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Women's Experience of Becoming a Counsellor:
A Phenomenological Inquiry

by

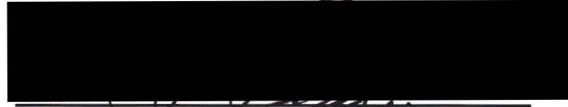
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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard



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ABSTRACT

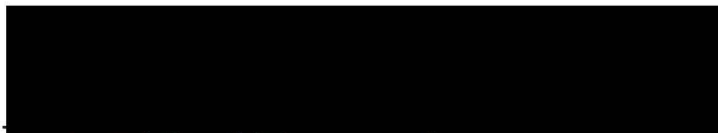
This study investigated, from a phenomenological perspective, women's experience of becoming a counsellor. As the review of the literature indicates, many women choose occupations which involve providing service to, and caring for others. Often these occupations pay poorly and have lower status than many male-dominated occupations. In addition, many women may unconsciously choose these careers due to the sex-role socialization process. Although research has explored factors influencing the career choices of those involved in the helping professions, most of this research has focused on isolating and manipulating variables thought to effect the career choices of helping professionals. No other studies have examined women's career choices from a phenomenological perspective. Furthermore, the research that does exist has not exclusively investigated the motivations and experiences of women who choose a career in counselling or therapy. The purpose of the current study was to explore in-depth, from a phenomenological perspective, women's subjective experience of how they have come to be counsellors.

Three professional counsellors were interviewed for this study. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed using index cards. First, a narrative was written for each woman emphasizing reoccurring themes; second, an overall account of all three women's experiences was composed, indicating the fundamental structure of the experience of becoming a counsellor for the women in this study. The overall account noted similarities as well as differences in the three women's stories.

Results of the study showed that the women's experiences of becoming counsellors began in childhood and carried on throughout their adulthoods. Reoccurring themes were found within the individual accounts as well as in the three women's stories combined. Major reoccurring themes for all three participants included nurturing, supporting, listening to, taking responsibility for and caring for others throughout the course of the participants' lives. In addition, all three participants developed a desire to understand the psychological worlds of themselves as well as those of others. Finally, the women emphasized that they were not always conscious of how they came to be counsellors; it just felt like a natural thing to do. In this sense, their identity as a counsellor became intertwined with their identity as a person. In spite of the common themes which emerged from the data, there were many differences in the women's stories, making each story a unique one.

The concluding chapter of this thesis discussed relationships between the present findings and the literature, application of the present findings for counsellors and counsellor educators, and recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Impetus for Study

My interest in women's experience of becoming counsellors was inspired by my own process of reflecting on how I have come to be a counsellor. Having resolved to pursue a career in the helping professions (i.e., social work) at ten years of age, it wasn't until I was twenty-five years old and had been employed in the helping field for five years, that I suddenly--or so it seemed--began to seriously examine how I came to choose a career in a helping field. This abrupt and unforeseen experience, triggered by events in my personal life, hurled me into a lengthy and penetrating period of self-analysis.

Seven years later, after much soul-searching, I have reached what to me has been a momentous revelation: My decision to become a helper was made, at least to some extent, "unconsciously"; I say unconsciously because I believe that events in my life--in particular, my socialization as a woman--have played a fundamental role in my initial desire to become a helper, and this transpired without my awareness. In addition, I have discovered that my identity as a woman is integral to my identity as a helper and this is inextricably connected to my sex-role socialization as well.

Subsequent to drawing the above conclusions, several things occurred: first, I became curious about what kind of career I would have chosen had I been cognizant of how my sex-role socialization had contributed to my career choice; second, I wondered

how the experiences in my life that led me to be a helper affected my work with my clients; third, I began, in an almost rebellious fashion, to consider pursuing a non-traditional career; and finally, I became intrigued by other women's experiences of becoming counsellors.

I have come to the conclusion that sex-role socialization is deeply and insidiously embedded in all aspects of our society; and thus it influences our lives in many significant ways, of which we are frequently unaware. Furthermore, for women in particular, this can limit, if not be a detriment to, their ability to utilize their maximum potential in the career decision-making process (see review of the literature). Although sex-role socialization is not the only factor involved in my or other women's career choices, I believe it is a predominant one.

It is my contention that if we had more awareness of why we choose the careers we do, we, as women, might expand our options when making a career choice and, consequently, make more informed choices. Moreover, the more "conscious" we, as women, are of how we have come to be helpers and what personal needs we fulfil by helping others, the more "conscious" we will be about how some of our underlying motives for becoming helpers impact on our work with our clients.

My self-examination process and the ensuing conclusions were the impetus for this study.

Problem Statement

In spite of the gains made by the feminist movement, women still predominate in occupations that involve providing service to, and/or caring for others. Research has

shown that because of sex-role socialization and other related factors, women tend to restrict their career options and, subsequently, end up in traditional female occupations which, generally speaking, have lower status and lower pay than traditional male occupations. Furthermore, because women often choose these careers, which are extensions of the way they are socialized as women, many do not pursue other career options and, hence, may not be making full use of their potential.

Until the 1960's, studies on women's career development were virtually unknown. Early research focused on differentiating between career-oriented and homemaking-oriented women. As more women entered the work force, research began to explore factors that distinguished traditional career women from non-traditional career women. Other studies, while not necessarily focusing on women in particular, have examined factors contributing to the choice of a career in the helping professions (professions that are usually considered to be traditional occupations for women).

Most of this research has concentrated on isolating and manipulating variables thought to influence career choices. It has not examined women's own perceptions of how they came to be involved in traditional occupations. Furthermore, although research does exist in the area of counsellors and therapists, it has either used all male subjects and then generalized the results to all counsellors, or both males and females were studied and then the results were considered to be representative for all counsellors/therapists. (For the purposes of this study, the terms counsellor and therapist were used interchangeably.) To my knowledge, the motivations for women's career

choices in counselling and therapy have not been investigated. In addition, research on any aspect of women as counsellors is scarce. The present study investigated women's experience of becoming a counsellor. This emphasized, but was not limited to, women's motivations for becoming counsellors.

Purpose of the Study

In this inquiry, my intention was to investigate, using a phenomenological approach, three women's experiences of how they have come to be counsellors. I examined their life experiences as they impacted on their decisions to become counsellors. The research questions which arose out of this purpose were as follows:

1. How did these women come to be counsellors?
2. What are the life experiences and critical events in these women's lives that have led them towards a career in counselling?
3. Are there people in these women's lives who have influenced their decisions to choose a career in counselling?
4. What meaning or significance do these women ascribe to being a counsellor?
5. What is it that these women *envisioned themselves doing* while counselling that they thought would be meaningful for them?

Contributions of the Study

By acquiring knowledge about what experiences these three women perceive to be instrumental in their process of becoming counsellors, counsellors will:

1. Better understand what may motivate female clients to choose careers in helping, and consequently, help them to understand and expand upon their career choices.

2. Be better able to cultivate an awareness of how some of their life experiences may have influenced their decisions to become helpers and how this, in turn, may impact on their work with clients.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH AND THEORY

History and Overview

As discussed by Betz and Fitzgerald (1987), theories of and research on career development have focused primarily on men and, until recently, have not investigated differences between the career choices of men and those of women.

Some of the earliest studies of women's career development centred on the characteristics of homemakers versus career-oriented women (e.g., Gysbers, Johnston & Gust, 1968; Oliver, 1974; Rand, 1968). As the numbers of women in the work force increased, research began to concentrate on examining women's career choices, specifically the difference between women who choose traditional careers (those careers primarily occupied by women) and those who choose non-traditional careers (those careers primarily occupied by men). Research in this area indicates that there are important differences between the two types of women.

As indicated above, most of the research existing in the area of individuals' motivations for choosing a career in the helping professions has either focused on men or has examined men and women together as a group. The following review of the literature examines the various factors that have been found to influence women's career choices. The literature on individuals involved in the helping professions is also reviewed, paying particular attention to the professions of counselling and therapy.

Personality Characteristics and Attitudes that Influence Women's Career Choices

Personal Interests

Several studies have examined women's career interests by using Holland's (1985) categories of personality types. Results of these studies indicate that women tend to score high in Social areas (e.g., enjoy social involvement, see self as being nurturant, understanding, enjoy teaching and helping others), Artistic areas (e.g., prefer unsystematic tasks, see self as being imaginative, expressive and independent), and Conventional areas (e.g., prefer systematic, concrete tasks involving data; see self as precise; as a conformist and as having clerical and numerical skills). Conversely, women tend to score low in areas such as Realistic (e.g., value concrete and physical tasks); perceive self as having mechanical skills and lacking social skills), Investigative (e.g., want to solve intellectual or scientific problems; see self as scholarly, analytical and methodical), and Enterprising (e.g., value political and economic achievements, leadership, recognition, and power; see self as extroverted, sociable and assertive) (Gottfredson, Holland & Gottfredson, 1975; Prediger & Hanson, 1976; Stonewater, 1987).

An important implication of the results of these studies is that women's interests correspond with careers that are more traditional.

Values

Research has shown that women who choose traditional majors have similar values and that these values are distinct from women pursuing non-traditional majors.

For example, Strange and Rea (1983) found that among females in male-dominated majors, less importance was assigned to interpersonal skills and service values, and greater importance was assigned to material values and job opportunities when compared to females in female-dominated majors. She concludes, "both males and females appear to be co-opted into a particular major precisely because they share the prevailing values of that field" (p. 225).

Other research has found that women in traditional careers have similar values. For example, Pearson and Kahn (1989) discovered that clerical workers shared the same values. Supervisory Relations, Way of Life and Achievement received the highest ratings and Associates, Esthetics and Management received the lowest ratings. These results were obtained in spite of the fact that these women experienced different sex-role socialization experiences due to the different decades in which they grew up (i.e., some grew up in the 1970s and the others grew up in the 1950s).

Young (1984) studied adolescent women and found significant differences in values between women who chose traditional careers from those who chose non-traditional careers. Results of the study showed that women who chose innovative (non-traditional) occupational roles, ranked the values of courageous, imaginative and independent as being more important to them than students who aspired to traditional occupational roles. These women also ranked clean, forgiving and obedient as significantly less important to them than traditionals did. The authors concluded that the women who chose traditional careers differentiated themselves by value rankings that can

be identified as traditional sex-role beliefs. Therefore "values serve as adequate and economical representations of sex-role beliefs that affect career choice" (p. 490).

A study of social work students (56 female and 8 male) investigated whether the values of these students are acquired during professional training and whether persons who are attracted to social work have different values from students in other disciplines (Enoch, 1988). Enoch found that 65% of social work students wanted a job where they could help others as compared to 29% of social science students.

Sex-Role Orientation

Studies have indicated that women who choose traditional occupations score high on feminine or expressive characteristics--affectionate, compassionate, tender, nurturing, interpersonally concerned, emotionally expressive; and women who choose non-traditional occupations score high on masculine or instrumental characteristics--independent, assertive, self-sufficient (Jones & Lamke, 1986; Strange, Carney & Rea, 1983).

A study done by Jones and Lamke (1986) revealed that a greater number of "feminine" women were enrolled in home economics than were enrolled in engineering, and a greater number of masculine women were enrolled in engineering than were enrolled in home economics. Strange, Carney and Rea (1983) found that females enrolled in female-dominated majors were primarily feminine and that the largest proportion of those in male-dominated majors were masculine.

Self-Esteem

Women who score high on masculinity scores also score high on self-esteem and general psychological adjustment. On the other hand, women who score high on femininity have been found to score lower on self-esteem scales (Antill & Cunningham, 1979; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975; Whitley, 1984).

As women who have high masculinity scores are more likely to be enrolled in non-traditional careers, results of these studies indicate it is likely that women who choose non-traditional careers also have higher self-esteem than those women choosing traditional careers. In fact, research has shown that there is a relationship between self-esteem and women's career development. For example, in a study investigating the relationship between self-esteem and career attitudes, and self-esteem and career choice, results showed that non-traditionality of attitudes was strongly correlated with self-esteem. The higher these women's self-esteem, the less traditional was their career choice. (Hughes, Martinek & Fitzgerald, 1985).

There is also evidence that women in non-traditional occupations have high levels of self-esteem (Bachtold, 1976; Bachtold & Werner, 1970; Lemkau, 1983).

Self-Efficacy

Several studies have reported that women who score high on self-efficacy are more likely to be employed in non-traditional careers (Betz and Hackett, 1981; Foss &

Stanley, 1986; Hackett and Betz, 1981; Nevill & Schlecker, 1988). Hackett and Betz (1981) have applied Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy to women's career development. Self-efficacy refers to:

Expectations or beliefs that one can successfully perform a given behaviour. Efficacy expectations determine whether or not behaviour will be initiated, how much effort will be expended and how long behaviour will be sustained in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences. (Hackett & Betz, 1981, pp. 327-328)

Hackett and Betz contend that women face many barriers in career development (discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of support systems) that require strong efficacy expectations to overcome. Women may choose a traditional occupation because of their belief that they are not capable of succeeding in a non-traditional one.

Hackett and Betz have shown support for the above ideas in their research (Betz & Hackett, 1981; and Hackett, 1985). For example, Betz and Hackett (1981) found that females reported substantially higher self-efficacy with regards to traditionally feminine occupations compared with non-traditional occupations. These findings have since been replicated by Matsui and Ikeda (1989).

In an extension of Betz and Hackett's (1981) work, Nevill and Schlecker (1988) studied 122 undergraduate females, and examined the relationship between self-efficacy, assertiveness, and willingness to engage in traditional career-related activities. Results of the study revealed that women who scored high in self-efficacy were more willing to engage in the career-related activities of non-traditional occupations than were women who scored low in self-efficacy. However, women who scored high in self-efficacy were

not more willing to engage in the career-related activities of traditional occupations than were women who scored low. In Foss and Stanley's (1986) study, they also discovered that high self-efficacy scores were related to the choice of a non-traditional career.

Attitudes Towards Women's Roles

Attitudes toward the roles of women have been found to be an important predictor of women's career choices. The more liberal or feminist a woman's attitudes, the more likely she is to choose a non-traditional career or major (Bachtold, 1976; Bachtold & Werner, 1970; Fassinger, 1985; Foss & Stanley, 1986; Harren, Kass, Tinsley and Moreland, 1979).

Fassinger (1985) discovered that women who stated that they would call themselves a feminist and who preferred to use the title "Ms." when referring to themselves were most likely to choose a career that was high in prestige and non-traditional.

In one study (Foss & Stanley, 1986) women's scores on a scale measuring attitudes toward women were related to their responses to a career intervention. It was discovered that women with higher scores on attitudes toward women tended to choose more non-traditional careers than the women scoring low on the scale.

Cultural Factors Influencing Women's Career Choices

Sex-Role Socialization

One of the most important elements that influence women's career choice, and to which many other factors are related in some way, is sex-role socialization.

Girls and boys learn at an early age what is sex-appropriate behaviour.

As children play, help with household tasks and engage in early paid work activities, they are rewarded for, and thus reinforced in, some of these activities but not in others. (Astin, 1984, p. 121)

Astin explains how the socialization process happens. She states that little girls are involved in activities that include nurturing and caring. They play dolls and make-believe school. Girls also take care of younger siblings or help around the house. In early paid experiences girls babysit. Astin summarizes:

In short, play, household chores, and early paid work are differentiated by gender and these differences produce different skills, different perceptions of what the world of work has to offer, and different impressions of what activities can best satisfy survival, pleasure and contribution needs. (Astin, 1984, p. 122)

Other psychologists (Chodorow, 1974; Gilligan, 1982; Jordon, Surrey, & Kaplan, 1991; Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1991 and Washor-Liebhaber, 1982) have described women's psychological development, particularly in how they relate to others, based on the sex-role socialization process.

Miller (1976) asserted that women in our culture are the carriers of qualities such as emotionality, vulnerability and the fostering of growth and development of others. She explained that "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliation and relationships" (p. 83). Surrey (1991) described women's psychological development as "self-in-relation" to others:

Self-in-relation involves the recognition that for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships. (p. 52)

Based on her work on moral development, Gilligan (1982) stated that women:

Judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Woman's place in man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. (p. 17)

Stonewater (1987) argued that our understanding of women's career development can be enhanced by utilizing Gilligan's work. For example, because of women's socialization, they see themselves as wanting to help others, enjoy environments where relationships are valued, and have good interpersonal skills. These traits then may affect the careers they view as appropriate or desirable.

This desire and ability to relate or care for others is a primary skill used in the therapeutic relationship. Brown (1990) described how "the phenomenology of being female" in our culture overlaps with qualities necessary for effective therapists. Using

the work of various theorists, she described the qualities women develop because of the expectations placed on them by the culture. These qualities include:

1. The phenomenology of connection, the "self-in-relation" as discussed by Miller, 1976 & Surrey, 1991. Women's position as primary caregiver in society gives them a greater sense of empathic attunement, a greater capacity to encounter another person at a level of emotional depth, an enhanced ability to be present with the intense feelings of another.

2. The phenomenology of being the "other", the outsider (Daly, 1973) because in patriarchal cultures men and male experience are the norm against which other experiences are compared. This otherness places women in the role of observer and "usually carries with it a loss of socially ascribed power, placing women in subordinate positions in relation to men" (p. 230). This can therefore make them dependent on men for their survival. From their "acute attunement" to what is going on for men, women receive "unconscious training in the skills of attending to the minutiae of someone else's expressions and movements that goes beyond empathic connection" (p. 230). "Women are thus likely to share the experience of being able to see through the roles and self-delusions of others" (p. 230-231). Moreover, the experience of otherness often enhances women's ability to understand pain and alienation.

3. The phenomenology of empowering others. In the "holding role" as mothers, women empower infants to know their feelings as real, meaningful, capable of being felt; in the caretaking role as wives, women empower their husbands by creating a base support from which the world can be encountered (Luepnitz, 1988).

4. The phenomenology of living in the shadow of [male] violence. "One of the social factors that is constantly interacting with our private sense of self is the public reality of violence against women" (p. 232). Since many clients have survived violence and women therapists will either have "survived violence or experienced anticipated fearing it" (p. 236), they are more likely than male therapists to be able to empathize with their clients.

There is research that has shown that socialization experiences can influence girls' and women's career choices. Through socialization experiences, women develop stereotypes about what is an appropriate career for them. Beliefs about and preferences for occupations tend to be consistent with the stereotypes held (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978; Frost & Diamond, 1979; Gettys & Cann, 1981; MacKay & Miller, 1982; Shinar, 1975).

When girls are exposed to stories that portray women in non-traditional roles, they rate traditional male roles and characteristics as being appropriate for females more frequently than girls who heard only traditional stories (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978). Since most story books show women in traditional roles, girls may tend to limit their aspirations because of these limited role models (Ashby & Wittmaier, 1978).

Gettys and Cann (1981) found that children as young as two and one half years old were able to distinguish "masculine" and "feminine" occupations. Adults have also been shown to rate occupations according to stereotypes. For example, Shinar (1975)

asked college students to rate occupations as either masculine, feminine or neutral. Results indicated that both male and female students consistently stereotyped occupations as masculine or feminine.

In her "conversations with teachers", Miller (1986) observed that female teachers often speak of teaching as a "natural career", enjoy the "family feeling" at the schools, and value being with children. She concluded:

Such responses, I believe, reflect the degree to which many women have internalized the notion of teaching as a desirable occupation because it does not require the sacrifice of the feminine role. Social images create expectations for women to retain the traditional feminine qualities of nurturer and supporter even within the context of a professional career. (p. 115)

Sex-role socialization also limits the number of role models of women in non-traditional occupations. Research has indicated that lack of role models can discourage women from entering into non-traditional careers (McLure & Piel, 1978, and O'Donnell & Anderson, 1978).

Amount of Support and Encouragement Received

Women who choose non-traditional occupations frequently report that receiving support or encouragement was a major factor in their choice of career (Haber, 1980; Houser & Garvey, 1983). Examples of such studies are:

Houser and Garvey (1983) discovered that women who choose non-traditional careers indicated that they received more support from significant people in their lives than did women who chose traditional careers. They also found that women who considered entering a non-traditional career but never did (considereds) differed from

non-traditional women in that the non-traditional women received significantly more support from significant males in their lives (fathers, brothers, boyfriends/husbands, male friends, etc.) than the considereds.

Male support in particular has also been found to be a significant factor in women's career choices (Houser & Garvey, 1985; Wilson, Weikel, & Rose, 1982). For example, when women were asked which people were particularly supportive of their career decisions, traditional women stated their parents and non-traditionals mentioned their husbands as being their mentors (Wilson, Weikel & Rose, 1982).

Studies have revealed that women who chose non-traditional careers received more support from their fathers than traditional women did (Lemkau, 1984; Nagley, 1971; Turner & McCaffrey, 1974). Lemkau's (1984) study revealed that non-traditional women reported receiving support from males during their youth. For example, one woman stated: "My father always encouraged me, saying I could do anything I set my mind to. I seldom, if ever, heard words like 'girls can't do that'" (p. 121).

Factors Influencing the Career Choice of Helping Professionals

Birth order

Birth order has been found to be related to a career choice in caretaking or helping (Bruce & Sims, 1974; Lackie, 1984; Marsh, 1988; McCarley, 1975; Miller, 1981; Norcross & Guy, 1989). Following are examples of some of the research in this area.

Rossi (1965) argued that first-born females are more likely to go into occupations that are extensions of childhood experiences of nurturing and responsibility. She points out that growing up for most women shifts from being taken care of in a people-oriented environment (i.e., the home) to taking care of others.

Other studies, while not focusing specifically on females, indicated that first-borns are highly represented in occupations that involve caretaking. For example, Marsh (1988) in her study discovered that 42% of social work students were first or only born, as compared to 30% of business students. In another study, Lackie (1984) found that in a study of 1,577 social workers, 48% of the men and 46% of the women were first or only born. Finally, Bruce and Sims (1974) discovered that, in small families, a disproportionate number of first-borns became therapists and, in large families, a disproportionate number of last-born children became therapists. It is not known why such a large number of last-borns from large families become therapists. This is an area that needs to be examined in more depth.

Characteristics of the Parents of Counsellors/Therapists

It has been found that the parents of those who choose a career in therapy have not been able to fulfil their children's emotional needs (Ford, 1963; Frank & Paris, 1987; Henry, Sims & Spray, 1973; Miller, 1981). Fathers of counsellors/therapists-to-be have been found to be emotionally distant from the family, unable to contribute much emotionally to their wives or their children (Ford, 1963). However, they have also been found to be empathic and active (Norcross & Guy, 1989). Some studies have found

mothers to have had some kind of emotional disturbance (Henry et al., 1973 & Miller, 1981), and other studies have reported that mothers have been viewed by therapists-to-be as understanding, giving and striving to meet the needs of others (Ford, 1963).

Roles Played in family of Origin

Research has indicated that those who choose a career in a helping profession have played nurturing or caretaking roles in their families of origin (Burton, 1972; Ford 1963; Fussel & Bonney, 1990; Henry, 1966; Lackie, 1984; Mc Carley 1975; Miller 1981; Racusin et al. 1981; Welins, 1964). As discussed by Lackie (1984), "Induction into a caretaking role occurs in the family of origin through personally significant life experiences in taking on the care of others" (p. 309). In their childhoods, helpers-to-be were the family negotiators and mediators, taking responsibility for resolving family tensions. In a study of 1,577 social workers, he found that over two-thirds described themselves as the parentified child (one who assumed parental responsibilities), the over-responsible member, the mediator or go-between, or the "good" child.

Based on her experiences with leading groups of psychotherapists, McCarley (1975) concluded that:

There are deep-seated unconscious reasons, rooted in family dynamics, that motivate a person's choice of a caretaking career role such as that of psychotherapist. A significant number of psychotherapists are drawn to the role of caretaker because they were assigned this function early in life in their families. The role of caretaker allows for some symbolic gratification of one's own needs through identification with the client or patient to whom one is giving. (p. 223)

In her book, The Drama of the Gifted Child, Alice Miller (1981) asserted that sensitive children can be trained for caretaking roles by needy and dysfunctional parents. Often therapists would receive praise and attention from their parents only after fulfilling their parents' emotional needs.

Family members also have been found to see the therapist-to-be as "affectively" or "therapeutically oriented" (Racusin et al., 1981) and therefore likely encouraged therapists-to-be to engage in helper-type behaviours.

The Wounded Healer Syndrome

Helpers have been described as possibly having "the wounded healer syndrome" (Groeseck 1975; Miller & Baldwin, 1987). This theory holds that helpers enter the field because of the feeling that something is lacking in them (likely due to the dysfunction in their families of origin) and through their relationships with clients, they unconsciously attempt to heal their own childhood wounds while attempting to heal the wounds of others (Ford 1963; Frank & Paris, 1987; Holt & Luborsky, 1958; Burton, 1972). However, it should not be assumed that all, or even most, helpers fit "the wounded healer syndrome". More research in this area is required before such conclusions can be made.

Because of the above mentioned "woundedness", becoming a therapist can play a significant role in the therapists's identity. For example, in Ford's (1963) examination of 25 psychiatric residents, he reported that:

They [the psychiatric residents] had ultimately been led into psychiatry in response to an awareness of need within themselves....depending upon the degree

of his [or her] conscious awareness and acceptance of his [or her] need, the psychotherapist in training is free to follow two collateral mutually interacting goals: The attainment of both his personal and his therapeutic role and identity. (p. 476)

Henry (1966) also discussed the relationship between the therapists' personal and therapeutic role and identity when he asserted that the therapist makes a commitment to not just a line of work, but to an entire lifestyle; and Farber (1985) stated that "most psychology students are deeply psychological-minded individuals who have been inexorably drawn to the field by the conviction that the practice of psychotherapy is the most ego-syntonic career available to them" (p. 172). Finally, Goldberg (1986) stated that:

Not altogether consciously, psychotherapists are drawn to their subject matter in a magical hope that if they could study people long enough and intimately enough, they may come upon the eternal secret--the key to the mysteries of human existence. (p. 116)

The uncertainties many helpers face in childhood appear to play a role, albeit unconsciously, in their development of curiosity about themselves and other people (Farber, 1985; Fussel & Bonney, 1990; Goldberg, 1986; Henry et al, 1973, 1986; Norcross & Guy, 1989 & Rychak; 1965). For example, in a study of 4,000 psychotherapists Henry (1977) discovered that the principle motive for entering the field was the desire to understand oneself and others. In this sense, the desire to become a helper can be viewed as a "spiritual calling" (Goldberg, 1986), in that, "at an early age [therapists] became sensitized to the emotional substratum of human life with regard to how people interact and how they may feel about themselves" (p.53). This sense of being called into the profession can give therapists a sense of being gifted or special

(Burton, 1972; Henry 1971; Norcross & Guy, 1989) as well as being seen as special by others (Guy, 1987).

Practising psychotherapy also can allow the wounded part of the therapist to feel more in control:

In a word, a therapist is molded in childhood, whose early experiences left him/her with a certain residue of impotence in the face of human suffering. As an adult with mature life experiences the therapist-to-be is better equipped to carry out the practitioner's family script than he/she was as a child. The therapist-to-be, in the face of his/her frustration at fulfilling the family needs selects those educational and life experiences, often largely unwittingly, that enable him/her to feel more adequate in dealing with human suffering. (Goldberg, 1986, p. 58)

Burton (1972) and Henry (1966) have speculated that as a result of unmet childhood needs, therapists tend to be introspective and concerned with their inner worlds. This introspective quality can cause therapists to experience some sense of isolation from others (Farber, 1985; Henry 1966; Burton, 1972).

The Wounded Healer Syndrome and Therapist Effectiveness

Many consider the qualities developed in therapists as a result of the wounded healer syndrome to be necessary in order to be effective therapists (Burton, 1972; Goldberg, 1986; Miller & Baldwin, 1987). For example, Miller and Baldwin (1987) stated:

The mystery of healing interactions deepens when the interactions of the patient [client]-healer and wounded-helper poles are considered. The helper takes on the wounds of the patient [client] and begins experiencing his [or her] own wounded polarity...increasing an awareness of his [or her] own vulnerability. The helper's wounded pole activates and helps actualize the patient's [client's] wounded pole, a step necessary for true healing. Both patient [client] and healer experience themselves more fully through greater awareness of their human potential to be both wounded and healed. (p. 145)

Miller and Baldwin add that a therapist must learn to consciously attend to his or her inner-self and become aware (conscious) of his or her "wound", so that it may be integrated and the client avoids indirectly playing the role of healer for the therapist.

Burton (1972) stated that:

Psychotherapy succeeds best when the therapist himself [or herself] participates deeply in the process as a human being. When some of his [or her] growth needs are not met, the therapy languishes....the treatment satisfactions of the therapist are as important, if not more important, than the client's, for the simple reason that the unconscious takes over in extreme therapist dissatisfaction and punishes or even eliminates the client. (p. 2)

Goldberg (1986) contended that the ability to facilitate clients' growth depends on the therapist's ability to utilize "his/her own family role in enabling clients to differentiate their needs" (p. 48) and Gustafson (1986) posited that because the therapist has experienced emotional pain, he or she can understand and respond more appropriately to clients.

Summary

As this review of the literature indicates, there are many factors that have been found to influence women's career choices. The ones mentioned include personal interests, values, sex-role orientation, self-esteem, self-efficacy, attitudes toward women's roles, sex-role socialization, and amount of support and encouragement received. This research indicates that women in traditional careers tend to have characteristics, interests, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are congruent with these careers. Although most of these factors are presented separately, it appears likely that they are inter-related. For example, women in traditional careers tend to score high on

feminine characteristics and women who score high on femininity scores also score low on self-esteem scales. The literature surveyed dealing with the motivations of therapists in making their career choices appears to indicate that there is a strong link between therapists' experiences in their family of origin and their career choices. In particular, birth order, parental characteristics, reversed roles and early wounding experiences seem to be salient factors in the career choice of therapist.

Implications for the Present Study

The above literature review gives an overview of some of the specific factors that appear to influence women's career choices as well as a survey of individuals' motivations for becoming helpers. It can be seen that many of the factors concerning women's career choices appear to be related to one another. However, the research in this area does not give us a clear understanding of *how* these factors interact with one another to influence women's career choices. Nor does it give us an in-depth understanding of what women's own views are on how their life experiences influence their career choices. Further, the literature on people's motivations for becoming counsellors/therapists has not focused specifically on women. Moreover, the studies in this area often have not made distinctions between men and women, or else have examined only male subjects.

Because of the above gaps in the research, it seems important that counsellors acquire further knowledge of how women come to choose traditional careers so that they can increase their understanding of these women. It will then be possible to assist such

women in increasing their career options and in making more informed choices. Since research is also lacking in the area of women in the helping professions, specifically in the profession of counselling, it is particularly important that we acquire more knowledge of women who choose careers in these fields. Finally, results of this study will be useful to practising counsellors who wish to explore and understand how some of their experiences that led them to be counsellors affect their work with their clients.

This study investigated how women's experiences, based on their own perceptions, have influenced their choice of choosing a career in counselling.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Theoretical Assumptions of a Phenomenological Approach

The aim of phenomenological psychology is to study things as they appear in order to come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle, King & Halling, 1989). Phenomenology "has become that psychological discipline which seeks to explicate the essence, structure, or form of both human experience and human behaviour as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection" (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p. 6). Because the phenomenological approach assumes that knowledge is grounded in experience (Valle, King & Halling, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1989), the purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate human experience as it is perceived and understood by the person experiencing it (Giorgi, 1970). Its "aim [is] to understand phenomena on their own terms, rather than to seek explanation by going 'behind' phenomena via operationally defined hypotheses about them" (Barrell, Aanstoos, Richards & Arons, 1987, p. 446). As Van Manen (1984) stated:

Phenomenology is the study of the life-world--the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or theorize about it. (p. 17)

When studying this life-world, "the goal of inquiry is the articulation of the essential meanings of the described experience" (Hosmand, 1989).

Some of the major philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, as described by Valle, King & Halling, 1989), are outlined below.

The term **co-constitutionality** refers to the idea that individuals are not separate from the world they live in; the world and the person are interdependent--one does not exist without the other. It is through the interdependency of the person and the world that experience occurs. "Experience, as it is directly given, occurs at the meeting of person and world" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 42). This is in direct contrast to traditional research where the environment and the person are seen as being separate from one another.

The concept of co-constitutionality is based on the premise that people and the world are always in **dialogue** with one another. People always act upon the world and the world always acts upon them. In this sense, people are partly active as well as partly passive.

In phenomenological thinking, people are said to have **situated freedom**. This means that individuals are neither completely free nor are they completely determined by the environment. Instead, situations are presented to individuals and they then have the freedom to decide, with some limitations, how they respond.

Phenomenologists believe that the **nature of consciousness** begins with the life-world of the individual--the world as it is presented and experienced by the individual. This life-world is **pre-reflective** in nature, meaning that it "is both independent of knowledge derived from reflective thought processes, and yet being pre-reflective (before-reflective), it is also the indispensable ground or starting point for all knowledge" (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p. 10).

Phenomenology holds that we are always conscious of something. In other words, consciousness is **intentional**--it is focused on an object. Objects are made present by consciousness, and consciousness is revealed through the presence of objects (Valle, King & Halling, 1989).

While doing phenomenological research, researchers assume a **transcendental attitude**. This refers to the procedure whereby researchers' preconceptions and presuppositions about the particular phenomenon under investigation are put aside or **bracketed** before proceeding with the research so that the chances of these biases influencing the research will be reduced.

Another important concept in phenomenology concerns the assumptions held regarding **objectivity**. According to Colaizzi (1978), "Objectivity is fidelity to phenomena." By this he means that when conducting research, researchers allow the phenomenon to speak for itself rather than telling it what it is (i.e., operationally defining it). In contrast to traditional researchers, phenomenological researchers try not to judge, interpret or analyze the phenomenon so that it fits into preconceived ideas or theories. Every attempt is made to avoid this. At the same time however, the researchers' experiences must not be denied; rather they must be made explicit so researchers become aware of their biases and then set them aside so that these biases do not operate unconsciously in the research process. In this way, phenomenological research is neither purely objective (as is the intent with traditional research), nor completely subjective. Instead, objectivity and subjectivity are seen as being inseparable. One cannot exist without the other.

When analyzing data, researchers use the procedure of **explication**. This term refers to the process whereby participants' experiences are analyzed so that the meaning of the experiences are revealed.

Finally, the overall goal of phenomenology is to determine the **structure** of an experience, which is the essence or form underlying the phenomenon examined. Although phenomena are revealed to us in many different ways, they are viewed as having the same essential meaning. To determine the structure of a particular experience is to ascertain what it is about an experience that remains similar in different situations. An analogy is provided by Valle, King & Halling (1989):

The perceived phenomena is analogous to a mineral crystal that appears to have many different sizes and shapes depending on the intensity, angle, and colour of the light that strikes its surface. Only after seeing these different reflections and varied appearances on repeated occasions does the constant, unchanging crystalline structure become known to us. (p. 13)

Rationale for Using the Phenomenological Approach

There are three reasons the phenomenological approach was chosen for this study. The first involves the topic to be investigated. The aim of this study is to explore, understand and describe what women's perceptions are, based on their own experiences, of how they have come to be counsellors. The phenomenological approach is ideally suited to this task because of its emphasis on examining and describing the lived-world of individuals as they experience it.

The second reason a phenomenological study was deemed appropriate for this investigation is because the relationship between the participant and the researcher in phenomenological research parallels the relationship between the counsellor and the client. Being a counsellor, I felt it was important that I choose a research approach that is compatible with my philosophy as a counsellor. As Osborne (1990) has pointed out, many counsellors have experienced a kind of dissonance because of the radical difference between the practice of counselling and the methods of research. Aspects of lived experience which are the focus of counselling are "either inaccessible to prevailing quantitative methods or distorted by the need to operationalize the quality to be measured" (p. 89). Osborne believes that integrating phenomenological research with the practice of counselling can alleviate this dissonance and give the counsellor the feeling of "coming home".

An important aspect of phenomenological research is that its method of interviewing is congruent with counselling. When conducting interviews in both situations, it is imperative that researchers/counsellors listen respectfully to participants/clients and allow their stories to emerge, while asking primarily open-ended questions and refraining from imposing their own views as much as possible.

Osborne mentioned other parallels between counsellors and researchers. These included the qualities of warmth, caring, openness, ethical integrity; the skills of being able to read between the lines and pursue clinical hunches; as well as being able to bracket their own beliefs and experiences while interviewing.

A final rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach is because it is seen as being compatible with a feminist approach to research. As phenomenology asserts, I cannot separate myself from my research, and because feminism is inextricably part of who I am as a person and how I view the experiences of women, it seemed appropriate to use a research method that was congruous with feminism. Moreover, the participants in this study are all women involved in a traditional female occupation, which is an important feminist issue because of the often under-utilization of skills, lower status and lower wages generally involved in traditional careers for women.

Many feminists have advocated approaches to research that I believe are compatible with the phenomenological approach (Gergan, 1988; Harding, 1987; Oakley, 1981, Salner, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Unger, 1982; Wallston, 1981). Similarities between the two approaches are discussed below.

1. Feminists and phenomenologists both believe that personal experience is important and merits scientific investigation. Feminists have argued that we should accept the validity of women's experiences based on their own accounts instead of finding the "truth" about women's lives for them, as has been done in traditional research (Stanley & Wise, 1983). "Feminism insists that women should define and interpret our experiences, and that women need to re-define and re-name what other people--experts, men--have previously defined and named for us" (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 114). Phenomenologists also accept the validity of participants' experiences and make it the

focal point of their research. Their goal is to determine the overall structure of individuals' experiences based on participants' accounts of their involvement with a particular phenomenon.

2. A fundamental feminist belief is that women's personal experiences cannot be separated from the social-political context in which they live. Hence, the popular feminist slogan, "the personal is the political." As previously mentioned, phenomenology also views the person and the world as being dependent upon, and influencing, one another. One cannot occur without the other, therefore, it is concluded that experience is situated within a context.

3. Phenomenologists and feminists both place significance on the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Feminists point out the importance of listening to women with respect, and advocate a mutual and non-hierarchical relationship between participant and researcher. Gergan (1988) argued that it is unrealistic to establish an objective distance from participants and Salner (1989) stated that "The effort to maintain such artificial distance creates a psychological sense of personal alienation to which feminists have objected on experiential and moral grounds" (p. 6).

Phenomenologists also have commented on the attitude researchers need to have towards participants.

The researcher must realize that his [or her] subject is more than merely a source of data: he [or she] is exquisitely a person, and the full richness of a person and his [or her] verbalized experiences can be contacted only when the researcher listens to him [or her] with more than just his [or her] ears. He [or she] must listen with the totality of his [or her] being and with the entirety of his [or her] personality. (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 64)

4. The notion of objectivity in scientific research is viewed in a similar way in both phenomenological and feminist research. For both feminists and phenomenologists there is the belief that the researcher and participant are involved in an interaction--in a reciprocal relationship with each other. Both are persons with thoughts, feelings and behaviours that impact on the research process and on the research outcome. Since the researcher's presence is bound to influence the research, the researcher must acknowledge and utilize this presence. Traditional, positivistic research is criticized for not including the presence of the researcher and his or her subjective experiences within the research. Stanley & Wise (1983) stated:

The choice is of either including the researcher's self as the centre of research or of simply not talking about or writing about it. It is impossible to 'do' research and at the same time 'not do it'; and not 'doing it' is the only way that the researcher's self can be excluded from the centre of the research process. (p. 49)

Below is a summary of what Gergan (1988) envisions feminist research should look like. I think most phenomenologists would agree with her conclusion.

Feminist inspired research would endeavour to recognize that scientists, subjects, and "facts" are all interconnected, involved in reciprocal influences and subject to interpretation and linguistic constraints. In addition, scientific endeavours would be treated as value-laden and would be formed with specific value orientations in mind. This research approach would treat scientists as participants in the research project along with the subjects of the research and not as superior beings who maintain a knowledge monopoly among themselves. (p. 94)

Procedure

Colaizzi (1978) stated that:

There is no such thing as THE phenomenological method. Instead the phenomenologist employs descriptive methods, with emphasis on the plural. Each particular psychological phenomenon, in conjunction with the particular aims and objectives of a particular descriptive method. (p. 53)

While keeping the flexibility of the above statement in mind, the method I chose to employ for this investigation follows closely the one outlined by Colaizzi (1978).

Assumptions of the Researcher

In keeping with the phenomenological approach, before interviewing my participants, I examined my assumptions about how women come to be counsellors in order to assist me in bracketing them before beginning my research. I did this by first listing any presuppositions of which I was cognizant. In order to aid me in becoming more aware of those presuppositions of which I was not conscious, I then gave the interview questions to a fellow student who interviewed me about my experience of becoming a counsellor. This interview was audio taped and, upon completion of the interview, I listened to the tape several times while taking notes. This enabled me to become more aware of my own experiences so that I would be less likely to impose my

beliefs on my participants and the research data. From this process I listed the following assumptions:

1. A primary factor in women's motivations to become counsellors is their desire to help or care for others.

2. Women are socialized to take care of others and therefore choose careers in which they can provide service to and/or care for others.

3. Women who choose to work in the helping professions often make these choices without being aware of how familial (e.g., being involved in caretaking roles in their family-of-origin) and cultural factors (e.g., sex-role socialization) have influenced their choices.

4. Many women lack self-confidence about their abilities when considering potential careers and therefore limit their career options.

5. Because women restrict their career options, their skills are under-utilized in the work force.

6. Women can become aware of how cultural and familial factors impact on their career choices and this increased awareness can help them to increase their career options.

7. The older women are and the longer they have been practising counsellors, the more likely they are to have some awareness of how their decisions to become counsellors were influenced by their sex-role-socialization processes.

8. The more aware counsellors are of their motivations for becoming counsellors, the more aware they will also be of how these motivations impact on their work with their clients. This in turn will assist them in being more effective counsellors.

Selection of Participants

As Colaizzi (1978) indicated, "experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selection of subjects" (p. 65). Three female counsellors, over thirty years of age, who were acquaintances of mine, were selected as participants for this study. All had been practising counsellors for at least four years at the time of the initial interviews. I wanted to ensure that participants had at least two years counselling experience to increase the likelihood that these women would have done some reflection on how they came to be counsellors. When the counsellors agreed to take part in this study, they were given both a verbal and written description (Appendix A) of the study and were encouraged to ask any questions. Once I was confident that they understood what was being asked of them as participants, they were asked to read and sign consent forms (Appendix B).

Data Gathering and Analysis

The interview questions were generated from the title of the research and through discussions with fellow counselling students. The following questions, which directly parallel the research questions, were used as a guide in the interview process:

1. How did you come to be a counsellor?

2. What life experiences and critical events have played a role in your decision to become a counsellor?

3. Were there any significant people or role models throughout the course of your life who influenced your decision to become a counsellor?

4. What meaning or significance have you ascribed to becoming a counsellor?

5. What did you envision yourself actually doing as a counsellor that you thought would be meaningful to you?

The participants were interviewed a total of three times for this inquiry. The initial audio-taped interview took place at an agreed upon location and lasted between one and one half hours. The length of time depended largely on how much the participant had to say. When the interviewees felt they had said all they wanted to, and I felt I had understood their experience sufficiently, the interview was concluded.

During the first interview, open-ended questions were used to elicit the women's stories of how they came to be counsellors. I began with the question, "How did you come to be a counsellor?" and then asked further questions only as necessary to probe the participant to explore her story in more depth.

After the initial interviews, I listened to the tapes while noting areas that I wanted to clarify or learn more about. I then returned to my participants and conducted a second audio-taped interview asking more detailed questions in order for them to illuminate specific areas they had spoken of in the previous interview. I also gave the participants the opportunity to add any information that they may have thought about since our last interview.

After transcribing all the tapes from my interviews, I took each participant's transcript (protocol) and proceeded to listen to the tapes in order to "acquire a feeling for them" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Once I felt I had obtained a sense of the participant's overall experience, I went through the transcripts and underlined words or phrases that directly pertained to the phenomena under investigation; namely, the experience of becoming a counsellor. The next step entailed transposing the meaning of these significant statements onto index cards using a different colour for each participant. I then organized these significant statements into clusters of themes while remaining mindful of allowing the themes to emerge from the data as opposed to pre-determining the categories. To validate these clusters of themes, I again read the original protocols to ensure I had not lost the original meaning of the participant's experience. When I was satisfied that I had organized the themes into the most meaningful categories, I wrote a detailed description of the participant's experience and prepared a summary chart indicating the significant aspects of the participant's experience. In addition, in this summary chart I highlighted the reoccurring themes of each woman. After giving these written descriptions to the participants to read, I interviewed them a third time, giving them the option to add, delete or modify the descriptions so that they felt satisfied that the descriptions presented an accurate depiction of their experiences. The final step of analysis entailed writing "the exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon in as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61), as well as developing a chart to summarize this fundamental structure.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter includes an explication of the data for each participant, along with an account of the general structure of the experience for the three women, based on similar as well as divergent themes. For the individual accounts, words and phrases in quotation marks are exactly those used by the women interviewed; those phrases underlined connote reoccurring themes which emerged as the participants relayed their stories. For the summary of all three participants, underlined words highlight themes common to at least two of the women. A chart summarizing each participants' experience follows each narrative, and an overall chart outlining the general structure of the experience of becoming a counsellor for the three women is located at the end of the chapter.

Explication of the Data

Introduction to the Women's Stories

I have organized the participants' stories into categories emphasizing the areas in their lives that they saw as being salient to the phenomenon being investigated; namely, the experience of becoming a counsellor. It is important to note that, although these categories may appear to be distinct from one another, most of them actually overlap and are inextricably intertwined. This is due to the fact that events in the women's personal lives are interwoven with their experiences of becoming a counsellor. Hence, all three participants spoke at great length during the interviews about the experiences

in their lives that have had significant meaning for them as women, as well as those that have impacted on their lives as counsellors. The categories were not prearranged; instead, they were allowed to emerge from the data during the analysis. As a result, the categories, albeit similar, are not exactly the same for each participant, nor are they the only way the narratives could have been arranged.

Sandra

Introduction

Sandra is a personal acquaintance of mine who, at my invitation, agreed to take part in my study. At the time of the interviews she was 46 years old, had been married for 26 years, and had two boys aged 19 and 22. She had been a practising counsellor in private practice for 8 years.

I met with Sandra on three separate occasions in her small, but cosy office where she sees her clients. Sandra easily settled into telling her story, choosing to recount it chronologically, beginning with the relevant events from her childhood and concluding with the meaning she attributes to currently being a counsellor.

Sandra's story will be presented within the context of two major categories. I will begin by relaying significant experiences from her childhood--her relationships with members of her family of origin, and her experiences in Catholic school--her relationship with the symbols of the church and influential relationships with teachers. The next major section discussed will consist of pertinent experiences in adulthood, starting with her personal growth/development and its impact on her relationships with others. From here,

I will recount messages that were conveyed to her by prominent women in her adult-life and then move on to examine her relationships with members of her current family. Finally, Sandra's narrative will conclude with a description of the present meaning she ascribes to being a counsellor.

Experiences in Childhood : Embracing My Inner-World

Relationships With Members of Family of Origin : I Exist for the Benefit of Others

Sandra, the youngest child in her family, having an older brother by ten years, grew up in a "dysfunctional family" where both parents were alcoholic. She described her home life during her childhood as "volatile" and believes that her relationships with members of her family of origin have played a critical role in her experience of becoming a counsellor. These childhood experiences, and how they have impacted on her life as a counsellor, are reviewed below.

Relationship With Mother: My Mother Needs Me; I am Special.

Sandra spoke a lot during the interviews about her relationship with her mother and how it influenced her as a counsellor. There were many problems in her family, and Sandra's mother was very unhappy and reactionary. Sandra sensed her mother's fragility and took on the role of listening to and caring for her. The image Sandra carries of her early years with her mother is described below:

My mother--my earliest memory is of her sitting in the bedroom crying. I don't know about what. And my putting my arm around her and patting her and telling her everything is going to be okay. And I think that pretty much is an image or symbol of the kind of relationship that I had with her. She would frequently

break down and kind of collapse. She was quite hysterical actually. And it was my job to--what I did to survive was to be there for her.

After being comforted, her mother would "get better" and tell Sandra that she was special. Consequently, Sandra learned that if she nurtured her mother she would receive attention, recognition, and a sense of belonging. It was essential for Sandra's existence that she feel special--she needed to "be something". She desperately lacked any sense of herself as being worthwhile because of her mother's inability to nurture and validate her worth as an individual.

Sandra used the words mused and fused repeatedly during my interviews with her to impart the quality of her relationship with her mother. She remarked that it was as if she was the adult and her mother was the child in their interactions. To Sandra, this role-reversal, along with the fact that she was only valued and nurtured for how she made her mother feel as opposed to her own uniqueness as a person, indicated that her mother was narcissistic. If she was not doing something for her mother then it was as if she was invisible. Sandra summarized, "the phrase that sort of sums up what that was about is I feel like I was for my mother".

Relationship With Father: In Order to Be Safe, I Must Be on Guard.

Unlike her mother, Sandra did not mention her father until the end of the second interview and this was only when asked about how he may have influenced how she has come to be a counsellor. Sandra had only reflected minimally on her father's role in her

life prior to my interviews with her and had difficulty articulating the nature of his influence on her. Part of the reason for this could have been because he seemed to have both a negative and positive affect on her life.

She described her father as "unhappy, passive, volatile and labile". She remembers an obvious tension when she was around him and that there were certain topics which were not discussed in his presence. Sandra had to be on guard around her father, particularly when he was drinking; she had to be able to "sniff the wind" to ascertain what kind of mood he was in and what she could do to "keep things together [in the family]". Becoming embarrassed when her father was drunk in public, she recalled having to discover methods to "run interference" on these occasions. Sandra does not think her father saw himself as a father. She did not see much of him as a child, nor did he support her emotionally; hence, she concluded that there was a "big lack of his involvement" in her life. She remembers him being in the background at home, coming forward mainly to criticize her along with her mother and brother. Internalizing this criticism and the low expectations he had of her contributed to the formation of her low self-esteem.

Paradoxically, Sandra told me how her father had a "stabilizing" effect on her. He had a kind of "silent presence--"when the chips were down, he was there, but they had to be really down." If Sandra was quiet, she could connect with him on a certain level. However, it was when she did something wrong that he began to "take shots at her". Sandra emphasized that although her father criticized her, he didn't criticize her

for who she was, rather it was more for what she did. Somehow, in spite of her father's criticisms of her, at her "core", she held the belief that deep down there was something about her that is worthwhile.

Relationship With Brother: Learning Compassion

Sandra believes her brother has always resented her because she was born on his tenth birthday and as a result took the attention away from him. As a consequence, her brother was very rough with her and she spent a great deal of her childhood "tip-toeing" around him, trying to stay out of his way. He had many medical and emotional problems and so, in spite of his cruelty to her she learned to feel compassion for him. She knew him to be a "tender little boy" underneath his rough exterior and that was what kept her caring for him. She stated:

I just knew him to be a vulnerable person--that kept me feeling O.K. about him...[he] was actually kind of sweet in some ways--it was like he was a tender little boy in some ways who had this really rough exterior.

Summary of Relationships With Members of Her Family of Origin

Sandra's primary function in her family of origin was to listen to and care for her family members. No one was able to give her much attention; what little attention was available was given to her brother, "the acting-out-child". She believes the only role left for her was that of the caretaker-- to be the one who operated behind the scenes supporting people and taking care of their inner-worlds. She felt she had to take responsibility for keeping things together because her parents were incapable of doing so. Although Sandra now understands that she was not really in any position to hold

things together in her family, she had the false sense that she could. She needed to believe that she had the power to prevent chaos from occurring in order to feel safe and to "survive". It gave her the feeling that she had some control over what happened to her.

Sandra contended that these experiences in her family of origin made her acutely sensitive to other people's inner-worlds and able to take care of those inner-worlds. She was well trained to be intuitive and to read between the lines in order to determine (understand) what was occurring inside other people. This training was instrumental in cultivating her interest in the inner-worlds of others.

Sandra saw herself as being a "boundary-less person" in her early adult years because of her relationships with her family members, particularly her merged connection with her mother. She couldn't separate the need to be emotionally available for other people from her own need to be separate; she had a tendency to become enmeshed in her associations with others. Sandra described this need to merge with others: "It was as if I didn't feel at home until I could get the kind of symbiotic relationship with others where I was indispensable to their well-being". Sandra took the skills mastered in her family --to watch (be on guard), to caretake, to merge, and to listen, out into the world with her and subsequently sought out relationships with people who wanted and needed her help--she assumed the role of "confessor" or counsellor with people in her personal life. Often, friends would disclose their life stories because she was a good listener, she was understanding, and she was empathic.

Educational Experiences: Discovering Meaning in Life

Experiences With Catholicism: Taking Refuge in the Symbols of the Church.

Although Sandra's parents were not Catholic, they enrolled her in a Catholic school when she was 6 years old because she was not doing well in public school. Sandra believes her poor performance in school was due to the distress she had about the turmoil happening in her family and what she could do to alleviate it.

While attending Catholic school, Sandra found that she was fascinated by the odours and the symbols of the church. She had difficulty articulating what this experience was like for her. She said that it had more of a "felt sense and meaning".

She said:

I remember just the richness of all those images that I really didn't understand because I hadn't grown up to be a Catholic. And so, it was like what my imagination would make of those. For instance, uh, just being inside the chapel, not knowing what was going on, not really participating in it but all the smells and the images and--it was just really, uh, I suppose you could call it a kind of a religious--spiritual kind of experience that was not really connected with too many people.

Sandra had the feeling there was some sustenance in these images that she could get a sense of comfort, security and identity from. The church helped Sandra realize there was "something bigger" than the deprivation she was experiencing in her external world that could give her life meaning. This something turned out to be Sandra's inner-world which eventually became a "refuge" for her. She learned that there was a "whole rich life inside herself that was separate from everyone else". She discovered not only that she could have a meaningful relationship with this inner-world, but also that it was necessary for her to do so in order to survive. It was essential because of the "poverty

in her relationships" with the outside world. Being starved of nurturance "threw her back into herself"--into her inner-world where she found the nourishment unobtainable from her parents. It validated her and assisted her in unearthing a sense of herself--of "mirroring her own distinctive identity" which her mother was unable to do. Sandra summarized the significance of her inner-world : "The only kind of relationship I could have within my family was between me and myself".

Even though Sandra found solace and a sense of protection in her inner-world, there were drawbacks to spending so much time inside herself. She worried a lot about the things that were not going well at home and subsequently, sometimes felt "trapped" inside with her preoccupations. She felt lonely, angry and resentful.

Spending time inside herself contributed to her desire to know (understand) what goes on inside other people. She wanted to be able to share her understanding and experiences with others--to enter other people's inner-worlds and to be deeply involved with them. Counselling, therefore, meets some of her needs to be with people in that inner-world. She no longer has to be alone in it as she was in childhood.

The kind of counselling that Sandra does has also been influenced by her school years in the Catholic church and her relationship with her inner-world. Her own experiences with symbols and images have led her to focus on symbolism with her clients. She sees the inner-life as a kind of potential that can be "locked up" in symbols. She has come to understand how private inner images are to people and how profoundly these images can affect their lives. When working with clients, she listens to symbolic material manifested by the unconscious and then guides her clients in the process of

uncovering the layers of meaning available in this material. She believes that working with clients in this manner can unleash their untapped resources and give them the freedom they need to find the means to create more fulfilling lives.

Relationships With Teachers: I am a Unique and Worthy Being

As opposed to the messages communicated to Sandra by her family, which, explicitly and implicitly, informed her that her purpose in life was to "be there" for (care for) other people, she received very encouraging messages from some teachers in her early years, specifically from those who were accepting of her self-expression. One teacher especially had a very strong impact on Sandra:

I remember being in a class with a teacher I really liked. She would do things like put on music and then give us crayons and paper and have us close our eyes and image something and draw that. I just thought that was wonderful. I thought, this is it!

This teacher showed interest in her and listened to her. She did not require Sandra to meet her needs as her mother had, and as a result, her own uniqueness (identity) was allowed to unfold. As Sandra stated, these influential teachers appreciated her in her own right. They helped her cultivate a belief in herself (improved her self-esteem), which later on in her adult life, permitted her to believe that she could have ambition and a career in an area that correlated with who she was as a person. They further fostered and validated her fascination with the inner-world, both her own and other people's.

Messages Received Regarding the Roles of Women: My Function as a Women is to Promote Men.

Sandra acquired the notion, both overtly and covertly, from her family of origin and from society in general, that men's role is to have ambition and that women's role is to help them with that ambition. For example, the women in her family (mother and aunts) were powerful but they used their power to promote men rather than to pursue their own interests. She learned that it was acceptable to be educated as a woman, but it was unacceptable to "do" anything with that education. Sandra's mother conveyed the impression that, as a woman, she could be a secretary or do something behind the scenes, (e.g., caring for people), but she was not supposed to have ambitions of her own. Sandra mentioned the difference between her mother's attitude toward her brother's achievement and her own:

My brother is very successful and makes a lot of money and so she really pushed him and just kind of ignored me and what kind of grades I got didn't matter. I wasn't expected to achieve. I was going to get married. But my brother she really pushed.

Sandra stated that these attitudes had a significant influence on her. In her personal life, she acted on the message that women were not supposed to be out in the world accomplishing for themselves. Instead, they were to be in the background (behind the scenes) supporting others--particularly men. Because she never thought she had the right to do something that would fulfil her own aspirations, she denied her own desires to achieve and became skilled at attending to the needs of others.

Experiences in Adulthood: Learning to Trust My Unconscious

Personal Growth/Development and its Impact on Her Relationships With Others: Becoming Autonomous

For the majority of Sandra's life the reasons underlying her career choice were "unconscious." However, everything she did guided her along the path of becoming a professional counsellor, even though she did not make the "conscious" choice to seek a career in counselling until well into her adult life. This decision came about only after many years of exploration of her own inner-world--largely through participation in therapy groups and individual therapy, which eventually led her towards wanting to share what she had learned with other people. She felt that she had developed an understanding of her process of personal exploration that could be useful to others. For this reason, Sandra's quest to discover herself and evolve as a person, and how this quest has influenced her relationships with others, will be described in detail below.

One of Sandra's first significant personal growth experiences occurred in the sixties when she joined a dream group where the participants analyzed one another's dreams. On one occasion, she did a therapeutic exercise with a reoccurring dream of hers in which something she was unable to see was chasing her. When she confronted this "invisible force" and asked what it wanted, it answered, "I just want to get to know you". Sandra reported that this incident was "transformational"--it changed her life. As she stated:

And suddenly, it was like something really shifted in me. It was a very transformative experience. In that moment I knew that instead of running from that inner-world and uh putting it down and thinking it was weird and thinking it was something I had to keep to myself. It was a sense that I could have a

relationship with that inner-world that would be meaningful, that it was okay. In fact it was necessary. This was a kind of driving force. That if I didn't do something with it, it was going to bug me, which it had been. And I never had the nightmare again. And I began a real quest at that time. I was so excited. It was like now here is my life work!

This dream helped her to re-connect with and value the inner-world she had unearthed in childhood. She began to see that self-understanding could resolve a lot of the conflicts she had within herself. Through this event, she generated a sense that compelled her to persevere in the search of herself so that she would continuously move forward in her life and evolve as a human being. As Sandra described it, "There was something inside me that just knew I had to keep putting one foot in front of the other. I couldn't stop. I couldn't go back to being chased by this thing". This process of self-discovery has been beneficial in that it has enabled her to replace the role of being a person who worked behind the scenes to one of more visibility and directness. Sandra believes that who she is stems from her inner-world. She has learned that she is "competent and capable" of achieving. Throughout her life she has had a heart-felt sense that she has to become who she is. This means continuing to cultivate and express her inner-world. When she interacts with the outer-world, she has to bring her inner-world with her, and her inner-world is the place she has to return to for nurturance of herself.

Sandra has undergone many personal changes that have had repercussions on her earlier impulse to merge with other people. Eventually, she realized that she needed to detach herself from those friendships where she was fused with others in the way she had

been with her mother and instead, become more independent (autonomous). In Sandra's words:

I have just stopped seeking out those kinds of relationships [ones in which she played the role of confidante] and have let the ones that have been that way go. Just-- it was a real crisis and turning point in my life when I realized that I almost had to surgically remove myself from those kinds of relationships because I had invited people to treat me in a certain way, which I could no longer tolerate. It was too late to change it and I just had to kind of surgically remove it. It was a very, very hard time and yet it is something I really feel was necessary.

Sandra has become responsible for herself in a way she could not be with her mother. She no longer feels accountable for others; she assumes responsibility for herself and believes others will take responsibility for themselves. Sandra is now cautious about who she spends her time with and who she brings into her inner circle of friends. At the present time, her relationships are conducted on a more equal basis. There is more of a give and take in terms of nurturance and support. Whereas in the past she played the part of listener in her personal relationships, and gained a sense of being special by being empathic with others, she now gets a sense of being special from understanding, experiencing, and expressing herself, and providing clients with the means to do the same for themselves. Because of this, there is now much more autonomy in Sandra's friendships, as there is in her relationships with clients. Sandra's ability to relinquish her unconscious craving to merge with others has been, and still is, a "continual evolution". Sometimes, she finds herself slipping into fused ways of being with others and then she has to struggle to disentangle herself. In her personal life,

Sandra now feels resentful if she listens to people too much, as it is disrespectful of her own boundaries. She is compassionate towards others and a good listener, but her primary focus, as she stated, is on "living my life" and "being who I am".

Sandra has come to value "being human" and "being real," both of which she continues to become more of herself. She does this by spending a lot of time alone, self-reflecting and coming to greater self-understanding. Sandra described this process as the "guiding force in her life". For Sandra, the discoveries she has made in her inner-world have been the "thread of continuity" throughout her personal and professional life.

The above personal growth experiences have enabled Sandra to re-connect with, validate, and further her understanding of her own inner-word, which, in turn, has fostered her capacity to nurture herself. This has also increased her ability to nurture others. When working with her clients, for example, she no longer has an unconscious desire to become enmeshed with, or to be special to them. She now appreciates listening to them as part of the process of understanding them, whereas previously she listened to them in a symbiotic way.

Influences From Significant Women in Adulthood: I am Capable of Achieving in My Own Right.

Even though the ideas instilled in Sandra during childhood indicated that women were the caretakers and men were the actors, paradoxically it was women, in her adult

life, who inspired her to get an education, to be in the fore-front and to actualize her potential. Sandra recalled an occasion, at the age of 35, during which she witnessed a group of female students dressed in scholastic robes in a cathedral at an academic institution. This became another transformative experience:

There was something about these female scholars that suddenly put together for me in an image a kind of epiphany that women could take themselves seriously in the same way that men take themselves seriously, and be out-front people instead of background people. I guess that's when my ambition clicked into place. Whereas before it had been sort of unconscious and oh well alas and all that. All of a sudden it was wow--this is what I have to do next!

From this event, Sandra deduced that she could get a university degree and work on her own behalf. Shortly after this experience, Sandra was moved to return to school and finish the undergraduate degree she had begun following high school. Although she had initially studied psychology, she decided to complete her degree in English literature because of its focus on imagery and symbols. After finishing her baccalaureate degree, she launched into working on her Masters degree in a counselling-related discipline. (For reasons of confidentiality, Sandra requested that I not specify the field in which she received her professional training.)

Sandra mentioned two women in her adult life who have had a major effect on both her personal and professional life. One of these women, who emphasized people's strengths as opposed to their deficiencies, taught at an ashram where Sandra studied for a brief period of time. This woman advocated "being real"--accepting oneself and one's

life as it actually is. She taught Sandra to "turn to herself" to find out who she really was, what she wanted, felt and believed. Sandra also was influenced by a nurse when she was hospitalized after an automobile accident:

There was a woman, a nurse there, who... when I think back on her in terms of being able to really set limits and confront reality. She--I was in a lot of pain. I was trying to get more medication for it and she finally got angry and came storming in there and told me the reality of my situation. And, that if I took any more drugs I would end up being dependent on drugs and so forth and so on and that I better learn to roll with the tide. That somehow--her image has really helped me, uh, to keep putting one foot in front of another in terms of facing reality. This is the reality.

Through her associations with these two female mentors, Sandra began to see how embracing the actuality of her circumstances could assist her as she strove to uncover further meaning in her life. This discovery has augmented her effectiveness as a counsellor in that she has refined her skills in the area of helping clients to accept the reality of their life situations. Essentially, Sandra has come to know that "suffering is a door that can be moved through to something beyond". She is able, therefore, to assist clients in viewing their pain as an ally on their journey as they uncover richer ways of living.

Sandra informed me, albeit briefly, that her women friends have had, and continue to play, a significant role in her experience of becoming a counsellor. As well as providing her with a forum to share similar perceptions, because, "women think differently than men", her close friends, who are also colleagues, give her the support that was lacking in her childhood. What is especially meaningful about her relationships

with these women is that they are willing to accept the "dark side" of her. They don't just want to know her "nice" qualities. Being accepted in this manner has allowed Sandra to develop an accepting attitude towards her clients.

Influences of Current Family Members: I am Challenged and Supported to Expand Myself

Husband's Influence: Actualizing My Goals By Having to Assert Myself

Sandra highlighted the salient role her husband has played in her career as a counsellor. When she was twenty years old, after completing her first year of university, her husband entered graduate school. Even though Sandra wanted to continue school herself, it was not financially feasible for both to attend university, so Sandra quit and found a job in order to support the family. Sandra felt a substantial amount of unacknowledged resentment about this at the time, but she agreed to withdraw from her studies as she still hadn't realized her own potential for succeeding at a career. Many years later, when she resolved to return to school, her husband initially expressed a lot of opposition to her plans. Eventually, however, he gave in to her wishes due to her persistence and began to support her. As Sandra stated:

He was not really keen on it [her returning to school], but he stayed there with me, for me to fight him. So-- it was like my own--I had to fight for my individuation against somebody who would hang in there. But basically it's been his faith in me and his willingness just to hang in. I mean, to me, he mirrored back to me my own faith in myself...and it [her relationship with her husband] is sort of like therapy in that there are two people hanging in there through a whole lot of different things.

Influences of Youngest Son: Learning to Accept Others as They are.

Sandra's youngest son has been influential in her life; he continuously challenges her because of his strong will. Sandra reflected on her experience with him:

I remember with my youngest son when he was really little, he was very wilful, really wilful...But if you told him something, forget it, he had to do it himself. And I can remember at some point thinking, I'm going to have to either break this kid's spirit or get in line with him. I have to get behind him. He has continued throughout my life to expand me in that way in the sense of having to put myself in his shoes in order to understand him.

Her relationship with her son has promoted her development and expression of empathy with her clients, as she invites them to voice uniquely who they are, and as she strives to understand and support them throughout this process.

Summary and Meaning Ascribed to Being a Counsellor as it Relates to the Present

Sandra sees her identity as a person and as a counsellor as "one and the same", claiming that counselling is "who I am and what I do". As well, she felt that it was imperative to clarify that she does not see her whole identity as being a counsellor. Rather, counselling, for Sandra, is:

What I do that comes out of who I am; it's one aspect of my identity. And yet it almost is as though what I am doing is so congruent with who I am that it is part of my identity.

For Sandra, being a counsellor is a way to be something in the world. Counselling provides her with an important role in society that corresponds with who she

is. She now has a structure that enhances the skills she acquired as a child (supporting and caring for others), and can make a living from these skills. Sandra described the meaning of this in the following way:

It's like becoming a counsellor has given me a way to be in the world where I don't have to tell everybody everything that is going on in my life...See, before, if I'm merging with people, I don't have any boundaries and this inner-life is really important to me--I have to give it to everybody--share it and tell about it and be very intimate with people. Uh. because I now have a role that is kind of who I am--in my practice, I can say to people this is what I do. Which then satisfies a certain level of intimacy without having for me to go into my own personal stuff.

Sandra has always had a sense of herself as being special. She has come to believe that her "specialness" is linked in part to the process of becoming who she really is. Becoming herself is a special thing to do. Since part of her identity consists of being a counsellor, she maintains that being a counsellor is special in that it provides a means for communicating who she is.

Becoming a counsellor has given Sandra an opportunity to cultivate what she refers to as the "male parts" of herself (e.g., limit-setting, being ambitious, direct, visible and autonomous). Sandra has observed that her work is becoming less traditionally female and more analytical, requiring more boundary delineation, objectivity and empathy (as opposed to sympathy). This means Sandra concentrates more on caretaking the process her clients are involved in, whereas, previously she would attempt to inappropriately take care of (alleviate) her client's actual problems by merging with them. Sandra has become more competent as a counsellor since she has become more self-reliant and defined about her own boundaries, and consequently, she is able to hear what her clients are conveying to her in a more dispassionate way. She believes her

work with her clients improves the more she separates herself and maintains a healthy distance from them while still remaining compassionate and being with their "psychic process fully". Sandra summarized the meaning she gets out of being a counsellor:

I guess the thing that I get the most out of--it's kind of hard to put into words--the sort of words that come are human--people being human--I love to be in the presence of people when they are being human. When they are being genuine with themselves, I find it deeply moving. Uh, uh, and watching their struggle and witnessing their struggle and their courage to go through that struggle and their commitment to their own process. I find it really rewarding. Moving and rewarding and comforting is the sort of sense I feel. To me that is sort of the highest thing that human beings can do in a way, is take a look at their own shit and own it and acknowledge it and look at themselves and move on and I just find it really a privilege to witness that and to get the feeling that my presence somehow is a part of that-that makes me feel really good.

Sandra's story of becoming a counsellor is one which encompasses many aspects of her entire life. Although she was not cognizant of it as she progressed through her life, it became evident to Sandra during our conversations that everything she has done to become who she is, is inextricably connected to her experience of becoming and being a counsellor. In her early adult years, she did not have the goal in mind of becoming a counsellor, but she always had the sense that the path she was on was appropriate for her. She learned to trust her own inner-world and where it was taking her. Sandra continues to trust this inner-world as her experience of becoming a counsellor is altered as she continues to evolve as a person.

On the following pages there are two charts that summarize the major themes in Sandra's experience of becoming a counsellor.

Figure 1 SANDRA: Experiences in Childhood

Relationships with Members of Family of Origin			Educational Experiences		Messages Received Regarding Women's Roles
<p><u>Mother</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother was alcoholic • received attention and recognition for listening to and caring for mother • took responsibility for caring for mother • caring for mother was necessary for her survival • felt special for caring for mother • enmeshed (merged) relationship • role-reversal in relationship 	<p><u>Father</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • father alcoholic and volatile • was on guard in father's presence • took responsibility for caring for father • father had low expectations of her • father was there for her when "the chips were really down" - helped her to believe that at her "core" she was special 	<p><u>Brother</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • was hostile towards her • was on guard in brother's presence • cared for brother • felt compassion for brother 	<p><u>Influences of Catholic Church</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • found comfort, security and sense of identity in the church- helped her to "survive" • symbols of the church facilitated interest in the inner-world- wanted to share her understanding and experiences of the inner-world with others • developed understanding of self through symbols of the church • now focuses on symbolism and imagery with her clients 	<p><u>Relationship with Teachers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listened to her and accepted her self expression • facilitated sense of identity and enhanced her self-esteem • enhanced and supported her development of inner-world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • woman's role is to be behind the scenes, caring for others • role models were women in her extended family who used their power to promote men
<p>Overall Effect of Relationships with Members of Family of Origin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low self-esteem • sense of belonging came from caring for others • became skilled at perceiving and attending to the needs of others 			<p>Overall Effect of Relationships with Members of Family of Origin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed desire to merge with others - lack of boundaries and loss of autonomy • lacked a unique identity - wanted to "be special" • became a "behind the scenes" person 		<p>Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes</p>

Figure 2

SANDRA: Experiences in Adulthood

<p>Personal Growth and Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everything she did in her life led her in the direction of becoming a counsellor • personal growth -exploration in her inner-world became her life-work • has become increasingly more self-reflective and has come to understand herself more deeply • has struggled to become independent, autonomous and visible • learned to feel competent and capable- self-esteem has improved • has spent a lot of time listening to and learning about the inner-worlds of others • has learned to overcome the need to merge with others- has established firmer boundaries • has learned to be responsible for herself- no longer feels responsible for others • sense of being special now comes from self-understanding, self expression, and helping and supporting others in doing the same • has learned to care for clients (feel compassionate) without the need to merge with them • has the desire to share her interest in the inner-world with others • has learned to value her own unique identity 	<p>Influences of Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women scholars inspired her to achieve (to be upfront) and become autonomous • returned to school to study English literature because of its focus on symbols and imagery • female mentors taught her the value of facing the reality of life - now assists her clients in doing the same • female friends have provided her with support and acceptance which has helped her in supporting and accepting her clients • she shares her experiences with other women counsellors 	<p>Influence of Current Family Members</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="352 457 1340 798"> <p>Husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has had faith in her - supported and believed in her • learned to be autonomous and assert herself with husband in order to achieve her career goals </td> <td data-bbox="352 138 1340 457"> <p>Son</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learned to listen to and accept her son in order to understand him • relationship with son has facilitated her development of empathy </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has had faith in her - supported and believed in her • learned to be autonomous and assert herself with husband in order to achieve her career goals 	<p>Son</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learned to listen to and accept her son in order to understand him • relationship with son has facilitated her development of empathy
<p>Husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has had faith in her - supported and believed in her • learned to be autonomous and assert herself with husband in order to achieve her career goals 	<p>Son</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learned to listen to and accept her son in order to understand him • relationship with son has facilitated her development of empathy 			

Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes

Teresa

Introduction

As with Sandra, Teresa is a personal acquaintance of mine, who when approached, was pleased to partake in this study. At 34 years of age, she was the youngest woman interviewed for this investigation.

Teresa, married with two children aged nine and five, has a Ph.D. in psychology and has maintained a part-time private practice counselling clients for the past five years. In her remaining time, Teresa is involved in numerous research projects, which to her, are as much, if not more meaningful than her individual counselling work with her clients.

Two out of the three interviews I had with Teresa took place in her research office where, indicative of her love for research, stacks of papers were piled in all corners of the room. As Sandra did, Teresa recounted her story chronologically. She began by relaying prominent events from her childhood, reflecting on the day when, at twelve years old, she decided she was going to become a psychologist. This incident led her into a discussion about her relevant experiences with members of her family of origin and how they influenced her process of becoming a counsellor. She then described applicable experiences from her adult life--her parent's divorce, educational and work experiences, and relationships with others. She concluded by discussing the meaning she currently attributes to being a counsellor.

Experiences in Childhood: The Desire to Understand

Deciding to Become a Psychologist: What Causes Human Behaviour?

When asked the question, "How did you come to be a counsellor"?, Teresa promptly began to describe an incident from childhood when the notion of becoming a psychologist first transpired. She was twelve years old, in grade seven, doing a project on human psychology where she was "mapping out the different parts of the brain and the functions they served":

I remember it quite clearly...when I grow up I'm going to be a psychologist. And what got me there is--there must have been something I was thinking about at the time when I thought that's what I want to do...in my mind I was thinking I just want to understand, you know, how the different parts of the brain affect what you do. I guess I was putting together something that there is a reason for what we do ... which was quite enlightening to me at the time and I thought that's something I would like to understand more. There's a reason for the way people behave and react and feel.

Teresa emphasized the profundity this experience had for her at the time, as it did while she relayed it to me. What stood out for her about this event was the causal relationship between the brain and how it dictates what people do. She thought to herself, "there has to be a reason and it's in the brain".

At the time, she did not associate becoming a psychologist with counselling or helping people, nor did she know what a psychologist actually did. The extent of her understanding was: "A psychologist was someone who aspired to understand human behaviour".

The other meaningful component of this experience for Teresa was that she thought that if she could understand human behaviour she could "be taken seriously",--

she could "be somebody". As will be described in more detail later, becoming somebody was a major factor in her desire to become a psychologist.

Relationships With Members of Family of Origin: Playing the Role of Helper

Teresa, the oldest female and second born child out of eleven children, spoke at length about her family of origin during my discussions with her. She drew many connections between her relationships with members of her family and her early inclinations of wanting to become a psychologist. Pertinent experiences within these relationships are reviewed below.

Relationship With Mother: Receiving Attention for Caring for Her Siblings.

In keeping with Teresa's analytical nature, evident right from my initial contact with her, she tried to understand where her desire to understand came from, as she shared with me the above experience of deciding to become a psychologist. While reflecting upon the significance of this need to understand, she began to impart aspects of her relationship with her mother which were illuminative for her. She realized that her need to understand how human beings operate was partially linked to positive experiences she had discussing her younger siblings' behaviour with her mother during childhood.

During our interviews Teresa spoke fondly of her mother with whom she had, and still has, a very supportive and influential relationship. In her childhood, most of the quality time she had with her mother occurred through exchanges about Teresa's younger

siblings. Teresa was responsible for caring for her siblings every Saturday during her middle childhood years. As well as receiving attention and reinforcement for caring for the children when her mother arrived home from her outings, Teresa was given attention for recounting anecdotes of her siblings' behaviour. This was important to Teresa, as there wasn't much other individual attention available from her mother, who was "spread out amongst eleven children". This was essentially the only focused time Teresa had with her mother. As Teresa reflected on these occasions, she said:

I remember this part quite well. I would go talk to my mom while she was preparing dinner or sorting it out and assembling it, and recount to her some of those silly little things that the younger siblings would do. [She would say things like,] you know what little Peter said, he said that you know, that one day he'd like to grow up and be a pirate or something silly like that. And I would always get a chuckle out of mom when I'd recount it. She kind a liked it. She liked listening to these little stories... it made me feel good too.

Besides providing Teresa with an opportunity for rapport with her mother, these dialogues allowed her to become more sophisticated in her understanding of, and more effective at dealing with, her siblings' behaviours. Teresa stated:

When she'd [her mother] come home from the hairdressers and the house would be a shambles and the kids would be here and there. And there would be blood dripping on the floor (laughs) and [she'd say], 'how did things go'?... and she would sort of talk to me about it and sort of help me out kind of thing--with how to handle it. When things got out of control for me and I was sort of overwhelmed with it, she would talk to me about, 'well here's another way to do it' kind-a-thing.

Teresa contended that the above recollections of her relationship with her mother are salient in her experience of becoming a counsellor. They were instrumental in that she was reinforced for caring behaviours and inspired to further her understanding of human behaviour. Both of these qualities are, of course, significant functions of counsellors.

Teresa's mother also influenced Teresa's career choice by being interested in other people. As well as believing that relationships are important, she valued the ability to understand one's place in the world and the meaning this place has. Teresa was therefore encouraged by her mother to be self-aware and to strive to increase her understanding of herself. Not surprisingly, helping clients to better understand themselves, as I will explain later, is a fundamental component in Teresa's work with her clients.

Relationship With Father: Trying to Become Somebody.

Contrary to the enriching relationship Teresa had with her mother and its positive effect on her career choice, her distant relationship with her father affected her and her experience of becoming a counsellor in a "negative way"--she reacted against him, and became determined to achieve in the world in spite of his disregard for her accomplishments.

Her father, physically absent and emotionally distant much of the time, never took her or what she did seriously--he did not pay attention to her. In fact, Teresa reported that he never regarded any of the girls or girl activities seriously in her family; he never

expected them to achieve at anything. Whereas the boys received attention for participating in male activities like hockey, "the girls were in another camp, "partaking in activities such as figure skating and ballet. These "girl activities" did not get the female children the same kind of attention that the male children were given.

Teresa felt frustrated with her father as a child; she tried, but was unable to understand him and get him to pay attention to her. Teresa recalled showing an interest in his business at one point, trying to understand the manner in which he did his financing, but when she asked him to explain how it operated, he never really answered her. As she stated, "The message I got was I couldn't be taken seriously".

Teresa came to the conclusion that there was not anything she could do about the way her father was toward her except to push herself in areas of her life where she could be successful. For example, she became very successful at playing sports. Although she received attention from others for her outstanding achievements in this area, it was only on rare occasions that her father noticed her accomplishments. She remembers "getting a pat on the head" once in a while when she would win a race.

Teresa believes that part of her desire to understand others stemmed from her wish to understand her father and why he was so distant. Furthermore, if she could understand people, she could be somebody who would be taken seriously.

In regard to the type of career she chose, her father was generally unconcerned as to what she did. Teresa stated, "I could be a real estate agent or something awful like that". At seventeen years of age, an incident occurred which, for Teresa, epitomized her father's attitude toward her and her career abilities. She was in the hospital with a

broken leg for three months, a time when she was making decisions about what she was going to do in the future. While in hospital, her father "planted the idea of becoming a physiotherapist into her head" and tried to encourage her to study in this area. Teresa gave a lot of consideration to this idea, even though her heart was not in it. She still had the notion that she wanted to study psychology but she hadn't told anyone, particularly not her father, as she thought he would think she wouldn't be able to do it.

When Teresa's father suggested to her that she might meet a doctor if she studied physiotherapy, she became angry and determined that she would not become a physiotherapist. Teresa described her feelings about this event:

I remember him saying quite clearly , 'Well, have you given the physiotherapy very much thought?' And I go, 'Well you know'- and I actually--I did lousy at physics and stuff because I was sort of working on this.....and then he said,--this is really--convinced me that that's not what I wanted. [He said,] 'If you go do physiotherapy, then you might meet a doctor.' And then I thought, 'He's done it again. He's discrediting me and what I was able to do'. It was like, 'Oh well, if you go meet a doctor, then you are somebody'. I didn't realize how angry that made me at the time.

Teresa interpreted her father's statement to mean that she wasn't capable, but there was also a more general message--women are not capable. Teresa hypothesized that her commitment to pursue psychology as a career was partly motivated by her determination to prove that she, as a woman, was competent and capable.

Relationship With Siblings: Wanting to Understand Their Behaviour.

As already mentioned, Teresa was responsible for caring for her younger siblings when she was a child. She enjoyed this task; besides giving her the opportunity to earn money, it gave her the opportunity to try and understand them better. Her siblings were particularly interesting to her when they were two and three because of "the silly behaviours they would do". As Teresa stated,

I'm seeing these kids growing up... I wanted to be able to sort of explain why it is when they are two as opposed to four that they act differently and stuff like that. And what you would expect or something. So I imagine I was sort of thinking about them developmentally--trying to understand why and how things change and why they do them and stuff like that.

Teresa believes that babysitting (caring for) her siblings probably played a key role in stimulating her interest in psychology.

Experiences in Adulthood: Actualizing My Childhood Dream

The Dissolution of Parent's Marriage: Acquiring My Identity as a Helper

When Teresa was twenty-one years of age, her parents separated and subsequently divorced. For a period of approximately three years, Teresa's parents, caught up in the turmoil of the break-up, were emotionally unavailable for their younger children. Consequently, Teresa took on the task of fulfilling the children's emotional needs. The many reasons why Teresa did this are discussed below.

Being the eldest girl, Teresa felt responsible for providing nurturance to her siblings. She felt that she had to care for them. She told herself, "I have to do this

because there is nobody else there for these kids." She told me, "It's not something I really wanted to do; it was something I felt like I needed to do for them." Moreover, she stated that she probably would have felt guilty if she didn't care for them. As Teresa described this time:

I was picking up on--these guys [her siblings] are lacking--they are missing out here. And they were obviously distressed. My mom became quite depressed actually and my dad just became crazy. And ah, so I ended up being a mediator. My husband and I were the only source of stability in the family.

Aside from her feelings of responsibility, Teresa really cared about her siblings.

As she said:

I always sort of adored my younger siblings...I really cared for them a lot and I always thought they were just great kind- of-thing. So there was a bit of--I felt sorry for them. You know, this shouldn't have been happening to them.

As well as having the opportunity to integrate what she was now learning at university in psychology courses with the events occurring within her family, Teresa experienced a lot of satisfaction in caring for her siblings; she gained attention, recognition and a feeling of competency.

Although they never said it directly, Teresa maintains that because she was studying psychology at the time, the rest of her family sort of expected her to care for her sisters and brothers. As she explained:

[The family members thought] it's okay, Teresa can do it. Teresa will be there. Well that's how I perceived what they perceived kind of thing, you know. You can always rely on Teresa. Teresa is sensible and she's logical and ah, she knows how to help. It sort of reinforced their expectation that they can come to Teresa. At least I believed that it did.

Along with caring for her siblings, Teresa took a helping role with her father after the separation. Even though she "hated listening to him," she allowed him to use her as a "sounding board" to discuss his feelings about the divorce. She listened to him because it was a way of getting attention from him, of being visible to him:

At that point in time he'd never talk to me. So, it sort of gave me a sense of feeling 'well at least I can do this for god's sake. I can sit here and listen to him'. Sort of gave me the sense of being somebody.

Although Teresa's initial desire to become a psychologist originated from her need to understand, through engaging in the above helping experiences with her family of origin, she developed an identity of herself as a helper. Not only did she gain confidence in her ability to help, these experiences of caring for and helping her family members led her to the belief that helping was a natural thing for her to do. It was something she did without thinking much about it. She stated:

What really impressed on me was this idea that you're a helper and you counsel and you--you help people with their problems. Well yeah, it's just what I did. Just do it, I just do it, yeah it's just what I did.

Educational Experiences

Undergraduate Experiences: Deciding to Study Psychology While Keeping it a Secret

After high school, Teresa was so upset with her father and his lack of faith in her abilities that she "took off travelling" for a year. She wanted some time to think about what she wanted to do. Once returning and beginning her first year of college, her thoughts about studying psychology "were on the back burner." As she said, "I didn't know that I knew what I wanted to do."

After completing her first year of college, she took a another year off from her studies. This time, upon returning to college, Teresa felt "very sure" about pursuing psychology.

Except for informing her husband, throughout her undergraduate training, Teresa continued to keep her goal of becoming a psychologist a secret. This way, if she didn't succeed no one would know. During her third year of studies, Teresa was encouraged to enter an honours program in psychology. Teresa described the meaning this experience had for her:

It was sort of like--I wouldn't have done it [studied psychology] unless I had to. But I wouldn't have made an outright declaration. But it was okay to make the declaration if it was attached to an honours degree in psychology.

Teresa was still afraid that if she told anyone she wanted to study psychology, they wouldn't believe she could do it:

I don't think other people think I can do this, but I know I can. Weird huh? As I think about it very weird. It [wanting to become a psychologist] was dream-like. I don't want anybody coming back and saying, 'Oh, you can't do that or why would you want to do that? Or, what do you--you couldn't do that. You think you could do that? You are not the kind of person--'

Teresa stated that the part of her that worried about what other people would say if she told them about her educational plans, was connected to her experiences with her father; he was the one she especially feared wouldn't think she was capable of becoming a psychologist if he knew.

Even though at this point she was feeling confident about studying psychology, she still did not think about doing counselling. Her interest remained focused on learning how to understand people.

Graduate School Experiences: Deciding to Become a Counsellor

Teresa began her Ph.D. after completing her B.A. in psychology. Not surprisingly, because of her interest in understanding others, this degree had a research, as opposed to a clinical, focus. Initially, Teresa had planned on writing her dissertation in the area of marital interaction which, although she was not cognizant of it at the time, stemmed from her experiences surrounding the break-up of her parent's marriage. However, because she was able to receive funds for conducting research in another area, she relinquished her plans to study marital interaction because receiving money for doing her degree was more important to her than the topic she studied. She was, nevertheless, able to incorporate a component into her study that examined couples' communication; she did not have to forego her original idea entirely.

It was while she was working on her Ph.D. that Teresa became interested in becoming a counsellor. Being involved in a research group where all the students were studying family therapy allowed her to develop knowledge in this area. By the time she completed her Ph.D., Teresa knew she would be a counsellor. With the exception of her husband, nobody was informed of this goal--it remained her secret. She described how she thinks she came to this decision and the meaning it had for her:

The element of still wanting to understand human behaviour was there. The helping, I guess I'd really been pushed into this role of helping by this time. You know, helping my siblings, helping my mom, helping my dad. I mean it was real strong by this time. I was just doing it all over the place...I think it was just like well, that's what I do. And there was no question that the role I was playing in my family...what really impressed on me was, this idea that you are a helper and you counsel and you help people with their problems...It's just the role I played as a person in my real life so why shouldn't I do it and get paid for it. It made sense... I guess in a way it gave me the confidence to start saying, 'Well, yeah, I could do this. Sure had a hell of a lot of practise with my siblings.

Work Experiences: Confirming the Desire to Study Psychology

On her way to becoming a psychologist/counsellor, Teresa had two significant employment experiences. While enrolled in her third and fourth year of university, Teresa and her husband became residential counsellors in a group home for schizophrenic people. She was attracted to this job because she believed she needed some practical experience. She was fascinated by the clients in the home. They affirmed her interest in wanting to understand human behaviour. She said:

The whole system was interesting. It wasn't working right necessarily, but it was--it sort of created an interest in me. It was inspiring in that there is lots to understand here and there is lots that needs to get sorted out and there is lots of helping stuff that can happen here...it confirmed the aspiration I had of wanting to understand more. Because while I was intrigued by it, I didn't understand it all either.

Teresa's second job, after completing her B.A. degree, was in a government office doing psychological research. Teresa discovered that she really enjoyed doing the research because it was about "knowing and understanding," but she found the structure of a nine to five job restrictive. After noticing the freedom her boss had to come and go as she pleased because of her M.A. in psychology, she decided that she needed to return to school and get more education herself. Teresa learned that she needed more freedom than this type of job could give her. Freedom had always been important to Teresa; being the eldest female, she had a lot of it while she was growing up.

The other component of wanting to acquire more education was that Teresa wanted to have a position with more status because, "Status gives you respect, you see, and respect gives you a feeling of, hey then you're somebody." Based on her

experiences in this government position she concluded: "I need something else where I can either be my own boss or, um or else have other people working for me and I can do what I damn well please".

Influential Relationships

Relationships With Peers: If I Can Understand Them, I'll Be Somebody.

The theme of wanting to understand others extended into Teresa's personal relationships. She thought if she could understand others, then she could be somebody. For example, if she could learn to understand how to beat her components at tennis, then she would be "one up on them." She would be important, feel powerful and get attention. As Teresa said:

If I could understand them [people], then it doesn't matter. You don't need to tell a funny story and you don't need to be smart. It doesn't matter. If I understand them, I'm okay. That's my little pocket of security. They can think I'm dumb or they can think I'm not capable, it doesn't matter because I understand them...If I understood them, I could feel sure about myself.

Relationship With Husband: The One Who Supported and Encouraged Me While Carrying My Secret.

Teresa was initially attracted to her husband because of his interest in ideas which overlapped with her interest in understanding others. While her parents were going through the break-up of their marriage, Teresa's husband, "quite interested" in what was occurring within her "crazy family," would try to help her figure out what was going on within it.

Throughout her process of becoming a psychologist/counsellor, Teresa's husband also supported and encouraged her plans. The two of them would often talk about things and what implications they had for the kind of work she was doing.

Relationships With Significant Women: Being Inspired to Achieve

Teresa mentioned three women who seemed to have influence on her in her adult years as she became a psychologist. The first of these was her mother who, as previously stated, valued self-awareness and self-understanding. These values were subsequently passed on to Teresa. Throughout her life, she has remained intensely fascinated by and engrossed in understanding herself as well as understanding others.

Teresa's mother, as well as being influential in the ways previously discussed, played a pivotal and supportive role in Teresa's life while attending college with her. Teresa described the impact this had on her:

We were sort of going [to college] together, and she was interested in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology courses and stuff like this. So we actually--you know--we actually shared-- we had an art history course together. So, here we are, mom and daughter going to college together and she was obviously quite influential-- and we'd have talks.

Teresa recalled a female undergraduate professor who encouraged her to enter an honours program in psychology. This was significant in that she would not have thought about focusing her energies in psychology in this way had this professor not suggested it to her. As mentioned above, Teresa's supervisor at her government job was a role model in that she inspired Teresa to obtain more education so that she could have more freedom, status and respect and thus "be somebody".

Teresa feels that she lacked strong female professional role models during her career. Although she wishes she would have had more of them, she did mention one woman who had a significant impact on her. This woman modelled an approach to counselling that "fit" with Teresa's way of conceptualizing and working with clients' problems.

Summary and Meaning Presently Ascribed to Being a Counsellor

At the present time, Teresa finds that being a counsellor is rewarding and challenging. Counselling is a way for her to live out some of her most important values. For example, Teresa values the ability to understand oneself and finds it satisfying to observe clients go through the process of learning to understand themselves better. When this happens, Teresa feels competent. As she stated:

It's rewarding to watch the client discover [himself/herself]. It's rewarding watching them figure it out for themselves--you know, like we assist of course but--more or less [they do it] themselves. And it's rewarding to watch them put it in operation.

Teresa did mention however, during my third interview with her that her focus on assisting clients to understand themselves is becoming less of a priority; instead, her primary focus when working with clients is on helping clients to "become more of who they are" by way of understanding themselves. For Teresa, the other rewarding part about participating in her clients' process of coming to understand themselves better is that she is able to learn more about (better understand) herself. She explained:

Ah, primarily, the other thing that is rewarding is that--it's sort of like, the same principle that you learn everything you know about yourself from your kids kind of thing? That you learn from your clients too. So you learn about yourself

when you do it [counsel]. And you see that's what builds that value that my mom instilled in me about understanding self. Because it always-- you're always focusing either-- when you're in the sessions you're focusing on your client but you certainly attend to you're own stuff. And when you're finished sessions and you're sort of going over what we did in the session, you probably think a lot more about your own issues that crept in.

Teresa asserted that counselling is about assisting clients in changing themselves. More specifically, it involves helping clients come to realize that they have choices and they can act upon these choices and make their lives more meaningful. Teresa can offer empathy to her clients because she knows what it feels like to believe that you do not have any options. She therefore appreciates the opportunity to assist clients in finding alternatives to present ways of living their lives.

Doing counselling with clients would not be meaningful in itself for Teresa if she could not read and write about what she is doing with her clients. Her quest to understand human behaviour, still embedded in a cause/effect framework, is never ending; in order to understand her clients and their concerns she feels she has to be engaged in research. This further feeds her feelings of competency. Teresa explained the meaning research work has for her:

There is something in me that has the need to--if I keep doing something, I need to keep trying to understand it. And it doesn't--it always changes because what I do changes and the experiences... I'm always at another level of trying to understand it. And my way of making sense of that for myself is by researching it or writing about it... otherwise I would just get bored with it [counselling]. And I guess there is a little bit of feeling like there is not permission to do it if I don't research it,--this is interesting to me--if I go research it, it's not that I have a lot of faith in the scientific method or anything, but it just allows me to sort out that whole area and how people have studied it and thought about it, and you know tried to plan and implement it and stuff and I get it all sorted out in my mind so then I feel more certain about what I can exercise in my work... it's weird because its sort of an insecurity in a way...It makes me feel more competent and then I do it better.

While presently Teresa remains interested in helping others, she would not continue counselling if she could not do research work. She would "fizzle away" if, while counselling her clients, she was not simultaneously involved in investigating and writing about the problems they are experiencing.

Although Teresa feels quite satisfied and a "little bit proud" of what she has done as a counsellor and as a researcher, she hasn't quite got the balance she is looking for in her work. She hopes to eventually spend about two to three hours a day counselling clients and another two to three hours doing research.

As with Sandra, Teresa's story of becoming a counsellor is woven into her experiences of developing as a person. As Teresa repeatedly stated during my discussions with her, counselling is "just something she did" throughout the course of her life.

The many themes which emerged from my interviews with Teresa are summarized in the charts on the following pages.

Figure 3

TERESA: Experiences in Childhood

<u>Relationships with Members of Family of Origin</u>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Mother</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother very supportive • received attention and recognition for caring for siblings • became more sophisticated in understanding of siblings through discussions with mother • mother valued understanding self and understanding of others 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Father</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • father physically and emotionally distant • father did not take her seriously • father did not take females seriously- contributed to her low self-esteem • became determined to achieve -- to be competent as a result of father's attitude towards her • tried to understand father so she could get his attention • believed that if she could understand people (especially her father) she would "be somebody" who was taken seriously • kept goal of becoming a psychologist a secret from her father • received message from father that type of career she chose was not important 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Siblings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • felt responsible for caring for siblings • earning money for caring for siblings was important • caring for siblings gave her the opportunity to understand siblings better • became interested in understanding why and how (the causal relationship) of siblings' behaviour • caring for siblings increased her desire to understand self and others
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Educational Experiences</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>The Decision to Become a Psychologist</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • during a science project at ten years of age, she became interested in understanding how the human brain affected behaviour • interested in causes of human behaviour • decided to become a psychologist because "psychologists try to understand human behaviour" • thought she would be taken seriously ("be somebody") if she became a psychologist • kept the idea of becoming a psychologist a secret 		

Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes

Figure 4

TERESA: Experiences in Adulthood

<p>Dissolution of Parents' Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> felt responsible for caring for siblings as parents were emotionally unavailable to them during this time sensitive to her siblings needs- felt compassion for them became mediator for parents listened to her father's feelings was able to integrate learnings from psychology course into her understanding of the events occurring within her family of origin experienced satisfaction and a sense of being "somebody" as a result of caring for siblings - felt competent received attention and recognition for caring for siblings family members saw her as having the expertise to care for and support siblings helped establish her identity as a helper supporting and caring for siblings felt like a natural thing to do 	<p>Undergraduate Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> became certain that she wanted to study psychology interest in studying psychology stemmed from her desire to become better at understanding self and others with the exception of her husband, she did not tell anyone that she intended to become a psychologist - it remained her secret was afraid people (e.g. her father) would not believe she was capable of becoming a psychologist 	<p>Graduate School Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> focused her Ph.D. on research because she wanted to further her understanding of human behaviour initial goal was to focus dissertation topic on marital interaction because she wanted to understand her parents' breakup, however she received funds to do it on couples communication was involved in a research group which studied family therapy during this period, decided to become a counsellor because it seemed like a natural thing to do decision to become a psychologist and do counselling became her secret 	<p>Work Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> job in group home confirmed interest in understanding others research job was satisfying because it allowed her to acquire more knowledge and understanding led her to the conclusion that she needed more education than her B.A. to "become somebody" 	<p>Significant Relationships</p> <p>Relationships with Peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wanted to become skilled at understanding peers so she would receive attention and recognition and hence "be somebody" <p>Relationship with Husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> supported and encouraged her career goals shared her interest in understanding others <p>Relationships with Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mother served as a role model by attending college with her- felt supported by mother mother valued understanding of self and others university professor encouraged her to enter Honours program in Psychology supervisor in one of her jobs inspired her to pursue her Ph.D. so she could "be somebody"
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Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes

Jacqueline

Introduction

Jacqueline, a forty-four year old counsellor, married with two adolescent children, received her Master's degree in social work (M.S.W) in 1972. She began her career as a social worker in child protection, however, for the last several years she has held a half-time position as a counsellor in an institution as well as maintaining a half-time private practice counselling clients.

When I asked Jacqueline to be a participant for my study, she quickly agreed even though she was unsure of how valuable she would be as a participant. She was doubtful about whether she had enough to say about her experience of becoming a counsellor.

The four interviews I had with Jacqueline took place in my home. Unlike Sandra and Teresa, Jacqueline did not tell her story chronologically; instead she moved back and forth between present and past experiences as she attempted to uncover the meaning becoming a counsellor had for her. The first interview was difficult for her; she struggled to find the words to describe the events and experiences which were indicative of her experience. She spoke in detail about the first helper-type job she had during the summer after her first year of university, but was unable to attribute much meaning to it. However, during the second interview, after being prompted with more specific questions, Jacqueline was able to articulate more experiences that were meaningful,

weaving together experiences from her childhood with experiences in her adult life to eventually form a rich story. By the end of the third interview, Jacqueline was surprised and pleased at how much she learned about herself in relation to the experience of becoming and being a counsellor.

Experiences in Childhood

Relationships With Members of Family of Origin

Relationship With Mother: Desiring Closeness While Desiring Distance

During my conversations with her, Jacqueline spoke only briefly about her relationship with her mother. Reflecting on the intensity of this relationship, she concluded that it had influenced profoundly her development as a person and as a counsellor. Jacqueline was very ill as a child and consequently required a great deal of physical care. This meant that Jacqueline's mother, as her primary caregiver, had to maintain very close contact with Jacqueline (e.g., frequently having to physically lift her). As Jacqueline stated, "She [her mother] was probably closer to me physically than somebody would have wanted somebody to be".

This forced physical proximity to her mother seems to have affected Jacqueline in that she wants to be "part of" (connected to) people, while concurrently, a piece of her wants to remain "outside of" (separate from) others. This quality in Jacqueline is illustrated in her work experiences; she has consistently been employed in positions where she was able to have a sense of belonging, but could also have a feeling of being somewhat detached (separate) from the people she worked with. She mentioned one of

her early jobs as a street social worker where she felt a sense of belonging with both her co-workers and the children on the street, while simultaneously being able to keep her distance from the more mainstream social workers who were employed in government offices.

Jacqueline's mother also was instrumental in that she valued and was involved in a lot of community service work. Jacqueline received the message that doing work in the community was "just something you did". As she explained:

You know my mom was the brownie leader and the guide leader and did all those very community involved kinds of things. [She was] part of the red cross, doing things, you know... canvassing. All that time she was--those were all just things that you did without, without question--that was part of the package of being a human being or a mom or a wife or a member of a small community. Those were just things that you kind of did.

During my discussions with her, Jacqueline stated that she had forgotten how active both her parents were in the community because it was so much a part of their lives that she took it for granted.

Relationship With Father: You are Capable of Doing Anything you Want.

As with her mother, Jacqueline's father was active in community activities, being a member of the Lions Club and superintendent of the Sunday school, as well as being actively involved in her siblings' sports activities.

Jacqueline spoke very positively about her father, declaring that he was always very encouraging of her:

I felt very close to him. I felt--I probably didn't go to talk to him about things where I would with my mom. But he always made me feel very competent and very capable and very smart and very--he really adored me, you know the same with my sister. He thought we were great and I think that was the gift he gave us probably that you can do anything and just that kind of idea like 'you guys are fine'.

Jacqueline's father had the expectation that his children would go to university.

Jacqueline thought that this is why, right after high school, she did her B.A. and then immediately went on to do her M.S.W. She told me that:

He [her father] certainly would have influenced me in terms of going to school. You know, to keep going to school. That was just a given in our family, there wasn't any question that you would finish university before you really thought about anything. And so that was--I think he would have contributed [influenced her] in that way.

Relationships With Siblings: Being the Leader.

Jacqueline, the middle child, having an older brother by two years and a younger sister by three years, spoke little about her relationships with her siblings during her childhood. She recalled that, as a child, she frequently played a game with her sister where she was the teacher and her sister was her student. She remembered being "bossy" and being in charge of the games. She deduced that she played a leadership, if not a helping role with her sister.

Other Significant Events From Childhood: Helping as a Way to Compensate for My Childhood Illness

Jacqueline has a vague memory of wanting to be a social worker at age ten, but she then relinquished this notion until later, when she acquired it again in early adulthood, which led her to pursue a degree in social work.

Jacqueline took a lot of time trying to recall experiences from her childhood that were instrumental in terms of the career she chose. A reoccurring statement of hers was: "It [becoming a social worker] just seemed like a natural thing to do".

Even though she did not see herself as a helper in childhood, Jacqueline recalled winning a citizenship award at school for being helpful. She assumed, with uncertainty, that she must have engaged in many helper-type of behaviours in order to have been presented with this award. Because of her illness, Jacqueline was somewhat self-conscious and speculated that becoming helpful may have been a way of compensating for this. She does not remember attributing a lot of meaning to her helping behaviours because what she really valued and wanted to do, and couldn't, was to play sports like the rest of her siblings.

Experiences in Adulthood

Educational Experiences: Social Work Just Seemed Like a Natural Discipline to Study

When first asked the question, "How did you come to be a counsellor?", Jacqueline's immediate response was:

I don't know how I came to be a counsellor...except when you asked me that, I ran over it quickly--I thought, I don't know that. And then, I thought, well I just kept going to school and that's what I ended up being.

Again, Jacqueline emphasized that studying social work seemed like a natural thing to do. As she stated, "It seems like I was always going to be a counsellor. Actually, I think I was always going to be a social worker, but then that changed to wanting to be a counsellor."

Another profession Jacqueline remembers considering at the time she began university was medicine. She further stated that she probably thought of being a teacher, but these were just "fleeting notions". Both of these career options were just brief considerations, as she never really thought seriously about what she wanted to do for a career. As she said, "I didn't really make a conscious decision about what I wanted to do." Rather, she just "kind of carried on" year after year and eventually completed her M.S.W. at the age of twenty-two.

Messages Received Regarding the Roles of Women: Women are Employed in Service Occupations

As we spoke, Jacqueline did mention that the fact that she was female probably influenced her to go into a helping profession. She stated, "That's what girls did at that certain time". Jacqueline lacked varied role models. Most of the women she was exposed to in the small town she grew up in did not work outside the home and, if they did, they were involved in service types of careers--clerks in stores, secretaries, and teachers. Jacqueline believes that she was "subtly pushed" to go into a helping career through society's expectations of her. She explained:

I think, 'Well, why didn't I even explore those areas [male-dominated careers]?' 'Why didn't I think about going into Poli-Sci and economics and those types of 'things [male-dominated disciplines]--doing an M.B.A. instead of a M.S.W.? Probably never entered my head. I would have liked to have known that [other areas were possible], but I wonder with the way things were at that time-- without role models....Like why would you go into a faculty that had no women in it?

Even though Jacqueline does not regret her career choice, she wishes she would have been more cognizant of other career possibilities at the time she chose to be educated as a social worker. She said:

I don't feel resentful about it [her career choice]. It was just the way things were and one would hope that we [society] would make it very different as time goes on. You accept it and you accept that you made a choice based on who you were and your interests at the time.

In spite of Jacqueline's hopes that things will change as a society, she has already observed that her daughter, who is now an adolescent, is showing interest in the helping professions. She hopes she will not chose a career in this area merely because it is familiar to her. She wants to encourage her daughter to at least consider other options.

Work Experiences: I was Employed in Positions That Felt Natural for Me

First Helping Job--Youth Counsellor in a Residential Treatment Centre: Feeling a Sense of Belonging

The summer after her first year of university, Jacqueline was employed at a residential treatment centre for adolescents. She does not recall how she came to this job, however, she thought that it was somehow related to a teacher she was close to in high school. She thought, but wasn't sure, that he may have worked at the centre in the past and told her about it. As was true throughout my conversations with her, Jacqueline repeatedly said that this job felt like a natural thing to do; she never really thought much about it. She said:

It just fit for me. It was just a job and it was all right. It was something I could do. It seemed really like a natural thing to do. It wasn't particularly hard. I mean at that time, of course, there was no basic skill. What were you doing? You were hanging out with kids is what you were doing. You weren't trying to--you were tolerating behaviour and trying to change behaviour where you could. You were trying to make their life, you know funner, or easier or what ever in some ways and that is how it was. I guess I'm saying that because I can't imagine doing anything else. I mean, I can't--it just seemed like this is what you just--it was my job....'What else would I do'? I mean that's what I would do. I mean, it just seemed like a natural thing to do.

Initially, Jacqueline said she did not know how she came to work at the centre. When asked to reflect on this further, however, she stated that part of her attraction to the adolescents could have been connected to her own unhappiness in adolescence due to the restrictions placed on her physical activity because of her handicap. There were many activities she was unable to engage in with her friends. She thought that she could identify with and understand the kids in the treatment centre in that they, like her, were

outside of the norm. Being with these children gave her a sense of "being filled up" and a sense of belonging while still being able to remain on the outside. As she stated:

And I don't know why I really did that, [the job at the residential centre] except that perhaps I was kind of maybe unhappy or something as an adolescent, at certain periods of time and maybe I thought I had some basic understanding...I imagine it had something to do with being somewhat maybe, introspective--probably feeling outside of myself, probably being outside of the norm. By being--by having a physical handicap and being unable to do things and growing up in a very athletic family...I imagine that was part of it. That I didn't fit into the mainstream and I adopted, you know, adopted a more rebel type stand in some ways and therefore, the type of people who worked at the centre were very eccentric and outside of, you know the mainstream, probably. That probably appealed to me in some way.

Other Work Experiences: A Continued Sense of Belonging in Helping Positions

As Jacqueline reflected on her experiences, she realized that all the work experiences in her early adult years were in the social services field. She was naturally attracted to these types of positions. As she explained:

It [the job at the residential treatment centre] just fit for me and it just seemed--once I got experience in doing that and I had experience from very young, it was easy to get jobs, you know? Oh, I mean I never quite knew where I was going, but it seems like that's what I did every year. I went and got [these types of] jobs.

These helping types of occupations gave Jacqueline a sense of belonging and a sense of community. She felt "connected" to the children as well as her colleagues. She explained that other types of employment didn't feel natural for her. When speaking of the meaning she got out of working at one of her jobs as a street social worker, she said:

There were ten of us who worked there. We were all social workers. There was a real sense of us against them in some ways. Us being the social workers who dealt with kids who were really quite odd and strange and on the street and stuff like that. And them being, you know, the regular, straight sort of social workers. There was a sense of, you know, whether we identified with the kids more or

whether it was being able to help or understand something that was harder for other people to understand. I don't know what it was, but there was definitely a sense of belonging there for me. And I think a lot of us had that...there was again, a real sense of we were in this together. And a sense of comradeship and that you were all talking the same language, you all understood what you were doing.

The Transition From Social Worker to Counsellor: Believing I Would Be Better

Challenged by Working as a Counsellor

Jacqueline continued to work as a social worker until sometime in the early 1980's when she realized she was a social worker who really wanted to be a counsellor. She explained why she wanted to make the change in her career from social worker to counsellor:

I wasn't satisfied doing social work, because the job was somewhat weird. We started out doing counselling, but we really weren't allowed to do that much counselling because there wasn't time. So it was band-aid work....It felt to me that the idea of being a social worker had never really entered my head. A social worker being somebody who went and visited families and worked with people who had, you know, who had many, many problems and that had--did not have an appeal to me any more--if it ever had appeal. I'm sure it did, but I didn't mind working with multi-problemed families, but as I started to grow up, I wanted to do therapy. I wanted people to be able to work on their issues and I wasn't interested in taking people to the doctor or getting somebody to take them to the doctor. I wanted to do therapy because it would be more intellectually challenging.

Jacqueline informed me that this modification in her career came about when her two children had begun school and she was ready to make some career moves. She saw herself as having two options. One would be to go into administration and begin climbing that ladder and the other was to become a counsellor. She chose to become a counsellor because:

I wasn't keen on writing tons of reports and I wasn't really keen on budget stuff. So... I just thought it was so--it would be interesting [becoming a counsellor]. I just thought it would be challenging. I mean those words keep coming to mind--I thought it would be hard and I guess I just wanted to see if I could do it.

Jacqueline thought that in order to be a counsellor she would have to be "very conscious and very clear" about her own personal issues to be able to assist clients in understanding themselves. Because she was also interested in her own personal development by this point, she was excited about working on her own psychological issues as well as being able to help others do this.

Following her decision to become a counsellor, Jacqueline began to enroll in counselling courses to improve her skills. Eventually, she undertook specific training in family therapy and, it was at this point in time that she began to do focused work on her own family of origin issues. Jacqueline's motivation for doing her own personal development stemmed from her assumption that, as a counsellor, if she wanted to be effective, she would have to work on being clear about her own issues. In her words:

Well, my own stuff, you know, gets in the way of what I'm doing with people and that to be able to see blind spots or being more conscious of what's going on for you, would help me be a better counsellor. I couldn't do counselling without it [personal growth].

Part of this change of focus in her career, Jacqueline hypothesized, was possibly due to her need to understand herself better. She stated:

Maybe as I started to do more family of origin work in the last ten years or whatever, I started to think more about, maybe some of those questions like belonging and how I needed to find a spot to fit in my family and that my issues with being--maybe being a middle child and having to find a spot that, you know, that I belonged in. Also, the fact that, you know, my mom was--in my relationship was pretty reactionary. That maybe I went into it in a way of trying to figure out what was going on, you know in my life. Understanding my part in my family. I tended to have a rebellious kind of stand towards my family.... I haven't come to a real conscious knowing of why I did it [became a counsellor].

Summary and Meaning Ascribed to Being a Counsellor as it Relates to the Present

Currently, Jacqueline finds meaning in assisting clients to "figure out" (understand) what is going on in their lives and how they can find ways to make their lives more meaningful; "That it is possible for people to be different". Jacqueline said:

Where do I get the biggest rush out of it? I guess it's part of--that is being able to unhook or unlock or to find or try to and figure out what it is that will be useful to them....Encouraging or inviting them to challenge their own perception of something. It's challenging. It's exciting to both see people change and to be able to--or see people get conscious about something or to gain a new skill that they didn't have before... to be able to see a connection that you couldn't see before or to be able to ask a question that's useful to the person. To be able to think of something that's going to give them a key--now that part of it is just--when it happens it's wonderful!

Jacqueline repeatedly used the words, "clarity" and "consciousness" when elucidating the meaning she experiences when working with clients. She contends that:

[Counselling can help clients] make conscious decisions about the way that [they] are going, even if [they] change it the day after. Even though what is aware and conscious and seems clear right now, six months from now, may seem like a total muddle.

Jacqueline also spoke of how the connection she feels with clients is integral to her work with them. She explained that sometimes when she feels a strong affinity to specific clients, her desire to help them is stronger than it is for those clients she doesn't feel as connected to. She appreciates "just being really with people while they work through something".

In spite of the value Jacqueline gets out of cultivating a connection with clients, she also appreciates the fact that while being connected, part of her can concurrently be separate from them. As she said, "You do get very involved with people's lives and things like that but you remain totally apart. It's like there you are in the middle of this big crisis and now it's time for me to go home".

Furthermore, Jacqueline is also able to be connected to her clients and colleagues and yet remain somewhat distant (separate) from them because of her two jobs. She is able to have a sense of belonging with her colleagues in the institution where she is employed as well as with those in her private practice, yet she keeps herself on the "outside" by only being in each place half-time. Jacqueline finds that by working with clients, she is perpetually challenged to work on herself. She remarked, "Doing counselling, to me, is constant personal development. Someone is paying for me to do my own personal development. It's real... really meaningful to me". Jacqueline further explained that it's challenging to be able to identify and acknowledge her own "personal hooks" when she is counselling her clients. It forces her to look deep within herself and to continue to grow as a person.

Jacqueline told me that the meaning of counselling has changed for her over the years. She went into the helping professions because of her desire to help others, but she finds that she keeps herself a lot more distant from her clients than she once did. For example, in her early social work days, she would frequently have kids coming over to her house. She described the boundaries with her clients as being blurred. She did more "hanging out" with kids. Now she said that doing this would not be acceptable to her. She has more distance and more appropriate boundaries with her clients. As she described this:

I don't like people calling me at home, particularly. I mean, they do and I don't mind it, but I mean it's not something I foster. I don't want people calling me between sessions, in which they need to...We do our therapy. They go home. They take care of the rest of their life. They come in for therapy.

Although initially Jacqueline was uncertain as to the significance becoming a counsellor had for her, throughout my conversations with her she was able to unearth and attribute much meaning to her experience. This was both enlightening and enriching for her. As with the two other participants, her story is one that encompasses her whole life; the meaning of becoming a counsellor is profoundly interconnected with her experiences of becoming a person. As she changes as a person, the meaning of becoming and being a counsellor also changes.

Jacqueline's experience is summarized in the charts on the following pages.

Figure 5

JACQUELINE: Experiences in Childhood

Relationships with Members of Family of Origin			Other Significant Experiences
<p><u>Mother</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> forced, close physical proximity to mother has affected her in that she likes to be in situations with others where she can be close (be connected) and have a sense of belonging and yet be distant (separate). She is able to do this in her relationships with clients mother valued and was involved in community service work which led her to the conclusion that providing service to others was "just something you did" (felt like a natural thing to do) 	<p><u>Father</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> valued and was involved in community service work very encouraging and supportive of her believed she was intelligent and capable - expected her to achieve and attend university 	<p><u>Siblings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> played a leadership and possibly a helping role with younger sister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> becoming helpful may have been a way of getting attention and compensating for feelings of self-consciousness due to childhood illness - helped to establish her identity remembers having a fleeting thought of wanting to become a helper at age 10 had difficulty understanding how she came to be a helper - repeatedly stated, "it just felt like a natural thing to do"

Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes

Figure 6 JACQUELINE: Experiences in Adulthood

<p>Educational Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not know why she studied social work - "seemed like a natural thing to do" • had "fleeting notions" of studying medicine or teaching 	<p>Work Experiences</p> <p><u>First Helping Position</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with adolescents "seemed like a natural thing to do" • could identify with and understand the adolescents because both she and they were outside of (separate) from the mainstream • felt connected to the adolescents • received sense of belonging and sense of identity from being with the adolescents and her colleagues <p><u>Other Work Experiences</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • was employed in helping positions because helping continued to feel "like a natural thing to do" • continued to feel sense of belonging and developed sense of identity from working in the helping professions 		<p>Transition from Social Worker to Counsellor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in mid 30's decided she wanted to make the transition from social worker to counsellor • believed that counselling would be more challenging and rewarding • wanted to be more involved in the personal issues of her clients • wanted to assist clients in understanding themselves • became more interested in her own personal growth and desired greater understanding of herself 	<p>Messages Received Regarding Women's Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women in her life were employed in service occupations that led her to the conclusion that caring for others was what women did • believes that sex role socialization was a major factor in her career choice
<p>Note: Highlighted words indicate reoccurring themes</p>				

Fundamental Structure of Becoming a Counsellor

Introduction

The three participants interviewed for this phenomenological inquiry all had unique experiences of becoming a counsellor; yet, on the other hand, there were many aspects of their stories that were similar. In this section I will give an overall account of all three participants' experiences, weaving together reoccurring themes while illustrating individual differences, in order to depict the fundamental phenomenological structure of the experience of becoming a counsellor for the three women.

This section, like the ones on the individual accounts, is organized into categories. The two major categories used here--Experiences in Childhood and Experiences in Adulthood--are the same as those used for the individual accounts. The subcategories, although resembling those used for the individual stories, are not identical to them because again, I attempted, as much as was possible, as Colaizzi states, to allow the data to speak for itself (Colaizzi, 1978). Underlined words and phrases indicate themes that were common to at least two of the participants.

Early Childhood Experiences

Experiences in Family of Origin

All three participants described their childhood experiences, especially their experiences in their family of origin, as being salient to their experience of becoming a counsellor. Below is a summary of these experiences.

Roles Played in Family of Origin

Sandra and Teresa spoke at length about the roles they played in childhood, which included caring for, supporting, nurturing, listening to, and generally feeling responsible for their family members. Both received attention, recognition, and rewards for engaging in these activities. Whereas Teresa received attention and recognition from her mother for babysitting (caring for) her younger siblings, Sandra received attention and recognition for caring for and listening to her parents, particularly her mother.

The two women stated that they had low self-esteem and consequently felt worthwhile or special for providing this caring to their family members. Caring for their family members was also connected to their identity. They came to see themselves as people who were skilled at helping others. Finally, Sandra and Teresa developed a sense of curiosity about themselves as well as others through their experiences of caring for family members. They became interested in understanding themselves as well as others.

As will be described in more detail later, Teresa also played a primary caretaking role with members of her family of origin (parents and siblings) in her early adulthood when her parents separated and subsequently divorced.

Jacqueline, in contrast to Sandra and Teresa, did not appear to play a caretaking role in her family of origin. Instead, she was cared for more than she would have wished to be because of her illness.

Parental Values

Both Jacqueline and Teresa were influenced by their parents' values. For example, Teresa's mother valued understanding one's place in the world as well as having the ability to understand others. Teresa believes this has contributed to her desire to deepen her understanding of herself as well as to help others do the same. Jacqueline's parents valued being involved in community service work and consequently, Jacqueline grew up with the belief that doing work with people was just part of life.

Relationship With Mothers

All participants attributed meaning to the roles their mothers had in their lives and how this influenced their career choices. Teresa described her mother's influence on her as being positive. As well as encouraging her to attend university, she kindled an interest in developing an understanding of herself and others.

Sandra and Jacqueline had less positive relationships with their mothers. Sandra's mother was emotionally unable to give her the nurturance she so desperately needed and so she became the one who nurtured her mother. She learned that nurturing her mother was the only way she could feel worthwhile. Jacqueline holds that because of her forced physical closeness with her mother in childhood, she developed the need to react against this kind of closeness in subsequent years. This created a paradox in Jacqueline's relationships with others. She finds that part of her wants to belong, and yet another part of her wants to remain separate. This paradox is something she is able to maintain in her relationships with colleagues as well as with clients.

Relationship With Fathers

Fathers' roles were seen as significant to all participants. Both Sandra and Teresa thought that their fathers had low expectations of them and this had an effect on their self-esteem. As a result, both women had self-doubt about their abilities. However, in Teresa's case, she reacted against her perceived view of her abilities and became inspired to prove to herself and to her father that she could achieve. Sandra eventually overcame her self-doubts as well, and contended that although her father's criticisms of her were detrimental, paradoxically, he was there for her when she needed him, which eventually aided her in cultivating self-confidence in her adult years.

In contrast to Sandra and Teresa, Jacqueline was encouraged and supported by her father to attend university, which she believes resulted in her choosing a career quite early in adulthood.

Relationships With Siblings

Relationships with siblings were considered relevant to the experience of becoming a counsellor by all three women. Sandra felt compassion for her "acting out" brother which, she believes, helped her in acquiring the capacity to feel compassion for others. Whereas Teresa felt responsible for and cared for her siblings, Jacqueline remembers taking a leadership or helper role with hers, which she thought could be interpreted as taking responsibility for them.

Through the relationships with members in their families of origin, two of the three participants acquired a sense of "woundedness". The third participant, Jacqueline,

felt wounded because of her childhood illness. Becoming counsellors became a way to heal some of all three women's childhood wounds.

First Inclinations of Wanting to Be a Helper

Teresa and Jacqueline remembered having thoughts about working in a helping profession in middle childhood. Teresa wanted to be a psychologist, even though her image of a psychologist was that of someone who was competent at understanding others as opposed to someone who helped or counselled others. Jacqueline only remembers having a fleeting thought about wanting to be a social worker in childhood. Sandra was the only participant who did not consciously decide to enter into a helping profession until later in her adult life.

Childhood Educational Experiences

Only Sandra and Teresa spoke of their educational experiences as being relevant to their experience of becoming a counsellor. Sandra's interest in her inner-world was enhanced by attending catholic school, where she found comfort in the rich symbols of the church. Moreover, she recalled having teachers who supported and believed in her. They valued her for who she was, unlike her mother, who only valued her for the way she met her mother's needs. Not only did these teachers listen to her, they accepted and encouraged her self-expression, which further fostered her interest in her inner-world.

When Teresa first decided to become a psychologist, it was while working on a school project having to do with how the brain works. She decided that she could learn

how to understand human behaviour if she understood how the brain functioned. She believed studying psychology would enable her to do this.

Messages Received Regarding the Roles of Women

All three women mentioned that their career choice was influenced in part by messages they received from their family members and society in general, which indicated that women's role was to support, nurture, and care for others. Because most of the role models she had were of women in service types of jobs, Jacqueline asserted that she was unconsciously socialized to enter a helping profession. Sandra stated that the primary function of the women who served as role models in her childhood was supporting, nurturing, and caring for others, at the expense of their own achievements.

The message Teresa received from her father regarding women was that women were not to become successful.

Experiences In Adulthood

Educational Experiences

Jacqueline and Teresa talked about their experiences in higher education as being pertinent to their experience of becoming a counsellor. Throughout her early adult life, Teresa focused on her academic goals because she saw this as the path leading to becoming a psychologist. She therefore continued to attend university until she completed her Ph.D. It was during her Ph.D. that she became interested in counselling, because, having done a lot of helping in her family of origin after her parents divorce

in her early twenties, helping seemed like a natural thing to do. As did Teresa, Jacqueline began studying in a helping field immediately after high school. As opposed to Teresa, however, Jacqueline doesn't remember why or how she came to study social work, but it also just seemed like a natural thing to do. Sandra only decided to become formally educated as a counsellor in her mid thirties after playing this role in her life for many years. Helping, for Sandra, also came to feel like a natural thing to do.

Work Experiences

All three participants were involved in helping-related work activities, paid or volunteer, before becoming professional counsellors. Teresa worked in summer jobs in residential homes and did psychological research while at university. Jacqueline also worked in summer jobs as a residential counsellor until she completed her M.S.W. degree. Sandra, although not officially employed in a counselling job, facilitated informal counselling groups in the community prior to returning to university in her late thirties.

Significant Relationships in Adulthood

Relationships With Current Family Members

Teresa and Sandra both described their husbands as playing an important role in their experience of becoming a counsellor. Teresa's husband has always believed in and supported her. Because of her husband's interest in ideas, she was able to discuss her work and career goals with him and received support and encouragement from him while doing so. Sandra reported that her husband always had faith in her process. He trusted,

encouraged, and supported her. Moreover, Sandra learned to assert herself with her husband, which helped her develop autonomy. This in turn assisted her in believing in herself, a process that allowed her to believe she could achieve (i.e., become a professional counsellor).

In addition to her husband's influence, Sandra described the impact her youngest son has had on her in that he challenged her to accept him. Because of the difference in their personalities, it was a challenge for her to be empathic with her son. The third participant, Jacqueline, did not discuss her current family members' role in her experience of becoming a counsellor.

Relationships With Members of Family of Origin

The only participant who discussed experiences relating to her family of origin in adult years was Teresa. As previously mentioned, her parents separated when she was in her early twenties. Teresa's role during the separation was to listen, care for, and generally take responsibility for fulfilling her parents' and siblings' emotional needs.

Influences of Women

Sandra was the only participant who spoke in detail about being inspired by other women to achieve in the world. Her two important mentors were women who taught her to face the reality of life instead of avoiding it. Teresa, however, mentioned significant women who, influenced and inspired her in some way.

Conversely, Jacqueline discussed the absence of female role models in non-service types of careers and speculated that, because she did not see women in more male-dominated careers, she probably limited her career options when she began university and decided to pursue a career in social work.

Personal Growth Experiences

All three women discussed the significance of their own personal growth experiences as impacting on their experiences of becoming counsellors. Sandra, however, was the only woman who placed a major emphasis on the role her own personal development has had on her career development. Her experience of coming to a better understanding of herself facilitated her interest in understanding others. Jacqueline and Teresa, while mentioning that their interest in their own personal development/understanding influenced their desire to understand others, did not discuss this in great depth.

Summary and Meaning Ascribed to Becoming a Counsellor as it Relates to the Present

What became overwhelmingly clear to me throughout my interviews with and subsequent analysis of the three participants was that, for the women in this study, becoming and being a counsellor is fundamentally connected to becoming and being a person. This was repeatedly shown in participants' statements such as, "Being a counsellor and being a person are one and the same", "Becoming a counsellor seemed

like a natural thing to do" and "Counselling is just what I did in my personal life so why not do it and get paid for it"?

As the participants discussed the meaning being a counsellor has for them at the present time, the above theme was again revealed. Currently, all three women find their work to be challenging, moving, and rewarding. They find meaning in supporting clients in coming to a better understanding of themselves. In addition, the participants all mentioned how working with clients challenges them to work on themselves and come to an increased understanding of themselves.

All the women spoke of how being a counsellor continues to give them a sense of identity. For example, Sandra stated that it was "a way to be something in the world", and Teresa said that it was a way to live out some of her most important values. The meaning of becoming and being a counsellor has not remained static for the participants of this study. Rather, the meaning of becoming and being a counsellor is constantly changing and evolving as the women change and evolve. Moreover, as the meaning of becoming and being a counsellor changes, so do the interests and focus of the women's work as counsellors. For example, although Teresa continues to find meaning in direct work with clients, she also has begun to attribute more meaning to doing research. And after working for a period of time as a social worker, Jacqueline decided that what she really wanted to do was to become a counsellor.

Charts summarizing all three participants' experiences follow on the next two pages.

Figure 7 THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF BECOMING A COUNSELLOR Experiences in Childhood

Experiences in Family of Origin				
Roles Played in Family of Origin	Relationships with Fathers	Relationships with Mothers	Relationships with Siblings	Parental Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> S. and T. played childhood roles which included caring for, supporting, nurturing, listening to, and taking responsibility for others S. and T. received attention, recognition, and were rewarded for caring for others S. and T. began to see their identity as that of a helper S. and T. had low self-esteem - caring for others helped them to feel special caring for others helped instill in S. and T. a sense of curiosity about (desire to understand) self and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fathers had low expectations of S. and T.'s capabilities which contributed to their low self-esteem S. and T. overcame low self-esteem and succeeded (became competent) in their careers J.'s father supported and encouraged her capabilities S. and T. wounded in relationships with fathers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all three women attributed significance to the role their mothers played in their decision to become counsellors, either through positive or negative experiences with them S. wounded in relationship with mother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> S. felt compassion for brother's problems J. and T. felt responsible for caring for siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T.'s mother valued self-understanding and understanding of others J.'s parents valued community service work
<p>Messages Received Regarding Women's Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all three women believed that sex role socialization was an important factor in their career choices 				
<p>Educational Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> S.'s interest in the inner-world was encouraged by the symbols of the church S. was valued and listened to by her teachers T. decided to become a psychologist while working on a school project T. and J. first thought of becoming helpers in middle childhood 				
<p>Note: Highlighted words indicate themes common to at least two participants</p>				
<p>S. -- Sandra T. -- Teresa J. -- Jacqueline</p>				

Figure 8 THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF BECOMING A COUNSELLOR
Experiences in Adulthood

<p>Relationships with Members of Family of Origin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T. listened to, cared for, and took responsibility for parents and siblings after parents' separation • caring for members of family of origin during parents' separation confirmed T.'s helper-identity 	<p>Educational Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for all three participants, pursuing a helping profession seemed like a natural thing to do 	<p>Work Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all three participants were involved in helping-related work activities before becoming professional counsellors • work experiences of all three participants further stimulated their interest in understanding self and others • work experiences of all three participants further established sense of identity and sense of being special • felt like a natural career to pursue 	<p>Influences of Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S. and T. were inspired to achieve by female role models • lack of female role models in J.'s life 	<p>Personal Growth Experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal growth experiences of all three participants influenced their desire to become better at understanding self and others • S. and T. learned to feel competent • all three participants have continued to see a strong relationship between their identity as a person and their identity as a counsellor 	<p>Relationships with Current Family Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T.'s and S.'s husbands supported and encouraged their career choices • S. developed autonomy through relationship with husband which helped cultivate the belief that she was capable of achieving - (she was competent) • S. learned listen to and accept son in order to understand him
<p>S. -- Sandra T. -- Teresa J. -- Jacqueline</p>				<p>Note: Highlighted words indicate themes common to at least two participants</p>	

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the limitations in generalizing from these results; the relationship of the results of this study to previous research; implications for counsellors and counsellor educators; and the implications for future research.

Relationship of Results to Previous Research

Because this study was unique in that a) it used a phenomenological approach, focusing on subjective experiences using in-depth interviews and b) examined women's (as opposed to men's and women's or only men's) experiences of becoming a counsellor, any conclusions drawn regarding the relationship between the present study and previous ones must be tentative and speculative.

Factors Influencing the Career Choices of Women

Personality Characteristics and Attitudes

Results of this study could be considered to loosely support prior research in this area. Although the women in the present study were not asked directly about their personal interests, they all appeared to have personal interests that involved understanding or helping others. This supports the findings of Holland (1985) who found that women score high in areas of social interests (e.g., having to do with understanding and helping others).

Values

The findings of the current study would also support the findings of researchers in the area of career choice and values. For example, Enoch (1988) found that social work students wanted a job where they could help others. The women in the current study eventually came to place a lot of value on helping others.

Sex-role Orientation

Studies in the area of sex-role orientation have indicated that women in traditional occupations score higher on feminine characteristics (e.g., affectionate, compassionate, interpersonally concerned) than those in non-traditional occupations. Although the present study did not compare traditional and non-traditional women, two women in this study appear to have displayed feminine characteristics in their families of origin (nurturing and caring for family members) and, by adulthood, all three women were showing these characteristics in their relationships with others.

Self-Esteem

Two of the women in this study reported having issues of low-self-esteem in their childhoods and in early adulthood. This relates to previous work which indicated that women who score high in feminine characteristics tended to score lower on self-esteem (Anthill & Cunningham, 1979; Orlofsky & Stake, 1981; Spence, & Helmrich & Stapp, 1975; Whitley, 1984).

Self-Efficacy

It has been found that women tend to have stronger self-efficacy expectations about traditional occupations than they do about non-traditional expectations (Hackett & Betz, 1981; Hackett, 1985; Matsui & Ikeda, (1989); Nevell & Schlecker (1988). For the women in this study, it is not known how their self-efficacy expectations would have compared between traditional and non-traditional occupations. However, the women in the current investigation all appeared to have fairly strong self-efficacy expectations that they would succeed at their chosen career of counselling. For instance, Teresa knew that she was capable of becoming a psychologist even though she did not think others would have thought so.

Attitudes Towards Women's Roles

The research on women's attitudes toward other women indicated that the more liberal women's scores are in this area, the more likely they will choose a non-traditional occupation. For the present study, it is not known how the women's attitudes toward women in general influenced their career choice.

Cultural Factors Influencing Women's Career Choices

Sex-Role Socialization

The women of the current study gave a great deal of evidence which supports the literature on women's psychological development. The literature indicated that women are socialized to nurture and care for and, in general, relate well to others. These

qualities are essential to the occupation of counselling. Two of the women in this study became highly skilled at caring for others in early childhood. The other woman began caring for others in early adulthood.

The three women in the present study described how they believed they were socialized to enter into a career in a helping profession. From their parents, extended family members, and society in general they received the message (both explicitly and implicitly) that women's role is to care for and nurture others. This also supports the work of other researchers who found that women's career choices are influenced by the sex-role socialization process (Asby & Whittmaier, 1978; Frost & Diamond, 1979; Gettys & Cann, 1981; Mackay & Miller, 1982; and Shinar, 1975).

Amount of Support and Encouragement Received

Previous research has indicated that women who choose non-traditional careers receive more support, particularly from males in their lives, than those women who choose traditional careers (Haber, 1980; Houser & Garvey, 1983; Wilson, Weikel & Rose, 1982).

The current study did not compare the difference in male support between women who choose traditional careers and those who choose non-traditional ones. However, these women did speak about males who have supported and encouraged them in their careers. One of the women (Jacqueline) reported receiving a lot of support and

encouragement from her father while growing up. Although she chose a "traditional" career in that social work involves providing service to others, she described her father's support as being instrumental in her belief that she was capable of achieving.

Both Teresa and Sandra reported that their husbands played a major role in their process of becoming counsellors. Although they also chose traditional careers, their father's support also helped them believe they were capable of achieving and appeared to have assisted them in their achievement.

Factors Influencing the Career Choices of Helping Professionals

Birth Order

Research on birth order has shown that individuals involved in the helping professions are often first-born (Lackie, 1984; Marsh, 1988; Rossi, 1965). None of the women in the present study were first-borns, although Teresa and Jacqueline were the eldest females in their families. However, it appears as though Teresa was the only one of the two who took on some of the parenting functions that first-borns often take on.

Roles Played in Family of Origin

Consistent with past research (Burton, 1972; Ford, 1963; Fussel & Bonney, 1990; Henry, 1966; Lackie, 1984; McCarley, 1975; Miller, 1981; Racusin et al. 1981; Welins, 1964), two of the three women (Teresa and Sandra) in the present study played caretaking roles in their families of origin. Often helpers-to-be played reversed roles

with their parents in that they were the ones who cared for their parents (Miller, 1981; McCarley, 1975;). This was clearly the case in Sandra's situation. In fact, she stated that she felt like she was the parent and her mother was the child in their relationship.

Wounded Healer Syndrome

Research has shown that those who choose a career in the helping professions often have had some sort of "dysfunction" in their family of origin (Ford, 1963; Frank & Paris, 1987; Henry, Sims & Spray, 1973; Miller, 1981). As a result of this family dysfunction, helpers have been described as having the "wounded healer syndrome" (Groeseck 1975; Miller & Baldwin, 1987). These authors asserted that helping provides a means for attempting to heal childhood wounds caused by the dysfunction in the family of origin (Ford, 1963; Frank & Paris, 1987; Holt & Luborsky, 1958; Burton, 1972).

To some extent, all three participants in the current study could be considered as having "the wounded healer syndrome". The women all spoke of wounding experiences that occurred in their families during their childhoods, and that appeared to play a role in how they came to be counsellors. Sandra, having two alcoholic parents, was severely deprived of nurturance. She took on the role of caretaking her parents, particularly her mother, as a way of surviving. Teresa talked about feeling wounded because her father did not pay any attention to her, and Jacqueline's wound seemed to stem largely from her illness and the way it restricted her physical movement.

It has been stated that becoming a therapist, for a person who was wounded in childhood, allows the therapist to simultaneously fulfil his or her personal and

professional identity (Ford, 1963; Henry, 1966). The participants in the current study all talked about the interconnectedness between who they are as women and who they are as counsellors. Their identity as women was fundamentally intertwined with their identity as counsellors.

This connection therapists often feel about who they are as people and who they are professionally has been described as making helpers feel gifted or special (Goldberg, 1986). Two women in the current inquiry stated that they felt this way. Sandra felt that she was very special for nurturing her mother when she was growing up and continues to this day to see her work as being special. Teresa felt that becoming a counsellor would make her "be somebody".

Research has indicated that the problems helpers faced in childhood can impart in them a curiosity-- a desire to understand themselves and others (Farber, 1985; Fussell & Bonney, 1990; Goldberg, Henry et al., 1973; 1986; Rychak, 1965). For the women in the current study, the theme of wanting to understand themselves and others occurred repeatedly throughout their lives.

Significance and Implications of Results for Counsellors and Counsellor Educators

The intent of this study was not to obtain information that could be generalized to include all women's experiences of becoming a counsellor. Keeping this in mind, readers should not assume that all, or even most, women will have experiences similar to these participants. The purpose of this research was to acquire an in-depth description of the experiences of three women. This kind of in-depth understanding cannot be

acquired by the use of quantitative methods. It is important that we, as counsellors, counsellor educators, and researchers use the results of this study to guide us in our work with our female clients. This study serves as an exemplary example that can be used to stimulate our thinking and direct us in our actions when working with clients. In addition, this type of study raises important questions for future research.

The results of the present investigation could increase counsellors' awareness of the potential importance of early childhood influences on women's career and life choices. Although this study did not examine men's career choices, the findings could encourage counsellors to examine the importance of early childhood influences in their male clients as well.

It is hoped that the results of this work will increase counsellors' awareness of the role sex-role socialization plays in women's lives, as it relates to their career and life choices. Career counsellors in particular may want to help their clients explore how their sex-role socialization impacts on their career choices.

Based on the results of this study, counsellors may be encouraged to examine their own experiences of becoming counsellors and how this affects their work with their clients. Part of this would entail encouraging counsellors and counsellor educators to heal their own wounds, so that they may become more effective counsellors.

Finally, the findings from this inquiry can be used by counsellor educators in counsellor training programs. Training programs could include a component where counsellors examine their own life experiences of becoming counsellors and then explore how these experiences may affect their work with their clients.

Implications for Further Research

Prior to this inquiry, research on how women come to be counsellors was non-existent. Previous research on factors influencing the career choice of counselling has not focused exclusively on women, nor has the research explored in an in-depth way counsellors' own perceptions on how they have come to be counsellors. Because female counsellors have not been examined, there are many directions future research could take. Examples of these are suggested below:

1. Investigate more on the topic of women's early childhood experiences and how they influence a career choice in counselling and other related fields.
2. Compare men's and women's experience of becoming counsellors.
3. Examine women's experience of how early sex-role socialization impacts specifically on their career choices and career development.
4. Examine women's experience of *being* counsellors, in particular the costs and the benefits.
5. Compare the effectiveness of counsellors who have examined their experience of becoming a counsellor with those who have not.
6. Compare the effectiveness of counsellors who seem to have successfully come to terms with their own wounds with those who have not.
7. Investigate how the experiences in women's lives that influence their career choice may or may not relate to their theoretical orientation.
8. Investigate how counsellors may change their way of working with clients as they are changed by their own life experiences.

9. Compare the experience of women during career counselling when their counsellors explore with them information regarding the influence of sex-role socialization on career choice, with the experience of women whose counsellors do not share this information with them.

10. As only one woman in this study had her Ph.D. degree, it could be interesting to compare the experiences of female counsellors who have received doctorate degrees with those who have Masters degrees. There could be value in examining whether or not there is a difference in the achievement motivation of these women.

In general, because the research on women as counsellors is scant, any study that addresses this area would make an important contribution.

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Appendix A

Women's Experience of Becoming a Counsellor:

A phenomenological Inquiry

I am doing a Master's thesis at the University of Victoria and am planning to do a study on women's experiences of becoming a counsellor. I am interested in interviewing women who are thirty years of age or older and have been practising counsellors for at least two years. Participants should also have spent some time reflecting upon how their life experiences have influenced their decisions to become counsellors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how women's experiences, based on their own perceptions, have influenced their choice of choosing a career in counselling.

Contributions of the Study

By acquiring more knowledge about what experiences women perceive to be instrumental in their process of becoming counsellors, counsellors will:

1. Be better able to understand what motivates their female clients to choose traditional careers (specifically careers in helping) and consequently help them to understand and expand upon their career options;

2. Have an increased awareness of how some of their life experiences have influenced their decisions to become helpers and how this, in turn, impacts on their work with clients.

Method of Study

For the purposes of this inquiry, the in-depth interview will be used to obtain accounts of how participants have come to be counsellors.

The purposes and procedures will be fully explained to the participants before they agree to become involved in the study. Once participants have agreed to participate in the study, they will be asked to sign a consent form which will indicate that their involvement is voluntary, that they can withdraw from the study at any time, and that the data collected will be kept confidential.

Women participating in this research project will be requested to be involved in at least two audio-taped, 1 - 1 1/2 hour interviews. During the first interview, open-ended questions will be used to elicit information on how the women have come to be counsellors. The second interview will be conducted after a preliminary analysis of the data has been made. During this interview participants will read summarized descriptions of their experiences and will then have the opportunity to modify, add, and/or delete any information they deem appropriate.

Confidentiality

The names of persons, places, or any other identifying information will be changed in the transcript and in the text of the thesis. The original tapes will only be heard by the researcher and possibly another individual who may transcribe the tapes. Consent forms will be stored separately from the material of the thesis.

If you are interested in becoming a participant for this project, or would like further information please contact Bonny Austin at 370-1523.

Appendix B
Consent Form

I, _____ consent to being part of this study regarding how women come to be counsellors.

I understand that my involvement in this study is completely voluntary and that I may decide to withdraw at any point without negative consequences.

I am further aware that I will participate in at least two, audio-taped interviews lasting approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours in duration. During these interviews, I will answer open-ended questions regarding how I have come to be a counsellor. I understand that it is my right during these interviews to refuse to answer any questions.

I will be given the opportunity to read the summarized transcriptions of the interviews and to delete and/or modify anything I deem necessary. The names of persons, places or any other identifying information will be changed in the transcript and the original tape will be erased upon completion of the study.

I am further aware that the researcher will keep my involvement in this study strictly confidential.

(Signature)

(Date)

VITA

Surname: Austin

Given Names: Bonny Louise

Place of Birth: Edmonton, Alberta

Date of Birth: 01/08/60

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1987-1993
University of British Columbia	1983-1984
Grant MacEwan Community College	1979-1981

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University of Victoria	1989
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Title of Thesis: Women's Experience of Becoming a Counsellor: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Author



(Signature)

BONNY AUSTIN

July 8, 1993
(Date)