

How Does Becoming and Being a Professional Counsellor Affect One's
Personal Life: A Qualitative Exploration

by

Barbara Sampaio Alhanati
B.A. University of Alberta, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study investigates the effects that becoming and being a professional counsellor, including training and professional practice, can have on one's personal life. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a base of research literature that is starting to form on the personal lives of counsellors. Qualitative methodology and thematic analysis were chosen for this study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six professional counsellors, asking them how their training and professional practice has affected their personal lives. Findings revealed participants experienced mostly positive effects, which impacted their personal lives in a variety of ways and in a range of areas.

It is suggested that the research be used as part of counsellor training and support programs, as well as to inspire future research on how the profession of counselling psychology comes to affect the professionals engaged with this work.

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My time spent in this masters program has come to symbolize two years of growth and exciting changes in my life. I moved away from my home city, away from family and friends, which became a new adventure and at times a challenge. During this time, I feel I have grown into myself. I also became engaged, and will be married shortly after completing this degree. Further, there have been two births, a death, and many changes in my friendships and family relationships. This journey has been rich, intense, and at times difficult, and I could not have done it without the warm support of the important people in my life, whom I wish to thank.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The profession of counselling, in the way that it is generally understood today, is relatively new. National associations of counsellors are only a few decades old, and the definition of counselling is yet to be universally agreed upon (Gladding, 2004; Smith, 2001). As this young profession has evolved, researchers have tried to study it and those engaged with it. As a unique category within the helping profession, many have worked to understand different aspects of how it is that counsellors, with their 'person' being their professional tool, are effective in helping people in our communities.

As a young counsellor-in-training, the topic of counsellor development and counsellor education directly applies to the researcher's own life and thus is of great interest to the researcher. The profession of counselling is still somewhat of an unknown for the researcher, as her training in this field is still in-progress, and there is much more to be discovered once she moves from being a student in counselling to a professional counsellor practicing out in the world.

As the researcher has tried to gather knowledge about the field that she has chosen as a career, it has been clear that while some aspects of counselling and counsellors have been focused-on within the research literature, other aspects of this profession have been overlooked.

Statement of the Problem

While the profession of counselling is still evolving and changing, certain components of the profession have been well studied and are well understood at this point in counselling history. Researchers have explored how counselling differs from other professional helpers such as social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrist. Studies have

identified motivators for counselling as a career choice and uncovered the types of people that seem to choose to become professional counsellors (Guy, 1987). Further, research has investigated what characteristics and personality traits make a person best suited for a career in counselling and form the foundation of effective counselling (Gladding, 2004). The process of becoming an effective counsellor, usually referred to as the professional development of counsellors, is also well discussed and described throughout the literature, with a few key models of this process informing counsellor education programs and workshops (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Skovholt & Jennings, 2004; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). Counsellor education is also influenced by the more recent research on application of therapeutic theories and techniques, and the importance of the therapeutic alliance in effective counselling.

In a different side of the counselling profession, professional hazards and drawbacks associated with working as a professional counsellor have been well documented. Burnout and other potentially impairing conditions that arise from providing counselling are no longer seen as *rare* consequences of this work (Maslach, 1976). In connection to this, research has indicated that counsellors may tend to work long hours, and may experience levels of clinical issues and interpersonal disruptions that are higher than those experienced by the general population. While more research is still needed to determine more widespread prevalence and incidence rates, this suggestion is enough to raise some concern. This is especially true given that counsellors need to be in 'good shape' in order to provide help to others.

This leads to the gap in the literature that is targeted by this research study. One aspect of becoming and being a professional counsellor that has been generally excluded

from empirical research is the personal lives of counsellors. While the accumulated knowledge base in the literature guides counsellor education, the therapeutic process, and counsellor professional development, there are no models for how the profession impacts the private aspects of counsellors' lives. It is fair to assume that with the intense, personal nature of counsellor training, and the high personal investment inherent in conducting therapy, the person, not just the professional, is likely to be affected. As such, the effects of psychological training and connecting with clients on the inner person may also be influencing the personal lives of counsellors, in both positive and negative ways.

Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this research was to increase understanding about the personal aspects connected to counsellor development and living as a professional counsellor. The objectives of the investigation proposed were to learn what differences counsellors experience in their personal lives in connection to their counsellor education and their professional role. This study aimed at uncovering differences in the counsellor's private life that resulted from this process of becoming a counsellor. Specifically, the researcher wanted to explore the subjective experience of change that the counsellor has experienced in personal aspects of life, such as in relationships with one's partner, family, and friends. Further, the researcher was interested in understanding meaning counsellors make of these differences in their lives currently compared to their lives before they began their counsellor education. Part of this investigation process was also aimed at looking at how experiences of personal change and personality re-organization resulting from becoming and being a professional counsellor influenced the other aspects of the counsellor's private life.

Increasing understanding through this study was a way to add to the existing literature on counsellors and counselling as a profession. This investigation can begin to fill in the gap within the literature on this topic. Further, with an increased sense of understanding of how becoming a counsellor affects the personal lives of counsellors, changes and improvements can continue to be made within counsellor education programs. Moreover, by increasing our knowledge on this subject, developments in other counsellor-related topics such as burnout and self-care, along with models of supervision can potentially be improved. Additionally, by uncovering some common experiences of counsellors in terms of their private lives, prospective counsellors can make more informed career choices and potentially refine their self-care strategies in order to maintain a high level of professional effectiveness and personal satisfaction. Finally, by disseminating the knowledge and understanding gained from this investigation, it is hoped that further research on this topic will be conducted, which may come to positively impact the lives of professional counsellors who share the same experiences discovered here. This may help increase a sense of normalcy among counsellors encountering unique struggles in their personal lives and could potentially lead to preventative or support programs for such challenges specific to professional counsellors. A more extensive summary of the relevant research on this area of counselling research can be found in Chapter 2.

Background to the Study

The target of the research proposed here is the subjective experience of changes and differences. The researcher wanted to learn how counsellors experience their personal lives to be influenced and affected by their counsellor education and counselling

work. While in other fields of research there is a generally accepted “propositional truth” that is being sought, in the realm of subjective collective experience, as is the described research target, this is not the case. In the social realm, reality is co-constructed, and in the place of “propositional truth” is “justness”, which is a form of truth that is time-bound, subjective and contextual. In order to investigate this form of knowing or reality, we must engage in dialogue with others who know or experience the phenomena under study. In other words, to find out how counsellors’ personal lives are affected by their counsellor education, we cannot simply put the personal lives of counsellors under a microscope and compare the before and after samples. In order to understand the impact of becoming and being a professional counsellor on one’s personal life, we must ask counsellors to describe the experience in their own words.

As such, qualitative methodology has been proposed for this research. Since qualitative research operates under the premise that social reality is mediated by interpretation, it fits well with the topic under investigation. Further, qualitative methodology allows the researcher to engage with participants in the social meaning-making process that make subjective experiences exist. By learning about the targeted experience through the counsellor’s own words, the researcher is getting as close as possible to the real experience. A more thorough explanation of this proposed methodology follows in Chapter 3.

Overview of Methods

In order to increase understanding of the personal aspects of counsellor development, the following research question was posed: *how does becoming and being a professional counsellor affect one’s personal life?*

This question was addressed by conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with six professional counsellors who obtained a Masters' degree in Counselling between 2 and 10 years ago. These masters level counsellors engaged in a conversational interview with the researcher where they were asked to discuss how they feel their personal lives have been affected by their career as a counsellor. Specifically, the participants were asked what differences they have experienced because of their counsellor education and what meaning they make of these differences.

The data obtained from the transcripts of the interview then underwent thematic analysis, where quotes were extracted to form categories of experience. The researcher laboriously sorted through the data in order to formulate "meaning units", and these categories were later refined into a manageable number of themes with the help of the supervising faculty member. At that point, the participants were asked to review the results, and validate that themes presented represent their experiences well. A detailed outline of the methods can be found in Chapter 3.

To conclude, the results of the thematic analysis are described in Chapter 4. To follow in Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results in relation to other research and literature on the topic of counsellor development.

Chapter 2: Review of the Relevant Literature

Counselling as a Profession

The development of the counselling profession began in the United States and can be traced back to the late 1890's and early 1900's. Throughout the early twentieth century, the profession's main focus was vocational guidance, with psychometrics also forming part of that early foundation. In the 1930's, the work of counsellors began to broaden beyond occupational concerns, and the concept of education as guidance began to emerge (Gladding, 2004). It was not until 1942 when Carl Rogers published his book *Counseling and Psychotherapy* that this idea of guidance – providing advice, direction, or instructions – began to disappear from the counselling literature. The 1950's solidified counselling as a profession with the establishment of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, the establishment of Counseling Psychology as a division of the American Psychological Association (APA), the passing of the National Defence Education Act, and the introduction of new guidance and counselling theories (Gladding, 2004). In the 1970's, counselling began to appear outside of the educational setting, along with the formation of helping skills programs, the beginning of licensure for counsellors, and the development of professional organizations. By the 1980's standardized training certification of counsellors had developed, counselling was recognized as a distinct profession, and counsellor specialties began to diversify with focuses on human growth and development (Gladding, 2004). Finally, the American Counseling Association celebrated its formal 50th anniversary in 2002.

Parallel development of counselling as a profession was occurring in Canada during the twentieth century. In the 1920's, vocational guidance appeared in the junior

and senior high schools across Canada (Marshall & Uhlmann, 1996). Out of World War II came the collaboration of psychologists and counsellors, and in 1939 the Canadian Psychological Association was established (Paivo & Ritchie, 1996). Throughout the 1930's and 40's, various Guidance Clinics were established across Canada, targeting elementary school children (Herman, 1981). The 1940's also saw the development of vocational guidance organizations, and guidance counsellors were being recognized as specialized professionals. By the 1950's and throughout the 1960's, Carl Rogers' influence on the Canadian side of the counselling movement was evident (Hayduk & Jewell, 2005). In 1965, the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association was created, following in the steps of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, and was organized geographically with a representative from each province (Canadian Counselling Association, 2004). By 1969, there were fourteen Masters level programs being offered in universities across Canada (Herman, 1981). The profession of counselling gained further recognition in 1972 when the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) created the Applied Division (Wand, 1990). Ten years later, school counselling was well established, and the Counselling Psychology Section was formed within the CPA, differentiating counselling psychology from other psychology specializations in 1986 (Lalande, 2004). The Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association later became the Canadian Counselling Association in 1999 (British Columbia Chapter of the Canadian Counselling Association, 1999).

In 1997, the American Counseling Association (ACA) accepted the following definition of counseling: the practice of professional counseling is “the application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive,

affective, behaviours or systemic interventions, strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology” (Smith, 2001). However, the Canadian Counselling Association asserts that there does not seem to be one single, overarching or widely-accepted definition of counselling as a health profession as of yet (Canadian Counselling Association, 2005).

In general, as described by Glassing (2004), counselling is conducted both with people who are functioning well and with those who are having more serious adjustment problems. Additionally, it deals with wellness, personal growth, career, and pathological concerns. Furthermore, counsellors work in areas that involve relationships (Casey, 1996). Moreover, counselling is theory based, and the various approaches can be applied with individuals, groups, and families. Further, counselling is a process that can be viewed as developmental – where individuals are helped through concerns in order to facilitate personal growth. Counselling focuses on the goals of the client, and involves both choice and change.

While clinical psychologists tend to work with more seriously disturbed populations, and are more likely trained in a medical model of clinical assessment, counsellors work with less pathological populations within a framework of life transitions (Lalande, 2004). In other words, while clinical psychologists aim to diagnose and provide treatment for disorders classified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), counsellors aim to provide remedial or preventative help to individuals (who may or may not have a DSM diagnosis) going through personal issues or changes in their life. However, the professional counselling relationship is still quite different from the more familiar experience of natural everyday helping. Rather than

relying solely on intuition, familiarity, natural responsiveness and personal opinion, professional counsellors also attempt to purposely direct the counselling relationship by applying a broad range of critical skills in a systemic fashion (Neukrug & Schwitzer, 2006).

Counselling as a Career Choice

There are many factors inherent in the role of counsellor that may attract people to the counselling profession. As described by Guy (1987), these factors include independence, considerable financial rewards, variety within the practice, recognition and prestige, intellectual stimulation, emotional growth and satisfaction, personal enrichment, and personal fulfillment. These benefits of practicing psychotherapy make counselling a very desirable career choice. However, these “fringe benefits” alone do not motivate individuals to choose a career in counselling. Most applicants for counsellor training programs commonly express a desire to help and understand others, although often they have minimal awareness of the origins of that desire (Barnett, 2007). It has been suggested that many enter the profession because of a need for intimacy due to a sense of isolation that was existent during childhood, and that many come from families marginalized by their socio-economic status or religion, which heightens their initial sense of separation from mainstream society (Guy, 1987; Owen, 1993).

In part, to address the possibility that counsellors may try to fulfill their need for intimacy through their professional role, the Code of Ethics for the Canadian Counselling Association (CCA) has outlined clear regulations for counsellor conduct. Code B8 clearly states that dual relationships with clients, such as providing counselling while also engaging in familial, social, financial, business, or personal relationships, is to be strictly

avoided. This concern is further addressed in code B11, where any relationships with former clients – such as friendships, social, financial, or business relationships – should be established cautiously, making use of consultation, and ensuring that the “relational dynamics present during the counselling have been fully resolved and properly terminated” (Canadian Counselling Association, 2007, p. 9). Finally, the Code of Ethics (B12) clearly outlines that sexual intimacies with clients, or counselling individuals with whom a sexual relationship existed previously, is prohibited. This prohibition is extended to former clients for a minimum of three years after termination of the counselling relationship, and further extended “indefinitely if the client is clearly vulnerable, by reason of emotional or cognitive disorder, to exploitative influence by the counsellor” (Canadian Counselling Association, 2007, p. 9).

There have been studies to suggest that there are both functional and dysfunctional personal motivators for counselling as a career choice (Guy, 1987; Owen, 1993; Foster, 1996). A recent study has further supported this idea, providing evidence to suggest that many counsellors and psychotherapists have experiences of loss and deprivation, especially in early life, and their caregivers often failed to meet the normal narcissistic needs of childhood (Barnett, 2007). The painful results of early loss are often difficulties in respect of intimacy, dependency, and separation – such as having many different partners over a short period of time or relationships characterized by a cycle of intense connecting and active distancing. Additionally, for those who have experienced narcissistic injuries, issues around control, self-less giving, and a need to be needed are evident (Barnett, 2007). In sum, the resulting defenses of these early experiences tend to mask an underlying sense of vulnerability within the counsellor.

According to Guy (1987), negative motivators for becoming a counsellor includes emotional distress, vicarious coping, loneliness and isolation, a desire for power, a need for love, and vicarious rebellion. Fortunately, there are also positive factors that motivate individuals to become counsellors, and make them well suited for the profession. Some of these personal qualities that make an effective counsellor include a curiosity and inquisitiveness, an ability to listen, comfort with conversation, empathy and understanding, emotional insightfulness, introspection, capacity for self-denial, tolerance of intimacy, comfort with power, and the ability to laugh (Gladding, 2004). In addition to these personal qualities, personal characteristics such as stability, harmony, constancy, and purposefulness are associated with being an effective counselor over time (Patterson & Welfel, 2000). Overall, the potency of counselling relates to the counsellors' "personal togetherness" (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Kottler, 1993). Despite an increasing emphasis on the learning of theories, models and techniques within counsellor training programs, it is widely believed that it is the relationship between therapist and client that is of vital importance to the outcome of therapy, regardless of theoretical orientation (Crits-Christoph & Gibbons, 2003; Aveline, 2005; Barnett, 2007).

The ability to work from a perspective of resolved emotional experience that has sensitized a person to self and others in a helpful way is commonly characterized as the *wounded healer* (Gladding, 2004). Throughout the literature there are many references to this concept of the "wounded healer" (Sussman, 1992; Burton & Topham, 1997; Cain, 2000; Herman, 2001; Wheeler, 2002; Mander, 2004). Individuals who have been hurt and then been able to transcend their pain, gaining insight into themselves and others, can be helpful to those who struggle to overcome emotional problems (Miller et al. 1998).

Wounded healers, then, are those who have usefully explored their own motivations and gained sufficient insight to help others (Barnett, 2007). Thus, counsellors who “have experienced painful life events and have adjusted positively can usually connect and be authentic with clients in distress” (Foster, 1996, p.21). So, while initially counsellors may tend to present themselves as ‘strong’ and without significant problems, further exploration usually reveals a troubled personal history (Barnett, 2007).

Although a number of students attracted to the counselling profession appear to have some serious personality or adjustment problems, most are weeded out before they complete a counsellor education program. Fortunately, most people who eventually become professional counsellors have healthy reasons for pursuing this career, and many even consider it to be their “calling” (Foster, 1996). Counsellor education, however, is not always a smooth and pleasant process. Counsellors-in-training must learn to be professional relations, able to make therapeutic relations with a large range of awkward, immature, unreasonable, self and other hating individuals, from different races, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Owen, 1993). Further, the quality of the trainee is judged based on his or her ability to form this type of relationship regularly, without having to wait for the random occurrence of a spontaneously good match between self and client (Owen, 1993).

Counsellor Education and Training

Although the years spent in counsellor education can be particularly stressful and difficult for many trainees, it is also a time of exciting changes and growth. Learning the skills and techniques of therapy, while also focusing on self-awareness, growth and development can be both challenging and rewarding. For many trainees, some of the

most important changes and decisions are made during the period of counsellor education, impacting the course of adult life to follow (Levison, 1978). Moreover, the training process can bring on personality changes that result in a higher level of overall functioning and greater emotional stability (Guy, 1987). Additionally, it is believed that counsellors-in-training develop more mature relationships, become more self-confident, less defensive, and more humble in their interactions with friends and family (Maurice et al., 1975). Further, studies have shown that there is a tendency for trainees to become less authoritarian and more tolerant of diversity and ambiguity (Henry, 1966). Finally, students in counsellor education seem to experience greater self-ideal congruence, and the reorganization of their individual self-concept promotes more stable, healthy functioning, and good social adjustment (Guy, 1987).

In addition to these positive personality changes associated with counsellor education, numerous professionally related changes also occur. Several models of professional counsellor development have been proposed, such as those provided by Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986), Skovholt & Jennings (2004), Skovholt & Ronnestad (1992), and Stoltenberg & Delworth (1987). These models offer useful ways for counselling trainees and trainers to reflect on the processes, the stresses, the dissatisfactions, and the ambiguities involved in becoming an experienced or master therapist (King, 2007). Eventually, students emerge with a strong commitment to the professional practice of counselling and their work with clients (Guy, 1987). However, to reach this level of professional development, they must often endure the sometimes negative impacts of counsellor education.

One major stressor of graduate counsellor training, as discussed by Guy (1987), is the unspecified nature of psychotherapeutic work. It can be very difficult for trainees to confront the complexity of practicing therapy without becoming overwhelmed or discouraged. In addition, the large variety of diagnostic systems, theoretical orientations, and therapeutic techniques can be both confusing and disheartening for counselling students (Guy, 1987). Generally, it takes a long time for trainees to develop a strong sense of mastery and competency in their therapeutic work. Yet, the nature of training often requires that students begin “treating” clients before they feel ready to do so. Hence, counsellors-in-training typically experience a great deal of stress related to their own sense of inadequacy and failure (Guy, 1987). Further, the undefined nature of the overriding goal of therapy – to alleviate psychological pain and suffering – adds another source of anxiety for the student, as there is a lack of clear, concise, measurable gains.

The psychological-mindedness, emphasized in counsellor education programs, is another source of stress for counsellors-in-training. This emphasis brings an increased focus on early experiences, memories, emotions, and motivations as they relate to the human behaviour of both clients and trainees (Guy, 1987). As a result of their academic studies, supervision, personal therapy, and early work experience, counselling students become more internally focused. This process of constantly thinking psychologically can cause the trainee to lose him- or herself in endless analysis and introspection, restricting spontaneity (Guy, 1987). This can then impact the interpersonal relationships of the student in some unfortunate ways. Guy and Liaboe (1986) reported that many counsellors experience difficulties with their ability to relate meaningfully with family and friends. This supports Guy’s (1987) speculation that when it comes to being psychologically

minded, learning how to “turn it off” is a major task not easily mastered concurrently with learning how to “turn it on”.

Personal psychopathology – the tendency for students to discover psychopathology within themselves – is a further source of stress connected to counsellor education. As Farber notes, “beginning therapists may compare their own early development with that of patients and question their own defence mechanisms and even their own sanity” (Farber, 1983a, p. 100). Unfortunately, the stress of graduate study, compounded with the resultant life changes already discussed, may in fact produce or exacerbate already present psychopathology in trainees (Guy, 1987). The onset or discovery of psychopathology during counsellor training can be very unsettling and disturbing for the trainee, as it raises the issue of suitability for the role of professional counsellor.

Changes in values and perspectives can be another source of stress for the counsellor-in-training. Trainees tend to undergo significant shifts in religious beliefs, political views, and personal attitudes throughout their counsellor education. These seem to occur consistently in a “liberal” direction, perhaps as a result of the exposure to and increased tolerance for a wide diversity of views and experiences expressed by clients (Guy, 1987). It has also been suggested that these changes arise from a need to act out against the authority figures of one’s youth in an attempt to obtain autonomy (Bugental, 1964). Along the same line of thinking, Farber (1983a) found that fifty percent of the counsellors he studied reported decreased emotional investment in their own families. New attitudes and beliefs may lead to misunderstandings, arguments, strained

communication, and alienation from parents and family members who hold different views.

These effects of counsellor education described in the literature suggest that the training involves transformative learning in addition to didactic learning. As such, it is not surprising that learning about the interpersonal and intrapersonal processes clients often go through can come to affect the counselling trainee in a personal way.

Transformative Learning Theory, as proposed by Mezirow (1991, 2000), explains that the adult learning process can involve becoming “critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others, and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p.4). In other words, transformative learning is learning to “purposively question one's own assumptions, beliefs, feelings, and perspectives in order to grow or mature personally and intellectually” (Herod, 2002).

Furthermore, the holistic approach to Mezirow’s theory emphasizes the role of feelings, other ways of knowing, and the role of relationships with others in the process of transformative learning (Taylor, 2008). This model involves inviting the ‘whole person’ into the classroom (Dirkx, 2006). Hence, it is fair to assume that when counselling students are being confronted with material of great personal relevance, transformative learning would occur where this material would lead them to engage in deep structural shifts in thoughts and feeling, which then come to inform their actions and relationships.

In sum, many counsellors-in-training find that the course work, supervision, and clinical experience inherent in their professional training “promote personality reorganization, resolution of underlying problems or conflicts, and facilitation of growth and maturity within themselves” (Guy, 1987, p. 43). The many personality changes that

occur as part of counsellor education can make it difficult for trainees to integrate these changes into their sense of self, which can then lead to a sense of alienation from friends and family. This sense of alienation is reinforced by the competitive nature of counsellor education, where trainees that may be familiar with the pressures of academic competition are not prepared for the competition related to differing levels of psychotherapeutic skills (Guy, 1987). Further, trainees often find that their relationships with various faculty members are ambivalent and emotionally loaded, where faculty serve in the dual role of both facilitator and evaluator (Guy, 1987). The resultant tension, combined with the distancing associated with becoming more psychologically minded, can lead to a profound sense of isolation and aloneness for the counselling trainees.

Professional Practice

Overall then, the literature seems to show that professional counsellor education can be challenging. The trainee counsellor is likely to experience rapid changes in their relationships and their self-perceptions, which can cause many difficulties. As professionals, therapists have not always been successful in managing or resolving these difficulties (Truett, 2001). Merklin and Little (1967) studied the effect of training on the lives of psychiatrists, and found they experienced moderate to severe anxiety and depression, short-lived neuroses, and psychosomatic disturbances. It is probably fair to assume then, that counsellors-in-training may have similar experiences.

Unfortunately, the adverse consequences of becoming a professional counsellor are not limited to the training years. Once professional therapeutic practice is underway, additional risks exist, which commonly affect the quality of therapy as well as the therapist's personal wellbeing. Isolation is one of the hazards to a career in counselling,

and has been repeatedly identified as one of the greatest sources of stress and displeasure among psychotherapists in professional practice (Bermak, 1977; Deutch, 1984; Goldberg, 1986; Hellman et al, 1986; Kottler, 1986, Tryon, 1983). The practice of psychotherapy includes both physical and psychic isolation – a sense of both bodily and mental aloneness – which affect many facets of the therapists' life (Guy, 1987).

There are several aspects of therapeutic practice that contribute to the physical isolation experienced by professional counsellors. The inherent privacy and isolation of the therapy hour, providing insulation from the chaos of family and job-related stress, may be ideal, creating an optimum environment for reflecting and listening to one's feelings and thoughts. However, the physical isolation can eventually become a source of discomfort for the therapist. As the therapist spends countless hours in the office, meeting with clients to discuss their issues and concerns, a pronounced sense of isolation results separating the therapist from the events and interactions of everyday life in several ways (Guy, 1987).

A lack of contact with colleagues is an obvious contributor to this sense of physical isolation. As the counsellor sits alone in a secluded office for much of the day, they are isolated from peers and colleagues. With the busy schedule of appointments, some counsellors can go for several hours (or even days) without getting a chance to visit other counsellors (Guy, 1987). Tryon (1983a) found that for those counsellors in private practice, the isolation may be even more oppressive. Moreover, the lack of normal breaks during the workday makes even social phone calls nearly impossible (Guy, 1987). Due to the intimate behind closed doors nature of therapeutic work, it is often felt as though one is "alone" with clients all day (Owen, 1993).

Another aspect of the physical isolation inherent in this secluded, uninterrupted practice of counselling is that the therapist is isolated from the outside world and daily events. Often the day is spent in an artificially lighted, climate-controlled environment, unaffected by the physical changes outside. For those unfortunate to have an office with no windows, there is a sense of isolation from the passing of time and the changing of seasons. This is especially true for the many professional counsellors who work 10 to 14 hour days, beginning and ending their days in darkness, particularly in the winter months (Guy, 1987). Therapists are largely insulated from daily, local, national, and world events, as they are unable to listen to the radio, watch television, or even read the local newspaper during the typical work day. Further, therapists spend most of their time separated from “emotionally healthy” individuals, creating a very real experience of isolation from those “normal” members of the general public (Chessick, 1978).

This physical isolation does not end here however. Psychotherapists also feel isolated from the lives of family and friends during the workday, as it is usually true that therapists are strictly unavailable except for those with a scheduled appointment. The therapist can rarely be reached directly by telephone, and is often completely isolated from the daily events or concerns of family and friends.

Additionally, the unique isolation of spending hours with clients restricts the wide range of possible human behaviours, leading therapists to behave in highly prescribed and narrowly defined ways (Guy, 1987). There is little opportunity to function in an innovative manner, resulting in boredom and isolation, which can have a significant impact on the inner experience and satisfaction of the counsellor. Further, inherent in the therapeutic setting is the physical inactivity and fatigue that results from therapists

spending most of their time sitting in a chair, immobile and inactive (Farber, 1983a). This inactivity, combined with the emotional intensity of therapeutic interaction can leave the counsellor drained, tired, stressed, and uncomfortable.

Moreover, the strict constraints of patient confidentiality add another layer to the physical isolation of professional counsellors. There is little opportunity to share the details of one's work with family, friends, or the public; as such, the exciting or concerning aspect of therapeutic practice must always remain a secret. This is a lonely experience, and the sense of mystery that results can isolate the therapist from the support of family and friends (Kottler, 1986).

Finally, this physical isolation is further enhanced by the other activities that make up therapeutic practice. Activities such as report writing, testing and diagnostic assessment, record keeping, account billing and posting, maintaining professional records and process notes, and waiting for clients to be referred and to show up for scheduled appointments are all equally isolating, and require the counsellor to remain in the confines of his or her office (Guy, 1987). This experience of aloneness can be intense, and the isolation associated is a common experience for therapists (Guy, 1987).

In addition to the physical isolation discussed, there is a sense of psychic isolation that also comes with therapeutic practice. One part of providing therapy involves the therapist shutting away a portion of him- or herself, setting aside personal concerns, feelings, and preoccupations as much as possible in order to focus on the client. The therapeutic encounter requires that the personal needs and concerns of the counsellor be set aside during the session. This therapeutic "abstinence" impacts the counsellor's inner experience in several ways (Guy, 1987).

As a result of withholding personal and concerning information about his or her private life, the counsellor can often feel that he or she is largely unknown to the clients whose feelings, thoughts, and behaviours have become so familiar. This again, brings with it a certain sense of emotional isolation and aloneness. Further, the counsellor is required to set aside his or her personal needs while in therapy sessions, which can lead to intense loneliness in the counsellor who senses that maybe the client could provide much needed support, but is required to resist the urge to reveal these concerns to the client (Guy, 1987). Adding to the experience of psychic isolation, is the attempt to provide a stable, neutral, and safe environment for the client, which requires that the counsellor restrain emotional reactivity. This can then develop into an “emotional tightness” as the counsellor minimizes or denies his or her own feelings and inner experience (Malcolm, 1980). Even more serious is the possibility that the counsellor will become alienated from his or her own feelings, as a by-product of this constant suppression and restraint (Freudenberger & Robbins, 1979).

Further contributions to this psychic isolation include the one-way intimacy inherent in the therapeutic relationship, the objective interpretive stance required of therapists, the idealization and omnipotence of counsellors by clients and the public, and also the devaluation and attack that some therapists experience. All of these factors seem to exacerbate the loneliness already discussed, and contribute to a sense of detachment from one’s natural emotional expressiveness and spontaneity. Finally, the pressures created from the goals of treatment and often time-limited nature of therapy, combined with professional competition and the stereotypical public perceptions of therapists all serve to increase the sense of psychic isolation (Guy, 1987).

Although isolation has been identified as a major hazard of the counselling profession, professional counsellors are often also burdened with vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue (Hunsley & Lee, 2006). Although attention to these phenomena has been increasing, there has been relatively little systematic research on the topic (Hunsley & Lee, 2006). These concepts seem to be very interrelated, and yet some differences do exist.

Vicarious traumatisation, originally conceptualised by McCann & Pearlman (1990) is “the cumulative transformation in the inner experience of the therapist that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with the client’s traumatic material” (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p.31). As such, vicarious trauma refers to harmful changes that occur in the professional’s view of themselves, others, and the world, as a result of exposure to graphic and/or traumatic material. Vicarious trauma can be seen as a normal response to ongoing challenges to a helper’s beliefs and values, yet can result in decreased motivation, efficacy, and empathy (Baird & Kracen, 2006). More recent research has suggested that vicarious trauma is associated with disruptions to schema related to five psychological needs: safety, trust, esteem, intimacy, and control (Baird & Kracen, 2006).

Figley (1995) first used the term “compassion fatigue” to describe the symptoms of exhaustion, hyper vigilance, avoidance, and numbing often experienced by professionals working with people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He later modified this concept and called it secondary traumatic stress. Figley defined secondary traumatic stress as “the natural consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatising event experienced by a significant other and the stress

resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatised or suffering person” (Figley, 1999, p10). In other words, secondary traumatic stress refers to a syndrome among professional helpers that mimics post-traumatic stress disorder and occurs as a result of exposure to the traumatic experiences of others.

Although there appears to be considerable overlap among these theoretical constructs, this new line of research seems to be exploring the adverse effects that a profession in counselling (or other helping fields) can have on the counsellor. These experiences of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, combined with the intense isolation inherent in professional counselling are some of the contributing factors to *burnout*.

Burnout is another major hazard of a career in counselling. Burnout, as first defined by Maslach, is a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people” in a helping role (Maslach, 1976, p. 3). This state of becoming emotionally or physically drained to the point that one cannot perform functions meaningfully is the single most common personal consequence of working as a counsellor (Gladding, 2004; Emerson & Markos, 1996; Kottler, 1993). The general understanding is that in order for counsellors to function adequately, they must habitually step out of their professional roles. Regrettably, Farber (1983b) found that 72% of the therapists surveyed reported that they at least occasionally acted “therapeutically” towards others outside of the office. This suggests that practicing psychotherapists sometimes find it very difficult to stop being a therapist when they are in social situations.

Burnout is both a serious personal and professional concern for all counsellors. Overall, work related factors contribute to noticeable decline in job performance both inside and outside of work. The cognitive symptoms of burnout are often characterised as individuals being increasingly intolerant, rigid, inflexible, and closed to new input (Freudenberger, 1975). Therapists are likely to find it more difficult to be patient, tolerant, and accepting of their clients, and there may be renewed doubts concerning efficacy of treatment and personal competency (Farber, 1983a). Emotionally burnt-out therapists may experience an increase in depression and despondency, loneliness, fearfulness, emotional exhaustion and depletion, guilt, irritability, helplessness, tension, anger, loss of control, and self-doubt (Freudenberger, 1975; Watkins, 1983). Additionally, counsellors may find it increasingly difficult to experience care and concern for their clients and may experience an increase in emotional detachment and compartmentalization (Farber, 1983a).

Further, behavioural symptoms for burnout include a decline in productivity with therapists becoming bored and distracted (Guy, 1987). Counsellors may find therapeutic interactions to be increasingly dissatisfying, causing them to be easily distracted by movements, noises, or interfering thoughts. Along with these symptoms, burnout can cause several physical symptoms for counsellors. These include chronic fatigue, exhaustion, sleep disturbance, muscle tension, and increased illness (Guy, 1987). Additionally, the reoccurrence of pre-existing medical disorders such as high blood pressure, insomnia, headaches, lower back pain, asthma, and allergies are common physical consequences of burnout. Finally, therapists experiencing many of these

symptoms may find conducting therapy difficult due to a decrease in stamina and energy combined with increased discomfort and illness.

The problematic symptoms of burnout can also be relational. Professionals experiencing burnout often begin to relate to individuals in their lives differently, even outside of the office setting. Thus, there can be an increase in interpersonal conflicts as the counsellor misperceives and misinterprets the motives and feelings of others (Freudenberger, 1975; Watkins, 1983). As a result, the therapist experiencing burnout is likely to have a great deal of difficulty relating satisfactorily with clients, colleagues, family, and friends (Guy, 1987).

To summarize, there are many aspects inherent of therapeutic work, in addition to personal factors, that cause stress for professional counsellors. Further, a career as a therapist has several inherent hazards, as described. As such, burnout is probably the result of a complex interaction among individual, organization, and societal factors (Cherniss, 1980). Although the emphasis is often placed primarily on work-related factors as the primary cause of burnout, it likely results from an interaction among the personality traits of the counsellor, client characteristics, work-related factors, and societal attitudes (Farber, 1983a). Fortunately, only a relative minority of therapists seem to experience a level of burnout serious enough to render them incapacitated or impaired (Guy, 1987). However, as Guy (1987) notes, the “lines of demarcation” between counsellor stress, dissatisfaction, burnout, and impairment are often very blurred. Unfortunately, although self-care and other strategies have been suggested to help prevent burnout and impairment (Guy 1987), helping professionals do not often manage the stresses and hazards inherent in the counselling profession appropriately. As Truell

(2001) pointed out, more counsellors than is acceptable abuse alcohol and drugs, and the rate of counsellor suicide is very concerning.

Specifically, Deutsch (1984; 1985) reported that psychotherapists from various disciplines experienced significant personal problems related to: relationship difficulties (82%), depression (57%), substance abuse (11%), and suicide attempts (2%). Wetchler & Piercy's (1986) review of non-empirical articles also found high rates of depression and suicide amongst mental health professionals. Additionally, Thoreson, Budd, and Krauskopf (1986) found that 69% of psychologists know of colleagues with mental illnesses serious enough to impair their therapeutic work. Unfortunately, these and other related studies are based largely on surveys, self-reports, and general clinical experience, leaving the results to be affected by subject self-selection bias, questionable diagnostic validity and reliability, under- or over-reporting, and interviewer bias (Guy, 1987). However, according to the limited existing literature, the documented incidence of mental illness and chemical dependence among therapists is somewhere between 5 to 15%, suggesting that the diagnosable psychopathology of practicing therapists likely occurs at a rate similar to, if not greater than, that of the general population (Lalotis & Grayson, 1985; Guy, 1987).

Research has also shown that the coping mechanisms of counsellors are not always positive and tend to include social withdrawal, depression, denial, drug and alcohol usage, displacement behaviour, and obsessionality, all which may be associated with the lack of initiative in counsellors to seek help (Owen, 1993). This seems to occur despite the clear requirement for counsellors to "maintain high standards of professional competence and ethical behaviour, and recognize the need for continuing education and

personal care in order to meet this responsibility”, as outlined in code A1 in the Code of Ethics (Canadian Counselling Association, 2007, p. 5). This unfortunate component of a career in professional counselling may be related to the sometimes long work schedules and the isolation inherent in therapeutic work, in addition to the other sources of stress already discussed. As a professional group, therapists have been noted to be ‘loners’ (Owen, 1993). Studies on the friendships of therapists, such as the one done by Cogan (1977), have found that counsellors who have been practicing for more than ten years reported very few friendships, when previously they had reported much enjoyment and satisfaction from many more friendships. While this is not a direct concern for the effective practice of counselling, if therapists have a tendency to abuse alcohol or drugs, then the quality of therapy may be adversely affected (Thoresen, Nathan, Skorina, & Kilburg, 1983).

Relevant Studies

Few recent empirical studies have explored the impact that becoming and being a professional counsellor has on the counsellor’s personal and private life. Additionally, much of the foundational research in this area has become outdated, as research methods have evolved, and training programs for professional counsellors have continued to change and develop. The limited research in this area (all conducted over two decades ago) is described by Guy (1987) in his book *The Personal Life of Psychotherapists*, and includes a brief exploration of potential positive and negative consequences of the psychotherapeutic practice on the therapists’ family and social relationships.

In regards to familial relationship, it has been mainly suggested that therapists become more tolerant, accepting, nurturing, understanding, and patient in relationship to

his or her family members. Further, these qualities are assumed to improve the counsellor's ability to experience meaningful intimacy and fulfillment in relation to one's spouse (Cray & Cray, 1977). Unfortunately, other studies have found that therapists experience marital discord and failure at rates greater than that of the general public, with forty percent of therapists surveyed being divorced (Looney et al., 1980; Wahl, 1986). While the benefits and professional hazards already discussed expectedly also affect the spouse and family of the therapist, the suggestions provided by Guy (1987) of how they are affected are "largely a result of conjecture and supposition" (p. 129). Research on the impact of therapeutic practice is also limited in this same way, with few empirical studies supporting the suggested positive and negative impacts discussed. Overall, the many articles, books, and studies cited in Guy's review of the literature suggest that the influence of therapeutic practice on the personal lives of therapists is largely an unknown and mixed bag.

More recently, a research study conducted by Truell (2001) has been able to offer empirical support for some of the suggestions found in Guy's discussion, including the 'mixed bag' influence of counsellor education. Truell interviewed graduates (class of 1998) of a Diploma program in Counselling at a university in the United Kingdom. Eight participants were randomly selected by a former professor and then invited to participate. Six former students volunteered to take part in the research. All six subjects had been in the same class, and thus knew each other very well. There were four females and two males, all between 25 and 45 years of age. The two central questions the study intended to answer were: (a) what are the negative effects of counselling training upon the trainee; and (b) what are ways to reduce the negative effects associated with learning

counselling? Only the results targeted by the first research question are relevant to the current discussion.

Truell's (2001) methodology included in-depth semi-structured interviewing, which was an attempt to harness the voice of counselling trainees and recent graduates, as that has been mostly absent in the literature. More specifically, the researchers used grounded theory, ex post facto research, and action research methods to guide the study. Relevant focus questions used in the interviews asked about the effect of learning counselling on the participant's relationship with his or her spouse, other family members, and friends. Further, participants were also asked: (a) what expectations they had placed upon themselves in the process of becoming a counsellor, (b) what feelings these expectations had led to, and (c) what the public reaction was to their choice to become a counsellor.

The process of data analysis was mostly informed by the grounded theory approach, and thus the data underwent a constant process of selection, focusing, abstracting, and contrasting so that the researcher was able to draw distinct themes and conclusions. Overall, four major themes resulted from participants' responses to the various focus questions. Only the first two themes are relevant to the effect of becoming a counsellor on the personal life of counsellors, as the other two themes summarised suggested changes to the counsellor training program.

The "effects of counselling training on the trainees' relationships" was the first theme. All six participants reported re-examining their relationships with family members and having become more focused on the communication patterns in their families. Interestingly, while five said that their new perspectives caused difficulties in their

relationship with their spouse, five also indicated that their relationship was currently better than before they started training. The difficulties described included: mistaken beliefs that they could resolve all the problems in their relationship, changing interests that they previously had shared with their spouses, alienating their spouses by using psychological jargon/techniques, and expecting their spouse to change at the same rate they were changing. These difficulties resulted in the couple distancing themselves from each other, and in one case engaging in ongoing and excessive argument. Further, two of the participants reported that these difficulties dissipated within eighteen months after training ended, while three participants were still experiencing relationship difficulties that had started during the counselling training. Finally, one person reported that her and her spouse underwent personal growth in a complimentary fashion, and that there was little conflict in their relationship.

All six participants in Truell's study (2001) also reported that they had begun to question their relationships with siblings, parents, and for one participant, her own children. Five out of six participants experienced uncomfortable feelings as a result of their new perspectives. Another participant commented that at the start of his training he became more distanced from his family members and then had to re-establish new connections with them. For other participants, different problems occurred, such as family members asking them for an 'expert' opinion on a family difficulty. Two participants felt that generally their relationships with their family members have now improved after having completed the counselling training. Three participants reported that they have decreased their involvement with their family members. Moreover, one

participant said that she now has the same kind of relationship with her family as she previously had.

In regards to their relationships with friends, all six participants reported that their friendships had changed as a result of counselling training. Five of them reported that they had become more selective and chosen to distance themselves from some friendships or seek new ones. Another participant reported that the course helped her to establish new boundaries so that her old friends would not take advantage of her. A further participant reported that he came under a lot of pressure from some of his old male friends who had said that counselling was not part of the male role. Four of the participants said that they had fewer friends now than at the beginning of their training. Three of the participants stated that the changed relationships were positive for them. They said that the friendships they now had were more meaningful than previous friendships. Participants said they could now talk more intimately with fewer friends. Five of the participants said that it was difficult for them while these changes were taking place and some reported that their old friends accused them of being 'arrogant'.

Finally, all the participants noted that the general public reacted differently to them when they said that they were doing counselling training. The participants reported being more aware of these reactions from the public in the first half of their training. None of them were sure whether they became accustomed to the reactions, or the reactions became less severe as time went on.

How the learning of counselling affected the trainee's self-expectations was the second theme that emerged. All six participants reported varying levels of distress, and all of them had come to believe that in order to be a good counsellor, they needed to

resolve all the conflicts in their own lives. Other self-expectations included participants feeling that they should be able to solve all of their clients' problems, and that they should acquire counselling skills with ease and perform them perfectly. All of the participants reported that these expectations caused them to have feelings of depression, one reported feeling heightened anxiety, another reported sadness and excessive crying, and one more reported feeling like a fraud. Four subjects indicated they had feelings of guilt, experienced in the earlier part of their training, although several of them reported still experiencing some of those beliefs and the subsequent feelings.

Truell (2001) asserts that it was clear from the findings that learning counselling can cause the trainee, along with their family and friends, considerable disruptions, which confirms much of the research previously discussed. It supports the ideas that the public reacts differently to counsellors, that the process of training leads to changes in the trainee that can cause interpersonal conflicts, and that counsellors experience decreased emotional investment in their relationships. Additionally, the results indicate that these experiences begin in the counselling training as the trainee becomes more selective about which friends and family members they want to spend time with. Further, the results suggest that trainees tend to feel stress, guilt, and even depression as a result of unrealistic expectations that develop in the training process.

Although Truell's (2001) findings offer preliminary support for the outdated literature on the impact of becoming a counsellor on the personal lives of those counsellors, there are some limitations to this research. The sample size used in this study was relatively small, and thus further research is needed to determine the transferability of the phenomena described. Further, the participants were all from the same graduating

class within the same program, allowing for possible cohort and program effects. Finally, the participants had taken part in a Diploma training program in the UK, and may not compare to the two-year graduate training required of professional counsellors in Canada, which may influence the counsellors-in-training in different ways. As such, while the findings of this study suggest that counsellors are indeed affected by the process of becoming counsellors, the impact on their personal life is still not fully understood.

Another relevant research study was conducted by McAuliffe in 2002. In this study, fifteen undergraduate students in a counselling program in the United States were asked (a) how they changed during their program, as well as (b) what in the program influenced these changes. Twelve of the participants, who were all students in one group techniques course, were interviewed in a semi-structured fashion in a focus group setting. Three other students from a senior internship seminar participated in intensive one-to-one interviews. For the purpose of this discussion, only the results of the first research question is relevant.

From the results, the researchers identified three categories of changes in students: (1) increased reflexivity, (2) increased autonomy, and (3) valuing dialogue. *Increased reflexivity* was defined, on the basis of the data, as “an inclination to consider multiple perspectives within oneself before acting.” Being reflective implied actively seeking and naming the personal, family, and other cultural influences on one’s own perceptions. The change to increased reflexivity was deduced from a series of interviewee statements about pausing before acting.

Increased autonomy and interdependence was defined, from the data, as “the capacity to distinguish one’s own from others’ perspectives and to act accordingly, as

opposed to unquestioningly adhering to social expectations and norms.” The researchers labelled three related subthemes for autonomy: (a) creating boundaries between self and other, (b) reducing the need for control in counseling situations, and (c) learning to cooperate. *Creating boundaries* was defined as “the ability to separate one’s own perceptions from others’ and to set limits on relationships.” *Reduced need for control in counseling situations* was defined as “letting others present themselves and not imposing directives on their behaviour.” This took the form of reduced directiveness in helping. *Learning to cooperate* was defined as “recognition of the importance of mutuality in creating effective work environments.” This cooperative inclination appeared to add the dimension of “interdependence” to autonomy.

Valuing dialogue was defined by the researchers, on the basis of the data, as “interest in others’ perspectives, actively listening to others, and the ability to engage in verbal interaction with others so that a synthesis of perspectives is possible.” This category of change included four subthemes: appreciating uncertainty, recognizing others’ contributions, reducing one’s directiveness and “judgmentalness”, and deliberating dialogically. *Appreciating uncertainty* was defined as “appreciation for emerging information and willingness to delay closure.” *Recognizing others’ contributions* was defined as “openness to peers’ ideas.” *Reducing “judgmentalness”* was defined as “recognition of an inclination toward prejudice and the tendency to criticize others.” *Deliberating dialogically* is the fourth subtheme under “valuing dialogue.” It was defined as “actively listening to and incorporating others’ perspectives in discussions and problem solving.”

While these results help clarify and describe the experiences of counselling students, its contribution to the literature for understanding of the impact of counsellor training on the personal lives of counsellors is very limited. Additionally, the participants in the study were undergraduate students rather than graduate students in a professional program in counselling. Moreover, the study seemed to focus primarily on the educational and professional development aspects of the program rather than how they were affecting the trainees in a personal way. Further, the findings described were seen as similar to the general expectations of change resulting from participating in university education, and were not specific to the process of *counsellor* education.

As these appear to be the only two recent studies currently available in the literature, it is evident that more research is still needed on this topic area. Particularly, research that investigates the personal impact that becoming and being a professional counsellor has on the private lives of current professional counsellors in Canada is required. This kind of specific research allows us to better understand the effects of Canadian counsellor education and how the *profession* affects the *professional*.

Chapter 3: Methods & Methodology

As a student in a Masters in Counselling Psychology program, the researcher knows the impact the professional training she has received has had on her life. The year and a half of graduate counsellor education has already influenced not only her professional identity, but also her personal sense of self. The intensely experiential nature of the learning process and the great amount of self-reflection involved has led to many developments in the researcher's personality, her interactional style, and her frame of mind. Further, because of this psychological education process, personal issues and worries have been amplified, past experiences have been endlessly analyzed, and relationships have been experienced in a different light. Moreover, the researcher's relational skills have been refined, her understanding of herself and others has increased, and her empathy and tolerance of differences in the world has deepened. Although the researcher's professional education in counselling is only partially complete, the effects of this training are already noticeable, at least to the researcher herself. Furthermore, her experiences and her review of the literature have led her to believe that there may be more negative than positive impacts on one's personal life as a result of counselling training and practice. As a researcher, the researcher acknowledges this bias as she embarks on this investigation. How this experience of counsellor training will continue to impact her life in the future, she is not sure. Yet she imagines that the re-organization of her personal life will continue as her counsellor training transforms into her counselling career.

Exploring how counsellor education could further affect her personal life is a topic of great interest to the researcher. While many models and expectations have been

outlined in regards to common paths in the professional development of a counsellor, she has yet to find a model for how her personal life will develop alongside her professional career. Thus, she can feel a sense of normalcy when she doubts the effectiveness of her counselling skills or when she is unfamiliar with certain therapeutic techniques, for she has been repeatedly reminded that the learning and mastering of counselling abilities is ongoing. The researcher can also feel satisfied with her progress as she begins to develop her personal theory of change, complete her first practicum, and gain confidence in her professional role, for these are all well outlined steps in the professional development of counsellors. However, when the researcher finds herself examining her childhood, questioning the psychological motives of family and friends, or feeling alone in her deep understanding of her own unconscious motivators and underlying feelings, the sense of normalcy is not as strong. Further, when the researcher is able to better communicate with her partner or more clearly understand her emotional experiences, she feels alone in her personal improvements. Perhaps these experiences are in fact common to many professional counsellors and counsellors-in-training, but there is no evidence to support this hope. And thus, the personal and private changes that occur simultaneously to the professional changes go unclassified and misunderstood.

In an attempt to address this gap in understanding, the following research question has been proposed: *how does becoming and being a professional counsellor affect one's personal life?* This chapter describes the methodology and methods used for answering this research question. 'Methodology' refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective for the research project, while the 'methods' are the specific techniques used.

In good research, the methods are consistent with the logic embodied in the methodology, which is what the researcher has strived for in this study.

Methodology

As outlined by Wilber (1999) and summarized by Black (2008), there are three strands of all valid knowing that should be considered when attempting to gather subjective experiential data “scientifically”. These are ‘instrumental injunction’, ‘direct apprehension’, and ‘communal confirmation/rejection’. Instrumental injunction refers to using the appropriate method for answering your specific type of question. Direct apprehension refers to the immediate experience of the subject area, as a result of the appropriate method. Finally, the communal confirmation/rejection is the validation of the results with others who “have adequately completed the injunctive and apprehensive strands” of the process (Black, 2008, p. 5).

In keeping with these essential properties of valid scientific investigation, the research question – *how does becoming and being a professional counsellor affect one’s personal life?* – needs to ultimately determine the injunction. This investigation aims to explore counsellors’ subjective experience of the effect that graduate counsellor education has had on their personal lives, which fits with the concept of *analytic realism*. Analytic realism assumes that the social world is an interpreted world, and thus the meanings and definitions brought to actual situations are produced through a communication process (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). In other words, human social experience is mediated by interpretation, as objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own inherent meaning separate from interpersonal dialogue. Further, the meaning that people give to their experiences and their process of interpretation are

essential and constructive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Additionally, “justness” or the subjective truth that makes up the social realm is time-bound, contextual, and co-constructed through language. Basically, the internal experience of an event – such as the one targeted in this research question – only exists when it is represented by words, which are intrinsically created by a social process. Thus, these experiences cannot be observed or measured through physical or statistical means. Instead, in order to gain greater understanding of this inner experience of counsellors, it is necessary to engage professional counsellors in conversational dialogue where they describe this experience first-hand and give meaning to it through their own words.

As such, a qualitative injunction is most appropriate for uncovering the answers of the proposed research question, since qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understating a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994, p. 2).

There are five basic features of qualitative research, though not all characteristics are always exhibited to an equal degree. These basic features are a naturalistic context, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive data analysis, and participant perspectives or meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Further, the basic theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research are in accordance with the concept of analytic realism described above. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2003), qualitative researchers are concerned with “meaning” in addition to the five basic characteristics mentioned, and

qualitative research often assumes the stance that human experience is mediated by interpretation.

Moreover, qualitative methods allow the researcher to get closer to the conditions in which people attribute meanings to objects and events, and thus the resulting descriptions of those meanings are likely to be more accurate in comparison to results acquired through more formal and impersonal quantitative methods (Becker, 1996). Qualitative research, which often involves participant interviews, allows the researcher to directly engage in the meaning-making process of the participant through dialogue. This also fulfills the requirement for direct apprehension of data in valid scientific investigations (Wilber, 1999). These co-constructions obtained through direct dialogue require less inference and fewer assumptions and are likely to be a more adequate representation of the participant's and the researcher's joint understanding of the subject matter. It is also important to understand that in qualitative methodology: (a) the *accuracy* of the data refers to the sense of being based on close interaction with what is being talked about, (b) the *precision* of the data refers to the sense of being close to the thing discussed and thus being ready to take account of matters not anticipated in the original formulation of the problem, and (c) that the *analysis* is based on knowledge about a wide range of matters that impinge on the question under study (Becker, 1996). Thus, qualitative research is "carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts, and is commonly guided by the ethic to remain loyal or true to the phenomena under study, rather than to any particular set of methodological techniques or principles" (Altheide & Johnson, 1998, p. 290). In sum, the qualitative

researcher attempts to study the subjective states of the participants in order to increase understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Finally, in qualitative research, the validation of the results through communal confirmation/rejection occurs when the results are checked by the participants themselves. Initially, the researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the empirical world, laboriously collecting, reviewing, and coding piles of data. Qualitative researchers believe that situations are complex, so they attempt to portray many dimensions rather than to narrow the field of knowledge. After the researcher has organized the results, validation can occur. The participants of the study co-constructed the data with the researcher – and are the only ones who have adequately completed the injunctive and apprehensive strands – and thus the participants must validate the results as being representative of their experience. This again, is consistent with the underlying concept of analytic realism discussed, and aims at ensuring that the participants' subjective experience is well represented.

To summarize, since the targets of the research question – the counsellors' experience of how their personal lives have been changed in relation to their professional training and practice – are part of the inner collective realm of reality, a method that allows these experiences to be studied directly is needed. Further, these experiences can only be described through language, as dialogue reveals the true meaning given to these experiences. Qualitative research using interviews aims at increasing understanding by gathering data about an experience directly from the participant through conversation, which fits with the needs of the research question and the three requirements of valid scientific inquiry.

Assessing Rigor in Qualitative Inquiry

As discussed, qualitative methodology offers many strengths for conducting the research proposed. Qualitative methods strive to increase understanding about a subject area by studying those who experience it first-hand. Further, the naturalistic setting, the concern for process, and the concern with ‘meaning’ allows the researcher to get as close as possible to observing the inner social truth of the participants of interest. As such, the data is represented through words, which can be seen as a closer representation of the real human experience than numbers or formulas. In this sense, the validity of qualitative research methods for studying a subjective social process is undeniable. Additionally, the vast descriptive data that result from qualitative methods such as those proposed offers a great amount of detail and a broad range of information related to the topic under investigation. Moreover, the inductive approach to data analysis allows theories to emerge from the bottom-up, making room for any anomalies or outliers that may exist. In contrast, a top-down approach would utilize the data to further support, modify, or refine a theory already developed. Finally, qualitative research widens the base of knowledge and makes way for new understandings and ways of studying phenomena.

Although the qualitative methodology described has many strengths and characteristics that are called-upon by the proposed research question, it is still important to assess the rigor of this qualitative inquiry. For traditional quantitative researchers, certain aspects of qualitative research may be considered to be weaknesses and are often critiqued. The descriptive data that is an inherent part of qualitative methods frequently requires procedures for data collection and data analysis that are time consuming. Further, the process of analysing the vast amount of data is not standardized, raising

questions about the “reliability” of the results. Additionally, it can be quite difficult to go through the process of data reduction and construction of themes, potentially leading the researcher to over-simplifying the data or excluding important categories of experience, raising concerns about “internal validity” and “objectivity”. Finally, the findings obtained through qualitative methods may not appear to retain the same kind of “external validity” and “generalizability” that findings of quantitative methods are often considered to have. The problem however, is that while the issues of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity are valid concerns in quantitative research, they are based on a model that is incompatible with qualitative research.

Different language is needed to fit the qualitative view, although the *trustworthiness* of the research can still be assessed. According to Guba (1981), there are four aspects of trustworthiness that are relevant to both quantitative and qualitative studies: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. However, since there are philosophical differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches, the model defines different strategies for increasing and assessing trustworthiness in each type of research (Krefting, 1991).

The “truth value” of the research refers to “how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants, and context” (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). In quantitative research, this is determined by how well threats to internal validity have been managed and how valid the instruments used are for measuring the phenomenon under study. In qualitative research, this concept of internal validity, which assumes that there is a single tangible reality, is replaced by the term *credibility*. In qualitative investigations, the truth value is obtained from discovering human experiences

as they are lived and perceived by the participants (Krefting, 1991). It has been suggested that a qualitative study is credible when it presents such accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience that those who share that experience would immediately recognise the descriptions (Sandelowski, 1986). One strategy for increasing credibility in qualitative research is for the researcher to be immersed in the research setting in order to enable recurrent patterns to be identified and verified. By spending an extended period of time with informants (called *prolonged exposure*), the researcher is able to build rapport with participants and check perspectives, which ultimately enhances research findings. The length and conversational tone of this study is aimed at achieving these effects. Further, credibility can also be increased by member checking – where the researcher reveals the overall interpretation of the data to the participants to ensure that the final representation of the data reflects their experiences well. This strategy has also been incorporated into the study, as the final step in the data analysis involved having the participants themselves review and make revisions to the resulting themes and findings to ensure that these are accurate representations of their experience, encompassing all major aspects and components of their subjective realities.

The “applicability” of the research is the ability to generalize the findings to larger populations or the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or with other groups (Krefting, 1991). In quantitative research, this is determined by how well threats to external validity have been managed, and how “generalizable” the findings are based on the sampling technique. In qualitative research, the applicability is sometimes not seen as relevant, since the purpose of the research is to describe a particular phenomenon or experience, not to generalize to others. However, the

transferability of qualitative research is sometimes relevant, and is the criterion by which the applicability of the data are assessed. Qualitative research meets the criterion of transferability when the findings fit into contexts outside of the study situation that have a degree of similarity and goodness of fit to the research context (Krefting, 1991). Thus, as long as the researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison, he or she has addressed the problem of applicability. While the sample of participants used for this study may not be representative of all professional Master's level counsellors worldwide, it is hoped that the descriptive data allows the findings to be relatively applicable to other groups of professional counsellors who share the same form of professional training and standards of practice.

The “consistency” of research is “whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). This is called “reliability” in quantitative research, referring to the degree to which the same findings would be obtained if the investigation were to be replicated. This quantitative notion of reliability assumes again that there is a single reality, which is incompatible with the qualitative emphasis on the uniqueness and variation of the human subjective experience. Thus, variability is expected in qualitative research, and the consistency of a study is defined in terms of its *dependability*. The concept of dependability implies variability that can be ascribed to identified sources (Krefting, 1991). One way to assess the dependability of a study is to determine how *auditable* it is – whether another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail used by the primary investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of a colleague or methodological experts to check the research plan and implementation is another means of ensuring dependability

(Krefting, 1991). Both of these strategies were used in this study, as other supervising researchers reviewed both the research methods and the data analysis.

Finally, the “neutrality” component of assessing trustworthiness in research refers to the freedom of bias in the research procedures and results. In quantitative research, this is referred to as “objectivity”, achieved through procedures like instrumentation and randomization, and supposedly sufficiently distancing the researcher from having any personal influence on the study. The opposite is true in qualitative research, where the distance between the research and participant is minimized in order to increase the worth of the findings. The researcher’s primary goal is to add to knowledge, not pass judgement or make speculations about a setting, while keeping in mind that they are active participants in the creation of the data. Qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a way of dealing with them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Rather than trying to eliminate their personal biases, the researchers strive to become more reflective and conscious of how who they are shapes and enriches what they do. In qualitative research, the emphasis of neutrality is shifted from the researcher to the data, so that the neutrality of the data is assessed instead of the neutrality of the investigator (Krefting, 1991). This is referred to as *confirmability*, and is achieved when truth value and applicability are established. The major strategy for establishing confirmability is the audit strategy already mentioned. It is suggested that by having an external researcher (such as a supervisor as was done in this study) follow the progression of events in a project and be able understand how and why decisions were made, another researcher could arrive at comparable conclusions given the same data and research context (Krefting, 1991). Furthermore, in order to become more reflective and conscious

of her own biases, the researcher continuously wrote in a journal throughout the various stages of research.

In sum, the assessment of trustworthiness in qualitative research has been described in terms of truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. This study included strategies for increasing all four of these aspects of rigorous qualitative research, which established the trustworthiness of this investigation.

Methods

The specific procedures used in this investigation, as described below, were selected based on their consistency with the methodology already discussed and with the needs of the research question: *how does becoming and being a professional counsellor affect one's personal life?* Further, a thorough review of the literature surrounding this research topic has informed the recruitment of participants, the interview questions, and provided a base of knowledge for discussing emergent themes. These factors help to strengthen the credibility of the study. To strengthen the dependability and the confirmability of the study, the supervising faculty members for this investigation aided in the process of data analysis. Further, the participants validated the themes resulting from the data analysis in order to ensure their experiences are well represented. Finally, the results are descriptive in nature, contributing to the transferability of the findings.

Sampling and Recruitment of Participants

Purposeful volunteer sampling included poster/telephone recruitment and snowball sampling to recruit participants for the research study. Purposeful sampling refers to choosing particular participants to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory or understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Snowball sampling involves asking participants already interviewed to recommend other people to the study who fit the research criteria and are likely to yield relevant, information-rich data (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005). For this investigation, participants needed to be Master's level counsellors who have obtained their master's degree in Counselling between 2 and 10 years ago – which assures that participants have had time post-graduation to become practicing professionals and yet can still recall their professional training in a fair amount of detail. Eligible participants were selected from the Victoria yellow pages under 'counsellors', and then received a phone call where they were invited to participate in the study. Participants were also recruited through posters that were displayed in a variety of agencies where professional master's level counsellors are employed, such as Counselling Services at the University of Victoria, Citizens' Counselling, Child and Youth Mental Health, and Adult Mental Health & Addictions Services in Victoria. The posters described the study in general, described the participant criteria, and directed interested counsellors to contact the researcher by phone or email if they wished to participate in the study. Approximately seven participants were desired in total for this research in order to allow for depth and thoroughness in conclusions made from the data. A total of six counsellors participated in this study, all of whom were invited to participate through telephone recruitment.

When contacting interested individuals about participating in the study, the researcher outlined the purpose of the study and explain how their contributions would fit with her research objectives. Additionally, she described the nature of their participation and what would be involved. The researcher explained that she would be looking at the impact of becoming and being a professional counsellor (at the master's level) on his or

her personal life. If individuals indicated continued interest and availability, they were scheduled for an interview. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were given a copy of the participant consent form for their perusal and signature. The consent form outlined in detail all aspects of participation and methods utilized to secure anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Collection

The data gathering method used in this investigation was semi-structured qualitative interviews. Interviews allow the researcher to learn and understand the meanings the participants make of their everyday lives, and how these impact thoughts and feelings (Weiss, 1994). According to Patton (1991), this approach to data collection provides a thorough description of what people know about the situations that they themselves create.

The primary question that guided the individual interviews was: How has your counselling education and professional practice affected your personal life? In addition, the following sub-questions were used to further explore this subject matter: (a) What is your experience of change within yourself? (b) How have your relationships with your partner, family, and friends been changed? (c) How has your communication changed? (d) How has learning about individual psychology affected your personal life? The interview questions were informed by the literature which suggests that counsellors-in-training often experience changes in their sense of self and in their relationships with others, and were formulated in order to address the research question. The interview procedures and questions were pilot tested by the researcher with a colleague in the counselling training program prior to the beginning data collection. This allowed the

researcher to refine the wording of the questions in order to ensure the questions were eliciting responses that answered the research question, and to obtain an accurate sense of how the interview would unfold.

Furthermore, as a student in counselling without the experience of professional practice, and as a new researcher without specific training in research interviewing, one additional question was asked of all participants. As the final question of the research interview, participants were asked if there were any questions that had not been asked that they felt should be asked. If participants proposed a question, they were then asked to answer their own question based on their experience as professional counsellors. This allowed the researcher to acknowledge the limitation of her experience, and offer the participants a chance to use to further inform the research and results.

All participants were interviewed over a span of three weeks, and each interview lasted for approximately 90 minutes, with a period available for debriefing afterwards. Time was taken at the start of the interview to build a sense of trust and comfort with the participant prior to proceeding into the interview question. The interview questions were used to guide the conversation, and were supplemented with prompts for clarification or to elicit the participant to expand on a particular response. Additional questions were sometimes asked in response to participants' answers in order to better understand their experience and the meaning given to it. These steps helped ensure that the data gathered in the interviews formed as clear and as accurate of descriptions of the participants' experience as possible, eliminating the need to verify the transcripts of the interviews with participants. By taking these careful measures, validation by participants was only necessary as part of the data analysis process.

To facilitate the transcription process, all individual interviews were audio-taped with the participants' permission. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym of their choice to be used in the interview. Although participants were not anonymous to the researcher during the interview process, all names and specific identifying information were excluded from the data and results in order to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. Audio-taping the conversational interviews allowed the researcher to recall and review the content of the interview in a more holistic fashion, enabling attention to innuendoes of vocal variance such as tone and pacing of speech. After the interview was complete, participants were thanked for their participation and reminded that they would later be asked to review the results of the thematic analysis and be invited to make any changes in order to make sure the resulting descriptions represent their experience well.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching through and arranging the content obtained in the interview to enable the researcher to come up with findings.

Analysis involves “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147). For this study, straightforward qualitative thematic analysis was used. The first step in this data analysis process is the transcribing of the interviews.

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, with font size indicating significant changes in volume and color-coded text indicating general emotional tone. Different fonts were selected to represent the researcher's experience of each participant. This form of transcribing provided the closest representation of the dialogue shared with

the participant, and thus maintained the most accuracy in describing the participants' inner experience.

The next step in the data analysis and interpretation process is for the researcher to immerse herself in the data and begin to develop a coding system to organize the data. Initially, the researcher went through the data and coded it for "meaning units". This involved a careful and thorough process of going through each interview transcript and separating the dialogue that pertains to the research question from other extraneous dialogue (such as small talk, or unrelated tangents). Once this was complete, the thematic analysis could begin.

As described by Bogdan & Biklen (2003), thematic analysis involves several steps: the researcher searched through the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data covered, and then she wrote down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. In the end, these words and phrases became coding categories, which formed a means for sorting the data. By applying and modifying these categories of data, themes began to emerge. At that point, refining the vast number of themes was necessary to reduce overlap; data reduction is often a part of thematic analysis. Decisions to limit codes are imperative, and fixed codes should eventually emerge. Once this coding system had been developed, the researcher went back through the data and marked each unit of data with the appropriate coding category. This task can be complicated as often different sections of data fall into more than one category. Deciding exactly what phrases and words pertain to each specific coding category is the only way to form clearly supported themes. Finally, after the data had been categorized, the formation of themes was complete and would eventually constitute the findings to be discussed.

Validation Process

To ensure that the data have been organized with exclusive regard to the themes that participants actually generated, the data analysis was reviewed by the researcher's supervising faculty member. This helps ensure that there is external consistency between the content provided by the participants and the themes generated through data analysis. After this revision process, participants were asked to review the categorizations and offer any insights towards revision. In order to best represent their experience, the participants were invited to make changes, additions, or deletions to their contributions to the pool of data if necessary. This process of validation ensured that the data segments, codes, and code categories were generated from an emic perspective that revealed the participants' experiences accurately. After these two phases of validation and revision were complete, the thematic results were formulated into a discussion of the experiences of the participants and were considered in relation to other literature on this topic.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an essential part of all scientific research studies. In order for the study to be approved by Human Research Ethics Boards, the benefits of participation in the study must outweigh the potential risks. In this particular investigation, the risks to participants was considered to be minimal, in the sense that the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research was no greater than those encountered by the participants in their everyday lives related to the research topic.

There was only one potential inconvenience and one possible risk to participating in this research study. This drawback was that participation would require approximately

80 to 150 minutes of the individual's time (combined time between participating the interview and then validating the results as part of data analysis). Although the premises of this research did not require that participants necessarily take time away from work to take part in the study, it may still have posed an inconvenience to subjects. The potential risk to participating in this research was that participants could have experienced some unpleasant emotions or recalled unpleasant experiences when participating in the interviews. On the other hand, the benefits associated with participation could have included having an opportunity to openly discuss how one's career as a counsellor has impacted one's private life, and perhaps an increased sense of self-understanding and awareness. Further, participation in the study allows the research to contribute to the literature on counsellor personal development and the resulting increase in understanding may eventually influence counsellor education programs and the lives of professional counsellors.

Another component of ethical research is the process of obtaining participants' consent to participate in the study. As already mentioned, participants received a description of the study and of what was involved in their participation prior to being scheduled for an interview. Further, prior to commencing the interview process, participants were asked to read over a consent form describing the parameters of the research in detail, and then provide their signature on the consent form if they wish to participate. As such, after receiving this information, the participants could give free and informed consent to participate in the study. Since participation was requested of participants at two separate points in time – the first for the interview, and the second for the validation of the results – ongoing consent was indicated on a second portion of the

consent form prior to participants engaging in the second part of the study. This ensured that participants had given ongoing consent, and that all the data obtained from them, both in the interview and in the form of revisions to the results, were obtained ethically. Furthermore, participants were informed that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences or explanation, and that if they wished to withdraw from the study, they could choose whether to allow their data to be used in data analysis.

A further ethical concern is that of anonymity and confidentiality. As already mentioned, participants used a pseudonym during interviews in order to ensure their anonymity. Further, all identifying information was excluded from the transcripts, data analysis, and results in order to protect the participant's confidentiality and anonymity. Only the primary researcher made note of which interview transcript corresponded with each participant in order to connect the participant to the appropriate results in the validation phase. Finally, all research data were kept protected in locked cabinets and password protected files. The only limits to confidentiality – which are likely already familiar to professional counsellors – were the legal requirements for disclosures of a child or vulnerable adult in need of protection to be reported. These limitations were outlined on the consent form, and verbally reviewed by the researcher prior to commencing participation in the study. As a final ethical precaution, all data will be destroyed twelve months after the completion of the investigation; paper data will be shredded, electronic files will be deleted, and audiotapes will be erased.

Given the nature of this investigation, the competence of the target population, and the precautions described above, the ethical considerations for this investigation did

not pose any major concerns. With this in mind, it is believed that the benefits of conducting this research outweighed the potential risks to participants.

Chapter 4: Results

Qualitative interviews were conducted with six professional counsellors in the greater Victoria area. All six participants had obtained a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology from university programs primarily in Western Canada. All six participants were in private practice, although a few participants were additionally employed by local agencies. Although the exact age of participants was not obtained during the interview process, all participants appeared to be over the age of 40 at the time of the interview, and thus all would have been over the age of 30 at the time they completed their Master's program. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence would suggest that Victoria is a relatively competitive market for counsellors, given the sheer numbers of counsellors advertised in the Yellow Pages and the fact that Victoria is a relatively small city compared to larger urban centers like Vancouver. However, it is acknowledged that an empirical study is required to verify if Victoria has more counsellors per capita than other cities of equal or larger size. Finally, it is the researcher's perception that the commitment to maintaining a healthy and balanced lifestyle appears to be prominent in Victoria and is often a topic of discourse among both professionals and lay people in the researcher's life.

The qualitative interviews, as described in the previous chapter, were conducted in a semi-structured format, with a focus on how the training and practice of counselling has affected the participants' personal lives. The interviews were carefully transcribed by the researcher, at which point the data underwent Thematic Analysis, based on the system described by Bogdan & Biklen (2003). After the researcher spent a considerable amount of time in the empirical world, carefully collecting, reviewing, and coding piles of data, a list of 15 themes eventually emerged. The development of these themes was reviewed by

the supervising faculty member, in order to ensure that the process was *auditable* – when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail used by the primary investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – and thus that the dependability of the study remained intact. Finally, each theme was individually validated by all six participants, to ensure that the themes reflected their experiences well.

Although it was originally expected that a smaller number of themes would result, the professional counsellors interviewed were quite articulate and reflective in reporting their experiences, which allowed for a larger number of clear, distinct themes to develop. All fifteen primary themes were endorsed by at least four of the six participants, half of which were endorsed by up to five or six participants. The fifteen themes that emerged in relation to how becoming and being a professional counsellor affects one's personal life were: 1. Better Boundaries; 2. Better Interpersonal Relationships; 3. Better Relationship with Self; 4. Better Self-Care; 5. Better Understanding of Immediate Family Members. 6. Clarification of Values; 7. Evaluation of Integrity of Self; 8. Greater Self-Awareness and Self-Understanding; 9. Improved Communication; 10. Increased Acceptance of Others; 11. Interweaving of Personal and Professional; 12. More Presence; 13. Richer Life; 14. Selective Investment of Personal Energy into Relationships; 15. Sense of Gratitude.

It should be noted that a number of themes pertain to improvements of relationships. While the researcher considered combining these themes into one single theme representing “improved relationship”, review of the data clarified that there were several specific and clearly distinct categories of data within this larger umbrella of ‘improved relationships’. Thus, based on these clear distinct categories of data, the

various themes presented here were able to emerge as strong individual themes, all of which were individually validated by participants.

Additionally, two other notable themes also emerged, although both were only endorsed by three of the six participants. These secondary themes were Decreased Personal Resources and Increased Spiritual Connection. Finally, a notable category of responses pertaining to the financial aspects of becoming and being a professional counsellor is described.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that while counsellor training and professional practice have been discussed in detail throughout this document as separate phases of becoming and being a professional counsellor, this distinction was not made by participants when discussing the effects this process has had on their personal lives. Counsellor training most often involves a large component of practice, and professional practice must include continued professional development, which may account for this perception of one single process rather than several steps towards an end. Despite this overlap, counsellors are regularly considered to be trainees until their program has been completed, at which point they are considered to be in professional practice. However, this did not seem to influence the participants with respect to how they discussed the ways their personal lives were affected by the counselling profession.

What follows is the title and description of each of the themes, followed by a verbatim quote from each participant who expressed the theme during his/her research interview. The title of the theme, the description of the theme, and the supporting quote provided were all validated by the participants as part of the validation phase of data

analysis. The names used here are the pseudonyms selected by participants. Further, the fonts presented here were selected by the researcher to represent each participant.

Primary Themes and Supporting Quotes

Better Boundaries

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have better boundaries in their interpersonal relationships. In other words, participants reported being more willing to set boundaries, seeing boundaries as important in relationships, or having more boundaries in their relationships with others.

- Allan: “And I’m sensitive to that kind of.. borderline-ish energy, and I, I’m ver, I just get really like, sharp boundaries around that, and tend to stay a little away, from those.”
- Anne: *“Uhhmm, you know I have healthier boundaries with people. And uh, that clarity around, there is a boundary, there is a limit to what you can be responsible for. And uhm, and, in all my relationships, I started to examine that, that boundary.”*
- Gail: *“Uhhmmm, I think just a willingness to set boundaries better. Uhm, boundary work is one of those areas that, we all, you know, women in particular perhaps, but lots of people struggle with setting good, healthy but flexible boundaries. And I think it’s helped me, you know, just with my brothers and things, being able to set a boundary, and,*

and the realization that you know, you do need to be able to say no. So definitely has improved my ability to set boundaries and my giving myself permission to do so, and knowing that that does make a difference, in how you feel.”

- *Norah: “So I guess, it’s a different boundary that exists for me now..... And coming back to a boundary, for myself of being okay with that... more willing to set up boundaries.”*

Better Interpersonal Relationships

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have better interpersonal relationships. Participants reported that their relationships have qualitatively improved, deepened, or become warmer.

- *Allan: “the one thing, specific thing that occurred to me, is that I’m tender-er with people, tender-er with people that I love and care about in my life. And, less afraid to show them that I care about them. Uhm, more embracing. I guess I, I, I felt uh happier, in relationship, and less, less stuck in some way.”*
- *Gail: “I guess I think that, uhm... they’ve deepened. I think I’ve deepened some of my friendships because I’m willing to really listen, and be patient. And maybe deal with issues rather than, uhh, let them, think that, I don’t need to deal with them or hope that they’ll go away.”*

- Norah: “Yess, uhhhm.....euuh.....noticing that the quality of some of my friendships have really improved. So I think the skills can be helpful and can enhance relationships”
- Sparky: “I guessssss that most of my relationships became a lot better. Because of course I was learning things about relationships, conflict, needs, all those kinds of things, and of course, so I started applying them. My relationships are deeper.”
- Tim: “my relationships, umm became significantly more uhmmmm.... rewarding and, and fulfilling. Uhmmm.....yeah my relationships with my with my kids improved, my relationship with my wife improved. Mmmhmm. As I..develop, grow, become more whole or complete or experience myself as those things, it allows me to support the people in my life in a different way.”

Better Relationship with Self

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice their relationship with themselves has improved. For example, participants found that they could trust themselves more, felt more comfortable with themselves, felt more whole, or felt more like their true selves.

- Allan: “I just, I feel like I uhm, am closer to my authentic self.”
- Anne: *“And that, I think,.. I think it's connected to a deeper assurance that I can trust myself around these things. It's not like you have, everything your way all the time, but you*

can make thoughtful decisions and you listen to that inner voice, to pay attention to your emotional responses. Well I think, the clarity I think contributes to a lot of things. I think there is more a sense of, I have a greater sense of who I am. "

- *Gail: "I think that it's uhm, probably raised my own sense of self. Uhm My own belief in myself. I think that I'm just far more willing to accept who I am. And, appreciate that. And uhm.....yeah so, I think in terms of change, uhghhm...it's just, I think it's just deepened my resolve to be who I am. Yeah, just sort of feel.. more, more, more of who I am. More, it's kind of like the process of becoming. Just, uhm..... I don't know, just, just look to feel more like myself in all situations."*
- *Norah: "well I think, my relationship with myself. More willing to ask for what I need, and feeling more comfortable. But I've become in some ways more of a priority. In some ways, it kind of felt like... learning to become in some ways a new or different me."*
- *Sparky: "I'll say that I just feel more whole, that I'm much more open about, uhm who I am and uhm, yeah. And I like it. I like who I am."*

Uhm...uuhhm, so that, so, and uhm, and I'm more forgiving of myself than I used to be as well."

- Tim: "On another level,..another way of looking at it, like the, the ego identity that I had held for myself before was dissolving and this more essential self was coming through and being expressed. And uhmm connecting with the deeper sense of knowing which goes with the trust in myself and...relying more on that, and an uhmm an artful intuitive way."

Better Self-Care

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have come to practice better self-care. Participants reported using strategies for taking better care of themselves, such as doing more things they enjoyed or making healthier day-to-day choices.

- Allan: "I actually do more self-care as a result. And you know, some of that is sitting and meditating more, or if just making sure I get out for a walk, on a grey day like this more often, or whatever it is."
- *Gail: "It also helps me integrate some of the strategies for self-care. I give myself permission way more to do self-care perhaps than I did before."*
- *Norah: "I just don't mess around with sleep anymore. So I go to bed at 9:30 or 10, and if I am tired, I don't do a very good job of being in relationship. I have*

to have a bit of an equilibrium in my life or a sense of balance. The piece around self-care has just become mandatory, so there's the time, the expense and the building in, eh having in my life ways to attend to my body, ways to attend to my psychology, ways to attend to my relationship, ways to, to attend to my environment."

- Sparky: "uhh....where I wo, might meet someone for coffee, or something like that, now I'm more interested in there being some sort of physical exercise involved with that, And uhhh so paying attention to uhhh how I'm looking after myself in the world. And sitting and having a coffee isn't one of them. Uhhh...you know, so I am making sure that I am eating well, sleeping well, exercising, uh reading, uhm doing art, uhm being with friends, having a spiritual connections. I mean I really try to have a pretty well-rounded life. And, I see that very much a piece of self-care. I really need that, I need to have other interests in my life, I have to be able to, you know, paint and play with people and those kinds of things."

Better Understanding of Immediate Family Members

Participants reported that due to their training and/or their practice, they have a greater understanding of the psychology of their immediate family members. Participants were able to understand the psychology around some of the behaviours and reactions their immediate family members habitually engaged in.

- Allan: "I was able eventually to recognize that a certain rather odd behaviour of my dad's was, that I was finding particularly hard to uhm, hard to keep baring with, uhm, really came out of, came out of traumatic reactions of his own."
- Anne: *"Well the other thing I mentioned was in my family, so my, my family of origin, uhmm, I had positive relationships with my mother, grandmother, but not so much my father, and I think uhmm my coursework, in my coursework, I came, 'cus I did a lot of family course work, I came to an understanding of, again that bigger picture, uhmm, how my father came to be who he is, and who I was, and what I needed, and what he was able to give me, and what I wasn't going to get. But I, yeah, in that way it affected my life. uhmm the biggest part being my dad was never going to be quite the dad I wanted him to be. I just knew, you know, there's no point in going over the same track that's never worked. He isn't going to change."*
- Norah: "So, like sure, attachment style, like we were doing training on, ehhhh...pre-natal experiences and how that impacts attachment, and it got me thinking about my circumstances of birth and what was happening for my mom there, so that, I think that informs my sense of my history with my family of origin and, and gets me thinking about things. And noticing that some of the learnings...uhh through the training, translate to my awareness when I'm, uhhh talking with s, family members. Uhhhhm, aware that, say for example, if I hear my mom and I can hear her begin, her anxiety level to go up,

and I have a sense of wh, of maybe what that's about, and then I don't need to take it as personal."

- Sparky: "The one [relationship] with my sister used to be kind of, uhm, competitive. Uhm, very competitive, not kind of. Very competitive, she's a younger sister, and she, uhm, was always competing with me. And I didn't understand that. And once I understood that, I was much more able to, uhm, be appreciative of her. I don't know that that would have happened otherwise."

Clarification of Values

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have gained some clarity around their values. Participants reported feeling clearer about their values or what they feel is important or a priority in their lives.

- Allan: "I really didn't... a lot of who I am, even the really profound things that I want or value, were kind of, out of sight or out of my reach. And they're much more in my sight and reach now. And the, the significant part of that has to do with, to do with my training. Yeah."
- Anne: *"I think that uhmm it's made, it's created a lot more clarity for me about what's important in life. ... I also explored it from my own personal experience, and out of that I gained more clarity about what I needed and what was important."*
- Norah: "And so I don't really feel like I'm on a treadmill, and that feels different when I'm interacting with some of my friends that are not in this field. I feel like the quality of my life is much more important to me now than

being busy or accomplishing. And so kind of a prioritizer of what's important. Uhhm....well, one of the things I've been thinking more about is, well what's important to me now?"

- Tim: "So those are the things that, that are important to me. Whereas, previous to my counselling experience, what was important to me was being financially secure, ummmmm, you know, living up to a certain image that I imagined was important, and ...getting my needs met and little capacity to support others in their own needs. And, ss, and so that is kind of flipped 180 degrees, where it'sss...those, those, those things that I deemed of primary importance, the ya know, security, finances, having my own needs met, are uhhmm..are not terrible important to me now."

Evaluation of Integrity of Self

Participants reported that due to their practice, they find themselves reflecting on how they live their lives and evaluating how well they integrate the lessons from their work into their personal lives. In other words, they strive to practice what they preach to their clients, and reflect on the level of congruence or integrity between their professional practice and their personal lives.

- Allan: "Just those, those kinds of interpersonal skills that, you know, I might coach a client on, or uhm, you know, I see it really helpful for some people when they're having a tough time in the office or in their relationship. You sit down and you work with people, and it puts you right in front of, it puts me right in front

of things that have personal meaning to me, that I have to ask myself questions about my own self or my own relationships, or my own aspirations for myself.”

- *Anne: “Ummm in a very sort of uhh basic way, if I’m encouraging a client to, you know, uhhm look at something and to think about how that something is affecting her or his life, maybe impeding their natural expression of self, or, it’s pretty hypocritical on some level to be encouraging someone to do that and then to go home and not do it yourself. I think what, what would you, if you’re going to have this exposure and, it ma, it only makes sense to apply it to your own self and to your own personal life and to try and improve your life and the lives of those that you love.”*
- *Gail: “I’m advocating that they take care of themselves, that they believe in themselves, that they, they allow themselves to be, you know, at the top of the list every once in a while. And so, that probably made me realize that, well I need to do that for myself too, got to walk my talk. And I think that I am, walking my talk around that. ...working with people. And encouraging them to be doing these things. And realizing, well, hmm I need to do these things for myself as well.”*

- Norah: "And I think that other people's process...uh, makes me think of my own stuff, or starts stuff for me, or affirms, or gets me curious, or..."
- Sparky: "uhm,...what I recommend to clients, I practice. I don't really see being able to recommend something I don't practice. Yeah. Uhm, one just to reiterate, is that...I try to practice what I preach, so if I'm recommending things to people, I often think in my mind, think Ah! When's the last time you did that? And then do something about it. uhm, and I don't recommend things that I'm not prepared to attend to myself."

Greater Self-Awareness and Self-Understanding

Participants reported that due to the training and/or the practice, they are able to be more aware of their own internal processes. Participants expressed having more understanding of their own thoughts, feelings, sensations, or patterns of reacting.

- Allan: "It does, it does land in just being aware, more aware of how I do what I do....and particular how it affects me, and that, how, and how that effect on me shows up in my relationship or you know. I'm more able to see the habitual ways that I got hooked on stuff, and habitual patterns that, some of which were kind of embarrassing to recognize that I would fall into."
- Anne: *"But I had no connection to what was going on in here. And it was in one of my first courses in my graduate program, uhmm the professor gave us an exercise around three emotions, and to talk about how each of these emotions was expressed and how each of us expressed them. And one of the emotions he gave, uhhh us was anxiety... And I actually,*

uhmm, was completely baffled. I had no understanding of how I expressed anxiety, because I was so disconnected from it. I also noticed in myself a tendency, when I've felt overwhelmed with demands of work and you know, school and family, that, I have a need to kind of go in and get myself contained, and then go out."

- *Gail: "How that impacts my personal life... just..... just the noticing more when I, when I'm heightened, or when... Yeah, being a witness to myself....hmm, yeah. Probably that would be.. just being able to do it. So I think probably, in that way, it's just made me more attuned to everything. Attuned, in tune."*
- *Norah: "It helped me to see one of my patterns in terms of, err, it helped make visible to me one of my own patterns. I think some of it is awareness. Uhhm, so I think some of it is about awareness. I think I have a, a level of meta-awareness that I didn't used to have before."*
- *Sparky: "I'm much better, I'm much more attuned to how I am physically, emotionally, spiritually, these days. Uhm pay much more attention to that, try to honour it more, put things in place that things are happening in those different uhm, kind of aspects of my life. Yeah, all of that, uhm, so uhm, much more, uhm aware of how I am emotionally. I watch that quite carefully these days. I don't mean,*

uhm, keep it in check, but monitor it a lot more, uhm, notice how it's playing out in my body, where it is in my body, uhm paying attention to that."

- Tim: "uhmm more understanding umm, more aware of my own inner process, yeah focused more on that. It helped me to understand my own experience.Well, the, the, this whole change is really fuelled by me..becoming more intimate, aware of my own experience, of my own process, and my own being."

Improved Communication

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they became better communicators in their personal lives. Participants expressed they are able to communicate more effectively with others.

- Allan: "So it's really affected how I communicate. I can let people know that I've heard them. I know how to disagree with people without maybe alienating them quite as much hehe. Uhm And it's very dependent on good communication skills, many of which I've learnt as the counsellor, as you know, whatever in this field."
- *Anne: "I became a better communicator. I think the more you are empathetic and the more you respond in an empathetic way, the more you learn about empathy. And, so I think I've just brought that into my interactions with people. And I became a better, you know, when I said communication, I became a better communicator with my father."*

- Gail: “You know, my, my training helps me have more effective conversations with people. yeah I’m able to... to bring both, both the learning that I’ve had, uhm... and life experience into how I, you know, how, how I deal with people, how I address things, how I interact. I think some of the communication, some of the work with couples, uhm... you know, I think sometimes it’s helped me bite my tongue. Ummm, realizing that sometimes, the best... way to handle a situation is not to, heheh, be, not to say those things, hehehe that you’d like to say. Heh.”
- Norah: “I think that I’m more articulate.. more clear and specific, and uh I can argue better. So I can be.... probab, I don’t know if it’s clear and articulate, but I can be more purposeful in what I’m doing and why. I think the more knowledge of communication stt, ehh.... And then, I think, in those subtle ways, that shows up in relationships.”
- Sparky: “A lot of the coursework, uhm, was really helpful. And that continues to be so. Uhm... Uhm...sure. Sss, like uhm...aspects of communication. Uhm, how to uh diffuse conflict. I have language for

that now, and I don't think I had language for that before, of how I might do that.”

- Tim: “....Well, maybe not so much in, in how I communicate, but what I communicate, and maybe they are the same thing,..... So, definitely in terms of my interpersonal skills, umm my..um ...ability to expresssss emotionally, to communicate that in healthy ways, to...uhhhhhmm....yeah.”

Increased Acceptance of Others

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they are more accepting of other people. Participants expressed being more tolerant, forgiving, compassionate, or understanding of others in their lives.

- Allan: “I do notice... what I would call character structure, a lot more in people. Uhm And, so looking through that lens, I can identify certain things that are dynamics or character structures, you know, oh this person really leads with their need to be autonomous and in control. Or this other person leads with their kind of unresolved neediness, and so on. I mean everyone notices these things, but I suspect I do, you know, more than average, the average person does. And in some ways, I try to steer clear of it, because it's sort of diagnostical and clinical, and it's not a very nice thing to do to your friends. But in another way, if I'm really in my heart, then I just see it as, oh, oh so that's where that comes from. Just to hold that with compassion.”

- *Anne: "So, that's made me, I think, a much more tolerant person. Uhm, I think I was pretty tolerant before, but much more tolerant. I mean... so, uhmm because I have had the experience of sitting with someone, if I had met them in any other arena, I would not like them, I wou, we wouldn't have any shared belief systems at all haha, they were really like polar opposites on many dimensions."*
- *Gail: "It ten, but it tends to help me be a lot more accepting...of people. Better perhaps, have a greater understanding. I think it's absolutely increased my capacity for compassion. And uhm, and so it really helps me accept bad behaviour and understand it, really what's underneath that, is their needs, attachment needs. Yeah... it's just certainly helped me be more compassionate of other people, and understanding."*
- *Sparky: "So it seems I'm much more forgiving of others. And I also don't make the kind of assumptions that I used to make. Uhm...I'll check them out more now."*
- *Tim: "Yeah yeah, so I developed a lot more capacity to tolerate other people's behaviours and sort of became less triggered myself."*

Interweaving of Personal and Professional Lives

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice personal life and professional work are seemingly inseparable and interwoven. During the interview, participants reported that it was difficult for them to discuss their personal and professional lives as two separate topics.

- *Anne: "It's just hard, it's kind of hard to separate that out sometimes. You know, people that are my friends, and people who do similar kind of work, so you know, it's what we talk about, it's interesting. Yeah it's interesting, it's not, you know, I have...my husband, he would leave his work at work, he would never want to talk about it, which, that isn't how it is for me, I'm really interested in talking about it. I, it, it's sort of, it sort of infuses sort of everything. So..yeah, I mean. So when you ask me how it affects my personal life, it's really hard to separate it out."*
- *Gail: "You can't really separate it totally, all the book learning and the academic learning from the personal experience, and personal. Yeah, it seems to have kind of a global effect on everything... because this field is all about your own personal relationships with yourself in the world."*

- Norah: "Like in some ways we're talking about personal and professional, and that's in some ways kind of a false dichotomy, and well, it is what it is, but..uhmm....you know I read a book, and then my client talks about it in the next day's session, uhhm, a friend tells me they're struggling with it and I'm also struggling with something, like it just all feels so incredibly circular and interconnected. ...it's all so interactive or interwoven."
- Tim: ".....You know it's like there's not separation between...uhhm....the process, the personal life, the professional life, it's just all..all one experience. I don't even think about it separately. Yeah, it's just all one experience."

More Presence

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they find they are able to have more presence. Participants expressed being better able to stay present in the moment, to stay engaged with others, and to avoid falling into old roles.

- Allan: "I also, uhh, then I guess I know how to stay present. Uhm.. in my relationships with my family... There was a time in my life when, again I felt like stuck and stale, and how I related to, to many of my family members, particularly my mom and my dad. I know how to bring a, a conversation into something that feels like it has personal contact instead of a kind of habitual role that may be in role, two roles talking to each other instead of people."

- Anne: *"I'm much more invested in the moment to moment quality of my relationships, I'm more responsive in the moment. Uhm, I might be a little bit more...conscious of stuff. Before I think lots of stuff flew over my head, now I'm a little bit more conscious in interactions with people, like what's going on in the moment, that was not so much like that before."*
- Norah: "Yeah.. Uhhm That I'm better able to, with people in front of me, whether it's at work or at, in my personal life, settle in with them, and attend. Attend, attune, value.....than I did before. I think I can....show up, attach, be more loving, than detaching or go away, a lot more effectively in general or in moments than I used to be able to."
- Sparky: "It gives me a lot more freedom, uhm, and a lot more energy in the moment, just to deal with, uhm, my world, to engage with my world. Uhm, but I'm, but I'm wanting more to be in this moment. Uhm, and if I find myself, uhm, kind of mm, being drawn into those places, I use strategies to bring myself back to this moment and be paying attention, and to be moving on."
- Tim: "So, I guess, the, the, another sort of theme in this overall change has been one from conceptualizing experience to directly experiencingWell again it's, it's a freedom to be who I am in, in each moment, just respond to life."

Richer Life

Participants reported that due to training and/or practice, they find their lives to be richer or more interesting.

- Allan: “Things were more interesting too, things are more interesting now, than they were. In my mid 30’s I felt like I was really stale in my relationship with my partner, and, and we were both wondering whether we should stay together. I wanted kids and she didn’t, uuhm, and then there was this sort of relational staleness that showed up in all kinds of ways... Uhhm, and now.. I look at her and think that she’s like the most interesting person I could be with. Uhm, and I don’t feel bored at all.”
- Anne: *“It brings this richness into my life, which I think I said at the beginning, I don’t know what else, beyond sort of adding this richness to it, Yeah, so I think, well what if I hadn’t gone there, and done that program? And what if I wasn’t doing this work? It seems that my life would be less rich. For sure.”*
- Gail: *“It certainly just added a richness, you know, the relationships that I, you know, had going to school... I think just, globally, to be able to say that it’s just helped me live my life more effectively.”*
- Sparky: “You know, I’d had a good life I thought, uhm looking back on it, it was a good life, but it’s just, uhm....richer now. Much richer. Uhh

I have a lot more time for my garden, for my art, for music. Uhm, for friends, than I had before. So, I have a rich life. And I like it.... I'm always reading books and looking at what's new in the field. I'm taking courses all the time. And so that is, eh uhm, enriching my life too."

- Tim: "Yeah, and so it's like I get to be in this, in this place of being in contact with others, being in deeper contact with myself through that, and.. it's its' umm ya know catalyst for my own growth, it's fuel for my own growth, it's, it's umm.. it's uh very rich in that respects. Yeah, it's yeah....growth promoting as opposed to being overwhelming or...or you know, a 'job' or something that's difficult."

Selective Investment of Personal Energy into Relationships

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have found they have chosen to maintain those meaningful and satisfying relationships while letting go of more superficial or one-sided relationships. Participants expressed being mindful or selective of the time and energy they were willing or able to invest into a relationship.

- Allan: "I went through a certain period where I suddenly decided that, you know, I've got way too many sort-of friends, way too many people that I see, but that I don't really care very much about. And, and my life is busy, and I'm kind of running around doing all this stuff, and it's like, you know what, I don't love that person, I'm not going to spend a lot of time with them. It made a big difference. Yeah, it sounds kind of cold, but it wasn't at all. It was like, where do I want to

focus my energy? Oh, duh! Hehe on the people I really care about, and then focus it in a way that is genuinely caring rather than, well I've got half an hour for you."

- *Anne: "So, I started to see that some of my friendships were really built upon that, that, you know, the friendships were built upon, okay my role is to listen, their role is to have a problem or talk about their day or, and uhhh those relationships didn't continue. They didn't succeed. So that, you know, it's not... it's a painful realization, but I think, uhhhm, it's a reality, so I'm, that's the other thing, is that I think it makes me want to know wh, as much as possible, what the reality is about things, so. So yeah I lost some... what were called friendships became more acquaintance relationships because that's truly what they were. The friendship part was based sort of on me filling this role that sort of...and just because you can do something doesn't mean you should do it, you know, just because you can listen doesn't mean you should always be the listener."*
- *Norah: "But then I've also been aware that...uhm...of...maybe letting other relationships go. This is what I'm willing to do with some people and this is what I'm not willing to do with some people. I wouldn't say so much a, maybe it's a selection process, but, what I've gotten clear about is that in my adult relationships, so aside from kids, or elde, elderly or really ill, I'm wanting reciprocal or mutual relationships. And now that I do fair amount of intense*

personal work, just not willing to...maintain relationships that aren't reciprocal. So, I don't know that it was a selection process, but it was a stopping of certain behaviours on my part that used to maintain some relationships, so now I don't do that. That, if it doesn't feel reciprocal or mutual with both people wanting the relationships, and attending to it, I'm just not going to participate."

- Sparky: "And I also find that I don't hold onto relationships anymore, that don't really serve me well, where I used to kind of think I could always make them work. But no, sometimes they don't, they're not really worth pursuing. Yeah."

Sense of Gratitude

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they experience a sense of gratitude in their lives. Participants expressed appreciation for their families, community, the opportunities they have had, and life in general.

- *Anne: "uhm but just, it's really just quite wondrous that we're all here, and we're living, you know, the way we live. And I don't think I would have quite appreciated that to the same level that I do. I will often stop, in the middle of a day, or stop when I'm doing something at home, and just experience that sense of awe or appreciation or respect or whatever sort of quality is attached to it."*
- *Gail: "some of the learning made me feel really, very fortunate and thankful that I received the upbringing*

*that I did. It made me very thankful that I was able to
 uhhhm, you know have a pretty, pretty good family life,
 and good attachment. Well I think it's made me very
 grateful for my marriage, and for, and for my, my
 husband. So I think that I've really... probably
 appreciated him more. I think to it's like, uhm, I was,
 also by taking the training and then working in private
 practice, have really come to value my own life
 experience."*

- Norah: "how that impacts my personal life is kind of the sense of.....well I guess in some ways it's an appreciation for the community that I'm part of."
- Tim: "In the sense that, that everything that happened was..a part of some greater design. And now I'm aware of that and I can appreciate it as opposed to be in the suffering.Well, I guess for fundamentally, the,...uhhm, ya know, I feel very fortunate in that, uhm....in terms of the, the, the educational experience, that it was available to me, that I had an undergrad

degree that I, that was related to it, that you know this sort of unfolding happened in the way it did.”

Secondary Themes and Supporting Quotes

Decreased Personal Resources

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they sometimes find they spend personal resources, such as personal time or energy, thinking about or engaging with work-related things, which means a decrease in personal resources available to be spent in their personal lives.

- Allan: “It consumes some energy, some concern, makes it hard to rest properly. You know, like you know, there’s, yeah there’s a way which I have less, a way, there’s a very significant way, in which it’s hard to get real genuine down time. My practice is always in the back of my head. Particular people that either are interested in what’s going on, I’m a little worried about, or in this case, acutely worried about, like this person I’m talking about. That doesn’t happen very often, happily.”
- Norah: “...well what I noticed heh in my personal life now is, sometimes on days when I have had quite a few clients or clients with really intense issues, I’m not all that interested in listening to anybody else at the end of the day. Uhhm...so what it’s done is, it’s increased my capacity to listen, but that capacity to listen is ju, is sometimes used up at work. Which means that there’s less of that available for my spouse or I need a rebound period where I can kind of, eehmm mhh fill up my own gas tanks again. Sometimes that

may only take a couple of minutes, but sometimes that might last a day or two.”

- Tim: “there’s a certain capacity for, for, for life, to take things on, and to, to be in, at times it becomes, uhhh draining or overwhelming. If I take too much on, if I’m too busy, and then my coping abilities, ya know are, are reduced, and there’s... Yeah.Well, there’d be less capacity there for .. umm maybe to engage with people or to uhh..to complete umm tasks around the house, or that sort of thing, yeah.”

Increased Spiritual Connection

Participants reported that due to their training and/or practice, they have experienced an increased spiritual connection in some way.

- Allan: “...in particular that, that has, has uhm, prompted me to have, a more regular, I’m hardly the worlds’ greatest meditater, but a more regular mindfulness practice. Partly because I see how much it helps my clients, partly because some of my clients do it, partly because it’s part of the training that I have, uhm. Some of the, uhm, a lot of the body centred work required developing a certain kind of mindful awareness. I do that more, and that actually supports my spiritual life more.”
- Sparky: “Uhm and spiritually too, I was going to say something about that, because that was another piece I’d thrown out of my life early on. Uhm, didn’t see myself as a spiritual person, and uh, and I’ve returned

to that in a different way, but I've embraced that, uhm, in a way that's working for me now, as opposed to having to keep it out there."

- Tim: "So it's been a process, and ummm.....and most recently, uhm coming into an alignment with uhm with the flow of life, the will of the universe, uhmm is more of a state of being and there is this uhm basic trust that I experience now that I uhmm, that I just have this trust that...there is perfection in every moment and that the universe is supporting me in exactly the way that I need to be supported."

Notable Category of Responses

While this did not emerge as a distinctive theme or answer to the research question, it should be noted that all six participants discussed the financial aspects of becoming and being a professional counsellor. These responses were also clarified with all six participants during the validation phase of data analysis. Several participants noted that they have less money or monetary benefits now that they are a professional counsellor in comparison to their previous career choice. Others reported that their training did not prepare them for the business aspects of being a private counsellor, thus requiring them to work harder than expected in order to be financially successful as a professional counsellor owning and operating his/her own practice. Lastly, one participant pointed out that even after the formal counsellor education is complete, professional counsellors are regularly required to fund their own professional development and further training in order to maintain an expected level of competency and professional competitiveness.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of the Findings

The results from this study, as outlined in Chapter 4, shows that the subjective experience of counsellors is that their training and work as counsellors has impacted their personal lives. The researcher assumed that this would be the case, based on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991; 2000), which theorizes that the adult learning process can lead to self-reflection and personality re-organization, and that the lessons learned can be transferred to various aspects of the student's life. As reported by participants, this appears to be true for the case of counsellor training and professional practice. Although empirical and/or causal associations cannot be made with the current methodology, the research increases our understanding of the subjectively reported effects of counsellor training and work on the personal lives of counsellors. Further, as an interesting note, it is fair to hypothesize that many of the themes pertaining to specific skills and abilities (such as improved communication or better boundaries) acted as transferable foundational skills which allowed for the other effects that emerged as themes. In addition to fitting with Mezirow's theory, these findings also support the researcher's personal belief that counsellor education and the practice of counselling affects one's personal life. However, given that much of the literature on the effects of counselling work on the clinician focuses on negative consequences such as burnout etc., the findings of this study are unique as the reported experiences of the participants are overwhelmingly positive.

As previously discussed, prior to beginning the data collection for this investigation, the researcher held a biased belief that there would be more adverse effects on one's personal life than positive effects. Based on personal experience and the

information presented in the literature, the researcher suspected that learning to be psychologically-minded and to apply counselling skills would create personal stress for both counsellors-in-training and practicing counsellors, which would then likely negatively impact their personal lives. The researcher could relate to the many hazards of therapeutic training and practice described by Guy (1987), and thus thought participants would mention many of these hazards during the research interviews. Further, although the researcher is not in full-time counselling practice, she felt the concerns around burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and isolation would likely be mentioned in the data collection process, as these are well-researched phenomena and are thoroughly discussed in the research literature. Consciously aware of these biased beliefs, the researcher kept a journal throughout the research process, in order to maintain an awareness of these biases, and remain conscious of how they could affect the research process if not monitored.

To the researcher's surprise, many of the resulting themes indicate that participants experience improvements in a variety of areas within their personal lives; only one (secondary) theme describes a potentially negative impact. From the themes presented, one general area of improvement was in terms of the participants' relationships. Participants reported a qualitative improvement in their interpersonal relationships as well as an improvement in their relationship with themselves. Other specific improvements reported included having better boundaries in relationships, noticing an improvement in communication skills, having more presence, and practicing better self-care. On an intrapersonal level, participants reported greater self-awareness and self-understanding along with a clarification of their values. Moreover, participants

discussed a continuous evaluation of their integrity, where they strive to practice what they recommend to their clients, and are regularly questioning how well they are meeting these personal standards.

More generally, participants reported having a richer life, a sense of gratitude, and some also experienced an increased spiritual connection. Furthermore, participants reported being more accepting of others, understanding their immediate family members better, and being more selective when investing in relationships. The one potentially negative effect reported by some participants was a decrease in personal resources. Three participants felt that they sometimes spend personal time or energy engaging with work-related things, which leaves less of these resources to be spent in their personal lives. Finally, several participants felt their personal and professional lives are interwoven, and found it challenging to think of them as separate.

When considering these findings, one must keep in mind that the participant self-selection process likely affected the results, which may explain why the researcher's biases were not validated. More specifically, it is likely that counsellors who were experiencing any negative consequences of becoming a counsellor, as a result of various professional hazards – such as burnout, stress, or interpersonal difficulties potentially due to physical/psychic isolation or vicarious trauma – would not have been exposed to the recruitment methods or have chosen to take part in this study. Professional counsellors who have not been able to build a successful practice may not have had listings in the yellow pages used for recruitment. Further, had participants been primarily professionals working in an agency rather than private practice, the results may have been different. Moreover, perhaps professional counsellors who experienced negative effects of the

profession, such as burnout, chose to leave the profession, and thus were not available to participate.

On the other hand, in hind-sight the researcher can also understand that her biased beliefs regarding this topic were likely more reflective of the intense nature of graduate training as well as the personal challenges she faced during this time period. Some of the research previously reviewed supported these biases, and were likely selectively attended to by the researcher, while more positive findings in the literature were probably less frequently noted.

Other alternative hypotheses could also account for the primarily positive results obtained here. One alternative hypothesis is that the participants all had excellent transformative learning skills, as described by Mezirow (1991; 2000) and Taylor (2008), and thus were able to effectively apply the many helping skills learnt in their training to their own personal lives, leading to primarily positive effects. Alternatively, perhaps the language and culture of counselling affected the way participants viewed and discussed the results. Counselling works from a perspective of developing strategies for coping with and adapting to transitions, and this may have led the participants to interpret and describe their experiences of change within this perspective. This is different from some other helping professions, such as clinical psychology for example, which tends to work primarily from a disease and treatment model. As compared with the counselling professionals interviewed in this study, it is possible that the difference in professional culture may lead a clinical psychologist to view and describe their experiences of change in the language of disorder or lack thereof and not in terms of life changes transitions and personal learning. The distinction between the two cultures must bear in mind that there

are, indeed, many areas of overlap between counselling and clinical psychology and, hence, further investigation would be required in order to shed light on this hypothesis. As a further alternative explanation for the overwhelmingly positive results is that participants chose to only discuss positive effects in order to protect the researcher, who is a young graduate student about to enter professional practice. While this may not have been intentional, it is possible participants would have felt more inclined to share negative effects with an older researcher who had already been practicing for some time.

Findings in Relation to Previous Research Literature

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are certain personality traits that make effective counsellors, which tend to be reinforced during counsellor training. These traits, as described by Gladding (2004), include a curiosity and inquisitiveness, an ability to listen, comfort with conversation, empathy and understanding, emotional insightfulness, introspection, capacity for self-denial, tolerance of intimacy, comfort with power, and the ability to laugh. Remarkably, these very characteristics seem to have influenced the semi-structured interviews conducted for this investigation, as well as the results. Participants were not only quite clear and concise in describing their experiences, but were reflective, insightful, self-aware, and mindful in their responding. Participants seemed open to discussing their personal lives, and appeared curious in exploring the research topic. This resulted in a balance of both depth and clarity in the data, which allowed a large number of clearly distinct themes to emerge as a result. The researcher is aware that this large number of distinctive themes (seventeen in total) would likely not be probable with a random sample from the general population. It is possible that the number of resulting themes is a reflection of refined communication skills and greater self-awareness in the

counsellors interviewed, which could be characteristics of students undergoing counsellor training and counsellors in professional practice, although there is little evidence to support this.

Many of the themes that emerged from this investigation complement the findings and hypotheses discussed in previous literature. Guy (1987) had suspected that the therapist training process causes personality changes that result in a higher level of overall functioning and greater emotional stability. The fact that overall participants experienced improvements in their relationships and their lives in general supports this line of thinking. Additionally, it has been suggested that counsellors-in-training develop more mature relationships, become more self-confident, less defensive, and more humble in their interactions with friends and family (Maurice et al., 1975). This fits with the themes of experiencing improved relationships (both interpersonal and relationship with self), and the theme of experiencing greater acceptance of others. Finally, students in counsellor education seem to experience greater self-ideal congruence, and the reorganization of their individual self-concept promotes more stable, healthy functioning, and good social adjustment (Guy, 1987). The theme of evaluation of integrity of self, as reported by participants, supports this belief in the sense that the evaluation of integrity of self may contribute to this greater self-ideal congruence, the reorganization of one's self-concept, and to healthier adjustment and functioning.

With regards to familial relationship, it has been suggested in the literature that therapists become more tolerant, accepting, nurturing, understanding, and patient in relationship to their family members (Guy, 1987). The theme in the current study of better understanding of immediate family members, as well as the themes of increased

acceptance of others, and better interpersonal relationships support this general suggestion in the literature. Further, these qualities are assumed in the literature to improve the counsellor's ability to experience meaningful intimacy and fulfillment in relation to one's spouse (Cray & Cray, 1977). While this specific connection did emerge as a distinct theme here, quotes in support of the themes of better relationships, more presence, and sense of gratitude appear to support this assumption made by Cray & Cray (1977).

In Truell's (2001) study, participants reported re-examining their relationships with family members and having become more focused on the communication patterns in their families. Reportedly, this had initially led to difficulties in some of their relationship with their spouses, but many participants also indicated that their relationships were currently better than before they started training (Truell, 2001). The current study found that participants experienced improvements in their patterns of communication, gained a better understanding of their immediate family members, felt an increased acceptance of others, and overall experienced a qualitative improvement in their interpersonal relationships. While these themes do not speak specifically to the themes discussed by Truell (2001), and do not support the initial interpersonal difficulties described by Truell's participants, the findings seem complementary rather than contradictory.

Studies on the friendships of therapists (e.g. Cogan, 1977) have found that counsellors who have been practicing for more than ten years reported very few friendships, when previously they had reported much enjoyment and satisfaction from many more friendships. Additionally, Truell (2001) reported that his participants felt their friendships had changed as a result of counselling training. Many of Truell's participants

reported that they had become more selective and chosen to distance themselves from some friendships or seek new ones, while one participant reported that the course helped her to establish new boundaries so that her old friends would not take advantage of her. Several of Truell's participants said that they had fewer friends now than at the beginning of their training, and that the changed relationships were positive for them. They said that the friendships they now had were more meaningful than previous friendships. His participants further said they could now talk more intimately with fewer friends.

The findings from the current investigation fit well with those of Truell's (2001). Participants in this investigation reported experiencing a selective investment of personal energy into relationships such as friendships. Additionally, instead of this being an undesirable effect, participants reported that it resulted in the maintenance of only those relationships that were reciprocal and satisfying, and participants reported better interpersonal relationships overall. In connection, participants also reported better boundaries, which again fit with the findings described by Truell.

The current findings also appear to complement some of the findings from McAuliffe's (2002) study. The theme of greater self-awareness and self-understanding support McAuliffe's finding that counsellors-in-training experienced increased reflexivity – an inclination to consider multiple perspectives within oneself before acting. Further, the current study's theme of better boundaries supports McAuliffe's subtheme of 'creating boundaries between self and other'. Participants from the current study reported being more willing to set boundaries, seeing boundaries as important in relationships, or having more boundaries in their relationships with others.

While many of the findings support some of the previously cited research literature, there were also some discrepancies between earlier findings and the results of this study. For example, Guy (1987) suggested that counselling students become more internally focused, which then causes the trainee to lose him- or herself in endless analysis and introspection, restricting spontaneity (Guy, 1987). On the contrary, while participants in the current study affirmed that training and/or practice did lead them to become more internally focused, the results of this appear to be positive, in the sense that they gained greater self-awareness and self-understanding. This theme expressed by participants does not support Malcolm's (1980) statement that an "emotional tightness" develops in counsellors, nor the suggestions that counsellors will become alienated from their own feelings, as a by-product of the constant suppression and restraint required in therapeutic practice (Freudenberger & Robbins, 1979). Further, reports from participants of having more presence, better interpersonal relationships and a richer life suggest that intense introspection did not lead to a restricting of spontaneous responding or decreased genuine connection with others for this group of professional counsellors. As such, these discrepancies may be better understood when considered in the context in which these studies were conducted. Many of these previous studies were conducted at a time when Freudian psychoanalysis was the primary theoretical orientation of counsellors and counselling training programs. Although the therapeutic orientations of the professionals studied by Guy, Freudenberger & Robbins are not clearly specified, this perspective likely affected the experience of counsellors-in-training, with a focus on psychoanalysis and intense introspection. This historical context is likely to have also affected both the language and the process of data collection used as well as the interpretations made by

the researcher, thus affecting the results. In today's context there are many more choices for "linguaging" one's experience that were not available in the past. The wide variety of counselling approaches informing the profession today - approaches such as Cognitive-Behavioural, Rogerian, Gestalt, Somatic Experiencing, Narrative, Hakomi, etc – provide a multitude of ways of understanding oneself, as opposed to the predominantly psychoanalytic approach widely used in the past.

Bugental (1964), Farber (1983a), and Guy (1987) hypothesized that counselling trainees experienced changes in values and perspectives, which they saw as being a source of stress leading to decreased emotional investment in one's families. The findings from the current study support the hypothesis that a clarification of values was a part of the experience of becoming and being a professional counsellor. However, participants also reported understanding their family members better, having better relationships, and being more accepting of others, which contradicts the suggestions made by Farber (1983a). This may be explained by the political and cultural contexts in which those studies were conducted in comparison to the current views held by North American society today. There seems to have been a movement towards more liberal views over the last two decades, such as greater acceptance and tolerance for diversity, which may have influenced how the families responded to these changes experienced by the counsellors.

Interestingly, physical and psychic isolation – as described by Bermak (1977), Deutch (1984), Goldberg (1986), Guy (1987), Hellman et al (1986), Kottler (1986), and Tryon (1983) as one of the greatest sources of stress and displeasure among psychotherapists in professional practice – was not reported by participants in this study. Instead participants reported an increased connection with others, themselves, and the

world around them. This hypothesis that therapeutic practice is a lonely experience, with a sense of mystery that can isolate the therapist from the support of family and friends (Kottler, 1986) is not supported by the findings of this study. As previously mentioned, this may in part have been a result of self-selection bias, where counsellors who do experience this sense of isolation would likely not choose to take part in this study. Furthermore, since counsellors were recruited out of the yellow pages and from agencies that employ counsellors, any counsellors who are not currently employed, who are burnt out, or suffering from compassion fatigue or vicarious traumatisation were less likely to be recruited and less likely to be interested in participating, potentially skewing the results.

Furthermore, it has been suggested in the literature that psychotherapists experience significant personal problems related to relationship difficulties (82%), depression (57%), substance abuse (11%), and suicide attempts (2%) (Deutsch, 1984; 1985). Additionally, Wetchler & Piercy's (1986) review of non-empirical articles also found high rates of depression and suicide amongst mental health professionals. No specific questions about substance use, depression, or suicidal ideation were asked as part of this research study. Given that there is so little current literature on this topic, relating the findings from the current study to these from over two decades ago is difficult. Many changes have occurred – politically, theoretically, professionally, in counsellor education, and in terms of increased awareness around vicarious trauma and other professional hazards – which makes discussing these findings with relation to the outdated literature a challenge. Further, again self-selection bias likely resulted in the recruitment of participants who were not experiencing these difficulties. As such, neither of these

findings were supported in this investigation. Alternatively, overall themes such as better interpersonal relationships, richer life, better self-care, sense of gratitude, and increased spiritual connection seem to directly contradict these findings cited by Deutsch (1984; 1985) and Wetchler & Piercy (1986).

The theme of decreased personal resources could be interpreted as early signs of “compassion fatigue” – including symptoms of exhaustion, hyper vigilance, avoidance, and numbing – or burnout – “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (Maslach, 1976, p. 3). However, there is not enough evidence in this investigation to support this interpretation, and none of the participants spoke of any of the well-researched hazards of professional practice. Moreover, only half of the six participants experienced a decrease in personal resources, these experiences were described as infrequent, and participants were able to utilize self-care strategies to deal with these experiences. However, as already mentioned, self-selection may have resulted in the exclusion of participants who may be experiencing these negative effects of being a professional counsellor.

Notably, Guy (1987) described the factors that attract people to the counselling profession twenty years ago as independence, considerable financial rewards, variety within the practice, recognition and prestige, intellectual stimulation, emotional growth and satisfaction, personal enrichment, and personal fulfillment. While many of these factors – such as emotional growth and satisfaction or personal fulfillment – seem to be supported by the themes discussed in this study, it should be noted that all six participants commented on the notable lack of “considerable financial rewards” that Guy described as part of being a professional counsellor. One must keep in mind that the economic climate

in the 1980's may have influenced these findings in the same way that the current economic climate likely influenced the findings of this study. While it is conceivable that some professional counsellors today do reach a high level of financial success, the participants in this study indicated that this was not the case for them (although a common link to training or counselling work in particular could not be made). As such, it is unlikely that considerable financial rewards, recognition, and prestige are major factors that currently attract people to the profession of counselling.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the interweaving or interconnectedness of the personal and professional lives of counsellors – which emerged as a clear theme in this investigation – has been markedly omitted from the research literature to date. While all other themes have been mentioned in the literature, either in a contradictory or complementary way, this theme has not been clearly discussed anywhere in the literature to date. Curiously, while the relationship between one's personal developmental process and the choice to become a professional counsellor has been extensively researched – such as the literature on the *wounded healer* (Sussman, 1992; Burton & Topham, 1997; Cain, 2000; Herman, 2001; Wheeler, 2002; Mander, 2004), the contrasting relationship – between the process of becoming and being a professional counsellor and one's personal life – has been overlooked. The fact that counselling is a relatively new profession, the unspoken assumption that few professionals are personally affected by their training and work, and the belief that counsellors should keep personal and professional strictly separate, may provide clues as to the reasons for this omission. However, it is difficult to know exactly why the personal life of counsellors has not been previously explored in the research literature.

Limitations

The findings of this investigation speak to how becoming and being a professional counsellor subjectively affects one's personal life. However, while qualitative methodology allows the researcher to investigate this topic area using a bottom-up approach and to provide depth in the results by making use of descriptive data, there are some limitations to consider.

First, self-selection bias may have influenced the results found here. It is possible that those professional counsellors who have been positively affected chose to participate in the study, while those whose personal lives have not been affected, or have been negatively affected, were not interested in participating. Moreover, the recruitment of counsellors from the yellow pages and from mental health agencies may have excluded counsellors who are not finding success in this profession and are currently unemployed or under-employed. Replication using different sampling and recruitment strategies, as well as a greater number of participants or variety of participant characteristics, will further support and strengthen the current findings.

Furthermore, the applicability of these findings is limited to the profile of the participants involved. Since specific demographic, educational, and professional background information was not collected as part of this study, the description provided of the sample of participants is limited, which limits the transferability of the data to some extent.

Moreover, although the six participants obtained their master's training from a variety of programs and universities, the majority of these training programs were based in the western areas of Canada and the United States. This limits the findings to similar

programs, since programs in other parts of Canada may have different areas of focus and methods of counsellor education. Similar research conducted with participants training and practicing in other parts of Canada would be beneficial in expanding the applicability of these findings.

Additionally, although participants had all completed training between 2 and 10 years ago, all participants were in similar stages of life, in the sense that all were over the age of at least 30 when entering their training program, and all were at least 40 years old at the time at which the research interviews were conducted. Thus, it is difficult to account for maturation effects in the findings, as all of the participants would have been considered mature students during their counsellor education. For this reason, replication of this research using professional counsellors who are younger in age would further contribute to the base of research on this topic.

In addition, all of the participants were practicing as professional counsellors in the greater Victoria area, which from the researcher's perception seems to carry its own type of lifestyle and culture and is said to be a competitive market for professional counsellors. This may have also influenced the themes that emerged, where there may be a relationship between prescribed local cultural norms and the themes. For example, there appears to be a sense of maintaining health and well-being on the west coast, which may have influenced the theme of better self-care, among other themes. Thus, it would be beneficial to research the impact that becoming and being a professional counsellors has on the personal lives of counsellors in other parts of Canada, such as in rural communities, large cities, or natural resource/mining cities.

Further, the small number of participants, which fits with the qualitative methodology appropriate for this investigation, does not allow generalizations to be made to the general population of professional counsellors. Research that builds on the current findings and is of a quantitative nature with a larger, more representative sample may allow for more generalizability of the results and provide more data in support of the current findings.

A final limitation of the current study is the inexperience of the primary researcher in conducting qualitative research and qualitative semi-structured interviews. In an attempt to minimize this limitation, the researcher took graduate-level courses in research methods, and qualitative research, as well as incorporating other precautionary measures, such as pilot testing, into the research procedures. In addition, the research process – including methodology, procedures, data collection, and data analysis – was supervised by faculty members experienced in this type of research. Finally, the validation process included in this study further add to the credibility of the findings discussed here.

Recommendations for Future Research

Some recommendations for future research have been made as part of the discussion on the limitations of this study. A further recommendation for future research, building on the current investigation, is to explore whether professional counsellors working in different settings and with different populations experience their training and/or practice to have affected their personal lives in different ways. For example: does training in, and professional practice with children in schools affect one's personal life

differently compared to a counsellor trained in and practicing with adult trauma survivors?

Furthermore, a longitudinal study on this topic could explore how one's personal life is affected at different points during the process of becoming and being a professional counsellor. It would be interesting to see how one's personal life is affected just as one begins counsellor training, during training, at completion of training, a few years into professional practice, several years in to practice, just before retirement, and after retirement.

Another interesting perspective on this topic would be that of the romantic partner of the professional counsellor. A few participants had casually asked themselves, "I wonder what my partner would say about that" when reflecting on various questions during the research interviews, which suggests that the partners may have a unique perspective on how becoming and being a professional counsellor affects one's personal life. Future research could explore how having a partner who is or has become a professional counsellor affects one's personal life. Additionally, future research could focus on the partner's perspective on how becoming and being a professional counsellor impacts the counsellor's personal life. Moreover, conducting research that includes multiple sources of data (such as from professional counsellors, their spouses, families, friends, etc.) would further broaden our understanding of how the training and practice of counselling affects the personal lives of counsellors.

Implications for Practice

The significance of this research lies in the contributions it makes to the research on counselling psychology and counsellor development. This investigation helps to lay a

foundation for future research in an area of counsellor education and counselling psychology that is largely un-explored. These findings provide a new perspective on counsellor development that is not currently incorporated into well-known and widely-used models of counsellor training and counsellor supervision as it provides evidence that counsellors-in-training and professional counsellors report they are affected in a personal way by their training and work. Moreover, the findings suggest that personal and professional lives are more intertwined than perhaps was previously thought, and perhaps further exploration is still needed before we can fully understand counsellor development, counsellor competency, and the effectiveness of counselling.

The current study also has implications for counsellor training programs in the sense that it may be beneficial for such programs to incorporate a component that addresses how training is affecting the personal lives of trainees in a more thorough, comprehensive, and supportive way. It is ironic how programs aimed at training mental health professionals can come to interfere with the mental health of the very people it is training. While graduate training in any discipline can be stressful, the personal nature of counsellor training adds a further dimension to the process which appears to affect trainees in a more profound and exaggerated way. Further research is still needed before specific implications or suggestions for change to counsellor education programs can be made.

The findings of the current study also support and reinforce the literature on the importance of self-care amongst helping professionals. The results from this investigation suggest that the impact of therapeutic training and practice affects many facets of the counsellor's personal life. While most of the effects found here are positive, one must

remember that the more aspects of counsellors' lives that are impacted by their counselling work, perhaps the greater the variety of self-care strategies they need to employ in order to maintain balance and health in those various parts of life. It seems sensible to conclude that without support and self-care, all of the same areas of their personal lives would continue to be affected, although perhaps in more negative ways.

Finally, the findings described herein may be used to encourage students to enter the field of counselling psychology. The beneficial effects of counsellor training and professional practice, as subjectively experienced by participants in this study, could be used by counsellor training programs to attract new students, practitioners, and educators into the counselling psychology discipline. This could also help promote the regulation of the counselling profession by encouraging lay counsellors to partake in professional counsellor education programs.

Summary and Conclusion

Little research has been done on how counsellor training and professional practice can affect the personal lives of counsellors. As such, the current study helps to lay the foundation for future research in this area. This investigation complements the available research conducted in this area, and also helps to shed light on the largely anecdotal body of literature that exists on this topic from over two decades ago. Six professional master's level counsellors have participated in this investigation, taking part in semi-structured qualitative interviews where they have discussed their subjective experience of how their training and practice has affected their personal lives in various ways.

This investigation has been exciting and incredibly personally-relevant for the researcher, who is completing her counsellor education and preparing to begin

professional practice. It is hoped that this investigation inspires other researchers to further explore the personal lives of professional counsellors. Several recommendations for future research have been suggested, some as a way of addressing the limitations of this study, and others simply as interesting avenues for further discovery.

From the thematic analysis, fifteen primary themes as well as two secondary themes have emerged. To conclude, these findings suggest that the subjectively reported experiences of becoming and being a professional counsellor has primarily positive effects on the lives of counsellors, and can affect many different aspects of their personal lives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Poster

Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership
Studies
University of Victoria

**THE PERSONAL LIVES OF COUNSELLORS:
A Qualitative Exploration**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study on how becoming a professional counsellor affects one's personal life.

Desired participants are professional Master's level counsellors who obtained their Master's degree in Counselling between 2 and 10 years ago.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a single one-to-one interview with the researcher, and a couple months later you would be asked to review the results obtained from your interview.

The interview is approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and the review of the results will require approximately 20 to 40 minutes of your time.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Barbara S. Alhanati
Master's student in Counselling Psychology

Phone: 250-812-2961
Email: alhanati@uvic.ca

This study has received ethical approval from the UVic/VIHA Human Research Ethics Board (Protocol #J 2008 – 96)

Appendix B: Telephone Recruitment Script

P = Potential Participant; R = Researcher

R: May I please speak to [name of potential participant]?

P: Hello, [name of potential participant] speaking. How may I help you?

R: My name is Barbara Alhanati and I am a Masters student in the Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Tim Black on the personal lives of counsellors. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting interviews with professional Masters level counsellors who obtained their Masters degree between 2 and 10 years ago in order to discover their perspectives on how becoming a professional counsellor has affected their personal life.

As a professional counsellor in the greater Victoria area, if you fit the criteria I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Is this a convenient time to give you further information about the study?

P: No, could you call back later (agree on a more convenient time to call person back).

OR

P: Yes, could you provide me with some more information regarding the interviews you will be conducting?

R: Background Information:

- The interview would last about 60 to 90 minutes, and would be arranged for a time convenient to your schedule.
- Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.
- The questions are quite general and will pertain to how you feel your education as a counsellor has impacted different aspects of your personal life.
- You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time.
- With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.
- Once the data has been analyzed, I will ask you to review the results to make sure that it describes your experience accurately. This process will take approximately 20 to 40 minutes.
- All information you provide will be considered confidential.
- The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of 12 months after the investigation is complete.

- If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Tim Black at 250-721-7820.
- I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria. However, the final decision about participation is yours. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Human Research Ethics Office at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

R: Do you have any questions or concerns so far?

P: Yes... (Researcher responds to questions or concerns)

OR

P: No. (Continue below).

R: At this point, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Would you like to become a participant?

P: No, I would not like to be a participant.

R: Okay, thank you for your time. Goody-bye.

OR

P: Yes, I would like to participate in this study.

R: Great. When would be a convenient time for us to meet for the research interview? (Researcher and Participant schedule a mutually convenient time for the interview).

R: Would you feel more comfortable participating in the interview in a research room at the UVic campus or at your professional office? (Researcher and Participant agree on location for research interview).

R: Okay, I have you scheduled to participate in the research interview for [date/time/location]. Thank you for your time. Good-bye.

P: Goodbye.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

***Participant Consent Form*****How does becoming a professional counsellor affect one's personal life: A qualitative exploration.**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *how does becoming a professional counsellor affect one's personal life: A qualitative exploration* that is being conducted by Barbara S. Alhanati.

Barbara S. Alhanati is a Master's of Arts student in the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone (250-812-2961) or email (alhanati@uvic.ca).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Counselling Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Tim Black. You may contact my supervisor by phone at 250-721-7820.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how professional counsellors feel their personal lives have been affected by their counselling training and work. The objectives are to increase understanding about how becoming a counsellor impacts one's private life.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because very little is known about how the psychological training received in counsellor education influences the personal lives of the counsellors.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a professional counsellor who holds a Master's degree in Counselling that was awarded between 2 and 10 years ago.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include engaging in a one-on-one interview with the researcher where you will discuss some questions pertaining to the research topic. This interview will take place in a private office setting and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes, with time available for debriefing afterwards. The interviews will be audiotaped in order to allow the researcher to review and transcribe the interview later. Additionally, a few months after your interview you will be asked to review the results drawn from your interview in order to verify that the descriptions are good representations of your experience. This process of reviewing the results will take approximately 20 to 40 minutes of your time. The total time commitment for the study is maximum 2.5 hours. Approximately 6 to 8 participants will be involved in this study.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including between 80 to 150 minutes of your time in total.

Risks

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. Participation in this study may cause you to experience some unpleasant emotion or recall some unpleasant experiences. You are free to refuse to answer any questions asked of you by the researcher and to end the interview at any time without any consequences or explanations.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include a chance for you to openly discuss the impact of your counselling career on your personal life, a contribution to the literature surrounding counsellor personal development and training, and the potential improvements in counsellor education programs.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, you may choose to remove your data from the study, or you may allow your data to remain part of the study.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, you are asked to choose a pseudonym to use during the interview, which will also be used during transcription and data analysis. Although you will not be anonymous to the researcher in the interview, all identifying information will be excluded from the data and the results. Only the primary researcher will retain information connecting you to your interview transcript in order to link your data to the second portion of your participation.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by keeping all paper copies of the data in locked cabinets, and all electronic data in password-protected files on a private computer.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through the completion of the researcher's Master's Thesis and potentially in a published journal article, chapter, or book.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of within twelve months of the completion of the investigation. All paper copies of the data, such as transcripts, will be shredded. Further, all electronic data will be erased and deleted. The audiotapes of the interviews will also be erased.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Barbara S. Alhanati by phone (250-812-2961) or email (alhanati@uvic.ca) and Dr. Tim Black by phone (250-721-7820).

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the researcher's supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you

Appendix D: Participant Withdrawal Form

***Participant Withdrawal Form*****How does becoming a professional counsellor affect one's personal life: A qualitative exploration.**

Researcher: Barbara Alhanati
Supervisor: Dr. Tim Black

Phone: (250) 812-2961
Phone: (250) 721-7820

Email: alhanati@uvic.ca
Email: tblack@uvic.ca

Your signature below indicates that you understand that you may remove all of your data from the study as part of your withdrawal from this research or you may choose to allow the data to remain part of the study, and that you have been given a copy of this form for your own records.

I _____ consent to having my research data remain part of this study
Name of Participant

and be included in the data analysis, even though I have chosen to withdraw from further participation in the study.

Signature

Date