

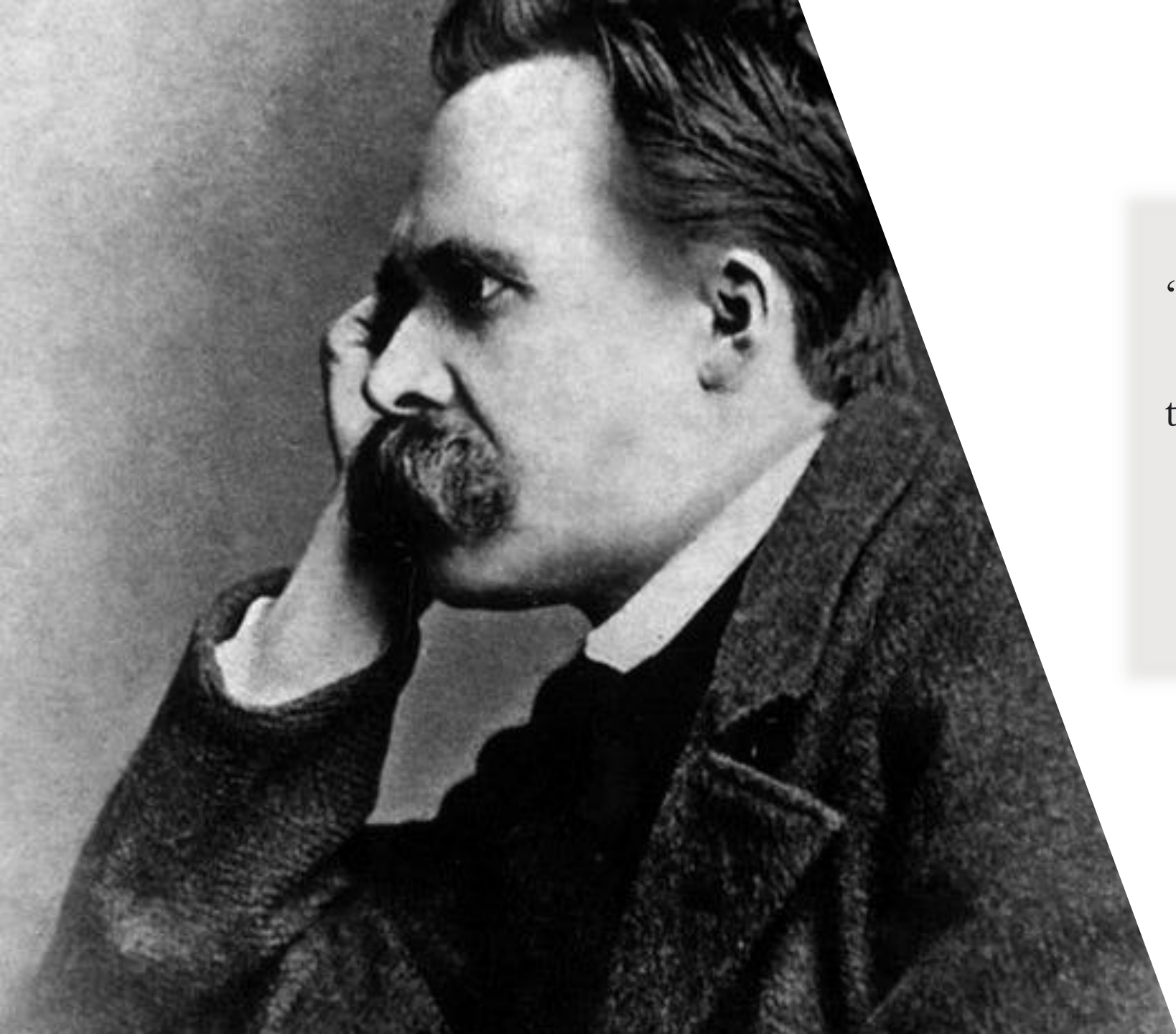


*Interim Findings/  
Discussion*

‘Therapists Facing Masks:

A Qualitative Study of the Nature  
of Relationships Between Masks  
and Relational Depth’

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“Everything **profound** loves  
the **mask**, the **profoundest**  
things have a hatred even of  
figure and likeness”

(Nietzsche, 1886)

# Aims

- 📖 Investigate characteristics which facilitate and/or inhibit meetings at relational depth
- 📖 Exploring **masks** as a **characteristic**

## Overall Aim

- 📖 Make an original contribution to relational depth knowledge by asking the question:  
'What is the nature of the relationship between **masks** and **relational depth**?'

# Objectives

**Identify** impacts/potential issues of relating while wearing masks within sessions

**Evaluate** critically previous, relevant research on relational depth and masks

**Explore** therapists experiences of masks and relational depth within sessions

**Advance** knowledge of how characteristics such as masks influence relational depth

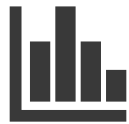
# Relational Depth

“A feeling of **profound** contact and engagement with a client, in which one simultaneously experiences high and consistent levels of empathy and acceptance towards the **Other** and relates to them in a highly transparent way. In this relationship, the client is experienced as acknowledging one’s empathy, acceptance and congruence – either explicitly or implicitly – and is experienced as fully congruent in that moment” (Mearns & Cooper, 2005., p. 36)

Imagine your life with **no** relationships...



# Design & Methodology



Qualitative  
research approach:  
measuring quality



Phenomenological  
based design:  
structure of  
experience and  
consciousness



Subjective  
phenomena mixed  
with observations  
of reality



The study of what  
'**matters**' rather  
than matter

# Method



Semi-structured interviews (45 mins – 1 hour)



Participants: 4 Therapists (Alice, Leia, Dinah & Merida) with experience of working with clients with masks



Questions engaged deeply with participants about their general experience of **masks** in sessions before exploring experiences of **relational depth** with clients while wearing **masks**



Interview schedule consisting of 6 questions



# Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis



# Alice

- 📖 "It was always the same kind of theme - 'something' in the way. Just something in the way. A barrier or an intrusion. It was always that kind of theme"
- 📖 "There's is something about me driving that you know? it's not all about the masks. Something about my own self-consciousness. Once I've put the mask on there's something...I don't exactly know what it is"
- 📖 "It feels that's like seeing, but not seeing. Am I still me?' 'is this recognizable?' I don't exactly know what it is. Like 'am I still able to do the same things'? which is just bizarre because I think I can do the same things".
- 📖 "Not experiencing RD: "Probably a combination of me monitoring myself and being less present and less able to use myself. And the physical barrier"

# Leia

- 📖 "Emotions are **still** emotions and empathy is **still** empathy. Present with the client is **still** being present with a client. Whether you've got a mask on or not"
- 📖 "I don't think it [RD] was as often, and I wonder whether that's to do with the mask or with people not feeling as **comfortable**"
- 📖 "It became **something** way bigger than just a mask, it became less about just talking. I felt **unencumbered, alive, engaged**. Thinking back, I don't even remember being aware I was wearing a mask"
- 📖 "I remember seeing **real, genuine joy** in her eyes because we were **painting** that picture together. There was this **shared sense** of 'something'"

# Dinah

- 📄 “The mask is the main **focal** point. But its more, masks are the **reminder**, about the environment, the pandemic, all the **distractions**”
- 📄 “There have been moments of **deep connection** despite masks. One girl burst into tears and was **open** to the experience regardless of the mask. It’s one extreme to another with nothing in between”
- 📄 “Remember my **heart beating** so fast. My **palms felt sweaty**, and I almost wanted to **reach out** and cuddle her. The mask was not even in the picture”
- 📄 “On a human level, if there's a **willingness** to **connect** from both parties, it can happen. If they're **willing** to go to these dark places, whether there's a mask or not, they will go there”

# Merida

- 📄 "A **conscious choice** to step back from that and let go. Almost in the way I had when I was doing my core training"
- 📄 "A real sense of **connectedness, hope** and **understanding**. A sense that the client is **mutual** with that **appreciation** of my world as a Therapist"
- 📄 "**Trust** the **relationship**, the **process**, what's happening. I think that's what the client can be experiencing at that moment, it's **trust**"
- 📄 "There's nothing I can do to make that happen. When I say, 'that's I'm trying to **do**', I mean 'that's what I'm trying to **be**'"

# Interim Themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
<b>Epicentre of the Barrier</b>	Mask dominating agenda Re-evaluation of practice Presence/Intrusion Safety
<b>Disconnection Paradox</b> <i>(connecting through disconnection)</i>	Transcendence Familiarity to without masks Personal integration/attachments Willingness
<b>Multi-etiological Problem</b>	Power balance Sensory barriers Practical considerations Mask symbolism
<b>Loss</b>	Identity as a Therapist Visual cues Meaning Feedback
<b>Intersubjectivity</b>	Attitude (of therapist & client) Lack of freedom and choice Trust Collective experience

# Interim Conclusions



**Relational Depth possible** with masks – but additional challenges connecting through the disconnection



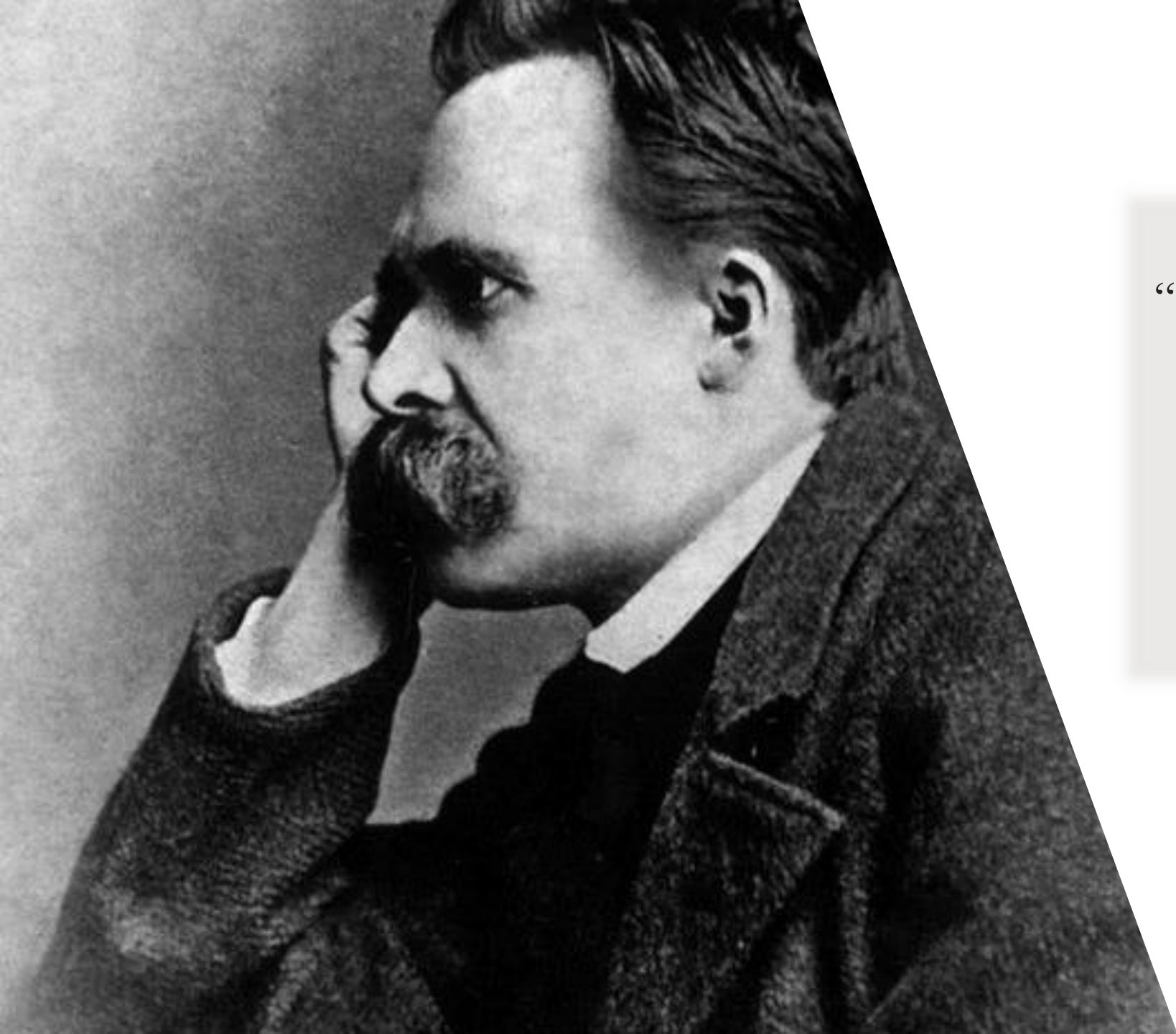
Masks may not be as much of an influential characteristic as therapists/client attitudes and capacity to relate to them



Individual experience within broader social contexts essential to understand relationships between masks and relational depth



Impacts of masks on therapeutic relationships are multi-etiological



“Every **profound spirit** needs a **mask**: even more, around every **profound spirit** is a **mask** continually growing”

(Nietzsche, 1886)



Relational Depth as the embodiment of a  
'profound spirit'

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