THE MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY FOR EXPERIENCED COUNSELLORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1990

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Education

ACCEPTED
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated, from a phenomenological perspective, the meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellor. As the review of the literature indicates, empathy is an essential condition in helping relationships. Of equal importance is the counsellor's understanding of empathy, his or her beliefs and values in regard to empathic rapport, and awareness of the consequences of empathy on the therapeutic relationship. In spite of this, research examining empathy from a qualitative perspective has been very limited. This study sought to explicate the meaning and development of empathy for the purpose of deepening understanding of the phenomena and investigating its complexity.

Previous researchers have endeavoured to identify and measure behavioral indicators of empathy in counselling interactions as well as to describe empathy in a broader sense. Experimental methods used in many of the previous studies have not addressed the meaning and development of empathy for counsellors. Writers and researchers agree that empathy is a complex and demanding, yet sensitive and powerful way of being. The present study adopted a phenomenological approach in order to explore and describe the meaning of empathy from the perspective of experienced counsellors.

Counsellors' experiences of empathy were assumed, for the purposes of this study, to include the following aspects: their definition of empathy, the context and process involved in the development of empathy, the perceived impact of empathy, and the personal meaning of empathy. Three women who were experienced counsellors were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed

and analyzed in relation to the meaning and development of empathy, for each participant individually and three participants together as a group.

The results indicated that the development of empathy was an on-going process, occurring in different contexts over time. Participants identified individual life circumstances, learning experience, emotional reactions, physiological responses, and observations of the impact of empathy for themselves and others.

In the concluding chapter of this study, relationships among the present findings and those of previous researchers are discussed, applications of the present findings to both counsellors and counsellor education, and recommendations for future research are suggested.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to give my sincere thanks to Dr. Vance Peavy, for his guidance and belief in my scholarly ability; to Dr. Marcia Hills for her feedback and encouragement; to the participants for sharing their experiences; to John for his support and unshakable faith in me; to my family for loving me; to Lynn for listening to me; to Jocey for offering me refuge.

DEDICATION

For all the women and men,

young and old,

living compassionate lives.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Impetus for the Study

The impetus for this study arose from reflecting on my learning experiences in relation to empathy. When I began my university training in Human and Social Development I was encouraged to explore and reflect on my beliefs and values regarding "helping." This process led to a deeper, more meaningful interpretation of various counselling concepts. As each "skill" was introduced in training I gained a cognitive understanding and an experience of the concept in practice sessions. I was able to begin the process of creating personal meaning of the skills for myself after reflecting on how the concepts related to me in my past and present experience. The learning process itself intrigued me and I began to wonder how others made meaning out of their training experiences.

My personal experience of empathy contributed to powerful and intense connections with others. Compassion and empathic self understanding have altered my relationships. The evolution of empathy over time has been enriching and meaningful for me in my personal and professional life. These experiences have led to this study in regard to the meaning and development of empathy for others.

My current focus and direction in regard to my professional career is counsellor education as well as clinical practice. It seems important to me that I explore the meaning and development of empathy that others have experienced so that I can be better prepared to facilitate meaningful learning for students in my future role. In the following thesis I will report what I have found in the

literature related to the learning process in counsellor education and how I will conduct my own research project with a specific focus on the meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellors.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of interpersonal communication is a major focus in many human service agencies, colleges and universities. Researchers and practitioners recognize that effective counsellors are able to facilitate positive change in their clients by engaging in a therapeutic relationship (Combs, 1985; Perlman, 1979; Rogers, 1980). Genuineness, empathy and unconditional positive regard were the descriptors Rogers (1980) used to explain the helping process, defining empathy as "a way of being." In an effort to teach these qualities to students entering the helping profession, courses have been developed that focus on micro-skills. Educators, such as Egan (1986) and Ivey (1983) have written text books for teachers and students outlining the skills and practice sequences. This method of teaching will be referred to as the Technique Approach in this thesis (Hills, 1985).

While there is a need to include skill-based training in counsellor education, another important component of the process of learning has been largely neglected in the literature: the integration of skills and knowledge with the beliefs and values of the helper (Combs, 1982). In addition, the personal meaning that is attached to the helping skills will influence the effective use of the skills over time (Hills, 1985). When the learner believes in the relevance and need for the skills, and becomes aware of the emotional impact inherent in using the skills, the discovery of personal meaning will occur (Hills, 1987). Counsellor education that includes the discovery of personal meaning through reflection of

the helper's beliefs and values was identified by Hills (1988) as the Integrative Approach.

In order to provide effective counselling programs, theory and behavioral skills need to be closely allied to the self-exploration and experiences of the learner (Combs, 1985). As the learner follows the principles of effective communication, educators need to provide opportunities for the participants to reflect on how they apply and are relevant to their interpersonal style (Plum, 1981).

In Hatcher's (1978) survey of 400 counsellor-education programs, 76.1% focused on teaching counselling skills. Only 7% of the graduating students were able to demonstrate competent use of the skills in a six-month follow-up study. This evidence suggests that skill-based programs do not necessarily train students to be effective counsellors. Kolb (1984) argued that integrative experiential learning opportunities led to a higher degree of competence. He suggested that the learner is more adaptable and flexible in response to the demands of a counselling situation. Further, Bergin and Soloman's (1963) study provided evidence that supports the importance of "personal" and "experience" factors in therapeutic competence.

It is agreed that empathic listening is a key skill related to counsellor effectiveness (Egan, 1986; Ivey, 1983). After reviewing the literature, Gladstein (1983) concluded that empathy is helpful in initiating the helping process, establishing rapport and developing closeness, helping clients identify problems and helping them explore themselves and their problem situations. Rogers (1980) concurred that analysis of empathy as a skill is important; however, over-emphasis of micro-skills can have "appalling consequences" (p. 139). He

suggested that focusing on empathy as a skill misrepresents the complexity of empathic understanding. He recommended that students be encouraged to incorporate both cognitive and affective-experiential aspects into learning. Similarly, in the Masters program in Counselling through the department of Psychological Foundations in Education at the University of Victoria, it has been suggested that counsellor education should make provision for self-understanding and self-appraisal on the part of the student (Peavy, Robertson, & Westwood, 1982).

Review of the literature suggests that if counsellor education can integrate theory and skills with important personal qualities and experiences of the students, it can deepen their understanding, enrich their resources and provide a firmer basis for effective counselling interactions. This study explored three counsellors' experiences of empathy in the context of both their learning experiences and within the context of their living and professional practice in order to explicate the meaning of empathy for these counsellors. The researcher looked for themes inherent in the experiences and learning process that facilitate the counsellors' development of personal meaning in regard to empathy.

This study may have implications for counsellor education programs in Peer Counselling Training, undergraduate studies in Human and Social Development, as well as graduate studies in Counselling. In turn, the competency of graduates from these programs will have a profound impact on the quality of services that they provide to their clients. The personal meaning counselors attach to empathy and the learning process in counsellor education are significant issues in present and future curriculum planning.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is twofold: one is to explore the meaning which empathy has for three counsellors, and the other is to explore the process whereby these three participants attach meaning to empathy. Using a qualitative methodology, I have examined the counsellors' experiences, beliefs and values regarding empathy in the counselling context.

Research Questions

Specifically, four research questions provide focus for this study:

1. How do these participants describe empathy? (definition)
2. What life experiences and critical events in the counsellors' lives led them to their understanding of empathy? (development)
3. What do the counsellors believe to be important about empathy? (impact)
4. What meaning or significance to counsellors ascribe to empathy? (meaning)

Significance and Implications for Counselling

To understand how counsellors experience empathy might result in recommendations on teaching strategies that will facilitate meaningful integration of empathy into the students' counselling repertoire.

CHAPTER II

RELATED RESEARCH

The following section of this study reviews four key areas in counsellor education: skill training, personal meaning as a basis for learning, integrative approaches to counsellor education, and empathy in the counselling context. Highlighting the similarities and differences in various approaches to counsellor education helps to provide a basis for understanding the teaching strategies used most frequently in counsellor education programs. The researcher believes that this information is relevant and important in order to understand how counsellors come to learn about empathy and consequently to incorporate its use in their professional counselling practice.

Skill Training

Text books, such as The Skilled Helper (Egan, 1986) and Intentional Interviewing and Counseling (Ivey, 1983), are used to teach the techniques of helping. Their work defines interpersonal communication in terms of specific behavioral skills that are taught systematically to ensure mastery and competency.

Empathic understanding is one dynamic in the helping process that is accepted as the most potent factor in bringing about change, and yet, focus on empathy as a skill can have "appalling consequences" (Rogers, 1980). Attentive and reflective listening have been analyzed and distorted. Rogers' approach came to be known as a technique, sometimes described as a non directive therapy where you repeat the last words the client said. This behavioral description is in sharp contrast to Rogers' definition: "being empathic is a complex, demanding, and strong--yet also a subtle and gentle--way of being" (p. 143). Skill training in

empathic listening centers on behavioral strategies that are intended to communicate the helper's understanding of the client. According to skill-based training manuals, paraphrasing the client's main ideas by using the "important words" of the client are the behavioral indicators of empathy (Ivey, 1983, p. 222). However, researchers and educators have voiced their concern that parroting, misinterpretation and pretending to understand may be mistaken for empathy (Egan, 1986). Miller (1973) reported that empathy and reflective listening did not transfer to classroom settings following Carkhuff's (1969) training model. Further research is needed to confirm the argument that all skills are not equally "trainable," nor are all approaches to training consistently effective (Hills, 1985; Mahon & Altman, 1977; Plum, 1981).

Mahon and Altman (1977) suggested that skill training alone is limited. Skill-based training fails to integrate skills and knowledge with the beliefs and values of the learner, frequently resulting in poor retention of the skills and inadequate transfer of the skills to the counselling setting (Marshall, Charping, & Bell, 1979). Sensitivity to what others are trying to express, and the personal meanings that lie behind the words they use, better describe the quality of empathy (Combs, 1982). Greater emphasis on the learners' understanding of counselling principles, their subjective experiences and the process of learning have become an important issue for educators in counselling programs.

Personal Meaning as a Basis for Learning

Counsellor education researchers have suggested that learning is a deeply personal process (Combs, 1982, 1985; Hills, 1985; Kolb, 1984). The phenomenological view of learning focuses on understanding the students' perceptions and the internal processes of growth and change.

Experiential learning models are designed to integrate the learners' beliefs and values about helping into their interpersonal style:

> If the belief systems of helpers are as crucial to effective practice as research suggests, then the training of professional helpers must be approached as a process in personal becoming. The goal of training must be on the personal development of aspiring helpers' belief systems, including at the very least the development of sensitivity, a phenomenological approach to understanding human beings, clarification of personal and professional goals and purposes, acquisition of positive self-concepts, and high levels of personal authenticity. (Combs, 1985, p. 26)

Combs (1982) discussed the importance of helper beliefs as they affect counselling interactions. He offered three necessary components for counsellor education programs: creating an atmosphere for learning, providing information or experience, and aiding discovery of meaning. While Combs presented the theoretical premises and descriptions of these learning conditions, he neglected to clearly outline an alternative approach. Specific strategies need to be developed in order to implement counsellor education programs that are based on Combs' personal approach.

Hills (1985) supported the position that the discovery of personal meaning is of central importance in counsellor education. In order to explore Combs' personal approach to learning, research was conducted in a similar, but different setting--a parent education program. In Hills' (1987) study, parents were taught such skills as empathic responding and I-messages (Gordon, 1976) using the following principles:

> (a) the present experiencing of the learner is acknowledged as important and relevant to the learning task;
> (b) the learner is encouraged to develop an attitude of searching for personal relevance;

> (c) the belief that the learner is able, is conveyed by providing challenges that develop confidence and self-reliance;
> (d) the integrated use of knowledge and skills is exemplified by the way in which the trainer demonstrates trust and respect for the learners;
> (e) the learner is encouraged to report both affective reactions and personal interpretations of the learning events;
> (f) learners practise using actions and words and are coached to assimilate these skills into their natural ways of responding; and
> (g) information is provided about how others are interpreting and reacting to the learner's actions and words so that the learner can choose more effective ways of responding. (p. 41)

The independent variable of primary importance was the use of the skills in the home setting of the participants, as measured by Guerney's Empathic Behavior Scale (Guerney, 1977) and the Sensitivity to Children Scale (Hill, Raley, & Snyder, 1982). One group of parents was given skill-based training. The second group received the skill-training following the principles described above. Both groups demonstrated improved skill during the course; however, transfer to home settings and retention over six weeks occurred only with the second group (Hills & Knowles, 1988).

This project is useful in clarifying the learning conditions for parents; however, further studies are needed before the results can be applied to counselling students. The results of this study suggest that learning conditions have a significant impact on the learners' skill acquisition, retention and ability to transfer the learning to other settings. Similar findings have been noted for Peer Counselling programs based on Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Model; however, no studies have confirmed this claim.

Integrative Approaches to Counsellor Education

Counsellor education programs range from skill-based training (Egan, 1986) to experiential learning models (Kolb, 1984). One program that attempts to integrate the learners' beliefs and values into theory and practice is Peer Counselling. Peer counsellor training offers skill development to augment the student's natural communication skills (deRosenroll, 1988). In addition, the learners are provided an opportunity to examine the relationship between the learned skills and their own day-to-day interactions and experiences. Personal growth and learning occur with the experiential learning process as the students are active participants (Sachnoff, 1984). In deRosenroll's (1988) review of peer counsellor training programs, four stages of the learning process are described according to Hunt's (1987) model:

> (1) participation in an exercise (Direct Experience) or recall of a past experience (Remembered Experience).
> (2) the trainer helps the students to systematically break down aspects of the experience (Reflective Observation).
> (3) group members are then asked to make some personal statements, based on reflections of their experiences (Abstract Conceptualization).
> (4) in the final phase students are asked to discuss how they might use their new awareness, both as peer counsellors and, more generally, in their ongoing lives (Active Experimentation). (p. 48)

As each new skill or counselling concept is introduced, the students explore the information as it relates to their beliefs, values and experiences. This integrative approach to learning contributes to the development of personal meaning and relevant application of the skills.

The Peer Counselling literature presents useful information regarding the theory and practical application of the experimental model for learning and

development. deRosenroll's (1988) study suggests that a more general college program with the same integrative approach might be effective.

Empathy in the Counselling Context

In the counselling literature, empathy continues to be recognized as an important construct. Several theorists and researchers suggest that empathy is critical to successful outcomes in psychotherapy (Barrett-Lennard, 1981; Gladstein, 1987; Katz, 1963; Kohut, 1987). Fitting with the purpose of the study, the review of the literature will focus on the meaning and significance of empathy in the counselling context and the consequences of empathy for self and others.

Rogers (1980) suggested that empathy is "a process, rather than a state." He described the process as:

> entering the private perceptual world of the other . . . being sensitive to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, [and] temporarily living in the other's life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments. . . . It includes communicating your sensings of the person's world . . . [and] frequently checking the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. (p. 142)

Rogers developed a scale to measure empathic understanding. In regard to the implications of empathy for the client, Rogers added that:

> By pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of another person's experiencing, you help the other to focus on this useful type of referent, to experience the meanings more fully, and to move forward in the experiencing. (p. 142)

Barrett-Lennard (1962) also has a specific conceptual formulation of empathy, suggesting that:

> Qualitatively it [empathic understanding] is an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his communication and

> meaning, and of translating his words and signs into experienced meaning that matches at least those aspects of his awareness that are most important to him at the moment. (pp. 143-144)

The Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory was developed to measure empathic understanding and is filled out by the parties to the relationship.

Truax (1967) devised the Accurate Empathy Scale to rate degrees of empathy evident in the helping relationship. Portions of tape recorded counselling interviews are rated on an eight point scale.

The measurement tools described above help to define empathy in theoretical, conceptual, subjective and operational terms, however, the meaning and development of empathy are not fully explicated.

The following are some of Rogers' (1980) general research findings:

> The ideal therapist is, first of all, empathic.
> Empathy is correlated with self-exploration and process movement.
> Empathy early in the relationship predicts later success.
> In successful cases, the client comes to perceive more empathy over time.
> Empathic understanding is provided freely by the therapist, not drawn from him or her.
> The more experienced the therapist is, the more likely he or she is to
> be empathic.
> The better integrated the therapist is, the higher the degree of empathy he or she exhibits.
> Brilliance and diagnostic perceptiveness are unrelated to empathy. (pp. 146-150)

The consequences of an empathic climate in the context of a therapeutic relationship is summarized in Rogers' work, A Way of Being. He suggests that empathy is clearly related to positive outcome, indicating that the more sensitively understanding is the therapist or teacher, the more likely are constructive learning and change to take place (Rogers, 1980).

Rogers (1980) expands on the consequences of empathic interaction by suggesting the empathy dissolves alienation, the recipient feels valued, cared for, and accepted and hence, he or she can consider themselves worthwhile and valuable. They are more likely to adopt a prizing caring attitude toward themselves and listen more accurately to themselves with greater empathy toward their own visceral experiencing and their own vaguely felt meanings. These consequences lead to greater self-understanding and openness to new possibilities and facets of experience.

Defining empathy and evaluation tools designed to measure degrees and accuracy of empathy contribute to understanding the impact that an empathic climate has on the therapeutic relationship and positive outcomes for the client. The nature of this research and ensuing discussions continue to neglect the meaning of empathy for experienced counsellors. A brief review of the literature related to the development of empathy presents an overview of empathy over the life span with a particular focus on adolescents and adults from a learning/ training perspective.

In early theorists' views about empathic development, infants and very young children are capable of responding with affective empathy. Piaget suggested that the ego-centered child becomes decentered and able to take on the role of the other. This process is often referred to as emotional contagion. It is speculated that an empathic mother-child interaction evolves from a symbiotic relationship into individuation, whereby the child can, in turn, be empathic with others.

Social factors have been studied in regard to modeling and behavioral expectations, power and punishment, and experience with expressing emotion

and feeling supported and acknowledged emotionally. Where the results are somewhat inconclusive it appears that children who experience affective empathy tend to develop higher levels of affective and cognitive empathy (Gladstein et al., 1987).

In an effort to examine counsellor training programs, Gladstein and associates (1987) described empathy in three domains: affective (identification, emotional reaction, emotional contagion, resonation), cognitive (role taking, perspective-taking, predictive, communicative), and affective-cognitive (combinations of various types in various proportions). They have also shown that it exists as a trait (inactive in the person but capable of being activated) and a state (the activated condition as manifested in feelings, thoughts, or behaviors). Most theorists have also argued that it is different from sympathy. The latter involves feeling sorry for the other person.

The literature suggests that the development of empathy is partially a learned phenomenon developing through natural maturational stages. Learning and practicing empathy, as presented in the various counsellor education approaches described previously, vary from skill based, to integrative and experiential methods. The meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellors continues to be neglected.

Summary and Implications for This Study

A review of the literature highlights two key components of counsellor education: skill training, and personal meaning providing for the integration of skills and knowledge with the learners' beliefs and values about the concepts being taught, specifically empathy. Researchers such as Egan (19486) have attempted to identify the particular behaviors that significantly affect the change

process in clients. Empathy is noted to be of primary importance. Skill-based training programs describe the specific behavioral indicators of empathy in counselling interactions. They have been useful in helping students to develop counselling strategies that facilitate the client-therapist relationship. However, empathic understanding is less successfully transferred to actual counselling interactions when it is learned through behavioral practice sessions alone. This evidence has resulted in further exploration of empathy and its development.

Based on Combs' (1985) description of empathy from a phenomenological perspective, Hills (1987) conducted a study to compare skill-based training with an integrative approach to parent education. Her research confirmed that empathic understanding is retained and transferred to practical settings more effectively if the learner has had an opportunity to integrate the skill with their personal beliefs and values. It is uncertain whether similar results would occur in a Counsellor Education Program. Her conclusions precipitated further research regarding the importance of the learning process for counselling education.

Experiential learning, as described in Kolb's (1984) model, suggested that the combination of didactic and experiential methods, with a major emphasis on empathic listening, will facilitate the students' ability to learn and apply counselling principles. The difficulty in assessing this claim with any degree of accuracy is due to a lack of studies in the area.

It is apparent through the research that there is a significant difference between counsellor education programs. Further, there is little empirical evidence to discern which approach delivers the most effective counsellor education, specifically in regard to empathic understanding. It is implied that providing for personal meaning contributes significantly to retention and

transfer of empathy; however, further research is needed to explore this hypothesis. This study will elicit examples embedded in the learning process from the counsellors' subjective experience in an attempt to better understand the meaning and development of empathy for counsellors. In this study, the counsellors were asked to create a personal journal of their beliefs, values and experiences in regard to empathy. Audio tape-recorded interviews were conducted by the researcher. The data were reviewed in order to illuminate themes that arise from the accounts of the counsellors' experiences.

Implications for Research

Research alternatives that could build on this study might be to focus on the subjective meanings of various other counselling concepts, such as acceptance. A qualitative method similar to that of this study could be used to study the shifts that occur in counsellors' subjective experience over time, what experiences contribute to these shifts, and the impact of these changes in their professional practice as a counsellor.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Methodological Considerations

I believe that there is an important difference between using the formula responses associated with empathy and the personal meaning that I have arrived at through reflecting on its importance and its relevance to me. Where experimental research is of value, the quantitative, scientific evidence that empathy is important in counselling relationships does not adequately address the complex experiential learning process necessary to internalize and conceptualize the personal meaning of empathy. When empathy is artificially isolated and all conditions are held constant (as in experimental designs) the richness and depth of understanding experience from the experiencer's point of view is lost. In addition, the relevant context in which the meaningful learning grew is not recognized.

Theoretical Assumptions of a Phenomenological Approach

The following is a summary of some of the basic concepts and assumptions of this method that were utilized in the study.

The investigation of human experience. Phenomenology "is by some considered to be a paradigm rather than a research strategy" (Tesch, 1990, p. 68). It is not intended to test a hypothesis, but rather to investigate lived experience. Whatever is given to human experience is acceptable subject matter for scientific psychological inquiry (Colaizzi, 1978). Phenomenological research methodology attempts to capture the "actuality of experience" (Osborne, 1990). This study seeks to understand the meaning and development of empathy from the counsellors' perspective.

Phenomenology and "objectivity". Phenomenology is a form of cooperative inquiry where there is involvement of both researcher and subject. The classic scientific idea of 'absolute objectivity' is not recognized as entirely plausible nor desirable in phenomenological research since the researcher's experience is always present and cannot be eliminated from the investigative process. This experience and the assumptions of the researcher are taken into account and explicitly acknowledged as "potentially informative" (Tesch, 1990, p. 34). In this study the researcher has stated her assumptions, expectations and personal experiences of the phenomenon of empathy and the process of attaching meaning to the concept. Here, the researcher attempts to be true to the phenomenon:

> suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher's meanings and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed. It means using the matrices of that person's world-view in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying, rather than what the researcher expects that person to say. (Hycner, 1985, p. 281).

The dialogal relationship in phenomenological research. Interactional communication in the dialogical relationship between the researcher and the participants acts to stimulate recollection of the participant's experience. In phenomenological research the interpersonal dynamics and reciprocal influence of the interviewer and the interviewed on both cognitive and emotional levels are viewed as strong points of the qualitative research interview (Kvale, 1982). The researcher and the participant are viewed as con-constituents of the world created by the research process; a cooperative way of learning from individual and shared experience (Boud, 1985).

Methodology

For this study a qualitative approach was used to explicate the counsellor's experience and understanding of empathy. This approach will assist the researcher to "understand the meaning of events and interactions to . . . people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 31). The emphasis of qualitative research is on subjective aspects of people's behavior; the goal in this study is to gain entry into the conceptual world of the counsellor in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around empathy.

A qualitative methodology is appropriate to this study since the goal is not to predict, control, or show quantitative relationships among phenomena but rather to acknowledge, describe, and explore the meaning and significance of the phenomenon of empathy.

The researcher is committed to the phenomenological paradigm for philosophical reasons that fit within humanistic counselling premises. General counsellor education programs stress the importance of the client's experience; the client's unique subjective reality is valued. There is a parallel between the client's struggle to discover and cope with his or her issue(s) in counselling and the counsellor's experience. Both are engaged in the discovery of personal meaning. Both the client's and the counsellor's experience can only be understood in the context of their living.

The rationale for the use of a qualitative methodology has been outlined in the previous section. This study will use interactive, open-ended interviews where the researcher was receptive to the recollected experiences of the participants. The question path focused on the participants' experience in relation

to empathy. Attention was paid to the rigor of this study by following the expertise and guidance provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Explication to Reveal Meaning

Data have been drawn from the participants' reflective experience. That is, the recollected thoughts, feelings and experiences that are described in the interview are used to understand the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee. The researcher listened to the directly expressed descriptions and formulated implicit meanings. The synthesis is "fed-back" to the participant to confirm or disconfirm the interpretation (Kvale, 1982). Colaizzi (1978) and Giogi (1975) suggest thematic analyses of the data where themes are clustered to help define the phenomenon. The researcher's focus is on the deep structure of meaning which characterize the phenomenon. In this study the researcher moved through four phases of analysis: (1) reading the descriptions (protocols), (2) extracting significant statements, (3) formulating meanings, and (4) clustering themes which are common to all of the participants' protocols. The participants were asked to review the clusters of themes in order to validate the researchers' understanding.

Selection of Participants

"Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The primary logic behind purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases where the researcher can gain substantial knowledge about a phenomenon. Patton (1990) points out that:

> Piaget contributed a major breakthrough to our understanding of how children think by observing his own two children at length and in great depth. Freud established the field of psychoanalysis

> based on fewer than ten client cases. Bandler and Grinder founded neurolinguistic programming by studying three renowned and highly effective therapists. (p. 185).

Intensity sampling is the strategy used in this study. This enabled the researcher to access individual participants who offered information-rich data, and not extreme or unusual cases that may distort the findings. The researcher invited three counsellors who have a minimum of three years experience as professional counsellors.

Counsellors fitting the description above were invited to participate (See Appendix I). It was made clear that participation would be completely voluntary and that confidentiality would be protected. Consent forms (See Appendix III) were signed by both the researcher and the participants.

Interviews

The participants were told at the time of initial contact that they would be interviewed about their subjective experiences with the concept of empathy. Once three counsellors had agreed to participate in the study, the researcher arranged a mutually convenient time and place at the University of Victoria to meet together to explain the nature of the inquiry. At this time the counsellors were asked to prepare a brief journal of their thoughts, feelings and experiences in regard to empathy. This included in-class lectures, discussions and practice counselling interviews, as well as professional experiences or recollections and reflections of past events in their lives.

Two-hour audio-taped interviews were scheduled with individual participants. All tapes were transcribed and a written protocol for each participant was prepared. When this was completed, a second interview was arranged with each participant.

> In this interview, each participant [will be] asked to read over the protocol carefully, elaborating and clarifying, until satisfied that the revised account represents his or her experience accurately. This interview [will] provide the opportunity for the researcher to elicit detail, clarification, or information that may have been missed in the first session. (Samson, 1984, p. 25)

Data Analysis

As soon as the first data were collected, the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. The researcher read the entire data set to get a sense of the whole interview. The data were reread until the researcher was "satisfied that the text has become accessible to her" (Tesch, 1990, p. 93), she felt sufficiently familiar with the content of the interview. From the material that pertained to the phenomenon, empathy, meaning units were determined. Similar meaning units from each interview protocol were clustered together until the "essential non-redundant themes" from one interview were "tied together into a descriptive statement" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 88).

The researcher identified themes that were "trans-situational"-- or common across protocols. In addition, close attention was paid to the range of the meanings of the phenomenon. Tesch (1990) identifies two commonalities in this type of interpretational qualitative analysis: segmenting (de-contextualizing) and categorizing (re-contextualizing). This researcher de-contextualized by separating relevant portions of data from their context, and re-contextualized by assembling the categories created. The following is a composite summary of the guidelines followed in the qualitative analysis.

1. Analysis is not the last phase in the research process; it is concurrent with data collection or cyclic.

2. The analysis process is systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid.

3. Attending to data includes a reflective activity that results in a set of analytical notes that guide the process.

4. Data are "segmented," i.e., divided into relevant and meaningful "units."

5. The data segments are categorized according to an organizing system that is predominantly derived from the data themselves.

6. The main intellectual tool is comparison.

7. Categories for sorting segments are tentative and preliminary in the beginning; they remain flexible.

8. Manipulating qualitative data during analysis is an eclectic activity, there is no one "right" way.

9. The procedures are neither "scientific" nor "mechanistic."

10. The result of analysis is some type of higher-level synthesis.
(Tesch, 1990, pp. 95-97)

The researcher followed the steps for developing an organizing system for the unstructured qualitative data as outlined in Tesch (1990, pp. 142-145). When the data were organized and interpreted the organized system helped to structure the flow of the research report.

Assumptions of the Researcher

Based on my own personal experiences and my knowledge of the research on counsellor education and the role of empathy in counselling relationships, I have developed the following assumptions:

1. Empathy is a key factor in effective counselling interactions.

2. Empathy is not integrated into the counsellor's way of being in counselling situations merely by memorizing formula responses.

3. Reflection on the meaning of empathy as it exists in the counsellor's experience--emotionally and cognitively--facilitates the discovery of personal meaning.

Limitations

1. The results of this study will only pertain to the particular participants and this researcher, because of the chosen research method. Possible application of the result to other counsellors will depend on the richness of the data collected.

2. The researcher has attempted to bracket her assumptions regarding the meaning and development of empathy. These presuppositions have been articulated so that the researcher will not impact the participants with her biases.

3. Accurate analysis of the interview data may be limited by the ability of the researcher to recognize and articulate emergent themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter includes an explication of the data for each participant. In addition, an account of the general structure of experiences of the meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellors, based on an analysis of themes, for the group as a whole.

Certain words and phrases have been underlined throughout each participant's account in this chapter, according to procedures outlined by vanManen (1990), in order to highlight the themes which emerged as the participants described their experiences. maps containing these themes are located following each individual account (see Figures 1-3). An overall map of the general structure of participants' experiences is found at the end of this chapter (see Figures 4-8).

Explication of the Data

Introduction to the Individual Accounts

A definition of empathy, development, impact and personal meaning of empathy is included.

Amber

Introduction. Amber agreed to participate in my study when I asked her if she would be interested in sharing her ideas and experiences in regard to empathy. We met at the University of Victoria. Amber is 44 years old, has experience as a counsellor in the field of addictions and is an instructor and author of counsellor education material. She has been married for 22 years and has two children.

Definition of empathy for Amber. Amber described empathy as working toward understanding with a kind of compassion attached to the experience that arises out of an attitude or feeling of generosity and openness. Amber was adamant that empathy is "not a rational technical attempt to understand" but rather "a process of connecting through thoughts and feelings."

Although Amber did not have the personal experience of empathy in her original family, she recalled an experience where a friend struggled to understand a particular life challenge Amber had encountered. "It was seeing her struggle to understand, her sincerity and willingness to understand . . . the intention that was important."

Amber described empathy as a "willingness to keep thoughts and feelings on hold with an attitude of genuine interest in the other person." There is a desire to receive the other person's story, to appreciate their experience as well as a recognition and acknowledgment of the other's world.

Development of empathy for Amber. The development of empathy for Amber included an evolutionary process, the quality of interaction in empathic rapport and a variety of contextual situations.

Amber described empathy as an ongoing process that includes experience as both counsellor and client. Reflecting on empathic experience led Amber to discover that she needed to "let go of textbook definitions and recognize that you can't know another's experience entirely."

The depth of introspection in regard to beliefs, values and assumptions, both as a counsellor or client, is a sensitive and respectful process, according to Amber. She describes a back and forth clarification process between two people involved in an empathic relationship where reflective questions lead to new

meaning and deeper understanding. This active enquiry into another's world contributes to a building of rapport between two people. Amber stressed that empathy is not limited to relationships with others, it also includes compassion and awareness of 'self' as well.

Amber's learning experiences in regard to empathy included relationships with friends and family, teaching laboratories, in counselling with clients, personal reflection on her beliefs and values, and acceptance of the limitations of connecting on an empathic level.

Amber described a powerful example of empathy where a friend expressed,

> a depth of understanding . . . that really transcended words. I could sit with him and he could really hear what I was saying without even putting words to it. That was a really wonderful feeling--that kind of understanding. And also he knew when to step back and when to be there--his timing was impeccable with it which really made me feel really understood.

Amber was experiencing a great deal of distress in her personal life and her friend had offered to spend time with her, take her out, give her a break from the crisis at hand. She explained that she "could say 'no, that doesn't feel right' and I knew he would come back. That he wasn't going to go away." This experience underscored the importance of sensitivity, safety and trust implicit in an empathic relationship for Amber.

Amber's experiences as a teacher and student were also valuable learning experiences in regard to the development of empathy. As a student, Amber found that learning the behavioral skill components of empathy as described in counsellor training manuals and memorizing the 'definition' of empathy shut down her learning. She went through a period of time where she thought, "Okay,

now I know what that is. I stopped trying to understand what empathy was. So when I think back to that course I didn't have a clue what empathy was."

Amber provided an example from her teaching experience in order to illuminate how "fragile and tenuous this whole empathy thing is" and to highlight its importance in learning environments.

> We were talking about professional self vs private self. The student I was working with--I was having a terrible time connecting with her. She really saw herself as being very, very professional and she had a social work background and she knew all the answers--you know the kind of student--so I was really challenged by her and I was really determined to try to understand her. So I ended up posing a question to her that would help--I thought would help her to go a little deeper with her processing this idea of professional self and personal self--and what I ended up doing was really upsetting her to the point where it really as interfering with her learning. So to me that was a sort of classic example to me of how I really didn't understand her world at all. I hadn't made the time. I didn't understand how important it was to her to have a professional self--and because of the history in her family she was having a difficult time in her personal life. There were a lot of issues around trying to integrate the private self and the professional self. I was holding my ground around what my agenda was for her and eventually I had to accept that I wasn't being the wonderful facilitator that I wanted to think I was and that I had made a mistake and that I had been insensitive and I was teaching about empathy and hadn't modeled it. So that took a lot, and yet, once I accepted that, it opened up a whole depth of understanding of her and we could finally start connecting again--but it was pretty painful for me to let go of some of those things.

Being in the position of the instructor posed some underlying problems for Amber. She was providing her student with information and posing questions that were perceived to be manipulating the student to accept the knowledge of the teacher. This approach limited the student's ability to create and discover personal meaning in the course content.

Amber needed to be in touch with her assumptions and agenda in order to let go of this position of 'knowing'. The personal reflection on this teaching experience contributed to Amber's commitment to empathic understanding in this context and its value in the learning environment, modeling empathy for her students.

In the counselling context Amber described how she developed a personal understanding of the limits of empathy. She stresses the importance of "letting go and accepting weakness in myself. Accepting that I'm wrong, accepting that I'm not always going to be on track with the client." She accepts that there will likely be occasions of inaccuracy, owning her limitations, "knowing that you can't really know the inside soul of another person."

In working with a client with suicidal ideation Amber came face to face with the limits of caring.

> He was in an altered state of reality. Caring wasn't enough. I didn't understand what gave him a sense of purpose in his life--where was it? He hadn't committed suicide--he was choosing life over death. When I think about it I didn't want to connect with this guy. he'd frighten me, I was afraid of him, and yet I remember he had this anxiety attack and I remember getting out the brown paper bag--lesson number one at drug and alcohol--and feeling tremendous compassion--it was scary for me to connect with this person.

Amber believed that she would have to give up being safe in order to connect with her client and to hear what his life was like. It felt threatening, risky, and scary. This fear was not only at a physical level but also at a psychological level. In order to connect she had to be open and receptive. Her client's reality was bizarre and really frightening for Amber and yet she realized that if she didn't enter his world with him she would not have any empathy for him. "So I followed that route and it was really psychologically terrifying for me." Amber

described an experience where she felt that he would "go right inside my soul or psyche and contaminate me."

This example illuminates the notion that where part of being empathic is being open and receptive and genuinely interested in understanding, there is also a need to be holding a "sort of central part of yourself that's separate from the other. There's an appreciation that the client has a private core and there needs to be respect and a connection with your own separate core in order to feel that empathy is safe and healthy."

For Amber, deeply felt and expressed empathy tends to occur more often when people are suffering than when they're in their joy. "Joy and pleasure are more universal experiences and so there isn't the same motivation to try to understand." Alternatively, with despair, for example, there are so many intricacies and so many variances in the meaning and experience--there is a level of challenge and struggle that require the support and compassion of empathy.

In addition to recounting empathic experiences with friends, family, students and clients, Amber described the process of personal meaning making in regard to empathy through reading, writing, keeping a journal and dialogue. As a teacher and counsellor, Amber reiterated the importance of reflecting on the meaning of empathy as "something that has to be ongoing. As I change and grow it has new meaning for me."

Reading is valuable for Amber in that it introduces theoretical perspectives and various aspects of empathy. Writing helps to "get it down and say, this is what I can say at this moment." At times writing about a situation or challenge, "identifying the feelings is really helpful, especially if I don't have anyone to turn to talk things over with." For Amber, journaling works like a

dialogue with herself, allowing her to have some emotional discharge and also a chance to track what was going on in her thinking and feelings. It led her to a deeper level of self-understanding, compassion for herself and an awareness that being understood is nurturing and satisfying. This process led Amber toward a sense of resolve and connectedness with herself.

At other times, writing leads Amber in circles, keeping her within her own level of reference. Self-learning alone "just reaffirms what you already know." What really helps Amber to clarify and expand her understanding and the personal meaning of empathy is to engage in dialogue with others. "Discussion helps to flush it out and bring some richness of understanding and depth." Following this type of discussion, Amber finds that she is more likely to move back to the literature and writing, finding that this process of moving back and forth stimulates her thinking and develops deeper understanding, and provides for fostering the personal meaning that empathy holds for her.

Impact of empathy for Amber. As a result of engaging in an empathic rapport with others Amber has experienced rich consequences. Empathy, according to Amber, facilitates meaningful relationships, fostering closeness and intimacy on an emotional level. Through listening and attending to another's recounting of his or her experience, a person feels validated and valued. Amber explains that, a person would feel acknowledged and respected--that their experiences aren't positive or negative--they just are." And that there is a sense of relief and acceptance and belonging when a person feels the listener's intention and genuine interest in understanding their world. When a person feels the depth of involvement and active participation in the interaction, trust and safety develop.

In Amber's experiences within empathic relationships, as a client, counsellor, teacher or friend, she describes the relaxing of an invisible guard allowing new information to be explored. In this empathic atmosphere there is often an opportunity for quiet contemplation, reflection, introspection and self-evaluation. Deeper levels of self-awareness and self-understanding occur where beliefs, values and assumptions can be safely examined. This type of empathic rapport opens up possibilities and choices where maintenance, revision or discarding of attitudes and behaviors can take place.

Personal meaning of empathy for Amber. The personal meaning that Amber ascribes to empathy arose throughout the interview process. She described a tentative process where there is a collaborative experience that "bit by bit, there is an enquiry where you move to a deeper level of understanding of the issues or situation and you both gain an understanding of what matters to them . . . how they make sense of their world." Through focusing and putting her own beliefs and values to one side she experiences a personal connection. When Amber engages in an empathic relationship she experiences tremendous compassion and a depth of understanding at a rich and meaningful level. She feels tuned in to her self and at the same time responsive and receptive to the other. A part of the experience of empathy is a "spiraling down, a going deeper to a place where core issues surface and there is a fine line between psychological safety and the threat of invasion to a private spiritual core." She describes the importance of sensing this line and the risk of crossing over this boundary.

> and it's knowing when that line's been crossed. There's such a fine line there. Because if you don't get close enough to it there isn't a connection but if you step over it there's a total shut down because it's too frightening. And in thinking about it I should be able to listen to some of the cues that I get.

When asked to clarify, Amber could identify some physiological cues that, at times, are difficult to differentiate.

> Sometimes there is that really uncomfortable feeling anyway and all that really means is that you're really touching on some really core issues, and so I think those are really good clues that you still have to keep going further. So, where the difference lies is in giving up too much of self.

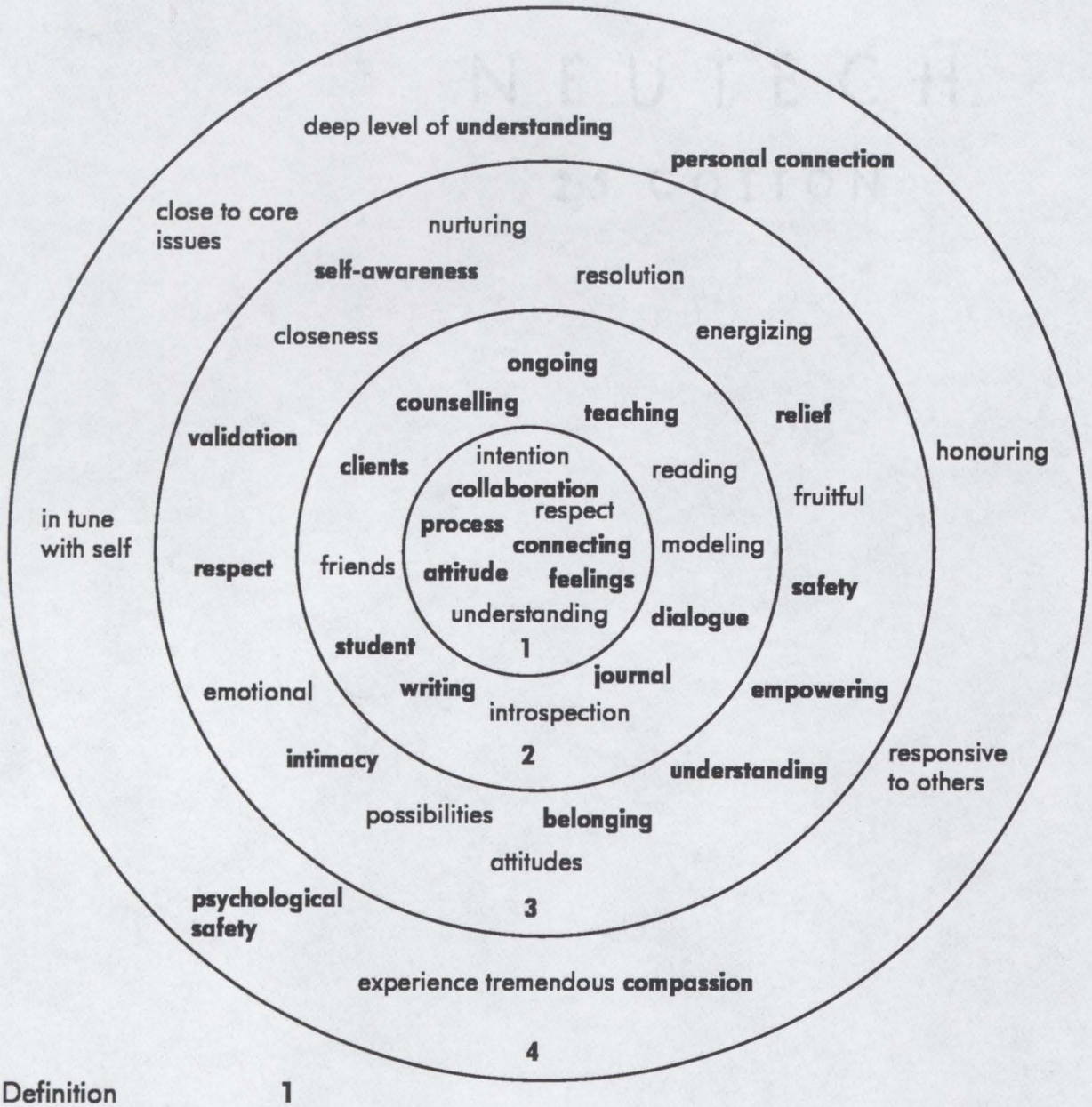
Being close to core issues in a fruitful sense feels "painful" for Amber. The level of discomfort is manageable and useful because it informs her that she is coming close to something really important here, either for herself as the counsellor, or for the client. "I get a yicky feeling in my stomach about this--it's just because I have some things to look at--some things in myself."

Experiencing the risk and threat to her psychological safety resounds in physiological symptoms, such as "heart pounding, adrenaline gets going and there is a panic that precipitates it." These indicators are signals for Amber and she reminds herself to "take baby steps backwards" until she feels safe--"maybe the discomfort is still there but there's safety and that's critical"--that's what she strives toward "rather than shutting down, referring, running out of the room, changing the subject or attacking." This description illustrates the felt meaning of empathy where there is a self respect and awareness as well as an acute sensitivity and respect for the other.

Where Amber describes a considerable degree of energy demanded by an empathic relationship she also describes the experience to be "energizing, stimulating, motivating and uplifting. "With my friends, it's kind of like breathing. It's that important, that nurturing."

Figure 1 provides a visual map of the general structure of the meaning and development of empathy for Amber.

AMBER



Definition	1
Development	2
Impact	3
Meaning	4

Predominant Themes **bold**

Figure 1: Map of general structure of meaning and development of empathy for Amber

Heather

Introduction. Heather agreed to participate in the study when I approached her to share her ideas and experiences in regard to empathy. We met at her home. Her background is in nursing and she has counselling experience in working with grief and loss issues. Heather is presently teaching at the University of Victoria and completing her Ph.D. Heather lives with her husband and their three young children.

Definition of empathy for Heather. Heather describes empathy as a way of being. "It's a whole kind of process--It's not just, 'Am I being empathic?' It's how the other person feels it." For Heather, both persons engaged in an empathic relationship experience an interaction where the one expresses empathic understanding and the other feels understood. There is a mutual feedback. Heather gauges her interaction by the response she receives from her client--or the person who she is working toward understanding.

To further explain what empathy is Heather includes that it is about connecting with the intention and attitude toward understanding the other. "It includes respect, caring, warmth and genuineness." Heather believes empathy is embedded in every aspect of her interaction, whether it be in reflecting the feelings expressed or implicitly stated by the other, reflective questioning, listening attentively or a statement that "reflects my intent" and the person's responses.

Empathy can be expressed in a "kind of quiet support." Heather explained, "You can express your understanding by leaving a person alone and a person can feel really understood when they are respected for their need to be alone for a bit."

For Heather there is an element of intuition, where the two persons in an empathic rapport are in tune with each other and she feels consciously connected. This is directly related to the client feeling understood. Empathy includes honouring and respecting the other and relating to "how it is for them to walk in their shoes - as opposed to how it might be for me to walk in their shoes."

Development of empathy for Heather. Heather recalled instances prior to her formal education where she experienced intuitive empathic rapport with others. In her childhood she was recognized in her family as a caretaker. The one who could identify with others in their difficulties and respond in ways that were supportive and understanding. She was identified as a "natural helper" and was encouraged to enter a human service profession. She chose nursing.

In Heather's training program she was introduced to the 'term' empathy.

> When I first learned about empathy in my formal education was in nursing school. It was described as a skill and it really didn't have any meaning for me. It was like 'read this, this is empathy', or 'here's the definition of empathy--now be empathic'. So there was an expectation that you be empathic. And so that almost got in the way of really understanding it or really looking at what empathy was. It was almost taken for granted.

Heather believes that she misunderstood what empathy was from this learning experience. She likened her interpretation to 'sympathy'. She described further training experiences that continued to identify empathy as a "behavior."

> There was no concern about what effect it had on the client. You were graded on what you said--was it an accurate reflection in terms of 'feeling and content'. No concern if it was appropriate or meaningful for that person.
>
> When I got into learning how to be empathic (in this context) it actually blocked my ability to be empathic because I got so worried about feelings and content and asking myself, 'Now, was that

> empathy? or was that self-disclosure?' or 'don't ask two questions in a row because that couldn't be empathy' and all that stuff around micro-skills that I stopped, I think, being empathic. Because it put this focus on me instead of them. It focused on what I couldn't do and what I wasn't doing.

Heather experienced a debilitating sense of incompetence. Her experience of empathy and intuitive belief that she was a 'good counsellor' was undermined. She felt very confused and struggled to negotiate between what she believed to be a supportive caring and effective attitude of helping and accommodating to the structured "dry, behavioral" interpretation of empathy.

Heather described a contrasting learning experience that assisted her in "reclaiming my way of being. I reclaimed my right to be a person." She describes her "core self" as being the "source of where empathy resonates." Her instructor, in this instance, encouraged Heather to reflect on what empathy meant to her. The instructor turned the examination of what seemed helpful, what worked, what impact her counselling had for her clients, back to her students. She encouraged Heather to trust her self and acknowledge her intuition. Her instructor suggested that:

> You could trust your inner self, your response and the client's response . . . trust in the process of connecting and how it feels and that would be the indicator as to whether you were on track and that you would know that because it would be back and forth and the client would decide.

In regard to the development of empathy for Heather, she recounts how her instructor, in the latter example, modeled empathy in the classroom. In the interaction with her students "she came through as a person" unlike other instructors who would distance themselves intellectually. For Heather, this attitude and presence of being a caring, helping person lent her more validity.

In Heather's capacity as an instructor her understanding and development of empathy have continued to evolve. Teaching and learning about empathy includes reading articles that have been written about empathy:

> Reading good articles is like praxis--going back and forth from theory to practice--it only has meaning if I'm using it in my life. Thinking about it as I'm reading about it helps me put into words more clearly what my experience is--in terms of teaching I definitely include literature.

Keeping a journal about interactions with others and the empathic qualities embedded in those interactions and engaging in discussions about the personal meaning and experience of empathy also helps to broaden and enhance the personal meaning and understanding of empathy. She believes that, like herself, it is valuable to "experience understanding" as well as "being the understander." These opportunities help to "flesh out" the meaning of empathy. "You gain an appreciation for being connected, consciously connected."

> For Heather there are levels of empathy. A person can express understanding through words and identification of feelings at a "cognitive level." At a deeper level, there is a feeling of connectedness when a person is really willing to "just be there" and make room, through silence, for the emotions to surface, be expressed and "simply to be." Being "truly there" exactly where the client is in the moment, without explaining, but by just being present.

From Heather's point of view there are some cultural norms that impinge on empathy as a way of being. She refers to this as cultural repression.

> In a way our culture isn't very conducive to the development of empathy. We learn to make things better, to fix it, the quick fix. We breeze through feelings--help to stop the crying, certainly not to provide room for more crying! So if a person is in pain we learn to make them feel better. Like that's the job of a caring person. To take the pain away.

In Heather's childhood she recalls being valued as the family barometer, supportive and responsive to felt needs of family members, and at the same time, reprimanded for being "over-reactive." She was not valued for her ability to be self-reflective and in touch with her own emotions. If she was thoughtful about an issue or experience, she was criticized as being "too sensitive." She was able and expected to look after herself, consequently she didn't learn how to seek and openly accept support from others.

When Heather's brother died the family turned to her for support. A turning point for Heather arose when she began to recognize that she had an intuitive ability to be helpful and supportive for others, but didn't know how to go about seeking or accepting support for herself. When asked, "how are you doing?' Heather would flip the conversation in order to put the focus on the other. A compassionate friend encouraged her to express her experience of her deeply felt loss of her brother and Heather experienced the powerful support and connectedness of empathy for herself.

In another context, Heather describes empathy as a "requirement of a rich, meaningful friendship." Mutually felt respect and appreciation for each other's experience is not dependent on the amount of time spent together or even a match in beliefs and values, but rather a felt sense of being honored and acknowledged. Where empathy is mutually expressed and experienced there is a deeper level of connection.

While Heather does not believe that it is necessary to have encountered the same situations in order to experience empathy, she suggested that being able to relate to the emotional aspect of an issue is helpful. For example the loss of her

brother has enriched her understanding of grief and yet she qualifies that each experience is unique and the meaning is different.

> It's not the content, it's the depth of emotion, that feeling of death, where there's nothing, I don't have any control over it. It's that tremendous depth of emotion--that's what it is--it's not the content. It doesn't matter if my brother died or whether I was an alcoholic--it's that we've both experienced the depth of emotion and vulnerability.

Self-awareness is a significantly important aspect for counsellors according to Heather. Self-knowledge, being aware of beliefs and values, compassion and appreciation for self, self-nurturing, "being empathic with self would contribute to the development and expression of empathy." Experiencing the healing that can take place in this kind of relationship is a valuable learning opportunity.

Impact of empathy for Heather. As the receiver of empathic intent Heather feels rejuvenated. When there is support, understanding and connection there is an experience of validation.

> It relieves the pressure. You know how things build up and then how you feel when you have a chance to talk about it and be understood and validated and cared for and nurtured. It gives me the energy to go back and face the onslaught again. Helps me to put things in perspective. It's not just the understanding, again it's that being validated by another person--I'm not alone.

The validations and lack of isolation that results from an empathic exchange fosters a sense of self confidence for Heather. She develops a willingness to explore further, go deeper into the feeling and a sense of safety in being vulnerable. She comes to value her experience, accept herself and finds the experience to be empowering. Being appreciated and visible she describes as "that wonderful feeling of connectedness."

The physiological cues that arise for Heather in an empathic exchange are a "quiet and kind of raw feeling--very peaceful." There is an openness and intimacy that is reflected in the tone of the interaction as well as in the words.

> Quite vulnerable and receptive. It's scarier for me when someone is being empathic with me. I'm risking more--even though we're both opening up--they're opening up with the intent to help me understand myself or to be with me more particularly around my pain or whatever, whatever is going on for me.

For Heather, these types of experiences have underlined the importance of recognizing the importance of respect for the other's felt sense of psychological safety and the necessity of pacing with the client.

When she is listening to someone else's story she senses that her story is with her but in the "background." If she senses that her experience is encroaching on theirs she 'shifts her body around a little bit' in order to distance herself from her own emotions and remain present with them in their experiencing. This way she can remain clear in what they are experiencing, ensuring that the client is the focus of the interaction.

In regard to empathy on joyful occasions Heather perceives the intensity and depth to be less potent. The intensity of the need is less than in circumstances of pain or sorrow. "People who are excited about something don't want to sit down and explore it, they just want to be in it!"

The energy output in an empathic relationship is extremely draining, demanding, and challenging for Heather. She gets tired, at times exhausted and she strives to find a balance in her life between "always being out there in response to feelings" and taking care of herself by taking at least two weeks off between semesters.

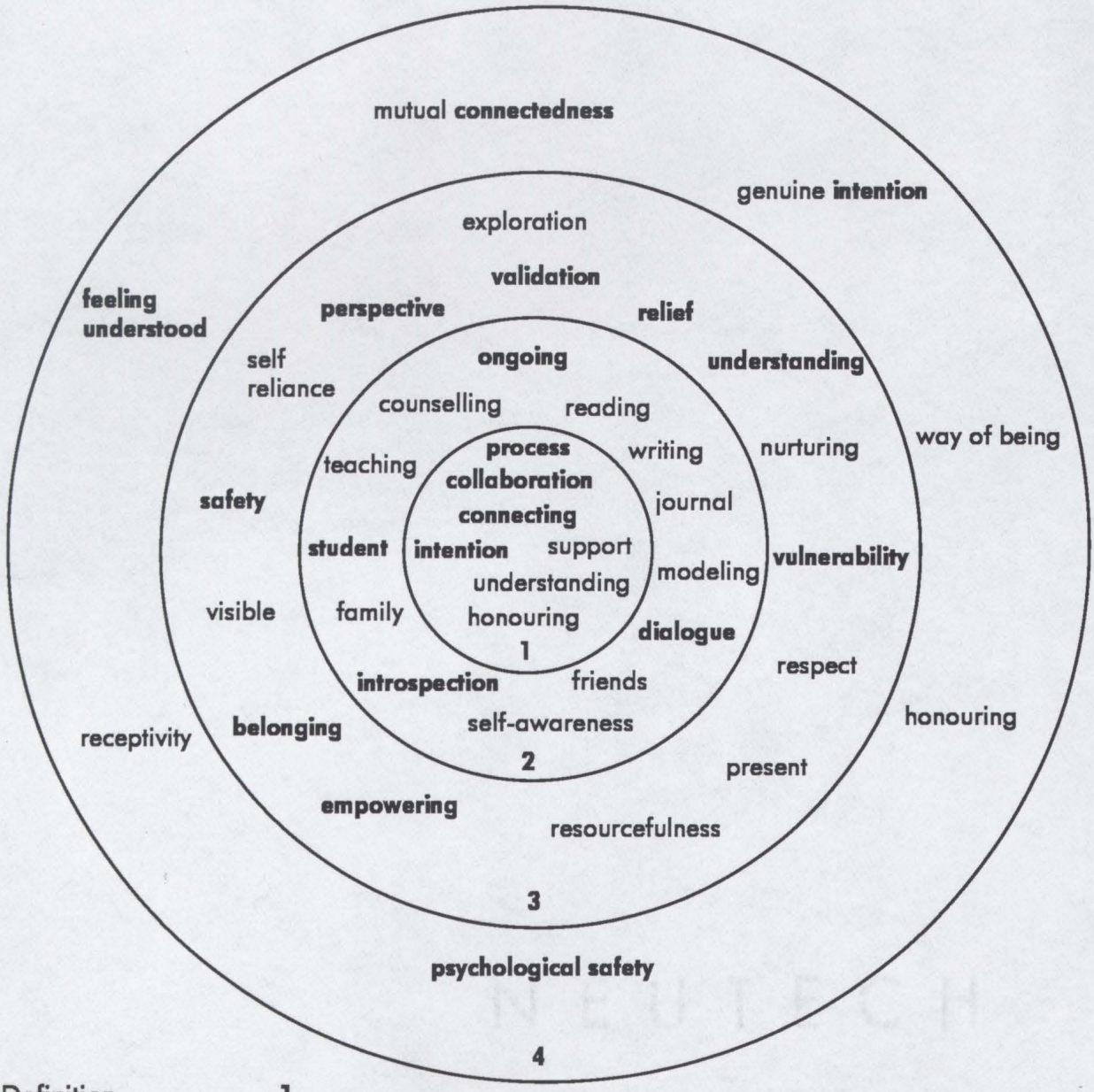
Personal meaning of empathy for Heather. The personal meaning of empathy was like a colorful thread interwoven through the tapestry of Heather's experience of empathy. As client or counsellor, friend or family member, student or teacher, empathy means being mutually connected. Empathy is a powerful aspect embedded in meaningful interactions. It is not an isolated behavior imposed on another, but rather a genuine intention to understand another's experience. Fully understanding, accurate recognition of the whole experience of the other is secondary, in Heather's opinion, to the others' feeling understood. A person needs to be receptive to the experience of empathy in order for an empathic experience to occur. Both parties need to be collaborating through mutual feedback in order to foster an atmosphere of genuine conscious connection.

Empathy means being in touch with her core self and opening up to receive the depth of experiencing in another. This includes sensitivity toward the person's thoughts and feelings as well as their beliefs and values as they play a role in their story. Honouring a person's experience, being respectful and in tune with their need in the moment. Being present with the client's immediate experiencing, earnestly striving toward understanding, acknowledging and validating as the connection extends to deeper levels of self-exploration for the client and intunement for the counsellor. Empathy means being responsible for providing the safety for a client's self-expression and self-exploration. Being aware that her own beliefs and values, emotional experiences and personal story do not interfere with the process.

> Being able to walk with a person, being empathic so that they can be more in touch with their experience. There are times when, if I get too involved, I can't walk with them. I have to step back a bit so that they have a choice again. Empathy is engaging with another person in a way where they feel understood.

Figure 2 provides a visual map of the general structure of the meaning and development of empathy for Heather.

HEATHER



Definition	1
Development	2
Impact	3
Meaning	4

Predominant Themes **bold**

Figure 2: Map of general structure of meaning and development of empathy for Heather

Sandi

Introduction. I contacted Sandi following a recommendation by a colleague that she might be interested in participating in the study. We agreed to meet in my office downtown. Sandi's background is in nursing and after completing her Masters in Counselling has been in private practice as well as working with children and families that have been affected by sexual abuse.

Definition of empathy for Sandi. Sandi describes empathy as being able to share an experience through the memory and emotions of that experience. It is sharing a time and a place and an experience with someone and being really in tune with what that was like for them. Sandi is clear that it is not intellectual, it is emotional, occurring at a feeling level, feeling connected. With empathy, "there is nothing demanded, no right or wrong. There is no judgmental attitude placed on the person, the situation, or the experience." She explains that:

> It's where a client tells you of something that has happened or something they were struggling with and you haven't shared the actual experience with them. You weren't there but you are sharing it now with them through their feelings and their memories and thoughts about that experience.

Development of empathy for Sandi. In Sandi's formal training, particularly in the nursing program, she was taught to maintain a perfectionistic stance where problem solving, taking charge and having all the answers was a great asset. In counselling she has discovered that "it is much more important to share experiences with people than it is to teach." These two contrasting approaches to 'helping' have contributed to a personal struggle for Sandi in her professional practice. The behavioral definitions of empathy delivered in the counselling program coupled with skill building in techniques dove-tailed with her nursing background. However, in practice, Sandi finds herself reverting to "instinctual

connectedness." Empathy was taught as a skill that could be defined and isolated as a separate component of a counselling interaction and what Sandi has discovered for herself, over time, is that empathy is embedded in the sharing of a recollected experience--a "two way receiving/responding process."

Sandi's nursing training included stringent focus on technique, which she found very stressful. There was little time for personal care or connecting with patients. Performance was measured according to accurate completion of data gathering information forms and precise reporting procedures. It's very discrete and measurable." She recalls that where completing these tasks was "satisfying" there was a much bigger part of her "that wanted to be involved in what people were experiencing." This qualitative difference in the meaning of "helping and care" continued to pose a challenge for her throughout her nursing and counselling careers.

When Sandi encountered one patient admitted to the medical/surgical floor she took an unusually brief history and proceeded to take care of her in a very basic way. The young woman talked a little about herself but basically there was minimal verbal exchange. With an intuitive response Sandi comforted her, nurtured her, rubbed her, propped her with pillows. Later that night, after Sandi left work, the young woman died.

As Sandi reflected on this experience she spoke of knowing in an instinctual way what the young woman had needed and the patient was able to convey her needs through subtle non-verbal signals that emanated from her.

> It was a two way, back and forth, communication and response. I think it was the best thing I could have done with her was to just have shared that very sad time and place with her. Because those were the last few hours of her life. And, someone took care of her without expecting anything.

At the completion of her nursing training an instructor urged Sandi to "never, never, lose the sensitivity." In reflecting on this comment Sandi realizes that her intuitive sensitivity has enabled her to work closely and effectively with her clients.

In a different context, when Sandi was working with youth at a residential treatment center for adolescents, she identified a fairly small, compact exchange with a young boy. She could see that he was tremendously agitated and uncooperative, listing complaints about the staff and residents. Sandi responded by saying: "You're really pissed off aren't you? You're really fed up with this place!" The child's face lit up and he gravitated toward Sandi and off they went to complete the day's routine.

This incident of empathic rapport was brief, and yet, imbedded within it were many significant factors that Sandi identifies with empathy. She was able to meet this boy at an emotional level, use the slang that fit within his language, identify at a peer level, and 'conspiratorially' accept and validate his reality in the moment. She spontaneously responded to his need to be acknowledged and the result was instant relief--she was with him, not judging, not guiding him. This incident contributed to Sandi's faith in empathy as a valuable and powerful component in helping relationships.

In Sandi's experience, there are factors that inhibit the development of close meaningful relationships. "Socially what happens in relationships is very superficial and opportunistic. For me, that's never been very satisfying--I'd rather read a good book." Sandi's relationships that are rooted in an empathic attitude and rapport are primarily limited to family members. In this context there is willingness to be "very wide open" where the people involved are "extremely

vulnerable" and there needs to be a mutual commitment to maintain mutual respect and safety. Sandi describes these connections with people to be "a very special and privileged kind of relationship."

The quality of the process embedded in an empathic experience includes sensitivity, respect and provision for psychological safety. Sandi often refers to empathy as the process of being with, or sharing in the private world of the other with tenderness, caring, and compassion. Empathy is a gentle process of moving back and forth in an exchange of information that contributes to clarification, connection and understanding that frequently transcends words.

Impact of empathy for Sandi. Sandi describes the impact of empathy in relationships to include and increase in the trust level between the persons involved. When people are respected and accepted at their own level for who they are and for whatever they have to offer they feel safe.

> They begin to see themselves in different ways. They begin to feel okay and begin to feel hopeful. Their self perception shifts toward a capable attitude where change is possible. They begin to see themselves as able to manage whatever is going on--or go back to or do hopeful sorts of things. Through sharing some of their experiences that contributed to a helpless, overwhelmed place and then movement to make healthier choices.

Sandi attributes some of this process as a consequence of breaking the isolation, sharing their recollected experiences with someone who cares and is not in a hurry. Empathic rapport can be very nurturing and supportive and encouraging and people move toward a sense of self-reliance and competency.

The level of intimacy involved in an empathic relationship can feel risky, scary and overwhelming and Sandi notes that some people might begin to feel defended, vulnerable. It's almost like being naked." She is very careful not to overwhelm them and she takes small steps backward to a safer, less intimate

interaction until the client indicates that they are prepared to move on with the sensitive material.

According to Sandi, when a client has been able to express themselves and experience being heard, valued and visible, there is often a dissipation of the intensity of the emotion. There is a sense of relief and a reduced urgency to keep repeating themselves emotionally, verbally or behaviorally and not the need to carry the experience internally where it escalates and becomes distorted. Movement toward making healthy choices, recognizing the self as a valuable significant person who has the ability to develop is an empowering experience.

Self-reliance and resourcefulness on the part of the client are illustrated in self-reported success, self-initiated plans to take responsible action in their lives, and a shift in their attitude toward competency. "They begin to manage their lives more effectively, at a higher level." Sandi attributes some of these attitudinal shifts and changes to experiencing support from someone who believes in their ability and who has faith in them.

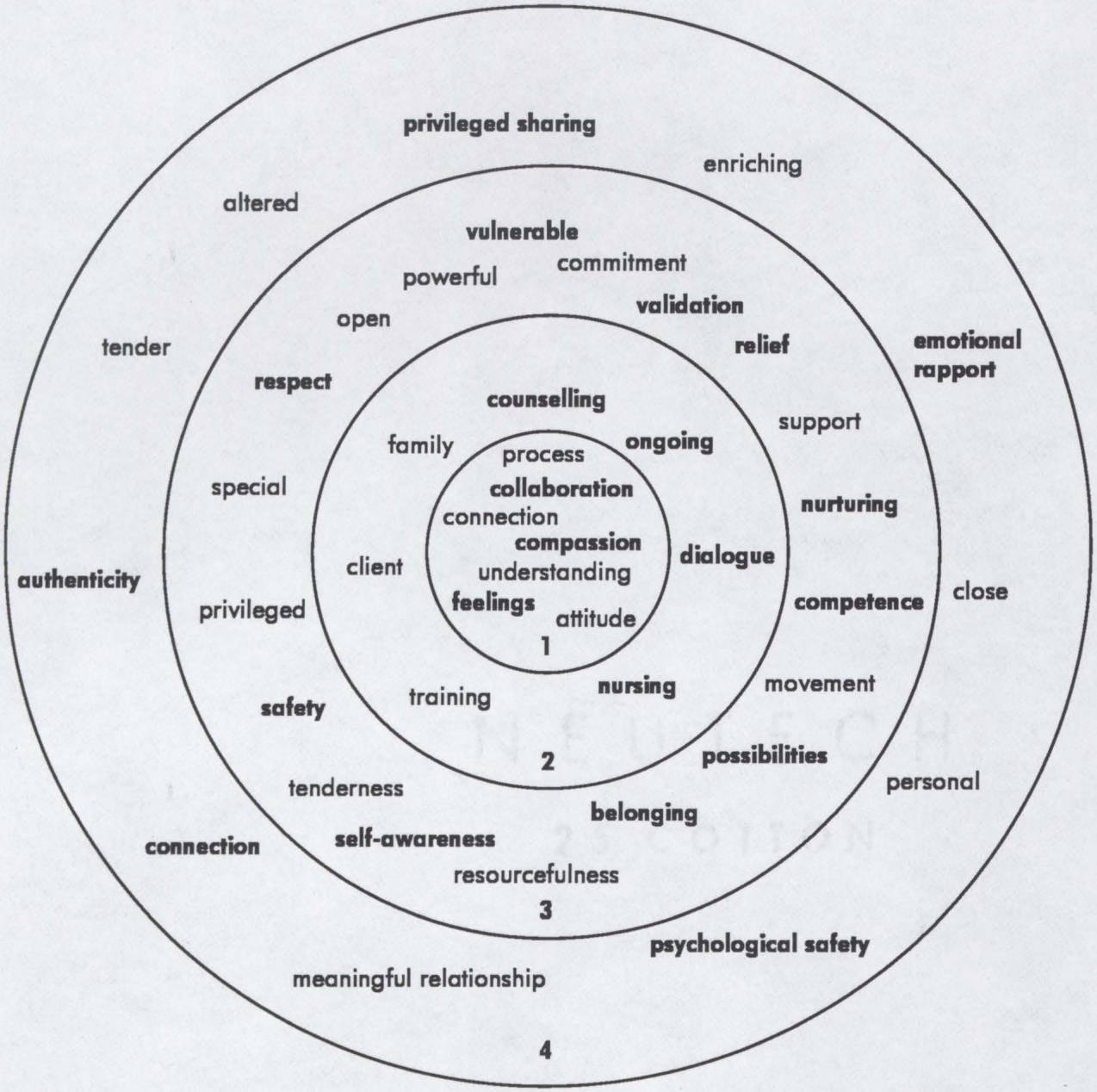
Empathic rapport has had an impact on Sandi as the counsellor. She describes a sense of reward and connection that she values, that she calls a "very privileged relationship." She honors the client in their process and at the same time feels honored that they have engaged with her and trusted her with their private world.

Personal meaning of empathy for Sandi. The meaning Sandi ascribes to empathy includes the privileged sharing of another's experience through their thoughts, feeling and experiences. Sandi feels both enriched and touched by the experience. Even in the recollection of empathic interactions Sandi is moved to an emotional level and feels altered by the experience. There is an element of awe

and tenderness in the recounting of her experiences where the depth of connection went beyond words. The authenticity between herself and another is powerful and she expresses a sincere appreciation for the value and impact on helping relationships. Close, deep and meaningful personal relationships are rich with empathic intention for Sandi. For Sandi, empathy is "the very bottom line."

Figure 3 provides a visual map of the general structure of the meaning and development of empathy for Sandi.

SANDI



Definition	**1**
Development	**2**
Impact	**3**
Meaning	**4**

Predominant Themes **bold**

Figure 3: Map of general structure of meaning and development of empathy for Sandi

The General Structure of Experiences of the Meaning and Development of Empathy for Experienced Counsellors

The following section will examine the participants' experiences, as a group, to each of the four main questions of the study.

1. Definition of Empathy for Participants

Where each participant's explanation of empathy varied, one predominant theme throughout each person's description was connecting with another person on an emotional level. Empathic rapport was consistently described as an encompassing attitude of openness and receptivity in an effort to understand another's experience and to feel with the other in their recollection and recounting of life circumstances. Heather included the significance of the client's feeling understood as a more important feature in an empathic interaction than accurately knowing. Amber added that, where connecting and understanding are essential, respect for the private sacred core of each person is critical.

Each of the participants stressed that a requirement of the counsellor is to be self-aware of their own beliefs and values so that they can consciously put their own thoughts, feelings and assumptions aside. This aspect of empathy will allow the counsellor to be in tune with the client's experience and reduce the risk of influencing the process of connecting and understanding.

Genuine, authentic interest in the client's experience was a predominant theme through all the participants' definitions of empathy. Intentionality, the commitment to focus and relate to the client's experience, was of particular importance to Heather. Recognition and appreciation of the client's world are primary features of empathy for all participants. Entering, receiving and sharing in recollected experiences involved a tentative, non-judgmental and sensitive

approach on the part of the counsellor. These attributes of empathic rapport contribute to the development of trust and safety in the relationship.

All the participants identified a back-and-forth process of clarification and identification of emotions and experiences for the client. Heather included that she is guided by the client's response. That empathy can only be present if the client is feeling understood and the process cannot be an empathic exchange if both parties to the interaction are not wholly involved in a mutual feedback.

The participants all described an element of intuition, or a natural ability to sense another person's experience. Each identified circumstances where the experience of empathy transcended words. Both Amber and Heather experienced empathy in situations where they were respected for their need for solitude. Sandi agreed that empathy can be responding to a person's desire to be alone in their experience. A silent moment where both persons are present and in tune with each other were cited as powerful examples of empathy.

2. Development of Empathy for Participants

Three basic areas in the development of empathy for all the participants were the training experience, various life contexts and the quality of the process of empathic rapport.

Each of the participants were clear that, for them, empathy is not a technique or skill that can be isolated. Where all of the participants were taught about empathy in their training programs, Amber and Heather emphatically underscored the negative consequences of learning about empathy as a skill. Being provided with brief behavioral descriptions of empathy and being graded and evaluated on their performance in counselling interactions based on these criteria undermined their ability to be empathic with their clients. Sandi found

that her training experience in regard to empathy helped her to articulate a previously elusive attribute she identified as sensitivity. Naming empathy and being provided with a basic explanation of empathy as the ability to understand another's experience contributed to the validation of her way of being with people.

Each of the participants agreed that the development of the experience and meaning of empathy is an ongoing process that evolved over time. Experience as both counsellor and client were invaluable for both Heather and Amber. They believe that the client experience in the learning process provides an opportunity to experience the process of empathy at a personal level and is an integral part of integrating the meaning of empathy into their counselling relationships. Sandi agreed that direct contact with clients solidified her understanding of empathy at a personal level.

Heather and Amber identified modeling by instructors to be a significant factor in the development of empathy for them. When instructors were able to demonstrate empathy in the learning environment in their interactions with students, and expressed their genuine interest in connecting with their students, they illustrated the attitude implicit in an empathic relationship. Heather, in particular, described the experience as reintegrating a belief in her natural ability to connect with people at an empathic level. In their teaching experiences, Heather and Amber express and learn about empathy in increasingly meaningful ways. Sandi's nursing training, on the other hand, continues to conflict with her confidence in empathy as a valuable aspect of her counselling interactions. The incongruence between stringent training in technique and service delivery rivals her belief in connecting with clients on a level of compassion and emotion.

The various life contexts that were presented by all the participants were with friends and family. Both Heather and Amber included the aspect of empathy with self as an additional contributor to their development of empathy.

Each of the participants agreed that empathy is a necessary component of rich, deep, meaningful personal relationships. That in the experience of mutual respect, genuine interest, and with the willingness to be open, receptive and vulnerable, relationships flourish. Sandi acknowledged that she has a limited number of relationships that possess these qualities. She believes that some of the reasons for this may be attributed to the lack of mutual commitment to this vulnerable and sensitive way of being in relationships. The quick fix that society embraces, the minimal credence that emotions are attributed, and the criticism and reproach for being sensitive impinge on the recognition of empathy as a valuable way of being.

Another predominant theme was that the experience of discussing the personal meaning of empathy with instructors, colleagues or students contributed tremendously to their understanding of empathy. Amber and Heather noted reading and writing about empathy enhanced their repertoire in regard to empathy and that keeping a personal journal was a fruitful tool in reflecting on their experience of empathy. The process of writing, reading and dialogue positively impacted the development and meaning of empathy.

The quality of the process for the participants included the awareness that one person can never truly know another's experience, implying a genuine respect for the uniqueness of each individual. Each agreed that, where it is helpful to have had similar experiences as the client, what is more important is recognizing and resonating with the similarly felt emotions embedded in the

experience. All concurred that empathy is an active enquiry into another's lived experience involving a sensitive regard for psychological safety in the counselling interaction. Physiological clues that signal a potential infringement on client or counsellor boundaries that might threaten the perceived safety in an empathic relationship varied for each of the participants.

Amber experiences an increase in her heart rate, hightened adrenaline and a feeling of panic when her personal boundaries are disrespected. In response to cues that are somewhat less intense, Amber reminds herself to take small backwards steps so that safety is ensured at the same time that movement forward and connection is maintained. Marginal discomfort may simply indicate that core issues are being addressed and that staying in the moment may be a fruitful choice for further exploration.

When Heather notices that her emotions have moved toward the foreground in an interaction with a client she moves back a bit by shifting her body around slightly in order to refocus on the client's experience. This shift ensures that the client guides the process and has room to make choices.

For Sandi, there is an anxious feeling in her stomach that brings her awareness to potential risk of a boundary invasion. These could be times when she might draw the client's attention to an art therapy activity where there is a slight distancing effect that enhances the safety of the relationship.

3. Impact of Empathy for Participants

A predominant theme that arose from each of the participants were the rich consequences that arise from empathic relationships. There is an increased level of intimacy and vulnerability for both parties involved. These occasions include an active participation and opportunities for quiet contemplation. All the

participants notice movement toward fruitful choices, and positive change in their clients.

Both Heather and Amber noted an openness to possibilities where there is maintenance, revision or discarding of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions. With empathy there is a feeling of connectedness with self and other. This experience results in a diminished sense of isolation and the development of a sense of belonging, validity, and value. Sandi believes that clients experience themselves as more capable and competent. There is a more hopeful attitude. All agree that once the client has experienced the nurturing supportive atmosphere implicit within the empathic intent forward movement begins to take place with more energy, self-reliance and self-confidence.

As counsellors, each of the participants report the experience of empathy as rejuvenating, rewarding and exhilarating. At the same time it is demanding, draining and challenging. Contacting and relating with another person in their adversity or sorrow is often a painful experience that touches each of them deeply. Heather finds that particularly in her role as a teacher she is in contact with a large number of students and that she needs to take a break for at least two weeks between semesters to replenish her energy.

4. Personal Meaning of Empathy for Participants

The personal meaning of empathy was expressed throughout each of the interviews with the participants. All agreed that empathy was a powerful and valuable aspect of their way of being. Empathy means connecting with another in a sensitive, tentative way through the emotions, thoughts and experiences of the other. Empathy for each of them means entering into a collaborative relationship with the intention and commitment toward understanding. There

was agreement amongst all three participants that empathy is an intimate, personal connection where there is an intuitive response to the felt meaning expressed by the other. Further, there is a recognition, appreciation and respect for the uniqueness of each person's experience and an honoring of that experiencing. Heather and Amber add that empathy means being self-aware and open to receiving another person's reality.

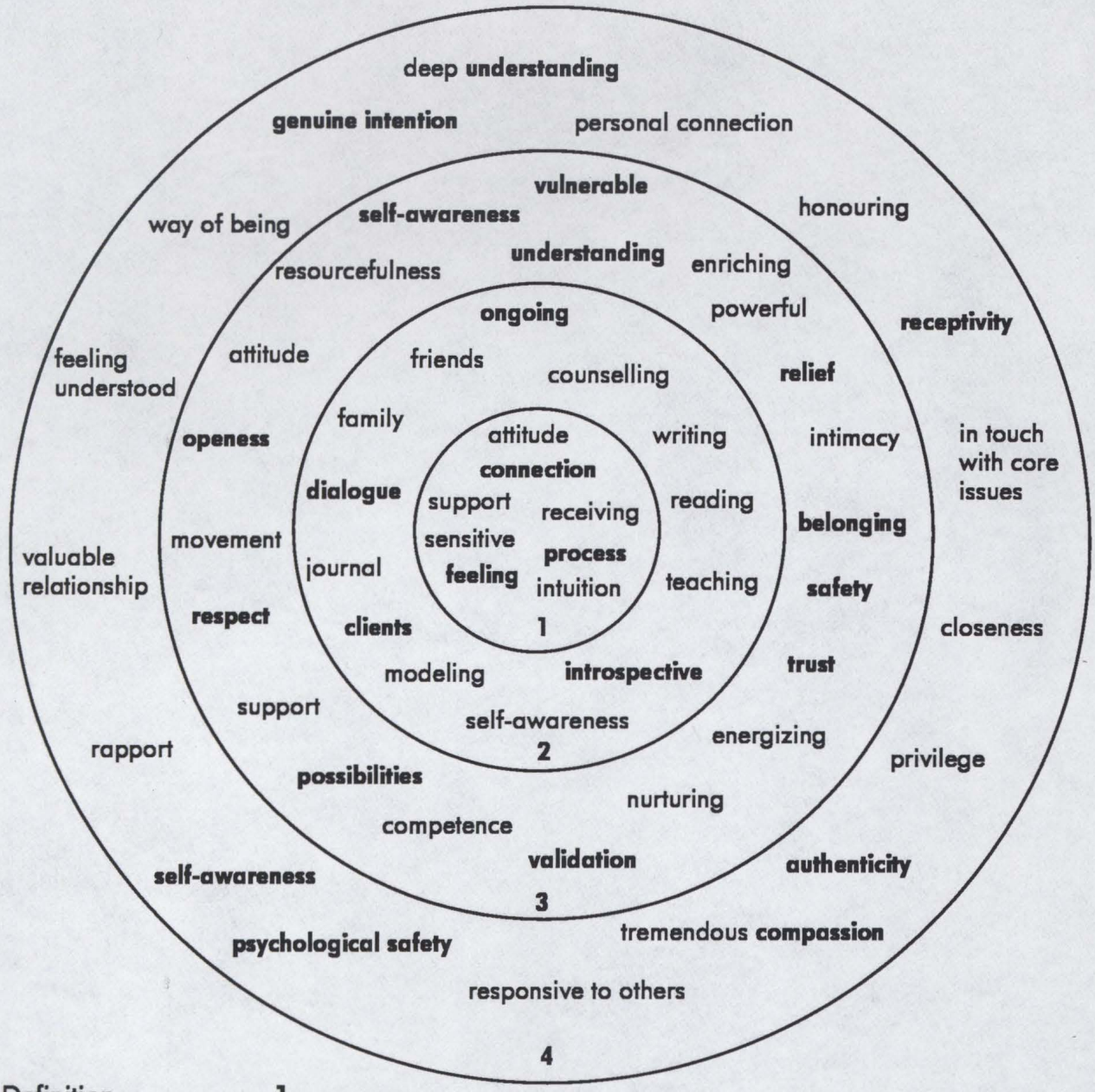
Empathy means being engaged and focused with the client where a depth of understanding unfolds, often in a way that transcends words. Heather believes empathy must include feeling understood on the part of the client. Empathy means preserving often tenuous psychological safety by responding to clues from both client and counsellor.

Each of the participants believe that empathy means participating in an atmosphere where exploration, self-discovery and empowerment occur. It is here, engaged in an empathic rapport, that tremendous compassion resides.

Figure 4 provides a visual map of the general structure of the meaning and development of empathy for the three participants.

Figures 5 through 8 illustrate the definition, development, impact and meaning of empathy for the participants.

OVERALL THEMES



Definition	1
Development	2
Impact	3
Meaning	4

Predominant Themes **bold**

Figure 4: Map of general structure of meaning and development of empathy for participants

DEFINITION OF EMPATHY

connection	♀ ♀ ♀
compassion	♀ ♀
respect	♀
collaboration	♀ ♀ ♀
attitude	♀ ♀
understanding	♀ ♀ ♀
process	♀ ♀ ♀
intention	♀ ♀
support	♀ ♀
honouring	♀
intuition	♀

Figure 5: Definition of empathy for participants

DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY

student	♀ ♀
teacher	♀ ♀
counsellor	♀ ♀ ♀
client	♀ ♀
friends	♀ ♀
ongoing	♀ ♀ ♀
training	♀
modelling	♀ ♀
journal	♀ ♀
introspection	♀ ♀
self-awareness	♀
reading	♀ ♀
writing	♀ ♀
dialogue	♀ ♀ ♀

Figure 6: Development of empathy for participants

IMPACT OF EMPATHY

emotional	♀		
vulnerable	♀	♀	♀
powerful	♀		
relief	♀	♀	♀
validation	♀	♀	♀
intimacy	♀		
understanding	♀	♀	♀
belonging	♀	♀	♀
psychological self	♀	♀	♀
trust	♀	♀	♀
energizing	♀		
nurturing	♀	♀	
closeness	♀	♀	♀
perspective	♀	♀	♀
commitment	♀		
respect	♀	♀	♀
openness	♀	♀	♀
support	♀	♀	♀
competence	♀	♀	♀
movement	♀		
possibilities	♀	♀	♀
attitude	♀	♀	♀
resourceful	♀	♀	♀
self-awareness	♀	♀	♀
personal connection	♀	♀	♀
enriching	♀		
empowering	♀	♀	

Figure 7: Impact of empathy for participants

MEANING OF EMPATHY

deeper understanding	♀	♀	♀
personal connection	♀	♀	♀
honouring	♀		
enriching	♀		
responsive to others	♀	♀	♀
meaningful relationships	♀		
tremendous compassion	♀	♀	♀
in tune with self	♀		
psychological safety	♀	♀	♀
authenticity	♀	♀	♀
self-awareness	♀	♀	♀
privelleged sharing	♀		
close to core issues	♀	♀	
mutual connectedness	♀	♀	♀
genuine intention	♀	♀	
way of being	♀		
feeling understood	♀	♀	
receptivity	♀	♀	
valuable relationship	♀	♀	♀
emotional rapport	♀	♀	♀

Figure 8: Meaning of empathy for participants

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses how the findings are related to the assumptions and expectations stated in Chapter 3. It discusses the relationship of this research to previous research, the implications for counsellors, the implications for counsellor education, and implications for future research.

Generalizations

The participants who were involved in this study were three women who have completed their Masters degrees in counselling. Two of the women are currently instructors in interpersonal relationship courses, who by their own definition, include a counselling attitude as part of their teaching role. The third is counselling full time in a community agency and is engaged in ongoing training in family therapy. Their counselling experiences range from three to ten years.

Given that the experiences, beliefs, attitudes and insights represented in this study are a reflection of these particular three women, readers should not assume that all experienced counsellors have similar ideas or experiences in regard to the meaning and development of empathy.

Findings Related to Assumptions and Expectations

Certain assumptions and expectations were stated in Chapter 3. The expectations drawn from my assumption that empathy is a key factor in effective counselling interactions was identified as crucial by the participants. All described empathy as a primary contributor to positive change for clients. Empathy, according to the participants, fosters self-reliance, empowers the client to access their own resourcefulness, diminishes isolation and facilitates the

expression of emotion which contributes to renewed energy and the development of new perspectives.

The second assumption in Chapter 3 states that empathy is not integrated into the counsellor's way of being in counselling situations merely by memorizing formula responses. Two of the participants stated that reducing empathy to behavioral definitions and an isolated skill significantly interfered with their ability to express and experience empathy in helping relationships. The third participant noted that where an explanation of empathy in her training experience validated her own natural ability to respond to clients with sensitivity, she recognizes that it had a limited impact on understanding and developing empathy.

The third assumption stated that reflection on the meaning of empathy as it exists in the counsellor's experience--emotionally and cognitively--facilitates the discovery of personal meaning. All the participants concurred that discussing their experiences of empathy in their personal and professional interactions was extremely valuable in their learning and development of empathy. Two of the participants found that giving and receiving feedback in regard to expressed empathy in counselling interactions as both counsellor and client greatly contributed to their understanding and experience of empathy. Keeping a journal for self reflection was also an integral aspect in the meaning making process, enhancing self awareness in their beliefs and values in regard to helping and integrating empathy into their way of being.

Relationship of Results to Previous Research

The focus of this study differed in a number of important ways from the research described in the review of the literature. The present study examined

the qualitative experience and development of empathy for counsellors. In contrast some of the studies reviewed in the second chapter examined issues such as measuring the behavioral indicators of empathy (Egan, 1986; Ivey, 1983). Rogers' (1980) comment that focus on empathy as a skill can have "appalling consequences" was evident in the experiences of two of the participants, who reported that behavioral descriptions of empathy in their skill-based training "shut down their learning." Empathy presented in this fashion "didn't have any meaning" for them and removed the focus away from the client and onto the formula response. Marshall, Charping, and Bell's (1979) findings indicated that skill-based training fails to integrate skills and knowledge with the beliefs and values of the learner, frequently resulting in poor retention of the skills and inadequate transfer of the skills to the counselling setting was confirmed in the description of the participants' experience. The counsellors from the present study stopped being empathic, they felt removed from their client's experience, and they felt incompetent as a result of evaluations of performance based on behaviors alone.

Hill's (1985) study applied to the discovery of personal meaning with a focus on the transfer of empathic attitudes in a parent education program. Guerney's Empathic Behavior Scale (1977) and the Sensitivity to Children Scale (Hill, Raley, & Snyder, 1982) were used to measure the transfer of skills to home settings and retention over six weeks. Where quantitative measurement scales indicated that integrating the learners' skill training with personal experience was effective, the meaning and development of empathy for the learner was not addressed. In light of these differences, any conclusions drawn about the

relationship between the present study and past ones must be tentative and, for the most part, speculative.

Many of the consequences of empathy described by Rogers (1980) were also identified by the participants in the present study. These include: the recipient feeling valued, cared for, accepted, worthwhile and valuable, less alienated, greater self-understanding, and openness to new possibilities.

Gladstein and associates (1987) suggested that the development of empathy occurs over time and that modeling and personal experience in regard to empathy impact the learner's ability to express empathy. Two of the participants in the present study identified instructors that positively impacted their understanding and development of empathy. The same two counsellors from the study included experiences with being a client as well as learning through teaching and discussion with students has enhanced the personal meaning of empathy. All three participants experience the development of empathy as an ongoing process. Clinical experience and personal reflection continue to enrich their understanding and integration of empathy as a way of being with people in the counselling context.

The development of personal meaning in regard to empathy as evidenced by the reported experience of the participants in this study support the hypothesis that provided the foundation for Kolb's experiential learning model. Personal growth and learning occurred with the experiential learning process where the students were active participants. Both Heather and Amber described a two-fold learning process that impacted the development of empathy for them in both the learner and the teacher roles.

deRosenroll's (1988) paper in regard to Peer Counselling training suggested that experiential training is an effective process that augments the student's natural helping ability. In this training context learners are provided with an opportunity to examine the relationship between the learned skills and their own day-to-day interactions and experiences. This aspect of learning and development of empathy parallels the experience of all three participants in the present study. Each described empathy as an integral part of who they are and how they interact with others. Descriptors, such as intuitive, natural, sensitivity and instinctual were offered as a way of explaining their inherent sense of empathy and their natural ability to connect with others. Reading, writing, reflecting, journal writing and discussion were identified as significant factors contributing to the development of empathy. This learning process includes the four stages of Hunt's (1987) model: Direct/Remembered Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. The present study goes further to illuminate the experience of empathy for the participants.

The present study identified social and cultural factors that impacted the development and experience of empathy for the participants. Heather believes that our culture is not very conducive to the development of empathy. Often she perceives an urgency to minimize unpleasant feelings and to move too quickly toward problem solving. Sandi speaks to the unwillingness of some people in social relationships to engage in the intimacy and openness that are essential in deep, meaningful friendships. These comments add to Gladstein et al. (1987) in their study where modeling, behavioral expectations, power and punishment,

and experience with expressing emotion and feeling supported and acknowledged emotionally are identified as influencing factors.

Intentionality on the part of the counsellor toward understanding the client was a predominant theme in the present study. This feature of empathy is noted in studies and literature from Barrett-Leonard (1962), Combs (1962) and Rogers (1980). They agree that qualitatively empathy is an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person. The participants in the present study extended this aspect of empathy by including the limitation that a person can never truly know another's experience. Further boundaries in regard to empathic rapport were identified in the present study.

Where all the participants in the present study described emotional vulnerability, openness and a receptive attitude they each provided examples where sensitivity toward client and counsellor's personal boundaries was critical in maintaining a psychologically safe therapeutic environment. Physiological clues were identified as indicators that this aspect of safety may be at risk. These findings offer further understanding of the meaning and experience of empathy for counsellors.

Self-awareness on the part of the counsellor was a significant theme for the participants in the present study. Beliefs, values and personal experiences need to be kept on hold in order to be present for the client. Combs (1985) stressed the importance of this practice in his work saying that counsellors need to develop sensitivity, a phenomenological approach to understanding human beings, clarification of personal and professional goals and purposes and have high levels of personal authenticity. Authenticity and genuineness were

embedded in the meaning of empathy for the counsellors who participated in the present study.

Significance and Implications of Results for Counsellors

Past studies of empathy and its development were largely replicated in present findings. The qualitative methodology used in this study enables the researcher and other readers to elicit detailed descriptions of empathy for the participants; illuminating and sensitizing others, in qualitative terms, to their lived meaning. Counsellors can consider the findings as they might relate to themselves, their clients and other interpersonal relationships.

The goal of the present study was not intended to produce findings that would be applied to the general population. The intent of this study was to illuminate the complexity and diversity of the development and experience of empathy. Reflection on and information about the meaning, development, and impact of empathy for both clients and counsellors may lead counsellors to engage in the process of exploring the personal meaning of empathy in their own experience. The potential consequence of such self-exploration may lead to further development of this critical dynamic in helping relationships and to sensitize the counsellor to the potential impact of an empathic climate for his or her clients.

Significance and Implications of Results for Counsellor Education

Historically, many counsellor educators have been aware of the importance of empathy in the counselling context. Reflecting on the findings from this present study, as well as previous research, counsellor educators could gain increased awareness regarding the impact of their teacher/student interactions, and the process involved in effectively engaging students in the

discovery of personal meaning in regard to empathy. Learning opportunities could be developed to enhance the opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences, thoughts and feelings about empathy. Implicit in this process could be fostering an attitude for self-exploration and identification of beliefs and assumptions in regard to empathic rapport and its consequences. Hopefully, counsellor educators would re-engage with the exploration of the meaning and development of empathy for themselves and integrate empathic rapport into their teaching laboratories with increased awareness that this modeling will have a significant impact on their students.

Implications for Research

This investigation into the meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellors has endeavored to show that systematic study can provide insights into the deeper meaning structure of the phenomena. The method used in this study could be used to learn more about the subjective meanings of various other counselling constructs. This study has also explicated the limiting consequences of particular teaching strategies in counsellor education. Both these parameters are worthy of further investigation.

A number of research alternatives that future researchers might follow to build on the foundations of this study are suggested below:

1. To study the meaning and development of counsellors' beliefs and values in regard to helping;

2. To expand on the present study by exploring the relationship between the counsellor's personal history with empathy and the development of empathy for the counsellor;

3. To explore the personal meaning of other counselling constructs and the perceived impact on the client.

4. To enquire about the counsellor educator's perceptions of various teaching methods and the impact on their students.

In general further research is necessary for counsellors and counsellor educators to better understand the development and meaning of counselling practices. The phenomenological method used in this study has allowed the variations and differences, as well as the common threads of the meaning and development of empathy for experienced counsellors to emerge.

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APPENDIX 1

LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

University of Victoria
Faculty of Education
September 1992

To Whom It May Concern:

I am working on my Masters degree in Counselling at the University of Victoria and am planning a study of counsellors' understanding and experience of empathy. I am looking for experienced counsellors who would be willing to participate. If you are interested at all, please read on.

Participants will be asked to prepare a brief journal of their beliefs and experiences in regard to empathy. The counsellors will then be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview with the researcher, approximately one hour in duration. The purpose of the interview is to explicate the meaning you have attached to empathy, how you see the value of empathy in your work as a counsellor and life experiences that impacted your beliefs and values in regard to empathy.

The study will employ a descriptive methodology focusing on participants' subjective experiences of the particular counselling phenomenon, empathy. The goal is to understand and to describe this experience in the counsellor's own terms. Preferably, the participant would be introspective (aware of and willing to explore his or her "inner" experiences), and articulate (able to recount this experience to another in clear, explicit terms). If you think you possess these qualities, please consider contributing to what may prove to be a most interesting project.

If you would like to become involved or to obtain more information up which to base a decision, please contact me by message (preferably before March 1, 19930, through the UVIC Education Main Office, at 721-7764 (8:30-4:30, weekdays) and I will return your call. You might also phone me at my home in the evenings at 727-2086.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I hope to hear from you soon.

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE TO SERVE AS AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Empathy is considered by many counsellors to be an important component of a "Helping Relationship." As a researcher, I am very interested to know your subjective experience regarding the meaning of empathy and how you have experienced empathy in your professional and personal life. Your thoughts and experiences as a counsellor are important and valuable to those persons developing counsellor education programs in the future. The information you provide will be confidential. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Beth Lisson

1. What is the meaning of empathy for you?
   How did you come to that meaning?

2. How do you experience empathy?

3. What is it like for you to be empathic?

4. Think of a specific time when you first became aware of the experience of empathy. Please describe the circumstances.

5. What meaning did empathy have for you at that time?
   Probe for: beliefs and values in regard to empathy, feelings that the participant experienced, source of the definition (i.e., dictionary, instructor definition, readings related to empathic understanding).

6. At what point did you "label" it empathy or understand that this experience was called empathy?
   Probe for: personal experience (i.e., being understood by another person, relating to another person's experience in a counselling situation).

7. Was there a time when you thought differently about the meaning of empathy? (Compare their experiences i.e., similarities, differences, receiving, giving.) If yes, describe when and how empathy seemed different.

8. How do you account for what was the same or different in your understanding of empathy?

9. What led you to change, do you think?

10. At what times do you currently notice feeling empathic? (i.e., counselling or personal interactions) Is empathy strictly a counselling concept?

11. How did the counselling program stimulate you to consider your beliefs about the value of empathy in helping relationships?
Probe for: learning experiences, emotional reactions.

12. What effect did creating a journal about your beliefs and experiences in regard to empathy have on your understanding of empathy?
Do you experience empathy differently since maintaining a journal?
If yes, how do you account for the difference?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX 3

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

1. Participant's Name _____

2. Address _____ Phone: _____

3. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the counsellor's experience of the meaning of empathy.

4. The participants will engage in a reflective interview that is designed to facilitate discussion regarding the counsellor's experience with empathy.

5. I have been informed of the nature of the research and I voluntarily agree to be a participant. I am at least eighteen years of age, having been born on _____. I understand also that I may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.

   I understand that the audio tape recorded interviews will be erased at the conclusion of the project.

6. _____
   Signature of participant

7. _____
   Signature of person obtaining consent

8. Date _____

The above statement is to be signed in duplicate with one copy being kept by the researcher and the other by the participant.

NOTE: If you have questions about the research, do not hesitate to ask the researcher, whose phone number is 727-2086. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the chairman of the Human Subjects Committee, University of Victoria.

VITA

Surname: LISSON (formerly GRAY) Given Name: BETH

Place of Birth: Bitburg, Germany Date of Birth : Oct. 25, 1953

Educational Institutions Attended:

Camosun College	1974 to 1976, 1985 to 1987
University of Victoria	1987 to 1990, 1990 to 1994

Degrees Awarded:

E.C.E.C. (Early Childhood Education Certificate), Camosun College, 1974

B.A. (Honours), Child & Youth Care, University of Victoria, 1990

Honours and Awards:

Robert S. Evans Memorial Scholarship in Child Care, Alumni Award, 1989.

William & Gladys Partridge Award in Child Care, 1990

University of Victoria Graduate Fellowship, 1990 and 1991

Publications:

Peavy, R.V., & Gray, B. (1993) Constructivist Perspectives on Career Counselling: A Complete Learning Package. University of Victoria.

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Title of Thesis: **THE MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY FOR EXPERIENCED COUNSELLORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

Author: 

(Signature)

BETH LISSON

April 21, 94

(Date)