963: 210) described how a public occasion defined as a 'meeting' may exhibit 'a standard type of involvement contour' that begins with 'muttering and milling, move[s] on to the formal official proceedings, and then terminate[s] in another loosely defined period'. Atkinson et al (1978) similarly noted the diffuse group chatter before a 'call to summons', differentiated from the recognisably engaged and collaborative talk of all parties to talk 'in a meeting'; while Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997) outlined the transitional moves between the 'opening', 'debating' and 'closing' phases of a meeting.

Nevertheless, as Turner (1972) suggested, the opening phases of a group meeting can be sensitive to both the context and type of business at hand. Turner's study of group therapy talk identified how pre-therapy talk is sometimes closed with an extended silence and what is subsequently constituted by the group as 'therapy talk' is unaccompanied by any announcement or specific calling to order. In the silence, it seems, the group begins collectively to orient to the singular focus of the meeting. The silence is constituted by the participants as the boundary of the opening into the matter at hand.

In this article we examine a particular kind of business-opening activity found in a specific, and little analysed type of institutional group meeting: group supervision for psychotherapeutic counsellors. In these meetings, small numbers of practising counsellors, usually four or five, meet with a more senior counsellor to discuss their ongoing work with clients, examine and explore their approach to client concerns, and discuss with the supervisor their professional practice development (Proctor and Inskipp, 2001; Wheeler and Richards, 2007; Ögren and Sundin, 2009; Bernard and Goodyear, 2010). These meetings are different from the kind of group therapy discussed by Turner (1972) in that there is a distinctively hierarchical organisation in which, as we will show, the supervisor is in control of the overall structure, purpose and running order of the meeting. They are also different from psychotherapeutic counselling meetings themselves (Peräkylä, 1995; Peräkylä et al., 2008; Silverman, 1996) in that they contain talk *about* counselling which has the possibility, through the counsellors' interpretations and reflections on the discussion with the supervisor, to feed into future counselling sessions.

Our analysis focuses on a particular set of activities that occur in the initial stages of group supervision in our data, that are neither the kind of pre-meeting talk identified by those researchers above, nor specifically the business of group supervision itself. Rather, this phase in the meetings, which we (following the supervisors themselves) refer to as the 'check-in', functions as an interim stage between small talk and getting down to business. Nevertheless, the check-in comprises a highly structured set of linguistic sequences whose production is bound up with one of the key interactional features of group supervision: the collaborative orientation to the production and relevance of 'feelings-talk' (Hutchby, 2007).

Data

The data comprise audio recordings of group supervision sessions taking place as part of the work of a city-based practice offering counselling and psychotherapeutic services to adult members of the public. These data were collected as part of a larger research project intended to investigate aspects of counselling practice, process and outcomes, including recordings of 35 complete client cases, associated counselling outcomes data using the CORE-NET system (Mellor-Clark and Barkham, 2012), and the group supervision meetings routinely attended by counselling practitioners. All data were collected with fully informed consent and stored in a secure digital format with a research-usable life of up to 10 years.

For present purposes our interest is solely in the group supervision sessions attended on a regular basis by counsellors throughout the project. Although, in general, individual supervision is practised more often than group supervision (Hawkins and Shohet, 2012: 177), much clinical supervision is conducted in a group format. Group supervision happens when

Three or more people form a fixed membership group and have planned, regular meetings in which each person gets the chance for in-depth reflection on their own practice and on the part they play as individuals in the complexities and quality of that practice, facilitated in that reflection by the other group members (Bond and Holland, 1998: 173).

However, as a number of researchers in this area have pointed out, more research is needed to understand the different applications of the group as a format for supervision and teaching (Proctor and Inskipp, 2001; Wheeler and Richards, 2007). In analysing in significant depth the organisation of one specific phase of group supervision, the 'check-in' (Edwards and Heshmati, 2003), we aim to contribute to this research.

The 'check-in'

As noted, the opening moments of group supervision produce, almost without fail, sequences which involve an invitation from the supervisor to the members in the group to respond to a request for a procedural 'check-in'. This is hearable as a request to the group members to focus on a meeting-specific topic; more particularly to participate in the routine enterprise of sharing with each other their current state of being. The invitation is always made by the supervisor; however in responding to the invitation, counsellors are required to use a 'next speaker self-selection' turn-transition technique (Sacks et al., 1974). As we will see, this has implications for and influences the design of the sequence.

The check-in process is a regular activity which happens in every group supervision meeting in the data except the very first meeting and one where only a single supervisee attends. This structured routine activity nevertheless has an ambiguous role in the oriented-to business of doing supervision. It always precedes the talk about clients and as such is identifiable as an opening phase in supervision meetings. However its ambiguity as a distinct organisational stage in the meeting can become clear in the concluding phase, as the transition to talking about clients occurs, with members saying, after all members have 'checked-in', such things as 'who's going to start?'.

The various components of the sequence and overall organization of the check-in phase will be described in detail below. Initially however we give particular attention to the opening turn in these sequences, produced by the supervisor as 'authorized starter'.

The opening turn is an institutionally specified form of 'how are you' request which acts to orient the participants towards the meeting as a place and occasion where moods and

feelings are prioritised, and where individual participants are expected to be reflective about their current state of well-being. In the following extract this is done comparatively overtly:

Extract 1 ((S = Supervisor))

1. S: so let's just have a brief run down about how you're
2. all feeling today

This utterance initiates a particular activity ('a brief run down'); moreover, one that will involve the group as a whole ('about how you're all') in producing some form of feelings talk ('feeling today').

However, in the majority of cases, the check-in phase is initiated in less explicit ways, as in the following extracts:

Extract 2

1. S: uh .hh let's sort of have a checkin as to where we
2. are

Extract 3

1. S: Shall we just checkin with sortov where our
2. tummies are

Extract 4

1. S: Can I just hear from you all ↑first of all >well I
2. normally start with how yuh tummy is don't I< right
3. .h let's do that how yuh tummy is and then who you want to
4. bring today

Extract 5

1. S: O:kay so: let's check in with our tummies

Although in three of these extracts (2, 3 and 5) the activity being initiated is described as a 'check-in', the nature of that activity – in other words, what the check-in is to consist of – is not specified in the same way as extract (1)'s 'how you're all feeling today'. Extract (2) simply

refers to 'where we are'; while extracts (3), (4) and (5) refer to 'our tummies' as the intended focus of the proposed check-ins.

Thus an initially striking feature of these sequence-initiating turns is that, in many cases, they are presented as topically 'open' in the sense of not directly specifying what kind of talk the request seeks to make relevant in next turn. A second feature, that we will discuss in more detail below, is that the check-in requests are sequentially open in that, in the multi-party meeting context, they do not specify a particular next speaker. Members of the group need to use a 'next speaker self-selects' transition procedure (Sacks et al., 1974); and the next self-selected speaker needs to produce a turn which is a hearably relevant response to 'let's check in with our tummies' (or its variants).

Of course, in some contexts, reference to how one is 'feeling', and in particular to how one's 'tummy' is, might be taken as an inquiry into a physical state of being: whether one is healthy or ill, for example.¹ However, as we will show, in this context the check-in request is produced and responded to as an invitation to talk about the recipient's *emotional* state of being. In that sense, the phrase 'check in with our tummies' is being deployed in a way that both orients to, and reproduces, the counselling supervision context; a point we will unpack below.

In some cases, the apparent topical openness is mitigated by the supervisor offering illustrations of the kind of feelings-talk that is being invited. In extract (6) this is done fairly overtly, as in extract (1) above, using references to 'feeling' and 'how are you':

Extract 6

1. S: uh .hh let's sort of have a checkin as to where we are
2.→ sort of °I'm not feeling well° or how are you
3.→ both↑ (0.5) one word will do↑ more if you want↑

In other examples, however, the exemplification itself can be cryptic, as in extract (7) where in addition to reference to 'your tummies', the supervisor invokes some kind of homunculus

¹ For non-native speakers of English, it might be worth clarifying that 'tummy' is an abbreviation of 'stomach'. Though usually used in interaction with children, it also appears to be commonplace in doctor-patient interaction.

('little Graham or little Olivia...where are they')² representing the inner feelings of the counsellors present:

Extract 7

1. S: just a- tell me a bit about where ya
2. where you are coming in to the today yeh >where
- 3.→ are your tummies< as I call it .hh another way of
- 4.→ saying is little Graham or little Olivia or
- 5.→ Esther where are they

In the following extract, the supervisor provides a lengthy grounding which sets out her reasons for posing the check-in question. Here, the key aspect seems to be the location within the body from which the recipients are being invited to 'check in' (arrowed lines):

Extract 8

- 1.→ S: the reason the reason I I I like to do that is
- 2.→ just that it takes us out of our heads er
3. because I mean to some degree you've got to be in
4. your head when you're in supervision .h but just
- 5.→ to sort of contact with what's going on here as
- 6.→ well .hh so. that's I'd just like to know what's
- 7.→ going on in here for everybody .hh one ↑word
8. will do (2.0) and ↓don't ↑know will do as well
9. 'if you don't know' .hh

At the arrowed lines, a contrast is set up between 'our heads' as a locus for talk produced during counselling itself, and 'in here' as the locus for talk during the check-in. Intuitively, it seems that the words 'in here' could be accompanied, in this case, by a gesture to some part of the body.³ And while 'in here' could be used, and gesturally contextualised, to refer to the head ('in the brain', 'in the mind'), we can see that in this particular case 'in here' is being used in express *contrast* to 'the head'. Thus it seems likely that the indexical 'in here' is being used to refer to the stomach, or the viscera.

² Throughout, names have been changed to protect anonymity.

³ Since our data consist of audio recordings we do not have access to this kind of non-verbal data.

In fact, this locational aspect of the feelings-talk initiated by the check-in is explicitly referenced in the following extract from a session in which check-in responses are underway, but a counsellor has become hesitant in expressing his feelings:

Extract 9 (C1, C2 etc = Counsellors in supervision group)

1. C2: um
2. (1.0)
- 3.→ S: don't use your head use your tummy
4. C2: yeh I am I guess I'm ↑something quite unsettled in
5. a funny way

In line 3, the supervisor responds to the counsellor's 'um' followed by a pause by instructing him to speak not from the 'head' (the locus of reasoning) but from the 'tummy' (the locus of feeling), to which he responds affirmatively and produces a report of feeling 'unsettled'.

There are numerous approaches, within the fields of both psychotherapy and psychiatry, for which the stomach or the viscera represent a deep site in which the most fundamental human feelings and emotions reside or are 'encoded' (for example, Reich, 1961; van der Kolk, 2015). It may or may not be that aspects of that mode of thought influence the way that check-in requests are formulated in our data. The infantilised term 'tummies' certainly functions to make the invitation less portentous than an alternative such as 'check-in with our inner state of being'. But whether through the explicit use of the term 'feeling', or the more indirect reference to the bodily location of 'tummies' for the source of a response, it is clear that check-in turns are not produced as (nor, as we will see, responded to as) invitations to talk about clients. That is, they are not designed to do the work of 'getting down to the business' of the group supervision meeting – discussing counsellors' progress with their clients. Rather, the check-in is an intermediate activity designed to elicit from counsellors talk about themselves.

The specific type of talk that the check-in elicits – that is, talk about (emotional) feelings – and the way in which that talk is both shaped by and shapes the group supervision context, are both traceable in detail through consideration of how the check-in *sequence* unfolds following the initial invitation. In what follows we outline the five key features of the

check-in sequence as it occurs in our data, and discuss how this sequence lays the ground and prepares the group for the context and milieu of their subsequent therapy supervision task.

Sequential characteristics and overall organisation of the check-in phase

The sequence is routinely organised with five features and the turns are designed to orient the discourse towards the feelings talk of therapeutic supervision. The five elements identified are as follows:

The check-in sequence

- a) the invitation
- b) a gap or silence
- c) pursuit of invitation by S
- d) individual counsellor's response
- e) the supervisor's reply, often a formulation of the previous response

The elements (b), (d), and (e) are repeated until all members of the group have spoken. This may, but not always, include the supervisor's own response to her initial invitation at the end of the round.

Extract (10) illustrates how this sequence unfolds using one particular session in which three counsellors are present along with the supervisor. Each of the elements above are indicated with lettered arrows. The first line shows the supervisor ending the previous phase of the meeting by stating an agreed date for the next meeting. The check-in occurs at line 2, and the sequence runs through three iterations involving each of the three counsellors present followed by S's own brief check-in response (lines 31-33). Finally, in the last two lines of the extract, S moves on to initiate the next phase of the meeting, counsellors' talk about their clients.

Extract 10

1. S: we've got. .hh December the 14th
2.a→ S: so just a quick checkin with how everyone's ↑feeling

3. to start with
 4.*b→* (8.0)
 5.*c→* S: no particular ↑order
 6.*(b→)* (4.0)
 7.*d→* C1: well I've just left my c- counselling bag under my desk
 8. at work so I'm feeling a bit lost .hh
 9.*e→* S: °lost° .hh and annoyed with yourself probably
 10. C1: yes it's kind of been the bane of the day
 11.*(e→)* S: oh dear
 12. C1: leaving things where I shouldn't have left them .hh
 13.*(e→)* S: okay.
 14.*b→* (7.0)
 15.*d→* C2: h mm just feeling a bit tired I's just saying my eyes
 16. feel tired er than I do
 17. S: right.
 18. C2: so I'm too long at the screen today
 19.*e→* S: tired eyes
 20.*b→* (3.0)
 21.*d→* C3: I'm feeling very: ru:shed just feeling like I'm
 22. fitting things into pockets of time all the time I
 23. just >rushing from one thing to the next< jst uhmm
 24. .hhh yeh
 25.*e→* S: something familiar about that ur is it ↑jus today
 26. C3: umm: mm that's >prbly quite familiar actually< I
 27. think I need ta. try and find some spa:ce.
 28. somewhere
 29.*(e→)* S: mmm
 30.*b→* (2.0)
 31.*d→* S: ↑okay↓ (2.0) well I'm feeling quite relieved becos I'm
 32. I have all my nervousness thinking I wasn't going to
 33. get here so .hh
 34. (2.0)
 35. S: okay um can I just double check with you all who's
 36. seeing who

As already noted, there being more than one possible respondent of the check-in turn in lines 2-3, the turn initiates a next-speaker-self-selects transition procedure. In line 4, we see that what ensues is a gap of some 8 seconds during which no such self-selection occurs. Whether this is to do with the nature of the check-in request itself – that is, with the group members attempting to work out what sort of turn they might be able to produce in response – or with a

sort of collective hesitation as each group member deliberates on whether it will be another member or they themselves that will 'go first', is unclear. However, the supervisor's next turn in line 5 acts as a pursuit of a response (Pomerantz, 1984) that clearly orients to it being not the nature of the check-in itself but hesitancy on the part of group members that provides for the silence. That is, 'no particular ↑order' acts as an instruction to the group members to embark on next-speaker self-selection.

The silence at location (b) in the sequence occurs routinely throughout the data corpus (see examples below). However only in some cases does S issue a pursuit of response. Nevertheless, when a pursuit is issued it indicates that S does not consider the check-in request itself as potentially problematic, but the willingness of group members to begin responding. Extracts (11) and (12) further illustrate this:

Extract 11

1. S: so let's just have a brief run down about how you're
2. all feeling today
- 3.→ (6.0)
- 4.→ S: no particular ↑order
5. C1: a bit rushed hh.

Extract 12

1. S: Shall we just checkin with sortov where our
2. tummies are
- 3.→ (3.0)
- 4.→ no particular order
5. C1: I'm feeling quite anxious actually

In both cases, a pursuit having been issued, one of the group members initiates a response foregrounding feelings talk of some kind.

In the following extract, the pursuit (lines 6-7) more explicitly chastises the group members for a perceived reluctance to provide the requested feelings-talk:

Extract 13

1. S: can I just hear from you all ↑first of all >well I
2. normally start with how yuh tummy is don't I< right

3. let's do that how yuh tummy is and then who you want
4. to bring today
- 5.→ (3.0)
- 6.→ you take your time to come here you've been sitting
- 7.→ here for a long time we ought tuh know how we are .hh
8. (7.0)
9. C1: I'm generally feeling quite good this week

Interestingly, in this case the first group member to respond (after a further, and longer, pause) foregrounds *positive* feelings. In the majority of cases, the feelings referred to in response to the check-in are negative or ambivalent, as shown below:

- (14) I'm not feeling too good today I've >had some bad news<
- (15) um (2.0) sortov mixed. like almost like there's a unsettlement
- (16) um I'm feeling a little bit flat
- (17) I think I feel a bit apprehensive today
- (18) I'm feeling a bit lost
- (19) I'm not really sure trying to I'm not really sure how I feel
- (20) I think I said this last time but feelin' a bit jittery again

Potentially, then, the group members orient to the check-in sequence as an environment in which not only feelings-talk, but talk about problematic feelings, is preferred. As Sacks (1975) observed, in a how-are-you sequence during ordinary conversation the preferred or non-problematic response is a non-committal one such as 'Fine'. A response which either highlights extreme positivity ('Absolutely brilliant, as a matter of fact!') or, more crucially, highlights negative feelings ('Pretty dreadful actually') serves to occasion further, and possibly not initially sought after, follow-up talk. By producing feelings-talk that generally foregrounds negative feelings or problems, therefore, group members provide for an environment in which the supervisor may, or should, produce follow-up talk. This in turn enables the check-in sequence to function as a situationally relevant exchange in which some form of pre-counselling talk is accomplished.

Feelings-talk: Response and formulation

The supervisor's turns after each (d) response are therefore an important part of the sequence, to which we now give some attention. These next-position responses (arrows e in extract 10 above) are always produced, and are always the turn of the supervisor. That is, other group members do not speak in this position. By this means, the supervisor 'does' being the primary recipient of check-in talk: group members' check-ins are produced for all group members to hear, but the hierarchical structure of this phase of the meeting is sustained both by S producing a follow-up turn, and by other members refraining from doing so.

Position (e) turns can be designed in several formats, from single-word acknowledgements to more discursive questions and summaries. However, whatever form they take, these turns generally do more interactional work than simply acknowledging a group member's check-in response. Even apparently simple acknowledgement tokens such as 'Right' or 'Okay' function in a wide range of ways according to the sequential and even topical context in which they are produced (Schegloff, 1982; Gardner, 2001; Goodwin, 1986; Jefferson, 2002). Other more interpretive utterances used in this position include formulations: turns which seek to summarise the gist or develop an upshot to the immediately preceding turn (Heritage and Watson, 1979); and pursuit turns which seek to extend the response produced by the group member. Frequently, then, the supervisor uses this position to seek expansion of the supervisees' often fairly brief offerings of feelings-talk, usually in order to do some kind of affiliation with the (as noted earlier) typically negative feelings expressed during the check-in.

The following extracts show the four main types of follow-up move used by S during a check-in sequence following an initial response from a supervisee. These are: acknowledgement tokens (arrows marked 'a'); acknowledgement-plus-affiliation tokens incorporating repetition or re-wording ('a&a'); formulations of gist or upshot ('f'); and pursuits of further information ('p'):

Extract 21

1. S: okay now I'm totally unprepared cos I've come out
2. straight out of that meeting ((clears throat)) just a

3. ((rustle of papers)) tell me a bit about where ya
4. where you are coming in to the today yeh >where
5. are your tummies< as I call it hh. another way of
5. saying is little Graham or little Olivia or
6. Esther where are they
7. (3.0)
8. C1: I think I said this last time but feelin' a bit
9. jittery again
10.a→ S: °right°
11 C1: I felt really restless this week agitated and I
12. found myself kicking my foot on what I do that-
13. but I'm just a bit which is I don't know if it's my
14. client my new client but
15.a&a→ S: right jittery agitated
16. C1: .hh yeah
17.f→ S: unsettled
18. C1: unsettled yeh
19.p→ S: and not just (.) coming in (.) ↓here
20. C1: no
21.p→ S: all week↑ (1.0) or
22. C1: mmm
23. S: it's been around you
24. C1: hmm yeah beginning of this week yeh
25.p→ S: and you could link it to which client
26. C1: my new client Abby
27.a→ S: °right°. okay↑
28. (4.0)

C1's check-in report at lines 8-9 is potentially complete: that is, as requested it reports a present feeling-state of the counsellor, 'jittery'. It is responded to with a neutral acknowledgement, a quietly spoken 'right'. However, although the acknowledgement token does not overtly request further elaboration, as we see C1 elects to expand on her report in the following turn. In this expansion, albeit somewhat haltingly, she introduces a possible reason for her 'jittery' state which has to do with a new client she has recently begun to work with.

This voluntary expansion-with-possible-reason leads the supervisor, in the following sequence (lines 15-27) to employ further and more probing or elaborative forms of response. S first offers an acknowledgement+affiliation in line 15, repeating C1's 'jittery' but then proffering an alternative descriptor, 'agitated'. In line 17 S goes further and produces a new

gist formulation, 'unsettled'. C1 immediately accepts this new formulation by repeating it with an agreement token (line 18).

At this point the check-in sequence begins to take on the shape of a mini counselling dialogue, with the supervisor doing 'active listening' (Culley and Bond, 2011). Active listening is part of the 'professional vision' of counsellors (Hutchby, 2007) through which they do the interactional work of empathy, receptivity, and so on; and in which the practice of formulation plays a central role (Hutchby, 2005).

In extract (21) S extends the sequence through the use of 'pursuits' (arrows p). These turns are used to seek further elaboration from C1 as to whether the 'unsettled' feeling pervades beyond the group supervision meeting (line 19) and across recent time (line 21); and ultimately to request details of 'which client' C1 links the feeling to (line 25). Following C1's naming of the client, S returns to a simple acknowledgement: '°right°.' The following, upward-intoned 'okay↑' marks the termination of this particular check-in sequence, and as we see a four-second pause ensues, in line with previous examples, as a next check-in respondent self-selects.

The extract below follows on from the previous extract, and shows how the combination of pursuits and formulations can be used more directly, following an initially hesitant attempt to produce a check-in:

Extract 22 (Continuation of 21)

27. S: °right°. okay↑
28. (4.0)
29.→ C2: um
30. (1.0)
31. S: don't use your head use your tummy
32. C2: yeh I am I guess I'm ↑something quite unsettled in
33. a funny way
34.a→ S: o:kay
35. (2.0)
36.p→ S: what you mean in a funny way
37. (3.0)
38. C2: I suppose my head wants to find a reason why I'm
39. unsettled but I can't so
40.a→ S: ye::a::h

41. C2: so that's why it's a funny way
 42.a→ S: yeah
 43. C2: or it's I think I can
 44.p→ S: is it familiar unsettled or
 45. C2: er
 46.p→ S: not familiar unsettled
 47. (2.0)
 48. C2: it's not a regularly familiar unsettled
 49. (2.0)
 50.a&f→ S: right so you still trying to work it out
 51. C2: mm

As remarked earlier in the analysis (re. extract 9), C2's initial hesitancy (lines 29, 30 above) results in an instruction from S to use the 'tummy', rather than the 'head': to articulate a feeling rather than a thought. In that context it is perhaps worth noting that when C2 eventually reports a feeling state he uses the same word, 'unsettled' (line 32), as S's own formulation of the previous respondent's state (extract 21, line 17).

It may be, then, that in this instance the respondent is struggling to produce something that would adequately count as a check-in, and resorts instead to mirroring a key term from the previous exchange. The fact that he then tags 'in a funny way' on to 'quite unsettled' is consequential in two respects. First, it potentially serves to mitigate any interpretation that he is simply repeating the prior respondent's feeling-state; that is, either it is 'funny' that he is feeling the same 'unsettled' state, or his own state of 'unsettled' is differentiated from the prior by being felt 'in a funny way'. Second, it provides for an opportunity to further elaborate, or be further pressed, on what 'in a funny way' might actually mean.

As we see, this pursuit of further elaboration is indeed what follows. After an acknowledgement token (line 34) and a pause (line 35), S embarks on a series of pursuit turns beginning with the interrogative 'what you mean in a funny way' (line 36). The following exchange between C2 and S seems to revolve around a version of the problematic 'head' vs 'tummy' dichotomy introduced in line 31, with C2 referring to his 'head' wanting to 'find a reason' for the unsettled feeling, and S issuing further pursuits that focus more on the feeling itself and whether it is 'familiar' or 'unfamiliar'. Finally, in line 50, S moves to producing a

formulation that acknowledges an intellectual dimension in which C2 is still trying to 'work out' what his feeling-state is.

The work that is done by the supervisor in what we have called position (e) in the check-in sequence is therefore more than simply acknowledging a group member's check-in response as an adequate contribution to the activity. The supervisor frequently uses this slot to further clarify the supervisees' responses and refine their feeling-state reports, using a range of follow-up turns such as pursuits and formulations. In this process, S attempts to exhibit her grasp of meaningful connections between the check-in response and either the work-at-hand, the supervision of counsellors' work with clients, or aspects of the supervisees' natural lives beyond the group supervision session.

Conclusion

In many types of group meeting, the organisation of interaction has been shown to conform to Goffman's idea of a 'standard involvement contour' with a three-part structure: 'muttering and milling, ...[then] the formal official proceedings, ... terminating in another loosely defined period' (Goffman, 1963: 210). But as we began by noting, this overall pattern can be shaped and in some cases varied by the nature of the business at hand (Turner, 1972). The present analysis has focused on a particular phase that occurs in the context of group supervision for psychotherapeutic counsellors; a phase that is both highly structured and ubiquitous in our data, but that conforms neither to the standard 'pre-business' types of talk, nor to the 'official business' of the meeting, which in this case is discussion of the counsellors' work with their clients.

The check-in sequence has a hybrid status in which it both precedes (and is therefore not) the meeting's official business, yet is also a piece of official business in its own right, with a distinctive hierarchical structure and a recursive turn-taking format. However the purpose of this business is not straightforward to grasp. In responding as they do to the supervisor's invitation to 'check in with our tummies' (or its variants as found in the above data), counsellors must draw on a range of resources, including knowledge of the present

setting and its associated activities, knowledge of the roles of participants in that setting, and awareness of their (the recipients') own categorial status for the present course of action.

Nevertheless, the fact that supervisees are able to produce situationally appropriate responses to a check-in request still leaves open the question of what interactional work this sequence is designed to accomplish, in this particular setting; and how that work and the setting may be reflexively related.

At certain points in the data we in fact find the supervisor putting forward accounts for the check-in, using phrases such as 'to bring you into the room', to 'see where you are'; as an opportunity for 'bringing you in touch with your own self' and 'maybe linking it to what you're working with'. These phrases seem to foreground a notion of situating supervisees as 'feeling bodies' in the here and now of the session. In this, the 'feeling body' is to be understood not as a physical but an emotional presence. And as we have seen, supervisees respond to the invitation to check in with 'how we're feeling', 'where we are' or 'with our tummies' by producing brief accounts of their predominant emotional status in the present or in recent days; and these accounts tend to highlight negative emotional states. Thus, supervisees' responses to check-in requests collaborate in focussing on the supervisee as a repository for personal material which can be brought out and examined to support the business of clinical supervision.

As has been observed in numerous studies of psychotherapeutic interaction (Hutchby, 2005, 2007; Peräkylä et al, 2008; Silverman, 1996) orienting to feelings-talk is itself an omni-relevant activity (Sacks, 1992: 312-319, 515-519, 590-596) for counsellors; one which they can be shown to pursue even if the client displays resistance to it (Hutchby, 2002). In this setting, both supervisors and supervisees are also incumbents of the category 'counsellor', which lends a hybrid status to their roles in the meeting. This may also account for the way in which, as we showed, the supervisor frequently uses the second half of the check-in sequence to elicit, clarify or further pursue feelings-talk from the check-in respondent.

In sum, far from being a minor or transitional phase in the overall organisation of the group supervision session, the somewhat arcanelly phrased 'let's check in with our tummies' sequence displays core features of the management of categorial identity, and the production

of both category-bound and setting-relevant talk, among participants in this type of professional meeting.

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